A COMPARISON OF TEACHER AND PARENT ATTITUDES TOWARD CHARACTER EDUCATION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL

MASTER'S PROJECT

Submitted to the School of Education

University of Dayton, in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science in Education

by

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UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

Dayton, OH

July 1997

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Justification of the Problem

"To educate a man in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society." This quote by Theodore Roosevelt suggests that an educator has failed if he/she has merely taught academics and basic skills with little or no effort to teach a child to be a morally educated person as well. (I prefer to use the term "character education" because, as I will attempt to show in the review of the literature, there is much negative connotation to "moral education" though I feel that the two can essentially be interchanged.)

The topic of character education in the public schools is enjoying a renaissance. One need only to type the phrase "character education" in an Internet search engine to find that character education is indeed a hot topic. Today there is a renewed interest in character education, as the perception grows that many American youth are getting out of control. Drugs and gangs, teenage pregnancy and suicide, and the breakdown of school discipline, have led many educators and political leaders to once again look to the schools to educate not only the minds but the consciences of children.

The author chose to study the topic of character education because of a personal interest in the topic and because of the controversial nature of the concept. Some cringe at the very mention of the idea of teaching character traits in the schools. The popular response to a call for teaching core values is, "But WHOSE values do we teach?" A follow-up statement usually follows that points out the diverse culture in which we live and that we shouldn't step on anyone's

toes. Indeed we shouldn't step on anyone's toes, but the author wishes to show that, as much research supports, there are common core values that we should all be able to agree upon regardless of our cultural or religious background. Indeed character traits ARE being taught whether teachers want to admit it or not. Teachers teach certain values, whether they be positive or negative values, in the "hidden curriculum." It is evident that character traits are indeed being taught by necessity in our schools today. Inherent in the teaching field is a moral element. In order to foster an environment that is conducive to learning, teachers expect certain behaviors of their students. There are classroom and school rules that students (and teachers) are expected to uphold. This is part of the hidden curriculum -- a more subtle way schools teach certain values. As Etzioni states in an interview with Educational Leadership (Nov 1993, p. 12):

> "If you allow the classroom to be unruly, you transmit a message. If you give higher grades to white children than you give black children, you transmit a message. If I smoke in my college classroom, I transmit a message.....Every teaching act has a moral dimension."

Teachers teach not only by pedagogy but by example. Students learn from their whole social learning environment (Bandura, 1977) which includes the observation of peers, teachers, and administrators in the public schools. If students see fairness permeate every aspect of school culture, they learn fairness. If they see respect, they learn respect. Conversely, if they see what many would agree are negative character traits, they will learn these negative traits (e.g. racism).

It is important to note that the topic of character education causes controversy in many circles largely because of a misunderstanding and/or miscommunication of terms. Character education is not values clarification. Values clarification deals with specific issues such as abortion, teen pregnancy, euthanasia and gay rights. Values clarification was a movement that

began in the early seventies. Its philosophy was not to transmit sound moral values but rather, to allow the child to "clarify" his own values which adults, including parents, had no right to criticize (Lickona, 1991, p.11). This form of moral relativism said that no set of values was right or wrong; that everybody had an equal right to his own values; and all values were subjective, relative, and personal.

Conversely, the philosophy of character education states that there are common virtues or character traits that every American can agree are worthy of attainment both for individual self-worth and ultimately the common good of all. Character education upholds specific traits as beneficial for each individual to possess for the betterment of personal life and for the public good; positive traits that individuals, regardless of their cultural background or religious or non-religious beliefs, can agree are traits everyone should strive to acquire (Lickona, p.43). Even the laws of the land demand people to have RESPECT for others' property with penalties given for stealing and vandalizing. Our country was founded on ideas of respecting others' lives, liberty, and equality. These traits can and should be upheld and taught in our public schools in a manner that pleases everyone in our pluralistic society. The future of our democratic society depends on it.

