

2009

A review of character education programs and their impact on student performance

Cara Marie Ludemann

Copyright ©2009 Cara Marie Ludemann

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp>



Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), and the [Humane Education Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

A review of character education programs and their impact on student performance

Abstract

The teaching of character education in the U.S. public school system is being proposed by many educational leaders as a way of reducing deadly violence perpetrated by children and addressing the broad spectrum of social ills found throughout the country (Lickona, 2004). This review addresses research regarding the purposes of character education, roles of the teacher, program implementation, evaluation of programs, and financial considerations. This review reports elements found in successful character education programs. The review supports the value of implementing character education into a school's curriculum but also identifies obstacles that need to be overcome.

**A REVIEW OF CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND THEIR IMPACT ON
STUDENT PERFORMANCE**

A Graduate Review

Submitted to the

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

Cara Marie Ludemann

July, 2009

This Review by: Cara Marie Ludemann

Titled: A Review of Character Education Programs and Their Impact on Student Performance

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts.

July 27, 2009
Date Approved

Dr. Lynn Nielsen, Graduate Faculty Reader

July 27, 2009
Date Approved

Dr. Donna Schumacher Douglas, Graduate Faculty Reader

August 3, 2009
Date Approved

Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Statement of the Problem.....	7
Research Questions.....	8
Definitions.....	8
Significance of Study	8
Methodology	9
Method to Locate Information.....	9
Method to Select Sources	9
Procedures	9
Literature Review	10
What is Character Education?.....	10
Why Teach Character Education?.....	11
The Role of the Teacher	12
Implementation of Programs	13
Opposing Views on Character Education	15
Evaluating Character Education.....	17
Financial Considerations	18
Successful Programs.....	19
Teacher, Family, and Community Involvement.....	22
Lasting Effects.....	25
Conclusions and Recommendations.....	26
References	33

Abstract

The teaching of character education in the U.S. public school system is being proposed by many educational leaders as a way of reducing deadly violence perpetrated by children and addressing the broad spectrum of social ills found throughout the country (Lickona, 2004). This review addresses research regarding the purposes of character education, roles of the teacher, program implementation, evaluation of programs, and financial considerations. This review reports elements found in successful character education programs. The review supports the value of implementing character education into a school's curriculum but also identifies obstacles that need to be overcome.

Introduction

The teaching of character education in the U.S. public school system is being proposed by many educational leaders as a way of reducing deadly violence perpetrated by children and addressing the broad spectrum of social ills found throughout the country (Lickona, 2004). The problem is illustrated by the increase in deaths attributed to the use of guns by young people. Between 1980 and 1997, young adults between the ages of 19-24 were responsible for the increase of deaths by gun fire from 5,000 to 7,500 and there is no evidence to suggest that this number has begun to improve (Lickona, 2004). One example that our schools are not immune from this problem was when a teacher and four middle school students were murdered in 1998 in Jonesboro, Arkansas. Also, in 1999, fourteen students, including the two shooters, along with one teacher were killed and 23 others were wounded during a one hour rampage at Columbine High School (Infoplease, 2009). More currently, on March 21, 2005, in Red Lake, Minnesota, a 16 year old student killed his grandfather and companion, then went to school where he killed a teacher, five students, and a security guard, and finally turned the gun on himself (Infoplease, 2009).

These examples should not imply that character education is designed solely to keep children from committing major crimes; rather it was designed to focus on all aspects of an individual's character. In November of 1993, character education provided the theme for an issue of *Educational Leadership*. In the article entitled, "The Return of Character Education," Thomas Lickona identified the impetus behind the renewed interest in character education:

Increasing numbers of people across the ideological spectrum believe that our society is in deep moral trouble. The disheartening signs are everywhere: the breakdown of the family; the deterioration of civility in everyday life; rampant greed at a time when one in five children is poor; an omnipresent sexual culture that fills our television and movie screens with sleaze, beckoning the young toward sexual activity at ever earlier ages; the enormous betrayal of children

through sexual abuse; and the 1992 report of the National Research Council that says the United States is now the most violent of all industrialized nations. (p. 6)

Character education is the continuing effort to develop values that are good for the individual and good for society. The objective goodness of values, as described by Lickona (2004) is based on the fact that they affirm our human dignity, promote the well-being and happiness of the individual, serve the common good, define our rights and obligations, and meet the classical ethical tests of reversibility (i.e. Would you want to be treated this way?) and universal behavior (Would you want all persons to act this way in a similar situation?).

Character education involves teaching children about general democratic values including honesty, kindness, generosity, courage, freedom, equality and respect (Rusnak, 1998). It is not about advocating religious beliefs even though many religious groups are also influenced by character education traits (Lickona, 1993). In 1836, because of concern of the Bible being used as the public school's source book, W. McGuffey developed the *McGuffey Readers*, which removed the use of the Bible to teach character in the classroom (Lickona, 1993), but still incorporated numerous scripture references and moralizing.

