Character Education Through a Reflective Moral Inquiry:
A Revised Model that Answers Old Questions

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Abstract

With trends suggesting a new era of democratic pluralism in the United States, traditional notions of character education must be revisited. In this climate of diversity and cultural heterogeneity, indoctrinary approaches to character education must be replaced by responsive and inclusive approaches that have an eye toward building consensus among disparate viewpoints. No character education approach to date has gained salience on all the varied issues surrounding moral schooling in today's educational climate. In an increasingly pluralistic American society it would seem that it is necessary for character education programs in the public schools to foster a reflective, self-analytical vision of morality and character that has at its heart the reciprocity of one's actions within the bounds of democratic society, an approach that is neither indoctrinary nor relativistic. This article forwards a process approach rooted in the social studies called reflective moral inquiry that answers many challenges of existing approaches.

One of the continuing issues in social studies education over the last century is centered on the teaching of character education in public schools. A number of theoretical and practical models exist that range from the listing and indoctrination of certain virtues to an "I'm OK, You're OK" sort of relativism. Yet, each theoretical model to date, regardless of how well-contrived and seemingly sound, has met challenges when applied to the public schools in contemporary American society. Whereas critics of one model may claim that it asserts indoctrinary practices, critics of another model may assert that it is by nature rooted in relativism. Scholars have warned that educators must prime themselves for a new era of public education centered on helping children in an increasingly pluralistic and global society (Banks & Banks, 1997). Schools in contemporary American society, therefore, are faced with responding to the challenges of democratic pluralism at home and globalization worldwide.

In an effort to help children gain a sense of global perspective and to prepare them for life in a global community, students must be presented means for approaching moral dilemmas that allow individual perspectives to be highlighted while at the same time provide for establishment of moral principles. This requires that classroom teachers present a process for moral deliberation that is both *inclusive* of individual and cultural perspectives and *principled* through establishment of universalizable moral guidelines or rules. This melding of seemingly disparate purposes can be rather daunting to the 21st century classroom teacher.

This article proposes a model of character and moral education, reflective moral inquiry, rooted in existing approaches currently used in schools. The model provides teachers with a sound pedagogical approach that allows them to explore moral and ethical dilemmas within the context of social studies content. The byproduct of the

reflective moral inquiry model is an engaging and meaningful approach to teaching that integrates academic and moral education and fosters global and cultural awareness among students.

An investigation of the philosophical, theoretical, psychological, and practice-based literature related to character and moral education produces an extensive volume of educational theories and research. By taking advantage of overlaps and minor revisions, it is plausible to group the literature into three categories: virtues approaches, values clarification approaches, and values analysis approaches. These approaches either fill the gaps of alternate models (values clarification vs. values analysis), present completely opposite views (virtues approach vs. values clarification), or provide a "middle-ground" (values analysis as a compromise between the virtues approach and values clarification). The three approaches will be addressed briefly here and followed by an alternative model.

Existing Gaps in Character Education

One popular character education approach that comes into question when viewed within the context of contemporary society is the virtues approach. Given alternate labels such as directive moral education, indoctrination, or social moralization, the virtues approach requires subscription to what proponents call non-controversial values – common values held by almost all societies (Chazan, 1985; Durkheim, 1961; Ryan & Bohlin, 1999). Although the virtues approach has gained momentum in the last decade (Bennett, 1993; Durkheim; Ryan, 1989; Ryan & Bohlin), critics have long argued that in pluralistic societies, espousing a given set of virtues or values sways too far in the direction of universalism (Banks & Banks, 1997; Kirschenbaum, 1973, 1976; Raths, Harmin, & Simon, 1966; Simon, Howe, & Kirschenbaum, 1972; Wilson, Williams, & Sugarman, 1967).

Virtues approach advocates, in turn, have criticized alternate process models such as values clarification (Kirschenbaum, 1973, 1976; Raths et al., 1966) and values analysis (Coombs & Meux, 1971; Evans, 1978; Evans, Applegate, Casper, Tucker, & Meux, 1974) of shifting toward relativism. Within relativism all values are accepted, provided proponents of those values are willing to voice their position. Proponents of values clarification argue that educators should teach moral deliberation and not a given set of predetermined morals. Critics of values clarification, however, argue that without providing any criteria for assessing beliefs derived from the moral deliberation process, this approach lacks intellectual and empirical depth.