The very nature of the educational field necessitates the teaching of character/moral values. It is impossible to be "value neutral." Children look to adults (parents, teachers) for guidance and learn by observing adult behavior. Thus, teachers and parents alike have a tremendous responsibility to not only profess the value of specific character traits but must be living, walking examples in action. Public schools are indeed teaching character traits. The author wishes to educate parents, teachers, and community members alike that though this topic

raises controversy in many circles, it is largely controversy based on inaccurate assumptions. Since schools are teaching character traits in the "hidden curriculum", why not teach them in an overt manner? The researcher intends to conduct a study comparing the attitudes of parents and teachers regarding the teaching of character traits in the public schools. The researcher feels that indeed, as communities communicate and discuss the hidden curriculum, they will come to see that a set of core values that should be taught in the schools (and community) can be agreed upon.

Statement of the Problem

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine if parents and teachers are of the same opinion regarding the public schools' role in teaching morals to students. The researcher's goal is to determine if: (1) parents and teachers agree on the role of schools regarding teaching morals to students, and (2) if parents and teachers agree on common values that should be taught in the public schools.

Hypotheses (2)

(1) There will be no significant difference in the opinions of parents and teachers regarding the role of the public schools in teaching morals. (2) There will be no significant difference in a comparison of the lists of core values that teachers and parents feel should be taught in the public schools.

Limitations and Assumptions

1. The study was limited to one middle school (Grades 6-8) in a Texas suburban school district.
2. The literature survey was limited to the English Language, and the resources at both the University of Dayton library (including OhioLINK and Internet services) and the Katy Public Library system in Katy, TX.

3. The sample was small and the respondents were volunteers.
4. The form of data collection which attempts to quantify respondents' attitudes is a limitation.

Key Terms

Attitude: positive or negative response or feeling toward a particular concept.

Character education: the teaching, specifically by example, of core values and/or morals such as respect, responsibility, honesty, and caring.

Formal (overt) curriculum: the school's planned educational experiences -- the selection and organization of knowledge and skills from the universe of possible choices.

Good character: knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good -- habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of action (Lickona 1991, 51).

Hidden curriculum: the personal and social instruction that students acquire from their day-to-day schooling; the impact that everyday behavior of faculty, staff, and other students have on students.

Moral values: concepts such as respect and responsibility -- those values that are a matter of moral obligation, not mere preference, and around which good character is formed.

Pluralistic society: the blending of diverse cultural backgrounds.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

> There is today a widespread, deeply unsettling sense that children are changing -- in ways that tell us much about ourselves as a society. And these changes are reflected not just in the violent extremes of teenage behavior but in the everyday speech and actions of younger children as well.
>
> - Thomas Lickona, author

It is evident to many, from private citizens and public organizations alike, that we face a moral crisis in our communities and society at large. The news is wrought with increased teen and child-committed violent crimes. People are using the school system as the scape goat for the problems we face with an increasing number of our young people and for the problems we face in our society as a whole.

The issue of character education is a critical one. Our future as a nation is at stake.

> The character of a society is determined by how well it transmits true and time-honored values from generation to generation. Cultural matters, then, are not simply an add-on or an afterthought to the quality of life of a country; they determine the character and essence of the country itself. Private belief is a condition of public spirit; personal responsibility a condition of public well-being.
>
> - William Bennett

However, as William Bennett states in his book entitled, "The De-Valuing of America": "There are still those today who claim we are now too diverse a nation, that we consist of too many competing convictions and interests to instill common values" (p. 46). He continues:

> They are wrong. Of course we are a diverse people. We have always been a diverse people. And as Madison wrote in Federalist No. 10, the competing, balancing interests of a diverse people can help ensure the survival of liberty. But there are values that all American citizens share and that we should want all American students to know and to make their own.

He proceeds to list some common character traits such as honesty, fairness, responsibility, and equality that should be explicitly taught in our schools.

Perhaps the question "should character education be taught in public schools?" is not the relevant question since research supports that character education does indeed take place in every classroom in every school. Oftentimes the question becomes: "What character traits are being taught?" That is, are positive or negative character traits being exemplified in this particular classroom? Albert Bandura's theory of modeling demonstrates that students learn from observing others' behavior. This includes the observation of teachers and administration as well as peers (Bandura, 1977). "Many of education's most profound and positive teachings can be conveyed in the hidden curriculum. If a spirit of fairness penetrates every corner of a school, children will learn to be fair....By creating an atmosphere of high standards, the hidden curriculum can teach habits of accuracy and precision" (Ryan, 18).

