

St. Catherine University

SOPHIA

Masters of Arts in Education Action Research
Papers

Education

8-2013

The Influence of Character Education on Positive Behavior in the Classroom

Matt Montonye
St. Catherine University

Sonja Butenhoff
St. Catherine University

Shawn Krinke
St. Catherine University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://sophia.stkate.edu/maed>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Montonye, Matt; Butenhoff, Sonja; and Krinke, Shawn. (2013). The Influence of Character Education on Positive Behavior in the Classroom. Retrieved from Sophia, the St. Catherine University repository website: <https://sophia.stkate.edu/maed/6>

This Action Research Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Education at SOPHIA. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters of Arts in Education Action Research Papers by an authorized administrator of SOPHIA. For more information, please contact amshaw@stkate.edu.

The Influence of Character Education on Positive Behavior in the Classroom

An Action Research Report
By Matt Montonye, Sonja Butenhoff, and Shawn Krinke

The Influence of Character Education on Positive Behavior in the Classroom

By Matt Montonye, Sonja Butenhoff, and Shawn Krinke

Submitted on August 9th, 2013
in fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree
St. Catherine University
St. Paul, Minnesota

Advisor_____

Date_____

Abstract

One basic goal of all educational systems should be to prepare students to be effective members of a society. For these reasons, it is imperative that school districts and educators across the nation look at developing, implementing, and teaching students basic character education traits. Our team explored the influence character education had on positive behavior in our classrooms. Specifically, our data comes from two English Language Learner classrooms containing 33 total juniors and seniors, and one traditional English class containing 25 total seniors. We collected four types of data, including pre and post-surveys, PACK Referrals, a daily observational Tally Sheet, and student interviews. Our results indicate a clear relationship between character education and student awareness of character traits. This supported our belief that character education should be developed, implemented, and taught in school districts. As a result, we recommend schools seriously consider implementing a solid character education program.

In 1989, Will Smith famously rapped, “Parents just don’t understand,” capitalizing on the feelings of misunderstanding teen’s experience. Teens are not the only ones to experience misunderstandings because of generational gaps. “Kids today just don’t respect their elders” is probably a common phrase that most adults have said or thought at some point when having to work with teenagers. Most generations assume that the next generation is disrespectful, rude, and has lost their moral compass. While many people tend to believe this is simply natural progression, others notice, as the older generation advances, they are apt to complain about the younger generation.

Unfortunately, there exists an increasing trend where some teenagers and young adults in American society lack basic character traits. Multiple factors led to the decline of character skills in young adults such as the changing structure of two-parent families and schools across the nation not finding time to teach character education because of mandatory federal and state testing. One basic goal of all educational systems should be to prepare students to be effective members of a society. Unfortunately, some school systems veer away from teaching basic character traits and in return, there are staggering amounts of negative results. For these reasons, it is imperative that school districts and educators across the nation look at developing, implementing, and teaching students basic character education traits.

As in most public schools across the country, teaching character traits varies from district to district. In most cases, implementing character education is not rooted in a set curriculum but left up to the teacher’s discretion. Subsequently, if an educator chooses to teach some character traits in their own curriculum, they become added benefits to teaching the required standards and benchmarks. Therefore, the main purpose in our

action research examines whether teaching explicit basic character education increases positive interaction within a secondary classroom. While most character education focuses on at least five traits including respect, integrity, responsibility, trustworthiness, and loyalty, we decided that our limited time allowed us to focus on only the trait of respect. In most character education curricula, trying to teach all the pillars of character education is a yearlong process. By teaching respect, it allowed us to branch out to other character traits for brief mini-lessons, but at the same time maintain focus on just one pillar. While teaching the pillar of respect, we were able to incorporate other crucial pillars of character education and in turn, create awareness and positively change the interactions in our classrooms.

Our action research plan took place in one of the larger urban high school districts in the state of North Dakota. The 10-12 high school is composed of a wide diversity of students where 7% of the school's population of 1,500 is made up of immigrant and refugee students. For this action research project, 33 of the students were English Language Learners in grades 11-12. Nineteen of these students were in a U.S history sheltered instruction classroom and another 14 students were in an economics sheltered instruction classroom. Twenty-three traditional American 12th grade students were in an English classroom.

During the initial stages of our action research plan, we realized that for a truly effective character education program to take place the whole school must be involved. Berkowitz and Schwartz (2004) write that building a successful character education program requires participation from all stakeholders. Schools exhibit positive results by teaching character traits, while involving all teachers, administrators, students, and

parents. Most schools, including ours, do not have curriculum for teaching character education nor are all the stakeholders involved in teaching character. The focus of our action research is based on just a three secondary classrooms, but the results can be used as a model to demonstrate how teaching character education to an entire school can positively influence the overall climate of a school and build the moral character of our nation's youth.

The first element that we wanted to examine in our literary research was to look at the historical context of how character education has changed throughout the modern era of education. While character education represents nothing new to the American educational system, it has been on a roller coaster ride of vicissitudes mainly depending on the decade. Early 20th century teaching focused heavily on character education while progression from the 1960's to the 1970's led to a severe decline in schools concentrating on teaching character. Prestwich (2004) discusses that during this time, students were able to decide on their own values without interference from other people. Realizing this did not produce the best results, from the 1990's through the present, the focus shifted back to the direct teaching of character education traits. Berkowitz (2004) goes on to explain that some states have started to encourage and mandate character education within their schools. Not surprisingly, this concept of directly teaching character education fits into our action research plan.

