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AN EVALUATION OF A CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAM ON STUDENTS
WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

by
Andrew Disque

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
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Approved by
Professor

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ABSTRACT

Andrew Disque
AN EVALUATION OF A CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAM ON STUDENTS
WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

2003/04

Drs. Dihoff and Klanderma
Master of Arts in School Psychology

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of a character education program on students with developmental disabilities. Both the experimental (n=20) and the control (n=14) groups were administered a pre-test during the same week. Following this, a six-week character education program was implemented with the experimental group. A post-test was then administered to both groups. Two hypotheses were generated; primarily, character education would improve post-test scores in the experimental group compared to pre-test scores from within that group and post-test scores from the control group. Secondly, behavioral data would display a decrease in maladaptive behaviors for the experimental group. Data analysis showed no significant improvement in the experimental group in relation to post-test scores or behavioral data. Significant differences were noted between the mean scores on the pre-test and post-test between the two groups. Implications for further research and character education programs for students in this population are discussed.

Acknowledgements

There are three people without whom none of this could have been possible. I would like to thank my wife for her love, dedication and support. Her tireless devotion to helping me achieve this goal was commendable and refreshing. In a lifetime I could never give back all she has given me. My parents, too, have been consistent in their love, support and encouragement. Without their direction and support, none of this would have been possible. I can never repay all they have given to me. I am truly fortunate, no matter where life takes me, to have had the privilege of having these three individuals in my life.

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This project is dedicated to Paul Cilmi.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Need

Thomas Lickona described a problem facing educators in the early 1990's, stating "concern over the moral condition of American society is prompting a reevaluation of the school's role in teaching values." (1993). Unfortunately, some troubling trends and statistics have developed over recent years prompting many educators, lawmakers, parents, and concerned citizens to evaluate what could be done to reverse the trends. In 1992, the Josephson Institute of Ethics, a non-profit and non-partisan group, sponsored a survey of 9,000 people consisting of mostly high school and college students. The results indicated a proclivity towards cheating, lying, stealing, and drunken driving (Josephson, 2003). A team of experts from around the country were paneled to face the daunting task of attempting to rectify the situation. What followed became known as Character Counts!, the most widely used character education curriculum in schools today.

Although each generation has faced deviant behavior from their youth, the increasingly aggressive and destructive behavior of today's youths warranted intervention that previous generations were able to forgo. As a result, character education was introduced as a program by many public schools. The underlying principles behind character education; choice making, empathy, sympathy, respect, responsibility, and fairness, are taught through cooperative education, service learning, and the modeling of appropriate behavior. It is commonplace for students to freely discuss current issues,

rules, and acceptable behavior. This social-learning perspective encourages respect of other's opinions, collaborative decision making, and identification of feelings of others.

Unfortunately, this curriculum has seen much of its implementation in the public, non-disabled sector. While this researcher does not doubt the necessity for the implementation of character education in public schools, the same trends and issues face many of the developmentally disabled students placed in a special education setting. While the overt behaviors each group displays may be different, the similarity is the violation of social norms that results from engaging in deviant behavior. Indeed, the needs of disabled students will be better met by this curriculum as compared to the regular educational population, as the program will serve a dual purpose. Primarily, students will learn to combat egocentrism, a characteristic shared by the majority of students with developmental disabilities. Secondly, the students will learn the benefits of social learning and choice making, two skills necessary to function optimally in the world.

While the disabled student is able to identify the feelings of others, they exhibit little empathy or sympathy towards those feelings. In this sense, though a student may identify when a peer is upset, there is little behavior extended to comfort his or her peer. Similarly, a student may initially act out physically towards a peer who upset them with little regard for the consequences of their actions. A portion of this behavior may be due to a neurological deficit, but the inability to identify with how their actions impact another plays a definite role in the execution of the behavior. Character education encourages sympathy and empathy for the feelings of others. In this sense, the student learns to

identify with the feelings of their classmates before the actions occur, prompting a choice-making situation in their minds.

There is much research done on the learning styles of the developmentally disabled student. A recurring theme throughout the findings reveals that special education students have a tendency towards social or cooperative learning. Character education encourages this modality of learning. While engaging in the curriculum, the students will learn the valuable lessons of teamwork, responsibility, and decision making. This is vital to this group of students, as these skills need to be reinforced and utilized for greater skill acquisition. The needs this curriculum will fulfill provide a stable foundation upon which the disabled learner can build a life in the world.

Purpose

Character education has already been proven successful at combating many of the problems facing students in the regular education setting. Though these issues may manifest themselves differently in the special education setting, the root causes of the behavior that character education targets remain the same. This researcher will show that with the implementation of a character education curriculum in a special education setting, egocentrism will decline as feelings of sympathy, empathy, and supportive services for others will increase. While this is the primary focus of the intervention, a secondary benefit will become apparent.

As the students learn to identify, sympathize, and empathize with the feelings and situations of others, their incidents of maladaptive behaviors will decline. While this may seem tangential, the implications are enormous. A necessity for acceptance and success

in the world, this repertoire of behaviors exhibited by special needs students will change based upon the skills learned from character education. The optimal situation for a special education student is full inclusion in the various systems of the general population. As a result of the character education curriculum, the behaviors that violate social norms and prevent this inclusion will be significantly diminished.

Hypothesis

This researcher will show that by implementing a character education curriculum, special education students in an experimental group (learning the character education curriculum) will obtain higher scores on a post-test than on a pre-test, and will obtain higher scores on the post-test than the control group (who will not receive the character education curriculum), who will take both tests at the same time as the experimental group. Specific areas of interest on the pre- and post-test are empathy, sympathy, and supportive behavior.

Additionally, as a result of the cooperative, social learning inherent in character education, students will learn choice-making behavior. This skill will allow students to improve their acceptable forms of behavior while reducing the number of maladaptive behaviors exhibited.

Theory

Character education, in isolation, provides students with the emotional knowledge and opportunities for perspective-taking necessary to change one's feelings and problematic behaviors. Character education focuses on rewarding the positive,

discussing the negative, and engaging in active service learning as an immediate, primary reinforcer for students to witness what proper values can accomplish. By learning what acceptable morals and values are in today's society, the student is better equipped to function as a "positive" member in our world. Based on this label, the student is no longer stigmatized as a "bad seed" or discipline problem. Rather, they are seen as contributing members of the school.

In this sense, students with special needs should be afforded the same opportunity to break down the stereotypes that surround them as problematic members of society, David Laman wrote that individuals with disabilities often suffer from mental health problems due to "segregation, stigmatization, lack of communication, rejection, social disruptions, poor social support, and poor social skills" (Laman, 2000). These influences perpetuate a cycle in which students with disabilities, already segregated from the rest of society due to their "unacceptable and deviant" behavior, engage in the behaviors which are expected of them. In addition, we find many disabled students model the unacceptable behaviors of classmates. These students have little education of what typical and accepted morals and values are in today's society. As such, they continue to engage in those behaviors which push them further from mainstream culture.

Additionally, the current "push" in education is for educational planning that allows the special needs student as normal a curriculum experience as possible. Though their counterparts in the regular school system are provided with character education to combat the social ills of the general population, no specific program is designed to both address the social and behavioral problems facing special needs students. Obviously, the curriculum provided would need to be adjusted to meet the curriculum requirements and

learning styles of the special needs individual. Though the styles of teaching may differ, the lesson to be learned remains the same; learning socially accepted morals and engaging in moral action equals greater acceptance and positive views by society.

As we prepare students in the general population for the morals and values that face them during everyday life, so we must prepare the special needs individual for the same.

Based on the need for the special needs individual to look outside themselves, become more aware of the choices and learn the moral values necessary to function in the outside world, character education is a necessity in a special education classroom.

Students in a special education classroom frequently become “stuck” in Piaget’s pre-operational stage, succumbing to egocentrism on a regular basis. This, too, corresponds with Lawrence Kohlberg’s pre-conventional stage of moral reasoning, though some students may exhibit a higher, conventional level of moral adjustment. While this may be overcome in some cases, classified students in and out of district placement show a tendency towards immediate gratification, a lack of perspective taking, and an inability to identify or understand the feelings of others. This lack of sympathy and empathy potentially leads to violent and destructive acts against others, as individuals in the disabled students’ surroundings are not considered before the urge to relieve anger is met. Character education contains a crucial ingredient of perspective taking and role-playing, forcing individuals to label the feelings of others and support this label with reasoning. This technique virtually forces the student to think outside of his or her own emotions. When this occurs, the student begins to identify that others share the same feelings as they. This, in turn, leads to a greater ability to understand how their actions

may impact others. As a secondary result, the maladaptive behaviors a student exhibits decrease.

Additionally, disabled students do not consistently understand or recognize the choices they have in certain situations. Gerald Corey postulates that behavior modification techniques are introduced so that individuals can understand the many choices facing them (Corey, 2001). Similarly, David Westling and Lise Fox indicate that professionals have noticed the conspicuous lack of choices available to persons with disabilities (Corey, 2001). This inability to make choices in the rare opportunity that choice making is an option becomes problematic for students with disabilities. Faced with immediate gratification of innate urges, students with poor decision making skills and an egocentric attitude opt not to seek other solutions, and instead act impulsively. Character education seeks to teach children responsibility for their actions. When students begin to accept accountability for their actions, a processing of their choices can occur. It is in this phase that students should be educated of the alternatives to the behavior chosen. This is taught through role-play.

Character education relies heavily on activities designed to engage the classroom as a whole. In this arena, students can voice their opinions about situations presented, offer different insight into the problematic behavior, and provide feedback on the course of action undertaken by a student. Skits are frequently performed in an effort to illustrate this point. Special needs learners are social learners. This instructional technique greatly benefits the students in this population. Primarily, it forces respect and listening skills. The students are required to listen to another student's opinion and contribution without ridicule. In this time, they may begin to identify with something a peer has said. This

begins to break the foundation of egocentric thinking. Additionally, students get a “hands-on” activity to practice what they are learning. Students also have greater control and responsibility in the values being taught. This collaborative learning strategy teaches understanding, patience, and tolerance. As a result, identification with others occurs, morals are learned and understood, and behaviors decline.

Character education is not new to curriculums. However, special needs students continue to be excluded from this program. This exclusion serves to continue the division of special education and regular education. Additionally, this creates a behavioral cycle in which students display the maladaptive behaviors expected from them by society. This repertoire of behaviors is due to an inability to see outside themselves, the modeling of poor behavior, and a lack of knowledge of acceptable values in society. Character education is necessity in special education if we are truly advocating for the full acceptance of a special needs student into today’s society.

Definitions

Aggression: any incident in which a person inflicts physical harm on another person, including: hitting, kicking, scratching, biting, pulling hair, pushing, tripping, throwing objects at others, or head-butting. This includes attempts.

Character Education: the Character Counts! curriculum and related materials.

Developmentally Disabled: any student classified by a certified School Psychologist as having a disability that impedes learning. This includes those eligible for special education services.

Egocentrism: the inability of a person to take another person’s perspective.

Empathy: the identification and understanding of another person's feelings or situation.

Maladaptive Behavior: the combination of aggression, verbal aggression, property destruction, and socially inappropriate behavior.

Property Destruction: any time a person causes damage to property, including their own. This can be breaking pencils, ripping paper, ripping clothes, drawing on desks, pushing over chairs, sweeping items off tables. This includes attempts.

Socially Inappropriate Behavior: teasing, name-calling, inappropriate sexual comments, obscene gestures or noises, glorification of past behavior problems, gastrological noises not associated with illness, and cursing.

Sympathy: an expression of feeling sorrow for the situation of another person.

Verbal Aggression: any threat to cause harm to another person. This does not need to be followed by action and can occur in isolation.

Assumptions

When discussing the efficacy and necessity of this study, it is necessary to presume that this study can be generalized to the entire special education population whose scores on standardized achievement tests are in the same range as in this study. This does not mean that positive results cannot be obtained with various ability levels, but that the results in this study would best be replicated with a group of similar performance ability.

