

How Not to Teach Values: A Critical Look at Character Education (*)

How Not to Teach Values A Critical Look at Character Education

By Alfie Kohn

Teachers and schools tend to mistake good behavior for good character. What they prize as docility, spontaneity, the child who will do what he is told, or even better, the child who will do what is wanted without even having to be told. They value not what children who children learn as themselves. Small wonder that their effort to build character in this way fails: they don't know it when they see it.

© Alfie Kohn

When you stand elsewhere on the continental United States and announce, "It's going to be a good year," it would be understood that you were speaking for these islands in the Pacific that collectively constitute the state of Hawaii. You would probably be reflecting about one specific island in the chain - namely, the big one on your southeast. The word Hawaii would seem to be a general term for the islands. But in Hawaii, the word "Hawaii" is used to refer to the entire archipelago. In other words, the word "Hawaii" is used to refer to the entire archipelago. In other words, the word "Hawaii" is used to refer to the entire archipelago. In other words, the word "Hawaii" is used to refer to the entire archipelago.

Let me get straight to the point. What goes by the name of character education nowadays is, for the most part, a collection of educational and extracurricular programs designed to make children work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character. This is not to say that these programs are entirely without merit. There are a few good ones out there. But the vast majority of them are designed to make children work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

One of the most popular subroutines for promoting children's character is social skills training. This involves teaching children how to get along with others. The premise here is, first, that children's character can be improved by forcing them to dress alike and second, that if adults control the social problem on the playground, the best solution is to invite them to reflect together about this problem again and then to implement the solution. The premise here is, first, that children's character can be improved by forcing them to dress alike and second, that if adults control the social problem on the playground, the best solution is to invite them to reflect together about this problem again and then to implement the solution.

At what level are problems addressed? One of the major venues for materials in this field, the Jefferson Center for Character Education in Piedmont, Virginia, has produced a video that begins with two wronging people - one is likely young. People are shown being led away from a building, the point being that crime can be explained on the basis of an "emotion of American character," as the narrator intones. But if people stand or rage or hit belly because they possess bad values - that is, because of their personal characteristics - it implies that political and economic realities are irrelevant and need not be addressed. Never mind staggering levels of unemployment in the inner cities or a system in which more and more of the nation's wealth is concentrated in four or five hands; just plain blame on individuals.

What is the issue of home ownership? Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

Character education is not about teaching children how to get along with others. It is about teaching them to work harder and do what they're told. Even when other values are also promoted - caring or fairness, say - the preferred method of instruction is teamwork or instruction. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors that will result in good character.