A major problem schools face when implementing a character education program is how to identify which teachers are prepared to teach this content. Few would have had training on character education as a part of their university preparation (Rusnak, 1998). Therefore, this would require a major in-service training program which would be both expensive and time consuming to a school district. But perhaps an even bigger problem is how schools integrate character education into curriculum which is already strained in an effort to teach the subjects required by the school district (Rusnak, 1998). These issues require serious discussion by teachers, administrators and school boards.

If character education is to accomplish what its advocates suggest it can, it will require a joint effort of the teachers and the parents (Murphy, 1998). Not only must parents support the program but they must also participate actively in the lessons being taught in the school (Murphy, 1998). One researcher reported that “when parents are involved, the effects on students are clearly positive” (Brannon, 2008, p. 56).

Within the movement of character education, there is some skepticism since there is little research to support its value even though common sense would suggest that teaching good values is the right thing to do. This review is designed to identify and report on current research on the topic. Efforts to structure a plan for character education took place in November, 1993. At that time, the Josephson Institute of Ethics invited more than 30 distinguish people to come together to develop a plan for teaching what they believed would be the essence of good character. Lickona (1993) stated the group was made up of a broad cross-section of people representing teachers, school boards, unions, universities, youth organizations, and religious groups. They developed what came to be known as the Aspen Declaration of Character Education (Lickona, 1993) which included six values they called pillars. These pillars are trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, caring, fairness and citizenship. These values became the foundation for the Character Counts program. They have become the foundation for many character education programs currently being offered across the country.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this review is to examine current research on character education to determine if it is effective based upon the time and expense required and how it is implemented. This review focuses on research regarding the purposes of character education, roles of the teacher, program implementation, evaluation of programs, and financial considerations.

Research Questions

This review will analyze character education as we currently know it and identify positive and negative aspects to be considered when implementing a program. The following questions will be addressed:

1. What is the role of the teacher, school district, and community in character education?
2. What research provides evidence that character education has an impact on student behavior?
3. How is character education evaluated?
4. Should character education be integrated into the existing curriculum or be taught as a separate subject?

Definitions

1. Character Education – “Any school initiated program, designed in cooperation with other community institutions, to shape directly and systematically the behavior of young people by influencing explicitly the non-relativistic values believed directly to bring about that behavior” (Lockwood, 1997, p. 6).
2. Character – comes from the Greek word charakter which means “enduring mark” (Murphy, 1998, p. 5).

Significance of Study

The significance of this study is to determine whether current research on character education supports the time and cost needed to implement it into a school district’s current curriculum. Abourjilie (2000) reported “character education is caring about your students and teaching so we can help improve or advance the lives of the children we teach” (p. 13).

Methodology

Method to Locate Information

The author of this review located information by using the databases in ERIC, the Library of Congress, and the search engine Panther Prowl through the Rod Library. Search terms used in this study consisted of character education, moral education, review, studies, ethical values, character programs, and conflict resolution. The term “character education review” produced the greatest results with articles that provided the author with information for this review as well as links to other articles that were useful. Books were also identified and read on the subject. Key terms used in research were community involvement, cost, effectiveness, teacher responsibility, and integration.

Method to Select Sources

The original criteria, set by the author, regarding the selection of sources was to choose documents that had been developed during the last ten years. After completing months of research, the author determined that in order to find more evidence as to why character education has become important to schools again, the author would go back farther than 1998. So, the date set for research documents spanned the last 24 years. Sources chosen were ones that included studies with data to support program outcomes, first-hand accounts or experiences with character education programs, or reviews written by educators regarding the impacts of character education in the elementary classroom.

Procedures

The author of this review developed an annotated bibliography to organize information. Within this bibliography, the author provided article summaries including the purpose and hypothesis of the article as well as the results the article was presenting. The author also

developed an outline where key factors to be addressed were listed along with sub-topics to support them.

Literature Review

A significant amount of research has been conducted and published in the area of character education. This literature review will analyze and report a range of opinions and findings regarding this topic.

What is Character Education?

Lockwood (1997) refers to character education as “any school-initiated program, designed in cooperation with other community institutions, to shape directly and systematically the behavior of young people by influencing explicitly the non-relativistic values believed directly to bring about that behavior (p. 6). Abourjilie (2000) reported that “character education is a label recently placed on what is considered the essence of true, quality teaching” (p. 13). Bohli, Farmer, and Ryan (2001) stated that “character education is about teaching our students how to make wise decisions and act on them” (p. 3). They go on to state that it is also about helping students live a good life where they contribute to the good of society. Brannon (2008) stated that “character education helps create a calmer and more caring atmosphere that helps children focus on learning” (p. 5). Children can build better friendships because they are able to think about others, not just themselves (Brannon, 2008). Lickona (2004) reported that “wisdom, justice, fortitude, self-control, love, positive attitude, hard work, integrity, gratitude, and humility” (p. 226-227) are essential virtues defining character education. Character Counts! (Charactercounts!, 2009) uses six virtues when describing character education. They are trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship.

