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Teachers' insights on character education

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TEACHERS' INSIGHTS ON CHARACTER EDUCATION

by
Meghan Kristin Salowe

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
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ABSTRACT

Meghan Kristin Salowe
TEACHERS' INSIGHTS ON CHARACTER EDUCATION
2004/05
Dr. Marjorie Madden
Master of Science in Teaching in Collaborative Education

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' thoughts and concerns regarding the practice of teaching Character Education programs in elementary school. The subjects for this study are twenty-one elementary school teachers and the school's guidance counselor. This study used a survey instrument with closed-ended responses (Likert scale) as well as teacher interviews. A qualitative approach was utilized to analyze the data, which showed varying teacher perceptions on Character Education. A need for consistent teacher training and opportunities for teacher dialogue are some implications that emerged from my study.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Madden for all the time she spent encouraging me and helping me make sense of my findings.

I would also like to thank my husband for never letting me doubt myself and for always knowing when I needed a cup of coffee. I would not have been able to do this without your support.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter One

Scope of the Study

I never thought I would have to break up a fistfight in my teaching career. Fistfights are something that only happen in high school, or so I thought. But here I am, a practicum student, in an elementary school looking out the window at two students throwing punches back and forth surrounded by at least fifteen other students. I am momentarily frozen, unsure of what to do. It is lunchtime, the "real" teachers are off in the teacher's lounge and the two teachers monitoring recess are nowhere in sight. I spring into action, and run outside. The two fighting students separate immediately. I never saw a group of students scatter so quickly. I recognize one of my students and tell him to get a teacher. He finds one of the monitors and I explain what has happened. The teacher immediately takes the two students to the office.

I am temporarily elated that I am powerful enough in presence to stop a fight, but then I begin thinking about all that I had witnessed. While none of my students were actually involved in the fight, several of them were gathered around engrossed. I am so disappointed in them. *Why didn't any of them get a teacher for help?* I think about the two boys who were fighting. *Why did the fight happen in the first place?* I am confused; just yesterday the students had signed an anti-bullying pledge. The students in this second through sixth grade elementary school had vowed to not bully one another and to get help if they saw anyone being bullied. Fighting most definitely counts as bullying. And today, during morning announcements, the character trait for the month of September was announced. The students were told how important it was for them to care about each other. *Didn't any of this echo in the minds of the students as they allowed two of their peers to become so upset with one another that they actually started fighting? What is going on here?*

Research Problem

After talking to other teachers, I find out that what I had witnessed is not entirely

uncommon. In fact, every teacher that I talked to that day seemed unbothered by an

instance that had shocked me. To them, it was just part of the territory. Fostering this

attitude is a trend noted by McDaniel (1998) that shows a rise in destructive behaviors,

including self-destructive actions. Because of this trend, teachers may have become

desensitized to these occurrences in school. However, as a wide-eyed practicum student I

still have the notion that every student will get along as members of a classroom learning community. As I thought more about this, I began to realize that teachers and administrators constantly deal with disciplinary issues regarding students' abilities to solve problems among themselves. While I haven't yet had the experience to create a plan of action for these kinds of instances, those ahead of me have attempted to lessen the amount of fights in schools and foster caring, moral behaviors in students. One response has been a nationwide push for Character Education Programs. The intent of Character Education is to teach values and strategies to resolve differences with others. I have become curious about the different ways that teachers try to instill these values in their students and how students respond to Character Education. In Central Elementary where I student teach, students sign anti-bullying pledges and listen to the morning announcements, but I notice that there is no follow-up discussion within the class to talk about the rationale. According to Leming (1993), schools that seem to impact student character are places that respect students and encourage student participation. Without discussions and opportunities for student participation, students often fail to fully understand the facets of Character Education in order to appropriately apply them in real world situations. Character Education makes its way to the students through the teachers. Therefore, teachers must be not only trained to teach Character Education, but they must also believe in the traits included in Character Education programs. If teachers do not fully embrace the goals of Character Education, they cannot expect their students to do so.

Research Question

I began to think about the different subjects that are taught in schools. In reading, teachers teach letters and sounds, then words; they show students how to connect the words to make sentences, and finally, students are able to read. This is an ongoing process with several steps. The way we teach students how to read influences how well they can actually do this. Teachers give students many opportunities to sharpen their skills along the way. The same methodology should be used in teaching students about character. Students should have experiences in the classroom where they learn the different elements of character and ways to apply these elements in real life situations.

Teachers should be taught how to teach Character Education with this in mind. Teachers cannot teach what they do not know. I want to know where the teachers' voices are heard when creating Character Education programs. Thus, my question becomes: *What are teachers' views on teaching Character Education?* Sub questions based upon this research question follow: *How are teachers trained to use Character Education? What are the advantages and disadvantages of Character Education? What would teachers change about Character Education programs? How do teachers feel students respond to Character Education programs?*

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this research, Character Education will be defined as curriculum designed to develop character, compassion, ethics, and responsibility in children. The goal of Character Education programs is to encourage certain values and conduct in students (Molnar, 1977).

Purpose Statement

The intent of this study is to explore teachers' thoughts and concerns regarding the practice of teaching Character Education programs in elementary schools. There exists little research that targets training of teachers and successful teaching of Character Education programs (Berkowitz and Bier, 2004). Furthermore, teachers' views on how Character Education programs should be taught and the resulting behaviors of their students have been minimally examined (Berkowitz and Bier, 2004).

There exists a need for research regarding teachers' feelings about ways of teaching Character Education because teachers need resources and examples if they are to teach their students how to get along with others and become better people. Teaching is a profession of sharing and the teaching of Character Education programs seems to be confined to each school and district (Weissberg and O'Brien, 2004).