Additionally, this researcher infers that all students in this study exhibit at least one type of the above mentioned behaviors. It is further assumed that the control group will have similar behavior patterns as the experimental group. It is rationalized that each

group will display approximately n behaviors in t days. This researcher further assumes that no character education curriculum was implemented in prior years with these students.

Limitations

The largest limitation of this study was the amount of time devoted to implementing the character education curriculum and the amount of staff members involved in the program. Research suggests a year-long program, at the very minimum, is optimal for students to understand all principles taught throughout the character education unit. As developmentally disabled students require more time to learn concepts than those in the regular education setting, the program implemented should be proportionally longer. However, due to time constraints, the character education program will be only six weeks. This limitation may have enormous consequences during the data analysis portion of this research.

Though careful analysis was done to select candidates of similar performance abilities, the pool from which subjects were picked was the same private, special education school. This limits the amount of potential subjects for the study. Similarly, the subjects themselves were not randomly selected. Unfortunately, in an effort to find persons of similar ability levels, entire classes were selected for study. Within this method, this research's classroom was assigned as one of three tested in the experimental group, with the other 5 classrooms participating in the study randomly assigned to either control or experimental group.

While it can be assumed that these students received no other character education in the school, this researcher was unaware of any character education/values education implemented in the home. Thus, it may be difficult to establish whether the school-generated character education curriculum was responsible for the results of the study.

Summary

In Chapter 2, this researcher will review areas of research and publication relevant to this topic. This will include discussion of journal articles, books, judgments about Character Counts!, and the concern over moral trends in today's society. Chapter 3 will discuss the study in greater detail. Particular emphasis will be give to the design and implementation of the character education curriculum, the testing strategies, and any related work to the curriculum. Chapter 4 will discuss the results of the study. This includes the confirmation of either this researcher's hypothesis or the null hypothesis. Chapter 5 will provide a comprehensive summary and discussion on the implications of the findings.

Chapter 2: Review of Relevant Literature

Introduction

The current upswing in support of character education programs in public schools has been fueled by many factors, namely the supposed decline of the “American family” and the return to thinking of schools as the core socializing structure in children’s lives. This chapter intends to provide the reader with a comprehensive overview of character education’s beginnings as an offspring of Kohlberg’s theory of moral reasoning, through the current case studies being performed around the country, and finally arriving at a discussion from the critics of modern character education programs. At the conclusion of this chapter, this writer will discuss developmental disabilities and the behavior aspects that will be addressed in a character education program.

History

While character education is experiencing a resurgence in recent years, “the term character education is not new to educational discourse” (Milson, 2000). Indeed, when many people speak of adding character education programs into the curriculum today, they speak as if the subject had never existed in public schools. This is not true, according to Thomas Lickona, who writes, “character education is as old as education itself” (Lickona, 1993). While no specific curriculum may have existed, it is a widely

held belief that teachers were always instilling values in our children without being cognizant of doing so.

Character education's place in schools was not clearly defined in previous decades. While values were taught through the curriculum, no specified set of values or curriculum existed. James Leming writes, "the character education movement of the first three decades of this century utilized elaborate codes of conduct and group activities in school clubs as a primary means of teaching character" (Leming, 1993). For many decades, character education remained hidden in the curriculum without a systematic or specified base to teach the values prized in society. This changed in the 1960's, with the advent of personalism and self-determination. At that time, individuals believed that the control and decisions over which values were deemed important were best left to that individual. Societal norms were frequently disregarded and character education became almost non-existent. The 1970's brought about a change in prior thinking with the advent of Kohlberg's theory of moral dilemmas and a topic called "values clarification".

Kohlberg, similar to Piaget, believed children progressed through a ladder of moral reasoning. In this theory, children begin at the pre-conventional stage of moral development. This stage is characterized by making moral decisions based upon self-interest, i.e. avoiding punishment or gaining a reward. According to Kohlberg, children can progress from this egocentric foundation through the conventional level, and finally reaching the top rung of post-conventional, abstract moral reasoning. Based upon this theorem, schools re-evaluated their roles as moral educators (Lickona, 1993).

As it pertains to a new, specified curriculum designed to address the current needs of today's students, recent experts argue that "indeed, no more important curriculum

exists” (Kagan, 2001). By stating this, Mr. Kagan supports Marvin Berkowitz and Michael Fekula’s position that promoting character is a basic goal of education (Berkowitz and Fekula, 1999). The current perceived moral decay of the youth in America renders character education a necessity. According to Thomas Lickona, schools now must teach the values that students are no longer learning at home (Lickona, 1993). From McGuffey’s readers to many of the books currently taught in the curriculum, basic human values are transmitted implicitly. Even the most ardent critic of current character education programs, Alfie Kohn, agrees, positing, “whether or not we deliberately adopt a character education program, we are always teaching values” (Kohn, 1997). Mr. Berkowitz and Mr. Fekula echo Mr. Kohn’s point, stating that if we do not address character in a structured and safe way, we are leaving to chance the transmission of values deemed appropriate for success in the world today (Berkowitz and Fekula, 1999). Apparently, educators in today’s society agree. William Damon argues that the educational system in the United States is recently realizing its role in values transmission (Hymowitz, 2003).

The most widely used and accepted form of character education curriculum, Character Counts!, has supported this trend of thinking. In 1992, the Josephson Institute, founder of Character Counts!, called a delegation of educators, ethicists, and non-profit leaders to Aspen, Colorado to define what specific character traits students today needed to become moral, democratic members of society (Josephson, 2003). What followed was called the “Aspen Declaration” outlining the “6 Pillars of Character Education” which are: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship (Josephson, 2003). If educators were able to instill these traits in students, encourage democratic

thinking, and personalize the aforementioned values to their lives outside of school, the founders believed we could reverse the detrimental moral trends and create a society of just individuals. Gloria Singh (2001) summed up the position of the Josephson Institute best, noting that schools need to take a more proactive approach at a time when our society is in moral trouble. The framework of a modern and effective program of character education was created; the issue at hand became implementation.

Though it seemed as though character education was transmitted effectively when taught within the limits of the school curriculum, the extent to which the morality and behavior of today's youth had varied from previous years sparked an interest in experts in the field. What followed was a debate that continues currently, that being the most effective way to communicate and instill core values.

What to Teach

When one hears the term “values transmission”, “values education”, or “character education”, questions naturally arise. Parents from the Halifax Middle School in Pennsylvania best sum up the most important and freely occurring one when they asked, “Which values do we teach?”(Levin-Epstein, 2002). Many experts in the field of character education heard this question and thought for some time. Donna Anderson provides a consensus opinion when she states, “in an ideal world, families, schools, and communities would work in harmony to teach young people the positive character traits that would decrease violence” (Anderson, 2000). This sense of collaboration is logical, given that the people mentioned can conceivably interact with the student at some point. To instill values not admired or accepted by the community in which the individual

operates would be a lesson in futility. In essence, you would be arming the person to function in a society with the wrong tools to become successful. As Ms. Anderson eloquently states, “an effective environment is when all involved work together” (Anderson, 2000). The primary objective is to get as many community, school, and family members together for the sake of the student and, by an extension, the character education program, and by an extension, the community as a whole.

Once this has been accomplished, the daunting question still remains. Which values are most appropriate to teach? Character Counts! continues to espouse the benefits of instilling the “6 Pillars”, stating, “the coalition strives to build consensus that there are values that clearly define us at our best, however diverse our views and backgrounds” (Josephson, website). While the intention is noble, it can be argued that some of the 6 Pillars may not necessarily define all communities. It is for this reason that programs in places like Corona Del Mar may be more successful. The school district in the California town hosted a “Character Education Day” with the intention of drawing “together school board members, administrators, teacher, students, parents, and community leaders to discuss local needs and goals” (Kann and Brooks, 1993). This interaction serves a dual purpose. Primarily, it sets in place goals that are universal to the community where the student functions. This allows norms to be present in all areas of the student’s life. As an added benefit, community leaders who may feel disconnected from the programs and routines of the school become more involved in shaping the youth of that community. Involving all interested parties can only serve positive purposes. Another character education program, CHARACTERplus, has developed a plan that allows all that are involved in the students lives to meet to discuss which values are

important to the community (McKay, 2002). When there is some semblance of consensus among the adults in a student's life, it provides stability for the student and credibility for the character education program. This enables the student to have a firm understanding of expectations, consequences, and valued behavior. These characteristics are crucial to healthy functioning of adolescents.

Students at Cravens Middle School are benefiting from just such an approach. Their school has formed a partnership with "parents and community institutions to develop a list of traits or values to be emphasized at school" (Milson, 2000). The curriculum is loosely based on Character Counts! and Thomas Lickona's views on character education. Evidently, when Mr. Lickona informed character educators that they should "recruit parents and community as partners in character education" (Lickona, 1993), the administrators at Cravens were listening. The impressive aspect of this program is the way administrators and community members adjusted an existing, popular curriculum to suit the values and needs of this particular community. Indeed, though having the community, school personnel, and family assist in determining what values are to be taught, a crucial aspect previously overlooked was the role of the student.

Student Involvement

While it is a necessity that students be taught certain mandated topics, values education needs to be treated differently. In this area of education, it is crucial that students have a voice in order to understand what traits they feel are most important in their lives. Patricia Harned agrees, arguing that an important component of character

education is having all involved, including students, decide on what values are taught (Harned, 1999). If we expect students to be internalizing the morals we are teaching them, then we must gain an understanding of which values are important to them. Brooks and Kann agree, stating that students should be involved in which values are taught, “it’s not enough to tell students how to behave” (1993). The acceptance of student input speaks volumes, indicating a sense of acceptance and respect of the student as a valued member of the character education team. Additionally, it provides the student the opportunity to begin being a member of the community. Ms. Harned continues, “even more important (than character education instruction), students should be involved in gathering together” (1999). James Leming describes a character education program at a Cluster School in Brookline, Massachusetts. “Through a process of careful deliberation, students and teachers proposed and agreed on norms for behavior. The group then enforced compliance” (1993). This system would seemingly work well due to the high amount of responsibility placed on the students and the level of respect for their ideas given by staff members. The understanding and regard given to the opinions and morals students bring to the program is crucial to the level of commitment students will have to the program. Linda McKay, in describing CHARACTERplus, details that students are involved in all aspects of the program, and they take pride in framing the program for future students (2002). This belief is founded in Lawrence Kohlberg’s moral reasoning theory. Kohlberg argued that it is the duty of adults to “develop student’s powers of moral reasoning so they can judge which values are better than others” (Lickona, 1993). An obvious rationale for this lies in the level of acceptance a student will have for a program in which they played a crucial role. It is evident that a necessary

component of a successful character education program is the inclusion of the student in many of the decision-making processes.

To illustrate this principle, Ravenwood Middle School in Eagle River, Alaska recruited students from upper grades to help facilitate learning and to evaluate the program (Cox, 2003). The results, obviously, indicated that students were more apt to adopt the character values presented when included in the instructive and evaluative processes of the program. Students harnessed a greater desire to see their work and showed a greater investment in the program as a whole. At River School, a charter school in California, administrators attempted to structure the school climate to encourage teachers to listen to students, accept their concerns, and recognize them as integral parts of the school community, according to Linda Inlay (2003). This includes a particularly interesting variation on peer mediation. While the basic rules to peer mediation apply, an added component in this school is the student's ability to take a teacher to peer mediation. The message this sends is clear; we value no person's opinion over another. This message makes the student feel more a part of the school community. Amatai Etzioni, in an interview with Diane Berreth and Marge Scherer, states that "students should be encouraged to give feedback" (1993). This allows the student's opinion to be taken seriously, despite the fact that the person they are in dispute with is an authority figure.

While the question of "which values?" has been provided with a starting point from which communities can find their answers, a haunting question is born from this. A curriculum has been formatted to the needs of the community, but what is the best avenue travel when relaying this information?