Likewise, critics note that a similar approach, values analysis, suffers from two major flaws. First, by purporting that students should look for "unbiased" sources, the values analysis approach does not allow the teacher to teach students to identify and consider bias in decision making (Evans, 1978). Second, as students are required to test their value decisions individually through four tests, there is not an explicit process that brings the whole group of students to consensus on formation of moral principles (Evans).

Filling the Gaps – Prescriptivist Character Education

In an effort to create a balanced character education program, this author suggests an approach that addresses historic and contemporary critiques. A truly balanced and holistic approach to character education should be characterized by the following (Guidry, 2006):

1. Allows for individual liberation.
2. Avoids indoctrination and manipulation.
3. Is rooted in empirical evidence.
4. Does not stray toward relativism.
5. Takes place in a social context.
6. Unites moral and academic work.
7. Allows for diverse perspectives.
8. Provides for an evaluation of potential consequences.
9. Provides outlets for reconciliation of diverse perspectives.
10. Comes to a substantive conclusion through development of a principle.

If these are the characteristics of a holistic and inclusive, yet principled version of character education the question remains, "How should character education be taught in public schools?" As previously noted, some existing models tend to marginalize minority groups by failing to allow individual perspectives to be highlighted. This leads to some level of indoctrination and lacks inclusiveness. Other models have a tendency to lack rigor because of a failure to require logical justification for belief formation. That is, there is no establishment of moral principles or guiding norms in decision making. In order to address a broad theoretical range, character education should not simply endorse values or virtues particular to certain groups, nor should it be a thoughtless process by which all asserted beliefs are openly accepted without logical justification. Rather, in an effort to provide moral instruction in a pluralistic society and to prepare students for inclusion in a global community, it is necessary to view character education as a reflective, self-analytical process. In doing so, students continually strive to live according to Kant's (1998) second categorical imperative, which requires students to consider the reciprocity of their chosen actions. In other words, a teacher might say to students, "When you are faced with a dilemma, think about making choices based on how you would like others to choose if you were in that situation." This process ensures all beliefs and values are taken into account while at the same time assures logical and just decision making that arrives at some formation of a moral principle or guiding course of action. Such a process, then, is both inclusive and principled.

As previously noted, two arguments in opposition to character education in the public schools are that such programs either fail to respond to social change because they state elements of morality as fact or they lack normative rigor due to their relativist and emotive nature. A prescriptivist or process approach, where a particular, universalizable process helps individuals arrive at ethical judgments through the use of reason, answers these challenges and allows for adaptation over time (Watkins, 1976). Such prescriptivism allows character to be taught in a way that responds to social

change and technological advancement, while at the same time provides a means for establishment of universal moral principles.

This prescriptivist methodology is supported by Deweyan pragmatism in the realization of the duality of moral education in a democratic and increasingly global society. Although moral standards vary from society to society, there is a societal need for instruction in a rational valuing process (Watkins, 1976). Additionally, Deweyan pragmatism supports such a process model by lauding systematic treatment of thinking as necessary to prevent development of misguided values and beliefs. Dewey felt these misguided beliefs were a great threat to our educational system and society (Dewey, 1933). Through a carefully constructed process approach to character education, students are provided an opportunity to develop a universally applicable, yet culturally responsive, means for approaching morally-charged situations that does not restrict them to a set of defined and often contradictory character traits. This process approach protects students from indoctrination by a prescribed set of values established by the ruling class as a means of maintaining the *status quo.* At the same time it develops skills centered on reflection and formation of moral principles. Such an approach is imperative as American society prepares its pluralist role in the global community and moves away from the "melting pot" notion. In this new democratic paradigm, a pedagogy must emerge to help citizens negotiate the rules and values of a new social realm with an eye toward global understanding, respect, and caring (Day, 1995; Heining-Boynton, 1995; Rong & Preissle, 1998).