It is evident that character traits are indeed being taught by necessity in our schools today. To have an environment conducive to learning, a teacher must set ground rules. In the process of setting classroom rules, a teacher is demonstrating certain behaviors he/she expects from his/her students. Thus, it can be seen that perhaps the question: "Should character education be taught in the public schools" is not relevant because in actuality it IS being taught in some sense, whether it be positive or negative character traits. Students learn from observing their whole surroundings, not just what is explicitly being taught. For example, RESPECT for others is expected in the classroom. That is, respect for the teacher and respect for fellow students alike. This is a must in order to have an environment conducive to learning. Listening while another is speaking and refraining from interrupting are ways RESPECT for others is exhibited. The standards a teacher

and administrator set for the students communicate traits the students are to exhibit. Advocates of character education programs purport that traits cannot merely be discussed, but these traits must be evident in action. The whole setting must encourage virtuous traits to the point that the peer pressure actually creates and upholds the values and moral culture of the school. Lickona cites an example that shows that this kind of moral culture can be fostered. He tells the story of a public school in which a black boy, a third-grader, was a new arrival. On his first day of school, another boy, also new, called him a derogatory name. Upon hearing this, a third student, who happened to be white, came over to the boy who had called the offending name and said, "Don't do that. We don't call people names here" (Lickona, 347).

Allen Elementary School on Dayton's northeast side has successfully initiated a character education program that upholds such positive character traits as respect, responsibility, honesty, courage, loyalty, and patience. The article entitled "Shaping Character," by Charles L. Scott, which appears in the December 1992 issue of The American School Board Journal, discusses the history of Allen Elementary and the success it has experienced with the recent implementation of the character education program. It is interesting to note the marked improvement in test scores that has ensued as a result of focusing on character development of the students.

The researcher believes there is much evidence that yes, indeed character education should be taught in the public schools. It should be taught using an overt curriculum, rather than merely existing haphazardly in the hidden curriculum, and should not only discuss the common positive character traits each student should possess and why, but should be exemplified in every teacher and administrator and permeate every policy and action within the school. Students learn with all of their senses. They are keen observers capable of sensing hypocrisy. Thus, schools not only

need to discuss positive character traits, but must create a moral environment that exudes these traits in everyday life.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Review of Internet Sources

The researcher conducted a computer search of literature pertaining to character/moral education on the Internet utilizing the Worldwide Web search engine, as well as search engines such as the following: Yahoo, Infoseek, and Netscape Navigator. The search phrase: "character education" was entered at the prompt for each of these search engines. The researcher browsed through the web sites found and read excerpts from the various resources offered. Some articles were chosen and hard copies obtained and subsequently listed as resources for this study, based on the researcher's perception of pertinence to this particular study. Previous to this study the researcher read the books entitled: Educating for Character by Thomas Lickona and The De-Valuing of America by William Bennett. These books provided additional background information to the researcher.

Review of Books

The researcher conducted a computer search on the ERIC and related databases at the University of Dayton for books relating to the topic. A comprehensive list of books on the topic were obtained and, based upon the book descriptions in the database, the list was narrowed. The following three books were studied and utilized for the majority of this study: Educating for Character, The De-Valuing of America, and Teaching Peace: Toward Cultural Selflessness.

Review of Journals

The researcher examined the reference sections of the books reviewed and conducted a computer database search of ERIC for journal articles pertaining to the topic of character/moral education. Particular interest was taken in articles of recent publication, that is, those published from 1988 to the present. Articles were chosen based upon the author's reputation in the field of educational research and the pertinence to the topic of study. The five articles were: "Shaping Character," "Mining the Values in the Curriculum," "In Search of Effective Character Education," "Teaching Students to See Beyond Themselves," and "Character Education: Some Observations." The researcher studied the articles and made notes on key ideas. The key points found in the articles were utilized as sources of information in writing this paper.

Subjects and Setting

The participants in the study consisted of two groups: teachers and parents. Sixty-four teachers were given the survey and forty-eight responded. This was a return rate of 75%. One thousand one hundred and twenty-seven parent surveys were sent home. One hundred and ninety-three parents responded. This was a return rate of 17.13%.The setting for this particular study took place in a suburban community on the west outer limits of Houston, Texas. The school district was large, consisting of 14 elementary schools, 6 middle schools, and 3 high schools. The study focused on responses from one middle school in the district. This middle school had an enrollment of 1,127 at the time of this study. Eighty-five percent of the students and parents attending this school were of middle class income. Approximately 6-7% were low income and 6-7% were upper income households. Ninety-five percent of the teachers resided within the

boundaries of the school district.

