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The Effects of Character Education
on Student Behavior

A dissertation
presented to
the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor in Education

by
William G. Thompson
December 2002

Dr. Ron Lindahl, Chair
Dr. Nancy Dishner
Dr. Elizabeth Ralston
Dr. Russell West

Keywords: Character Education, Values Education, Student Behavior

ABSTRACT

The Effects of Character Education on Student Behavior

by

William G. Thompson

Character education has been a part of public schooling in the United States since its beginning. It has undergone dramatic changes over the years, from didactic instruction to service learning; it continues to evolve as more and more schools become involved in teaching students right from wrong. The current emphasis on character education in schools began in the early 1990s as an attempt to alleviate the increasingly violent behavior of students as reported in the media.

The purpose of this study was to determine how character education affected the behavior of students. The study involved: observing student behavior; interviewing teachers, students, and parents to determine their perceptions of the effects of the character education program on student behavior; and reviewing disciplinary records to identify behavioral patterns.

The findings from this study suggested that character education programs may have a positive effect on student behavior. Furthermore, the findings led to recommendations regarding the implementation of character education programs in elementary schools. Character education should be an integral part of the curriculum, not taught as a separate subject. This includes not only academic subjects but also specialty areas such as art, music, and physical education. Classroom rules should be based on the principles of good character, and teachers should model good character for the students to observe. Additionally, students should be taught character through hands-on service activities that contribute to the school, the community, and society in general. This will help the students develop a sense of ownership of the program and should help to improve student behavior.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my wife,

Teresa

and my daughters,

Carley, Heather, and especially Taylor

who I have regretfully neglected over the course of this study.

It is also dedicated to all the children who have touched my life over the years.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In an ever-increasing number, many students are entering school without the basic values that have built this country. Depressing reports of students' cheating, lack of self-discipline, and a lackluster approach to schoolwork are common (Ryan & Bohlin, 1999). For almost 40 years, the trend in public schools has been to relinquish the role of building character, possibly as a result of Supreme Court decisions, which built a wall between public schools and religious beliefs (Eastland, 1993). Perhaps out of fear of sanctions from the federal government, public schools have failed in educating American children in basic moral principles. During the last decade, this trend of neglecting to teach character has changed with the introduction of value or character education programs. People are now talking about the importance of character and personal integrity (Ryan & Bohlin). According to Covey (1989), there is a shifting of paradigms in America, from a concern for a person's personality to a concern for a person's character.

Background of the Problem

Throughout history, education has had two primary goals: to educate people intellectually and to teach them to be morally good. The founding fathers of the United States believed that democracy had a need for character education because the people must develop democratic virtues (Lickona, 1992). These virtues included respect for individual rights, respect for law, participation in public life voluntarily, and a concern for the common good of the country. Historically, the Bible was the source in public schools for moral instruction. When differences arose over which Bible to use, the McGuffey Reader was introduced as a way to teach the virtues of honesty, hard work, thriftiness, kindness, patriotism, and courage (Lickona, 1993). Character education remained a part of public education until the 1960s through stories, teacher example,

and discipline. According to Field (1996), in the 1960s and 1970s character education changed dramatically when value clarification, moral dilemma discussions, and decision-making processes replaced the traditional emphasis on learning right from wrong and acting right. These programs failed to distinguish between the personal preferences of students and true moral values. Today, with the increased problems that society faces, more traditional character education is becoming commonplace in public schools (Lickona, 1995).

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this multiple-case study was to determine how character education affects students' behavior. Many principals spend a significant amount of time dealing with inappropriate student behavior. Character education programs are proactive approaches to improve discipline in the schools, but do they make a difference? If character education reduces disciplinary problems, instills compassion and caring, promotes citizenship, and develops a moral conscience in students, it would be a worthwhile endeavor in terms of time and money spent. If character education does not affect the manner in which students behave, then resources can and should be reallocated to other programs. This multiple-case study was conducted at a rural elementary school in East Tennessee and included (a) interviews with teachers responsible for character education instruction, (b) interviews with students, (c) interviews of the parents of students, and (d) a review of disciplinary records.

Significance of the Study

Character education is not new; it is as old as education itself. Lickona (1992) pointed out that “Wise societies since the time of Plato have made moral education a deliberate aim of school” (p. 6). In America, from colonial times throughout the early part of the 20th century, character education was central to education in general. Likewise, character education was at the heart of teacher preparation programs. The “normal schools” of the 19th century were designed

to train a new breed of teachers for the increasing number of public schools with the “development of public virtue” a central theme (Glenn, 1987). However, by the middle of the 1960s, many people considered that public schools in the United States no longer shared common values to teach America’s children. In 1966, with the publication of Lawrence Kohlberg’s theory of moral reasoning, American schools embarked on a journey through values clarification and moral dilemma discussions (Leming, 1993).

