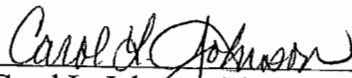Understanding the Importance of Character Education

by

Kelli Larson

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Carol L. Johnson
Carol L. Johnson, Ph. D.

The Graduate School

University of Wisconsin-Stout

May, 2009

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI

Author: **Larson, Kelli A.**

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ABSTRACT

Much of a child and adolescent's day is spent at school where they learn how to

read, write and do arithmetic. These students are developing mentally, physically,

socially, and emotionally from teachers, school counselors, administrators, support staff

and other students. According to Rigby (2009), these days bullying is accepted in many

schools throughout the states; it is extremely damaging to the minority of students,

mentally, emotionally, physically, and academically. Weaving character education into

the school's curriculum and/or encouraging the use of the various programs that are out

there encourages more students to think about treating others differently.

The definition of character education can be quite complicated because of the

many values it encompasses. The definition is universal and the outcomes are

distinguished. Pearson & Nicholson (2000), feel that there are three interconnected areas

that represent good character: self, others, and the community. With their own actual self,

students can look at self-discipline, responsibility, trustworthiness, courage, and self-

discipline. Character traits such as: honesty, respect, empathy, kindness, and caring play into affect with students who have relationships with classmates, teachers, friends, and family.

Utilizing schools discipline policies, character education programs, and encouragement from parents, schools are beginning to document that they can make a significant difference in the lives of the children they teach. Students will then live the positive character traits they learned through practice by treating others with respect and fairness while recognizing they are becoming responsible, caring, trustworthy citizens.

The Graduate School

University of Wisconsin-Stout

Menomonie, WI

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I: Introduction

Character can be little things such as holding a door open for others to pass through, helping a friend in need, and having honesty and integrity. "To educate a person in mind, and not in morals, is to educate a menace to society" (Roosevelt, 2007, as cited in Haynes & Berkowitz, n.p.). There are several different ways students can show good character; whether it is in school, home or in the community. "Children learn a repertoire of behaviors that when repeated become habits, which in turn facilitate the formation of good character" (Stone, 1997, p. 22).

According to McBrien & Brandt (1997),

> "The goal is to raise children to become morally responsible, self-disciplined citizens. Problem solving, decision making, and conflict resolution are important parts of developing moral character. Through role playing and discussions, students can see that their decisions affect other people and things" (p. 17).

The Boston University School of Education (2002) suggests that character education may not be a major emphasis in many schools currently, but appears to be an unavoidable element which schools need to consider for future inclusion. The societal changes teens have encountered have impacted students in areas such as dress, manners, language, entertainment, music, sexual habits. Many students seem under the influence of media bombardment that promotes promiscuity and lax attitudes toward good character development and some family dynamics appear to be more dysfunctional than ever before (Noddings, 1992).

The way schools have responded to these challenges has not been easy; as they already have a full agenda with testing, updating technology or adapting curriculum to

meet the needs of No Child Left Behind (Martin & Martin, 2007). Schools now need to include programs to address the reality of the way kids are socializing (Noddings, 1992). It is important to have character education in schools to develop a safe and inclusive school climate so that students can reap the benefits academically, socially, and personally.

Character education can also be a proactive way of helping those students who may be at-risk of not finishing school. According to *Wings: Helping Kids Soar* (2008), those students who are most likely to drop out before they graduate, demonstrate violent behavior, exploit weapons, and/or use drugs, alcohol, tobacco are the students who do not feel comfortable attending school, and cannot associate or attach with anyone in school. According to Battistich, (cited in Haynes and Berkowitz, 2007), the influences of character education programs can have profound effects on numerous problems that schools are facing today including increased drug/alcohol use, aggression, low school attendance, fights and suspensions, school shootings, sexual activity, vandalism, and low academic achievement. Character education may help schools develop a more positive school environment.

Viadero (2003) (as cited in Brown, 2007), feels that character education programs can be very useful in the sense of helping prevent school violence, drug problems, and promiscuous sexual activity. Infoplease.com (2007), noted several negative events involving school violence: The Columbine school-shooting in 2005; The Red Lake Minnesota school- shooting in 2006; and another shooting in Cazenovia, Minnesota, where a 15 year old student shot and killed principal, John Klang in April, 2007.

