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THE EFFECTS OF CHARACTER EDUCATION ON THE MORAL DECISION
MAKING OF A SELECTED SAMPLE OF
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Carol E. Lively

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
Of
The Graduate School
At
Rowan University
April 2002

Approved by _____
Professor

Date Approved: May 6, 2002

ABSTRACT

Carol E. Lively

The Effects of Character Education on the Moral Decision Making of a Selected Sample
of High School Students

2002

Dr. Stanley Urban
Learning Disabilities

The purpose of this study was to determine if a program of character education implemented in a public high school over a 6 month period would lead to measurable changes in value judgments as measured by the Student Survey of Social and Emotional Learning. The instrument contained 21 items requiring value based judgments to be responded to using a 5-point likert scale. One sample T-test showed no difference at the .001 level of confidence across the 21 items assessed. Also measured were teachers' perceptions of change in student behavior and attitudes toward school. Teachers felt there had been some improvement in the students attitudes. For character education programs to make objectively measurable changes in student behaviors will require sustained training over a long time period.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Character education or the teaching of moral values is not a new concept and has been a primary building block of the curriculum among America's public school systems since the 1700s. Why now is there a renewed interest in teaching values? Many Americans have experienced a harsh reality in media reports of increasing violence among youth, community property destruction without accountability or restitution, potentially resulting in an approaching generation that is unprepared to take its place in society as responsible and productive citizens. In the past eight years there has been the emergence of national organizations dedicated to character education as well as congressional action to fund the movement. Character education has received Presidential endorsement which resulted in two White House conferences. In addition, individual states have mandated that schools spend some time each day on character education. University centers have been created to help school districts implement programs and much media attention has been focused on this issue with the catalyst as the irresponsible and destructive behavior of our youth in the form of violence, dishonesty, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, and poor work ethics. All of these elements have a common core: the absence of good character (Lickona 1996).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate the positive effects of character education on the behavior of high school students in the areas of academic achievement and self management. The ultimate goal of this research is to share the results with the present Character Education Task Force at Millville Senior High in the hope that the data will assist in the continuation and expansion of the current program.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to accomplish the purpose of this study the following research questions will be answered:

Question 1: Will there be recognition from the student body of an increased civil climate in the school (i.e., friendlier, safer, more purposeful, more productive) as evidenced by their responses to *The Student Survey of Social and Emotional Learning*?

Question 2: What are the perceptions of a sample of teachers to the following questions:

- In your opinion do you feel the student body of MSHS enjoys and contributes to a safer school environment compared with last year this time?
- Do you find the greater portion of the student body friendlier and more civil than it was in the past?
- Do students show an improved attitude toward their education compared to last year?
- Do you find more students engaged in productive pursuits as compared to last year and are these students displaying and demonstrating values taught in the school?
- Have you observed a decrease in cheating on tests?

NEED FOR STUDY

Dr. Philip Fitch Vincent reports in his book, *Developing Character in Students*, that communities around the country are deciding that character education is as important as their school's focus on academics. At the same time, educators are returning to the belief that one of their obligations is to be the children's parents away from the home in both their academic and moral education. (Vincent 1999,p.11) He also offers that schools do not exist apart from society; they mirror it. Many of our school problems reflect deep, pervasive personal and social ills such as drug and alcohol abuse, child abuse, neglect, poverty, unemployment, and violence.

Character education programs may exist as a final hope for reshaping the destructive direction many students are inviting with their behavior. Ryan and Kitpatrick (1996) point out that in the past thirty years our schools have been 'value free zones'. Over this period we have also observed weakened family structure and churches dealing with new problems, like the homeless. In this environment schools are being asked to fill the void. Programs that are effective in character training are obviously sorely needed.

DEFINITIONS

- Character Education - the cultivation of virtues through the formation of good habits.
- Character - a pattern of habits and sense of right and wrong; involves action.
- Moral - has two common categories: positive morality, the obligation to help those in need; negative morality, the obligation to refrain from actions causing hurt to others.
- Moral person - one who makes decisions based on universal principles of right and justice.

- Improvement in morality - reduction in negative behavior, such as discipline referrals, substance abuse, fighting, truancy, etc.
- Pro-social characteristics - those behaviors directed toward another person that promote or sustain positive benefit for that person.
- Value - orientation or dispositions; seen as one of the foundations for character.
- Society - a community, nation, or broad grouping of people having common traditions, institutions, and collective activities and interest.
- Community - an interacting population of various kinds of individuals in a common location.
- Service learning - practicing values through service to others.
- Task force - committee whose members include school staff members, administrators, parents, and community leaders for the purpose of developing a consensus regarding the benefit of the whole.
- Respect - showing regard for the worth and dignity of someone or something.
- Responsibility - being accountable for your actions.
- Fairness - treating people impartially.
- Caring - being sympathetic, helpful.
- Citizenship - helping create a democratic society.
- Trustworthiness - worthy of confidence, dependable.