From the mid 1960s throughout the 1970s, values clarification and moral dilemma discussion dominated education in the United States. In values clarification, the teacher served as a facilitator in helping each student clarify his or her own values by following a prescribed seven-step valuing process. The teacher never attempted to influence the student and withheld his or her personal opinions. Whatever values the student arrived at were to be respected by the teacher. Similarly, Kohlberg’s moral dilemma discussion provided for the teacher to facilitate students’ reasoning, assisted students in resolving moral conflicts, and ensured that the discussions took place in a value free environment. The goal was to move the student to the next stage in moral reasoning. In both programs, the objective was cognitive development of moral reasoning; both emphasized that teachers were nonjudgmental and were not to moralize (Leming, 1993). Neither program appeared to deal with behavior. In fact, according to Leming, the research base for the moral and values education curriculums of this period offered little assistance in planning for character education where changes in student behavior were a central objective. This occurred during a period when the traditional family unit was disappearing from American society. Ironically, the social problems faced by public education during this time, such as violence, racism, teen pregnancy, low self-esteem, and drug and alcohol abuse, were the very problems that character education addressed (Character Education Partnership, 2002).

According to the Center for the 4th and 5th R’s (1999), there is a plague of youth violence in the United States today marked by a near total lack of conscience or remorse. Between 1965 and 1990, there was a 300% increase in the arrest rate for all juvenile violent crimes in this

country. Included among the reasons for the increase in youth violence were the rise in the single parent family, the increase in fatherless families, poor parenting in general, the physical and sexual abuse of children, the use of drugs, the desire for money and material things, the desire for power and respect that entices a child to carry a weapon and use it, a decline in respect for life, and explicit violence and sex in the media. The 1992 report of the National Research Council stated that the United States was the most violent of all industrialized nations (Lickona, 1993). More recently, the Columbine tragedy in Colorado underscored the violent behavior of many of today's youth. According to Schaeffer (1999), the easy availability of guns and the pervasiveness of violence in television, movies, and music play a role. Additionally, out-of-control youth, drug abuse, and other societal ills have played a role. However, the common thread seen in the recent school shootings is that the young people involved seemed disconnected and alienated; most had no meaningful relationships with their parents or other adults, and many were exposed to negative influences such as gangs and violence on television, video games, and the Internet. In today's society, many homes are headed by working parents who are exhausted when they come home, and the children are left with abundant time for exposure to such negative influences (Schaeffer, 1999).

Today, there is renewed consensus concerning core values that transcends cultural, political, and religious boundaries. These core values comprise the basis of modern character education. Respect, compassion, responsibility, honesty, integrity, and fairness are the building blocks of character education programs that are emerging across the nation. This new character education movement is based on the belief that the violent, dishonest, irresponsible, and destructive behavior of today's youth is the result of the absence of good character. However, not everyone is convinced that character education is the answer to the societal ills of today's youth. According to Black (1996), "Kids seldom practice what their schools' character education programs preach" (p. 29). She cited research that shows little positive correlation between what students learn about good character in school and the extent to which they

demonstrate good character both in and out of school. Similarly, Rich (1991) argued that schools must be familiar with research on child development and behavior before designing and implementing character education programs. He maintained “There is no such thing as honest and dishonest children, only honest and dishonest acts” (p. 293). According to his theory, a child’s behavior is highly specific to situations and circumstances. For example, a child might keep money found in the gym if the child thought no one saw him or her find it. The next day, that same student might turn in to his or her teacher a book or jacket he or she had found.

Character education is more than banners, slogans, and words on the school’s marquee sign. Reading stories with a moral, writing essays on the heroes, reciting slogans, and role-playing are all fine, but they will not necessarily change a student’s behavior. The Greek root for the word character means “to mark,” which supports the idea that a person’s conduct reflects his or her character (Wynne, 1988). Lickona (1992) stated that schools need to do more than concentrate on the cognitive side of character. He reported that schools need to bring students to the emotional side of character, where they feel and commit to virtuous behavior, and to the action side of character, where students change inappropriate behaviors and practice positive moral actions. Wynne argued that many educators have placed too much emphasis on how students reason about moral issues rather than how they conduct themselves. What and how students think clearly influences that person’s character; however, the measuring rod of society is not what or how people think, but how they conduct themselves. A student is judged by whether he or she is polite, whether he or she tells the truth, whether he or she observes the rules, whether he or she keeps the school clean, and whether he or she is helpful to teachers and fellow students.

