



# The Revitalization of Character Education in Today's Educational Psychology Arena: Contributions from the Sciences of Prevention and Positive Psychology

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## Abstract

Is moral education enriched with recent contributions from the Social Sciences field? The purpose of this article is to analyze the different factors that contributed to the revitalization of a “character” notion and to character education in the United States during the decade of 1990s. The reader will observe that this phenomenon is providing reinforcement and new perspectives to moral education. The aim of this study is to offer a compilation of the main issues relating to what we call the *Character Revitalization Movement* (CRM), encompassing its foundational concepts, most prominent models and main authors. We also want to highlight its close relation to some new, valuable developments in the field of Prevention and Positive Psychology. We foresee that, with its recent advancements, the CRM will become a standard for those interested in this type of education.

**Keywords:** Character Education, Positive Youth Development, Positive Psychology, Resilience, Prevention.

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## Resumen

¿Se está enriqueciendo la educación moral con las actuales aportaciones del ámbito de las Ciencias Psicosociales? Este artículo se dedica a estudiar el fenómeno del por qué de la revitalización de la noción de carácter y su educación ocurrido en Estados Unidos en la década de 1990. El lector podrá apreciar que dicho fenómeno está aportando un verdadero fortalecimiento y nuevas perspectivas a la educación moral. El objetivo de este trabajo es ofrecer una recopilación de las principales cuestiones relativas a lo que hemos denominado *Movimiento de Revitalización del Carácter* (MRC), abordando sus conceptos fundamentales, modelos más punteros y autores principales. Además, se busca resaltar su estrecha relación con algunas nuevas aportaciones desde el campo de la Prevención y la Psicología Positiva. Se vislumbra que, con sus avances actuales, el MRC será un punto de referencia para aquellos interesados por este tipo de educación.

**Palabras Clave:** Educación del Carácter, *Positive Youth Development*, Psicología Positiva, Resiliencia, Prevención.

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## Introduction

“*Character is destiny*”. This sentence, attributed to philosopher Heraclites of Ephesus (544-484 B.C.), has become a part of popular wisdom over the years, and its importance is exemplified by the thousands of years that the notion of “character” has prevailed in human history. This concept – linked to education in virtues – is clearly reemerging in the sphere of Educational Psychology research and practice in the United States, and is beginning to spread to other countries.

“Character education” is used in the USA as a general term that encompasses diverse initiatives, having to do with education in virtues, values education, citizenship education, education for personal development, learning-service, emotional education and education of affect. Although the concept is still under construction (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004), some features seem to identify this type of education: the notions of habit and virtue are used (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006), moral education aims to address the whole person – knowing the good, loving the good and doing the good (Lickona, 1991), it is thought that good character should be intentionally formed and developed in minor children by their significant adults (Murphy, 2002).

A small illustration of the centrality of character education in the US is found in its appearance in the discourse of the two recent presidential candidates (2007). The recognized American association *Character Education Partnership* thanked President-elect Barack Obama for his words which underscored the urgency of “restoring the moral stature of this people...” (*Character Education Partnership*, 2009), thus lining up directly with the objectives of Character Education. Similarly, Senator McCain (then Presidential candidate) underscored the importance that Character Education continues to have in that society, dedicating one of his books specifically to this topic (McCain & Salter, 2005). The importance that Obama and McCain gave to “character” and “character education” is echoed in a leading trend in our country, birthed in the 1990s, which we call the *Character Revitalization Movement* (and sometimes abbreviate as the Movement or as the CRM).

Our intent is to offer a summary of the state of the issue, referring to this movement and its great contribution to current challenges in moral education, serving as a “navigational

chart” for educators and researchers interested in the topic of Character Education (hereafter, CE).

For centuries, the notion of character and the importance of character education was unquestionable, but for different reasons – which we will refer to – it underwent a process of decline, to the point that it was practically abandoned in psychology research. In order to explain its reemergence, we will highlight the situation that made the authors of the CRM try to change the course of moral education as it was being taught in the US, and why. We will stress its history, its main proposals and its ability to incorporate and be strengthened by certain new contributions from the sciences of Prevention – with its paradigmatic change towards an emphasis on protection factors, and on the competencies and strengths of persons that encourage their own full development (*Positive Youth Development*, or PYD) – and from Positive Psychology, which is taking a similar direction.

### **Revitalization of Character Education as a response to the current challenges in moral education**

Presently there is a growing interest in the personal and moral formation of children and adolescents (Altarejos & Naval, 2000; De la Fuente, 2009; Iriarte, Alonso-Gancedo & Sobrino, 2006; López de Dicastillo Castillo, Iriarte, González-Torres, 2008; Nucci, 1997, 2005; Nucci & Narvaez, 2008; Trianes & Fernández, 2001). We know that promoting today’s requirements of technical and intellectual development, without equipping our children with the moral structure to know how to administer it, would be not only non-strategic but irresponsible (Lickona, 1999, Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

Moral education should be able to meet the challenges of today. Many experts in working with minors have a generalized concern over indicators that something is going wrong in the lifestyle of many children and youth. We speak of a crisis in values, of violence, of childhood depression, teenage pregnancies, school failure, excessive pleasure seeking, drug abuse and lack of purpose or the search for a valuable meaning of life (Damon, 1995, 2008; Elzo, 2006; Fernández-Berrocal & Aranda, 2008; Gimeno Sacristán, 2005; González-Torres, 2001; 2003; Pérez & Cánovas 2002; Rodríguez, Muñoz Pérez & Sánchez, 2005; Urra, 2006).

However, there is much disagreement about how this type of education should be given in order to be effective and to prepare young people for a life characterized by health, happiness and solidarity. Moral education today has gotten into deep ruts. Many types of programs have prevailed in the schools, under the title of “values education” or something else, but it is not clear that they equip children and teens with the tools they need for making good moral decisions (Hoff, 2002; Lickona, 1991; Lickona & Davidson, 2005). Additionally, education for fostering self-esteem, considered a focal point of moral education, has often been misunderstood, leading to unfocused practices. The result has been an unfounded fear of damaging the child's *self*, which translated into educational practices and a culture that is afraid to educate, to set limits, exercise authority or in general to demand anything that contradicts the young person's ambivalent desire. This has induced egocentrism and narcissism in youth, and paradoxically, the development of a weak, “inflated” and fragile self-esteem (Baumeister, Boden & Smart, 1996; Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2005; Damon, 1995; González-Torres, 2001, 2003; Seligman, 1996; Smith & Elliot, 2001; Twenge, 2006; Twenge & Campbell, 2009; Urra, 2006).