Why Teach Character Education?

As far back as the 1800s, some form of character education has been addressed in schools. Whether it was referred to as virtues, values, or traits, some sort of label has been placed on the terms associated with good character. The movement toward including character education in typical school curricula has picked up momentum in the last two decades. Vincent (1999) reported “Whether or not character education should be part of the curriculum in our school is no longer an issue – we have now moved to determining what we should be doing to facilitate the character development of our students” (p. 3).

Lickona (2004) reported on a character education study completed by the Josephson Institute for Ethics which identified the following three findings.

1. Three out of four students admitted to cheating on an exam in school during the past year.
2. Nearly four out of ten students said they had stolen something from a store during the past year.
3. Nearly four out of ten said they would lie to get a job.

Lickona (2004) also reported on a survey conducted by Who’s Who Among American High School Students that 80 percent of students admitted to cheating in school, the highest amount in the twenty-nine year history of the survey. In a similar survey conducted by Who’s Who Among America’s Teachers, veteran teachers said that students had declined in four main areas that not only affect the effectiveness of the classroom but also have an impact on society overall. The survey results showed that students are less respectful of authority, are less ethical/moral, are less responsible, and more self-centered (Vincent, 1999).

Brannon (2008) stated that character education has a positive effect on things such as achievement, classroom behaviors, and long-term test scores. Brannon (2008) also reported that character education programs reduce risk factors that are associated with school failure in students. Vincent (1999) stated “we must recognize that not all character is taught - much is caught – learned by watching the actions of adults” (p. 15). Therefore, the adults in schools have the opportunity to demonstrate the right way to behave in the millions of classrooms across our country.

The Role of the Teacher

Vincent (1999) summarized the role of the teacher well by stating “if you want to make permanent change in the attitudes and beliefs of children as they grow to adulthood, you must model good behavior and right conduct and explain to children what good practice you expect of them” (p. 158).

Sizer and Sizer (1999) wrote “schools have long had three core tasks: to prepare young people for the world of work, to prepare them to use their minds well, and to prepare them to be thoughtful citizens and decent human beings” (p. 121).

Lickona (2004) stated that when students feel connected with important people in their lives, such as teachers, they are less likely to participate in behaviors that jeopardize their future. Lickona (2004) also listed fourteen strategies to help students as well as teachers develop character in the classroom. They are:

1. Name the virtues needed to be a good student.
2. Teach as if purpose matters.
3. Teach as if excellence matters.
4. Teach as if integrity matters.

5. Teach as if students can take responsibility for their learning.
6. Use an instructional process that makes character-building part of every lesson.
7. Manage the classroom so that character matters.
8. Teach curriculum content as if character matters.
9. Use a school-wide curriculum that teaches moral and intellectual virtues.
10. Structure discussion as if character matters.
11. Teach as if truth matters.
12. Teach with a commitment to balance.
13. Model balance and fairness in dealing with controversial issues.
14. Teach as if justice matters.

Murphy (1998) reported that teachers promote good character both in and out of the classroom by challenging students. Murphy (1998) went on to say that teachers need to not only have high standards for all of their students but they must also have high standards for themselves.

Implementation of Programs

There is no clear evidence in the research on a common implementation strategy. Rather implementation of character education seems to be localized to the preferences of a particular school or a school district.

Bohlin, Farmer, and Ryan (2001) reported “character education can be very effective when it is taught across the curriculum” (p. 38-39). They go on to explain that the first step teachers should take when looking at character education is to determine what they are doing to include character education in their current curriculum.

Should an individual teacher wish to incorporate character education in their classroom, Rusnak (1998, p. 11) identified 5 elements to be considered:

1. How to focus students' attention on the ethical dimension of the story.
2. How to lead students to thoughtfully consider ethical principles.
3. How to focus students' attention on the moral aspects of a historical event and how to analyze and discuss it.
4. How to engage students in the moral of a story and get them to see how it may apply to their lives.
5. How to build among students the skill of moral discourse, which is not just casual argumentation but serious thinking about what is correct.

Implementation of character education within specific subject areas was discussed by Rusnak (1998). For example, in the study of history, teachers can focus discussions on the lives of prominent women and men. In English, while studying literature, teachers can draw models of self-discipline, and in the study of health, teachers can show students that they must maintain a certain degree of self-control if they wish to have a healthy body (Rusnak 1998).

Vincent, (1999) also developed a list of areas that need to be considered and included when implementing a character education program in a school:

1. Establishment of rules and procedures.
2. Cooperative learning.
3. Teaching for thinking.
4. Reading for character.
5. Service learning, both within and outside the school environment.

Vincent (1999) finishes by saying if each of these areas is addressed, the education of the students will be enhanced by adding character development to academics.