Overview of Related Research

Much of the research regarding Character Education centers around the specific character traits that teachers, parents, community members, and even the students themselves identify as the most important to master. According to Bulach (2002), the sixteen character traits most commonly taught in Character Education curriculums are respect, honesty, self-control, responsibility, integrity, perseverance, cooperation, compassion, kindness, forgiveness, patriotism, tolerance, courtesy, sportsmanship, and humility. Further, patriotism, respect, and sportsmanship are often cited as the character traits that students at the elementary level most need (Bulach and Butler, 2002). Although specific traits are named, the goal is not to have students recite all sixteen of the traits. Instead, students should be able to demonstrate the traits in real life situations.

4

Revell (2002) ascertains that there is an assumed link between students' attitudes and beliefs following Character Education programs and behaviors in the future. Supporters of Character Education strive to use programs that deeply impact students so that they hold on to the beliefs for the rest of their lives.

There are various ways to teach Character Education in the classroom. Muscott and O'Brien (1999) argue that Character Education can be taught effectively by connecting the lessons to art, literature, math, or drama. Lessons include a description of the character trait, opportunities to practice using the trait, and real life examples. Many classroom events lend themselves to character education learning experiences. For example, current event situations, such as Martin Luther King Jr. Day can lead to discussions on choices and the role of character.

In addition, Doyle and Doyle (2003) believe that the use of Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences is crucial in helping students absorb the elements of Character Education because of its focus on the development of interpersonal relationships. Students learn how to converse appropriately by learning to notice others' moods and attitudes. They also discuss that their point of view may differ from others and they learn how to respect these differences.

Most researchers agree that the way in which teachers present Character Education corresponds to how effectively students respond to the curriculum. Studies overwhelmingly suggest that there should be many opportunities for students to practice using the facets of Character Education (Doyle and Doyle, 2003; Berkowitz and Bier, 2004; McDaniel, 2004; Weissberg and O'Brien, 2004). Teachers are expected to model appropriate behavior and need to be cognizant of this at all times. Teachers must live the

Character Education program, even when they are not directly teaching the curriculum because students imitate teacher behaviors, both positive and negative. Thus, it is critical to create a class community that encourages respectful, moral behaviors among all of its members. Using older students as mentors for younger Character Education participants can also help create such a learning environment.

Researchers (Bulach and Butler, 2002) also argue that Character Education programs are beneficial in creating classroom communities and teaching students how to resolve differences between one another. Yet, although teachers voice the traits which they feel might benefit their students, they are not asked how they think these traits should be taught in the classroom. Most current research (Pastor, 2002; Bulach and Butler, 2002; Berkowitz and Bier, 2004; Weissberg and O'Brien, 2004) on the implementation of Character Education programs has been conducted by administrators or outside researchers. Teachers have been largely ignored when it comes to creating teaching methods for Character Education, a fact that may negatively impact students. This study hopes to add the voices of teachers to current research and to consequently improve current teaching and effectiveness of Character Education programs.

<u>Limitations</u>

This study has certain limitations, which must be considered when attempting to generalize the methods and results for other students and circumstances. As researcher, I have access only to the small group of teachers who volunteered to participate in the study. Furthermore, since my student teaching placement is in an elementary school, I was only able to gather information from elementary teachers. Finally, I am only able to

collect data on one type of Character Education program even though there are several different Character Education curriculums.

<u>Importance of Your Study and Potential Audiences</u>

My study examines one Character Education program as it is being executed in the classroom. Although ideals of Character Education programs have been widely accepted as positives, effective teaching practices have not often been discussed and documented in "real-life" settings. Much of the research discussion is conceptual; empirical research is lacking regarding teachers' opinions of the curriculum, how they actually implement Character Education programs in the classroom, and their views on Character Education's impact on their students.

Often teachers lose valuable classroom time dealing with student conflict. Character Education programs purport to teach students how to get along better by teaching problem solving skills, thus minimizing classroom conflict and increasing on task learning time. Ultimately, students learn how to be moral individuals. This study will consider if Character Education programs as they stand are truly impacting students.

Teachers and administrators may benefit from this study if it identifies ways to lessen disciplinary issues and increases on task learning time. Parents may be able to create partnerships with schools by gaining awareness of how Character Education is taught in the classroom and following up when comparable situations occur at home.

<u>Organization of the Thesis</u>

Chapter Two takes a more in-depth look at the related research on Character Education programs, their implementations, and supposed outcomes. Chapter Three discusses the context of the study and describes the research design and methodology.

Chapters Four and Five discuss the results of the research and its implications for further

research.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

<u>Introduction</u>

Chapter two presents a review of the literature regarding Character Education. The first half of the chapter will deal with elements necessary to build the foundation for a strong Character Education program. Resources such as teacher and student contributions will be discussed. The second half of the chapter will address the components of Character Education and describe specific programs. The chapter concludes with a discussion addressing how this particular study will add to the current body of research about Character Education programs from teachers' perspectives.

<u>Values and Behaviors in Character Education Programs</u>

A successful Character Education program does not result from simply reciting character based lessons to students. Instead, building moral and value laden behavior comes first from knowing your students and understanding behaviors that should be addressed (Baluch and Butler, 2002). Then a classroom can be filled with enriching activities where students can not only hear about the positive behaviors, but also have multiple opportunities to practice these behaviors. Successful Character Education programs motivate students academically, strengthen social skills, increase moral behavior, sharpen students' abilities to successfully resolve conflict, and teach respect and self-control (Berkowitz and Bier, 2004).

Shaping a strong Character Education program must first begin with determining

what character values need the most focus and what behaviors are associated with those

character values. Parents, teachers, administrators, and students should all be involved in

this process. Bulach and Butler (2002) conclude that it is essential to find out what

character values are needed at different grade levels based on student behavior in order to

plan a cohesive Character Education program. In addition, they wanted to find out what

behaviors correlate with specific values. This study looked at several different grade

levels and looked at the developmental levels of the students to determine what character

traits should be taught at specific levels. One high school, one middle, and one

elementary school were studied by a series of faculty and student interviews.