Hypotheses (2)

(1) There will be no significant difference in the opinions of parents and teachers regarding the role of the public schools in teaching morals. (2) There will be no significant difference in a comparison of the lists of core values that teachers and parents feel should be taught in the public schools.

Limitations of the study

The subjects of the study were those who were willing participants in filling out a questionnaire. Thus, the results of this study are subject to the group of parents and teachers who were willing to spend time completing the questionnaire. Also, it is assumed that those who chose to participate in this study spent time thinking about their answers and answered in an honest and sincere manner. The subjects of this study were located in a suburban district that is considered to be average middle class neighborhood. The teachers and parents that participated in the study were of average middle class means. A small percentage (3-5%) of parents/teachers were middle to upper class, and a small percentage (3-5%) of parents were middle to lower class in income status. The format of the data collection via questionnaires is a limitation in itself since there is an inherent element of subjectivity in each person's interpretation of the questions given. Lickert's scale was utilized in an effort to compile data in an objective manner and to compile results. This also could be considered a limitation of this study since the application of Lickert's scale must be accurately applied. The researcher spent much time researching other questionnaires/surveys that attempted to assess parent/teacher attitudes toward values.

Data Collection

Construction of the Data Collecting Instrument

The measurement instrument utilized in this study was a Lickert-type rating scale composed of questions designed to determine the attitudes of participants toward certain values, and the teaching of certain values in the public schools. The scale utilizes five positions including: "Completely True" (CT), "True" (T), "Not Sure " (NS), "False " (F), and "Completely False" (CF). Content for the questions on the Lickert-type rating scale was drawn from the literature reviewed for this study and a combination of Lickert-type rating scales that were utilized in previous research studies. The researcher sought input from two professors from the University of Dayton. Two questions, numbers 4 and 12 were clarified as a result of this process.

Administration of Data Collecting Instrument

In April 1997, the survey was conducted. The participants consisted of two groups: parents and teachers. The researcher obtained verbal permission from the school principal to conduct the study at the school. In this conversation with the principal, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and the nature of the data collection instrument. The principal gave permission for the researcher to conduct the study at the school. It was at this time that the principal suggested that the researcher could speak to the teachers and hand out the teacher surveys at the faculty meeting on April 2nd. Thus, on April 2nd, the researcher spoke to the faculty present at the beginning of the meeting on April 2, 1997. The researcher spent about 3-5 minutes briefly explaining the purpose of the study, and requesting teacher participation. Pencils were made available and surveys were handed out at the beginning of the meeting (See Appendix A for sample of teacher survey). A tray was made available by the exit so that teachers could hand in

surveys anonymously. It was also explained at this time that all ninth period teachers would have parent surveys placed in their mailboxes the next day. A request was made at this time that teachers hand out these surveys and ask students to show their parents the survey. Teachers were instructed that any surveys they received from parents were to be placed in the researcher's mailbox in the teacher mail room. An explanation reiterating this information to teachers was attached to the class set of parent surveys that were placed in each teacher's mail box on April 3, 1997 (See Appendix D). The researcher obtained a list of teachers at the school and their respective ninth period class attendances. In this way, the correct number of surveys could be placed in each teacher's box. Appendix B shows the attachment that was stapled to each parent survey sent home with students during the last period of the day on April 3, 1997. See Appendix C for a sample of the parent survey. The questionnaire was created utilizing the Lickert's scale so that data could be quantified during the data analysis. The researcher chose to have these surveys handed out during the last period of the day since this was a time in which students had become somewhat accustomed to receiving various items to place in their backpacks at the end of the day. This was done in hopes of receiving a higher rate of response from parents. Students were given a questionnaire and were asked to encourage their parents to respond. The participants were informed that the questionnaire and the study were being utilized for research purposes only and that the responses would be kept confidential. April 10 was selected as the deadline to accept returned questionnaires. Teachers were asked to place returned surveys in the researcher's mail box anonymously (Appendix D). Tabulation of results was concluded by June 20, 1997.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The opinion survey submitted to the teachers and parents contained a total of fifteen statements all representing the role of the public school in teaching specific character traits. Teachers and parents were asked to circle the response on the scale (completely false, false, not sure, true, completely true) which most closely approximated their attitude toward each statement (see Appendix A).