Opposing Views on Character Education

Research conducted by Vincent (1999) and Rusnak (1998) on character education support its implementation. However there is also a significant body of literature that calls into question the validity of teaching character. The most prominent person in opposition to character education was John Dewey, America's chief philosopher of education in the early 1900s. Moral education, as he referred to it, was the moral organization of the schools and not the instruction in virtue formation. He wrote, "a moral agent is one who proposes for himself an end to be achieved by action and does what is necessary to obtain the end" (Dewey, 1981, as cited in Murphy, 1998, p. 18). Dewey believed that moral education was not just teachers instructing students what to do or not to do, but it was a process to help them decide what to do. He went on to report that "moral education in school is practically hopeless when we set up the development of character as its supreme end" (Dewey, 1916, as cited in Murphy, 1998, p.18). In essence he wanted to structure the learning environment for sophisticated moral development rather than "Sunday School Lessons" on being good. A compromise position is exemplified in the Child Development Project [CDP] (Child Development Project, 2009). Their approach places character as one of several areas of focus. The CDP focuses on building students' academic skills while deepening their commitment to values such as kindness, helpfulness, personal responsibility, and respect for others at the same time (Child Development Project, 2009). The CDP's conceptual framework is similar to Dewey's approach as they both believe overall moral development is the key to good character.

In addition to Dewey, the research of Hartshorne and May supported that character education was ineffective (as cited in Murphy, 1998). In 1930, by the use of surveys distributed to 11,000 students in grades five through eight, Hartshorne and May determined there was little evidence to support that character education changed the behavior in students for the good (as cited in Murphy, 1998).

More recently, opponents to character education would include administrators, school boards, and families. Brannon (2008) reported that administrators and school boards may not support taking time away from core curriculum subjects for implementation of a character education program. Brannon went on to state that some families may be uncomfortable with the values instilled in a school's character education program if those values do not match practice at home.

Some researchers are unsupportive of character education programs. For example, Black (1999) stated that "most character education programs aren't worth the time, money and effort that's required to add them to the school day" (p. 24). Black (1999) goes on to report that "the fact is kids seldom practice what their schools' character programs preach" (p. 24). Leming (1993, as cited by Murphy, 1998), a researcher at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, stated that students may respond to prizes for behavior and pledges chanted in the classroom but typically will behave the same way they did before these activities when a situation arises that relies on them to use good character. Black (1999) supports the beliefs of Leming (1993, as cited by Murphy, 1998) by reporting that "kids learn in contextualized settings, and they seldom transfer what they've learned to other texts" (p. 24). Black finishes by stating that no matter what students chant in their classrooms, or promise when they recite a pledge, they may not relate it to their behavior outside of the classroom.

Evaluating Character Education

Since character education is finding its way back into the public school system, research has been conducted by Nielsen (2003), Lockwood (1997), and Lickona (2004) evaluating the effectiveness of character education programs. In a qualitative assessment of a citizenship program, Nielsen (2003) reported “while research is lacking regarding the effectiveness of character education programs, a growing body of knowledge enlightens our understanding of moral reasoning and its progressive development from childhood through adulthood” (p. 3). Nielsen also went on to state that while much effort has been placed on implementation of these programs, less attention has been given towards their effectiveness (Nielsen, 2003).

Lockwood (1997) and Lickona (2004) stated that an effective way to determine if a school’s character education program is working is to monitor the number of discipline referrals in a given amount of time. Lockwood (1997) went on to report real outcomes about how well character education is working are revealed in how engaged students are with their school work.

Linden (as cited by Lockwood, 1997), the co-developer of a character education curriculum (RESPECT), stated that by placing a character education program into a school’s improvement plan, data can be collected to show whether the program is having a positive effect or not. Linden went on to say that conducting teacher and student surveys about school climate is an appropriate way to evaluate character education programs effectiveness (as cited by Lockwood, 1997). Linden finished by stating that some of the best indicators that a character education program is successful is by personal observations (as cited by Lockwood, 1997).

When asked if character education improves learning, Lickona (2004) was affirmative. He went on to state that two things must happen in order for this to be the case. First, the quality of human relationships between adults and kids, and kids and each other, must improve through

the school's character education program, in turn improving the teaching and learning environment. Second, teaching students the skills and habits of working hard and making the most of their education must be part of a character education program. Lickona's (2004) conclusions regarding the qualities of a good character education program are consistent with other research studies conducted by Brannon (2008), Lockwood (1997) and Vincent (1999).