Some people question whether traumatic incidents like these in a school setting could decrease through the implementation of character education curriculum programs that teach such things as respect, conflict resolution, and acceptance. Brooks and Kann (1993) state that character education programs can help build safe havens for students to develop good conduct, strong character and acceptance of others. It is important that students feel they have a safe place to go especially when it comes to the school they attend and the community in which they live.

Jacobson (1999) researched the outcomes of some character education programs. After collecting the results from a survey given to an elementary school in Georgia the findings indicated that character education was not a large part of the curriculum. Jacobson (1999) found that schools need to focus on the positive within kids, and encourage children and teach core values. A tragedy such as the Columbine High School shooting incident should not be the impetus to prompt developing character education programs. School violence and related problem behaviors are genuine concerns that need to be investigated because schools need to be a safe place where students have the opportunity to learn, develop and grow.

Not only is school violence, bullying, exclusion, and threats that are the biggest concern for implementing more character education within the schools but issues such as cheating, poverty, harassment, and poor supervision of computer usage that may cause emotional or physical harm to other students. The impact of the media on students is an important consideration for integrating character education into a school's curriculum.

Parents do not always have the skills, time or ability to take responsibly for developing their child's character. Many parents are now hoping that the children will

learn the skills in schools, at church or from other community members (Ryan & Bohlin, 1999). Historically, public schools would build character into the educational curriculum from grade school all the way through college; but over the years, subject matter and demonstration of achievement have forced character education out of the curriculum. The education and development of students' character, specifically targeting social betterment and helping others as a means to personal growth, is essentially absent in many school's curriculum (Ryan & Bohlin, 1999).

Otten (2000), stated "In character education, the school community recognizes the core values of the school and works to teach, implement and emphasize those shared values within the students' lives" (n.p.). He further recommended the important character traits schools should develop ought to be introduced into the classroom environment where the student is learning. Students' education and development should appear naturally by their ability to help others and to make a difference in their community. Teachers are not lacking opportunity to develop student's positive morals; it just needs to be incorporated into their everyday teaching (Jacobson, 1999).

With character education programs being built into the curriculum, schools have the ability to make a difference in the lives of children. Professionals believe that educators need to strictly focus on developing positive morals, though realizing that it will not eliminate all negative actions that do occur at school (Weimer, as cited in Jacobson, 1999). According to Otten (2000), "character education integrated into the school community is a strategy to help re-engage our students, deal with conflict, keep students on task in the learning environment, and reinvest the community with active participation" (n.p.).

Linda McKay (as cited in Brown, 2007), believes that students not only need to learn and understand character education in the classroom but also in their homes and communities. By teaching character education in the schools and modeling it throughout the community, students can recognize the importance of having good character wherever they are. "Today's students are tomorrow's leaders and citizens; if schools can educate students to be young people of high character; our country will eventually become a nation of high character" (Ryan and Bohlin, 1999, *xi*).

Statement of the Problem

Developing strong character traits in children is an important issue in today's world. Character education programs are striving to positively promote student success in academics, person and social interaction and through means such as encouraging them to speak respectfully toward others, volunteering throughout the community, becoming responsible citizens by caring for others, and building decision-making and problem-solving skills. It is important that educators understand the impact these programs can have.

Statistics about teenage substance abuse, sexual promiscuity and gang activity are increasing, yet schools often have to focus on other important things including drop-out prevention, annual yearly progress and test scores. According to youthfrontiers.org (2008, n.p.) "...regarding teaching character: with today's emphasis on standards and testing, it's critical to remember the true goal of education, as Socrates said, 'to make kids both smart and good.' "

Therefore, the problem is, how can schools include character education as a part of the curriculum in order to prepare students to be good citizens at home, at school and in the community?

Purpose of the study

Through this review of literature, counselors and other school personnel may gain a better understanding of the importance of building positive character within children. The purpose of the literature review is to explore different models of character education programs that are utilized in schools to determine what is being implemented and how beneficial the programs are for the children. It is important to recognize the outcomes of developing good character in children. Literature pertaining to character education programs will be summarized to determine strategies to implement character programs in the schools. Literature will be reviewed in the spring of 2009.

Research Questions

Upon completion of this study of the literature, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. What are the positive aspects of quality character education programs?

2. Who should deliver character education programs?

3. What programs are being selected to provide students with character education and what benefits result for the school and community?