Reflective Moral Inquiry

A potentially more responsive way to teach character education in the public schools of America may be realized through reflective moral inquiry, a revised process approach rooted deeply in the moral education works of Dewey and Tufts (1908) and the theoretical social studies approaches suggested by Barr, Barth, and Shermis (1978). Reflective moral inquiry does not allow one value set to take precedence over another. Rather, it facilitates discourse about morality and character geared toward consensus-building situational reconciliation. Consequently, through the lens of social studies content, commonalities surface in experience and cultural community norms. In instances where moral beliefs clash, reflective moral inquiry fosters interactions and reconciliation resulting in dialogue, discussion, debate, and understanding.

It is important to note the inseparable link between reflective moral discourse and social studies content. The close link between moral and civic education was firmly touted by Dewey (1916) and this *de facto* emphasis of character and moral education within social studies content has received recent support from a number of scholars (Heafner, Lipscomb, & Rock, 2006; Merryfield, 2004; VanFossen, 2005). It is in light of such widespread acknowledgment of the centrality of the social studies in moral discourse that the social studies are chosen as the home of reflective moral inquiry.

The reflective moral inquiry process honors consideration of multiple perspectives in morally-charged situations while simultaneously building consensus.

Reflective moral inquiry focuses on how value-laden situations are approached, analyzed, and addressed. At the heart of this civic discourse is reconciliation of cultural community and national civic values. Individuals, regardless of cultural background, are asked to approach moral dilemmas with an eye toward weighing their individual interests and perspectives.

Kant's second categorical imperative (1998) serves as a useful vehicle for weighing competing interests. Using this reciprocity-oriented criterion as the rule of thumb for assessing one's response to a morally-charged situation, it is possible to weigh all perspectives. The use of any guiding principle may appear to contradict principles of pluralism. It could be argued that formation of any principle or criterion to define or guide "moral thought" would seemingly be in contrast to pluralistic thought. Such an argument would claim that if we are to celebrate the diversity inherent in a society with no ruling majority, we are to frown upon any attempt to formulate some defined moral course of action. Yet, through careful consideration of the implications of using Kant's second categorical imperative, the challenge is answered.

According to Wattles (1998), the central idea of reciprocity contained within Kant's second categorical imperative, known commonly as the "golden rule," is much more than merely a widespread formula for morality today. It is an engaging model for students to analyze and reflect upon reciprocal relationships. This serves to guide students toward a less self-centered approach to moral situations. Furthermore, Wattles has argued that utilizing reciprocity-centered discourse within the curriculum has four distinct advantages as it: forwards a non-theological philosophy of living, makes no room for superiority or prejudice of any kind, moves individuals from debate to cooperation, and emphasizes commonalities among disparate groups of individuals. Therefore, use of reciprocity-centered discourse in reflective moral inquiry is advantageous because it requires the intuition, interaction, and imagination that can only come from putting oneself in another's shoes while at the same time building principled morality (Wattles). This emphasis on principled morality is where reflective moral inquiry separates itself from other process approaches to moral education.

From a methodological standpoint, reflective moral inquiry is most closely linked to a process approach to moral education called values analysis (Coombs & Meux, 1971; Evans, 1978; Evans et al., 1974). As an approach for value decision making rooted in social studies and utilizing programmed instruction, values analysis provides six steps culminating in rational decisions. Values analysis has been criticized for its naiveté with regard to sources and its inability to foster consensus due to an individualistic focus on decision making. Reflective moral inquiry attempts to address these perceived inadequacies of values analysis.

The Reflective Moral Inquiry Approach – An Overview

In practice, reflective moral inquiry guides students through a classic inquiry process, similar to that forwarded by Barr et al. (1978), where students confront

historical and civic problems with implied moral dilemmas. The six steps in this process are as follows:

1. Introduce individuals to a moral or ethical dilemma or problem rooted in social studies content.
2. Guide individuals in formation of a hypothesis centered on solving the dilemma or problem.
3. Engage individuals in an exploration and evaluation of evidence for and against their formulated hypothesis.
4. Require individuals to make sense of and interpret the gathered evidence.
5. Direct individuals in an evaluation of their hypothesis leading them to a presentation of ethical claims.
6. Engage individuals in a consensus-building exercise where experiences are brought together in formation of ethical principles.

These six steps provide students with a systematic means for approaching a variety of problematic moral situations. The structure of this process affords students an opportunity for divergent thought and discourse.