This study (Bulach and Butler, 2002), focusing on teacher and student voices

found that patriotism and respect were most evident in study behaviors at the elementary

level, kindness and cooperation were frequently present in middle school, and kindness

and cooperation, along with integrity were values associated with their high school

students. Conversely, high school teachers and students reported that forgiveness,

humility, courtesy, and respect were the least evident in students.

Middle school students felt that their peers showed less forgiveness, kindness,

cooperation, and self-control than their teachers. Finally, elementary school students

agreed with faculty that sportsmanship was the character value least displayed by their

classmates. However, elementary school students did overall feel that their peers showed

more behaviors associated with character values than their teachers did (Bulach and

Butler, 2002). These results suggest what values and behaviors should be emphasized

10

throughout the course of Character Education programs based on the age of the students according to teachers and students. This research provides evidence that teachers are included when deciding what traits to teach; yet no dialogue occurred to involve these teachers in deciding how to actually do this. This will be further discussed a gap in the research later in the chapter.

<div align="center">Parent and Community Voices</div>

In a later study, Bulach (2002) looked beyond the school and into the community to determine what character traits members of the community felt should be taught. He found parent and teacher agreement on the three most important character traits to be addressed: respect, honesty, and self-control. Members of local clergy were also surveyed; they believed that perseverance, motivation, and empathy were the most important character values. Almost identical results as the previous survey (Bulach and Butler, 2002) were found: it is imperative to focus on behaviors because reiteration of values will cause a loss of meaning. Likewise, significant research has shown that behavior does not stem from knowledge of values; it is an "erroneous assumption that teaching moral values will produce significant reduction in irresponsible behavior" (Lockwood, 1993, p. 3). Discussion and research on whether teachers actually teach the behaviors in conjunction with the identified values are still lacking.

<div align="center">Student Voices</div>

A study of children's responses to Character Education found that children's views of the elements of Character Education corresponds to how they may possibly act later in life (Revell, 2002). A group of children were studied to see if commonalities were present in their responses to a singular facet in their Character Education program. If

<div align="center">11</div>

students' responses did align it would give teachers insight into whether the Character Education program was influential in promoting understanding of values.

Children from the ages of seven to seventeen were interviewed on the character trait of citizenship and their identity based on this trait as defined by the Chicago Character Education Programme (Revell, 2002). The students were asked to describe behaviors that would be associated with citizenship. Most students, while able to recite the definition of citizenship, had difficulty describing what behaviors a citizen may take part in.

When asked to discuss specific character traits, early elementary students relied on the vocabulary from the Character Education program to respond, while older students were able to use personal examples from their lives to support their answers. Younger students did not recognize Character Education singularly because it was so deeply embedded in the rest of their curriculum (Revell, 2002). Older students, on the other hand, knew that it was something that was isolated in much the same way that they viewed reading or math. All elementary students "assumed that all subjects had function and that the function of Character Education was to help them become better people" (p. 426). But by the time students reached high school, "they tended to view Character Education critically and did not reference their own lives when discussing the purposes of Character Education" (p. 427).

The study (Revell, 2002) concludes that outside influences and student responses must be taken into consideration when developing a Character Education program. Children seem to take what they learn in school and interweave it with their own personal experiences and previous thoughts.

Implementing Character Education Programs

Success with students in Character Education programs correlates with creating

caring learning environments where students can feel attachment to classmates, faculty,

and the school itself (Doyle and Doyle, 2003). Lincoln Center Middle School developed

a program that models caring within its entire curriculum. The school created activities

that "established powerful policies for equity, empowered groups, taught caring in

classrooms, cared for students, and taught caring by students" (Doyle and Doyle, 2003, p.

259). The study found that once students were enveloped in a caring environment, they

were able to take chances and practice appropriate behaviors. Teachers modeled caring

throughout the school day in order to teach students how to get along with and respect

other students. Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences was used to teach

lessons about caring because "it focuses on the development of interpersonal skills" (p.

260). A large focus was also on teaching and giving opportunities for students to care for

others. The students took part in several community service projects in order to practice

appropriate caring behaviors. Throughout this caring curriculum, teachers have noted a

decline in disciplinary referrals and an increase in attendance, and improvement of test

scores (Doyle and Doyle, 2003).

Research on various programs in other schools found that certain elements must

be in place in order for a Character Education program to succeed (Berkowitz and Bier,

2004): (1) students must be exposed to Character Education throughout the entire school

day; (2) content area curriculum must be laden with elements of Character Education;

and (3), when teaching and modeling specific character traits, it is important to provide

many learning opportunities; more exposure will ensure that students have adequate opportunities to practice using the character traits.

Faculty must also be committed to Character Education. According to the Character Education Partnership (Berkowitz and Bier, 2004), there are three important aspects of character: "understanding, commitment, and action" (p. 77). Everyone involved must fully understand and be committed to thoughtfully displaying the character traits identified. A successful Character Education program will fully integrate the program into each and every content area, influence student bonds with peers and school, and direct students in social skills in a straightforward manner (Berkowitz and Bier, 2004). However, for this to be accomplished teachers must be thought of as integral players in creating Character Education programs and receive proper training on how to use these programs in order to be expected to be committed to the programs.

Weissberg and O'Brien (2004) identify different Character Education programs that have enhanced character development in children. These programs seek to enrich "self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making" (p. 89). One such program, The Caring School Community (CSC), worked with kindergarten through sixth grade students, attempting to create strengthened bonds with other children. Throughout the program, the students hold class meetings where problems are discussed; students also take an active role in creating solutions. "Cross-age buddies" (p. 90) allow students to learn how to work with different kinds children. The program promotes family and whole school activities to create partnerships with families and the community. At the completion of this program, teachers note better

social relationships and an increased student initiative to solve problems (Weissberg and O'Brien, 2004).

Another program, Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS), also focuses on kindergarten through sixth grade students. This program, used over the course of an entire school year includes thirty to forty lessons where students learn about emotions, calming breathing techniques, problem solving skills, and how to work with peers. Throughout the year, the teachers find that "disruptive behaviors lessen; students follow rules more, and increase on task behaviors" (p.90-91). Although these various differ, they teach many of the same skills, such as ways to work with others and strategies to solve problems.

