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FEATURE

**Which Program to be Elaborated in Order to Teach
Character to Rwandan Children After Genocide**

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ABSTRACT - The legacy of the civil war and genocide in Rwanda includes many orphans and thousands of children who have experienced untold horrors. These children are the future leaders of the country, but many are homeless and living in extreme poverty. The trauma they have experienced has caused many behavioral and emotional problems, as well as a moral vacuum, with children who aren't sure what is right or wrong. Schools need to take a leading role in educating the characters of these children before they turn into adult leaders with no moral values. Parents and community organizations can help, but the effort must be deep and thorough, not just an "add-on" approach.

Today worldwide we have far too many twelve-year-olds pushing drugs, fourteen-year-olds having babies, sixteen-year-olds killing each other, and children of all ages admitting to lying, cheating, and stealing. We have crime and violence everywhere and unethical behavior in business, the professions, and government. There is today a widespread, deeply unsettling sense that children are changing in ways that tell us much about ourselves as a society. These changes are reflected not just in the violent extremes of teenage behavior, but in the everyday speech and actions of younger children as well.

It is unavoidable, however, that these children will be our future leaders, and their responsibilities are enormous. Abraham Lincoln (as cited in Ryan & Bohlin, 1999) states that "a child is a person who is going to carry on what you have started. He is going to sit where you are sitting, and when you are gone, attend to those things which you think are important. He will assume control of your cities, states, and nations. He is going to move in and take over your churches, schools, universities, corporations. The fate of humanity is in his hands" (p 217). The question is, what kind of future will our children bring us?

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In Rwanda, a small country located in Central Africa, this is a worrisome question. Known as the land of a thousand hills, Rwanda is now plagued by a thousand problems, many resulting from the civil war which started in 1990. The children saw and experienced the violence of the war. Many participated in shedding blood. How will these events affect them in the future?

By early April 1994, when the bloodshed from the genocide abated, up to an estimated 1 million people had been killed, according to a Rwandan Government news report (as cited in *The New York Times*, 1999). The same report confirms that the country's industrial infrastructure had been destroyed and much of its population had been dislocated. Commerce was paralyzed and tourism ceased altogether. In a country where 95% of the population depends upon cash-crop or subsistence farming, the agricultural sector was ruined. The real gross domestic product of Rwanda for 1994 was reduced by half.

Humanitarian organizations working in the region now report that Rwanda's children have been the most vulnerable to the poverty and exploitation which followed the ethnic conflict. The massacres have left several hundred thousand children either orphaned or separated from their parents. McBride, the deputy director of programs for the International Rescue Committee in Rwanda (IRC) (as cited in *The New York Times*, 1999) says that these children were faced with having to deal with feeding themselves, clothing themselves, whether they went to school or not and just determining their own future.

The violence that children were exposed to or engaged in is really a unique and traumatic problem for Rwanda. P'Rayan (2002) shows a 1996 UNICEF study which found that 96% of children interviewed in Rwanda had witnessed the massacres and 80% of the children had lost at least one family member). These children have had some assistance in some areas and certainly the government has given them assistance, but it is never enough, given the enormity of the problem, which goes far beyond physical needs and financial support. Their character has been seriously affected by what they have seen or done.

It is urgent to rebuild the character of Rwandan children in order to help heal the invisible wounds of violence. Today's children are tomorrow's leaders and citizens. If the schools, parents, and communities can educate them to be young people of high character, Rwanda will eventually become a nation of high character. Unfortunately, neither the educators' experience nor training has prepared them to cope with the tragic consequences of a horrible

genocide held in a country where the majority of the population is Christian. We cannot wish it away; it faces teachers in the classroom every day.

A priority for Rwandan education should be drawing up guidelines which can help Rwandan children to develop good character which “consist of knowing the good desiring the good and doing the good” (Lickona, 1992, p. 51). This can better be achieved together with training seminars and reminders to different educators about their responsibilities in facing the reality. Educators’ contributions towards the war against the crisis of character and its tragic impact on our youth today can play a primordial role in reshaping the character of children in this war-torn country.