Wynne (1988) stated that many schools teach character directly and have developed curricula and set aside class time to focus on issues of character. Although these programs may occasionally be beneficial, he argued that it is far more important that the teachers and entire school carry out activities designed to build character. Further, he stated that the overall conduct of the adults and students in the school should reflect a concern for character and that this

concern should be “interwoven throughout the school program” (p. 426). Similarly, Apple and Beane (1995) proposed that students learn values, morals, ethics, and character through the normal realities of their daily lives in schools. In other words, students learn character from their actions and the actions of everyone in the school.

Design of the Study

The study was conducted in a rural elementary school in East Tennessee with a population of 625 students. The school was comprised of kindergarten through fourth grade classes, with 54% of the student population participating in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program and 24% receiving special education services. The school was identified as a Federal Chapter I school. Located in a county that depends primarily on tourism to support the economy, this school had the highest transient rate of any school in the system (30%). Only approximately 40% of the student population had attended the school since enrolling in kindergarten. The remaining 60% moved into the community from other schools within the system, from other systems in Tennessee, and from other states ranging from California to New Jersey, Texas, and Florida. These transient students brought with them their own cultures and value systems. The Character Counts program (Lickona, 1995) developed by the Josephson Institute was adopted by the school in the fall of 1998 and was in its fourth year of teaching character education. The purpose was to establish uniform values for its diverse population by introducing universally accepted values.

This qualitative, multiple-case study was conducted over a period of one school year. The researcher observed and described student behavior throughout the school setting and interviewed teachers, students, and parents to determine their perceptions of the effectiveness of the character education program. Additionally, the researcher reviewed the disciplinary records of the students included in the study. The information was collected by making descriptive field notes of observations along with reflective information, taking notes during interviews using a general interview guide, audio-recording student and parent interviews, grouping similar

responses together, and coding the responses. The data were analyzed and the researcher attempted to identify constructs, themes, and patterns through reflective analysis.

Limitations

Students and parents selected to participate in the study were chosen based on teachers' perceptions of positive and negative behavioral changes over time and on the willingness of those students and parents identified to participate in the study. This purposeful selection process greatly limited the range and variety of cases examined in the study. The researcher was also the principal of the school where the character education program was introduced; therefore, the biases and preconceptions of the researcher must be taken into consideration. No other limitations were identified.

Overview of the Study

Chapter 1 has included an introduction, statement of the problem, purpose of the study (which also included background information and the significance of the study), and limitations of the study. Chapter 2 describes a review of relevant literature including reviews of educational journals, periodicals, and books related to character education and recent research on character education. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used in conducting the study and Chapter 4 is a presentation of the data collected. Finally, Chapter 5 analyzes the data and Chapter 6 contains conclusions, recommendations for practice, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature focuses on three main topics. First, the history of character education is reviewed because it provides a background for describing the events, philosophies, and attitudes that led to modern day character education. Second, programs currently in place are reviewed and can be divided into three categories: the Socratic approach, the integrated method, and service learning. Finally, the research on character education, both positive and negative, is presented because it provides a starting point for this study.

The History of Character Education

Character education in American schools has been around since colonial times. When communities were small, it was relatively easy for parents to control the content of what was taught in school, and what was taught were values based on Christian principles. Because the majority of early settlers were Christians, it was natural that the church would be responsible for the schools. According to Mulkey (1997), school textbooks of 1776 contained 100 % moral and religious content and parents demanded strict adherence to these values by their children.

As the new country and the beginning of publicly sponsored education developed, there was a trend toward separation of church and school. The transition from church schools to public schools lasted almost 100 years (Mulkey, 1997). During this time, the McGuffey Reader became a staple textbook for schools across the country. It included stories from the Bible along with larger than life stories of heroes, poems, and universal truths to develop students into good citizens. Never attempting to hide religious overtones, the McGuffey Reader taught values of frugality, cleanliness, honesty, hard work, dedication, patriotism, and obedience (Field, 1996). However, Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* best exemplifies the virtues that the early schools

sought to teach; they included temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity, and humility (Mathers, 1995). During the late 1800s, the Catholic community sought financial support from the government when they established their own schools, arguing that the public schools based their moral teachings on the Protestant Bible. This gave way to the changes in character education of the early 20th century.