There is an urgent need to reflect on the possibilities of moral education, and many voices (from research, from the practical sphere of education and from prevention and intervention) have underscored the importance of CE along these lines.

In the United States, the term “character education” has become both popular and controversial (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006). From the beginning of the 1990s until today, the bibliography on this topic has quickly expanded, including intervention programs, and theoretical and empirical research studies (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004, 2005a and b; *Character Education Partnership*, 1999; 2006; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006; Murphy, 2001; Schaps, Battistich & Solomon, 1997). Narvaez (2005) offers revealing figures: “at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the number of schools adopting CE programs in the United States continues to grow: out of 51 states, 47 receive funding for CE programs, 14 states consider this type of education compulsory”.

### *The rise and decline of interest in character education as an educational goal*

CE is not a new idea. Approaches to character education have been split along two opposite views that are rooted in different philosophical paradigms (Narvaez, 2008). The first is

based on the classical approach (on the contributions of Aristotle) and focuses precisely on cultivate the classic notion of “character”, linked to forming habits and virtue; the second derives from the thinking of Rousseau, prompting a process where moral formation would no longer revolve around the classic notion of CE.

### *The Aristotelian moral perspective: “Education of the Character”*

Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, understands virtue as a human excellence that permits the maximum of self-realization and the attainment of the “good life”. According to Aristotle, virtuous life is the only path to attain happiness, and thereby the fullness of humanity (Bernal 1998, Naval, 2001; Palmour, 1986). Men should cultivate (intellectual and moral) virtues, qualities that are objectively good. One novelty in Aristotle’s contribution to the theory of virtue is the ascertainment of three components of the individual’s moral development: intellectual, volitional and behavioral. Development of these aspects in order to experience the virtues is the center of Character Education, and is mentioned in the definitions from different leaders of the CRM (Murphy, 2001). Thus, for example, Ryan indicates that “*virtue is the disposition to think, feel and act in a morally excellent manner ... having good character means being a person who is able to know what is good, love what is good and do what is good*” (Ryan & Bohlin, 1999, p.5). Character education requires strengthening an internal disposition or facility (habits) for the good acts which are characteristic of virtue, and functions as a growth spiral.

According to Aristotle, community support is of vital importance to this process, since even though the person’s natural constitution is to live out the virtue, it will be avoided if –as often occurs – it involves pain or suffering (Naval, 2001). With the help of the teacher, the pupils learn to know, to love and to practice good action. Character is a second nature, forged voluntarily by individuals themselves, and which makes it possible to carry out a good life for yourself and for those who surround you (Lickona, 1999).

### *Decline of the classic notion of “Education of the Character”*

The principal counter-proposal to Aristotelian philosophy came through the Frenchman J. Rousseau (18<sup>th</sup> century). This thinker proposed a romantic idea of persons as being naturally inclined toward good. According to Rousseau, in order to help children live virtue,

the influence of others must be decreased to a minimum, since vice is generated by an inner disorder caused during socialization. Rousseau proposed that the child should be prepared for life in society by leaving him or her unrestricted and free of influences, so that habits would develop naturally. Such persons would then be their own master, listening only to the wishes of their own reason and will. Several approaches to moral education are based on this Rousseauian idea, and present autonomy as the primary goal of moral education (Bernal, 1998; Hoff, 2002).

Little by little, Rousseauian ideas gained acceptance, and consequently, classic notions of character and virtue were set aside in the Educational Psychology arena. New proposals and trends in Western thinking in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries influenced this process, for example: the theory of evolution, the theory of relativity, the adoption of empirical methodologies in the sphere of psychology, research studies on the nature of character, performed and published by Harshorne and May, and the personalist ideas promoted by humanistic psychology (Lickona, 1999). These last three are worth highlighting.

The use of experimental methodologies in the sphere of psychology occurred as an attempt to apply a scientific basis to its labor. Psychological studies focused on measurable, observable human characteristics, pushing aside constructs considered to be vague, general, and highly dependent on human judgment, such as “character”. Several authors indicate that the behavioral paradigm within Psychology has had a decisive influence towards obscuring CE (Lickona, 1999, Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

The second factor that influenced toward a decline in CE were studies by H. Harshorne and M. May, under the supervision of E. Thorndike, who published their results during the period 1928-1930, and who marked – perhaps unintentionally – the before and after of moral education (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006; Leming, 1997; Lickona, 1991; McClellan, 1992; Power, 1997). These researchers were interested in clarifying the fundamental structure of what is referred to as “character” in Psychology and in Education: they sought to determine whether it represented a set of stable, natural dispositions in a person, or rather a group of adaptive abilities that ordered a natural response according to each situation (Leming, 2007).

Leming underscores two central conclusions that changed how Psychology approached the notion of character (Harshorne & May, 1930, *Studies in the Nature of Character*

vol. 3, quoted in Leming, 1997). The first conclusion basically denied the existence of stable patterns – such as character – in the moral functioning of children. This affirmation was based on an experiment regarding honest/dishonest behavior in children. The authors state that “if honesty is a unified characteristic of character, and all children either have it or do not have it, then we would expect that those who have it would be honest in all situations, and vice versa, that the dishonest children would behave dishonestly in every situation. What we observed, in fact, is that honesty or dishonesty in a situation is only related to honesty or dishonesty in another situation to the extent that both situations have common factors” (quoted in McClellan, 1992, p.61.). Hartshorne and May then concluded that the existence of stable behaviors that can be identified as “character” could not be demonstrated, and they proposed that a person behaved differently depending on each situation.

The study’s second conclusion indicated that the CE programs that were evaluated had no effective impact on the moral behavior of the children. In the words of Hartshorne and May, “the teachers’ simple exhortation to act honestly, or the discussion of ideals or standards of honesty ... do not necessarily have any relation to behavior ... The prevailing methods for inculcating ideals probably do very little good and may even cause harm” (quoted in Leming, 1997, p.34). This called into question the relevance of investing resources in CE as it had been understood to date.

Leming stated that, specifically in the sphere of research, the findings of Hartshorne and May dealt a fatal blow to the conception of classic moral education, and led to decreasing interest in the notion of character. In order to back this statement, he cites two studies: (1) a study by Power, Higgins and Kohlberg in 1989, who find that the use of the term “character” decreased in use by 85% between the years 1930-1940, and (2) the study by Stanhope where he indicates that, during the period 1929-1939 one could find 480 articles on Character Education, while ten years later (the period of 1939-1948), only 115 were found 115 (a decrease of 76%).