Financial Considerations

During the review of the literature, there were few studies found that focused on the overall costs for including character education in curriculum. However, Rusnak (1998) stated programs can vary in cost due to training and materials needed to implement a program. As an example, Rusnak (1998) referred to the Heartwood Institute that provides curriculum for grades kindergarten through middle school. Developed curriculum can range in price from \$400 to \$1,000 depending on what a school's needs are. Another example Rusnak (1998) provided was regarding the Character Education Institute, located in Texas. This institute sells kits including pre-developed curriculum that can range in price from \$115 to \$140. Should a district choose to implement character education, the following costs should to be considered as reported by Rusnak (1998):

1. Expense of training school faculty.
2. Materials necessary for each participating classroom.
3. Equipment such as computers and computer programs.
4. Support Staff.
5. Training of community including families.

Overall costs will vary greatly based upon how in-depth a school system would like to go with their character education program.

Successful Programs

Determining if programs are successful is something that must be done in order to support research that states it must be included in every part of the curriculum (Bohlin, Farmer, and Ryan, 2001). Murphy (1998) stated there are six components that must be present in a school's character education program if it is to be considered successful. They are:

1. Commitment to developing students' sense of moral character and good citizenship through a strong school mission statement.
2. Staff, students, and the community must have a high level of participation in the development phase and decision-making process regarding the character qualities needing to be addressed and activities that the school will use to foster good character.
3. Teachings in the classroom must include curriculum that promotes character and use of teaching strategies, such as cooperative learning, learning styles instruction, and that authentic assessment must be used with high standards set for student academic performance.
4. Teachers, students, and community must all be involved in creating a caring school that is safe, drug-free, and nurturing. The school needs to be involved in community and global affairs.
5. A student recognition program that is well-planned; and communicates, encourages, and reinforces the character qualities, behaviors, and attitudes that are valued by the school and community needs to be in place.
6. A comprehensive commitment to character education that all the faculty, staff, administrators, students, and the community are in favor of. Teachers must be

committed to integrating character education into the various subjects they teach. All staff members must be committed to reinforcing character traits in places outside the classroom such as the lunchroom or the playground. The community must be supportive by promoting good character in local neighborhoods as well as in the media.

The following are programs that the author found which show high effectiveness regarding character education. The Character Counts! Program (Character Counts!, 2009) is recognized for two aspects. The first aspect is being an educational framework for teaching universal values. This means the program helps children learn how to make better choices, and to not only improve their own life, but the lives of others around them. The second aspect is being known as a national coalition of organizations that support each other. Coalition members include the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, Boys and Girls Club of America, as well as the National PTA. Together, these groups work with the Character Counts! Program and teach children how to demonstrate good character traits. The coalition also helps schools and communities recognize the importance of developing good character in their youth. Character Counts! is not a curriculum or an add-on program. It is character education that works with a preexisting curriculum. This program is focused on the six pillars that the Josephson Institute of Ethics developed and is also referred to as the Aspen Declaration of Character Education (Lickona, 1993). The six pillars include: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. The Character Counts! Program (Character Counts!, 2009) states when kids learn a consistent set of universal values and when teachers model these same values, behavior improves and educational focus soars.

The second successful program the author wishes to highlight is Characterplus (Characterplus, 2009). This program was developed in 1988 by a large group of educators, parents, and business leaders who were concerned with the deterioration of basic values in today's society. This program was developed to address issues relating to student character, responsibility, and academic achievement. As stated on their website (Characterplus, 2009), there are ten essential traits that need to be included in a character education program if it is to be effective:

1. Community participation.
2. Character education policy.
3. Identified and defined traits.
4. Integrated curriculum.
5. Experiential learning.
6. Evaluation.
7. Adult role models.
8. Staff development.
9. Student involvement and leadership.
10. Sustaining the program.

Characterplus is a successful program because it promotes the development of good character not only in the classroom, but also in the community. It has a clear, defined mission statement that shows a commitment to developing students' character and it contains staff development opportunities where teachers can learn more effective ways to integrate the Characterplus program into their current curriculum (Characterplus, 2009).

The third program the author wishes to cite is the Child Development Project (CPD) (Child Development Project, 2009). This program is not widely known due to the fact that it does not use the term character. This recognized program has one of the most effective and well-researched approaches to character education. CDP focuses on creating caring, supportive, learning environments to assist students feel a sense of belonging or connection to their school. CDP provides assistance to school district's by supplying what they refer to as complementary modules which include components, to be included in current curriculum, in many areas such as community building and reading.

The last program the author would like to present is that of an individual school's effort to put character education into their classrooms. As reported by Struck and Miller in 1993 (Iowa ASCP, 2009) the faculty at the Price Laboratory School (PLS) was concerned that their students were not able to transfer the level of respect demonstrated in the classroom to places outside of it such as on the playground or in the lunchroom. This concern triggered the development of the PLS Elementary Citizenship Program. The program focuses on the Six Pillars of Character Counts! as mentioned earlier, and continues to be revamped to assist in current needs and interests of the faculty, students, and families of PLS. Because of their continued effort with the program, PLS was awarded the First Amendment Project Schools Award and the Iowa Character Award, both in 2005.