The early 1900s brought a renewed interest in character education in the public schools. In 1916, William Hutchins developed the *Children's Morality Code*, which emphasized the values of self-control, good health, kindness, truth, sportsmanship, teamwork, self-reliance, duty, reliability, and good workmanship (Mulkey, 1997). This resulted in the formation of "good character clubs" throughout elementary and high schools with the hopes that peer pressure would be strong enough to ensure the practice of these character traits (Field, 1996). According to Leming (1993), schools attempted to integrate these codes into all facets of the school. In 1924, the most comprehensive study of character education began. The Hartshorne and May study assessed the character-related behavior of some 10,000 students primarily in grades 5 through 8 located in 23 communities across the United States. They found no relationship between character education and behavior, specifically as it related to honesty and helping others (Leming). This did not stop educators from continuing their programs of character education. Field noted that many educators were concerned that moral standards continued to be threatened by industrialization, urbanization, immigration, World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, and the laissez-faire attitudes of the 1920s.

In the mid 1930s, John Dewey focused the attention of public schools on the need for moral training and development and encouraged them to provide the environment for the moral development of the students (Mulkey, 1997). During this time, "Citizenship" readers became widely available for students; at the same time, there was a decrease in the number of formal character education programs as stability and hope returned to the country as a result of the

policies of the New Deal. The emphasis during this time was on patriotic values (Field, 1996). During World War II, character education was reanalyzed and the necessity for it was debated among educators. Although most insisted that it still should be taught in some form, others considered it too ambiguous to include in public education. Some educators attempted to persuade their peers by renaming character education. During this period, such programs as “social education,” “education for social adjustment,” and “building social foundations” were established to develop the social and civic consciousness of young citizens in order to achieve desired national goals (Field). While the debate over character education raged during the 1940s, many classroom teachers were going about the business of teaching their students practical values through scrap drives, war bond and stamp sales, conservation efforts, rationing, and morale building. In rural communities across America, schools were teaching students to raise and care for animals, cultivate vegetables and flowers, prepare and serve food, care for and help younger children, keep their school and community clean and attractive, and conserve everything. After the war and throughout the 1950s, formal character education gradually lessened and eventually all but disappeared (Field). This came to an abrupt end in 1966, with the publication of Kohlberg’s moral dilemma theory.

In 1966, Lawrence Kohlberg linked his cognitive-development theory of moral reasoning with the practice of moral education in schools (Leming, 1993). According to Mulkey (1997), Kohlberg’s theory was based on six stages of moral reasoning, whereby children could move from their present level of moral reasoning to the next higher stage through discussion about the behavior chosen in a particular situation. In the first stage, children are guided by rewards and punishment. As they move to the second stage, reciprocity becomes prominent and children will do things for others if they get something in return. At stage three, the child’s behavior is controlled by adult or peer approval. At the fourth stage of moral reasoning, behavior is based on respect for authority. Moving to the fifth stage, what is right is determined by the child’s personal values and opinion. Finally, at the highest stage, the child’s conscience determines

what is right and wrong. Here, respect for individual life and human dignity are guiding principles. According to Leming, the teacher's responsibility was to serve as a facilitator of student discussion of moral dilemmas and was not to attempt to impose his or her own values or judge the values chosen by the student. Critics of the moral dilemma approach argue that it promoted ethical relativism because it encouraged students to reason through situations that present artificial moral choices and dilemmas (Lockwood, 1997).

Also in 1966, *Values and Teaching*, the theory of values education, was written by Rath, Merrill Harmin, and Simon. Rath et al. proposed a seven-step process for students to determine their own values. The only requirements in this process were that the value must be freely chosen from alternatives after consideration of the consequences of each alternative, it must be prized and cherished, it must be publicly affirmed, it must be acted upon, and it must be used repeatedly. The teacher could express his or her own values, but the students understood that the teacher's viewpoint was not necessarily right. According to Leming (1993), the teacher typically withheld personal opinions for fear of influencing students, which was not a part of the process; the teacher was to respect whatever values were determined by the students. The values clarification approach was most popular among teachers during the late 1960s and 1970s, as evidenced by the large number of handbooks sold during the time. Values clarification has been rejected by current character educators as a glaring example of all that is wrong with both contemporary society and public schools in general (Lockwood, 1997). Critics argue that in this program, there was no right or wrong; any value a student chose was correct as long as he or she could provide a rationale; and the approach did not support pro-social behavior (Lockwood).