4. What results indicate that these programs work toward developing character in school-age students?

Definition of Terms

To assist the reader in clarity and better understanding of this study, the following

terms are defined for the reader:

Character education – teaching children about basic human values including honesty,

kindness, generosity, courage, freedom, equality, and respect (McBrien & Brandt, 1997).

Character – the aggregate of features and traits that form the individual nature of some

person or thing (dictionary.com, 2009).

Developmental assets – consist of factors that are essential to young people's success.

These are opportunities, skills, relationships, values, and self-perceptions that all young

people need in their lives (projectcornerstone.org, 2008).

Role Model – a person who serves as a positive model in a particular behavioral or social

role for another person to emulate (The American Heritage, 2006).

Assumptions of the Research

It was assumed that character education can provide students with the skills

needed to reduce school bullying and violence while developing a climate of acceptance

and respect. A further assumption is that schools are looking for ways to increase student

engagement in character building activities. It is also assumed that students with strong

character traits increase their opportunities to contribute to society in meaningful ways.

Limitations of the Research

A limitation to this review of literature is time and availability of resources for the

researcher. As character education is not utilized in all school settings, the review of

literature is limited to schools that implement character education programs. There are

many types of character education and due to limitations of time and curriculum

resources to review; some programs may have been overlooked. The literature may not reflect all the core values of all diverse ethnicities but findings may reflect those assets that many do agree upon. Due to time constraints and limited resources, and the more recent development of newer character education programs, some literature may have been overlooked. Literature was reviewed in the spring of 2009.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

"Good character, like the weather, gets a lot of talk, but too little action; to be effective, character education must become integral to the daily actions of everyone in the school community" (Hayes and Berkowitz, 2007 n.p.) Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, and Smith (2006), explain that students can become involved in volunteer activities within their communities such as organizing and implementing charity events, making communities safer by creating cleaner environments, and visiting the elderly, or raising money for charities as a way to develop character in the students.

The focus of Chapter II is on defining character education, determining the positive effects these programs have on students in schools, and describing what is being done to encourage continued development of these programs. The chapter will conclude with a discussion on responsibility and initiative for implementing character education programs within schools today.

Defining Good Character

The Character Education Partnership (cited in Otten, 2000) defined the many components of character education to include the following:

> Character education is an umbrella term used to describe many aspects of teaching and learning for personal development. Some areas under this umbrella are moral reason/cognitive development, social and emotional learning, moral education/virtue, life-skills education, caring community, health education, violence prevention, conflict resolution/peer medication, and ethic/moral philosophy (Otten 2000, n.p.).

Importance of Character Education Programs within Schools

There are numerous negative school incidents that have happened that reflect poor decision making and unhealthy character traits. The Columbine school shooting, incidents of cyber bullying, harassment of students, and texting inappropriate pictures or threats to others are a few examples. According to one character education program,

> One way to prevent such negative behaviors is to create a positive school climate that is rooted in shared values and responsible student participation. By building caring environments in which students feel safe and supported, schools can reduce the root causes of conflicts and help students gain a sense of belonging and attachment to school. These feelings are an important part of keeping students engaged in the educational process. Across the country, parents, students, and civic leaders are turning to character education as a way to help create such strong, healthy learning environments (the challenge.org, 2004, n.p.).

Families today often provide less supervision and moral guidance than previous generations, leaving children less capable young citizens as they often lack the skills they need to contribute to society. Because of technology and the advancement of education, families are leaving the core development of their children up to the schools (Benigni, 2006). If the moral development of young teens is an expectation, it is important that communities become more involved to help give students the opportunity to be positive leaders and contribute through community service (Benigni, 2006). Many students with little or no supervision may have nothing to do during the weekends and could find themselves making poor choices, getting into trouble, or using alcohol and/or drugs.

Good character education programs emphasize consequences for choices and support the need for alternatives for teenagers to learn assets that promote good character.

With character education programs, it is helpful to have support from all the caring adults in a child's life. Educators can help young people become caring, trustworthy, respectful, and responsible citizens by integrating different character education programs within their schools and community. Greer (2007) believes that it is the schools responsibility to develop these programs and to teach students what good character means so that it may reduce the number of negative incidents.