ASSUMPTIONS

An underlying assumption in this study is that an improved civil climate will be established and changes in that climate can be measured. This is an atmosphere where teachers, custodians, bus drivers, and cafeteria workers focus on sending a clear message

to the students, one that defines expected behavior. A civil climate is achieved through modeling, developing, and reinforcing good habits among students. Second, it is assumed that the character education program has the commitment of all involved staff members to model, instruct, and reinforce the core values of the program. Third, it is assumed that rules and procedures will be adhered to in a fair and consistent manner. Last, it must be assumed that all data reported is complete and accurate.

LIMITATIONS

There are certain limitations that must be taken into account when generalizing the results of this study. First, the program utilizes an eclectic approach and it is within the individual teacher's domain to select the duration, intensity, and the order of content as well as the specific method of instruction. Another limitation is that the sample consists of fifty students which is a relatively small number. Finally, the sample selected represents a convenience group that was accessible to the researcher.

OVERVIEW

A review of various character education programs will be presented in Chapter 2. A sundry of character education curriculum and contemporary programs will be reviewed, as well as, major areas of difficulty associated with the evaluation of character education programs. The methods, instrumentation and analysis of results for a study showing the effects of character education on secondary students attending a rural/suburban high school located in Southern New Jersey will be presented in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4 the results will be presented. Finally Chapter 5 will contain the summary, findings and discussion.

CHAPTER 2

Review Of The Literature

“To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society” Theodore Roosevelt.

BACKGROUND

Throughout history, in cultures around the world, education has had two great goals: to help people become smart and to help them become good (Lickona, 1996). This point of view is expressed by many other moral philosophers; for example, Lance Morrow observes, “transmitting values is the work of civilization.”(Lickona, 1996)

Schools in the early days of the republic tackled character education head-on through discipline, the teacher’s example, and the daily curriculum. Horace Mann, one of the first champions of universal public schools, urged educators to cultivate morality in children from their youngest years because democracy demands moral citizens (Lickona 1996).

In the nineteenth century, William McGuffey published his *McGuffey Readers* as a way to ensure that school children had a daily diet of inspiring tales teaching the virtues of hard work, sacrifice, altruism, honesty, loyalty, and courage. However, the first three decades of the twentieth century were a time of fast-paced technological change, increasing immigration and urbanization, and bewildering and disturbing social and moral changes as typified by the “Roaring Twenties” (Leming, 1997). The character education practices of the first decades utilized elaborate codes of conduct and group activities in school clubs as the primary means to teach character (McClellan, 1992;

McKown, 1935). Schools attempted to integrate such codes into all aspects of school life. By the middle of the twentieth century character education had gone into decline. Powerful forces converged to reshape the *zeitgeist* and erode support for teaching character in the schools. Prominent among these were the rise of logical positivism which states that there is no objective, verifiable moral truth and the moral relativism spawned by that philosophy. Other influences such as the spread of personalism that states each person should be free to choose his own values increasing multi-culturism; and the secularization of society observed in Supreme Court rulings against promoting religion in the public schools also provided an impetus for value systems (Lickona 1996). McClellan, on the other hand, suggests that character education did not decline but was simply transformed by the times as many school practices were slowly changing in response to shifts in societal and educational priorities. According to Lickona, the 1960s and '70s saw a new kind of values education. The new forms stressed "process" and thinking skills; clarifying one's own values; developing moral reasoning; and decision-making strategies. These cognitive process approaches focused on how to think replacing character education's traditional emphasis on moral content and conduct, on learning what's right and then practicing right behavior until it becomes habit (Lickona 1996).

For the next twenty-years two highly influential moral education models would dominate the field of values education. According to Lemming, Sidney Simon, collaborating with Louis Roths and Merrill Harmin, co-authored *Values and Teaching*, and launched the theory and practice of values clarification. Lawrence Kohlberg, (1997) linked his cognitive-developmental theory of moral reasoning with the practice of moral

education in schools. Both approaches kept the family and community at arms' length. Leming also asserts that children seemed to be doing little more than developing rationalizations for what was all too often their morally unacceptable behaviors.