Role Modeling

Surprisingly, there is little dissention on the importance of one component of instruction. Milson postulates that “perhaps the most important and lasting character lessons occur when teachers model the traits they espouse” (2000). Though this may seem obvious to the casual observer, the discrepancy between what is being taught versus what is being observed by students necessitated this policy. Character education proponents dictate that the adults whom students interact with need to consistently model the values they teach, and if not, the program will certainly fail (McKay, 2002). In support of this position, Marvin Berkowitz states that “role modeling by adults in the community and school is important” (1999). These assertions, while at first glance seem trivial, are rooted in behavioral psychology. A component of applied behavioral analysis is the gestural prompt, which is made by a staff member who shows the student how to successfully complete a task. This involves the staff member modeling the correct technique and asking the students to copy what was previously presented. The belief is that a novel task, when seen in action, will be correctly repeated when observed and rewarded. Loosely based on this is ideal, character education’s belief that “teachers and other adults need to set a good example” (Lickona, 1993) is rooted in the idea that a student will be more likely to repeat a behavior that is seen on a daily occurrence. Ideally, character education will be a “modeling experience for teachers to maintain their values and those of the school” (Harned, 1999). Hypocrisy in this aspect is a license for the student to disregard all material being presented as part of the curriculum. When we are extolling our students to practice virtuous behavior in order to be successful, the first experience for the student should be a visual presentation by adults of the behavior we

are expecting. This does not pertain simply to teachers and parents, but “it starts with the administrators, who should be role models for all. The rest of the staff also need to be roles models for the students, and the students need to be role models for each other” (Smith, 1999).

In the adolescent period of development, the peer group serves to be the greatest source of socialization and education. When peers model moral behavior, there is a greater likelihood it will be emulated by other students. Gloria Singh enlightens the reader on the aspect of peer role modeling. She states, “students began to hold one another and themselves to a higher standard” when they became more involved in character education (2001). The correlation seems distinct, give students more leeway in implementation and decision making, and you create a program children are more inclined to internalize. The internalization and identification of community morals is the primary goal of character education. Lynn Revell, in her research on American character education programs, states, “an important element of the success.....can be measured by the extent to which children take values on board” (2002). Realistically, this is the basal measure of the effectiveness of any character education program.

Infusion in Curriculum

A second and equally critical component of implementation is the infusion of character education into existing school curriculums. Spencer Kagan (2001) elegantly details the position of character education experts, stating that educators should incorporate character education into the curriculum. This echoed by Harned (1999) and Anderson (2000), who decree “let’s use school lessons and cocurricular activities to teach

ethics in schools” and “character education cannot be taught as a separate curriculum, but must be entwined”, respectively. The purpose for this is two-fold. First, many aspects of regular curricular instruction contain elements of character education. Harned (1999) states that core values should not be taught simply in the curriculum, but across curricular settings. Second, this negates the need for a highly specialized, formal character education curriculum.

Simply put, the current educational curriculum in schools offer a plethora of opportunities to expand on the values and morals deemed appropriate in a particular community. This requires some lateral thinking on the part of the educator, but is tenable by even the most novice of instructors. Peggy Pastor supports the use of curriculum for character education instruction. She states, “regular lessons also offer many openings for addressing character directly” (2002). Imagine the wealth of character lessons to be taught simply based upon the book “To Kill a Mockingbird”. Contained within the book are many social causes and value judgments. Current research suggests that as an extension of the literature lesson, character education lessons can be taught. Spencer Kagan (2001) agrees, stating that teachers should structure activities so students learn lessons on character regardless of what is being taught. At Cravens Middle School, Andrew Milson (2000) explains, educators became aware of the need to integrate character education into the curriculum. This stemmed from the realization that the curriculum could not be successfully implemented in a weekly, 20-minute time slot. What followed was a curriculum guide for teachers detailing how to integrate the concepts in classroom lessons being presented concurrently. This works well for students as they see the character values and concepts in practice while learning the material they

are required. Coupled with modeling, the referencing of character values to literature and other academic concepts creates a broader learning base for the student.

Additionally, when utilizing current curriculums to teach character values, a school district again personalizes what is being taught and how the material is being presented. Consider the fact that publishers are unaware of the learning styles of the class, the material being presented in other areas, and the amount of time dedicated to character education in the school. To account for these variables, it is beneficial to utilize existing material and lessons with extensions provided to teach moral issues and values. Etzioni summarizes the view of integrating character education into the curriculum by stating, “as important as English and Science and Math are, integrating the teaching of values in the curriculum is more important” (Berreth, 1993). Though this seems obvious, it is apparent that sufficient data exists to prove that this methodology is not currently in place. While an oversight of this magnitude is difficult to understand, it is important to note that the current push to integrate character education into the curriculum has no detractors. Whether or not decisions have been made on what values to teach or the method to teach them, it is obvious that educators and experts are exerting heavier weight on the explanation of moral events within the framework of the school curriculum.

Instructional Techniques

Consensus thus far has been achieved on the importance of role modeling and the inclusion of character education in the existing curriculum. However, a large division is apparent when discussing the most successful teaching style for character education. Generally, there exist two factions of correct character instruction. While each group

asserts their way to be the most beneficial and successful, it becomes apparent which method is best suited for adolescents. Before a detailed look at methodology is undertaken, it is best to understand the general consensus of the teacher's role in values transmission.

As stated previously, morals, character, and values are constantly being relayed in school. Linda Inlay states, "whether teachers intend to or not, they teach values" (Inlay, 2003). From role modeling the hidden moral dilemmas in the curriculum, many lessons a teacher produces have moral undercurrents. The important aspect is to realize and capitalize on these experiences which are naturally occurring in the curriculum. Etzioni states "every teaching act has a moral dimension" (Berreth and Scherer, 1993). In this respect, the role of the teacher is to realize the value lesson within the curriculum and expand upon its virtues. Concurrently, kids need to be in schools that embody the values they teach (Anderson, 2000). Reflectively, role modeling is a necessary component for all adults involved in the student's life. Of particular importance is the outward appearance and behavior of school personnel involved with the student. In behavioral terms, the primary avenue of transmission is how you treat the student (Hymowitz, 2003). Based upon this relationship, character formation begins to occur. Leming (1993) expounds on this tenet by stating that character best develops in a social web or environment. In this regard, there is little dispute on the primary importance of role modeling behavior. It is understood that the best benefit a student will get from a character education program is to have a visual, interactive reminder of the values expected of them. When discussing the remaining aspects of instruction, little common ground is found. The divergent opinions of progressivism and character education

proponents are discussed. As evidenced by the amount of research on the two schools of thought, progressivism is beginning to be the more acceptable method of character education instruction.

Rooted in the notion that repetition and practice yield understanding and incorporation into value systems, character education proponents in a stricter sense, abide by guidelines which are explicit and superficial. There is little leeway given to teacher or learning styles. Method, drill, and standard activity provide the instructional framework where little room for originality is afforded. Character education, in the stricter sense, aroused from the influx of support for a modern, value-based educational program. D. P. Doyle best encompasses the thinking of this movement by stating, “character education is about the rote learning of specific values, in the hope that practice becomes habit” (Robinson, 2000). The belief is that the specific values set in the curriculum are the only ones necessary to educate about and that little reflection is expected. Students are not encouraged to construct their own meaning. Rather, the point is to “drill students in behaviors rather than engaging in reflection” (Kohn, 1997). The repeated infusion of value definitions is believed to construct meaning once ingrained in the student’s memory.

Character education proponents, in this sense, leave little to the student or the imagination of the teacher. It is apparent that there is little trust placed in the student’s ability to construct individual meaning from the topics presented. Rather, this implies a pessimistic view that students do not have the ability to draw meaningful conclusions from material. Rather, they are seen as people without abstract reasoning. Milson, when discussing the program at Cravens Middle School, states that character education

proponents want the curriculum taught explicitly. By this, this researcher envisions the students repeating exactly the definition for a value word given in the curriculum guide. When this occurs, little personalization of the term is gained. “Trust” becomes simply a word to be remembered instead of a trait to be valued. This is apparent in high schools where Lynn Revell visited. Inside, character education was not part of the curriculum, but instead, banners and posters taught character education traits (2002).

These ideals provide fodder for progressivists to launch their campaign for character education instruction. Marvin Berkowitz and Michael Fekula state, “a less academic means of teaching about character is exhorting or espousing it” (1999). Simplistically, the repeated drilling and instruction proposed by early character education proponents serves only a short-term purpose. Little meaning is derived from the lessons and a value system is hard-pressed to be constructed from this style. Similarly, Kohlberg stated that “sermonizing” was simplistic and ineffective at achieving long-term results (Hymowitz, 2003). While it appears to be against modern learning theory, character education proponents believe that this “indoctrination” of values creates a larger number of moral citizens than other programs or teaching methods.

Cravens Middle School in Atlanta, Georgia, serves as an excellent example of this system of instruction. The program did not utilize a standard character education program, but relied loosely on the teachings of Thomas Lickona. Drill, repetition, and practice were encouraged, but play and story-telling regarding character traits were added. The method of instruction was very pedantic and changed little throughout the year. Based upon a parental and staff survey, a list of traits was developed such that one trait was studied over the course of the school year. Homeroom was designated as the

character education instruction time. The schedule of activities never changed and followed this pattern: the first day the students defined the word, the second day the students discussed how to incorporate the word into their lives, the third day consisted of a true story of a person who embodied that trait, the fourth day consisted of a fictional story based upon the trait and what could be done differently, and the fifth day was reserved for the hands-on activities. Similarly, Los Angeles Unified School District adopted a direct approach to teaching values, based upon the ideal that “direct instruction is necessary for infusion to be focused and effective” (Brooks and Kann, 1993). While no data was available in the Los Angeles report, Craven Middle School produced interesting results. Of great importance was the opinion of the staff on the character education program. All staff members were excited about the curriculum and expressed no ill feelings about the program. As for the “infusion” of values into the students, while preliminary results indicated positive behavior changes, the “trait of the week” model yielded poor long term results and was deemed ineffective (Milson, 2000). Though the results are not extremely poor, it is important to note that although initial results were good, the inclusion of the values presented into an individual’s personality showed little long-term effectiveness. When a primary goal of a program is for the material presented to become an integral part of that student, this result is detrimental to the effectiveness of “indoctrination” as a teaching tool.

Conversely, progressivists take a softer stance on the preferred method of implementation. Based on Alfie Kohn’s theory that “what goes by character education nowadays is.....designed to make children work harder to do what they are told” (Kohn, 1997). Progressivists are less concerned with the definitions and rote tasks of learning

character values as they are with assisting students construct their own meaning from the terms provided. Typically, cooperative learning is seen as the best tool (Leming, 1993). In this area, students are presented with topics for discussion. Based on these discussions, terms pertaining to character education are defined by their place in the lives of the student, rather than what an educator who may be disconnected from the school may feel the value means. The sense one gets from progressive approaches to character education is personalization. The values and beliefs presented are without parameters. This school of thought involves students holistically in the character education process, from planning, to implementation and enforcement, to evaluation. Lynn Revell succinctly states the views of progressivism by noting that it is important that kids appreciate and absorb the general rationale and values in character education, not recite a list of qualities associated with that value (2002). From this we see that progressivists are less concerned with uniform, strict definitions as they are with a broad framework for character within which students determine the meaning and importance of the values presented. This empowerment, as stated earlier, empowers the student to make decisions regarding their education. This, in turn, creates a feeling of value and responsibility.

Agreeing with these principles, Peggy Pastor hypothesizes that “helping students make good choices and be responsible for those choices” is a primary goal of character education (2002). This clearly illustrates the current push to create more opportunities for students to determine the nature and substance of their character education.