Additionally, we researched specific statistics that may correlate to school systems not teaching character education, or at least show that they should. The results we found were staggering—Berkowitz and Schwartz (2004) explain that with limited character education from the 1960's through the 1980's, violent crimes increased 500%

and teen suicide rates tripled during this period. Additionally, divorce rates doubled and one child in five lives in poverty. Clearly, the lack of character education in our schools has detrimental effects, so we wanted to research how teachers can properly implement a character education program. We found that most schools who have implemented character education programs use a wide variety of different techniques and strategies. However, schools that have developed and then implemented character education programs with success have all followed similar plans. Prestwich (2004) states that traits such as honesty, kindness, respect, and responsibility are included in most lists of desirable traits. Some schools focus specifically on character building in general, while other schools develop character building in core academic classes. Berkowitz and Bier (2005) write that specific instructional methods that work across all programs include peer interaction, direct teaching, skill training, family and community involvement, models and mentors, and using multi-strategy approaches. One program that that is used nationally is CHARACTERplus. Prestwich (2004) states that this St. Louis, Missouri based character education program is designed to combine the school, home, and community. CHARACTERplus offers a wide variety of professional development, programs and services, as well as lessons that teachers can use in their classroom to teach character.

Finally, we researched what positive effects teaching a character education program might have on the students, teachers, the overall climate of the school, and our society. A solid character education program inevitably benefits everyone involved. White and Warfa (2011) state that educating students on character and values changed the climate of the school. Students reported that learning becomes more fun because the

focus remains on the “good” kids and their behaviors rather than the students who are messing around. The students demonstrating appropriate behaviors then become the norm while students demonstrating inappropriate behaviors do not want to be the exception, so they quit the behavior to fit in with the rest of the class. This concept of continually demonstrating appropriate behavior, character, and strong morals applies beyond the classroom and out into the students’ community. The learning has gone beyond the classroom and out into the real world. The character education program creates students who are ready to be productive members of our society.

After exploring all the facets presented in our research, the need for character education is clear. Historically when character education was implemented school wide the results have been positive. It is for these reasons that our action research project will explore implementing character education programs. In the next section, we will describe in detail the methods used to collect our data.

Description of Research Process

In order to construct and implement a smooth action research project, we first discussed the appropriate depth in a character education program with which to approach our students. Initially, we thought we could teach all of the “Six Pillars of Character” from the *Character Counts!* program, which includes respect, trustworthiness, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. After much discussion, we decided that in order to achieve success in all pillars, the students deserved at least an entire school year of curriculum, which we did not have; therefore, we decided to focus solely on the pillar of respect. We focused our action research plan by teaching respect in our core content areas of English Language Learner U.S. History, ELL Economics, and a

traditional Language Arts class. We implemented some of Berkowitz's and Bier's instructional methods including peer interaction, direct teaching, journaling, modeling, and mentoring. With our focus determined, we set out to collect data from the following areas: a survey measuring students' opinions on respect, records of observations documenting undesired and desired behavior during our action research process, interviews with students to assess how the character education affects positive behavior in the classroom, and school records known as PACK Referrals used to measure the amount of behavior referrals before and after our action research process.

During week one, which began on March 25th, each of us administered the survey measuring various aspects of respect in our school. We created the survey (see Appendix A) in Google Forms because of the ease of access for students, the efficient tabulation, and the anonymity provided. We hoped the familiarity students feel with Google as well as the anonymity would increase students' comfort level, allowing them to be more honest with their answers. Our intentions in providing the survey first were to determine our students' beliefs and perceptions concerning respect. Therefore, the questions focused on three areas: student-to-student respect, student-to-teacher respect, and teacher-to-student respect. We drafted 31 questions in which students answered various questions on respect from the following options: yes, no, sometimes, often, and not sure. Additionally, in order to get more quantitative data, we utilized a short answer text box after some of the questions, encouraging students to explain answers in specific detail. Our goal with the survey was to discover the overall attitude our classes had towards respect in our school. This information would then help us design appropriate lessons on respect.

After gathering the survey results, we started the second week of our action research by documenting PACK Referrals (see Appendix B). The staff at our school uses the PACK Referral forms in order to monitor and document behavior issues for specific students. Then, administration and counselors utilize the referrals as evidence of misbehavior if needed. Some of the options on the PACK Referral form are insubordination, defiance, cell phone use, chronic tardiness, and cheating. Since our action research process focuses on improving positive behavior within the classroom, measuring the number of PACK Referrals the students in our class receive before and during character education on respect seemed an obvious data choice.

In the third week, we began observing and recording students utilizing our Tally Sheet (see Appendix C). This sheet recorded the student name, the date, and the time of either an undesired behavior or a desired behavior. Possible undesirable behaviors include disruption, dress code, and inappropriate language, whereas possible desired behaviors may be responding when spoken to and following oral directions. We also included a notes section in order to allow explanations and further details. Throughout the rest of the action research process, we utilized the Tally Sheet, our goal being to flesh out the detailed story of respect as it unfolded in our classes. It was imperative that we observe the students before instituting the character education as well as throughout our study.

Next, with a thorough exploration of student knowledge of respect, we began week four by creating class definitions of respect. Students focused on building their own definitions of respect by explaining the meaning of respect and identifying how one is respectful to self, peers, and adults. During this time, whole-class discussions,

journaling, and the think-pair-share methods became mainstays in our educational practice; however, we decided the character education lessons should be supplemental to the main curriculum being taught. We purposely began the character education process this way because we wanted to build a foundation by using the students' input. In this way, we modeled our respect for the students' thoughts and ideas, hoping it would translate into more engagement later.

Week five became more intensive as the students watched videos on respect, specifically videos showing positive behavior. The website Values.com provided us with a bevy of material, and during this week, we found the 60 second TV commercials invaluable. At our school, starters and closers are an important educational practice consisting of beginning and ending every class with a five minute activity of some sort. The brief TV commercials on Values.com provided us with a perfect way to do both character education on respect as well as starters and closers for the week. We used videos ranging from peer pressure to bullying during our starters and closers in order to gauge student perceptions on respect.