The findings of McDaniel (1998) concur with those of Weissberg and O'Brien (2004). She advocates the use of developmental theorists, such as Kohlberg, to determine how to teach moral education to students. Additionally, McDaniel argues that lectures and direct instruction are ineffective. Students often cannot relate because connections to real life experiences are not provided nor is student interaction engagement encouraged. Conclusions show that Character Education programs should be taught using age appropriate situations to which students can relate (McDaniel, 1998).

Pastor (2002) also studies the importance of involving students in Character Education programs. Her research argues that it is possible for children to figure out their own workable solutions for problems with guidance from others. Working with other members of the school community, she identifies several pillars of Character Education to work on in her school. The faculty collaborated to find "naturally occurring situations" (p. 660), which would prompt classroom discussions. Classes discussed what character

trait was being violated, why the situation occurred and what could have been done differently. Additionally, these discussions were carried into all other subjects. The study found that "students were able to deal with conflict better and felt ownership because they were given opportunities to decide how to deal with several different types of issues" (Pastor, 2002, p.661).

Another comprehensive after school program supports the effectiveness of student involvement (Muscott and O'Brien, 1999). The program focused on self-control, cooperation, and respect. It consisted of several mentor groups comprised of one college student, one high school student, and two elementary or middle school students. The character traits were taught during forty-five minute lessons where each trait was "connected to art, literature, math, or drama. Students were exposed to the trait, discussed their own examples of behaviors associated with the trait, completed hands on activities, and reflected on what they learned" (p. 376). Following the completion of the program, the participating students were interviewed and discussed what they learned from the program. Student comments indicated that they learned "how to appropriately solve conflict, how to get along with others, make friends, and act responsibly" (p. 378). The study shows that participating students were able to understand, vocalize, practice, and adopt the character values. Thus, engaging students in learning experiences make traits concrete and understandable for the students (Muscott and O'Brien, 1999).

<u>Gaps in the Research</u>

Based on the research discussed, there exists little evidence of teachers being included when choosing specific character traits and behaviors. Teachers seem willing to discuss what character traits should be taught in the classroom (Doyle and Doyle, 2003);

however they should be given the same opportunities to share their beliefs regarding how Character Education should be taught and what is needed to create a more enriching program. Additionally, elementary, middle, and high school teachers are not involved in much of the research even though they are the ones responsible for doing the teaching. Administrators or those in the university sector are doing most research (Muscott and O'Brien, 1999 and Pastor, 2002). While there is much information about programs themselves, and the positive outcomes that may stem from these programs, there exists a gap in the research concerning the ways that teachers should be teaching them.

Some of the research discussed has shown that students have a difficult time connecting Character Education to their own lives. This is discouraging because what they are learning is supposed to be demonstrated through students' actions throughout their lives. The inability to make a connection shows that something is lacking in the · teaching of Character Education. Research (Lockwood, 1993, Revell, 2002, and Bulach, 2002) concludes that behaviors and age- appropriate situations need to remain the focus if students are to feel connected to Character Education programs.

Conclusion

Several themes are evident in the research surrounding Character Education. First, discussions and opportunities to practice are essential in order to help students become proficient in the behaviors that are associated with the specific values. Secondly, teachers must remember that the actual values used in most Character Education programs are vague and open for interpretation. In order to make the concepts concrete for students, which, in turn, may help them move beyond simple recitation of the definitions, teachers must select behaviors that may accurately depict the identified

values. Thirdly, once teachers identify the behaviors, they must provide opportunities for students to use them; further teachers must display these behaviors in everything they do in the classroom.

While the programs described in this chapter show some success, these programs may be more effective if teachers are included in discussions regarding the implementation of Character Education programs. None of these programs study teacher talk about what they feel is effective ways to teach Character Education programs. Much of the research speaks about what teachers should be doing in the classroom. But, there is very little direction to guide teachers in how to do this. There exists little evidence that shows whether teachers actually know this information. Furthermore, there exists little data about what teachers are doing in the classroom. Without research showing teachers' beliefs about the *teaching* of Character Education programs, their full effectiveness cannot be known.

Teachers must speak about what they specifically do in their classrooms and how it impacts their students. Once this is done, other educators will have a rich variety of resources to help teach values in their classrooms. The current study addresses what teachers think about the Character Education programs that are currently in place in their schools. Teachers are the most crucial part of any Character Education program. Without them, we cannot expect students to believe in the values of the program. It is hoped that this study will open up the way for teachers to speak about Character Education programs and thereby further effectiveness.

Chapter Three

Research Content and Design

Introduction

Character Education programs in schools attempt to give students extensive

opportunities to shape and practice using positive character traits. This study hopes to

find out how teachers are included in implementing Character Education programs, and

what, if anything, teachers would do differently to improve Character Education.

I am taking a qualitative approach to this study. I plan on collecting "open-ended"

data through the use of surveys, interviews, and my own teacher research journal to

develop themes based on teachers' views on Character Education. I will present my

findings in a narrative, which is common to qualitative research (Creswell, 2003).

Context

School

The elementary school used in this study was located in a large suburban

community in central New Jersey. The school has approximately eight hundred students

in attendance, in kindergarten through fifth grade. The school district consists of

predominantly white upper middle class families (US Census Data, 2003).

Participants

The research subjects who were asked to participate were kindergarten through fifth

grade classroom teachers, two physical education teachers, and the guidance counselor.

The physical education teachers were invited to participate because Character Education

is frequently addressed during physical education activities. The guidance counselor in this school runs the Character Counts Committee, whose input would be informative. There were a total of thirty subjects who were asked to participate, and twenty-two of those actually did take part of the study by responding to the Character Education survey. Six of those twenty-two indicated willingness to be interviewed. The majority of participants in the study were female; only two participants were male. Teaching experience of the subjects ranged from first year teachers to others with over thirty years experience. The majority of teachers who participated held Bachelor degrees, although five participants had obtained a Master's level degree. Four of the six interview participants were voluntary members of the Character Counts! Committee. One of the two other participants was a former member of the committee.