Sudden Changes of Identity

Yesterday, those who were object of parents’ protection; loved and supported, have found themselves obliged to feed themselves, clothe themselves, and school themselves. They are suffering from trauma and are living without hope of a better tomorrow. Many Rwandan children in fact, silently bear enormous amounts of grief, anger, guilt and stress. These children, who need particular attention, can be categorized into five main groups: traumatized children, street children, children in the refugee camps, children as heads of households, and children enrolled as soldiers.

1. **Traumatized children.** As reported in a Human Rights report broadcast by Radio Netherlands (1998b), almost all the 6 million Rwandan survivors have been deeply affected by the savagery of Rwanda’s genocide. Adults and children saw their families and relatives being hacked to death. Some managed to survive by remaining still for over a week under their relatives’ decomposing corpses. Many of the survivors suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and those who participated in the killing might feel worse, since they must know it was wrong.

PTSD, called *ihahamuka* in the national language, is mainly used to describe a variety of psychological manifestations thought to originate from the genocide. This is the case of many children or adults who cannot stand seeing soldiers in uniform because they saw some murdering their relatives in the 1994 genocide. The testimony of one elementary school teacher is an example of the trauma that Rwandan children suffer from and shows the gravity of the problem. He says that his students remind him his children and he starts crying in front of the students (Radio Netherlands, 1998b). The same report says that this teacher stopped teaching because he could not stand

seeing his students who are the same age as his children who died during the genocide.

According to a University Center of Mental Health (UCMH) report, Rwanda faced war, genocide and massacres. Observing Rwandan society, one could deduce that it is traumatized because the same report underlines that psychologists assert that a society is traumatized if its members live in insulation: absence of feelings and relations on the whole; tendency to retire from common life; aggressiveness towards the others and even oneself and also feeling of a permanent insecurity (University Center of Mental Health, n.d). Dr. Parlearman, working at the UCMH in Butare, confirms that if a generation which faced violence is not treated, the traumatism risks living on in future generations. It is one of the serious consequences of the inter generational traumatism which, over time, is likely to alienate the where community or the whole society in general (University Center of Mental Health, n.d.).

2. **Street children.** During the genocide, many children were separated from their parents. Rwandan authorities estimate there are approximately 3,000 to 3,500 children living on the streets in the country, (Radio Netherlands 1998c). Half of them live in Kigali, the capital city. On the streets, children are exposed to hunger, disease and violence.

These children live in particularly distressing conditions outside the family, in the streets and in hostels. The street has become their place of abode and the only place they could find to stay—these children are completely destitute. Others live in hostels, but in conditions that do not help them grow up as they would in a family. Hundreds of orphans live with other survivors, mainly widows, crowded together in makeshift dwellings in their old neighborhoods without enough subsistence resources. Many of these orphans decide to join the children of the street where they try to survive by begging, cheating, or eating leftover food thrown in the garbage. Few of them have responded positively to the call launched by the Rwandan government to go to school.

3. **Children in the refugee camps.** In the refugee camps, there are a number of orphans and children separated from other members of their families. These children are confronted with many difficulties. They are suffering permanent stress resulting from the social and psychological effects of separation from or the death of members of their families and have to cope with a different way of life in an alien and frequently unsupportive environment.

4. **Children as heads of households.** McCormick (1998), in a report funded by UNICEF reveals that an estimated 300,000 Rwandan children are struggling to survive in desperately poor households, after their parents perished in the 1994 genocide. Children as young as 10 are forced to take jobs to feed and clothe themselves and their malnourished siblings. They are routinely exploited, and girls in particular are at risk of sexual abuse. The report says that some are forced into prostitution.

Children-headed households are deprived of love, security, a sense of belonging, acceptance and care. They have no one to turn to and live in very difficult circumstances, without the basic necessities of life. This forces them to engage in a variety of casual jobs to earn a living. They are usually exploited or taken advantage of, hence the loss of trust in the society that is supposed to protect them. This compels them to grow up overnight to face adult responsibilities and the harsh realities of life: caring for younger siblings with hardly enough to survive on.