Teacher, parents, and the community members can help students understand the significance of a healthy, positive character. To have students understand character, they must first recognize what forms a healthy, positive character. According to Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis (2007), members of the school community should help students understand and recognize more about character through behaviors that can be taught, practiced and measured throughout school.

Lickona, et.al (2007) want students to model caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect for self and others though classroom discussions, and everyday encounters with other students and adults. It is important that these core ethical values and traits be incorporated into academic lessons and though real-life experiences (Pearson and Nicholson, 2000).

Teachers can be aware of how their students are relating to one another and observe the way students communicate, interact, play and work together in and out of the classroom. School counselors may also contribute to character education by including it in the weekly guidance lessons in the classroom.

Pearson & Nicholson (2000) recommend that school counselors use their roles as leaders to serve as a consultant to other school personnel as they focus on helping children develop character traits that will enhance their understanding of self and their relationship with others (p. 243). Counselors can be the ones who coordinate the communication with everyone in the building about the overall framework for a character education program. They can help decide which character traits are significant, while establishing the necessary lessons, and activities that go along with these traits (Stone, 1997).

The school counselors at an elementary school in Jacksonville, Florida write a monthly newsletter that introduces the particular character trait they will be discussing that week. Pearson et al. (2000) suggested that school counselors and teachers can design their classroom guidance and/or small group activities around particular character traits. Also included in the newsletter are ideas and activities that they will be applying in their classrooms for guidance in hope that parents will support the program at home. They encourage parents to reinforce character traits that are part of the children's academic lessons if possible. Stone (1997) noted that the newsletters reinforce the philosophy that parents are valued as the primary educator in their children's lives (p.22).

In order to implement character education the school staff must become an inclusive, caring, and contributing community in which all share responsibility for character education. In an attempt to adhere to the same core values that guide the education of students, effective character education programs are encouraged to take a three-prong approach to include student thinking, feeling, and behavior. The schools may wish to provide opportunities for ethical decisions, and acknowledge appropriate

responses. The schools must involve parents and community members as full-partners in the character-building effort (The Character Education Partnership, 2000).

Character Education Programs

There are researched-based models of character education that are used to create a positive learning environment and to instill positive character within students. Viadero (cited in Brown, 2007) states that there are over 300 programs available for character education in school districts, however, only about twenty-percent have a strong research base.

With character programs that teach students do good things for others, it is often best when lessons are implemented throughout the course of the school day. This provides students with opportunity to apply what is learned in character education at both school and at home. Character education programs could be incorporated into all subject areas, as that way, teachers, parents and school counselors, work together as a team to reinforce the curriculum.

Challenge.org

There are additional ways to utilize character education within the school curriculum. The Challenge.org (2004), group provides an example of when teaching a student how to read, teachers would work to identify character education as one focal point in the reading lesson. With this process, teachers can help the students understand the content of what they are reading and then ask questions about developing good character. Discussions on the characteristics of the hero, downfall of the villain, and qualities of leadership, can emphasize the outcomes of good character. There are many teachable moments for students to learn good character through education.

Youth Frontiers

Youth Frontiers is a non-profit character education program that offers inspiring retreats for both students and educators. The programs are very powerful and are designed to have a significant impact. The retreats consist of opportunities to work closely with teens in a lively mix of small group discussions and large group activities directed by the experienced staff from Youth Frontiers. The trained staff can hold the attention of large groups of students with more than 150 participants. According to youthfrontier.org (2008), the vision of the program is to promote change in the way young people treat each other everywhere they go.

Youth Frontiers is trying to incorporate the program into every school in America. Schools can still have specific curriculum, yet deliver the content of character education as Youth Frontier Programs work at improving a school's climate while strengthening student character. The program provides lessons and discussions on values such as kindness, courage, and respect while they teach students how to be a better person.

According to Youth Frontiers Programs (2008), one of the three core elements to building a positive school climate is to teach healthy character traits to the students. The next core element is helping the student know what to do when a friend is being bullied and they are they bystander. The third core element to building a positive school environment is developing respect for educators for the important role they play in the development of their students.

Youth Frontiers Programs (2008), provide dynamic and meaningful programs that create a catalyst for change by challenging students to think about and reflect on the impact of their choices and behavior while engaging the silent majority of students to

take positive action on behalf of others. The program acknowledges and supports educators in their meaningful work with young people.