Finally, the influence of Allport (1897- 1967) is worth noting, as father of Personality Psychology and an important influence in the rise of Humanistic Psychology. Peterson (2006a) underscores his influence in the disappearance of the term “character” from academic discourse relating to the psychology of the personality, since this thinking proposed that character was more of a philosophical than a psychological term. According to Allport, personali-



ty features that ought to be studied were more objective entities, not carrying moral meaning, and more oriented toward a person's adaptation to his or her environment. On the other hand, the self-realization approaches of humanistic psychology also contributed to a questioning of the traditional idea of educating for concrete virtues and values.

Such was the context when the *Theory of Cognitive Moral Development*, proposed by L. Kohlberg and founded on the ideas of Rousseau, Kant and Piaget, changed the course of moral education as a conception (from being in line with the classic notion of CE) and became the center of psychological study and moral practice. According to this author (quoted in McClellan, 1992; Papalia et al., 2001; Peterson & Seligman, 2004), children progress in a more or less ordered fashion through the stages of moral reasoning, which equip them with greater autonomy for understanding and putting fundamental moral principles in practice. The development of moral reasoning is the essence of moral education. The child must be helped along in this development so that he or she progresses through these stages, and toward this end, Kohlberg proposes exercises of moral reasoning (with moral dilemmas) and a democratic model of school, where the child takes part in the decisions for its proper functioning. According to Kohlberg, both elements will strengthen the child's capacity for moral reasoning, will guide the child toward justice, and will prepare him or her for democratic life.

Moral education proposals derived from the theory of Cognitive Moral Development and also from models such as *Values Clarification* were launched in most public schools in the US during the 70s and 80s. With time, it was demonstrated that they did not produce the expected results (Benigna, 1991; McClellan, 1992; Naval, 2001; Power, 1997; Quintana, 1995). Some authors (Hoff, 2002; Lickona & Davidson, 2004) consider that the consequences of this type of education is largely responsible for prompting the CRM in this country. A mere rational understanding of good does not lead the student to act morally, therefore education must take into account other aspects of a person, such as feelings, motivation, habits and customs.

### *Character education in the American context and its reemergence at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century*

In the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a Movement (CRM) began to appear in the US, seeking to reintroduce into the school arena the classic notion of character education as living

virtue, and thereby respond to the problems of youth that other moral education proposals were unable to address. A review of the bibliography published by the principal exponents of the CRM reflects their clear foundation in Greek philosophy (Bennigna, 1991; Bennigna & Wynne, 1998; Berkowitz, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2002; DeRoche & Williams, 1998; Lickona, 1991, 1997; Lickona & Davidson, 2005; Narvaez, 2002; Ryan, 1999; Ryan & Lickona, 1991; Wynne & Hess, 1991; Wynne & Ryan, 1997). One of its characteristics is precisely their intention to recover old notions – such as character and virtue – and at the same time find new methodologies for teaching them, incorporating adjustments and conceptual refinements that are dictated by more recent theories.

Three factors can be identified that facilitated educators' taking a new look at the principles of CE: a) the long tradition in favor of this education, having been present since the beginnings of public education in the US; b) the particular process whereby its reemergence in the US was carried out during the 1990s, where the joint labor of different institutions was of vital importance; c) the findings of diverse studies which contradicted the conclusions from Harshorne and May and the integration of theories that, while bringing in the contributions of moral education according to the principles of Cognitive Moral Development, recovered the role of virtues and character in human life (Narvaez, 2008).

Regarding the first point, authors like Cunningham, 2005; Damon, 2002; Devine, Seuk, Wilson, 2000; McClellan, 1992, 1999 and Nash, 1997 affirmed that since its beginnings, public education in the US was understood as an extension of "Sunday school", thus it had a clearly moral-religious nature. The repeated waves of active immigration up to the present time have made this nation a cultural "melting pot". In order to respond to the challenges of this integration, the government made the decision to make use of public education to unify the values of this newly-formed republic. The choice was to adopt the Christian principles common to the Protestant denominations present in the country, and for this reason the classic approach to CE was followed. This has allowed American society to be familiar with this approach.

The ongoing interest in moral education in the US has prompted continuous research and the testing of methodologies in the search for more effective moral education. Just as this interest facilitated the rapid adoption of the Cognitive Moral Development model, it also facilitated the return to CE and the development of CRM proposals.

On the other hand, one particular aspect has been the process by which the CRM took shape during the 1990s. Collaborative work among the government, NGOs, research centers and schools was vital. Their joint labor prompted a rapid dissemination throughout the United States. By compiling the contributions from Cunningham (2005), Devine et al., 2000; De Roche and Williams (1998), Hoff (2002), McClellan (1999); Williams, Yanchar, Jensen and Cherryl (2003), it is possible to make a list of the events that enabled the introduction of CE principles in America public education policy in the early 1990s. In chronological order, some of these include:

1. In 1992, the *Josephson Institute of Ethics* gathered a group of 30 national leaders (including teachers, youth leaders, politicians and experts in ethics) in Aspen, Colorado to reflect on CE and to foster collaborative work (*Character Counts!*, 2007a and b). The *Aspen Declaration on Character Education* became a milestone that marked the beginnings of the CRM (Hoff, 2002). Particularly far-reaching was the affirmation that there is a list of core values that are common to all society and that, therefore, could be the basis for moral education across the country. The intent was to get past ethic relativism (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006) which had been prevalent in moral education based on Cognitive Moral Development. The meeting participants who birthed the *Aspen Declaration* committed themselves to promoting moral education that furthered these core values.
2. In the light of this experience, two non-profit organizations appeared in 1993 and have been promoting CE across the country ever since. The first is the *Character Counts! Coalition*, and the second is the *Character Education Partnership* (CEP),
3. From the start, the CRM has enjoyed significant support from the government, regardless of the political ideology of the President or of Congress. Several facts demonstrate this support, we highlight just two of them: a) since 1995 the federal government has offered aid to those states that launch CE programs; in the current year, eleven states profited from special subsidies that made possible methodology planning for promoting CE in all public schools; and b) in 2002 the topic of the annual White House conference was chosen to be "Character and Community", and gathered the principal CRM authors (Damon, Narvaez, Schaps, Walker, etc.).
4. 1996 was the year of the *Character Education Manifesto*, which sought to unify the core principles of CE. It was the first document of this kind, proposing a common de-

definition for the notion of character, in addition to seven guiding principles for educational reform that was to be established in educational programs (*Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character*, 2006). The Manifesto was undersigned by the governors of eight states, something which gave it considerable visibility.