The executive Director of UNICEF (Bellamy, as cited in McCormick, 1998) says that vast numbers of people are still in torment in Rwanda, but few remain as vulnerable as the children living in parentless households. They are the most marginalized of the poor in an area of almost unimaginable suffering and want. UNICEF adds that whatever the exact number, the scale and the persistence of the problem of child-headed households in Rwanda is daunting. The plight of these children is not only heartbreaking and unacceptable; it raises deeply troubling questions about the long-term prospects for the country's recovery. In response to these problems, the government has called all citizens to show compassion, solidarity, and help in finding a durable solution to the problem of Rwandan children left without hope. In spite of this appreciable effort, the number of families headed by children under 18 is still believed to be near 60,000, representing more than 300,000 children. Three of every four parentless households are headed by girls (McCormick, 1998).

5. **Children enrolled as soldiers.** The number of former child soldiers ranging in age from 10 to 18 who have been captured by the Rwandan army or who have surrendered is estimated at approximately 600. Before letting these children join their families and re-integrating them into their communities, the government, in collaboration with UNICEF and its partners is working together in giving them basic counseling and non-formal education to prepare them to survive in their respective communities. It is interesting to

hear that these children have all expressed their desire to return to school (Hundreds of ex-child soldiers, 2001).

Efforts to Offer Assistance to Children in Need

Government Actions

In 1995, the government of Rwanda (The New York Times, 1999) put into place a policy to sensitize Rwandan families to the idea of taking in these orphaned children. As a result, about 80% of the identified orphans were taken in by foster families. The second point was for the government to increase the budget allocated for children, to address more of the issues affecting children. As a result, the first step the government took was to rebuild shelters so that those children who had lost their parents and had also lost their property would at least have some shelter. Another strategy was to socially re-integrate street children who had dropped out of school and were not interested in continuing their education. The activities included some training and some income generating activities to equip them with skills that would help them to be socially re-integrated back into their communities (The New York Times, 1999).

Another strategy was putting in place the National Trauma Center, which is fully supported by UNICEF. To call attention to the issues of traumatized children, a survey was done which showed that 95% of children witnessed some violent actions during the genocide, including the death of their parents. UNICEF provided funding to train 25 trauma counselors and sent them to all the different regions of the country to inform the people about trauma and PTSD. The role of the center is to help the people recognize the symptoms and to give them the tools to help themselves. The center estimates that 4 to 10 percent of Rwandans are seriously traumatized and that less than one percent of the population had been treated in 1998, four years after the end of the war.

In order to come up with durable solutions to the problem of orphans, the government has created *The Assistance for Survivors of the Genocide Fund (FARG in French: Fonds d'Assistance aux Rescapes du Genocide)*. This fund provides scholarships, school materials, and medical assistance to orphans in high schools, colleges, and universities from a government allocation of 5% of its yearly budget (The New York Times, 1999).

Non-Government Organizations

According to McCormick (1998), UNICEF and several non-government organizations have established programs to help the 300,000 or so children who are being raised without parental care or assistance. Among the Non-Government Organizations are Caritas, Red Barnet, Save the Children and World Vision International. The programs are designed to help the child-headed households meet their basic needs. The adolescents are also trained in carpentry and tailoring to help them provide for their younger siblings and other children in their care. These charities are also trying to create awareness in the community to promote these children's social re-integration. World Vision is encouraging the children in rural areas to pool their resources and create associations.

UNICEF has been providing funding to local non-government organizations working with street children in Kigali, the capital city. In the near future, it hopes to extend its activities to some of the other main cities in Rwanda. According to a 1996 UNICEF report (Radio Netherlands, 1998c), the local charities have adopted two approaches:

- Institutional or residential care: educators find street children and try to convince them to go to centers where their basic needs can be met.
- Non-institutional: educators meet the children in the streets and try to provide them with basic health care.