Teacher, Family, and Community Involvement

Murphy (1998) stated if character education is to have a long lasting positive effect it must have significant involvement from teachers, parents and the community. This should come as no surprise as educational leaders have known for years the value of parental involvement in the successful education of their children (Lickona, 2004). This may be more of an issue at this

time because of the number of single parent families, recent increases in immigrant families with limited language skills, and the high mobility of the population in general. In former years, families relied on aunts, uncles, and other extended family members to assist a young person in developing positive character traits. Those influences are not as readily available in today's society. To support this point, Lickona (2004) reported "helping parents to be good parents is the single most important thing a school can do to help students develop strong character and succeed academically" (p. 35). Lickona (2004) went on to state that there are 11 principles that should be shared with parents. These principles are:

1. Make character development a high priority.
2. Be an authoritative parent.
3. Love children.
4. Teach by example.
5. Manage the moral environment.
6. Use direct teaching to form conscience and habits.
7. Teach good judgment.
8. Discipline wisely.
9. Solve conflicts fairly.
10. Provide opportunities to practice the virtues.
11. Foster spiritual development.

As shown by Lickona (1993), Lockwood (1997), and Brannon (2008), there is an abundant amount of research illustrating the way in which teachers include character education in their classrooms. For instance, Murphy (1998) stated that teachers believe that one way to show respect is to treat the classroom as if it belongs to everyone. An example Murphy (1998)

used to demonstrate this behavior was if someone wished to visit a classroom, rather than the teacher making the decision if it was ok or not, the teacher asked the permission of the class so the students felt ownership of their classroom. Since the teacher showed respect for the students' opinions, the teacher should expect the same kind of respect from her students. Rusnak (1998) stated that teachers feel that character education is the way they relate to their students and to the material being presented. Character education is demonstrated by involving students in the life of the classroom turning the classroom into a community (Rusnak, 1998).

New Hampton, Iowa public schools have done more than just teach the concepts of character education during the course of the school year. The district has also been proactive in involving the community. For instance, the New Hampton community has posted the six pillars of character taught in the school at local business and attractions where students visit. They hold town meetings where school and city board members meet to discuss ways to increase student, community, and family awareness of the character traits. This enables the students to not only work on character traits while at school, but also as they interact with members of their community (New Hampton School District, 2008).

Another aspect which should be considered when discussing character education is the value of role models. Abourjilie (2000) stated that it is evident that not only teachers, but parents and community members need to set an example as to what good character looks and feels like. Rusnak (1998) reported "classroom teachers are directly involved in helping to form the character of their students and doing so in positive ways" (p. 66). Murphy (1998) reported "the role of the teacher was found to be very important especially in schools that do not have specific curricular programs for the character development of student" (p. 46). Murphy (1998) went on to state "the principal also plays an important part in creating a climate for character

development in the schools” (p. 50). Murphy (1998) reported “parents are the primary educators of their children and their key character educators as well” (p. 53). Research conducted by Abourjilie (2000), Rusnak (1998), and Murphy (1998) provide support that a teacher, as well as a school’s administration and the community, must consider themselves role models at all times.

Lasting Effects

Through research by Lickona (2004), Lockwood (1997), and Nielsen (2003) it has been shown that evaluating character education programs is possible, but measuring a change in a person’s character is very difficult. Educators expect that what they teach in the classroom regarding character will carry over in the personal lives of their students (Lockwood, 1997). Unfortunately, it may take years before we can truly see if an individual’s character has been changed through the efforts of a teacher, a school, or a school district. Most teachers would wish to see the character traits currently being taught to their students be reflected in the children of those same students in years to come. Lockwood (1997) stated this would be a strong indicator as to whether or not personal character was shaped successfully.

Whether character education is going to remain a key component in America’s classrooms and whether its lessons have a lasting effect is yet to be seen. In order for this to happen, Lickona (1993) reported that four key elements must be considered:

1. Support for schools.
2. The role of religion.
3. Moral leadership.
4. Teacher education.

Based on the research by Lickona (1993), Murphy (1998) and Lockwood (1997) the first of these key elements, support for schools, would be the most important to be addressed in the

near future. It is clear that without support from all involved whether it is a teacher, the parent, or the business owner, character within children will not grow without role models (Murphy, 1998).

The literature used in this review clearly makes a case for conducting additional research which will gather and analyze data about the strengths and limitations of including character education in today's schools. Additional research would also provide assistance for school districts to develop ways to successfully implement character education into their current curriculum.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

There is a growing body of research and many articles on character education. The research reviewed for this paper has provided the author a comprehensive understanding of the many facts and opinions regarding the current status of character education as well as offered suggestions to consider as to its future.

The literature is robust and seems to be in agreement when answering the question, "What is character education?". Lockwood (1997), as well as Bohlin, Farmer, and Ryan (2001) provided a good working knowledge of character education. They concluded that character education is a school-initiated, community-involved program designed to shape children's behavior (Lockwood, 1997) and it teaches them how to make and act-on wise decisions (Bohlin, Farmer, & Ryan, 2001). In addition to what character education is, Lickona (2004) listed ten virtues that should be used when defining character education including love, positive attitudes, hard work, integrity, wisdom, justice, fortitude, humility, self-control, and gratitude.