Additionally, the environment this creates fosters a sense that understanding the concepts is more important than the “what” of the concept (Berkowitz, 1999). Spencer Kagan concurs, stating that the implicit curriculum and how teachers teach is just as important as

the material (2001). By creating an environment that empowers students to make value judgements and decisions regarding meaning while allowing teachers to explore alternative means to repetition drills, progressivists are telling students, “this is what we are teaching, what will you learn from it?”. From this, teachers are creating an “atmosphere in which it is okay to make mistakes” (Inlay, 2003). Ideally, progressivists would like students to make mistakes. From this, they can construct meaning and value from the experience and adjust their thinking to situations (Hymowitz, 2003). As a result, students are taught to constantly re-evaluate their thinking and values based on their actions. From this, a better internalization of the morals occurs. Students are personalizing what is presented to fit what they feel is just, the values of their family, and the morals of the community. This construct meaning lies at the heart of what character education is trying to teach.

Bob Hassinger, principal of Halifax Middle School, is arguably a progressivist in his views of character education. Mr. Hassinger created a program called “Discovery Process”. Similar to the program at Cravens Middle School only in that they focus on character at a specified time each day, Mr. Hassinger implemented to program to combat the rise in violent acts at his school. Students are placed in groups of 15 based on personality tests given at a 5th grade level. There are 20 groups in the entire 6th, 7th, and 8th grade school. Students remain in this group throughout their time at Halifax Middle. The program follows a specified format: Monday is Intramural Sports Day (or school clean-up day, which is rotated among the groups), Tuesday is Topic Day, Wednesday is Seminar or Stay-at-Home day, Thursday is Community Service/Performing Arts Day, and Friday is School Club Day. Among the many distinctions between this example of a

progressivist school and Cravens Middle is the manner in which the values are presented. On Topic Days, students and teachers engage in discussions about the topic. This may include what the value means to them, how they display it, and what they can do differently. Further, students spend three weeks on a topic, rather than the one week in Cravens (Levin-Epstein, 2002). Mr. Hassinger added the community service and school clean-up component to the program to instill a sense of pride, responsibility, and respect for the property of others (Levin-Epstein, 2002). However, the most important aspect of the program is the attention paid to the relationship between teacher and student. Should a problem arise between anyone in a group, Wednesdays become a “peer mediation” session, regardless if one of the individuals is the teacher. Together, the group works through the problem and agrees on a solution. Again, this reinforces the student’s belief that they are a valued member of the school. The results are impressive; an 82% drop in in-school suspensions, a 66% drop in out-of-school suspensions, a 50% reduction in fights and drugs disappear from campus over a 7 year period (Levin-Epstein, 2002). Hassinger attributes this success, in part; to the sense of responsibility each person feels to help one another (Levin-Epstein, 2002).

It becomes obvious that when we encourage responsibility and accountability in students, they become more vested in the processes around them. Character Education, in its most effective form, allows students to construct meaning on a more personal level rather than a systematic, rote approach to value definition. Since character education is designed to infuse values necessary for optimal functioning in the world, it seems almost obvious that students would be given some role in the decisions and internalization of those values. While instruction within the existing curriculum and cooperative,

individualized learning are extremely beneficial to character education, a recent influx of educators and experts agree that service learning helps students “practice what they preach”, and serves to reinforce the emotional component of character education.

Service Learning

Community service is gaining popularity as helping shape character, according to James Leming (1993). This is based on the notion that “moral action ties everything together” (Lickona, 1993). While it is beneficial to teach morals and values in an environment where students have freedom to express their opinions on what is being presented, it may not be enough to fully integrate what is being presented into the student’s value system. According to the age-old proverb, “monkey see, monkey hear, monkey do”, role modeling has been discussed as critical so students do not get a hypocritical view of teachers and administrators. Progressivist teaching methods have been shown to be effective in assisting students to construct meaning about values on a more personal level. Service learning affords the student the opportunity to put into practice the values being presented.

Donna Anderson states that students should be provided with hands-on, service projects to enforce learning (2000). Andrew Milson agrees, stating that students should have experiences outside the school to reinforce ideas, practicing what they learned in the classroom (2000). The idea that practice will assist students to gain a deeper understanding of the concepts presented in school is partly rooted in the “practice makes perfect” theory and partly rooted in emotion. The gratification and pride the students may feel after performing these acts serves as more reinforcing than any other form. This, in

turn, will encourage students to continue down a moral path and internalize the values they are exhibiting based on their emotional gratification and sense of accomplishment. Linda McKay states, “community-based, real world experiences that illustrate character traits are included in the curriculum” (2002). Supporting this notion, Kay Hymowitz writes that her daughter is required to perform 50 hours of community service over 4 years in order to graduate (2003). This relates to Hassinger’s belief that encouraging students to complete service projects instills a sense of responsibility and identification with the community. Since a good character education program is inherently teaching the values of the community, curriculum and role modeling display the values deemed necessary to function in the community, and the students gain acceptance and favor in the community by exemplifying that particular behavior.

However, service learning alone is not enough to reinforce what is learned. Once the project is performed, a key component of service learning is the processing of feelings that takes place following the activity. Timothy Smith (1999) states that students returned for work experiences to reflect on the event and their emotions. When students reflect as a group, cooperative learning occurs. This serves to further reinforce the values presented, as students witness peers discussing the benefits of the value. This peer role modeling and cooperative learning, as stated previously, is perhaps the greatest tool for the inclusion of values into a student’s personality. Simply put, “service learning programs encourage reflection when they require students to write or reflect on their experiences” (Berkowitz, 1999). An added effect of this reflection is the re-experiencing of the emotions associated with the completion of the project. This level of reinforcement goes beyond what teachers and peers can provide.

Many programs have seen service learning as beneficial to their character education programs. The River School in California requires students to perform community chores so the children can see that the community outside the school depends on them, both now and in the future (Inlay, 2003). At Mount Ford Middle School, students performed service learning as a means to improve reading scores. Students were taken to a nursing home several times a year to read to the elderly. The results were impressive. Reading scores improved dramatically, and students began to express themselves more creatively. Less discipline problems were noted, as students were able to take the perspective of their peer more easily. While statistics are lacking in this area, it is evident that service learning is an important part of values transmission and the reinforcement of the internalized values of a student.

Results

Due to the relative youth of character education, formal, standardized data is difficult to find. While there are some superficial statistics and studies, a comprehensive analysis of the efficacy of character education is almost non-existent. There are general descriptions of goals attained, behavioral decreases, and knowledge of values, but a detailed study of modern character education is uniquely difficult to obtain. The results of two comprehensive studies, the Character Counts! South Dakota Survey and New Jersey's Character Education Partnership Initiative are discussed. Further, statistics from studies detailed earlier by this writer will be touched upon, but careful consideration should be given to all data. Of particular importance to note is the NJCEP data, as this is only the second year of program evaluation.

Results on character education programs vary across settings and writers. There are those who claim “no consensus on effectiveness” (Revell, 2002), to dramatic effectiveness; Weber County schools in Utah report a 2.5 time reduction in problematic behavior due to character education programs (Leming, 1993). However, all indicators point towards character education having at least a small, short-term effect on character traits in students. While this is of benefit to character education proponents, an important drawback to the reduction in problematic behaviors is the seemingly non-existent change in pro-social behavior. What this means to this researcher is that character education is making students aware of the problems around them, but the internalization of widely-held morals and convictions is still lacking.

Specifically, Los Angeles County charter schools implemented a character education program developed by the Jefferson Center. They found that discipline problems were significantly reduced and school morale improved (Leming, 1993). Though this is encouraging, the improvement in morale is not a widely found result of character education. Gloria Singh implemented a character education program of her choosing in her classroom. She found that there was a 90% improvement in the knowledge of the 6 Pillars of Character Education (2001). This data is interesting as an evaluation of comprehension of the definition of character values, but no mention is made of the internalization of the traits prescribed. Therefore, it is difficult to judge the true effectiveness of this program. Finally, the Los Angeles Unified School District implemented the Jefferson Center program. Following implementation, major discipline fell 25%, minor discipline fell 39%, and suspensions fell 16% (Brooks and Kann, 1993). No mention is made of pro-social behavior. Unfortunately, this again makes it difficult to

analyze whether there was a true internalization of the values presented or if the reduction in behavior was simply a result of an increased awareness of the prescribed definitions of morals and values. While the data presented is sketchy and insufficient to procure an in-depth and scientifically valid analysis, it appears to this reader that character education is beneficial, at the very least, in reducing poor behaviors. Whether that translates to an increase in pro-social behaviors remains to be seen.

Character Counts!

Character Counts! implemented a comprehensive survey designed to gauge the effectiveness of their program in South Dakota. It is the most comprehensive evaluation to date of a character education program. This writer will discuss the evidence presented by Character Counts! in two parts; teacher observation and student self-report. Questionnaires were distributed to teachers and students participating in the Character Counts! program. Answers were agree, disagree, or not sure (Josephson, 2003). All statistics that follow are found at www.character.org (2003). According to the teachers surveyed, student behavior improved in the following areas two years after the implementation of Character Counts!: fight less occurred less often, students treated each other better, helped each other more often, were less disruptive in class, *had more respect for property*, treated teachers with more respect, and were less likely to get detention. In the “has more respect for property” category, students showed a less than 10% improvement over the 2 years (Josephson, 2003). This was not considered particularly beneficial in support of Character Counts!. Two areas where behavior did not improve were skipping classes less often and are less likely to cheat.

Based on these scores, one can infer that the character education program implementation was helpful in reducing problematic behaviors. In all but three categories surveyed, disruptive and maladaptive behavior reduced by over 10%. Additionally, the improvement in: treating teachers with more respect, treating each other better, and fighting less often indicate the beginnings of an infusion of character values into the student's personality. While the data is preliminary and warranting further analysis, the initial results are positive in describing character education as an effective tool to instill values. Additional surveys, while not as widely distributed, found that Character Counts! was an effective program in transmitting morals to students. In Tulare Co., California, suspensions dropped 30% and discipline referrals dropped 50% in the middle school. In the high school, discipline referrals declined 76%, suspensions 47%, expulsions 88% and dropouts 76% (Josephson, 2003). Of particular interest is the tremendous reduction in the dropout rate. This exemplifies the primary goal of character education. Obviously, a value in that particular community is education. Based on the internalization of that value, the dropout rate has declined incredibly. The results continue to show this downward trend.

In Lubbock, TX, discipline referrals at North Ridge Elementary fell 48%. In West Des Moines, Iowa, Clegg Elementary saw detentions fall 88%. Lombard, Ill., experienced a 50% drop in suspensions and a 43% increase in extra-curricular activities. This is the first indication of an increase in pro-social behavior. Finally, Virginia, Louisiana, and Nebraska saw improvements of up to 80% in measures addressed by Character Counts! Surveys (Josephson, 2003).

It is important to note that in many instances, results initially increased maladaptive behaviors before declining the second year. This may be due to several factors, including student resistance and poor staff training. However, one cannot deny the striking results contained in these studies. While it is unclear to what extent students internalized the values presented as part of their belief system and personality, they evidently became more aware of their behavior and the impact it was having on their lives and the lives of others. The results do give support for the traditional character education supporters, as Character Counts! curriculum stresses the repetition and drilling of students on the values presented (Josephson, 2003).

Based on the results indicated above, it is evident that some type of formalized character education program is beneficial to, at the very minimum, making students aware of commonly held morals and beliefs. Further, it assists students in understanding the impact their behavior has on their life and the lives of others. Though initially difficult to discern, a traditional character education program has difficulty infusing the values and morals it teaches into the student's belief system, thus making long-term effects of the program difficult to predict. However, the evidence linking Character Counts! to improved behavioral performance is clear and reliable. As we will see, the program designed and implemented in New Jersey yields similar results.