The decade of the 90's has seen a renewed interest in developing character education in schools due to a growing concern over the increasing moral decline in children and youth (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 1998a; Kilpatrick, 1992; Lickona, 1992). Ten troubling trends in youth character, as cited by Kevin Ryan, are as follows:

1. Rising youth violence (juvenile violent crime increased six fold from 1960 to 1992).
2. Increasing dishonesty (Lying, cheating and stealing).
3. Growing disrespect for parents, teachers and other legitimate authority figures.
4. Increasing peer cruelty.
5. A rise in prejudice and hate crime.
6. The deterioration of language.
7. A decline in the work ethic.
8. Declining personal and civic responsibility.
9. A surge of self-destructive behaviors such as premature sexual activity, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide.
10. Growing ethical illiteracy, including ignorance of moral knowledge as basic as Golden Rule and the tendency to engage in destructive behavior without thinking it wrong.

Increasingly, states and individual districts have begun to require some form of character education for all students, including those with disabilities. In New Hampshire, the State Board of Education adopted a policy in 1988 that mandates each local school board

adopt and implement written policies relative to character and citizenship development, “to be included in courses of study and instilled through an educational climate which encourages and prepares parents and teachers to be positive role models for our children and youth.” As a result of the policy shift towards building character through direct instruction, a dramatic increase in the number and variety of character education curriculums has become available to schools (Leming 1993).

New Jersey Governor Thomas Kean, in his 1988 State of the State address, identified character development within the schools as a priority and had the Commissioner of Education initiate a program to address this need. In September 1988, the New Jersey State Department under the leadership of Saul Cooperman, Commissioner, promulgated a monograph entitled, *Developing Character and Values in New Jersey Students*, to be used by the council to meet this end. Character education is now a stated part of the public school curriculum in New Jersey pursuant to the administrative code and is in process in many schools. The council recommended the appointment of citizens for every public school system in New Jersey, charged with the task of developing a program for local implementation of the guidelines set forth (NJ State Department of Education 1989).

In addition to character education curriculum, a number of character education programs have been developed by organizations and publishers. These are designed for use in a broad range of educational institutions. Leming (1997) reviewed a representative sampling of character education curriculum programs. He noted that underlying each curriculum’s list of outcomes is the assumption that good character consists of an individual’s manifesting these outcomes in their behavior. Also reported is that two

orientations, cultural transmission and individual development, have had a lasting and influential impact on curriculum development and educational practice in this century. The cultural transmission orientation is rooted squarely in the classical academic tradition of Western culture and education and in behaviorist psychology. From this perspective, knowledge and values are objective truths that are derived from history—from time-honored tradition of civilized life. As such, they are external to the child and must be internalized by children and youth through imitation of explicit instruction accompanied by reward and punishment. The second educational orientation, individual development, holds that the goal of education is the full development of individual potentialities. Development is interpreted as the results of the interaction between the child's innate capabilities and his or her environment. John Dewey and Jean Piaget are the intellectual parents of this perspective. Lawrence Kohlberg's (1981,1984) research in the area of cognitive moral development also adheres to the developmental perspective. Educational orientations manifest themselves in the theory and practice of curriculum (Leming 1997). He also notes that with a theoretical perspective, researchers may deduce and test a coherent set of hypotheses that provide data regarding the adequacy of the perspective upon which the curriculum is based.

PROGRAMS

The following is a listing of curriculum materials compiled by The Character Education Partnership's Annual Character Education Forum and the National Conference on Character Education: (Leming, 1997)

- (1) AEGIS - Acquiring Ethical Guidelines for Individual Development - is a K-6 character education program developed by the Institute for Research

and Evaluation in Salt Lake City, Utah(Weed and Skansky 1996). Its goal is to help children learn the basic principles and ethical standards that they need to become responsible, caring, productive citizens. Using a longitudinal design over a two-year period, the Institute for Research and Evaluation collected data from program and control students using questionnaire as data that measured students' responses to ethically based scenarios (Weed,1995). Teachers in the program classrooms reported a two-and-one-half times reduction in problem behavior in students. Additionally, it was found that students that had been in the program for two years, and had moved into the seventh grade, scored significantly better on attitudes against substance abuse and attitudes regarding positive school conduct than did non-program students.

(2) Character Education Curriculum is designed to be taught as a stand-alone subject or integrated into subject matter areas (Character Education Institute 1996).The focus of the curriculum is to teach twelve universal values to children. Woven throughout the curriculum also is an emphasis on drug abuse prevention. Research: The evaluation data on the curriculum, to date, consists of questionnaire data from students, teachers, and principles regarding program effectiveness. All of the reported evaluation data, along with testimonials, reflects a reduction in student problem behaviors and a high degree of satisfaction with the Character Education Curriculum.