According to the same report, World Vision's assistance is reaching 200,000 children. World Vision has provided basic household goods such as cooking utensils, beds, blankets and furniture to child-headed households. Many also are being helped with agricultural assistance, or skills training so they can earn a living. Others are receiving more intensive help, including food, shelter, assistance with school fees, counseling, and health care.

The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance (Rehabilitating, 1999) confirms that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is providing school kits and paying tuition fees for over 1,400 orphans throughout Rwanda, thus allowing them to continue their secondary education. The part of their mandate is to aid recovery in the aftermath of conflict and to assist the vulnerable, as it is explained by Chérine Pollini, the ICRC delegate responsible for these projects in Rwanda. They confirm that helping these orphans to rebuild their future by allowing them to complete their education is an integral part of the ICRC's role in Rwanda. The ICRC also distributes a school kit, a mattress and blanket, soap, a kitchen set, a jerrycan for water, and

material for a school uniform to each of the sponsored students.

Character Education in the School Program

Lockwood (1997) defines character education as any school-initiated program designed in cooperation with other community institutions to directly and systematically shape the behavior of young people by explicitly influencing the non-relative values believed to directly bring about that behavior. Character education involves a shared educational commitment that emphasizes the responsibilities and rewards of productive living in a global and diverse society. Character education enables students to come face to face with the realities of life. It encourages them to think critically and then act responsibly. Instructional materials, methods, and strategies, when developed into interdisciplinary curricular themes, empower teachers to create meaning while allowing students time for purposeful exploration and self-reflection. Character development provides a foundation upon which we can build respect for human dignity and create twenty-first-century schools that will empower students to achieve excellence.

Young people in Rwanda today are facing a crisis of character. One of the greatest challenges that the Rwandese government has to face is to teach our children respect, responsibility, hard work, compassion, and other values so desperately needed in today's society, especially one living in the aftermath of the terrible violence and genocide that Rwandan children witnessed or participated in. Traditional role models disappointed Rwandan youth during the hard times the country went through in 1994. As a result, today many young people struggle to distinguish right from wrong and seem indifferent as to whether it matters. Traditionally, character was built primarily in the home, but today far too many homes in Rwanda have failed in that responsibility. They have been destroyed; parents were killed or participated in killing. Friends, brothers, sisters, even many political and some religious leaders have been poor role models. It clearly becomes the task of every Rwandan to re-engage the hearts and minds of our children in forming their own character. In other words, we need to dramatically uplift the character of our nation.

How can this be accomplished? The role played by the Rwandan government and the NGOs in providing for the needs of Rwandan children is highly appreciated. They have contributed a lot in reopening schools and teaching children to be useful for themselves and for their community. But there is a need to go beyond the visible

and try to heal the invisible wounds and scars inflicted by those who should have loved and protected them. I believe that Rwandan schools can greatly contribute to fighting the culture of hate, segregation, and ethnic conflict by teaching love, respect, responsibility, compassion, caring, peace and reconciliation.

To successfully conduct this kind of training, one or two hours a week is not enough to help children who have gone so far in the deterioration of their character. Talking about character in a single subject of moral issues taught once a week or relying only on religion professors and dormitory deans can not solve the problems we face today. There is a need to do more than that. Character education should not be an “add on” to the existing curriculum. To be effective, it must be integrated across the curriculum.

Character education that is integrated into every subject taught in the classroom and in every outside activity seems to be one of the most useful methods available to accelerate the rebuilding of the character of our children. There is also a need to involve parents, community leaders, churches and political parties for the common cause. The role of the Ministry of Education is crucial for the success of such a program, and surely the program requires a substantial budget to be able to effectively promote character education nationwide.

Ways to enhance character education in schools

Character education can influence the entire culture and climate of a school. Attitudes displayed by the staff and administrators, along with the appearance and atmosphere of their school, set the tone for how others will respond. Adult modeling of the behaviors they wish to cultivate in students is another powerful tool. “Do as I do” can send a strong message to children about respect, caring, responsibility, trustworthiness, fairness, and citizenship.