Continuing on from week five's theme of videos, we used one specific video during week six—Shane Koyczan's "To This Day" spoken word poem on YouTube. This video specifically explores the issue of bullying in an engaging, youth focused format. After watching the video, students engaged in group discussions and wrote in response to prompts like "When people make fun of me, I feel," and "People show their respect for me when." Again, this video along with the corresponding journaling and discussions were supplemental to our primary curriculum for the week. With this video,

we hoped to raise student awareness on the issue of bullying, thus improving the behavior in our classrooms.

Next, during week seven, we implemented specific lesson plans from *Character Counts!*. All the lessons focused on fostering respect in and out of the classroom. Some of the lessons, like “Brush Up on Respect” were perfect for a starting or closing activity, while others like “It’s Who I Am” needed more classroom time. Additionally, many of the *Character Counts!* lessons applied to younger grade levels, which worked for the ELL classes, but Shawn had to adapt the lessons to fit his senior level classroom.

Finally, we reached week eight of our action research process where we conducted our survey again as well as interviewed (see Appendix D) some students. The survey was the same as the one utilized in week one in order to provide consistency. By using the same survey after students experienced our character education on respect, we hoped to see a measurable difference in their responses. In addition to the survey, we also chose students to interview. The interview questions focused on the students’ ideas of current views of respect, their experience with character education, and the affects it had or did not have on classroom behavior. We chose the students for their ability to express themselves intelligently and coherently because the interviews were conducted both in person and through e-mail.

In summary, we collected four types of data: pre and post-surveys, PACK Referrals, a daily observational Tally Sheet, and student interviews. The data painted a clear picture of students’ perception of respect. In the next section, we will use the collected data to analyze the effect of character education on positive behavior in the classroom.

Analysis of Data

During our action research process, we analyzed four main sources of data. As shown in the abstract of our action research project, the four data sources included a pre and post survey, a behavior-based observation tally sheet, interviews with students, and PACK Referral forms.

Initially, we wanted to analyze student responses to questions on respect, analyzing the students' perspectives and whether or not those perspectives changed. Therefore, we implemented a pre and post survey. After careful study and discussion, we found four statements from our survey that merited further analysis; those questions included, "The students in our school are respectful to each other," "The students in our school are respectful towards their teachers," "The students in our school speak up when they witness bullying," and "The students in our school are respectful in the classroom." These questions show a strong correlation to our action research question, which focuses on the affect character education can have on positive behavior in the classroom.

First, we analyzed the results to the statement "The students in our school are respectful to each other. In the survey, students read a statement and then chose from five options: yes, no, sometimes, often, and not sure. Figure 1 shows the percentage of student answers as well as the possible choices for both the pre-survey and the post-survey. The first aspect that gave us pause was the 12% increase in percentage of the student response of "sometimes" from pre-survey to post-survey. It stands to reason, that as the students engaged in more activities focused on respect, their awareness of their peers' behavior improved. Thus, as an understanding of respect blossomed, the students' awareness of what constitutes respect changed. We concluded that this could explain the

difference in “sometimes” responses. This also explains the 4% drop in “yes” responses as well as the 5% drop in “no” responses. The large percentage of “sometimes” indicates the realistic attitude the students adopted towards respect, showing that not every student showed respect, nor was there an abundance of disrespect.

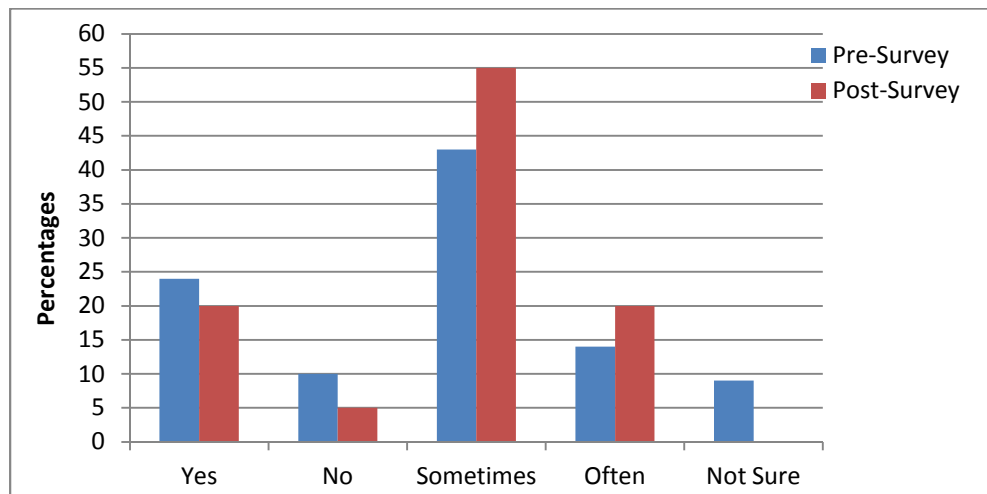


Figure 1. The students in our school are respectful to each other.

Next, we analyzed the statement “The students in our school are respectful towards their teachers.” Figure 2 shows the results with a large percentage of student answers for both the pre and post-survey congregating in the “yes” and “often” areas. As teachers, these responses are encouraging because they indicate that the students were aware of the respect their peers gave to teachers. Again, the pre and post-survey capitalizes on student perceptions of respect, and Figure 2 indicates that the students believe students in the school respect teachers both before lessons in character education and after. This suggests that student respect towards teachers is unchanged by character education, and perhaps, character education should focus more on student-to-student respect.