Character Counts

Another research-based program that is meant to be implemented into the entire community, not just within schools, is called Character Counts. Character Counts is built on the six pillars of life, respect, responsibility, trustworthy, fairness, caring, and citizenship. These six pillars are supported by schools and communities across the country. Character Counts (2009) is a specific program designed to help students become involved citizens with good moral character. When the Character Counts Program chose the six pillars, they wanted to pick common values that could be utilized consistently across the community whether at home, or school, on the playground, or in the workplace. One school that makes the most of the Character Counts program displays large wall-length banners in the hallway, gym, and outside the school entrance so that all the students who pass by are reminded of the six pillars of strong character.

Kindness is Contagious

Raymond and Broderick (2006), state that the number-one tool contributing to student demeanor is a character education program called Kindness is Contagious. What works to help these students develop good, positive character? Kindness is critical to the success of the program. Kindness is built into the curriculum, integrated into the daily activities, and is incorporated in lessons for all of the students. Children hold the door open for others, which created a lasting impression. Random acts of kindness occur each and every day throughout the entire school year at Brigantine Elementary (Raymond & Broderick, 2006). This school has also received the "Kindness School in New Jersey"

award three times. These experiences give students an awareness of repeating a kind deed, having it become a habit, and reaping the benefits of further developing their character while doing good things for others (Stone, 1997).

Positive character was supported everywhere at the school in New Jersey. Respect and consideration for one another was common; whether it was kids to kids, kids to teachers, and teachers to kids. The act of kindness does not have to be big or extravagant; easy things like saying "good morning" or helping someone without being asked is an effective means for developing consideration and respect for others (Raymond & Broderick, 2006).

Researchers Raymond & Broderick (2006) explain:

With this character education program, the school assigns October as "Kindness Month." Information is sent home with the student to give to their parents or guardians, so they can keep track of each act of kindness that the student demonstrates during the month of October. The random acts of kindness can happen anywhere, as it is up to the student with help from their parent to keep track of them. At the end of October, the school takes a final tally which is sent to Mission Kindness International (MKI), an organization that is devoted to character education, where MKI looks at all the participating schools, and then ranks them.

Tracking good deeds can be an effective visual for students, as helping students feel great about what they are doing when they can see the number of kind acts that their school has accumulated. Seeing the tally marks and understanding the good deeds for others can help students strive to want to continue doing them.

Each month character traits are intertwined with classroom lessons, as students practice demonstrating values that are common to building a positive personal identity while building a strong school, community and society (Stone, 1997). Parents feel the "Kindness is Contagious" program should not only be recognized for teaching students to have good character, but also for having recognition for a measureable decline in bullying, rudeness and unacceptable behavior (Raymond & Broderick, 2006).

Positive Aspects of Character Education Programs

Today, character education can reinforce positive student behaviors in schools. Without these programs students may not develop a sense pride or positive morals. They may be more likely to become connected with negative behaviors, conflict with others, or patterns of low-interest in academics, lower self-esteem, use of profanity, feeling worthless, lack of respect, and loss of empathy towards others.

Leming, Searcy and Meadows (cited in Martin & Martin, 2007) found through character education program evaluations a reduction of alcohol and drug abuse, decrease in vandalism, and drop in discipline problems. Improved school attendance, increase in student morale, and increase in student responsibility are a few of the positive aspects of character education programs. Finally, parental involvement at school and in the lives of children is greatly improved as a result of character education communication with the home (Bulach, as cited in Brown, 2007, p.143).

If schools integrate character education programs at an early age, children as young as four years old may begin to understand the importance of positive character. According to Raymond and Broderick (2006), character education must be implemented consistently, starting on the first day of school to be most effective. If all school staff are

not on board with wanting what is best for students, it may difficult for children to learn kindness and respect as they become responsible citizens. Early implementation of these programs allows students to see how important it is to be kind and treat others with respect from this day on (Raymond & Broderick, 2006).

With character education programs that schools implement, it is important to understand the positive support these programs offer to students. By implementing character education programs and integrating it as a part of a school-wide approach, student's education and positive moral development will only improve.

Character education programs can help give schools the opportunity to engage students in thinking about character and values, along with all the other positive aspects it can provide. The top traits of character education that educators feel are most important were respect for self, others and property, honesty, and self-control (Raymond and Broderick, 2006).