5. Finally, worthy of mention are the efforts of different researchers to propose models that delimit the best course for the Movement (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006; Lickona & Davidson, 2005). They offered analytical criteria for identifying good practices (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005a; CEP, 1999, 2006). Thus, the spread of the Movement was enhanced thanks to annual recognition programs for the best CE initiatives launched at schools around the country.
6. In recent years, other perspectives from diverse spheres of science and psycho-social practice have evolved, sharing common objectives with CE. Due to their theoretical and empirical strength, they have helped CE to take on importance in the sphere of preventive work with children and youth, thus providing strong backing for the CRM (Battistich, 2005; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006).

### **Contributions from the Sciences of Prevention and Positive Psychology**

It is possible to differentiate two phases in the historical development of the CRM. The first, called the “traditional CE perspective”, spans the decade of the 1990s and is characterized as a stage of consciousness raising and dissemination of the benefits of this type of education (Bennigna & Wynne, 1998; Lickona, 1991, 2004a, b; Ryan & Bohlin, 1999; Wynne & Hess, 1991; Wynne & Ryan, 1997). It lacks, however, consistent theory development and strategies for measuring and validating the results of its models and propositions. These gaps are what the second phase tries to address, developing models that are founded on the contributions of Psychology and on scientific advances in the areas underlying Prevention. They offer concepts and methodologies that facilitate education in virtues (Berkowitz, 2000, 2002; Berkowitz & Bier, 2004, 2005a and b; Catalano, Hawkons & Toumbouro, 2008; Lickona & Davidson, 2005; Narvaez, 2005).

*Changes in the area of Prevention: From deficit and risk factors to interest in strengths and in protection factors*

In parallel to the CRM, the 1990s also brought a change in paradigm or perspective in preventive work with children and youth, encompassed in what has been called *Positive Youth Development* (PYD), and also supported by the newly emerging Positive Psychology. A bibliographic review reveals that both those who promoted this orientation as well as the authors of the Movement identified a strong convergence in their approaches, that could be mutually beneficial (Battistich 2005; Berkowitz, 2000; Berkowitz, Sherblom, Bier, Battistich, 2005; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006; Narvaez, 2005; Park, 2004; Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 1997).

What does this paradigm change consist of? It is a movement in favor of a positive perspective for focusing preventive services, programs and policies that are designed to address the problems and development of youth. PYD encompasses recent findings from different behavioral sciences with regard to the huge potential of human development even in very adverse situations, and it has united scientists, politicians and workers from the practical arena of prevention, and from other scientific arenas, including those working in CE (Narvaez, 2008).

It is a difficult task to try to present in this section the common elements that summarize the work done from this perspective. Benson and Saito (2001) go so far as to say that if 10 people were asked to draw up a report that synthesizes what we currently know about PYD, that 10 very different reports would emerge and that the cross references would be minimal. Nonetheless, we will try to offer a brief review of the central ideas in this initiative and its relationship to the CRM. Note that Catalano et al. (2008) made an attempt at a operational definition of positive youth already in 1997.

K. Pittman, leading author in the launch of PYD, describes it as a movement which focuses the field of Prevention on developing the strengths and competencies of children and youth and not only on reducing problems (Pittman, et al., 2001). This movement (Benson & Pittman, 2001; Berkowitz et al., 2005c; Catalano et al., 2004; Clary & Rhodas, 2006; Damon, 1995, 2002; Pitman, Irby & Ferber, 1996; Pittman et al., 2001; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Small & Memmo, 2004) guides the area of Prevention not only toward protecting certain children and youth from the most frequent risk behaviors, with very specific programs fo-

cused on specific problem areas (drug addiction, violence, etc.), there is an emerging awareness that prevention requires investing in the entire population, whether it was labeled as healthy, sick or at risk (Damon, 2002). Prevention ought to occupy itself also with strengthening a wide range of personal resources capable of helping them not only to overcome these risks, or any other risks present in daily life, but also to have fuller and happier lives. It sought to overcome the widely held stereotype of adolescent and youth development as a period full of dangers, where minors are seen as “problems” that must be straightened out in time before they hurt themselves or others. Youth must be seen more as “resources” rather than “problems”, and we must adopt a multi-causal, ecological perspective (involving schools, family and the broader community in the positive development of youth).

Pittman et al. (2001, p.4) offer an example that may be quite useful by way of illustration. Imagine a young person is being introduced as a candidate for a job opening, along these lines: *“This is John. He doesn’t use drugs. He doesn’t belong to any gang. To date he has not presented absenteeism. He is not a teenage father. Please hire him.”* Logically, the employer would say something similar to: *“That’s good news, especially in these times, but ... what does John know how to do?”* Thus, the slogan of those who promote this paradigm shift called PYD, is *“being free of problems does not mean being well prepared”*. This phrase is considered to summarize the essence of the problem: a rather limited perception of youth, their possibilities and their needs. The question “What can young people do?” is the central focus of PYD: the capacities of each youth and the mechanisms for strengthening them.

Two lines of research have contributed notably to the development of PYD: a) research studies on resilience, and b) the study of the so-called *Developmental Assets (DA)* (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

Theories regarding “resilient” development seek to explain the “mysterious” fact that scientists and health workers have come up against rather frequently: certain individuals who have been exposed to serious risks during childhood (e.g. poverty, high probability of hereditary disease, violence, family disintegration and/or effects of war or natural catastrophes) apparently are able to move forward without any help, defying the expected dreadful results. Resiliency is understood as the competency that manifests itself despite exposure to significant stressors (Rolf & Glantz, 1999). Two aspects are needed in order to identify resiliency: exposure to an important risk or pressure, followed by a later positive adaptation to the envi-

ronment (Masten, 1999, 2001; Masten & Reed, 2002). The resilient capacity is a kind protection for the person against the possible risk, and at the same time, a resource for carrying on a healthy life in their specific environment.

One of the most significant contributions in this field was the intercultural research by E. Werner (1996), performed with children in high risk contexts in Hawaii and the continental United States. In this longitudinal study, he monitored the development of nearly 700 children in situations of poverty and marginalization, recording the risk factors present in their context at birth, and following up the course of their life over 40 years. One of his conclusions is that resilience occurs more frequently than is thought, and it is part of what Masten (2001) calls "magic of ordinary life". The study remarked that only 1 of 6 children exposed to at least one high risk factor showed any maladaptive behavior at age 32 or 40. Today there are several studies that support this assertion: far from being an extraordinary phenomenon, resilience seems to be a common characteristic in human beings, formerly underestimated by social scientists (Bonnano 2004; Brown, D'Emidio, Bernard, 2001; Glantz & Johnson, 1999; Henderson, Benard, Sharp-Light, 1999; Masten & Reed, 2002). Resilience is therefore not just a special quality or group of qualities present in a few "invincible children".