New Jersey Character Education Partnership

New Jersey recognized the need to implement a character education program in schools recently. After the 2000 school year, New Jersey school administrators held five public hearings throughout the state to determine what values parents and community

leaders deemed appropriate. Based upon those results, a character education curriculum was developed by educators across the state (State of New Jersey, 2003). Participating schools implemented the curriculum with the input of parents and community leaders. In the 2001-2002 school year, 99.5% of public schools and 100% of special services and charter schools participated in the character education program (State of New Jersey, 2003). Teachers and administrators were given a questionnaire (whose scale was not provided by the state of New Jersey) to evaluate the effectiveness of the newly designed character education program. 88% of public school schools, 69% of charter schools, and 88% of special services schools submitted evaluative data (State of New Jersey, 2003). It was determined from the data collected that 88% of participating schools implemented character education during regular school hours, with many schools offering after-school programs to supplement learning. This amount of repetition and exposure to morals and values certainly aided in shaping the outcome data.

When the data submitted from educators was evaluated, the findings indicated a positive effect of character education on the reduction of behavioral problems in the schools. All data that follows can be found at www.state.nj.us/njded/chared/outcomes/year2/ and were received primarily from teachers and school administrators. Great Egg Harbor School District reported a 53.5% reduction in disrespectful behavior after implementing Character Counts!. This was the only data discussed from this particular school district. Similarly, Pemberton Schools reported a 44.1% drop in insubordination and a reduction of 12% in suspensions of students. Again, this is the only data provided for this school district. Two Camden charter schools, Promise and Academy, reported suspensions 7 times and 3 times, respectively, lower than that of a control population not exposed to the

character education curriculum. While this data is impressive, a subtle drawback becomes clear when one remembers a key aspect of character education. Many supporters of character education believe that peer role modeling is key to the acceptance and exhibition of societal norms and morals. Based on this data, it does not appear that peer-modeling had a positive effect on the control population. While this is most assuredly not the sole reason for this discrepancy, it is worth noting. Voorhees Township schools reported a reduction of 57% in suspensions and 20% in Saturday detentions. No mentions of pro-social behaviors are noted, nor are any other anti-social behaviors discussed. Deerfield Township schools saw a 22% decline in discipline referrals, slightly lower than Clayton School's reduction of 31%. Washington Township High School provided the largest amount of data from a single school for the study. According to educators in that institution, fighting dropped 52%, assault 66%, provoking 94%, and verbal abuse 28%. Unfortunately, disrespect remained relatively unchanged, with a decline of only 5% (Josephson, website). Again, the research suggests that character education is efficient in reducing poor social behavior, but has provided little evidence that acceptable and admirable social behavior increase when the program is implemented.

While the reduction in maladaptive behavior is enough to warrant a character education program, the lack of evidence regarding positive moral behavior strikes a blow to the very foundation of character education's argument. While the students are becoming more aware of the values their community holds in high regard, students are not displaying an internalization of those values. Seemingly satisfied to espouse what was dictated to them, the students appear to display this behavior solely in the confines of the school, where the behavior, by happenstance, is measured. Noble as the aims of

character education are, there arise concerns regarding whether or not this program fulfills all of its assertions. It seems that while objectives for the reduction of poor social behaviors, knowledge of community-supported values, and understanding of the definitions of those values are met, character education fails to provide a successful avenue in which students believe and incorporate those values into their belief systems.

Opinions

As with any issue pertinent to children's lives, character education displays a wide array of opinions regarding its effectiveness, implementation, and importance. The instilling of morals in children, while somewhat controversial, is necessary given the considerable decline of student behavior in recent years. Administrators and teachers agree overwhelmingly, with parental support close behind. Though ridiculed at times, many students have begun to believe in the program. While this may not be evident through their actions, student opinions of character education tend to be surprisingly supportive. Finally, there are the ardent critics of character education. In theory, they support the school's role in values transmission. However, the differences occur mainly in the way values are taught. Gone are the beliefs of repeated drilling and rote memorization. These are now replaced by critics who feel that character should be an experience rather than an experience in indoctrination, where children are free to make their own judgments and come to their own conclusions about the values most desirable for them in today's society, similar to progressivist proponents of character education.

Generally, if staff members do not believe in the material being presented, the program will experience a large degree of difficulty. This point is documented widely

throughout the literature. Andrew Milson states that a crucial component of character education is “the desire of the faculty to implement the program” (2000). Indeed, in the South Dakota survey undertaken by Wood and Roach, 81% of administrators and 78% of faculty supported the new character education program (2000). Support and belief in the program leads to greater teacher effort to communicate the material. When teachers are happy with the curriculum, it is evident in lessons, morale, and discussion. Truly, teacher support and enthusiasm of character education is equally as important as the curriculum itself. A vehicle such as this needs a competent and energetic driver to guide the vehicle to its destination, the students. Overall, educators are very positive about character education.

While character education helps students learn values, it also teaches adults about their role in a student’s life and the influence they have on student behavior. The New Jersey study found that 93% of teachers were more conscious of their words, 93% had more awareness in their conversations with students, 86% felt they became better role models, and 86% felt that this increase in awareness brought the teacher/student relationship closer (State of New Jersey, 2003). These statistics provide an illustration of how character education influences the lives of all involved. One can infer that due to the increase in effective communication, teachers became more vested in the program, which will eventually lead to better student understanding.

While the opinions for character education were generally favorable, there were some drawbacks. Some teachers questioned the role of schools in teaching values, which can be seen as a private, personal matter. Additionally, a striking finding was that “50% had no training” in South Dakota (Wood and Roach, 2000). This statistic is only mildly

troubling when taken in context. The consensus view is that educators have always taught character, whether a formal curriculum existed or not. In the times before the influx of character education programs, no training was given in how to accurately and effectively teach the values of society, and this came at a time when society was not deemed to be in moral trouble. When viewed in this light, the lack of training is mildly discomforting only in that the “character education” program is not being taught in the manner prescribed.

Critics of character education provide a more cynical view of character education. When reading their opinions, this reader senses that critics feel character educators are attempting to turn students into mindless robots regurgitating values information that has been branded into their being. Alfie Kohn leads the group, repeatedly attacking the manner in which values are taught, stating that character educators are trying to “indoctrinate” children (Hymowitz, 2003). This is echoed by Robinson who states that critics claim character education, in its current form, is “indoctrination at its worst and simplistic at it’s best” according to critics (Robinson, 2000). Kohn provides the framework for this argument when he states that we are teaching children to have absolute respect and unquestioned obedience to authority in lieu of teaching values (1997). Specifically, Kohn focuses his attention on Character Counts! with the argument that the program is “reinforcing the belief that young people should specifically and repeatedly be told what is expected of them. This approach fosters not autonomy or character development” (1997).

As argued previously, critics of character education are not against education of values in schools per se, but in the manner in which the values are taught. Interestingly,

critics argument appears aimed at character instruction in the “old form”. When closely examined, many of the critics suggestions provided are quite similar to the progressivist view of character education. Kohlberg once stated that we should “develop student’s powers of moral reasoning so they can judge which values are better than others” (Lickona, 1993). This supports the main argument that character education should focus on the “why” instead of “what”. Being as personal as values are, the important aspect is that students are able to incorporate the meaning of values as they perceive them into their own lives. Only then do the values take on specific and important meaning as a foundation of a child’s moral functioning in society. Robinson agrees, stating that “rather than simply indoctrinating or inducing mere conformity of values, character education programs can help children to reflect on moral issues”(2000). Rather than simply telling students what values are and why educators feel it is necessary that students possess them, it is the responsibility of teachers to help students construct meaning and importance of values in their lives.

Summary

History has shown that character education has always been part of the American educational curriculum. This idea is supported by Lickona’s assertion that “character education is as old as education itself” (1993), and Milson “the term character education is not new to educational discourse” (2000). While there has been a labile relationship between the public and schools in regard to the role educators play in instilling values, character education has experienced a recent regeneration in popularity due to the

perceived moral decline in today's youth. Kohlberg is credited with the resurgence of character education in schools due to his theories of moral dilemmas.

The concept of how to teach values became of grave importance. Educators, community members, students, and families are encouraged to convene to determine which values are deemed important to the community in an effort to provide an optimally effective curriculum. Based on the values derived from this meeting, a primary goal is for all adults to model the appropriate value to the greatest extent possible. This serves to reinforce the curriculum presented to the student. Additionally, peer modeling and service learning has been shown to be effective avenues to transmit values.

While character education remains a young field, results are encouraging. Initial reports suggest that, at a very minimum, character education provides a basal definition of values appropriate in the community. From this, it is hoped that students will construct individual meaning to internalize the values presented. Thus far, the research suggests that there have not been reliable increases in pro-social behavior following the implementation of character education curriculums.

Finally, critics argue that the methods currently available for teaching character education are tantamount to indoctrination. Though this may be overstating the situation, it is important to note that many of the traditional character education programs emphasize and encourage teaching methods that oppose current learning theories. Based on these findings, adjustments may need to be made regarding implementation.

Chapter 3: Design of Study

Background

The recent upswing in the desire for character education to be implemented in educational settings has produced many intriguing studies. A significant portion of these studies deal with the implementation of a specific curriculum throughout the year, across all settings, and in all grades. This comprehensive and global approach to character education has produced impressive results in student's ability to identify character components. Students have been engaged in discussions of peripheral uses and examples of the values being taught. Finally, the students have had the opportunity to engage in service learning projects to formally apply the material being presented. Unfortunately, this researcher was unable to duplicate this entire set of criteria. Due to time constraints, curricular variations, and fluctuating ability levels, a novel approach to character education was implemented to allow for learning styles, time, and behavioral issues. The paragraphs that follow depict the program implemented to the students in a special educational environment.

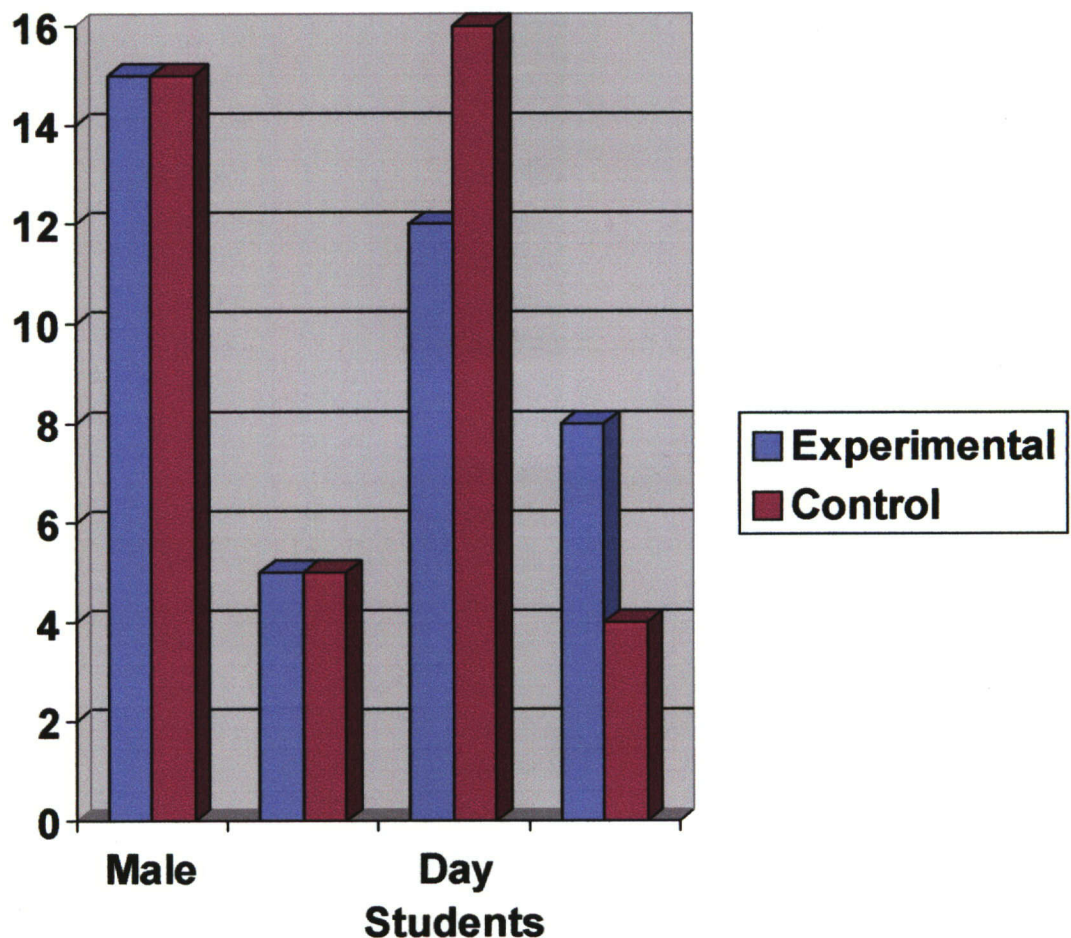
Sample

The participants in this study consisted of 40 students in an out of district educational placement. These students were assigned to two groups, the experimental group (who participated in the character education unit) and the control group (who only

completed the pre- and post-test). The participants were equally divided between the two groups of the study. The students participating in this study had age ranges between 15-19 (experimental), and 15-21 (control). There was no discrepancy between the two groups in regards to socioeconomic status or ability level. The chart below provides additional demographic information.