Table 1 shows a summary of the number of (T) teacher and (P) parent responses to each statement. A total of forty-eight teachers and one-hundred and ninety-three parents participated in the survey. Statement 15 elicited the most positive responses (Completely True and True) from both parents and teachers. One-hundred and fifty-six parents responded with "completely true." This was also the only statement in which all of the parents surveyed and all of the teachers surveyed responded with a definitive true or false opinion. That is, there were no "not sure" responses registered for this statement. One negative response was registered for this statement (one "false" parental response).

Statement 2 elicited the most "completely true" responses from the teachers. Thirty-nine teachers felt strongly that, as statement 2 stated: "Teachers should be kind and courteous and should teach their students to have the same traits."

Table 1- Summary of the (T) Teacher and (P) Parent Responses

	Response					
Statement	Com. False	False	Not Sure	True	Com. True	
1	0	0	1	13	34	T
	1	0	2	68	122	P
2	0	1	0	8	39	T
	0	0	1	59	133	P
3	8	14	12	14	0	T
	55	65	30	41	2	P
4	0	0	0	28	20	T
	0	1	3	69	120	P
5	0	0	0	20	28	T
	0	1	4	49	138	P
6	0	0	2	16	30	T
	0	0	2	65	125	P
7	0	1	4	15	28	T
	0	1	3	65	124	P
8	0	0	4	22	22	T
	4	8	24	68	89	P
9	0	0	0	17	31	T
	1	0	1	63	128	P
10	0	0	0	18	30	T
	0	1	3	65	123	P
11	0	0	3	34	11	T
	2	2	4	90	95	P
12	0	2	6	21	19	T
	2	6	11	66	107	P
13	13	29	4	2	0	T
	81	79	22	8	3	P
14	0	0	0	23	25	T
	2	0	4	83	104	P

Table 1 (continued)

Statement	Com. False	False	Not Sure	True	Com. True	
15	0	0	0	11	37	T
	0	1	0	36	156	P

Table 2 shows the percentages of teacher and parent responses to each statement. Of the fifteen statements, number 3 was the only one that elicited responses across the scale. Table 2 shows that for statement 3: "I believe that sometimes lying is necessary", there exists a wide range of opinions amongst both parents and teachers.

Table 2 - Percentages of Teacher and Parent Responses

	Response					
Statement	Com. False	False	Not Sure	True	Com. True	
1	0%	0%	2%	27%	71%	T
	1%	0%	1%	35%	63%	P
2	0%	2%	0%	17%	81%	T
	0%	0%	1%	31%	69%	P
3	17%	29%	25%	29%	0%	T
	28%	34%	16%	21%	1%	P
4	0%	0%	0%	58%	42%	T
	0%	1%	2%	36%	62%	P
5	0%	0%	0%	42%	58%	T
	0%	1%	2%	26%	72%	P
6	0%	0%	4%	33%	63%	T
	0%	0%	1%	34%	65%	P
7	0%	2%	8%	31%	58%	T
	0%	1%	2%	34%	64%	P
8	0%	0%	8%	46%	46%	T
	2%	4%	12%	35%	46%	P
9	0%	0%	0%	35%	65%	T
	1%	0%	1%	33%	66%	P
10	0%	0%	0%	38%	63%	T
	0%	1%	2%	34%	64%	P

Table 2 (continued)

Statement	Com. False	False	Not Sure	True	Com. True	
11	0%	0%	6%	71%	23%	T
	1%	1%	2%	47%	49%	P
12	0%	4%	13%	44%	40%	T
	1%	3%	6%	34%	56%	P
13	27%	60%	8%	4%	0%	T
	42%	41%	11%	4%	2%	P
14	0%	0%	0%	48%	52%	T
	1%	0%	2%	43%	54%	P
15	0%	0%	0%	23%	77%	T
	0%	1%	0%	19%	81%	P

T = Teacher responses **P** = Parent responses

(rounded to the nearest whole percent)

Table 3 shows the expected (E) and observed (O) responses. Parental percentages were used to calculate the expected responses for the teachers. These percentages were then multiplied by the total number of teachers (forty-eight). These numbers are the expected number of teachers for each category in each statement.