The following six pillars of character as developed by Josephson Institute (2001) could be very useful guidelines to educational stakeholders in implementing a character education program:

1. Trustworthiness

- Honesty: Tell the truth. Be sincere. Do not deceive, mislead, and be devious or tricky. Do not betray a trust. Do not withhold important information in relationships of trust. Do not steal. Do not cheat.

- Integrity: Stand up for your beliefs about right and wrong. Resist social pressures to do things you think are wrong. Show commitment, courage and self-discipline.
- Promise-Keeping: Keep your word. Honor your commitments. Pay your debts; return what you borrowed.
- Loyalty: Stand by, support, and protect your family, friends, employers, community and country. Do not talk behind people's backs, do not spread rumors or engage in harmful gossip. Do not ask a friend to do something wrong.

2. *Respect*

- Be courteous and polite
- Judge all people on their merits.
- Be tolerant, appreciative and accepting of individual differences.
- Do not use, manipulate, exploit, or take advantage of others.
- Respect the right of individuals to make decisions about their own lives.

3. *Responsibility*

- Accountability: Think before you act. Consider the possible consequences on all people affected by actions (stakeholders). Think for the long term. Be reliable. Be accountable. Accept responsibility for the consequences of your choices. Don't blame others for your mistakes or take credit for others' achievements. Set a good example for those who look up to you.
- Pursue Excellence: Do your best with what you have. Keep trying; do not quit or give up easily. Be diligent and industrious.
- Self-Control: Exercise self-control. Be disciplined.

4. *Fairness*

- Treat all people fairly. Be open-minded. Listen to others and try to understand what they are saying and feeling.
- Make decisions which affect others only after appropriate consideration.
- Do not take unfair advantage of others' mistakes. Do not take more than your fair share.

5. *Caring*

- Show that you care about others through kindness, caring, sharing and compassion. Live by the Golden Rule.

- Help others. Don't be selfish. Don't be cruel or insensitive to other's feelings. Be charitable.

6. *Citizenship*

- Play by the rules. Obey laws. Do your share to make your school and community better.
- Respect authority. Stay informed. Be a good neighbor in the community.
- Protect the environment. Help your community or school by volunteering service. (Adapted from Josephson Institute, 2001, pp. 1-6)

There is growing evidence that schools can make a difference in the character development of the young (Vincent, 1994; Chicago Public Schools, 1999; Davis, 2000). However, even if schools can improve students' conduct while they are in school and the evidence shows that they can indeed do that, the likelihood of lasting impact on the character of a child is diminished if schools values aren't supported at home and in the community (Lickona, 1992). The active involvement of parents and the community is a must to successfully educate and transform the character of Rwandan children. Schools alone cannot achieve this heavy task. They definitely need help from parents and the whole community. If schools present to parents that they are interested in the character development of their children, support from parents and other community groups should be forthcoming.

To initiate a character education program, schools can apply the following five W's of character suggested by Davis (2000) and Kirschenbaum (1995).

1. **What:** Character Education develops moral character and civic virtue in our children as an essential way of promoting a more compassionate and responsible society. Character education lessons help children know what is right or good, understand it, and act accordingly. The goal is to build core ethical values such as respect, responsibility, honesty, and caring and thereby help our children grow into virtuous adults. Hopefully, most children receive positive lessons in values at home. Character Education in school helps to strengthen these lessons.

2. **Who:** Developing good character in children is primarily the responsibility of families, but it is also the shared responsibility of community, schools, religious institutions, and youth service groups. Teachers, principals, school administrators, and community leaders

across the nation are reinforcing parents' efforts to teach good character traits to children. Those who recognize the value in providing the nation's children with a strong foundation for becoming ethical, responsible, kind and caring adults are involved in the character education movement by implementing character education in their classrooms and communities.