(3) The Community of Caring Program is part of the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation's efforts to prevent teen pregnancy and to thereby lower the incidence of mental retardation (Community of Caring 1996). The primary focus of the program is to strengthen decision-making skills that young people need to avoid destructive behaviors. The program initially developed as a middle school program but quickly was expanded into high schools. Research: Evidence for the program's effectiveness is based on data collected from Community of Caring schools. In the reported research it is found that students' grade point averages increased, teen pregnancies were reduced, students gained in knowledge of the adverse consequences and risks of early sexual activity, and in general there were fewer discipline problems,

(4) Project Essential is a K-12 curriculum developed by the Teel Institute for the Development of Integrity and Ethical Behavior (Teel, 1996). The purpose of the curriculum is to teach young people key concepts, skills, and behaviors that will allow them to earn their own sense of self-worth. This program is essentially a stand-alone program that is used most often in conjunction with the teacher's classroom management program. A four-year evaluation of the Project Essential Curriculum in the Kansas City area found statistically significant changes, when compared to control school students, in favor of Essential classroom students on teacher ratings of learning from errors, of exhibiting self control, of accepting

responsibility, and of respecting the rights of others (Reed and Wilson, 1995).

The founders of the Giraffe Program refer to their K-12 program as a character education and service learning curriculum (Medlock and Gradam, 1996). The objective of the program is to teach children that courage, caring, and responsibility is the key to reducing the risks that lead many young people into trouble. The program is based on the observation that, in every culture through recorded history, people have taken guidance from stories. At present there has been no evaluation of the Giraffe Program.

According to Exstrom (2000), character education programs usually require everyone—teachers, counselors, principals, secretaries and students—to exhibit positive character traits so that students can model their behavior on these authority figures.

Although no one recipe exists for a successful character education program (*State Legislatures*, 2000) most of the national organizations suggest guidelines or criteria for evaluating programs. These guidelines include:

- determination of the core ethical values.
- Instruction in the definition of a moral behavior process for making decisions based on ethical values.
- Reinforcement of the core values throughout a student's school experience.
- Opportunities for students to demonstrate the character trait.
- Leadership and commitment from both staff and students.

- Recruitment of parents and community members as partners.
- Revaluation and analysis of the effectiveness of the program.

STUDIES AND RESULTS

A national model demonstration program represents a unique higher education and K-12 collaborative partnership among a small private college, an inner city K-5 elementary school, a K-8 parochial school and two high schools designed to promote the character development of elementary and middle school students. This program is supported by the Council on Independent Colleges and the New Hampshire Campus Compact for Service Learning. The objective is to engage local high school and college students in service-learning experiences. The primary goal of the program is to teach elementary and middle school students social skills and attitudes that will build character (New Hampshire College and University Council 1997). The SO (Service-Learning Opportunities) Prepared for Citizenship Program covers the six pillars of character development by Josephson Institute (1998) and is directly aligned to the public school's district-wide character education program. Each trait is taught as a unit of study that typically last for four weeks. To achieve the goals the program uses multi-age cooperative learning teams in which college and high school students co-mentor and co-teach the curriculum (Muscott and O'Brien 1999). Evaluation data was collected by an experienced ethnographic interviewer and the program director. This study consisted of focused interviews which followed the guidelines established for ethnographic interviews by Spradley (1980). The interviews were conducted by an Associate Professor of Education trained in anthroethnographic research techniques at Rutgers University with ten years' experience collecting, collating, and interpreting ethnographic research in

Africa (Muscott and O'Brien 1999). Muscott and O'Brien also report that the data for this preliminary study is not formally triangulated; the focus is on ethnographic interviews with the elementary school participants of the program only. Above all else, the study allowed students with disabilities who participated in the SO Prepared program to speak for themselves. As a result of detailed ethnographic interviews it was discovered that the students responded positively to the character education traits of responsibility and self-control, teamwork and cooperation, and respect and appreciation of diversity. Fundamentally, the study found that the students could articulate the basic character education concepts studied; this finding is consistent with research on disabled and gifted students by Cassell (1995) and Yeatts (1990). The fact that students with learning and behavioral problems who often struggle in school found learning about character education in cooperative teams with mentors to be fun and voted to continue the program. This is encouraging. This result is consistent with the claims of Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (1990) who maintain that programs for students with learning and behavioral problems must be experiential, active, interesting, and relevant. These outcomes are even more significant in light of the fact that students with behavioral problems generally do not take responsibility for their misbehavior (Rockwell & Guetzloe, 1996) and often disrupt learning when working in small groups (Long & Morse, 1996). Finally, the fact that students made new friends is an important accomplishment for youngsters with disabilities who are sometimes shunned by their peers and often have difficulty making friends at school. This is consistent with the work of Searcy (1996) and Searcy and Meadows (1994) who argue that students with disabilities are more likely to make friends in programs that integrate friendship

development into curriculum, include cooperative teamwork and buddy systems, and honor friendships with rituals.