Werner's study identified certain elements common to the context and personality of resilient individuals, characteristics that were named "protective factors". This term refers to characteristics of a group of individuals, or of their particular situation, which are measurable and can predict positive results in the face of a context of risk or adversity (according to Masten & Reed, 2002). They are a kind of shield that preserves the person's internal structure, keeping the stress that they are exposed to from deteriorating their physical or mental health.

Different authors have proposed different lists of the most effective protective factors for generating a resilient structure (Benard, 2004; Masten & Reed, 2002; Morrison et al., 2006; Munist et al., 1998). Benard's proposal (2004) has had a huge impact on the practical guidance sector of the youth development field, classifying these factors into two large groups: a) *internal protective factors or strengths* that are personal characteristics that make the individual capable of responding to stress positively, and b) *external or environmental protective factors*: characteristics of the surrounding environment that favor the development of the internal protective factors. The first group of factors is seen in Table 1:

**Table 1. Internal protective factors. Taken from Benard, 2004.**

<b>Social competence</b>	<b>Problem Solving</b>	<b>Autonomy</b>	<b>Sense of Purpose</b>
Responsiveness	Planning	Positive identity	Goal directedness, achievement motivation, educational aspirations
Communication skills	Flexibility	Internal locus of control and initiative	Special interests or hobbies, creativity, imagination
Empathy/caring	Resourcefulness	Self-efficacy and mastery	Optimism
Compassion, altruism and forgiveness	Critical thinking and introspection	Adaptive distancing and resistance	Hope
		Attention / mindfulness	Faith, spirituality, sense of meaning and purpose
		Sense of humor	

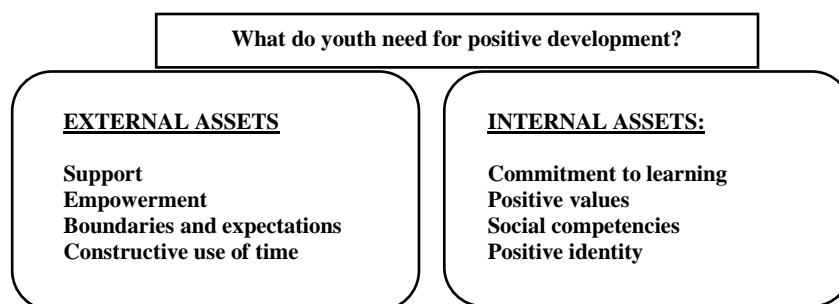
Among the external protective factors, Benard includes: a) *caring/relationship support*, b) *high expectations* in the child’s surrounding environment, and c) *opportunities for meaningful participation and contribution* in families, schools and communities.

Taking this research as a basis, the mid-90s brought work on *Developmental Assets* (DA) by P. Benson and colleagues from the *Search Institute* in Minnesota (Benson et al., 1999; Benson & Pittman, 2001; Benson & Saito, 2001). This Institute sought to study the most important talents, energies, strengths and constructive interests that help youth to have healthy development in every sphere. This interest was emerged within the framework of concern over the negative indices of “healthy behavior” during childhood and adolescence during this decade. Starting from a review of many related studies, the group’s intent was to put forward a conceptual framework for work that would promote the well-being of youth as whole persons, and to prepare them for coping with their problems. Their proposal has become one of the most well-known and influential in the framework of PYD (Small & Memmo, 2004).

In response to the PYD slogan, “*free of problems does not mean well prepared*” (Pittman, 2001; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Small & Memmo, 2004), those who promote this



approach seek to identify what “being well prepared” means, and how to help youth to get there. The classification put forward by the *Search Institute* includes 40 characteristics classified in 8 subgroups. On one hand are the *external assets* and on the other hand the *internal assets*, each includes twenty positive characteristics organized into four categories (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1. External and internal assets. Inspired by Benson et al., 1999.**

Presently, the *Search Institute* (*Search Institute*, 2007) is validating systematic models of *assets* for other age groups (preschool age children, primary school children) and their DA classification has been used in educational projects and research studies in several institutions.

A little more than a decade has passed, and despite the short time, there are a large number of persons and institutions that have launched youth development programs according to the principles of PYD, with interesting results (Battistich, 2005; Catalano & colls., 2004, 2008; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003) and they concur with many of the ideas of CE proponents. But practice has gone ahead of theory, and there are important challenges to be overcome (Benson & Saito, 2001; Berkowitz et al., 2005, Catalano et al., 2008). The so-called “Positive Psychology”, with its study of character strengths and virtues, is contributing substantially to this attempt.

### *Positive psychology and character strengths*

The paradigm change in Prevention Sciences is also seen in the Psychology orientation known as “Positive Psychology”, which was birthed by Seligman in 1998, and has experienced much development and interest in very few years (Chafouleas y Bray, 2003; Keyes & Haidt, 2003; Linley & Stephen, 2004; Linley, Stephen, Harrington & Wood, 2006; Lopez,

Snyder & Rasmusen, 2003; Maddi, 2006; Park et al., 2006; Seligman, Steen, Park, Peterson, 2005; Sheldon & King, 2001; Roberts, Brown, Johnson, Reinke, 2002; Vera, 2006).

Its principal proponents describe it as a science that seeks to study: a) positive subjective experiences (e.g. happiness, life satisfaction, positive emotions), b) positive individual traits (e.g. character, values, resilience) and c) positive institutions (e.g. family, schools, community), for the objective of improving people's quality of life and of preventing mental pathologies (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

This approach seeks to orient Psychology and the other Social Sciences to those positive characteristics that make life satisfactory and which are common to most people's lives, instead of what is going wrong (each person's pathologies or deficits). According to this approach, the important thing is not only the absence of illness but the development of positive emotions, personal strengths and the institutions that promote happiness, health and social bonding. These authors express their expectation that in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, Positive Psychology will develop as a science and profession that will not only understand, but also construct factors that allow individuals, communities and societies to flourish and to live satisfactory, full lives.

Positive Psychology has revived a scientific interest in character, as is underscored in the following statement by Seligman: *“any science that does not use character as a basic idea ... will never be accepted as a useful illustration of human affectivity. Consequently, I consider that the time has come to revive character as a central concept of the scientific study of human behavior”* (Seligman, 2003, p.193).