Adapting a curriculum that integrates character education promotes positive outcomes for students. According to a researcher in the field, Viadero (2007), character education programs can enhance student's academic progress and social development. According to Benninga, et al. (1993), schools that connect their goals and activities with character education programs show signs of improvement in academic achievement.

According to Brooks and Kann (1993), successful, effective character education programs are a result of a whole school effort. A positive and supportive school environment encourages good character building, while allowing students to gain the skills necessary for good decision making in all aspects of life. Students are gaining positive assets from being a part of character education programs. Statistics show

improvement with those students who are involved in character education programs. Stone (1997) indicated the ninety-four percent of character education program participants have noted a decrease in problem behaviors within the classroom. For example, teachers said that following the lesson on responsibility, the completion of homework assignments increased, and students were observed to be better prepared with the necessary school supplies (Stone, 1997, p. 22)

Teachers believe that character education belongs in their school. Ninety-five percent of these teachers feel it is the school counselor who has been most suitable to dispense information about character which has made such a difference within their school (Stone, 1997). According to Youth Frontiers (2008), a school district in Minnesota utilizes the researched based Youth Frontier programs as a strategy to improve discipline and reduce the number of discipline referrals. Character education contributed to decreasing nearly more than half the total incidents for grades 7-12 at the Minnesota school. In addition to the positive results in reducing discipline referrals, another area of improvement may be documented in academics.

Past research indicates that character education programs positively impact students not only in the personal/social aspects of their lives, but also in the academic domain as well (Benninga, et al. 1993). In another study, Benninga, et al. (1993), evaluated the effectiveness of the Peaceful Schools Project and the Responsive Classroom and the results indicated that schools that focused on character education as a part of their curriculum scored higher on standardized tests than those without such programs in place.

Character education programs in the schools strive to positively promote student success through various means such as encouraging them to speak respectfully toward others, volunteer throughout the community, and caring for others. These programs also provide students options for alternative activities that give opportunities to making positive choices (Benigni, 2006). Schools offering character education also report positive student qualities that lead to good character. Some of these qualities include self-respect, empathy, conflict resolution, kindness, responsibility, and cooperation.

It is important that educators understand the impact of these programs. Schools across the country that have character education programs found positive growth in student achievement, less disciplinary issues, increased involvement in extra-curricular activities, and more students involved within the community (Benigni, 2006).

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported in 1998 high school students who spend little or no time in extracurricular activities are forty-nine percent more likely to use drugs, and thirty-seven percent more likely to become teen parents than those who spend one-to-four hours per week in such extracurricular activities (Benigni, 2006, p. 42).

A study conducted by Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, and Smith (2006), found that implementing character education into school curriculum provided students with the opportunity to make a difference not only among their peers at school, but within the community as well. Starr (1999), reported that an elementary school in Virginia has all of the students participating in service learning programs. These programs allow for students to potentially merge community service into all aspects of the curriculum.

For example, Starr (1999) described the youngest students exchange visits with senior citizens. Second and third graders provide food and clothing to needy families and exchanged letters with other families in the community as part of their study of the postal system. Fourth and fifth graders adopt a ward at the local Veterans Administration hospital to learn about the technology used to treat patients there (Starr, 1999, n.p.).

Those involved in their community can learn the importance of social activism, personal identity, gratitude, kindness, and the positive effects of building a strong community. According to Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis (2000), bringing character education and concepts such as helping others, and social betterment into the curriculum will not only show above average personal and emotional development, but in turn, it will encourage altruistic behavior.

Think Right Now (2008), mentions that another result of character education may be the increase in children's self- esteem and level of confidence. Helping others often raises self-awareness, compassion and caring that may result in greater confidence and raised self-esteem. A strong level of confidence and self-esteem are two important factors in the development of well-rounded, responsible, and socially active youth. Having self-confidence and self-esteem may enhance other areas of their lives too.

The Character Education Partnership (2000) found that in order to make character education programs effective, the process has to be planned and included throughout the curriculum. Effective programs have teacher buy-in and they need to be supportive, and take leadership to make sure that the core values of character are being demonstrated. Clearly, all students are responsible for their behaviors in and out of school, but as a caring society positive expectations for behavior can be taught and reinforced. School

districts, communities, churches, and city recreational organizations can work together to reinforce student's attitudes about society.

