How Not to Teach Values: A Critical Look at Character Education (*)
4. Which values?

community or advocates for social justice. To be sure, these objectives are not inconsistent with the desire to preserve ... as endorsing anything that is traditional or making the preservation of tradition our primary concern. In short, we want

Were you to stand somewhere in the continental United States and announce, "I'm going to Hawaii," it would be understood ... you would probably be talking about one specific island in the chain – namely, the big one to your southeast. The word

Unhappily, the problems with character education (in the narrow sense, which is how I'll be using the term unless ... troubling are the fundamental assumptions, both explicit and implicit, that inform character education programs. Let

These are the capabilities that, we believe, underlie children's caring behavior in the presence of another person's ... feel responsible for (as well as connected to and dependent on) others at a very young age." (See Carolyn Zahn-Waxler et

by justice, but that children – or even adults – should not have an active role to play in making decisions and ... remember, is to elicit the right answer from students and tell those who see things differently "why their conclusion is

The second choice, meanwhile, presents its own set of practical difficulties. Given that the individuals and ... approach. It will not be easy, that is, to organize conferences, publish books and articles, and develop curricular

Happily, programs do exist whose promotion of children's social and moral development is grounded in a commitment to ... Studies Center in Oakland, California. The CDP's premise is that, by meeting children's needs, we increase the

The neoconservative concerns for social stability," observed David Purpel.[16] The movement has been described by another ... education is vital, according to one vocal proponent, because "the development of character is the backbone of the

Teachers and schools tend to mistake good behavior for good character. What they prize is docility, suggestibility; the ... in themselves. Small wonder that their effort to build character is such a failure; they don't know it when they see it.

rational because this route proves most expedient for performing well or maintaining an image of oneself as smart. These ... on children the importance of doing their best and then blame them for lacking perseverance if they seem not to do so.

Character education's "fix-the-kids" orientation follows logically from the belief that kids need fixing. Indeed, the ... [to character education] is based on a somewhat dim view of human nature," acknowledges William Kilpatrick, whose book

unpleasant incident that was "correctly" resolved by finding an adult. The teacher never asks the children how they felt ... by telling the children, "What we need to do all the time is clarify – make it clear – to the adult what you did."

in Fritz K. Oser, Andreas Dick, and Jean-Luc Patry, eds.,

virtues or values in question are fully formed, and, in the minds of many character education proponents, divinely ... so many passive receptacles to be filled, lumps of clay to be molded, pets to be trained, or computers to be programmed.

exactly, do they do their best? Surely it is not just a matter of blind effort. And

chaps. 4-5; for practical classroom activities for promoting perspective-taking skills, see Norma Deitch Feshbach et al.,

2. See, for example, Kevin Ryan, "The Ten Commandments of Character Education,"

The Brighter Side of Human Nature: Altruism and Empathy in Everyday Life

educational forum, September 1995, p. 22. For a summary of William H. Gans's critique of "education for character," see

Beyond Subjective Morality

This is the following, in my view, of character education. "Always be honest," says one of the messages to children. This is an assimilation of the moral virtues. "Do your best," says another. This is assimilated as a virtue of character. "No anger," says another. This is assimilated as a virtue. "No․


Ad hominem