Table 3 - Table showing expected (E) and observed (O) responses

	Response					
Statement	Com.False	False	Not Sure	True	Com. True	
1	0	0	0	17	30	E
	0	0	1	13	34	O
2	0	0	0	15	33	E
	0	1	0	8	39	O
3	14	16	7	10	0	E
	8	14	12	14	0	O
4	0	0	1	17	30	E
	0	0	0	28	20	O
5	0	0	1	12	35	E
	0	0	0	20	28	O

Table 3 (continued)

Statement	Com.False	False	Not Sure	True	Com. True	
6	0	0	1	16	31	E
	0	0	2	16	30	O
7	0	0	1	16	31	E
	0	1	4	15	28	O
8	1	2	6	17	22	E
	0	0	4	22	22	O
9	0	0	0	16	32	E
	0	0	0	17	31	O
10	0	0	1	16	31	E
	0	0	0	18	30	O
11	0	0	1	22	24	E
	0	0	3	34	11	O
12	1	2	3	17	27	E
	0	2	6	21	19	O
13	20	20	5	2	1	E
	13	29	4	2	0	O
14	0	0	1	21	26	E
	0	0	0	23	25	O
15	0	0	0	9	39	E
	0	0	0	11	37	O

(Parental percentages were used to calculate the expected responses for the teachers in Table 3).

Table 4 shows the summary of Chi Squared calculations. Using the expected and observed data, the chi squared formula for a multinomial experiment was then used: the observed minus the expected, square that difference, and then divide that answer by the expected value. After doing that for each category, the chi squared value (test statistic) for each statement became the sum of the values for each category. To find the critical value, 5% = alpha was used since that is common practice. The degrees of freedom is 4 since the degrees of freedom equals the number

of categories minus 1. A table found in *Elementary Statistics* was then used. That critical value is then compared to the test statistic.

Table 4 - Summary of Chi Squared Calculations

Statement	Test Statistic	Critical Value	Outcome
1	2.102	9.488	FTR
2	4.344	9.488	FTR
3	7.325	9.488	FTR
4	11.089	9.488	R
5	7.378	9.488	FTR
6	4.554	9.488	FTR
7	16.806	9.488	R
8	5.166	9.488	FTR
9	0.632	9.488	FTR
10	1.207	9.488	FTR
11	17.814	9.488	R
12	7.980	9.488	FTR
13	8.128	9.488	FTR
14	1.790	9.488	FTR
15	0.800	9.488	FTR

FTR = Fail to Reject

R = Reject

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

The last decade has brought a renewed interest from individuals and public schools alike, in the topic of character education. However, this topic of teaching character traits, or values, to students in a public school setting often draws fire from opponents who claim that it is impossible because values vary from individual to individual and from family to family. However, as discussed in the Introduction portion of this paper, there needs to be an understanding of terms. Character education is not values clarification, nor is it a curriculum that discusses controversial subjects like gay rights, euthanasia, and abortion. The researcher has found that the proponents of character education do not wish to approach these controversial subjects in the public school setting, but wish to teach students qualities of character, like respect and responsibility, in an overt manner (instead of in just the hidden curriculum as discussed on p.2 of the Introduction).

Therefore, the researcher chose to conduct a study to determine teacher and parent attitudes toward the teaching of certain character traits in the public school setting. Though many opponents of character education would argue that cultural and religious diversity disallows any possibility of a common set of values, the researcher sought to determine if, at least in one particular public school community, there was an agreement between parents and teachers about a core set of values that should be taught in the school.

The researcher began by reviewing the literature and searching for other studies that have been done on the topic of character education. An opinion survey was developed from information from a compilation of surveys and information gathered. Input was sought from two

professors at the University of Dayton regarding the format and substance of the questions. Permission was granted from the principal of the middle school in which this study was to be conducted. The majority of teachers at the school were initially contacted at a faculty meeting on April 2, 1997. Those that were willing to fill out the survey became participants in the study. On April 3, every student at the school should have received a survey from the last period teacher. Parents who responded to the surveys became participants in the study.