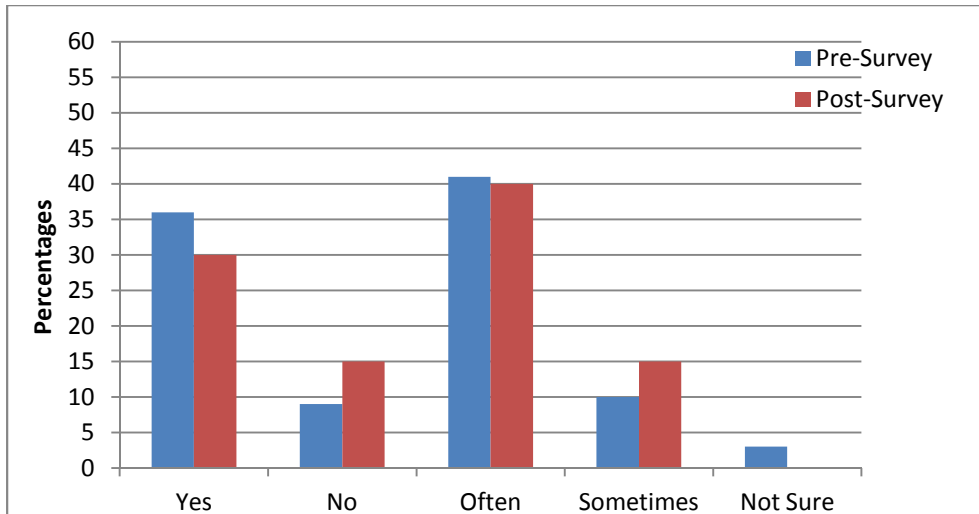


Figure 2. The students in our school are respectful towards their teachers.

The third statement of “The students in our school speak up when they witness bullying,” took more effort to analyze. Here, the students’ responses decreased in three of the five categories. Figure 3 shows that 35% of students in the pre-survey thought students did not speak up when they witnessed bullying. This number did drop to 26% in the post-survey, but it does suggest that the student perception of bullying is one of inaction. Not enough is being done if most students do not speak up and the others only sometimes speak up against bullying.

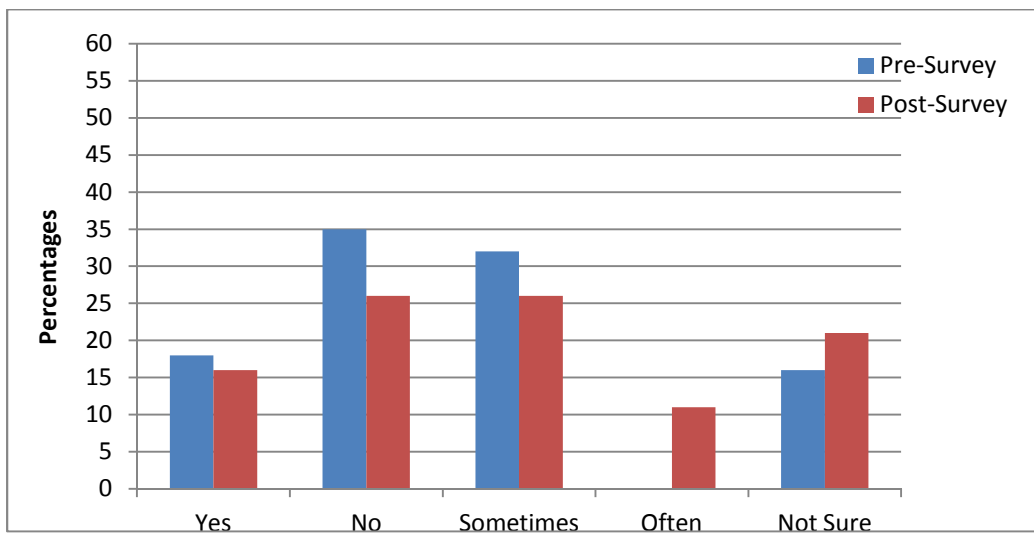


Figure 3. The students in our school speak up when they witness bullying.

Last, we analyzed the statement “The students in our school are respectful in the classroom.” With this question, we focused specifically on our classrooms, where we can provide more control and support for respect. Figure 4 shows that the most students thought that respect exists in the classroom only sometimes, with 46% pre-survey choices and 40% post-survey choices. The “yes” choice did garner a healthy 28% pre-survey and 25% post-survey. Again, the information, for the most part, suggests that character education did not significantly change student perception of respect.

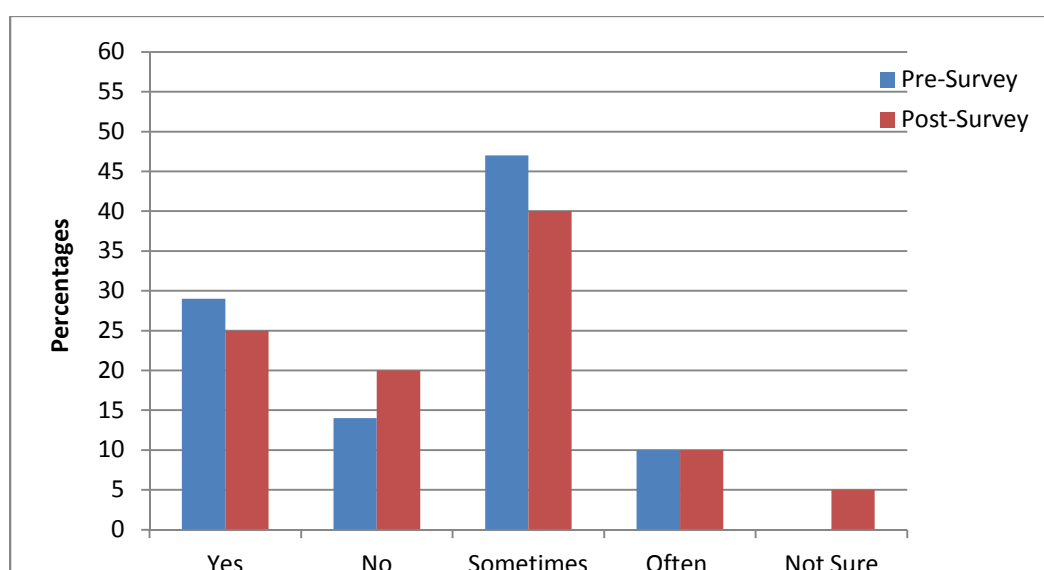


Figure 4. The students in our school are respectful in the classroom.