Figure 3.1- Demographic information of participants.

Demographic Information



Measures

Students who participated in this study were given a pre-test in week 1 and a post-test in week 8. Both the pre- and post-test consisted of the same 39 questions based upon the student's perceptions of character traits and their role in school (see Appendix for pre/post-test). Questions 7, 8, and 9 from the Clegg Park Elementary School were omitted in the pre-test as the intervention had not taken place yet. The tests were developed by the Josephson Institute of Ethics (2003) and the Clegg Park Elementary School, Iowa (2001). Part 1 of the test, developed by the Josephson Institute, consisted of 30 questions detailing student opinions of classmates, teachers, feelings regarding school (both positive and negative), and academic skills. The answers to the questions were in Likert format, with "Yes", "Sometimes", or "No" being to options given. Part 2 of the test, developed by Clegg Park Elementary, again consisted of 9 questions dealing with student perceptions of character values. However, the survey consisted of one question per character trait of the "Six Pillars of Character Education" developed by the Josephson Institute, rather than multiple, vague questions regarding the student's views of the school. The remaining 3 questions dealt with student's perception of the program and the impact of character education on their behavior and the behavior of their peers. Again, responses were in Likert format with "A lot", "A little", and "Not at All" being the options given.

In addition to the pre- and post-tests given in week 1 and week 10, academic data was taken throughout the program for students in the experimental group. This consisted largely of comprehension questions following lessons that dealt with a specific character

pillar, abstract/artistic projects designed to further infuse comprehension, and weekly quizzes on character traits presented during the week. Though this data is not dealt with in the results section due to reliability, validity, and generalization concerns, it is important to note that comprehension of the “Six Pillars” was being evaluated throughout the study. Quizzes were multiple-choice consisting of 7-10 questions and three answer choices. An example of abstract or artistic projects was a re-telling of “The Boy Who Cried Wolf” in current society, but consistent with the theme of trustworthiness (see Appendix for example of a lesson plan).

Finally, behavioral data was taken for one week prior to the study (the baseline period), continually throughout the curriculum, and for one week following the post-test. Specific behaviors targeted in the study were aggression, property destruction, verbal threats, and intervals earned. All students included in the survey earn reinforcers based on a token economy system, where each half-hour they are rewarded for being behavior-free with a “dime” on their point sheets. These dimes may be “cashed in” throughout the day for various reinforcers. There are 12 possible intervals of earning in the school day. A loss of dime results from non-compliance, self-injurious behavior, disruptions, or any behavior listed above. When computing the percentages for this study, this researcher placed an “A”, “PD”, or “VT” in the interval in which a student did not earn in order to count the number of target behaviors for the study. Additionally, percentage of intervals earned remained the same even though SIB, non-compliance, and disruptions are not included in the study. The behaviors chosen to be specifically targeted deal with disabled student’s low levels of sympathy, empathy, and lack of perspective taking.

As stated above, behavioral and pre/post-test data are the foundations for the results section that follows. However, details regarding other academic data taken are included to inform the reader of how comprehension was measured throughout the study.

Hypothesis

Based upon the necessity to implement character education in schools and the prevalence of impaired empathy and sympathy in developmentally disabled individuals, this researcher hypothesized two outcomes. Primarily, students receiving character instruction would score significantly higher on post-tests regarding character traits than their counterparts in the control group. This hypothesis rests on the notion that students receiving instruction in the character education curriculum will identify character traits, improve perceptions of those traits in others, and understand lateral examples of character traits in other areas outside of the classroom.

Secondarily, a parallel outcome of this study will show that behavioral incidents in the classroom will decline in the experimental group after implementation of the character education curriculum. Specifically, incidents involving student's ability to empathize, sympathize, and plan actions will be positively influenced by learning acceptable character traits. This premise is rooted in the belief that character education will improve positive feelings in the students, increase their ability to judge the impact of their behavior on other students, and effectively plan their actions in an effort to acknowledge their peers' feelings. The null hypothesis in this experiment would show that character education has no effect on outcome scores on the post-test and that behavioral incidents will remain unchanged following the treatment period.

Design

The research design of this study involves two assigned groups; the experimental and control group. Students were assigned to each group dependent upon class placement, class curriculum, and teacher assignment. The age ranges and educational variations (see “Sample”) were parallel in both groups. There was no variability in demographic information between the two groups with the exception of residential versus day students, where the experimental group experienced a significantly higher rate of residential students compared to the control group (8 to 4).

The program was an 8-week intervention based on the curriculum provided by Character Counts! and the Josephson Institute on Ethics. Prior to the implementation of the program, a one-week baseline behavioral data collection period occurred. Following this, the intervention began. Week 1 consisted simply of administering the pre-test to both the experimental and control groups. Weeks 2-7 were spent discussing the “6 Pillars of Character Education”; trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, caring, fairness, and citizenship. One trait was studied per week and given approximately 2.5 hours of instructional time. Students participated in lessons, discussions, individual activities, group learning experiences and service learning experiences designed to facilitate acquisition of the material presented. A sample lesson plan, group activity, individual activity, and service learning project are provided in the Appendix. Following this period, all participants were administered the same test as in week 1. It is important to note that during the 6-week intervention, the control group had no instruction whatsoever dealing with character education or citizenship.

Analysis

Based upon the information provided, this researcher believes the character education unit (independent variable) will increase both feelings about others/perspective taking (dependent variable 1) and will serve to decrease behavioral incidents within the school (dependent variable 2). However, due to the relatively small size of the school, several confounding variables may influence the outcomes. Primarily, due to impulse control problems, many students rushed through both the pre- and post-test. Additionally, several students attempted to work together, attempted to sabotage the survey (as they believed their answers would reflect poorly upon the school), and conferred with peers in the control group about the material being presented during instructional times. These behaviors, though significant, represent a small portion of the population as a whole.

The analysis of data in this study rested primarily from the pre- and post-test data taken in weeks 1 and 8. The same test was used in both instances to gauge knowledge acquired in specific areas of character education, the Six Pillars. Additionally, behavioral data was analyzed from the study to discern any effects the character education curriculum had on behavior and behavioral planning.

In each instance, a two by two analysis of variance was utilized to generate the results discussed in the next chapter. Significance levels are at .05. This measure was selected to analyze scores within both groups in the study. In addition, the ANOVA allowed this experimenter to examine data in specific areas (i.e., certain pillars, certain behaviors) both within specific groups and between the two groups.

Summary

This study consisted of 40 students educated in an out-of-district educational setting. These students were assigned to two specific groups within the study, the experimental and control group. There were no significant differences in age, socio-economic background, or ability level between the two groups. However, there were significantly more males involved (30 to 10) in this study, though this is due to the general makeup of the disabled population in the school. Additionally, more students received only day treatment than residential treatment (28 to 12).

The study was an eight week design consisting of a week 1 pre-test, six weeks of character education (one week per pillar), and a week 8 “wrap-up” where the pre-test was again administered to generate data on comprehension. During this trial period, students in the experimental group engaged in related activities to activate reading comprehension and participated in service learning projects. Students assigned to the control group received only the week 1 and week 8 pre- and post-test. While this study was being undertaken, behavioral data was collected to determine if character education would also improve feelings of sympathy, empathy, and action-planning as evidenced by a reduction in aggression, verbal threats, property destruction, and intervals earned in the experimental group.

A two-way ANOVA was completed on the data this researcher gathered to determine the effectiveness of the character education program on special education students. This test was selected for its ability to measure multiple levels of variables within and between the two groups.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Summary

Recent trends in educational philosophy and the increasing perception of a “moral breakdown” in American society have pushed the issue of character education to the frontline of educational debate. Proponents claim that teaching values in the curriculum through systematic and deliberate means will serve to infuse these traits into today’s student body. Others claim a character education program implemented within the existing curriculum will produce positive results. Both sides agree that instruction on proper morals will serve the good of society. Opponents of character education argue that there are too many variables for character education to be successful. Arguing that morals vary across cultures, socioeconomic lines, and even within families, these individuals claim that it is virtually impossible to adequately teach students all of the morals a society deems necessary to function. A character education program based upon this foundation will certainly crumble.

This researcher hypothesized that a character education program implemented with developmentally disabled students would serve two purposes. Primarily, students who participated in the character education program would score significantly higher on test measures assessing feelings of sympathy, empathy, and supportive behavior. Secondly, as a result of an increasing awareness of the feelings of others, students in the experimental group would show a reduction in certain maladaptive behaviors.

Aggression, verbal threats, and property destruction were analyzed in the experimental group to determine the reduction of maladaptive behaviors by individuals exposed to the character education program.

While the basic design of the character education unit followed closely with the subject matter described in Character Counts!, a widely approved and accepted character education curriculum, it differed in two main areas. First, the curriculum was implemented over a 6-week period rather than a full year of instruction. Second, this was not implemented school-wide. The basic tenets of the “Six Pillars of Character Education” remained the same.

Hypothesis I

A two-way analysis of variance was conducted on scores from a pre-test and post-test from subjects in the experimental group (n=20) and subjects in the control group (n=14). A significant difference was noted between the two groups on the pre-test at the .002 level. Additionally, a significant difference was noted between the two groups on the post-test at the .000 level. This large discrepancy between the scores of the two groups is noted in Figure 4.1.

However, as depicted in Figure 4.1, the mean scores from each group showed little variability. In the experimental group, mean pre-test scores were 62.45. According to post-test data, mean scores were 64.65. Similar results were noted in the control group. The mean pre-test score here was a 44.00 with a mean post-test score of 44.29. The standard deviation from each group also showed insignificant change between pre-

test and post-test conditions. In the experimental group, a standard deviation of 9.28 was noted in the pre-test phase. In the post-test phase, this number rose to 11.15. In the

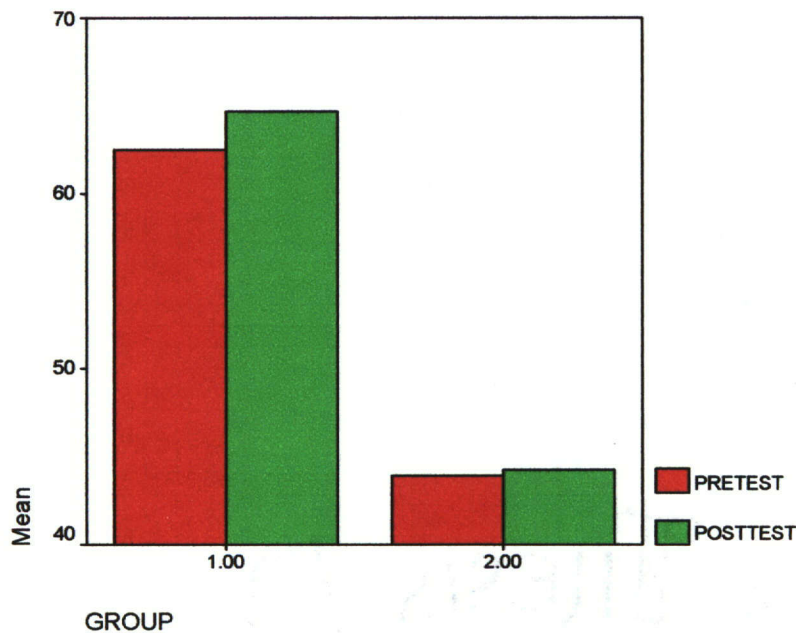


Figure 4.1- Pre-test/post-test means from experimental (1.00) and control (2.00) groups.

control group, the standard deviation went from 21.20 in pre-test conditions to 19.45 in post-test conditions.