One of the primary contributions from this school of thought, led by Peterson, Seligman, Park and others, has been development of the project *The Values in Action (VIA) Classification of Strengths*. This project sought to identify the virtues and character strengths necessary for each human being to develop in order to ensure the “good life” in the Aristotelian sense and that would additionally act as a protective barrier against psychological risks and problems, making development of these qualities a clearly preventive strategy (Park, 2004; Park & Peterson, 2009; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Seligman et al., 2005; Steen, Kachorek, Peterson, 2003).

According to Peterson (2006a), the project arose from the difficulties that PYD was experiencing in producing a clear definition of “optimal development” from which to establish agreed-upon strategies that would guide effective interventions for achieving this optimal development. Without common concepts and measures, it was impossible to determine the essential ingredients that ought to guide the design of interventions from the promising PYD perspective. The president of the Mayerson Foundation, N. Mayerson, was interested in sponsoring projects that promoted PYD, and asked Seligman whether Positive Psychology could produce some contribution in this regard (VIA, 2007). Starting with the question -- “*how can we help youth to realize their maximum potential?*” -- Peterson and Seligman (2004) jointly founded the VIA Institute in the year 2000, uniting the two perspectives of PYD and Positive Psychology in a common project.

The research by Peterson, Seligman and colleagues provided the starting point for a systematic study of character, and resulted in a classification of 6 core universal virtues that make possible a “good life”, contributing to the optimal development of the person. They also defined 24 “character strengths”, psychological ingredients (processes or mechanisms) that define the virtues and represent distinguishable paths for manifesting them (see the VIA Classification of Character Strengths in Table 2).

They also created a measurement instrument for adults that assess the degree to which these basic virtues and character strengths are present, called *Values in Action Inventory of Strengths* (VIA-IS). Peterson and Seligman published their classification and instrument in 2004, in the book *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*, published by Oxford Press with support from the American Psychological Association. This work has been considered the first large project developed deliberately from the current of Positive Psychology (Peterson, 2006b). On the other hand, as Park and Peterson recognize (2009 p.3): “the *VIA Project is offering a legitimated vocabulary for psychologically informed debate about the qualities of individuals that make them morally valuable*”.

Also worth mentioning is the contribution from Park (2004) on the relationship between Positive Psychology, PYD and CE as expressed in his article *Character Strengths and Positive Youth Development*. She thus affirms that from the conceptual framework of Positive Psychology, it is possible to find a framework of understanding that facilitates the promotion of positive development in children and young people, attained through CE. Park values the

work done by the CRM in reviving the terms virtue and character, underscoring the scientific backing received from the contributions of PYD and Positive Psychology. Furthermore, she is the author of a version of the instrument for young people (ages 10-17), called the *VIA Youth Survey*.

**Table 2. VIA Classification of Character Strengths**

<b>Virtue</b>	<b>Character Strength</b>
<b><i>Wisdom</i></b>	Curiosity/ interest, love of learning, Judgment, open-mindedness, critical thinking, Practical intelligence, ingenuity, creativity, originality, Perspective
<b><i>Courage</i></b>	Bravery Perseverance and industry, Integrity, honesty, authenticity, Zest, enthusiasm
<b><i>Humanity Love</i></b>	Intimacy ( capacity to love and be loved) Kindness, generosity/nurturance Emotional, personal and social intelligence
<b><i>Justice</i></b>	Citizenship, duty, loyalty, Sense of fairness, equity, Leadership
<b><i>Temperance</i></b>	Forgiveness and mercy, Modesty and humility, Prudence, caution, Self-control, self-regulation.
<b><i>Transcendence</i></b>	Appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, Hope, optimism, future-mindedness, Humor, Spirituality, sense of purpose, faith, religiousness

Next, we briefly present some of the recent advances from the CRM as found in the following contributions.

### **New Advances from the CRM: Contributions from Berkowitz, Lickona and Narvaez**

In their analysis of the course of the CRM to date, Berkowitz and Bier (2005 a and b) state that we run into that eternal problem of “the glass half empty or half full”. Should we turn our view to the large number of CE programs that have been implemented to date, or rather on the lack of conceptual precision and scientific rigor?

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century marks the end of the first phase of the CRM. During this era there has been huge progress, including support from North American society for CE objectives, and the establishment of the theoretical foundations of the Movement. With the new millennium begins a second phase, where the focus is on clearer and deeper definition in the theoretical *corpus* that deals with character and character education, continuing to incorporate contributions from other disciplines and to empirically verify proposals for the formation of character. In 2006, Lapsley and Narvaez published a highly significant chapter called “Character Education” in the *Handbook of Child Psychology* (volume coordinated by W. Damon), a work of world-renowned prestige which is a reference point in the field of Developmental and Educational Psychology, where they emphasize the current interest in this topic. Their review highlights the contributions of Berkowitz, Lickona and Narvaez. These authors also collaborated in the recent book entitled *Handbook of Moral and Character Education* coordinated by Nucci and Narvaez (2008).

Common to these contributions are: a) a search for greater precision in terminology, b) greater support in current Educational Psychology theories, and c) specific application experiences that have strengthened the theoretical models (in the case of Lickona and Narvaez).

#### *Martin Berkowitz and his model of Moral Anatomy:*

Berkowitz is a specialist in Developmental Psychology, professor at the University of Missouri (Saint Louis). He directs the *McDonnell Leadership Academy in Character Education*, an institution that focuses on working with school principals for the promotion of CE. Three of his main contributions can be underscored:

a) A model that illustrates the relation of character to the human moral structure, proposed in the 1990s. Berkowitz (1997, 1998, 1999) seeks to thus identify the components of human morality so as to specify what ought to be the approach of CE. The key principle behind his work is that CE (and Moral Psychology) have oversimplified their approach to human morality, taking it to be a relatively homogeneous construct. He feels that it should be understood rather as a complex group of diverse constructs that encompass the totality of the moral person. In order to understand the moral functioning of a person, he poses the following question: “*If we had to dissect the moral person and categorize the different moral organs that make up human morality, what would we include in the list?*” (Berkowitz, 1995, p.3). He proposes seven components of this *human moral anatomy*: moral behavior, moral character, moral values, moral reasoning, moral emotions, moral identity necessary for moral exemplariness, and moral person (include such things as self-discipline and perseverance) for effective moral functioning. He indicates that there should be strategies that respond to the nature of each of these components of the “moral anatomy”, in order to facilitate positive development of the whole person. According to Berkowitz (1997), character is one of the dimensions of human morality, and he defines it as a group of psychological characteristics of the individual, affecting his or her ability and inclination to act morally.