The reason why character education should be taught was addressed by Lickona (2004) when he reported on the results of the study completed by the Josephson Institute for Ethics as well as the results of a survey conducted by Who's Who Among American High School Students. The conclusions of the research by Lickona (2004) support why character education must be included in today's classrooms. Brannon (2008) also provided specific evidence, such as character education having a positive effect on achievement, classroom behaviors, and long-term test scores, which support the author's conclusion that character education is an important component in the education of our children.

It is the author's view that all research on character education is focused on the ultimate goal of preparing students to grow to adulthood ingrained with the six behavioral characteristics developed by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development in 1998 (Murphy, 1998). Those characteristics are:

1. Respects human dignity.
2. Cares about the welfare of others.
3. Integrates individual interest and social responsibilities.
4. Demonstrates integrity.
5. Reflects on moral choices.
6. Seeks peaceful resolution of conflict.

From research completed for the review on the implementation of character education programs and the role of the teacher, family and community; and citations by Murphy (1998), Abourjilie (2000), and Lockwood (1997); for a program to be successfully implemented, there are three components that must be present: the role of the teacher, the role of the school district, and the role of the community. Murphy (1998) stated the role of the teacher is the key element

as they have to explain, teach, and educate not only the students, but also the school district and the community on the importance of character education. Rusnak (1998) agreed “teachers represent powerful role models” (p. 62). Rusnak (1998) further stated teachers need to strive to be polite and well mannered in all of their interactions with students as well as with the community. Successful teachers of character education programs who have totally committed themselves to the topic seek out training and resources to use when implementing character education into their current curricula (Murphy, 1998).

Regarding the role of the school district, administrators and school boards, they need to advocate for character education and understand that it must be part of the core curriculum and not an add-on activity (Murphy, 1998). In the programs the author found for which there was evidence to support a belief in the successful impact of the program, the school districts were enthusiastic about character education being embedded in the core curriculum.

Community involvement may be the most difficult of the three components, but it is equally as important (Murphy, 1998). Rusnak (1998) reported “to incorporate an intrinsic value system in the educational system, community involvement must be included as a part of the instructional program” (p. 134). Successful programs described by Murphy (1998) demonstrated an active effort from community members by serving on committees, providing resources, and supporting the efforts of the school regarding character education. Lickona (2004) reported “anything the community can do to improve the character of its schools and the effectiveness with which they serve all students will help build a community and society of character” (p. 263). It is evident from research completed by Murphy (1998), Rusnak (1998), and Lickona (2004) that unless the teacher makes a strong commitment to invite and include the community to participate when implementing and teaching character education, it cannot reach its full

potential as a successful program unless all three components do not work together (Murphy, 1998).

The evidence collected for the literature review supporting lasting effects, presented by Murphy (1998), Lockwood (1997), and Lickona (2004) stated that character education has had a positive impact on student behavior. Murphy (1998) stated that through the use of surveys for data collection, decreases in the areas of absences, discipline referrals, as well as bullying indicated if a school's character education program was working. Also, through personal observations from teachers and school staff, school systems were able to measure success by monitoring positive attitudes that occurred among the students (Abourjilie, 2000). As an example, the increase in the number of students who said they felt safe at school and that they showed more respect to each other would indicate that a program was producing the desired outcome of a school (Abourjilie, 2000). The author concurs with the view, reported by Nielsen (2008), that research regarding the effectiveness of character education is lacking. Nielsen (2008) went on to say the overall focus is to learn if moral reasoning and proper character development is taking place from childhood to adulthood.

The author found little research that consistently identified a method by which character education programs were evaluated. Lockwood (1997) reported "character education is especially vulnerable to outside forces and research, even though much needed, [it] can be a dangerous way of calling attention to the enterprise" (p. 35). Vincent (1999) stated there is not a commonly accepted evaluation process. Rather, as reported by Lockwood (1997) each successful program has designed its own criteria to judge the effectiveness of their individual program. Murphy (1998) stated this was done by the completion of a survey by students, faculty, and families within participating school districts. Other character education programs relied on a

teacher's evaluation of a student's progress based on grades (Brannon,2008). Rusnak (1998) reported a technique to evaluate the effectiveness of their program was by having "children monitor their own actions and begin to problem-solve and resolve conflict" (p. 77). Still others chose to use personal observations as a way to evaluate the effectiveness of their character education program (Vincent, 1999).

It is the author's belief, after completing the literature review on evaluating character education, the real evaluation will need to wait fifteen to twenty years to allow for longitudinal studies to be developed and implemented. Following a student's behavioral pattern over years, will give researchers a better insight as to the effectiveness of today's character education programs. Lockwood (1997) discussed the fact that research tracking systems monitoring character education are currently not in place to gather information about what is being done and what is working.