For the second piece of data collection, we observed students desired and undesired behaviors in our respective classrooms. In Matt’s classroom, he collected data using the tally sheet for a period of five weeks. Being that week’s 1 and 2 were data collections for the pre-survey and PACK Referrals, his data on observed undesired and desired behaviors began in week 3. At the beginning of week 3, the students were simply observed on their behaviors before any Character Education mini-lessons were implemented into the classroom (see Figure 5). As the data shows, undesired behaviors

in the classroom were at their highest point with 12 incidents. However, desired behaviors were also at their highest point with 10 observed behaviors.

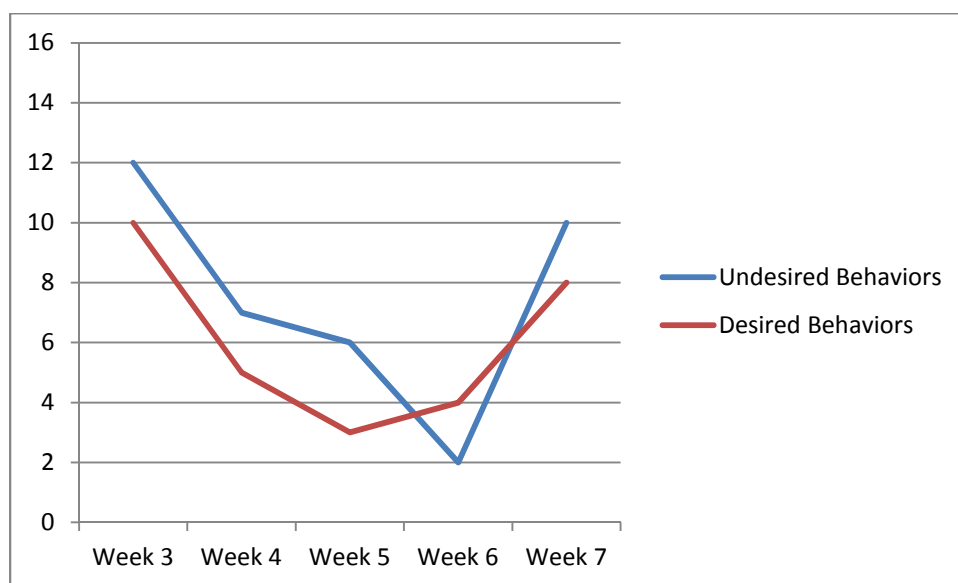


Figure 5. Weekly changes in behaviors in Matt's class.

The data during week 3 clearly shows that before teaching the Character Education min-lessons the students were more likely to exhibit undesired behaviors in the classroom. While most of these undesired behaviors were minor infractions like tardiness, disrespect, cell phone use, and lack of motivation, students were still negatively affecting the climate of Matt's classroom.

Figure 5 shows that in the corresponding weeks of 4 through 6 the undesired behaviors drastically diminished to their lowest levels at only 2 incidents. However, at the same time that undesired behaviors were becoming less so were the desired behaviors. Matt's findings show that as he began to teach the Character Education mini-lessons of respect the students undesired behaviors began to decrease. White and Warfa (2011) reported similar findings when they stated, "Schools utilizing character education noted behavior management in the classroom decrease from 66% to 18%" (p.13). Even

though undesired behaviors decreased, desired behaviors also decreased. Matt believed the reason for the decrease in desired behaviors during these weeks is attributed to actively focusing on observing only undesired behaviors.

Looking at Figure 5, during week 7, the final week of teaching Character Education min-lessons, there is an increase in both undesired and desired behaviors. Several uncontrollable variables came into play as why there is such an increase in undesired and desired behaviors the last week of teaching Character Education lessons. First, week 7 corresponded with the final two weeks of school. Being that Matt's classroom consisted of all but one student being a senior, these students started shutting down knowing that they would be graduating in two weeks. Secondly, Matt noted that observational bias played a part in the increase in desired behaviors in week 7. Matt stated that as he taught the mini-lessons on respect, he was more apt to look for desired behaviors being that they were being discussed within his classroom.

The tally sheets had a different trend in Sonja's classroom. First, she did not see very many desirable or undesirable behaviors at the start of week three (see Figure 6 below). She had three desirable behaviors noted, as well as 2 undesirable behaviors. During week four, the desirable behaviors stayed steady, but the undesirable behaviors went down to one. During the weeks where the respect lessons were taught, the two behaviors reversed and the undesirable behaviors went up while the desirable behaviors went down. As the collection of the tally sheets continued, week six showed an even split of behaviors at two apiece and finally on week seven, both the undesirable and desirable behaviors went up to three undesirable and four desirable behaviors. There is a possible explanation as to why the undesirable behaviors rose from the beginning of the

research to the end of the research in Sonja's classroom. There was one student who was responsible for a significant portion of the undesirable behaviors, particularly toward the end of the semester. The possible reason for this was the fact that he was over his days on absences for the semester. Since he was over his days, he was no longer receiving credit for Sonja's class and his undesirable behavior could possibly be a result of his loss of credit. Therefore, if this one student was taken out of the equation, the undesirable behaviors would have followed the trend of Matt's and Shawn's classes.