b) Advocating for joint work between Positive Prevention Sciences and the CRM, since they share objectives, terms and target population. He was among the first to highlight the importance of CRM proposals integrating different theories and methodologies from related fields, so as to better respond to the complexity and diversity of moral functioning. In his writings he underscores the importance of CE within the PYD framework, due to its preventive function (Berkowitz, 2000; Berkowitz et al., 2005).

c) A critical assessment of the advances and aspects for improvement in Character Education during its first and second stages. In a study titled *What works in character education* (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005a and b), financed jointly by the *Character Education Partnership* and the *John Templeton Foundation*, he reviews the initiatives which have labeled themselves as “educating character”. His objective was to identify the characteristics of programs that had empirically verified good results. The synthesis of “good practices” and recommendations has become a solid basis for the growth of the CRM. In a later article, Berkowitz et al. (2008) try to identify what is the common theoretical substrate of the CRM, and what ought to be the future lines for research.

Narvaez (2005) has emphasized that the Berkowitz model is an important support in recovering CE as a sphere of study for Educational Psychology. She feels that his greatest contribution was to establish the relationship between character and the notions of personality and identity. On the side of criticisms, she points to a lack of precision in defining the components of his model, and the lack of empirical support for his proposal.

### *Thomas Lickona and the model of Smart and Good High Schools*

In 2005, Lickona – a professor at *New York State University* and founder of the *Center for the 4th and 5th R's: Respect and Responsibility* (2006) – and in collaboration with M. Davidson, published their report: *Smart and Good High Schools: Integrating Excellence and Ethics for Success in Schools, Work and Beyond*. The report was published under the auspices of the *Character Education Partnership* and the *Center for the 4th and 5th R's: Respect and Responsibility*<sup>1</sup>. This research, based on recent theories from Developmental Psychology, incorporates some of Lickona's ideas from the prior decade.

It was already a fixed feature in Lickona's thinking that the objective of CE is education in virtue. He understands character as an inner disposition that allows a person to respond well when faced with moral situations. He feels that education should take into account the "psychological components of character" – knowing the good, loving the good and doing the good – with the objective of bringing the student to moral maturity. His understanding of character is therefore three-fold: mind, heart and action. The ultimate measure of character is action. The author then proposes specific methodologies that seek to develop each of these elements (Lickona, 1991; 1997, 1999).

These ideas are taken from his earlier work and reformulated. Lickona and Davidson (2005) summarize the essential idea in the new title for their model: schools ought to concentrate on cultivating two dimensions: intelligence (in the sense of multi-dimensional intelligence) and goodness (in the multi-dimensional sense of moral maturity). These two dimensions have been the core mission of education over the course of history.

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<sup>1</sup> We chose to name this section "the Thomas Lickona model", even though Davidson is a coauthor of the main study mentioned here (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). Lickona is the only author of other complementary bibliography that we include, and he is a renowned figure in the Movement. It seemed fitting to acknowledge his leadership in naming this section.

In their work, these authors adopt the quotation from former U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who said that “educating a man’s reason and not his morals means educating a threat to society” (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). But the opposite maxim is equally negative: educating a person morally but not their intelligence produces a different threat – having doctors, lawyers or mechanics who are honest but incompetent in their functions will always be harmful to society.

They recognize that wholistic education (mind, heart and action) should include both a moral dimension and a *performance* dimension, promoting not only the formation of thoughts, feelings and actions related to moral doing, but also the development of practical capabilities for personal excellence in a broader sense (Davidson, Lickona & Khmelkov, 2008; Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

In their thinking, a person with character responds with excellence to daily challenges, whether these have a moral aspect or are simply connected to their daily activities. They put forward a two-fold view of character, with:

- a) one dimension related to intellectual skills, called *performance character*. It is related to the education of intelligence. This character dimension is oriented toward personal excellence. It includes aspects such as diligence, a solid work ethic, positive attitude, self-discipline and perseverance, and is considered by this author to be a *self-mastery orientation*.
- b) another dimension linked to moral doing, and referred to as *moral character*. It is related to moral education. It is oriented toward education of a “moral character”, a dimension that establishes how a person relates to himself/herself and to others. It includes virtues such as integrity, fairness, goodness and respect, and has a relational orientation. This aspect refers then to the development of qualities needed for ethical behavior. Lickona and Davidson state that this dimension of character allows a person to treat others – and himself/herself – with respect and care, while also acting with ethical integrity.

Narvaez (2005) highlights four very concrete contributions from this model: 1) it is an integrated model that proposes “correct thinking” (based on Platonic thinking) incorporated into “correct behavior” (based on Aristotelian thinking), 2) the term “virtue” and its three-part



composition: moral knowledge, moral feeling and moral behavior, 3) it promotes the centrality of the educational mission in moral terms, and 4) it is fed by contributions from the sphere of Educational Psychology, for a stronger approach (e.g. metacognitive instruction, cooperative learning, motivation). As for criticisms, she mentions two important deficiencies in the model: the lack of greater scientific rigor in the definition of character, and the lack of a validated, systematic pedagogy to undergird his propositions.

*Darcia Narvaez and her Integrative Ethical Education (IEE)*

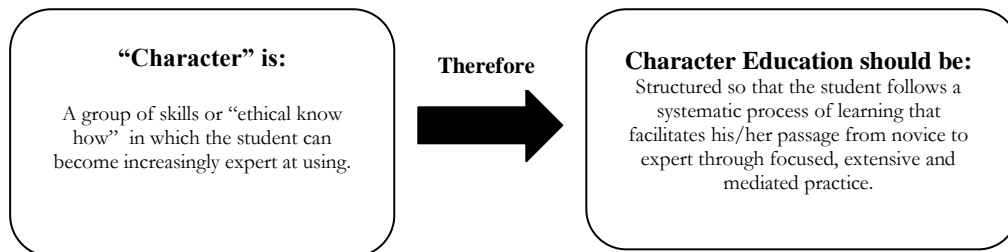
Narvaez is a professor at *Notre Dame University* and the director of the *Center for Ethical Education and Development*, connected to this same university. Her work has taken shape in a CE model called *Integrative Ethical Education (IEE)*. This model was spelled out in an educational project called *Community Voices and Character Education (1998-2002)*, which was launched at several schools in the state of Minnesota, with good results, thanks to financing from the US Department of Education (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006).