Lockwood (1997), Lickona (1993) and Murphy (1998) stated in order for character education to have a positive outcome it must be integrated into a school's current curriculum. Rusnak (1998) reported "the cornerstone of the school's environment is the development of an integrated approach to character education, one that energizes the organization of the school and the environment around basic human values" (p. 77). Whether integration is done by the use of specific lessons dealing with character that can be incorporated throughout the day (Lockwood, 1997), or through a teachable moment when the opportunity to build on a character trait during a story in reading, a problem being solved in math, or a theory being tested in science arises (Murphy, 1998), character education has a place in all areas of curriculum (Bohlin, Farmer, & Ryan, 2001).

As Murphy (1998) reported “schools and districts wishing to implement a character education program need to provide for staff development” (p. 47). Murphy (1998) also stated most teachers have not received any formal education at the undergraduate or graduate level for their role as character educators. It is the author’s view, after completing the literature review on the success of character education programs, that in order for character education to be successful, teachers need to be given the opportunity to receive training on how to implement character education in a way that would be most effective. Suggested ways to do this are by the use of videos, sharing of teaching strategies among educators, or by having an outside resource person share with others what can be done (Abourjilie, 2000).

After having read countless research papers, articles and books regarding the topic, the author has become convinced that character education is a key component within a child’s education. The hope is that teaching character education not only leads to a more effective learning environment within the school but to a more civil society. At the very least, character education within a school system will lead to a student body that is more sensitive to each other as well as being more accountable for their actions within the world. Therefore, the author is committed to being an advocate and taking on a leadership role in educating fellow teachers on the importance of character education. Even though there are obstacles that will need to be overcome, the author is confident that with the knowledge gained through this review, that character education has a place in every school’s curriculum.

Recommendations

Based upon a review of research from Lockwood (1997), Lickona (2004), Murphy (1998) Rusnak (1998) and others cited in this paper, the following recommendations are made.

1. To ensure that future teachers have the knowledge and skills to implement character education, it is recommended that teacher training institutions include character education as a part of their teacher training program.
2. It is recommended that continuing research be conducted on character education specifically in the area of effectiveness.
3. It is recommended that educational leaders continue to remind school districts that character education is not an extra-curricular activity but should to be funded as part of the core curriculum.
4. Further research, is recommended, regarding the financial obligations a school district may encounter when implementing a character education program into its current curriculum.

References

- Abourjilie, C. (2000). *Developing character for classroom success*. Chapel Hill, NC: Character Development Publishing.
- Black, S. (1999). Do you really need a character curriculum? *Student Assistance Journal*, 6(3), 24-26.
- Bohlin, K., Farmer, D., Ryan, K. (2001). *Building character in schools*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Brannon, D. (2008). Character education – A joint responsibility. *The Education Journal*, 73(8), 56-60
- CharacterCounts! (2009). Retrieved March 25, 2009, from <http://www.CharacterCounts.org>
- Characterplus (2009). Retrieved March 6, 2009, from <http://www.characterplus.org>
- Child Development Project. (2009). Retrieved July 9, 2009 from <http://www.devstu.org/about/mission.html>
- DeRoche, E., & Williams, M. (2001). *Educating hearts and minds: A comprehensive character education framework*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.
- Infoplease. (2009). *Time line of worldwide school shootings*. Retrieved March 25, 1009, from <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A077958.html>
- Lickona, T. (1993). The return of character education. *Education Leadership*, 51(3), 6-11.
- Lickona, T. (2004). *Character matters: How to help our children develop good judgment, integrity, and other essential virtues*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, Inc.
- Lockwood, A. (1997). *Character education: Controversy and consensus*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

- Murphy, M. (1998). *Character education in America's blue ribbon schools: Best practices for meeting the challenge*. Lancaster, PA: Technomic Publishing Company, Inc.
- New Hampton School District (2008). *New Hampton Community School District*. Retrieved July, 10, 2009, from <http://new-hampton.k12.ia.us>
- Nielsen, L. (2003). Price Laboratory School citizenship program: A qualitative assessment. *Journal of Social Studies*. 27(1), 3-21.
- Rusnak, T. (1998). *An integrated approach to character education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.
- Sizer T., & Sizer, N. (1999). *The students are watching: Schools and the moral contract*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Struck, C. & Miller, K. (2009). *Price laboratory school elementary citizenship program: Embracing the whole child*. Retrieved July, 9, 2009, from <http://iowa.ascd.org/documents/PriceLaboratorySchoolElementaryCitizenshipProgram.pdf>
- Vincent, P. (1999). *Developing character in students*. Chapel Hill, NC: Character Developing Publishing.
- Wayne, E., & Ryan, K. (1993). *Reclaiming our schools: Teaching character, academics, and discipline*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.