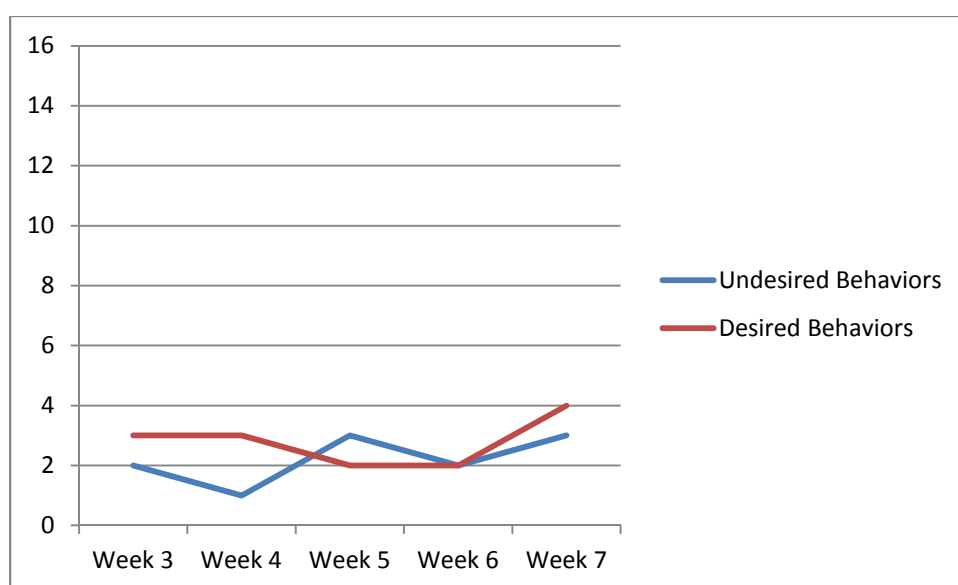


Figure 6. Weekly changes in behaviors in Sonja's class.

Shawn's classroom exhibited a consistent decrease of undesired behaviors as the weeks passed. Figure 7 clearly shows this information, with Week 3 tallying 16 undesired behaviors with only 3 desired behaviors. As each week passed, the number of undesired behaviors decreased until Week 7, where no undesired behaviors occurred. These data clearly show the positive affect character education has on classroom behavior. Although desired behaviors fluctuated both up and down, character education did decrease the number of undesired behaviors in Shawn's class. Incidentally, the

biggest drop in undesired behavior occurred between Week 3 and Week 4. This is significant because Week 4 marked the first lesson in defining respect and delving into the true meaning of the word. The simple act of having respect at the forefront of daily activity helped limit undesired behaviors.

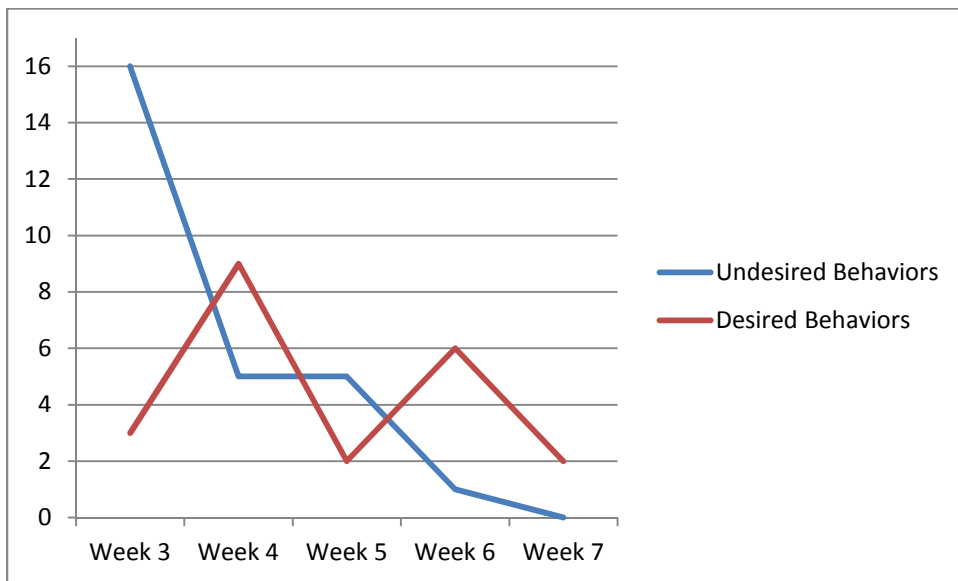


Figure 7. Weekly changes in behaviors in Shawn's class.

Tangentially, Shawn had three experiences with students that could not be measured, but the interactions support the positive affect character education has on students. First, Shawn shared a story about an experience he had in 8th grade when he was bullied. He hoped to engender some discussion and open students' mind to discuss respect. Most of the students responded with derision and laughter. It was not intended as negative or hurtful, and Shawn did not take it that way. However, the next morning, a student from that period came in to talk to Shawn. The student wanted to apologize on behalf of his classmates, citing their disrespect and inability to open up. It was truly an amazing moment for Shawn as a teacher and a person. This student fully understood the gravity of opening up and sharing an experience that Shawn felt ashamed of.

Second, another student showed thoughtfulness and kindness beyond the norm. A popular band, *The Red Jumpsuit Apparatus*, visited West Fargo High School's guitar class. They are a band Shawn listened to frequently in college, and he wanted to sit in on their visit badly. Unfortunately, He could not due to students needing help. The aforementioned student came to Shawn after the band's visit and brought Shawn a signed CD. It was an awesome gift, and it speaks to the kind of environment that has developed in Shawn's class.

Last, two students approached Shawn to discuss bullying in the school. One student was a junior that Shawn taught and the other was a senior from another teacher's class. Shawn recently showed Shane Koyczan's poem "To This Day." The students loved the video and it led to great a solid discussion about bullying. The video spread from Shawn's students to another classroom; from there it spread to a speech student who now plans to use it at the National Forensics League National Tournament. From there, it spread to the two students who came to visit Shawn. They wanted to get involved in an anti-bullying campaign for the school, and they cited Shawn as a teacher who inspired them. This is extremely flattering and proof that the character education plan works.

During week 8, all three of us interviewed selected students to gather their input on respect. We created questions focused on their final perceptions on respect in the classroom both involving student to student respect and student to teacher respect. (see Appendix X). One trend that we noticed from the student interview answers was that students are aware of what respect is between classmates and teachers. However, the interview students commented that not all students show the same respect that they do. One of Shawn's students commented that students were more likely to be disrespectful to

students they were not friends with or teachers that they did not like. Interestingly, all interviewees stated that the lessons on respect did little to improve them as respectful people. However, students did comment that they were more aware of the definition of respect and the impact that it can have. The final trend that we noticed was that all the interviewees stated that they thought that the school should teach some form of character education as a reminder of how to act.