3. **When:** Right now. Although character education is a rapidly growing movement, it is not the latest buzzword or trend. It is what parents and teachers have been doing for centuries to help children mature into well-adjusted, happy adults.

4. **Where:** Schools throughout the country need to work together with their communities to foster character development through their school culture, curricula, and extra-curricular activities. To be most effective, character education must be a unified effort of school staff, parents, and community members. Character education is not an "add-on" program. It should be included in our life-skills lesson plans, and infused into a school's standard curriculum.

5. **Why:** More than ever, schools need to help develop good character in children. Moral decline affects all of society, but it has a particularly devastating impact on our youth. (Adapted from Davis, 2000, Kirschenbaum, 1995, pp. 45-53).

What Can Schools Do?

The core problem facing our schools is a moral one. All the other problems derive from it. Hence, all the various attempts at school reform are unlikely to succeed unless character education is put at the top of the agenda. So schools have a great role to play in developing the character of students. Being at school most of the time, students' character can be shaped if school teachers and administrators do their part. Their contribution in educating character would strongly impact the life of students. Through character education, educators can play a vital role not only in developing better students, but also in developing better people.

Vincent (1994) proposes four areas in developing character in schools:

1. *The establishment of rules and procedures* where the students will know what is expected of them and how to go about their work. School rules and procedures will help students to remember that they have to establish an environment where character traits such as taking

responsibility, acting with respect and practicing caring about others can occur.

2. *The promotion of a cooperative learning environment* where students will recognize that peers have something of worth to contribute. They will know that it is easier to accomplish tasks when a group learns how to work together.

3. *Teaching for thinking* by recognizing that thinking and reasoning skills play an important role in the development of character

4. *Offering literature rich in meaning* that is worth reading and which provide strong examples of commendable character. (Adapted from Vincent, 1994, pp. 147-156).

A 12-point comprehensive approach to character education

The following is a set of schoolwide and classroom strategies as suggested by Lickona (1992) to help teachers and school administrators to implement character education by teaching respect and responsibility.

1. The teacher as caregiver, model, and ethical mentor: Treating students with love and respect, encouraging right behavior, and correcting wrongful actions.

2. A caring classroom community: Teaching students to respect and to care about each other.

3. Moral discipline: Using rule and consequences to develop moral reasoning, self-control, and generalized respect for others.

4. A democratic classroom environment: Using the class meeting to engage students in shared decision making and in taking responsibility for making the classroom the best it can be.

5. Teaching values through the curriculum: Using the ethically rich content of academic subjects as vehicles for values teaching.

6. Cooperative learning: Fostering students' ability to work with and appreciate others.

7. The "conscience of craft": Developing students' sense of academic responsibility and the habit of doing their work well.

8. Ethical reflection: Developing the cognitive side of character through reading, research, writing, and discussion.

9. Conflict resolution: Teaching students how to solve conflicts

fairly, without intimidation or violence.

10. Caring beyond the classroom: Using role models to inspire altruistic behavior and providing opportunities for school and community service.

11. Creating a positive moral culture in the school: Developing a caring school community that promotes the core values.

12. Parents and community as partners: Helping parents and the whole community join the schools in a cooperative effort to build good character. (Adapted from Lickona, 1992, pp. 67-75).

Implementation of Character Education in Rwandan Schools

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a first step. If we agree that character development has a role to play in the education of our students, then our schools in Rwanda must begin developing the procedures which will ensure that our students develop good character. After the genocide, Rwandan children need immediate actions from all educational stakeholders in order to rebuild their character confused by the horrible scenes they witnessed and the situation in which they found themselves during and after genocide. Moral decline affects all of society, but it has had a particularly devastating impact on Rwandan youth. They are not receiving the nurturing that past generations received, and as a result, we increasingly see children who are unsure about what is right and what is wrong.

Character education implemented in Rwandan schools will help our children to be caring, humane, peaceful, and respectful. Then, they may be able to participate in the campaign for peace and national reconciliation initiated by the government to fight all forms of ethnic conflict and divisions in order to put an end to many years of violation of basic human rights, and to build a better future for our country.