The core distinction between IEE and other propositions already described above is that this model is based on a new understanding of the notions of “character” and “education”, gained through integrating assumptions from CE, models of cognitive moral education (especially the Kohlberg proposal) and certain contributions from the spheres of Psychology and Education that have emerged in recent decades (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006; Liddell, 2007; Narvaez 2002; 2007; 2008; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2005). According to the author, IEE:

- a) Would like to revive notions from Classical philosophy such as *eudonomia* – “human flourishing”, *arete* – “excellence”, *phronesis* – “practical wisdom” and *tecne* – “expertise or expert learning”.
- b) Is founded on a notion of character that is related to contributions from the cognitive sciences, specifically with theories that explain the development of *expertise* – “expert learning” (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 1999; Ericsson & Smith, 1991; Sternberg, 1998), and self-regulated learning (Torrano & González-Torres, 2004; Zimmerman, Bonner & Kovach, 2002)
- c) Takes in findings from the Prevention Sciences and Positive Psychology in order to determine the group of skills that make up “good character”. It is compatible with the PYD perspective, since its objective is to equip with competencies that offer an assertive response to the demands of adulthood.

- d) Seeks to articulate a proposal of practical improvements for moral education, based on the knowledge accumulated by the *Movement* in its first stage, and on certain contributions regarding cognitive moral development.

The core thesis of IEE can be summarized in the following diagram:



**Figure 2. Core thesis of IEE. Inspired by Narvaez, 2007.**

In order to explain her model, the author poses the following questions: *how do children learn? how is a novice different from an expert? what is it that people with good character know?* She responds to these questions by referring to current theories on how learning takes place (constructivism / social mediation), how expert knowledge is developed and the role of self-regulated learning processes, as we have indicated.

Narvaez proposes that moral experts are distinguished by 21 well-developed skills (e.g. understanding emotional expressions, ethical reasoning, identifying criteria for making judgments, persevering, planning and decision making, etc.) that can be grouped in 4 areas (see Table 3):

An extremely valuable contribution for any educator interested in this topic are this author’s teaching guides, put forward as proposals for teaching each of these skills<sup>2</sup>.

The team led by Darcia Narvaez is presently devoted to the search for strategies for measuring moral skills that are worked on in this model, and to the study of its neurological foundations (Narvaez, 2008) and of moral identity (Liddell, 2007). It is expected that the model will continue to be enriched by these contributions. con estas aportaciones. Some topics remain under discussion, such as the definition of the axiology of values or of virtues to be

<sup>2</sup> The reader can find an example of the material used for strengthening each skill at the following URL: <http://cee.nd.edu/curriculum/curriculum1.shtml>.

taught (in *Community Voices and Character Education* it was the school itself that decided on these) and more precise contributions on a relationship (as the author sustains) between moral education and academic performance.

**Table 3. *The process model of ethical behavior. Inspired by Narvaez, 2007***

<b>Ethical Sensitivity (NOTICE!)</b>	<b>Ethical Judgment (THINK!)</b>	<b>Ethical Motivation (AIM!)</b>	<b>Ethical Behavior (ACT!)</b>
Interprets a moral situation, taking into account who is involved, what actions should be taken, what possible reactions might occur, and what results might be obtained.	Reasons about the possible actions, and judges which action is most ethical.	Gives a higher priority to ethical action than to other goals or needs.	Puts the ethical action into practice, since he or she knows how to do it and is able to overcome the difficulties in doing so.

## Conclusions

The *Character Education Revitalization Movement* (CRM) is an initiative for moral education that seeks to recover Aristotelian principles for educating in virtue. Education and moral psychology have been long dominated by the ideas of Cognitive Moral Development proposed by Kohlberg. In contrast to this hegemony, although incorporating its contributions, the CRM presents proposals for CE that have also drawn from theories and substantial research in different scientific arenas, with positive results.

This movement emerged in the US during the 1990s, in a context which favored its appearance, and in response to a concern over the growing problems of many children and young people, which the prevailing moral education did not seem to address. The history of moral education in this country has particular milestones that influenced both the decline of CE and the later rise of the CRM. Vital to this process has been the joint work among the government, NGOs, research centers and schools; this explains in large part its rapid dissemination across the US. Undoubtedly, its contributions are an important benchmark for establishing CE proposals in other contexts that face youth-related problems that are increasingly similar to those in the United States.

We have spelled out a few of its strengths and weaknesses, and how the CRM has been enriched and is being consolidated theoretically and empirically through contributions from the change of perspective in the Prevention arena (PYD) and from Positive Psychology. All this has increased the scientific and practical interest in CE. We highlight two interesting contributions:

a) *Character Education is preventive*: These perspectives have supported CRM propositions by focusing on the pupils' capabilities and possibilities for acting morally, and on the full development of youth.

b) *The reappearance of the notions of virtue and character in the Educational Psychology sphere*: Positive Psychology makes an extremely important contribution by recovering the notion of virtue and character as a focus of scientific study. It proposes that there can be systematic study of the virtues, of character strengths and of "the good life", and offers a first attempt: *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* by C. Peterson and M. Seligman.

Regarding recent contributions from the Movement, we consider especially valuable the work by Navaez. Her model (IEE) and her leading approach to CE have spawned interest in this topic within Educational Psychology, since it is supported by sociocognitive, constructivist and neurobiological perspectives, and specifically, by recent research on the development of expert knowledge (*expertise*). With this framework, she poses a new understanding of the notion of character, the dimensions to be worked on and how to do so. Furthermore, her model has been put into practice in the program *Community Voices and Character Education* and is being empirically validated with good results.

As a final conclusion, we consider that CE – virtues – can be viewed as a valid path for positive development of all youth, and consequently, for the prevention of problems. Different psychological theories back this premise, and results obtained by the CRM to date are promising. For the future, different obstacles must still be overcome, such as: language problems, definition of constructs and instrumentation, greater integration of the diverse perspectives that come under the heading of CE, empirical validation of intervention programs and more development of longitudinal studies (Berkowitz et al., 2008).

We wished to offer the reader a synthesis of relevant information on the past, present and future of the CRM in the United States. A burning question that we wish to pose is to

what extent the propositions of this Movement can be incorporated in countries with a different history and current context than that of the US. The authors of this paper give a specially high value to the theoretical and methodological richness of CRM proposals, and consider that they may be greatly useful for work that is being done along these lines outside the United States, and in our country specifically, although it is not classified under the heading of Character Education.

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