Based upon these statistics, no significant change was noted between pre-test and post-test in either group. A significance level of .537 was noted within subjects of group 1 between pre-test and post-test data. Additionally, a significance level of .634 was obtained when analyzing scores from pre-test and post-test data in the control group. These low levels of significance indicate little change in scores in either group from the pre-test to the post-test.

In addition to computing a two-way ANOVA, this researcher compared mean scores on particular questions from the test. In particular, four questions were selected

due to their close relationship with the hypothesis. Question 7, “This school is a friendly place”, question 32, “Students in this school respect each other”, question 33, “Students in this school act responsibly”, and question 35, “Students in this school care about others” were scored on a Likert scale. In this manner, a “not at all” was scored 0, sometimes was scored 1, and most of the time was scored 2. Mean scores for each question and each group are depicted in Figure 4.2.

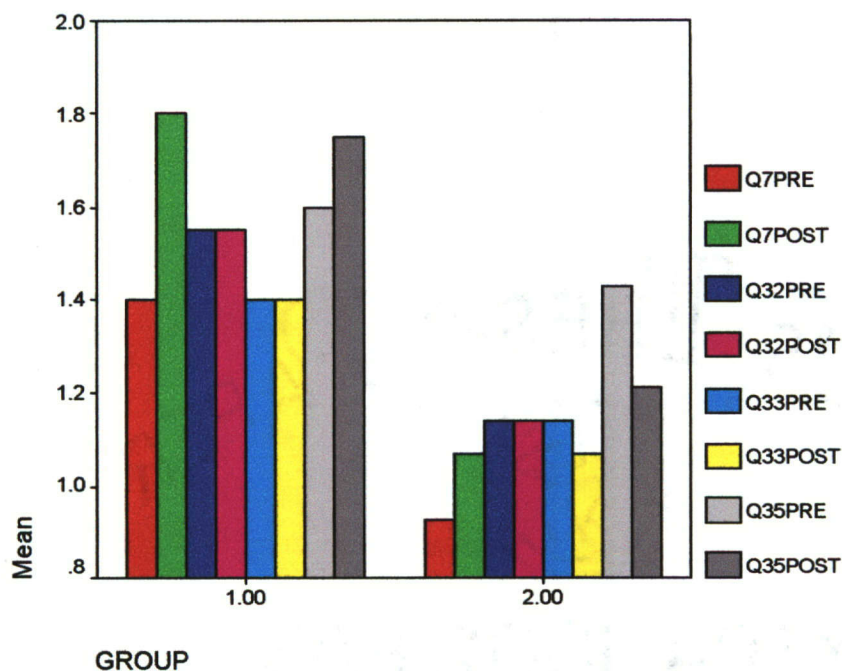


Figure 4.2- Mean scores on questions 7, 32, 33, 35 of test.

As represented in the graph, mean scores showed relatively little change with the exception of question 7 for the experimental group (1.4 pre-test to 1.8 post-test). In two instances, scores decreased after the intervention in the control group (question 33 and 35). These results are significant only in that they mirror the relatively minor increases in composite scores from the pre-tests and post-tests of both groups.

According to the data presented, a significant difference was noted between the scores of the experimental group and control group on both the pre- and post-test. There was no significant difference between scores on the pre-test and post-test from either group. Additionally, no significant difference was noted on specific questions regarding sympathy and empathy from either the experimental or control group from the pre-test to the post-test. These results indicate that the character education unit failed to prove the hypothesis that character education would increase scores on a post-test as compared to the pre-test in the experimental group. The control group scores remained as expected, as they received no intervention. Thus, the null hypothesis was supported.

Hypothesis II

Six students in the control group had their rates of maladaptive behaviors tracked in an effort to prove that a character education program would reduce the number of behaviors exhibited in the school setting. Behavior was tracked via a data sheet, which is included in the appendix. Data was kept on a half-hour basis and included the number and type of three specific behaviors, aggression, verbal threats, and property destruction. A two-week baseline pre-intervention period, the six-week curriculum period, and a two-week pos-intervention period were tracked. The results that follow in table 4.1 show the average number of behaviors per week per student (n=6). Included in the table are the percentage of intervals earned, which include the full gamut of behaviors which would prevent a student from earning their “dime”, including, non-compliance, disruptions, and self-injury.

	AGGRESSION	PROPERTY DESTRUCTION	VERBAL THREATS	INTERVALS EARNED (%)
PRE	.3 per week	.5 per week	0 per week	94%
INTER.	.3 per week	.5 per week	.4 per week	88%
POST	.2 per week	.1 per week	.2 per week	90%

Table 4.1- Average number of behaviors per individual per week, % of intervals earned.

Further, classroom data was compiled to depict the average number of behaviors per week for the class as a whole. Table 4.2 displays the results of the average number of behaviors for the class per week.

	AGGRESSION	PROPERTY DESTRUCTION	VERBAL THREATS
PRE	2 per week	4 per week	0 per week
INTER.	2.5 per week	3.5 per week	2.7 per week
POST	1.5 per week	1 per week	1.5 per week

Table 4.2- Average number of behaviors of the class per week.

As depicted in the tables, the reduction, or lack thereof, in behaviors are commensurate with the lack of efficacy of the character education curriculum on scores from the pre-test and post-test. As there was a high degree of insignificance from the raw test data, the

behavioral data exhibits little change in the repertoire of the students who participated in the curriculum unit. This stands to reason that, if no cognitive change was generated, there would be little chance for the students to adjust their behavior to what they have learned.

Much of the data displays very little, if any, change. In certain instances, as in verbal threats, incidents of behaviors actually increased, from 0 per week to 1.5 per week as a whole. Property destruction appears to be the only behavior which showed any clear sign of reduction, from 4 incidents per week to 1 incident per week. Aggression remained largely unchanged, from 2 incidents per week to 1.5 incidents per week.

The results of the behavioral data collection failed to prove the hypothesis that a character education curriculum would reduce the number of maladaptive behaviors exhibited by students in the experimental group due to increased awareness of the feelings of others. As shown, the only behavior where a clear reduction was apparent was property destruction. Logically, the null hypothesis was justified in this instance.

Summary

A character education unit similar to the one proposed by Character Counts! was implemented to developmentally disabled students in an effort to show that higher scores would be obtained from the experimental group on the post-test than on their own pre-tests and that post-tests from the experimental group would be significantly higher than those of a control group. Additionally, behavioral data was taken on six students in the experimental group in an effort to prove that, as a result of the character education program, a reduction in maladaptive behaviors would be noticed.

No significant change was noted in scores from the pre-test to the post-test from either group. Additionally, the variance in scores from pre-test to post-test between the experimental and control groups remained significant and similar. Therefore, no significant effect was noted due to the implementation of the character education program on the scores on post-tests from either group. Similarly, no significant change was noted in the behavioral incidents in the experimental group. The intervention failed to prove both hypothesis and thus the null hypothesis was proved. Chapter 5 offers a more detailed analysis of the results along with rationale for the levels of significance. Additionally, suggestions and implications for further or future research are explored.

Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusions

Summary of Thesis

Character education is not new to educational debate. Since the perceived breakdown of the American family in the 1980's, educators, politicians, parents, and theorists alike have weighed the options on this issue. Character education has now made it to the front line of political debate. Anderson (2000) quotes Al Gore as stating, "Schools should also reinforce parental efforts to teach children good character and American values". While recent debate has strongly favored schools teaching values to the children in today's society, many questions arise surrounding this topic. The values individuals hold in esteem vary across racial, socio-economic, cultural, religious, and familial boundaries. Educating students in every value every person holds dear is a lesson in futility. Whose values, then, do we teach? Additionally, which method of instruction is best? Shall we use the existing curriculum, or designate a specific set of lessons and activities designed to infuse values into students. Should we concentrate on the value as a whole, or on the menisci surrounding the value? Though researchers have agreed that education must play a larger role in moral education, some influential questions loom in this debate.

This researcher has reviewed current trends in character education and provided some evidence of the successes of character education. In conjunction with these successes, this researcher framed the successful character education program. In fairness

to those who oppose formal character education, this researcher included the major drawbacks to this program. Finally, a comprehensive review of two of the largest surveys available today, the Character Education Partnership and the New Jersey Department of Character Education, was undertaken. These studies clearly show the efficacy and need for a character education program in schools.

This researcher then implemented a six-week character education program with students in a special education setting. Based upon the hypotheses that character education would increase scores on a post-test than on a pre-test for the experimental group and that maladaptive behavior would decrease as a result of choice-making behavior, this researcher administered a pre-test to the experimental and control group the same week. After the six-week character education unit was completed, both groups were given the post-test. A two-way analysis of variance was completed on both sets of test scores for both groups. There was no significant difference found between pre-test and post-test scores within groups. There was a significant difference in pre-test scores and post-test scores between both groups. This discrepancy was significantly similar in both cases. The null hypothesis was justified in this instance.

Behavioral data taken on seven students from the experimental group indicated no noticeable change in behavior patterns resulting from the character education programs. In one instance, the rate of a behavior increased following the character education unit. These results are predictable based upon the results from the pre-test/post-test data. In this instance, also, the null hypothesis was proven.

Discussion

These results are predictable for four main reasons. As stated previously by a variety of authors, successful character education programs share key components for success. The length of time devoted to the character education program, both during the day and during the school year, are crucial in comprehension of the core values being presented. Additionally, the amount of people involved in the implementation of the program plays a key role. A positive correlation has been established for the number of staff and students involved in the program and the amount of success documented by the participating school. Similarly, role-modeling by staff and students alike increase the likelihood that character traits will be exhibited in daily life. For staff, this includes trainings on the subject matter. Finally, the method of instruction or type of program is predictive of how well students will accept the messages being taught.

Spencer Kagan (2001) postulated that “students do not develop character in a single lesson; rather they acquire it over time”. This point has been echoed by every successful character education program. Andrew Milson (2000) suggested focusing on *one value* for an entire year. Many programs implement the character education program for at least one academic period per week for the entire year. In this study, character education was only implemented for six weeks, due to time constraints. Confounding this extremely short intervention period was the intellectual capabilities of the students involved in the curriculum. Students in a “normal” educational setting receive an entire year of instruction with little change noted, in some cases. These developmentally delayed students benefited only from a fraction of the time that other students received. While the time spent each day or week on character education remained similar to other

studies with positive results, it is difficult to accurately predict how effective a character education program may have been had these students received instruction from this curriculum for the entire year.

While many studies have documented a whole-school approach (Levy-Epstein 2002, Singh 2001, Smith 1999), this study was conducted with only three classes receiving the curriculum. Additionally, only three teachers were aware of the information being presented and were able to assist students with experiential learning. While it may be argued that character and morals are displayed and enforced in schools everyday, it is necessary to point out that these students received no additional encouragement from staff or peers during the intervention period. Had they received additional support or seen the program being implemented school-wide, this notion of experiential learning may have taken place to a greater degree. Students in a special needs school are thought to learn better by observing rather than reading, and additional classes or staff members who could support the infusion of the values being taught may have been very beneficial.