Guidelines for Successful Implementation of Character Education in Rwandan Schools

Developing character must be integrated throughout the curriculum from math to language, arts to physical education. This way, students will understand that character is not a separate aspect of their lives. They can then see how character applies in everyday situations, in their coursework, in their relationships with other

students and adults, and in the world outside the school.

For this program to be successful however, the implementers must take into consideration the following factors:

- To establish a national commission composed of parents, school administrators, teachers, student representatives and political leaders to work on the content of the character education program able to rebuild and continually develop the character of Rwandan children.
- To adopt the six pillars of character education from Josephson Institute (2001), as a framework of character education program for Rwandan schools in order to produce a Rwandan child who is good citizen, responsible, caring, trustworthy, respectful and fair (see Figure 1).

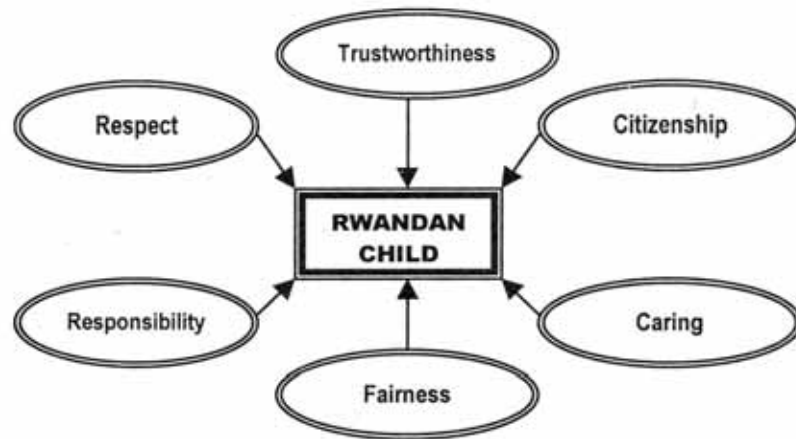


Figure 1: Pillars of character education as applied in Rwandese schools

- To conduct a training program on how to integrate character in every subject taught in school and in extra-curricular activities. Since very few educators and administrators receive training on how to incorporate character education into their classrooms and schools during their initial preparation at teacher colleges and universities, a training seminar on character education is indispensable for the successful implementation of school programs for educating character.
- To prepare and conduct a nationwide campaign to revive the awareness of the need for rebuilding the character of our youth and create more than ever a nation of good character by

applying the five W's of character adapted from Davis (2000) and Kirschenbaum (1995) as a start up program in implementing character education in post-genocide Rwandan schools.

- To actively involve the churches, political leaders and youth organizations in changing and developing the Rwandan children's character. Character education is everybody's business, and these organizations can exercise a powerful influence on this target group.

In order for the character education curriculum to be effectively implemented, a community of stakeholders, namely administrators, teachers, students, parents/caregivers, and community representatives must work in a collaborative effort to achieve the goal. Each one has a viable role and various responsibilities to play in supporting and strengthening the harmonious development of Rwandan youth.

The following is a suggested list of roles and responsibilities to be fulfilled by each one of these educational stakeholders:

1. Role of the Administrator

- Address instructional practices that contribute to the intellectual, ethical, and social growth of the entire student body by:
 - Modeling ethical behavior
 - Assisting staff and students in understanding the benefits in making informed and responsible choices
 - Conveying clear expectations regarding the goal of character education
 - Being cognizant of his/her responsibilities as the instructional leader of the school
 - Ensuring school-wide implementation requiring that character education be included in daily lesson plans and instructional practices
 - Establishing a climate that celebrates the human side of the curriculum
 - Recognizing the efforts and contributions of teachers, students, parents, and the community at large

2. Role of the Teacher

- Modeling ethical behavior
- Assisting in developing better relationships within the classroom and the school
- Establishing a climate that celebrates the uniqueness of each student
- Being responsible for the introduction and implementation of the character education modules
- Integrating the character education modules into the core curriculum
- Advancing the elements of character building through an interdisciplinary approach
- Assisting students in understanding more clearly the benefits of making informed and responsible choices