Simultaneously students are steered toward a formation of moral principles (moral guidelines or rules) by using guidelines and criteria they generate and establish during classroom deliberation. The structure and social context of small group (3-5 students) discourse assures engagement in conversations emphasizing the implications of one's actions on another. This exchange of ideas results in the development of universally acceptable moral principles. In the following sections the six steps are described and accompanied by sample problems and question scripts.

Step I – Introduction of the Problem

Inquiry learning is integrated throughout all levels of the reflective moral inquiry process. This is especially evident in the first step where students are asked to confront a problem relevant to their own experience. An effective problem statement presents a clear moral problem related to social studies that encourages student decision making. An example of a problem statement related to the criminal justice system is as follows:

An alleged murderer has been captured, charged, indicted, and is currently on trial. You are one of the detectives who cracked the case and you have been subpoenaed to testify in court. So far the prosecution has proven its case beyond a reasonable doubt and things are looking good for conviction. While on the stand, however, you notice that the wrong piece of evidence has been admitted within this potentially open-and-shut case. This was an oversight by both the prosecution and defense. By pointing this out on the stand, you may cast some reasonable doubt about the alleged killer's guilt. What do you do?

The same design principles are applied in the following example of a reflective moral inquiry problem statement related to the federal legislative branch.

As a five-term member of the U.S. House of Representatives you have developed a close connection with your constituency and have consistently represented their best interests. A bill has been proposed that, if passed, will lead to indirect discrimination of a small segment of your constituency (who did not vote for you in the last election anyway). Based on a recent public opinion poll, the majority of your constituents are in favor of the bill. Also, key supporters of your campaign have contacted you voicing their support of the bill. How do you vote on the issue?

In both of these instances, the teacher's role in the reflective moral inquiry process is to read the problem to the whole class and ask a series of questions requiring students to relate it to their own prior and experiential knowledge (Guidry, 2007). The following suggested questions may be used in deliberation of either problem scenario to guide this step of the discussion:

1. Think about a time when you or someone you know might have experienced similar dilemmas in your/their personal life. How did you/they respond?
2. Think about situations when leaders or citizens in this country (or in other countries, if applicable) experienced similar dilemmas in past or present situations. How did they respond?
3. Where might you look for additional examples of how people have dealt with similar dilemmas?

Strategies like whole-class brainstorming or think-pair-share might be used to engage students in consideration of problems at hand. Within a whole-class brainstorming situation, students call out appropriate related ideas while the teacher lists them for review or further discussion. A think-pair-share strategy affords students an opportunity to think first individually, pair with a partner to share ideas, and then share ideas as a pair or individual with the whole class (Lyman, 1981). Regardless of the instructional strategy utilized, discussion is suggested at this step within a large group setting so that a wealth of perspectives can be considered. The purpose of this step, again, is to assure that students frame the problem in terms they understand and can use to help them relate the problem to their own experience and knowledge.

Step II – Hypothesis Formation

Once students understand and connect with the problem, they then interact with classmates in an effort to come to a solution and develop a moral rule or principle to guide future action. To facilitate the process, students transition to small groups of three to five and engage in a round-robin brainstorm cooperative learning activity to formulate what they believe is an appropriate response. In this activity, each student in the group shares his or her responses to the questions posed by the teacher (see introductory questions below related to additional social studies topics).

It is important to note that particular attention is paid to the student composition of groups. Because reflective moral inquiry strives to promote social and global understanding and facilitate conversations that will help students consider the perspectives of other cultures in their decision making, it is necessary to ensure that small groups are diverse in their ethnic and racial make-up (Slavin, 1983). Banks (2002) has argued for the importance of building transformative knowledge among students in contemporary society – knowledge that exists in cultural and racial communities outside of the mainstream. If full advantage is to be taken of reflective moral inquiry as a model for character education in social studies learning, then groups must be carefully constructed considering gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic level.

After formation of diverse small groups, teachers guide students to develop hypotheses that lead to courses of action. Questions in Step II discussions about either the criminal justice system or legislative branch of government might include:

1. Based on what we discussed earlier, think about some common ways you and/or others have dealt with similar dilemmas. In what ways have the approaches been different?
2. Based on what you know, what is the best way to answer this question or solve this dilemma?

