

Eliminating poor character through character-based education

Where are children learning character? John Mickelson, our guest blogger, strongly believes that character needs to be addressed not only in families, but in schools as well.



Some may question the wisdom of spending school time and resources educating children about character. After all, school is for the three R's; character and manners are taught at home, right? I recently had an experience that proved this thinking outdated and reemphasized the urgent need for character-based education in our school system.

Last weekend I had the pleasure to volunteer with a great organization. We were tasked with giving away 97 bikes away to low-income students from the southeast side of Des Moines. The event was a culmination of literally hundreds of people donating money, tireless efforts of a top-notch staff, and thousands of hours of volunteer time. My two-year-old son and I got up early and happily sacrificed our Saturday morning for this noble cause.

We anxiously awaited in the crisp fall air for the children to arrive. The first group that came to me was a mom and two daughters, including the to-be recipient. The only words spoken to me from any of them the entire time were from the recipient when she told me her name so I could check it off the list. I fitted her helmet, showed her how to work the lock, and gave her the bike.

No one, not the mom, recipient, or sister said thank you or showed any sign of gratitude. Once the bike was in hand, they all turned on their heels and headed for the exit, the mom chatting loudly on her cell phone as she had been doing the entire time.

I was dumbfounded and upset. I could not get over the poor example this mother had set for her daughter and realized sadly that it was likely that the daughter had probably never been taught manners and without intervention would probably perpetuate the cycle with her own kids in a few years. *This kid needed the Six Pillars of Character now* and it was clear she was not going to receive that character-based education at home. She needed to receive it elsewhere and the most likely place would be within her school.

Thankfully the remaining eight of my nine recipients were overjoyed and gracious. Many of the parents were choked up (and a little bit nervous as their kids took off like a NASCAR driver on their new bikes). Their civility gave me hope, but also reminded me that others can slip through the cracks, which is why organizations like Character Counts In Iowa are so important in our schools.