Stone (1997, p. 22) encourages all to "Let us orchestrate opportunities which help our students to become better human beings." It has been said that it takes a village to raise a child and character education taught and reinforced by all is a step in the right direction.

Chapter Three: Summary, Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter includes a summary of the key points from the literature review. A discussion of ideas for school counselors and other educators working with character education programs will be presented, and recommendations for future research will conclude Chapter III.

Summary

Literature reviewed supports the importance of character education programs in schools and why these programs need to be incorporated as part of the curriculum. It is imperative that the teachers, counselors, parents, and school personnel work together as a team to integrate character education traits in the home, school and community. There are a variety of researched-based programs that can introduce and encourage character traits to students. Implementing these programs can not only show positive effects on student's personality and character, but may be beneficial to the student's academic success as well.

Encouraging schools to include character education programs can prove very beneficial for schools struggling with attendance, discipline and graduation issues. Character education programs are found to impact students academically, personally, and socially through as students demonstrate caring, responsibility, and respect toward others. Character education programs also encourage students to volunteer within their community while building positive relationships with others. Strong morals and values can assist students with everyday decision-making and problem-solving skills.

It is important that educators understand the impact these programs can have. With the pressures teens face today as a result of media, computers and cell phone use, it appears that some students are confused about the ethics and best options to choose. Schools face many challenges to improve student learning, increase test scores and hold students accountable for their behavior. Schools are also trying to provide safe learning environments for all students. Schools can use character education programs to help students understand the importance of good character while decreasing undesirable behavior.

Character education is important for all students. School staff and families need to communicate and work together to gain knowledge and understand character education programs. According to Pearson, et al. (2000), developing good character requires students to recognize the good, crave the good, and put forth the good. Character education often falls into the school's hands. The school, along with parents or guardians must help children identify core values, adapt and commit to those values, and then put them into practice within their own lives (p. 243).

Discussion

Schools may want to include character education to assist students in building healthy character that will allow them to succeed academically, personally, and socially. The education and development of students' character, specifically targeting social betterment and helping others as a means to personal growth needs to be a part of the school's curriculum.

When schools use character education programs, they teach students enduring lessons that may include developing and instilling a positive self-esteem, understanding

the importance of respecting one another, and taking on the responsibility of working together with others. Schools and families that help students identify their values, develop goals and make decisions, and solve problems are likely to see improved school moral.

It is important for teachers, staff members and school counselors, to promote character education to create an optimal learning environment, create a school culture welcoming of diversity, and provide safe schools. Good character education programs may inspire students to continue achieving academically while reducing unwanted behavior. Classrooms need to be a place where students, teachers, counselors and others live and grow together and it needs to be a place where all students can grow academically, emotionally, physically, and socially.

A good character education programs can play a critical role in defining what positive student behavior includes. Character education can be an effective tool to help students explore, define and understand their values. Character education just might be an option to assist schools to reach their goals of student achievement.

Recommendations for Further Research

These recommendations are made to continue the support for promoting character education in schools. As new programs are developed, school counselors can collect the necessary data to demonstrate effectiveness of the programs. Schools can do research to track the attendance, discipline referrals, and participation in extracurricular activities to see if character education is making a difference. By using hard data, schools can improve school climate, clarify student expectations and create safe learning environments.

As more schools are able to incorporate character education into their curriculum, the stronger the data will be indicating changes or modifications to newly developed programs to best fit the changing needs of society. Collaborating and working on integrating character education in the schools is a team effort and further research may indicate what is best for all students in that school and community.

Sharing future research could indicate how character traits may be made part of most academic lessons including foreign language, music and physical education. Traits can also be taught through school assemblies, display boards in the school, and school and community projects. Ultimately, by linking these programs with the school's curriculum, children may develop a greater vision for their communities and the world as a whole.

Further research may document an awareness of the interconnectedness of each other and the positive character one can embody then pass on to others. Future researchers may want to explore character education to determine a relationship between cultures and ethnicity to determine if the core values are the same for schools in diverse communities.

Socially and personally, children will continue to develop their character, through their home environments, communities and schools. With a more enriched environment the effective schools will continue to do research to include character education to determine the correlation between success and one's character. The future of the child in a global society is too important to disregard the need for the development and implementation of character education programs in schools.

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