Character Education Curriculum

The school uses Character Education framework called Character Counts! (2004) which focuses on six pillars of character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. Incorporated within the pillars is language that can easily be understood by children. Within the program, certain vocabulary is underlined indicating that teachers should introduce it when they feel it is appropriate for their students and will be understood. For example, to be a fair person you should play by the rules, take turns, and share. Another definition of fairness is imposing punishments that are consistent, certain, and proportional (charactercounts.org).

Teachers are encouraged to teach this program in several ways. The curriculum suggests teaching children that their character counts, enforcing the pillars of character, advocating for character by making sure the students know what kind of conduct is

acceptable, and modeling the behaviors that are being taught. The program also discusses

how to develop an effective program. Teachers should be very clear about the importance

of good character in and out of the classroom. All six character pillars should be

intertwined throughout each activity and should be repeated often. Finally, a Character

Education program must be consistent, creative, and concrete (charactercounts.org).

Research Design/Methodology

The design of the research is qualitative teacher research. Several qualitative

strategies of inquiry are used, including surveys, teacher interviews, and my own teacher

research journal, where I recorded my own thoughts and observations (Creswell, 2003). I

constantly looked for overlapping themes and broad concepts throughout data collection

in order to find out how much teachers are included in research and their thoughts on

curricula that they are responsible for teaching.

Sources of Data

I used three data collection instruments for this study: a survey, interviews, and a

teacher research journal. Before any types of data collection instruments were used, an

introductory letter was distributed to the teachers informing them of the surveys. The

first instrument was a one-page survey (Appendix B), which included questions regarding

demographic data and beliefs about Character Education programs. The demographic

portion of the survey asked participants to identify the grade level(s) that they currently

teach, highest educational degree obtained, and number of years teaching experience.

Seven statements to which the participants were asked to respond followed the

demographic portion of the survey. These statements addressed training, teaching of

Character Education programs, and student responses to these programs. Teachers rated

their responses using a Likert Scale of 1-5 (1=strongly agree, 2= somewhat agree, 3= neutral, 4= somewhat disagree, 5= strongly disagree). The final question on the survey asked participants if they would be willing to discuss the responses of their survey with the researcher. They indicated their choice by circling "yes" or "no."

The surveys were distributed in the participants' mailboxes in the main office following an introductory letter (Appendix A) in which I explained the purpose of my research. An envelope was also included with the survey. Once the survey had been completed, the participant enclosed the survey in the envelope, sealed it, and returned it to a collection box that was in the main office. The researcher emptied the collection box frequently and conducted interviews with six willing participants as the surveys were returned.

The second instrument was interviews (Appendix C) with willing participants. I asked four to five open-ended questions to focus and guide the teacher interviews. Views on the current program and how they felt this program impacted their students were solicited. Questions about training on using the program looked for changes, as well as what they found beneficial about the current program. The purposes of the interviews were to supplement and further explain the patterns found in survey responses and to determine any themes across the responses.

My teacher research journal was the third data source. It provided documentation of my thoughts and feelings regarding information gained during interviews. Additionally, I used the Character Counts! Curriculum (2004) that is currently in place in the school as a reference to familiarize myself with the program that the teachers discussed.

Data Analysis

The surveys, open-ended interview questions, and journal entries were used to draw conclusions regarding teachers' views of where their voice exists or does not exist in the creation and teaching of Character Education programs. The data analysis was primarily done by organizing the material into different categories labeled with language used by the actual participants. The categories were reexamined to determine interrelationships between categories. I used the philosophy and methods commonly found in Phenomenological research, which allowed me to identify the "human experience" as felt by the teachers in this study (Creswell, 2004, p. 16). I was able to "study a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning" (Creswell, 2004, p. 16) Additionally, I included my own thoughts and experiences on the teaching of Character Education in this particular school to help me better understand the views had by the research participants (Creswell, 2004).

<div align="center">Looking Ahead</div>

In chapter four, I will discuss the results of the survey and participant interviews. Chapter five will present the implications of the study and recommendations for further study.

Chapter Four

Findings of the Study

Introduction

Chapter four discusses the findings of the study. Responses from the survey and interviews, as well as my teacher research journal were triangulated to determine conclusions regarding teachers' views of where their voice exists or does not exist in the creation and teaching of Character Education programs.

Research Findings

Survey Responses

The survey was meant to determine teachers' roles in the implementation of the Character Counts! Program. Twenty-two members of the faculty responded to the Character Education survey. The following chart shows the statements addressed by the teachers and their responses.

Table One: Teacher Survey Results

Question	1= Strongly Agree	2= Somewhat Agree	3= Neutral	4=Somewhat Disagree	5= Strongly Disagree
1. I received sufficient training on how to effectively teach Character Education.	1	12	4	5	0
2. I was involved in determining how Character Education will be addressed in the classroom.	8	6	2	3	3
3. Character Education has made a positive impact on my students.	9	9	1	3	0

4. I incorporated Character Education within all curriculum areas.	10	3	6	3	0
5. I teach Character Education as a singular subject area.	4	4	1	2	11
6. I feel that I have sufficient time to teach Character Education to my students.	4	1	8	8	1
7. If given the opportunity, I would teach Character Education differently than the way I am currently teaching it.	0	6	4	6	6

The results of the survey imply that teachers have strong views on Character Education. As indicated by the survey results, teachers feel very involved in all areas of Character Education from sufficient training to determining how they should teach Character Education in their classrooms. In addition, the majority of teachers agreed that Character Education has positively impacted their students.