EFFICACY OF CHARACTER TRAINING

According to Dune (1996), in his article the definition of moral must be approached from two perspectives: 1) the researcher/theorist who is developing an academic conception of morality and moral development and 2) the administrators, parents, and specialists who implement programs into school settings around the country. Furthermore, the term “Value Education” is also employed to describe exactly the same set of values as moral education, although it is sometimes used to discriminate between programs which stress conduct (i.e., Character Education) rather than internal beliefs or values. In addition, “real life” programs generally attempt “whole school” interventions in which the entire school staff and community is encouraged to implement pervasive elements intended to facilitate moral development and behavior. Many proponents of moral education, whether from the research or school community, insist on the necessity of comprehensive programs to bring about effective moral education (Powe 1993, Lickona, 1995, Wynne 1986). Stemming from the wide range of research programs and the eclectic mix of local applications, sound assessment of improvements in moral behavior has been difficult, perhaps even impossible. Dune asserts that the greatest flaw of the character education program, as a whole, is that there is no philosophical basis for the list of desirable traits constructed by various character education organizations. Lickona suggests that these core values are treated as a matter of obligation, as having a claim on the conscience of the individual and community. Character education asserts that the validity of these values derives from the fact that they affirm our human dignity;

promote the development and welfare of the individual; serve the common good; meet the classical test of reversibility and universality and define our rights and responsibilities in a democratic society. The school makes it clear that these basic human values transcend religious and cultural differences and express our common humanity (Lickona 1998).

The measurement of character has proven difficult since character, by definition, involves behavior, but character is often defined in terms of traits (i.e., honesty, integrity, etc.). Some possible measures suggested by Campbell and Bond (1982) include: student discipline; student suicide rates; crimes: assault, burglary, homicides; pregnancy rates of teenage girls, and pro-social activities.

Of course, there are many challenging tasks ahead for researchers in the field. The wide variety of objectives, the lack of ‘operational’ definitions of key outcomes, and the methodological problems involved in assessing character related outcomes with valid and reliable instruments are significant challenges to the enterprise of conducting research in the field (Leming 1997). The development of a credible research base for the field will depend, in part, on an increasing open discussion of its quality and findings (Leming 1997).

CHAPTER 3

Design Of The Study

POPULATION

This study is being conducted at a local high school in the rural city of Millville, New Jersey. Millville is located in southern New Jersey's Cumberland County. Philadelphia (1 hour), New York City (2.5 hours), Baltimore (2 hours), and the Southern Jersey Shore/Delaware Bay Areas (less than 1 hour) are easy commutes with access to miles of municipal, county and state roads, especially Route 55. Millville, also known as the "Holly City," is a city 44.3 square miles with approximately 5600 Pre-K to Grade 12 students and a total population of 26,000 (Sheppard, 2001).

Millville, along with Bridgeton and Vineland, the other two cities in Cumberland County, have hospitals. Housing is inexpensive and varied. Clubs, cultural activities, attractions, and recreational opportunities are plentiful, including: several museums, ten historical societies, fishing, boating, hunting, bird watching, a municipal owned zoo, and a host of water related events throughout the county. (Seamore About Cumberland County www.co.cumberland.nj.us)

The spiritual life in Cumberland County is supported by a diverse inclusion of groups and faiths, some of which are: Buddhist, Christian Science, Islamic, Mennonite, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Wesleyan, Baptist, Catholic, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Seventh Day Adventist, Hebrew, and Quaker.

It is important to note that Cumberland County's primary industries have been and are glass manufacturing, canning and freezing factories along with extensive agricultural farms which produce vegetables and fruits for both inter and intra state distribution. In the past industry required the importing and employment of a large number of migrant workers who originated from along the south eastern seaboard states; recent years have seen an influx of Mexican migrant workers for the growing season. Many of the farm workers have elected to gather their families and remain in the area, thereby creating more sub groups. For many years the local farmers imported islanders from Puerto Rico annually to help with the harvest of crops and many have remained and taken residence in the three cities. Recent settlers have invited their families and friends from urban/metropolitan cities to the area providing for a greater climate of diversity and a metropolitan influence. This is reflected in the schools with a greater variety of cultures and mores. The results appear to be an expanding opportunity to understand, to learn about, and to share with people from different backgrounds.