As students answer these questions, they construct a hypothesis leading to a course of action. It becomes the job of the teacher at this point to encourage students to revisit and revise their hypotheses. Teachers should continually ask the questions, "Is this the best way to solve the problem? Why or why not?" The purpose of further query is to ensure that students are looking for solutions from a variety of perspectives. If students in small group settings share their revised hypotheses and rationale with the whole class, then each student can better appreciate each of the perspectives represented (Guidry, 2007).

Step III – Exploration and Evaluation of Evidence

Once a hypothesis has been formulated, the reflective moral inquiry process requires that the hypothesis be evaluated using historic and contemporary evidence. Within this step, true civic and historic relevance evolves. At this point in the activity the problem becomes surrounded and situated in the context of the social studies content that is central to the discussion. The guiding question for this step becomes, "How can you evaluate your hypothesis?" From this central question students are guided into an exploration of possible historic and contemporary examples that could help them further refine their course of action (Guidry, 2007). Teachers might offer the following related probes:

> One of the first questions asked when we began looking at this problem was related to exploring further examples, both present and past, of how people dealt with similar dilemmas. Let's share these examples that might help us decide a course of action.

Small groups of students are then asked to share examples that might serve as evidence for proving or disproving their group's hypothesis. An engaging way to facilitate this collaborative exercise is through a "four-corners" strategy where students in four equally-sized groups move around four stations sharing possible sources within each genre or type of evidentiary resource. Four appropriate station genres for the criminal justice and legislative branch examples provided in Step I might be: primary resources, secondary resources, human resources, and online/media resources. This list of possible sources now becomes the starting point for gathering evidence to support or refute their hypothesis.

Within their original small groups (those generated at Step II for hypothesis formation) students then begin to gather evidence using historical and/or current social and political events that support and refute their hypotheses. An effective instructional strategy to use at this point might be the jigsaw strategy whereby students are divided into groups and each student is assigned a particular topic or genre to research and present (Aronson, Blaney, Stephen, Sikes, & Snapp, 1978). Using the four genres of primary resources, secondary resources, human resources, and online/media resources, for instance, four students – each one with an assigned genre of resources – would gather evidence from available resources and then present their findings to the other group members. Such an approach not only assures complete examination of material, but also assures that all group members are on-task.

To fully engage students, most of the resources used should be student-chosen, although limited access to these resources may require that the teacher provide them for students. This would be necessary, for instance, in a school with limited access to technology and/or Internet resources or in a school with a limited library collection. If teacher-chosen resources are used, attention must be paid to the diverse perspectives presented in those resources to eliminate the possibility of indoctrination. These resources must present a variety of perspectives through which students may view the problem and responses to similar problems in order to avoid a predetermined, teacher-enforced course of action. It is imperative that teachers not steer students to a particular course of action through resources aimed at one perspective or approach to the problem.

In order to ensure that analysis and evaluation of potential resources are taking place, students should generate a "T-chart" and separate their pieces of evidence into two columns labeled "support" and "refute" as a way to organize their evidence. Teachers may require that students include evidence in both the columns to ensure thorough comparisons. Furthermore, it is helpful to have students evaluate their research by noting biased resources and the nature of that bias in their charts. This develops a sense of scrutiny and guarantees evaluation is taking place.

The reflective moral inquiry approach differs specifically from previous similar process-oriented character education methodologies like values analysis (Evans, 1978). By asking students to look for "unbiased" resources, values analysis was rooted in a non-realistic perception of evidence gathering that did not focus on teaching students to

look and account for bias during the decision-making process. Reflective moral inquiry improves upon this model by requiring that students account for bias and locate evidence both for and against their argument.

Step IV - Translation and Interpretation of Evidence

Evidence gathering and assertion of bias do not, however, guide students toward the defined goal of this exercise. In order to move students to a position where they can make a decision that could be universally applicable, it is necessary that they translate and interpret the evidence they have gathered (Guidry, 2007). This process engages students in defining common themes across multiple sources of evidence, identifying differing patterns in approaches to the problem, and establishing criteria helpful in evaluating solutions to the problem or similar problems (Beyer, 1971). In order to identify common themes and patterns of approach related to the criminal justice or legislative branch example, the teacher might ask the following questions:

1. Based on the evidence you have gathered, what are some common themes found in the way others have approached similar problems?
2. Based on the evidence you have gathered, what are some differences in the way others have approached similar problems?