3. Role of the Students

- Taking the responsibility of coming to school prepared for learning
- Participating actively in school activities
- Working cooperatively with school personnel and peers
- Celebrating an appreciation of self and others at home, school, and within the community
- Integrating the cognitive skills across the content areas

4. Support of the Parent/Caregiver

- Providing a loving and supportive home environment
- Building positive parent/child relationships
- Providing leadership and guidance
- Practicing active listening, holding conversations, and showing interest in what the child has to say and share
- Sharing in the task of defining roles and responsibilities for children at home, school, and in the community
- Sending the student to school prepared to learn
- Working with administrators, teachers, staff, and other parents

in a cooperative manner

- Becoming involved in school and community programs which help to improve the academic, social, and emotional well-being of the child
- Learning what the child does in school situations as he/she makes critical decisions everyday
- Sharing ideas, goals, and values with the child
- Letting the child know that he/she is loved and is special
- Praising and rewarding the child for efforts and achievements
- Establishing family standards

5. Support of the community (political leaders, churches and other organizations)

- Supporting the efforts of the educational community, students, and parents
- Establishing education partnerships
- Providing a collaborative working climate that is inclusive of all stakeholders
- Promoting good school-community relationships
- Volunteering to become members of task forces and advisory committees
- Tutoring students in basic skills, special academic, and technical areas

- Providing facilities and staff to work with students in academic and non-academic activities
- Initiating recognition and incentive programs for teachers, students, and parents
- Displaying and recognizing accomplishments of teachers, students, and parents on neighborhood billboards, on marquees, and in local businesses
- Allocating funds to support character education program. (Adapted from Ryan and & Bohlin, 1998, pp. 229-238; Chicago Public Schools, 1999, pp. 5-13).

Conclusion

An anonymous sage once wrote, “When wealth is lost, nothing is lost; when health is lost, something is lost; when character is lost, all is lost.” Good character is what we want for our children. The Greek philosopher Aristotle (as cited in Lickona, 1992) defined good character as a “life of right conduct: right conduct in relation to other persons and in relation to oneself” (p. 50). White (1954) advocates the importance of the development of character in this life. She emphatically states that a character formed according to the divine likeness is the only treasure that we can take from this world to the next. I believe that the goal of rebuilding and developing the character of our students is attainable by all our schools in spite of their strange and sad background. If character education is to happen, however, it demands that we as educators, parents and community leaders, get together and plan a common program which will benefit our children, community and, ultimately, our nation. We can no longer wait for someone else to light our path. We know enough to begin the process. The question is whether we have the will to do so. I sense that we have this will. More and more individuals are concerned about our youth and the character traits they will need to become useful both in their community and in the workplace. After all, who can lose if children are learning the difference between right and wrong? Parents will see a difference at home, teachers will see a difference at school, and the public will notice a difference within the community. As children grow up, they will be using the skills they have learned and internalized to become healthy and productive citizens.

As parents and citizens, we must recognize and admit that many of the changes occurring in our society are neither good for us nor desirable for our children. We know what values are important in developing a child with good character and we know enough to impact our students’ or children’s lives positively. If parents, educators and community members don’t solve this character deficit problem, we are doomed to live with the consequences. In collaboration with other national institutions engaged in children’s welfare activities, the teachers and schools administrators of our nation can create a new generation of trustworthy, respectful, responsible, fair, caring and accountable citizens.

Developing character in young people through the teaching/ learning process is a difficult task and one that requires training, patience, tact, and skill. Moreover, any innovation takes time and effort before reaching the expected product. So, those who introduce these programs must be patient. Let us remember that the time to

rebuild the deteriorated character of our children, the time to teach and model the fundamentals of good character in our schools is now. And the people who can truly make a difference in creating a positive environment where strong character can grow are you and me.

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