As our final piece of data, we analyzed the collection of PACK Referrals filled out for our students. We had hoped that this would be a great source of information, but it turned out to be not as useful as we had hoped. The administration had advertised PACK Referrals as a great way to track and monitor behaviors, but in all reality, they are deleted after a year and the teachers do not typically take the time to fill them out. At the start of the research, before any of the teaching on respect, we looked into the files to see if anyone from our classes had previous PACK Referrals. Shawn's class had three, Matt's class had three, and Sonja's class had one. At the end of the research, after the lessons on respect, we again checked to see if anyone had received PACK Referrals. Both Shawn and Matt had great results with a decline in referrals to zero. Sonja's class had the opposite effect. Her class went from having one PACK Referral to three referrals by the end of the year. As noted before, one student received all of these referrals. The poor behavior could possibly be because he was not receiving any credit for the course due to too many absences.

After collecting and analyzing the data sources, we constructed a plan to implement character education in the future. In the next section of our report, we will

discuss the action plan for using this data to positively change the behaviors in our classrooms.

Action Plan

After analyzing our results, we found that there is a need for character education in our schools. We received applicable feedback and data from our research, specifically, the survey and interviews gave us functional written feedback from the students in our study. The students also feel the need for some sort of character education classes in our school. Their responses show some respect exists in the school, but not all of time, and not toward all the people in the school.

Based on the results of our action research, we would like to implement some changes to our character education plan. First, we would like to stress the importance of a school-wide effort. The entire school would need to select an appropriate character education program with enough flexibility to meet the needs of individual classrooms. As a team, we found the *Character Counts!* program accessible and useful and would recommend it to the staff. Furthermore, we feel that the students would benefit the most if all of the faculty taught and modeled the different traits of the schools' character education program. We also are convinced that this should be taught throughout the entire school year to reach its full potential. Along with a school-wide effort, it would be most beneficial if the community and parents shared the responsibility of the schools' character education program. This would be a large undertaking, but students would see the positive results of the schools' character education program everywhere, and they would emulate what they see the adults in the community doing. To achieve all of this, teachers, the community, and parents would need the proper training to develop and

implement this type of program. The entire community and faculty need to “buy-in” to this program. They need to see the importance of character education in general and why it is important to teachers and to the students in the school.

In our research, we found that teachers represent a key factor contributing to the success of any character education program because teachers implement the curriculum. Romanowski (2005) discusses how the foundation for any character education program at any school is the support of the teachers. A successful character education curriculum flexes enough to allow teachers to have their own creativity in meeting the changing needs of high school students. For teachers to really adapt and embrace character education, they must have the ability to adjust the curriculum to fit into their own teaching styles as well as the students’ learning styles. Teachers who are enthusiastic about teaching character education will motivate the students who, in turn, are even more willing to embrace learning about building character skills. During our action research plan, we did not enlist other teachers, but we wonder what would happen if we had all teachers involved in teaching a character education program.

Training also signifies another key aspect in encouraging teachers to buy into a character education curriculum. In their undergraduate work, most soon-to-be teachers receive little to no training in teaching character education, even though Ledford (2011) writes, “Statistical significance was found between teachers with undergraduate coursework in character education” (p. 271). In addition, most teachers receive little to no staff development for implementing character education. With the lack of training at both college and career levels, it is imperative that a strong character education program be available for aspiring teachers and current educators. At the career level, which is our

focus, professional development and teacher buy-in go hand in hand. To get an entire school staff on board with a character education program, the professional development must create interest, be relatively easy to implement, and most importantly, give specific strategies that teachers can immediately use in their classroom. If all of these factors are met, teachers and staff will be on board with teaching the character education program.

We would also like to teach and focus on specific traits at certain times of the year. For instance, respect should be taught at the beginning of the year because it is the foundation for the other traits. It should also be taught continually throughout the year because it is one of the most important traits in developing a student's character education. Motivation, on the other hand, should be taught more towards the end of the semesters. This seems to be a time when the students are getting tired of their work and are ready for a break. It would be good to remind them of the importance of staying motivated.

There are some limitations we experienced during this action research. First, we needed a longer period time to conduct the research. Spending more time teaching respect and possibly expanding into other traits would have been beneficial to our action research. Having more time would have allowed us to assess and reteach if necessary, as well as gather more data. Inviting outside observers to come into our classrooms and help us tally the desired and undesired behaviors would have been helpful as well. It was a bit difficult to teach and keep track of specific behaviors, and we think our own expectations of the classroom may have influenced the tally numbers. We were also teaching character education on our own without any training. It would have been

beneficial to have had some professional development training on creating and implementing curriculum.

In the end, our action research includes a number of imperfections like inconsistent survey results, small sample size, and time constraints. Despite these faults, we believe our conclusions certainly could apply to numerous classrooms and schools. Clearly, as with most research processes, more questions arise than answers. Should character education be infused with curriculum? Does character education influence positive behavior in the classroom? What character education model is best? These questions can only be answered with further research, but hopefully, through our research and professional practice, our classrooms will continue to educate the whole student, both cognitively and character-wise.