On a similar note, it has been shown by many researchers (Leming 1993, Kagan 2001, Harned 1999, and Berkowitz 1999) that role modeling plays a decisive role in the acquisition of character traits being taught. Children are social learners, and the reinforcement they receive from observing the lessons they are being taught in the real world is enormous. The success of a program, according to the literature, lies in how it is carried out both those the child sees on a daily basis. This involves preparing staff before the curriculum begins. The students in this study did not benefit from role modeling outside of the three teachers implementing the program. However, perhaps the most

influential individuals in a student's life during adolescence are peers. In this scenario, peer modeling was largely non-existent outside of the classroom. The relatively small number of participants limited any benefit that may have been received from this observational learning to nil.

The limitations of this study have been shown to severely impede the conclusions that may be drawn from this research. While the character education program followed closely with an approved, successful curriculum, the obstacles which faced this researcher were extremely difficult to overcome. Suggestions for future research are discussed in the "Implications" section of this chapter.

Conclusions

Though character education has been proven successful in a variety of situations and with a variety of populations, in this study the results were unfavorable. No significant change was noted between the pre-test/post-test in either the experimental or control group. The only level of significance noted was between the mean scores on the pre-test and post-test between the two groups. The level of disparity between the two groups remained almost identical from the pre-test to the post-test. This suggests an unfair assignment of subjects between the two groups.

The experimental group appeared to score significantly higher on both measures, suggesting one of two possibilities. First, some form of character education may have been administered previously with students in the experimental group. Though the students claimed they had not received instruction in this area, it is unknown whether this was true. The second possibility is that students in the experimental group may be

functioning at a higher cognitive level before the tests were administered. The difference in cognitive level may have manifested itself in the scores on both tests.

Without definite support of either position, it is unknown what specifically caused the variance in scores on the pre-test. However, the lack of improvement on the post-test for the experimental group strayed from evidence found by this researcher. The successes of character education have been well documented. The State of New Jersey and the Character Education partnership both display large amounts of data supporting the effectiveness of character education. Even in the worst of cases from these two sources, improvements were noted. This was supported by Smith (1999), Singh (2001), Levy-Epstein (2002) and Leming (1993). In particular, Smith's discussion of Mount Ford Middle School and Levy-Epstein's depiction of Halifax Middle School assert that character education has the power to exact resounding changes in the school. Bob Hassinger, Halifax's principal, reports an 82% reduction in suspensions and a 50% reduction in fights (Levy-Epstein, 2002). Singh reported a 90% increase in the awareness of the "6 Pillars of Character Education" (Singh, 2001). These statistics tell a different story than the results of this researcher's study. It is important to note that the statistics provided followed a character education program implemented for an extended period of time, rather than a six-week period. This provides further evidence for the need of a longer, more comprehensive program.

Behavioral data taken throughout the study indicate little, if any, change in behavioral patterns of a sample of the students participating in this study. In one of the few articles detracting from character education, Lynn Revell (2002) found that six months following a character education program, students who had scored high on tests

measuring character traits were scoring significantly lower than before. Additionally, she found that students were making a mockery of the program, joking about how ineffective it was. Leming (1993) found similar results in Franklin County (Ohio) school district. It is important to note that while this data supports the results from the study, evidence of this sort is difficult to find. Many of the data from researchers discussed previously describe noticeable changes in the behavior of the students and staff members. While this was not replicated in this study, it is hard to theorize the outcomes had this program been implemented for a full year.

Implications

As discussed throughout this chapter, some significant changes are necessary to gain a deeper understanding of how great an impact character education would have on the behavioral repertoire and cognition of students with disabilities. Primarily, the curriculum would need to be implemented for at least one full year. As shown in the literature, the length of the program is a sound predictor of its success. In a utopian program, the curriculum would be a school-wide program implemented from the lower grades until graduation. However, the reality of the situation would dictate that, at minimum, students in the secondary level be administered the curriculum for one full year at one time in their educational career. Prior to this, staff members at the secondary level would receive training in character education and would be expected to model the behavior being taught. Additionally, students would be engaged in peer-modeling experiences as well as service learning. This allows the student to engage in observational and experiential learning to reinforce what is being taught in the classroom.

The implications of this are tremendous; as staff members, we must make a concerted effort to model the behavior we expect to see our students display.

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Appendix A

Student Opinion Questionnaire

Circle your grade, ethnic group and gender in the upper right-hand corner. Here are some things that students have said about this school. If you think the statement is *true most of the time*, then circle "YES" for yes. If you think the statement is *true some of the time*, then circle the "S" for sometimes. If you think the statement is *false most of the time*, then circle "NO" for no. Remember:

YES = Mostly True S = Sometimes NO = Mostly False

- | | | | |
|---|---------|---|----|
| 1. Students in my classes help each other. | 1. YES | S | NO |
| 2. I like this school. | 2. YES | S | NO |
| 3. My teachers care about me. | 3. YES | S | NO |
| 4. I am proud of my school work. | 4. YES | S | NO |
| 5. I know how I am supposed to act at school. | 5. YES | S | NO |
| <hr/> | | | |
| 6. I like the way my classrooms look. | 6. YES | S | NO |
| 7. This school is a friendly place. | 7. YES | S | NO |
| 8. My teachers make learning fun and interesting. | 8. YES | S | NO |
| 9. I know I can ask the principal for help. | 9. YES | S | NO |
| 10. Most of the kids I know at school like me. | 10. YES | S | NO |
| <hr/> | | | |
| 11. I do well in math. | 11. YES | S | NO |
| 12. I do well in reading. | 12. YES | S | NO |
| 13. I do well in writing (sentences and stories). | 13. YES | S | NO |
| 14. Students who break the rules get in trouble. | 14. YES | S | NO |
| 15. Students in my classes like each other. | 15. YES | S | NO |
| <hr/> | | | |
| 16. Students in this school show respect for each other. | 16. YES | S | NO |
| 17. I see the principal all around the school. | 17. YES | S | NO |
| 18. My teachers help me when I don't understand. | 18. YES | S | NO |
| 19. My teachers really listen to what I have to say. | 19. YES | S | NO |
| 20. I am an important person at school. | 20. YES | S | NO |
| <hr/> | | | |
| 21. All students who break the rules are treated the same. | 21. YES | S | NO |
| 22. I feel safe in my classrooms. | 22. YES | S | NO |
| 23. I get along well with other kids in this school. | 23. YES | S | NO |
| 24. What I am learning in school will help me when I start working. | 24. YES | S | NO |
| 25. My teachers want me to do my best. | 25. YES | S | NO |
| <hr/> | | | |
| 26. Most of the teachers and other adults I know at school like me. | 26. YES | S | NO |
| 27. I feel safe around the school. | 27. YES | S | NO |
| 28. I do well in music. | 28. YES | S | NO |
| 29. I do well in art. | 29. YES | S | NO |
| 30. I do well in P.E. | 30. YES | S | NO |

CHARACTER COUNTS! Questionnaire

STUDENTS

1. Students in this school trust each other.

A LOT

A LITTLE

NOT AT ALL

Why do you think so?

2. Students in this school respect each other.

A LOT

A LITTLE

NOT AT ALL

Why do you think so?

3. Students in this school act responsibly.

A LOT

A LITTLE

NOT AT ALL

Why do you think so?

4. Students in this school treat each other fairly.

A LOT

A LITTLE

NOT AT ALL

Why do you think so?



Based on a survey developed by Clegg Park Elementary School, Iowa.

CHARACTER COUNTS! is a service mark of the CHARACTER COUNTS! Coalition, a project of the Josephson Institute of Ethics.
4640 Admiralty Way, #1001 • Marina del Rey, CA 90292-6610 • www.charactercounts.org

CHARACTER COUNTS! Questionnaire

STUDENTS, cont.

5. Students in this school care about others.

A LOT

A LITTLE

NOT AT ALL

Why do you think so?

6. Students in this school know how to be good citizens.

A LOT

A LITTLE

NOT AT ALL

Why do you think so?

7. Do you think your behavior has changed after learning about the "Six Pillars of Character"?

A LOT

A LITTLE

NOT AT ALL

Why do you think so?

8. Do you think that learning about character traits (the "Six Pillars") has been important to you?

A LOT

A LITTLE

NOT AT ALL

Why do you think so?

9. Do you think other students' behavior has changed because of CHARACTER COUNTS!?

A LOT

A LITTLE

NOT AT ALL

Why do you think so?



Appendix B

TIME	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	WEEKLY TOTAL	% EARNED
8:30-9:00	10	NO NC 10	10	10			
9:00-9:30	10	NO NC 10	10	10			
9:30-10:00	10	10	NO	10			
10:00-10:30	10	10	10	10	10		
10:30-11:00	10	10	10	10	10		
11:00-11:30	10	10	10	10	10		
11:30-12:00	10	NO SES 10	NO SES 10	10	10		
12:00-12:30	NO	NO NC	10	NO SIB			
12:30-1:00	10	10	10	10			
1:00-1:30	10	NO PPS 10	NO PPS 10	/			
1:30-2:00	NO PPS 10	10	10	/			
2:00-2:30	10	10	10	/			
Daily Total	100	80	90	80		80	
Daily %	83%	67	75	88		88	

Weekly Time Sheet: Week of _____

Student Name _____

Vocational Teacher _____

Academic Teacher Andrew Disque

Job Coach _____

Appendix C

	sentence	diagram on the custom
	Eval: prompt hierarchies for definitions	Eval: completion of worksheet, diagram
3.2) write correct grammar or structure. I generate a story a sentence given by the re them. Daily, students was creating sentences one has had 2 turns (or 3 in the # of students)	9 th Reading (3.1) Obj: students will identify the main ideas, summarize, and make judgements about texts. Method: Students will begin a unit on Character Education by taking a pre-test and discussing trustworthiness, who we trust, how to establish trust. Students will read "the Boy who cried wolf" and re-write the story in modern times.	10 th Math (#7) Obj: students will participate perform well patterns and division problems Math: Students will play the game in ^{a game in} the they roll 2 dice, the come numbers will be chosen (a 5 or 6 or either 5 or 6). Students will determine ① if the number can be made by 2 numbers or if it's prime, ② which numbers (from a multiplication table)

Appendix D

RECEIVED

NOV 1

Appendix C

Government Grant INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Sponsored Projects DISPOSITION FORM

Andrew Disque

Principal Investigator

Co-Principal Investigator (if applicable)

401 N. Main St. Apt 170-C

Address of Principal Investigator

Address of Co-Principal Investigator

Williamstown, NJ 08094

City, State, and Zip Code

City, State, and Zip Code

(856) 740-0323

maxamooch@comcast.net

Telephone # Fax # e-mail address

Telephone # Fax # e-mail address

TITLE OF

RESEARCH An Evaluation of Character Education on Students with Developmental Disabilities

ADMINISTRATIVE DISPOSITION - DO NOT WRITE BELOW THIS LINE

Your claim for exemption for the research study identified above has been reviewed. The action taken is indicated below:

_____ **APPROVED FOR EXEMPTION AS CLAIMED: CATEGORY #** _____

Note: Anything that materially changes the exempt status of this study must be presented to the IRB for approval before the changes are implemented. Such modifications should be sent to the IRB Office at the address above.

_____ **APPROVED FOR EXEMPTION - BUT NOT AS CLAIMED.** Your claim for exemption does not fit the criteria for exemption designated in your proposal. However, the study does meet the criteria for exemption under CATEGORY # _____.

_____ **A determination regarding the exempt status of this study cannot be made at this time. Additional information is required.**

_____ **Your proposal does not meet the criteria for exemption, and a full review will be provided by the IRB.**

EXPEDITED REVIEW: _____ Approved _____ Denied

FULL REVIEW: _____ Approved _____ Approved with modifications _____ Denied

DENIED: _____

See attached Committee Action Letter for additional comments.

Chair, IRB

J. Syrot

Co-Chair, IRB

Hannel Hartman

Date

12/26/03

Date

12/16/03