According to the Census 2000, Millville has experienced a 3.3% population growth since 1990. Millville is the second fastest growing city in the county. The New Jersey Labor Market Information report, *Non-government employers of 100 or more employees, November 2000*, compiled by the Cumberland County Department of Planning and Development, revealed that almost five thousand people are employed by Millville industries. These companies represent the trucking industry, glass manufacturing, boat parts distribution, healthcare systems, and retail department store employment.

Millville Senior High School educates 1,499 students and includes three receiving districts from surrounding rural communities in Southern New Jersey. The students who attend are ethnically and economically diversified between lower and middle income background without a prominent majority. Millville Senior High School enjoys a wide range of extra curricular activities including intramural and varsity sports, academic clubs, and many service clubs and organizations.

METHOD OF SAMPLE SELECTION

For the purpose of this study fifty high school students who are attending grades ten, eleven and twelve have been selected for the convenience of the researcher. These students were selected from both regular and special education resource classes. It is felt that these students are a good representation of the student body.

INSTRUMENTATION

The Social and Emotional Student Survey, designed by Lynn Langford, a teacher and a member of the *Character Counts!* task force at Millville Senior High School, was administered to students for the purpose of obtaining students' attitudes and perceptions regarding their school environment. A copy is contained in Appendix A. The responses of *The Social and Emotional Student Survey* will be tallied, recorded, and analyzed for consensus. The results will be provided in a narrative. Each questionnaire is comprised of twenty-one questions. Question responses range from (SA-strongly agree) to (SD-strongly disagree) with three interim choices.

Teachers of both regular and special education students were interviewed for the purpose of obtaining their perceptions of the student body with regard to improvement in

school climate, student honesty, and positive pursuit of education. A copy of the interview questions can be seen in Appendix B.

COLLECTION OF DATA

The questionnaire will be administered in September 2001 and March 2002 to Millville Senior High School selected students. This questionnaire will be used to establish a baseline in September with a post questionnaire to follow in March. These questionnaires will be used as pre and post testing.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Based on the premise that the success of character education programs can be demonstrated by improved achievement and improved self management as well as the belief that civility in the atmosphere of the school must first be established, the interviews with teachers are reported to evidence growth in development of the school environment. Self management improvement will be shown by student surveys resulting in a greater number of positive (strongly agree or agree) responses to the questions.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis Of The Data

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to determine if the implementation of a character education program in the curriculum of a secondary public school would result in an increase in academic achievement and a reduction in educationally detracting, disruptive behavior. Most importantly, could a character education program succeed in providing a more appropriate school atmosphere for learning; one that is more civil, safe, and rewarding for the student population. The objective of this character education program is to graduate students that are prepared, productive, law abiding, and compassionate members of society. Educators desperately need methods and means to meet these goals.

RESULTS

Question 1: Will there be recognition from the student body of an increased civil climate in the school (i.e., friendlier, safer, more purposeful, more productive) as evidenced by their responses to *The Student Survey of Social and Emotional Learning*?

To ascertain the student's perspective on this topic a *Student Survey of Social and Emotional Learning* was administered to fifty students randomly selected from both regular and special education classes. The random selection

was for the convenience of the researcher. The students were comparative in gender, age, grade and ability to a cross section of the school population. The pre-test was administered in September 2001 while the post test was administered six months later, March 2002, after seventeen months of character education program's infusion into the high school curriculum, September 2000. A third of the sample population was sophomores having entered Millville Senior High School September 2001.

The *Student Survey of Social and Emotional Learning* (copy located in Appendix A) consist of twenty-one questions designed to extract the views vital to the students performance. The results are as follows: the pre and post test responses to the student survey to each item on the *Student Survey of Social and Emotional Learning* were compared using a one sample T test procedure described in *Using SPSS To Solve Statistical Problems*, (Shannon and Davenport, 2001, p.206). No significant differences were found across the twenty-one questions on pre and post test measures with 2-tailed significance at $p < .001$.

Question 2: What are the perceptions of a sample of teachers to the following five questions:

1. In your opinion do you feel the student body of MSHS enjoys and contributes to a safer school environment compared with last year this time?
2. Do you find the overview of the student body friendlier and more civil than they were in the past?
3. Do students act with greater purpose regarding their behavior toward their education compared to last year?

4. Do you find more students engaged in productive pursuit as compared to last year and are these students displaying and demonstrating values taught in the school?