The chart suggests that teachers have clear and concise opinions about how Character Education is taught in the classroom. As indicated by the responses to statement four, thirteen teachers incorporate Character Education into all curriculum areas; on statement five the same amount of teachers state that they do not teach Character Education as a singular subject area. This data shows a definite preference for teaching Character Education within other curriculum areas; still, the majority of teachers feel that even though they do this, there sill is not sufficient time to teach Character Education to their students. However, most teachers do not feel that they would change

25

the way they are currently teaching Character Education. The following section provides

additional insights into teachers' thoughts on Character Education.

Interview Responses and Discussion

Many of the responses given during the interviews contradicted survey results. At

the times the responses differed so greatly that some of the survey results could be

considered unreliable. I considered the responses given during the interviews to be the

most telling because four out of six interviewees were involved with the school's

Character Counts! Committee. Of the two other interviewees, one of the respondents was

a former member of the Character Counts! Committee. Because participation in the

Character Counts! Committee is voluntary, those who are members had a strong interest

in the topic and seemed to be more willing to participate in my study. This was noted in

my teacher research journal.

> In looking at the people who signed up to be interviewed, I noticed
> that four out of six of them are part of the Character Council. I wish
> more people who weren't on the council had been willing to be
> interviewed. I think a lot of their responses would have been different
> from those on the council. Then again, I'm not really surprised that
> the teachers who signed up were on the council. They are the ones
> who are probably most invested in Character Education.
> Taken from teacher research journal, March, 14, 2005

Teacher Training, A Critical Component

None of the teachers interviewed felt that they had received actual training on

how to teach the Character Education program even though over half of the survey

responses indicate that they had received training on how to teach Character Education.

The discrepancy may have been because the survey respondents were uncomfortable

admitting that is a subject area where they feel they may not know as much as they

should. An excerpt from my teacher journal provides further insights:

I'm really confused because a lot of people said that lack of training is an issue (during the interviews), but according to the surveys twelve out of twenty-two people thought that they had received sufficient training! I'm starting to wonder if those survey responses were one hundred percent truthful. Maybe they didn't want to seem like they were untrained teachers or they thought the school would look bad if they said they didn't have sufficient training. But maybe that isn't the case because the ones who were willing to be interviewed stated that they hadn't really been trained. And most of those people were even on the Character Council. Some of the other responses on the survey and things that were said during the interviews lead me to believe that training is definitely a factor of how well a teacher will teach Character Education.

Taken from teacher research journal, May 19, 2005

A teacher recollects her experience as a new teacher with little training on Character

Education.

Interviewee #3: I don't remember any type of training here. I learned a little bit about it during college. Once I was here and got my character stuff, I decided that I needed to take it upon myself to figure out the best way that I could incorporate into my classroom. But I'm also a member of the Character Council; I don't think I would be nearly as informed as I am if I hadn't volunteered.

Or training may have depended on when the teacher was hired into the district.

Interviewee #1: I remember the first year I started working here; it was the same year that the school started using Character Counts! I don't know if I would still even call what I got training, but Character Education definitely had a huge presence everywhere you turned that year. Ever since then I don't think it has been such a school wide thing. I'm still surrounded by it because I'm the gym teacher and I deal with it every day.

It is possible that if one of the teachers interviewed was hired after this time, they may

not have had the same exposure [what some might have considered training] to the

Character Education curriculum as other teachers.

Lack of training was a recurrent theme throughout the interviews. In fact, one

teacher felt that the lack of training was limiting the possible greater success of the

program. She states:

27

> Interviewee #2: Teachers are not taught how to teach character. It goes way beyond just having the kids know the pillars. Role-playing is a wonderful way to teach character, but a lot of teachers may not feel comfortable setting it up because they were never taught how. Another big problem is that teachers feel like they have more important things to do, like getting ready for the NJASK [standardized test] that they can't worry about something that they're not held accountable for.

Another teacher agreed that training must be a priority. Thus, these findings seem to suggest that without training and a lot of initial preparation by the teachers, it cannot be expected that many will take initiative to fully invest in Character Education. Other areas of the curriculum are given more attention when it comes to training, consequently, teachers respond by focusing more on those areas. She compared the training on Character Education to training on a new program in Math.

> Interviewee #3: For example, if we were to get a new Math curriculum everyone would get sent to an intensive training session. You wouldn't hear anyone saying that they didn't know what they were doing because we're held accountable for that kind of thing. Honestly, we're not really held accountable for Character Education.

Other teachers thought that training was more important than deciding how to teach Character Education because no matter how Character Education programs are taught, the highest and most difficult goal to obtain is teaching the students how to carry the Character Education curriculum beyond the classroom.

> Interviewee #6: I was here the year Character Counts! came to this school, but even before that it was something that was just a part of my theory on how to manage a classroom. I want my students to know how to relate and deal with one another. They don't have to be friends, but they do have to respect each other and that's the hardest part for them. It's also the hardest thing for me to teach because they've always been told that they have to be friends with everyone. I don't think it really matters how you teach character or what program you use, as long you know how to do it effectively.

Considering this data, training clearly emerges as a critical issue. The data also suggests that if training were initially given to all, then all other aspects of Character Education might fall into place. Training would logically lead into conversation and brainstorming opportunities to determine how teachers want Character Education to look in their classrooms. The issues of time and teaching opportunities that lend themselves to a Character Education lesson would be addressed and Character Education as a whole would make a stronger impact. Furthermore, even though twelve teachers stated that they would not change the way they are currently teaching Character Education, the teachers may discover after receiving training that they would actually prefer to teach Character Education differently.

Importance of Time

Another theme commonly discovered across the interviews and surveys was the importance of time in successfully implementing a Character Education program. Teachers agreed that they did not have enough time to teach Character Education because of other curriculum pressures.

> Interviewee #3: It's really difficult to find the time to address Character Education, especially in third grade. We have a standardized test that we spend a lot of time preparing for, and we've been the first grade level in the district to use the new math series and writing program. Those take up a tremendous amount of time, and because of that Character Education sometimes doesn't get as much time as it deserves.