Regardless of the particular problem posed by the teacher, it is also advisable to guide students in establishing criteria from which possible solutions may be assessed. The following comments offer an example for teachers considering this task:

> Based upon what you found in the evidence and your personal experience, establish a set of criteria for evaluating any solution (not just your own) to problems like the one you have just explored and similar problems you found.

Such prompts encourage students to frame their own solution both in localized terms related to their own solution and in more generally applicable terms for future use. This discussion should be facilitated within the original small groups that were generated for Step II. Incorporation of a think-pair-share or round-robin brainstorming strategy serve as cooperative learning tools as group members seek to frame solutions effectively.

Step V - Evaluation of Hypothesis

Now that students have confronted the problem at hand, determined a course of action, gathered evidence both in support and against that course of action, and established a set of criteria from which the course of action can be evaluated, they can move forward to evaluate their own hypotheses. Within this step it is important that students examine relationships between their hypothesis and the data collected. The use of graphic organizers is extremely effective for facilitating this examination. Students should seek out differences in their approach as compared to the approaches of others identified during evidence gathering. This is not a mere descriptive comparison of "us vs. them," but rather a deliberative small group conversation that addresses the

degree to which the group's hypothesis gains salience with regard to the core criteria. That is, students discuss the degree to which their course of action takes into account reciprocity, or Kant's second categorical imperative (Guidry, 2007).

While guiding students in small groups through this hypothesis evaluation step, the following teacher questions serve as examples:

1. What are the relationships between your hypothesis and the data that you have collected? Are there any differences in the way that you approached the problem and the way others have approached the problem? What is the nature of those differences? What do you think has caused those differences?
2. Which solution is more focused or centered on the statement, "Choose as you would be willing to have everyone choose in your situation?" Would you want someone to treat you in a similar manner as the way you have proposed?

Upon consideration of questions used for deliberation of any problem or dilemma, students are encouraged to modify their hypotheses based on their collected data. At the end of this deliberative exercise, the revised version of their hypothesis is to be worded in the form of an ethical claim using words such as "should," "proper," and "good." This ethical claim will be used in the large group discussion in Step VI to help develop a consensus statement of an ethical principle or universalizable moral rule.

Step VI – Formation of Principle

The final step of a moral inquiry process is the generation of an ethical principle. Students share the small group generated ethical claims and participate in a Socratic discussion to synthesize them into a class-generated ethical principle (Guidry, 2007). The Socratic Method is suggested within this final important step due to its effectiveness in stimulating moral understanding and development (Emler, 1996; Ries, 1992). In order to ensure that student-generated claims result in principled decision making, the ethical claims contrived through this large group Socratic exercise must be tested against the previously established criteria and against teacher-defined criteria including: acceptability for new cases, subsumption, role exchange, and universal consequences tests (Coombs & Meux, 1971; Evans, 1978). These tests ensure, respectively, that value decisions can be applied to future instances, rooted in more general moral principles, viewed from the perspectives of affected others, and applied universally (Coombs & Meux). To facilitate and quantify this process, teachers make use of opinion and attitude measures to see where students are in the process. Use of a consensogram, for instance, would require students to vote by placing a sticker beside the ethical principal statement with which they most agree. Suggested guiding questions for this whole class discussion are:

1. Does this solution abide by your group criteria?
2. Would you want someone to treat you in a manner similar to what you have proposed?

3. Does this solution close the matter and/or solve the problem?
4. Could you use this principle in deciding future cases or instances?

Additionally, these ethical claims must close the matter or problem in question while serving as a rule or principle in deciding future cases by being universally applicable (Dewey, 1933). If the ethical claims do not satisfy these constraints, then the claim fails to gain salience *vis a vis* established criteria and must be reassessed through exploration of additional evidence or through reconsideration via the inquiry process. This may mean returning to Step II or Step III to revisit selected criteria or to provide additional evidence to use in deliberation.