5. Have you observed a decrease in cheating on test?

Teachers of special education, vocational, general, and college preparatory tracks who taught MSHS students in grades 10,11,and 12 were interviewed during the school day. The results of the teacher responses are reported in percentages of positive and somewhat positive.

Teacher Interviews Regarding Positive Impact of Character Education	
Question 1	40% Positive
Question 2	60% Positive
Question 3	10% Positive, 30% somewhat
Question 4	20% Positive, 10% somewhat
Question 5	10% Positive

Additional teacher made comments include the following:

- “Maybe I perceive an improvement because I’m teaching the top 10% of academic students who are academically motivated.”
- “With regard to a safer environment, as a whole, I do think so, but there is a small group who detract.”
- “Many of the programs (i.e., Peer Mediation, Anger Management) have given the student extra options for settling their differences which encourages them to choose more acceptable behavior. We need more programs of this nature.”
- “With regard to behaving with greater educational purpose, I find the problem to lie with the curriculum for special education students. A curriculum that is geared toward co-operation with business entities that can better bridge the school experience with the real world is needed for many students. This could encourage and demonstrate the need for practical application of values being taught.”
- “Once students enter high school, if they haven’t had values drilled into them, it is very difficult to instill values when they are older.”
- “These kids are learning values from each other at this age rather than from home.”
- “Teaching character education is no different from teaching sports. You need a feeder program. Students are taught systematically in the lower grades the skills needed to be a good player. Teaching must begin and be treated as stair steps.”

- “With regard to a safer school environment, does anyone feel safe after September 11, 2001?”
- More of my students are involved with Big/Little Buddies and other service organizations.

Teachers reported a positive to somewhat positive improvement of 40% to 60% in the areas of students contributing to a safer school environment, a friendlier and more civil atmosphere, and students having demonstrated a greater purpose toward their education. The areas of students involved in productive pursuits were viewed with less increase and student cheating was minimally improved. Teachers have acknowledged an observable difference in student performance overall. A slow steady progress is indicated.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusion, Discussion, And Recommendations

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to determine if a program of character education implemented in a public high school over a six-month period would lead to measurable changes in value judgments as measured by the Student Survey of Social and Emotional Learning. The instrument contained 21 items requiring value based judgments to be responded to using a 5-point likert scale. One sample T-test showed no difference at the .001 level of confidence across the 21 items assessed. Also measured were teachers' perceptions of changes in student behavior and attitudes toward school. Teachers felt there had been some improvement in the students attitudes. For character education programs to make objectively measurable changes in student behaviors will require sustained training over a long time period.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing pre and post tests (student surveys) and conducting interviews with the high school teachers of the sample group, the results indicate the training period was too brief to make a significant difference according to the pre and post measurements. Even though we could not obtain measurable changes in the students' value systems, using the survey and the teachers' opinions indicate an improvement in the climate of the school.

DISCUSSION

Character education programs may be a mere drop in the bucket in an effort to stem the tides of societal change. However, the educators, national and local community leaders, and care takers of others have an increasing responsibility to instill, model and share values learned with each generation that emerges. According to Lickona (1998), it is helpful to keep in mind that character education is not a new idea. It is an idea as old as education itself; indeed, it is the school's most important mission. The current national character education movement is returning to ancient wisdom. Huitt (1966), reminds us that it is important to realize that while schools do and should play a role in the development of character; families, communities, and society in general also have an important influence. In fact, Senator Hilary Clinton coined the phrase, "it takes a village to raise a child today," which relates directly to the hopes being placed on character education by concerned educational supporters.

School climate is developed from attitude. Attitude is the direct result of one's perceptions; therefore, if a student perceives that he is in a right environment surrounded by friendly, accepting, and helpful people, he is more likely to reveal and practice just, moral applications. Environment has a powerful impact on the individual and can reinforce goodness or repress moral instincts.

The present behavior and attitudes of high school students toward right decision making has evolved over thirty years from one of anything goes as long as you don't harm anyone to anything goes and don't get in my way. We have witnessed the ramifications of irresponsible sex, drug exposure, alcohol used as a sedative, abortion crusades, media brain melting, and an unbridled thirst for power and influence. There is

nothing that can compete with this type of self gratification mind set other than time, perseverance and practice. Eventually practice becomes habit. It is not surprising to realize the benefits that character education has to offer will take a longer training period to recover right thinking.

Character education has a far more difficult task in assessing the effectiveness of its interventions. This study utilized student surveys and teacher interviews while a more comprehensive study may additionally consist of disciplinary referrals, achievement growth and attendance patterns to learn if improvements are unilaterally indicated.