Interestingly, ten survey respondents strongly agreed that they incorporated Character Education within all curriculum areas, suggesting that time was not an issue. But eight disagreed and felt they had insufficient time to teach Character Education to their students. Looking at the discrepancies between these two responses, it is difficult to absolutely determine if teachers really feel comfortable with the amount of time they

29

truly spend on Character Education. This could possibly be linked back to being a training issue because if teachers truly did incorporate Character Education into all curriculum areas, the struggle with time may not be so great. One interviewee described how she incorporates Character Education into her curriculum.

> Interviewee #6: We were recently learning about Jackie Robinson and the discrimination he faced. It was easy for me to pick out some Character Education vocabulary and ask where they did or did not see it present in the story. Then I quickly threw out some scenarios from the story and asked them what they might do in that situation. I think I changed one or two of them to something that they might experience and asked how they might feel or what they might do.

Other interviewees looked at the issue of time in a different way. They felt that many teachers do not realize that if they took the time to address character education in the classroom using real-life teachable moments, they may not have to spend as much time dealing with classroom disagreements in the long run. One of the interviewees discussed an instance of a fight between two students and how the fight lent itself into a mini Character Education lesson. I was actually in this classroom and witnessed this classroom discussion.

> Interviewee #4: When I got the phone call from Sara's mother about the fight between Sara and Amanda, I was pretty shocked and wanted to deal with it right away. I decided to actually cut Social Studies a little short because I couldn't believe what was going on. I found a book about name-calling and read it to the class. Then I asked the class what they could do and had them role-play a little bit. Then I asked them all to think about if they had ever called anyone names, and how they would feel if it happened to them. Then I gave them an opportunity to apologize to anyone they may have called a name. Of course, I dealt with the two girls individually, but I thought it was something really good for the whole class to hear.

I also addressed this in my teacher research journal:

> This character lesson was really powerful because it came from a real disagreement in class. I couldn't believe how well the students responded

to the lesson. A lot of them apologized to each other and there was so much participation from the students.

<div align="right">Taken from teacher research journal March 11, 2005</div>

All of the interviewees agreed that teachers need to be willing to put the time in and begin teaching Character Education in their own classroom. According to teachers' comments, it is almost entirely up to teachers to decide how much time they will be in teaching the Character Education program in their classroom.

Character Education Across the Curriculum

Data analysis of the survey results show that the majority of teachers surveyed strongly disagree with the statement regarding teaching Character Education as a singular subject. Based on this finding I began to wonder if teachers think that it is a negative thing to focus on Character Education as a singular subject.

> When I first became curious about Character Education I thought that everyone taught Character Education as a separate subject area, but as I started researching, I found a lot of studies that discussed how to incorporate Character Education in other subjects. Because of all that research I started to think that it wasn't the best method to teach it alone. I wonder if other teachers felt influenced in the same way that I was. But since I was able to go into several classrooms, which is not something other teachers can easily do, I see that teachers do teach it singularly with positive results.

<div align="right">Taken from teacher research journal March 18. 2005</div>

The majority of teachers strongly agree that they incorporate Character Education into all curriculum areas further supported this assumption. However, during interviews and observations strong evidence was found pointing to Character Education being addressed singularly. But there was also no indication that they did not incorporate Character Education into daily subject areas as well. However, giving Character Education a specific individual time can be quite powerful.

<div align="center">31</div>

Thinking back on my experience in this school, I can recall my cooperating teacher dealing with Character Education in as much as a singular subject as Reading and Math are. The specific lesson was always based on the needs of the classroom at that particular time. There wasn't a specific time though; it was done as needed.

Taken from teacher research journal April 12, 2005

Interviewee #4: When I teach Character Education, I always start it off with a book because we have a huge selection in the Guidance office. We read the book, do some role-playing, and the class is pretty good about having open conversations about whatever were discussing.

Interviewee #6: While Character Education is a big part of everything I do, I take time out every Friday afternoon to spend time on it. We have something called "Community Circle." We'll come up with a topic or we'll focus on the pillars and we'll do some team building activities based on this. We always talk about respect and listening to others when they're talking. We have a stick that we pass around; you have to be holding the stick to talk. It really helps giving the time structure. You can pass if you don't want to speak.

Based on this commentary, it is easy to see how beneficial it is to spend some specific time on Character Education. However, survey results suggest many teachers may not know how to do this. If teachers had an opportunity to share with one another, they may be able to model these strategies, which seem to be making a positive impact.

Summary of Findings

Looking across the various data sources I identified one overriding theme: teacher training. I found that the teachers interviewed believed that training is the biggest area of importance when it comes to Character Education. Time for teaching is also a major factor in how effective Character Education will be for students. Thirdly, findings suggest that teachers really do not feel they know how to efficiently address Character Education along with other curricular responsibilities. The conflict between incorporating Character Education into other curriculum areas and teaching Character Education singularly seems to be negatively impacting how effectively Character Education can be taught. This data

seems to suggest that opportunities where all teachers can be involved are needed. Additionally, dialogue must occur where positive teaching strategies can be shared with others.

Chapter Five

Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

Introduction

Character Education attempts to teach students how to relate to others in socially

appropriate ways (Weissberg & O'Brien, 2004). This better prepares students to be

contributing members of society. Teachers, directly responsible for teaching Character

Education, are crucial in determining the best way to immerse their students in a value

rich environment. Therefore, teachers should be contributors when all facets of Character

Education programs are being determined. The purpose of this study is to determine if

teachers are included in any aspect of a Character Education curriculum beyond the

teaching of that specific curriculum.

Conclusions and Implications

Many interesting findings emerged from my data about Character Education that

could be valuable for teachers and their practice. It was found that teachers had varying

feelings about their role in teaching Character Education. Based on these differing

responses, I have concluded that there is a great need for consistent training opportunities

and outlets for teacher dialogue if all teachers are expected to support Character

Education and teach the curriculum effectively.