The findings of this study point to the conclusion that there can be an agreement between parents and teachers regarding the teaching of certain character traits in the school. This conclusion is supported by two dimensions of the research data. First, as Table 2 demonstrates, the percentages of responses in each category from parents and teachers are very similar. Second, the statistical analysis as per Table 4 appears to show that teachers and parents believe in many of the same values. Twelve of the fifteen statements elicited a FTR status or fail to reject the null hypothesis. There were 3 of the 15 statements (statements 4, 7, and 11) in which the outcome was "R" for "Reject" the null hypothesis. However, there are plausible explanations for why statistical differences occurred: For statements 4 and 11: 1.) Respondents may have interpreted the statement in various ways. Statement 11 states: "Teachers should give their students opportunities to work with classmates in cooperative groups so that students learn to work well with others." Perhaps the statistical difference for this statement is because teachers and parents have differing opinions on the actual value of cooperative groupings in the classroom setting, rather than differing opinions in regard to the actual value of "getting along with others." 2.) Respondents may have differentiated between true and completely true in different ways.

Statement number 7 is as follows: "Schools should teach traits of good citizenship such as

responsibility and respect for others and their property." When the statistical results of this statement are compared with those of statement 15, one may conclude that statement 15 was worded more specifically to include parental and teacher involvement and therefore garnered a high positive response from both parents and teachers. Thus, many teachers and parents most likely interpreted statement 7 to mean that parents have little or no responsibility in the matter. Five parents and three teachers wrote specific comments to this effect on their surveys. As per Table 4, statement 15 shows a test statistic of 0.800 which is the second lowest statistical difference of all 15 statements (second only to statement 9). Statement 15 states: "I believe both parents and teachers should help young people to develop positive character traits like responsibility, respect, and kindness." This statement reiterates in a different manner the values of respect and responsibility that were addressed in statement 7. Thus, one can infer that the statistical difference for statement 7 was a result of misinterpretation and poor wording of the statement rather than an indication of differing opinions about the values of respect and responsibility.

The major finding in this study that there can be an agreement between parents and teachers regarding the teaching of specific character traits must be treated as suggestive since the sample representativeness could not be ascertained (because of the anonymity of respondents) and thus limits the generalizability of these results. Data collection for this study was solely dependent on volunteers which can also have an effect on the generalizability. It is assumed that participants responded to the survey in a sincere manner and read each statement carefully. It is plausible that the Hawthorne effect could be a limitation related to generalizability since respondents were volunteers and aware of the study and may have responded in a manner in which they felt was

appropriate or "most acceptable" instead of in a manner in which their opinion was truly reflected. The researcher therefore communicated to possible respondents that completed surveys would be kept confidential and anonymous. This was to encourage respondents to answer in a way that truly reflected their opinions regardless of any perceived idea of what the researcher was looking for, or what may be considered appropriate.

That parents and teachers can agree upon a specific core set of values is an important step toward the implementation of character education in the public schools. It is the researcher's assertion that should one conduct subsequent similar studies in different settings, the findings would be analogous to this study. That is, that parents and teachers, regardless of cultural and religious differences, believe in similar core values such as respect, responsibility, and fairness and thus, can agree on the importance of teaching these traits in the school.

The researcher acknowledges, however, that there is a gap between theory and practice. Specifically, there may be common ground as far as identifying traits that both parents and teachers wish to teach their children, but there may be differences of opinion as to how teaching of these traits should actually be implemented in the school setting. Thus, the identification of a common set of values is merely a baby-step toward the actual implementation of a character education plan but it is a very important step that should not be overlooked. The researcher recommends that any subsequent similar studies be conducted not only in a different setting, but with adjustments made to the Lickert-type scale that was used for this study. Instead of "Completely False, False, Not Sure, True, and Completely True" as possible response choices, the scale should be "Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Undecided, Agree, Strongly Agree."

The researcher has not discussed in this paper the various methods and different approaches that could or should be taken toward implementing a character education plan. There are differing opinions as to the methods that are most effective. Subsequent studies should not only seek to test the results of this study in different settings, but should also seek to determine the effectiveness of various character education plans that are currently in use.