References

- Berkowitz, M. W., & Bier, M. C. (2005). *What works in character education: A report for policy makers and opinion leaders*. Washington, DC: Character Education Partnership.
- Berkowitz, M. W., & Schwartz, M. (2004). *Character education*. Retrieved February 26, 2013, from NASPonline.org website:
<http://www.nasponline.org/resources/intonline/NAS-CBIII-05-1001-002-R02.pdf>
- Prestwich, D. L. (2004). Character education in america's schools. *The School Community Journal, 14*(1), 1-11.
- Ledford, A.T., (2011). Professional development for character education: An evaluation of teachers' sense of efficacy for character education. *Scholar-Practitioner Quarterly, 5*(3), 1-17.
- Romanowski, M. H. (2005). Through the eyes of teachers: High school teachers' experiences with character education. *American Secondary Education, 34*(1), 1-17.
- White, R., & Warfa, N. (2011). Building schools of character: A case-study investigation of character education's impact on school climate, pupil behavior, and curriculum delivery. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 41*(1), 1-15.

Character and School Climate Survey

[Request edit access](#)

Answer the following questions to the best of your ability. Be sure to give an open, honest answer. All answers are anonymous.

The students in our school...Are nice to each other.

Yes

No

Sometimes

Often

Not sure

The students in our school...Are respectful to each other.

Yes

No

Sometimes

Often

Not sure

How or how aren't students...respectful to each other?

The students in our school... Tell the truth.

Yes

No

Sometimes

Often

Not sure

The students in our school...Are respectful towards their teachers.

Yes

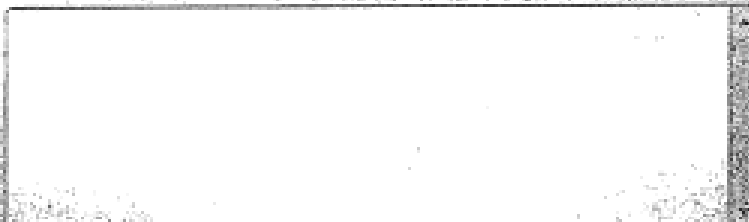
No

Sometimes

Often

Not sure

How are or aren't students...respectful towards their teachers?



The students in our school...Speak up when they witness bullying.

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Often
- Not sure

How do or don't students...Speak up when they witness bullying?



The students in our school...Generally want others to do well.

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Often
- Not sure

The students in our school...Are respectful in the classroom.

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Often
- Not sure

How are or aren't students...respectful in the classroom?

The students in our school...Are honest and do not cheat.

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Often
- Not sure

If you answered yes, sometimes, or often, please explain the cheating you witnessed or attempted...

Your opinion on homework and classroom behavior...In the last semester, I have cheated on an assignment or test

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Often
- Not sure

If you did cheat, how did you do it and why?

Your opinion on homework and classroom behavior...I have difficulty doing homework by myself.

- Yes

- No
- Sometimes
- Often
- Not sure

Your opinion on homework and classroom behavior...I often study before I take a test.

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Often
- Not sure

Your opinion on homework and classroom behavior...My teachers are respectful towards the students.

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Often
- Not sure

How or how aren'ts teachers respectful towards students?

Your opinion on homework and classroom behavior...My teachers love what they do.

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Often
- Not sure

Your opinion on school safety...Teachers care about the safety of the students

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

- Often
- Not sure

How do you know teachers care about the safety of students?

Your opinion on school safety...I feel safe in school.

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Often
- Not sure

What makes you feel safe or unsafe in school?

Your opinion on school safety...I have witnessed bullying.

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Often
- Not sure

If yes, sometimes, or often, please explain what you witnessed.

Your opinion on school safety...I respect school property.

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Often
- Not sure

How do or don't you show respect for school property?

Your opinion on school safety...I feel safe when not at school.

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Often
- Not sure

Your opinion on school safety...I have witnessed a student with a weapon at school.

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Often
- Not sure

If yes, sometimes, or often, explain what you witnessed.

Appendix B

PACK Referral Form

Name _____

Grade _____

Staff Reporting _____

Date _____ Time _____

Location

- Classroom Library Bathroom Bus Lunch Gym
 C Wing G Wing E Wing H Wing J Wing Commons

Classroom Managed (Minor)

- Inappropriate Language
 Defiance/Disrespect
 Disruption
 Dress Code
 Lying/Cheating
 Tardy
 Cell Phone

Office Managed (Major)

- Inappropriate Language (*toward staff*)
 Overt Defiance
 Disruption
 Dress Code—chronic
 Fighting/Physical Aggression
 Forgery/Theft
 Chronic Tardy

Office Managed (Major)

- Tobacco
 Drugs/Alcohol
 Harassment/Bullying
 Lying/Cheating
 Vandalism
 Skip Class/Truancy
 Cell Phone

Motivation

- Peer attention
 Other Motivation

- Obtain Items/Activities
 Unknown Motivation

- Avoid Tasks/Activities

Others Involved

- Peers
 Other _____

- Staff
 Unknown

- Teacher

- Substitute

Description of Incident

Teacher Action (Minor)

- Student Conference
 Parent Contact
 Teacher Detention

Administrative Action (Major)

- Student Conference
 Loss of Privilege
 Out of School Suspension

- Parent Call
 Parent Conference
 Police Report

- In School Suspension
 Admin. Detention
 Other

Administrative Comments

Student Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix C

Tally Sheet

Observed Student:**Date:****Time:***Undesired Behaviors**Desired Behaviors*

Inappropriate language: _____

Asking for help with work: _____

Defiance/disrespect: _____

Raising hand for attention: _____

Lying/cheating: _____

Responding when spoken to: _____

Tardy: _____

Following oral directions: _____

Cell phone: _____

Disruption: _____

Dress Code: _____

Notes:

Appendix D

Interview Questions

1. Explain your current view on respect in our schools.
2. Do you think you are a more respectful person since our class discussions on respect?
3. Do you think the other students are more respectful since our class discussions on respect?
4. Can you give me an example where you were respectful to your classmates, teachers, or school?
5. What do you think our school should do to teach students about respect?
6. Have you noticed any changes in the classroom environment since discussing respect?
 - a.) Student getting homework turned in on time increased
 - b.) Discipline issues
 - c.) Kindness to each other in and outside of class
7. Have you seen behaviors become more positive since discussing issues about respect?