Through surveying and interviewing, I have learned that teachers want training to

help them easily incorporate Character Education throughout the curriculum because

there is not always time to teach Character Education as a separate subject area. Student

behaviors, as well as themes expressed in literature and events in history can all provide opportunities to address Character Education in the classroom. Teachers need to be taught how to pick out these teachable moments and use them to help students see the impact of character. On the other hand, survey results suggest that teachers may not feel comfortable teaching Character Education as an individual area or view singular teaching negatively. Through training, teachers may learn that teaching Character Education on its own can actually be quite powerful when appropriately modeled and students are given ample opportunities to practice the behaviors.

Character Education is a curriculum area where an individual teacher's interest is essential. The teachers interviewed felt ownership to the Character Education program because they were knowledgeable about the program due to their role in the Character Counts! Committee. Without interviewing teachers who are not involved in the committee, it is difficult to determine the extent of ownership and knowledge possessed by other teachers in the school. Therefore, a way for teachers to all be included in making decisions about Character Education is needed.

Recommendations for Further Research

The majority of teachers who agreed to be interviewed were all involved with this school's Character Counts! Committee. Because the membership in this committee is voluntary, as relayed during the interviews, it can be concluded that these teachers have a strong, vested interest in Character Education. Having an opportunity to interview teachers who are not part of the committee may have provided a different perspective of teachers' roles in Character Education. This additional perspective may provide

35

opportunities for teacher dialogue to take place, further enhancing the teaching of Character Education.

Additionally, the majority of teachers surveyed felt that they did not have time to sufficiently teach Character Education; although, these teachers indicated that they incorporated Character Education throughout the curriculum. Interestingly, these teachers still did not think that they would change the way they are currently teaching if given the opportunity. Further research should be conducted to figure out why the motivation to change teachers' methods is absent. The issue of time needs to be examined to provide teachers with methods that would enable teachers to truly feel comfortable with the amount of time and ways they teach Character Education.

Further research could be conducted on other schools with similar characteristics to compare results and determine if they can be generalized across similar schools. Conversely, someone could study schools with different characteristics to compare those teachers' views with those of the teachers in this study. The population investigated in this study was small, with the participants coming from only one school. A future study may consider using a greater number of teachers from several different school districts. This would allow the researcher to see if the results found in this study could be generalized to a larger population.

Most importantly, I learned from this study that teachers see the value of Character Education programs and have several ideas about how it can be taught most effectively, but need an opportunity to share this information.

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Appendix A

Introductory Letter

Dear Teachers,

My name is Meghan Salowe and I am an MST student from Rowan University currently student teaching in Ms. Smith's second grade class. While here at Central Elementary, I will be conducting a field study for my master's thesis on Character Education. The intent of my study is to add to the body of research on Character Education by gaining teacher insights on the topic. I would like to find out about how teachers are informed about the school's Character Education program and trained to implement the curriculum. Additionally, I hope to explore teachers' thoughts on how it is taught in the classroom and students' responses to the program.

In order to complete this research, I will be giving each classroom teacher a short survey where you will be given the opportunity to share your opinions on Character Education. While you are under no obligation to participate by completing the survey, your responses would be greatly appreciated. The identities of the respondents will remain anonymous at all times. I will also be asking teachers to further discuss the responses of their survey by participating in an interview. Again, while your responses will be included in my thesis, your identity will not. I hope you will all join me by contributing to what hopes to be an informative addition of research on an invaluable initiative in education. If you have any questions you may contact me at reeves19@students.rowan.edu

Respectfully,

Meghan Salowe

Appendix B

Survey

41

By completing the following survey, you are agreeing to participate in a study entitled "Teachers' Insights on Character Education", which is being conducted by Meghan Salowe, a Collaborative Teaching MST student, Rowan University.

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' views on the teaching of Character Education. The data collected in this study will be included in my master's thesis.

All participation in this study is voluntary and participants are not required to respond to all questions and statements. All responses will be anonymous and all data gathered will be confidential. Information obtained through this survey may be used in any way thought best for publication in the thesis provided that the respondent is not identified and their name is not used.

If you have any questions or problems concerning your participation in this study you may contact Meghan Salowe or faculty sponsor Dr. Marjorie Madden at (856) 256-4500 ext. 3834.

Please complete and return in provided envelope to the labeled box in the main office. Thank you for your participation.

Respond to the following demographic statements.

1. Number of years teaching experience _____

2. Highest educational degree obtained _____

3. Grade level(s) currently teaching _____

4. Gender _____

The following seven statements are in regards to your training in and teaching of Character Education. Respond to these statements to the best of your ability. Circle the number which best indicates your response.

1= Strongly Agree

2= Somewhat Agree

3= Nuetral

4= Somewhat Disagree

5= Strongly Disagree

I received sufficient training on how to effectively teach Character Education.

1   2   3   4   5

I was involved in determining how Character Education will be addressed in the classroom.

1   2   3   4   5

Character Education has made a positive impact on my students.

1   2   3   4   5

I incorporate Character Education within all curriculum areas.

1   2   3   4   5

I teach Character Education as a singular subject area.

1   2   3   4   5

I feel that I have sufficient time to teach Character Education to my students.

1   2   3   4   5

If given the opportunity I would teach Character Education differently than the way I am currently teaching it.

1   2   3   4   5

Please indicate if you would be willing to further discuss your responses to this survey through a brief interview. Interview respondents will remain confidential. Interviews will be tape recorded only to insure accurate data collection and will only be used by the researcher for this study. I am willing to interview at your convenience: before or after school, during your prep period, or during your lunch period.

Yes   No

Please print your name **ONLY** if you are willing to be interviewed.

_____

Appendix C

Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. What are your views on the current Character Education Program?

2. Tell me about your training how to teach Character Education in the classroom.

3. Were you involved in the process of determining how Character Education would be taught in the classroom?

4. Tell me about how you typically incorporate Character Education in the classroom.

5. How do you feel this program is impacting the students in your classroom?

6. Are there any changes you would make to the current Character Education Program?