It is not feasible to insure that all teachers using an eclectic mix of application, as was done in this study, of character education will deliver the same instruction with comparable intensity, quality, and expectations.

When studying public school practices it is difficult to adjust for the many divergent backgrounds and environmental/cultural mores of the student population. In order to eliminate student bias due to earlier harmful educational experiences the researcher would need to study groups that have consistently and equally received character education through their school years. This would exempt transfer students who had not received the same from the study.

The researcher should consider this question: Is there any one method that can cure the ills of a societal deterioration that has progressed over the last thirty to forty years? Educators know that any gap between performance and ability only multiplies in subsequent grades, therefore, it is reasonable to expect that a gap between behavior and moral decisions would be no less progressive and require longer to reverse. There appears to be a trend of decreasing diverse groups among the economic classes of people

in this country: the moral privileged and the amoral underprivileged; there are indications of a greater number of amoral privileged and less numbers of moral under privileged. There may be no humanitarian way under our present societal system to rehabilitate or to close the gap.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It would be more accurate if one were to measure a larger sample and utilize a control group of non-program students for the purpose of controlling variables and achieving greater validity and reliability. Also, a retest is suggested for the same purpose. It is further suggested that the regular and special education population be considered independently of one another in future studies in view of the fact that there are many differences in academic, social, and maturity indices. Most importantly, a seven to nine year time table should be considered. This would allow students to have had continual instruction in character education throughout the school grades 2-9. Students could be measured at the beginning of their high school years and at the culmination of their public school experience.

A school staff intent on modeling and developing responsibility, respect, kindness, and courtesy will be helping children develop traits essential to being successful and happy in life, not just in school (Vincent, 1999).

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: STUDENT SURVEY OF SOCIAL AND
EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Student Survey of Social and Emotional Learning

SA=Strongly Agree
A=Agree
U=Undecided
DA=Disagree
SD=Strongly Disagree

1. Students received satisfactory recognition for socially responsible behavior (e.g. telling the truth, keeping notebooks and lockers clean, cooperating well with others).

SA.....A.....U.....DA.....SD

2. The school has done a good job of helping students understand their moral and ethical responsibilities.

SA.....A.....U.....DA.....SD

3. The school expected students to behave in an acceptable manner.

SA.....A.....U.....DA.....SD

4. Students who misbehaved were dealt with properly in the classroom

SA.....A.....U.....DA.....SD

5. If I had a problem, there were people available for me to talk to.

SA.....A.....U.....DA.....SD

6. Students knew what was expected of them in school.

SA.....A.....U.....DA.....SD

7. Teachers liked children and were fair when dealing with them.

SA.....A.....U.....DA.....SD

8. I received satisfactory recognition for academic accomplishments.

SA.....A.....U.....DA.....SD

9. I received satisfactory recognition for extracurricular accomplishments.

SA.....A.....U.....DA.....SD

10. Our school has demonstrated high expectations for academic achievement.

SA.....A.....U.....DA.....SD

11. Students' respected the property of others.

SA.....A.....U.....DA.....SD

12. Appropriate emphasis was placed on the social development of students.

SA.....A.....U..... DA.....SD

13. The values being taught in the school were satisfactory.

SA.....A.....U..... DA.....SD

14. The students should spend more time on homework and home study per night.

SA.....A.....U..... DA.....SD

15. The school maintained a satisfactory appearance.

SA.....A.....U..... DA.....SD

16. My teachers treated me with respect.

SA.....A.....U..... DA.....SD

17. The individual encouragement received by my teachers helped me to learn and develop.

SA.....A.....U..... DA.....SD

18. The student activities that I participated in such as clubs, sports, music, etc. were a benefit to my social development.

SA.....A.....U..... DA.....SD

19. My classroom time was spent purposefully with serious attention given to the academic program.

SA.....A.....U..... DA.....SD

20. I was taught important life lessons in my classes.

SA.....A.....U..... DA.....SD

21. Overall, my education has been a positive experience thus far.

SA.....A.....U..... DA.....SD

**APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR
CHARACTER EDUCATION**

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
FOR
CHARACTER EDUCATION

1. In your opinion do you feel the student body of MSHS enjoys and contributes to a safer school environment compared with last year this time?
2. Do you find the overview of the student body friendlier and more civil than they were in the past?
3. Do students act with greater purpose regarding their behavior toward their education compared to last year?
4. Do you find more students engaged in productive pursuit as compared to last year and were these students displaying and demonstrating values taught in the school?
5. Have you observed a decrease in cheating on tests?