Reflective Moral Inquiry as a Solution

Considering the wide array of character education programs used within today's American schools, one might ask, "Does a reflective moral inquiry approach fill the gaps left by other character education philosophies and methodologies?" By not prescribing the content of morality and character, but rather offering individuals the opportunity to investigate, debate, choose, and evaluate an appropriate course of action through a prescribed process, reflective moral inquiry is not indoctrinating. In a pluralistic, global society, teachers must not be purveyors of moral knowledge, but rather facilitate thinking and decision making about realistic situations involving character and morality. Yet, reflective moral inquiry is not relativistic, for it requires that individual or group action be tested against certain criteria, particularly Kant's second categorical imperative. By looking at the consequences of one's actions through the lens of the reciprocity of those actions, students are encouraged to make decisions centered on established moral guidelines or rules that are founded on cultural consensus and understanding. As a result, this process is far from relativistic, yet the process is well-situated to create ties among diverse cultural communities.

Furthermore, the reflective moral inquiry process assures that dialogue and discourse about character and morality take place in a social context in a way that unites academic and moral work. Students explore moral dilemmas by analyzing similar situations found within the content of the social studies. They use the academic discipline of social studies to inform their moral decision making. The importance of this social context in moral discourse and union between academic and moral work has been affirmed by a number of historic and contemporary scholars (Barr et al., 1978; Coonrod, Miller, & Rusher, 1995; DeHaan & Hanford, 1997; Dewey, 1933; Habermas, 1990; Heafner et al., 2006; Massialas, Sprague & Hurst, 1975; Merryfield, 2004; VanFossen, 2005). Through the moral and academic discourse facilitated by the reflective moral inquiry process, students are asked to confront their own and other's cultural norms by weighing their decisions with those made by others in historic and contemporary contexts.

Most of the context, consequently, is derived from state and national social studies standards. From a practical standpoint this is necessary because of the constant need to meet accountability standards associated with the modern

environment of high-stakes testing. Teachers constantly feel the need to link all teaching to established standards. Yet, as previously noted, these standards and the content they forward provide a sound foundation upon which to situate moral discourse. The situation of moral discourse within the social studies also ensures that diverse perspectives, taken from both the cultural context of the discourse and the content of the social studies subject matter used as evidence, are presented. This provides students with all the tools necessary to arrive at culturally-informed and principled moral decisions rooted in reciprocal relationships (Banks et al., 2001; Coonrod et al., 1995; DeHaan & Hanford, 1997; Wattles, 1998). Additionally, these decisions are made based on consensus and reconciliation across differing cultural community value systems. Thus, they are subject to scrutiny through evaluation of proposed action in light of both group-defined and established criteria. This sense of consensus and reconciliation is found in a number of existing models, yet few have layered the elements of evaluation in order to promote defense of a social position, an element vital to principled social decision making (Newmann, 1991).

In sum, reflective moral inquiry has the potential to effectively address character education issues. One recent empirical study (Guidry, 2006) sought to assess the impact of reflective moral inquiry on student moral judgment. Although this study did not show a statistically significant impact on student moral judgment, study limitations serve to call the findings into question. Therefore, in this study, the positive benefits and theoretical implications of using such an approach seemed to outweigh the limitations. Thus, further empirical research is suggested to assess the influence of reflective moral inquiry on student moral judgment.

Conclusions

With trends suggesting a new era of democratic pluralism in the United States, scholars and practitioners call for a new era of public education (Banks & Banks, 1997). Therefore, traditional notions of character education must be revisited in order to prepare students for the challenges of living in a global society. In this climate of increasing diversity and cultural heterogeneity, indoctrinating approaches to character education must be replaced by approaches that are more responsive, inclusive, and have an eye toward building consensus among those with varying cultural backgrounds.

Above all, in the current context of an increasingly pluralistic American society, it is necessary that character education programs implemented within the public schools foster a reflective, self-analytical vision of morality and character that has at its heart the reciprocity of one's actions within the boundaries of democratic society. It is only through such a process that a truly global model of character education can be implemented. Reflective moral inquiry provides such a platform and is an appropriate direction for character education as it further evolves into the 21st century.

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