

10-1-2004

Training Public School Teachers to Teach CHARACTER COUNTS!

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Recommended Citation

Donaldson, J. L. (2004). Training Public School Teachers to Teach CHARACTER COUNTS!. *The Journal of Extension*, 42(5), Article 22. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol42/iss5/22>

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October 2004 // Volume 42 // Number 5 // Ideas at Work // 5IAW3



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NEXT ARTICLE



Training Public School Teachers to Teach CHARACTER COUNTS!

Abstract

Through training, program planning, and evaluation in several states, 4-H has been a partner in the National CHARACTER COUNTS! Coalition. This article describes the results of one new approach to character education, training for public school teachers through their in-service education requirement. The instructional approach satisfied all six process standards of the National Staff development Council. The results of a post-test only questionnaire showed that the participants viewed the training as helpful, with the majority planning to include at least one new character education technique in their teaching repertoire. Implications, including the need for additional teacher training, are discussed.

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Introduction

CHARACTER COUNTS! (CC!) is a national coalition of non-profit organizations taking action to teach young people especially the "Six Pillars of Character": Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring, and Citizenship. Extension 4-H youth development programs have provided instruction and evaluation for a host of community-based CC! projects. A review of the National CC! Web site revealed nine states with Extension 4-H references (CC!, 2003).

One community-based project occurred in Giles County, Tennessee, where a coalition formed representing government, public service agencies, education, and churches. The Giles County public school system did not have a character education program, and educational leaders had little or no information regarding implementing such a program. Based on the tenet that effective character education is pervasive in the school and community (CC!, 1998), the local coalition identified teacher training in CC! as a critical need for building stronger character in youth.

As a graduate of the Josephson Institute of Ethics Character Development Seminar, the County Extension 4-H Agent designed and delivered a CC! in-service training for public school teachers. This training was one part of a comprehensive character education plan of work that included, among other strategies, a CC! youth public speaking contest, a local day camp, newsletters and club presentations, and volunteer training.

Innovative Approach

The National Staff Development Council (2004) promotes a set of standards for teacher in-service training with the goal that America's state and local school systems would achieve these ideals by 2007. The Extension 4-H Agent used the plethora of CC! materials to design a training consistent with the six National Staff Development Council process standards (2004). These standards were endorsed by the Tennessee State Board of Education (2004), an oversight group appointed by the Governor that set policy for the state's public schools.

Training adults to teach youth is not new; however, designing Extension training that satisfied an in-service requirement for public school teachers offered a new Extension opportunity. Of the Extension 4-H references on the National CC! website, this is the first effort toward fulfilling an in-service requirement for public school teachers. In-service training provides a captive audience of

educators who daily reach large numbers of children and adults.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the in-service training was to inform teachers about CC! and provide them with practical ideas for implementing a classroom and school-wide character education program. The program had four specific objectives; to help teachers to:

1. Explain the CC! movement;
2. Describe how CC! makes an impact for youth;
3. Utilize the six pillars of character to build stronger character in youth by incorporating CC! into academics; and
4. Gain ideas for teaching character throughout the school.

The instructional strategies supporting each of these objectives are shown in the in-service training schedule (Table 1).

Table 1.
In-Service Training Schedule

Hour and Objective	Instructional Strategy
8 am - Explain the CC! movement.	Explain the national coalition and check for understanding with questions (CC!, 1998).
9 am - Describe how CC! makes an impact for youth.	Present mini-lecture of research findings (CC! 2003b; South Dakota State University, 2003) followed by group discussion of key points.
9:30 am - Utilize the six pillars of character to build stronger character in youth by incorporating CC! into academics.	Model grade-appropriate lessons from <i>Good Ideas to Help Young People Develop Good Character</i> (CC!, 2002).
10:00 am - Gain ideas for teaching character throughout the school.	Model lessons from <i>Exercising Character Activity Guides</i> (Adkins, 1995).
11:00 am - Review resources	Conduct buzz groups to pinpoint teaching ideas for each pillar of character; highlight curriculum; highlight local coalition; highlight local Extension 4-H youth development plan of work in character development.
Noon - Lunch Break	
1:00 pm - Summary	Address any questions from participants; conduct written evaluation; and present door prizes.
1:30 - 2:30 pm - Collaboration	Provide an opportunity for teachers to begin work on bulletin boards and joint lesson plans.

Methods for Local Scheduling

The Giles County Board of Education has a decentralized method of teacher in-service training. Each principal has administrative responsibility for scheduling five in-service training days, on a variety of topics, at the individual school site each year. The length of training (5 days) is a state mandate, but the training topics are not mandated. The county's eight school principals were contacted via personal letter that described the proposed CC! in-service training, and two

elementary school principals were also contacted through personal visits by two different coalition members. The two principals receiving personal visits scheduled the CC! in-service training at their schools. Information was not obtained from nonparticipating principals/schools.