APPENDIX A

Teacher Survey

Please circle:

A. How long have you worked as a teacher?

1-5 yrs. 6-10 yrs 11-20 yrs 21+ yrs

B. Do you have children?

YES NO

For #1-15 please circle the number that best describes your opinion:

1. Students should be expected to show respect and courtesy toward anyone in authority.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

2. Teachers should be kind and courteous and should teach their students to have the same traits.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

3. I believe that sometimes lying is necessary.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

4. A good citizen should abide by the law.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

5. Students should be taught to live by the golden rule: treat others as you would want others to treat you.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

6. The educated person should be honest, responsible, dependable, and a person of integrity.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

7. Schools should teach traits of good citizenship such as responsibility and respect for others and their property.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

8. If a teacher sees a student cheating on an exam, the teacher should take firm action to assure that the cheater suffers a negative consequence.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

9. The educated person should assume responsibility for his/her actions.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

10. I believe that being able to work well with others is an important quality to have.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

11. Teachers should give their students opportunities to work with classmates in cooperative groups so that students learn to work well with others.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

12. Schools have a responsibility to teach students to respect and accept others, regardless of racial, ethnic, religious, or sex differences.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

13. Being honest seems like a good idea, theoretically, but sometimes it is necessary to cheat just to get along.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

14. Teachers should expect students to be kind and considerate of others.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

15. I believe both parents and teachers should help young people to develop positive character traits like responsibility, respect, and kindness.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

APPENDIX B
Parent Survey Attachment

Dear Parents: April 3, 1997

****PLEASE CONSIDER PARTICIPATING IN THIS RESEARCH SURVEY.****

I am currently working on my graduate degree and would greatly appreciate your help. Attached is a survey that I have developed to compare the attitudes of parents and teachers toward the role of the school in teaching certain character traits. This research is for my private use ONLY. Katy ISD is in no way associated with this survey. Please do not sign your name to the survey, simply circle the answers that best describe your opinion and have your child return it to his/her advisory teacher by Thursday, April 10th. Your survey will remain anonymous and I will not contact you further.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Tracy Crow, 6th grade teacher

APPENDIX C
Parent Survey

A. Please circle the elementary school your child attended:
A. Bear Creek B. Wolfe C. Mayde Creek D. other

B. You are:
A. male B. female

C. Which of the following most closely describes your child's home?
A. single-parent B. two-parent C. parent & step-parent D. grandparent E. other

D. Please circle the highest formal education achieved in your household:
A. Graduate degree or higher B. 2 or more yrs college C. High school D. Under 11 yrs

For #1-15, please circle the number that best describes your opinion:

1. Students should be expected to show respect and courtesy toward anyone in authority.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

2. Teachers should be kind and courteous and should teach their students to have the same traits.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

3. I believe that sometimes lying is necessary.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

4. A good citizen should abide by the law.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

5. Students should be taught to live by the golden rule: treat others as you would want others to treat you.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

6. The educated person should be honest, responsible, dependable, and a person of integrity.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

7. Schools should teach traits of good citizenship such as responsibility and respect for others and their property.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

8. If a teacher sees a student cheating on an exam, the teacher should take firm action to assure that the cheater suffers a negative consequence.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

9. The educated person should assume responsibility for his/her actions.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

10. I believe that being able to work well with others is an important quality to have.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

11. Teachers should give their students opportunities to work with classmates in cooperative groups so that students learn to work well with others.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

12. Schools have a responsibility to teach students to respect and accept others, regardless of racial, ethnic, religious, or sex differences.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

13. Being honest seems like a good idea, theoretically, but sometimes it is necessary to cheat just to get along.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

14. Teachers should expect students to be kind and considerate of others.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

15. I believe both parents and teachers should help young people to develop positive character traits like responsibility, respect, and kindness.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely False	False	Not Sure	True	Completely True

APPENDIX D
Teacher Attachment to Parent Surveys

Teachers:
Please hand these out to your ninth period class Thursday, April 3rd. Any completed surveys that you receive from parents, please place in my mail box. The deadline for turning in surveys is next Thursday, April 10th.
Thank you so much for all your help! It is much appreciated!

Tracy Crow

Appendix E

Further references for those interested in the topic of character education

Character Education Network: One of the interactive networks sponsored by the ASCD, the Character Education Network offers members opportunities to exchange research and instructional methods in ethical and moral education. Members communicate through a newsletter and receive bibliographies and a membership directory. For more information contact: Kevin Ryan, Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character, Boston University, School of Education, 605 Commonwealth Ave., Rm. 356, Boston, MA 02215. (617) 353-3262; Fax: (617) 353-3924.

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