Methods for Satisfying the National Standards

Standard 1: The Training Is Data-Driven

The standard states that teacher training should use "disaggregated student data." The aim is for teachers to set priorities and monitor progress toward instructional goals. With no convenient or ethical way to collect and disseminate disaggregated data, the Extension 4-H Agent showed how outcomes were measured in other programs highlighted on the evidence page of the National CC! Web site (CC!, 2003) and outcomes used in a character education study by South Dakota State University (2003). These outcomes were shared to demonstrate how baseline data was collected and used to measure character education outcomes.

Standard 2: The Training Is Evaluated

This standard establishes the need for evaluative information from more than one source that will direct teacher training improvement and also show outcomes from the teacher training. A one-page survey was created based on the training objectives with a close-ended response scale. Additionally, one question asked if the participants planned to use what they learned (yes/no) and to describe "yes" answers.

Surveys were distributed, completed, and collected at the end of the training. Of the 80 participants surveyed, 70 completed surveys were returned, for an 87% response rate. The questionnaire used a Likert-type scale with these response categories: 5=helpful, 4=fairly helpful, 3=slightly helpful, 2=no help at all, and 1=not applicable. Eight out of 10 teachers rated the training as "helpful" in assisting them to explain the CC! movement, utilize the Six Pillars of Character, and gain ideas for teaching character. Regarding the participants' knowledge of how CC! makes an impact for youth, more than 90% described the program as "helpful" (Table 2).

Table 2.
Participants' Rating of CC! Training (N=70)¹

To what extent did today's training help you to . . . ?	Helpful n %	Fairly Helpful n %	Slightly Helpful n %
Explain the CC! Movement	62 (88.6%)	8 (11.4%)	– ()
Describe how CC! makes an impact for youth	65 (92.9%)	4 (5.7%)	1 (1.4%)
Utilize the "Six Pillars of Character" to build stronger character in youth	62 (88.6%)	8 (11.4%)	– ()
Gain ideas for teaching character	62 (88.6%)	8 (11.4%)	– ()
¹ Likert-type scale was used where 1=n/a, 2=no help at all, 3=slightly helpful, 4=fairly helpful, and 5=helpful.			

The majority of teachers (n=38; 54%) planned to use at least one technique presented in the training. In an open-ended question regarding the specific technique they planned to use, four answers were given: role plays, bulletin boards, lessons from the *Exercising Character Activity Guides* (Adkins, 1995) and songs to promote good character.

Standard 3: The Training Content Is Research-Based

This standard alludes to the fact that training should assist teachers in making decisions based on an appropriate research-base. The Extension Agent highlighted research findings from the South Dakota State University (2003), which was, at the time, the largest study completed of a character

education program.

Standards 4 and 5: The Training Is Appropriately Designed to Achieve Its Objectives, and the Training Applies the Body of Knowledge in Human Learning

Teacher training must use "learning strategies appropriate to the intended goal" (standard four) and make an application of "knowledge about human learning and change" (standard five). Instruction included mini-lecture, group discussion, buzz groups, and modeling lesson plans such as those found in the *Exercising Character Activity Guides* by Adkins (1995). In addition to *Exercising Character*, the trainer introduced and modeled a number of strategies for teaching character, including the use of videos, books, and bulletin boards. During the training, examples were provided of how character education enriches the cognitive (e.g., ethical decision-making) and affective (e.g., empathy) domains.

Standard 6: Collaboration

This standard states that in-service training ought to "provide educators with the knowledge and skills to collaborate." The training concluded by providing teachers at least one hour to plan instruction, build lesson plans, construct materials, etc., with their colleagues.

Implications

Based on the evaluation results and the experiences of the Extension 4-H Agent who served as the trainer, these suggestions are offered for conducting a similar in-service training.

1. Consider the role of community leaders as central to in-service training success. Both school principals scheduling the Giles County in-service training events at their school had received personal visits from members of the local CC! coalition.
2. The training provider should work closely with one or more teachers so that the local teacher training norms will be understood and incorporated into the training schedule. In the Giles County case, close contact with at least one teacher at each school allowed the Extension 4-H Agent to plan for the collaboration session (which also met a national standard). The typical in-service at both schools provided at least 1 hour for teachers to plan lessons and construct classroom materials with their colleagues.
3. Future character education training for elementary teachers should focus on more in-depth instructional strategies related to role plays, bulletin boards, songs, and the *Exercising Character Activity Guides* (Adkins, 1995). Other instructional tools shown and used during the training included videos, books, and games (other than the games found in *Exercising Character*), yet these were not listed by the teachers as strategies they planned to use.

While the real impact of this program will not be seen immediately, effective instruction is one precursor to a social change such as personal character. The position of public school teachers should assist in motivating change among schools, youth and the community at large. The Extension 4-H Youth Development Program does have a role in providing in-service training for professionals. Relationships between Extension 4-H Agents and local school administrators should be strengthened and utilized to achieve Extension's priority program outcomes. Positive teacher reactions, as seen by the high ratings of this training, demonstrate that additional training and follow-up training opportunities should be pursued.

Acknowledgment

CHARACTER COUNTS!SM is a service mark of the CHARACTER COUNTS! Coalition, a project of the Josephson Institute of Ethics.

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