With the exception of these two approaches, moral dilemma theory and values clarification, little attention was given to the school's role in developing character until the mid-1980s (Black, 1996). According to Lickona (1993), a new character education movement began in the early 1990s. The Josephson Institute of Ethics held a conference in July 1992 and invited more than 30 educational leaders from state school boards, teacher unions, universities, ethics

centers, youth organizations, and religious groups. The result was the “Aspen Declaration on Character Education,” which established eight principles of character education. In March 1993, the Character Education Partnership was established. This was a national coalition of business leaders, labor leaders, representatives from government, national youth leaders, parents, religious leaders, and representatives of the media. Their goal was to place character education at the top of the national educational agenda (Lickona). National organizations to promote character education are numerous. The Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character at Boston University, founded by Kevin Ryan, and the Center for the 4th and 5th R's (Respect and Responsibility) founded by Thomas Lickona, are two prominent organizations that promote character education (Black). The Jefferson Center for Character Education (Leming, 1993) and the Josephson Institute of Ethics (Lickona) are also at the forefront in the movement to teach children about character. Finally, a survey by the National School Boards Association in 1996 indicated that 45% of school districts surveyed offered some form of character education and 38% of the remaining districts had plans to do so in the near future (Black). These modern day character education programs emerged as a result of the problems with today's youth.

The Impetus for Modern Day Character Education

Violent behavior, lack of respect for others and their property, lack of remorse, dishonesty, and no clear understanding of the difference between right and wrong was becoming commonplace in public schools. Goldberg (2000) reported on the six-year-old boy in the first grade at Buell Elementary School near Flint, Michigan, who took a gun from his pants and shot and killed a little girl in the classroom. A first grade student died supposedly because of a quarrel on the playground the day before. Sam Riddle, the father of a boy who was killed in another school shooting said, “The culture of violence is manifesting itself here with what occurred.” In Jonesboro, Arkansas, in 1998, two middle school boys opened fire on their classmates and killed four girls and a teacher. Two months later, a similar incident occurred in

Oregon (Hutcheon, 1999). The following April, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris killed 12 of their fellow students before taking their own lives at Columbine High School. In November 1999, an 11-year-old boy in Pontiac, Michigan, was convicted of murder, as an adult, for gunning down a stranger (Goldberg). In April 2001, a 14-year-old student at the Monroe City Alternative Center in Louisiana fired several shots at students, teachers, and the principal before being overpowered by the police while he was reloading. No motive was given, but the boy had been expelled from the alternative school earlier in the month ("Alternative School Pupil," 2001). Finally, in May 2001, a 15-year-old boy and his 14-year-old friend pleaded guilty to conspiracy, possession of a bomb, and terrorist threats. They had planned to bomb West Chatham Middle School near Savannah, Georgia ("Student Pleads Guilty," 2001).

Schaeffer (1999) pointed out that violence in television, movies, and music played a part in the violence in schools as did out of control youth, drug abuse, gangs, video games, the Internet, and other problems in society. However, the commonality of the perpetrators of violence has been their alienation from their parents and society (Schaeffer). Hutcheon (1999) condemned the electronic media for socializing children into violence and a premature, perverted, and abusive sexuality. He also stated that harassing and violent behavior toward girls was being reported as early as the second grade, that boys in sex-education programs frequently named O.J. Simpson and Mike Tyson as their idols, and that the seriousness of violent acts by youths was increasing. Alarming cases of violent acts among teens and preteens appeared to be common. For example, two young boys in Chicago dropped a five-year-old boy from a high-rise window because he would not steal candy for them; a six-year-old girl in California knifed another girl over a Barbie doll; another six-year-old girl in California killed an infant by kicking her in the head because she was in the wrong room at the wrong time; a Texas teenager killed a boy who blew a car horn at him; and a girl in New York murdered another girl during an argument over a boy (Hutcheon). Schaeffer argued that the easy availability of guns and the pervasiveness of violence and sex in television, movies, and music were at least in part

responsible for the violent behavior of today's youth. Hutcheon described in detail the deterioration of society and cited examples from movies, music, and television. He stated that television was the single most influential socializer in modern society, that the programming is increasingly violent and most violent during the times when children were watching, and that the programming specifically for children was filled with horrifying acts of violence. He also cited the titles of popular rap songs such as "Back off Bitch," "Another Body Murdered," and "Come Die with Me" as examples of the negative influence music was having on children. Finally, Hutcheon described serial-killer board games, mass murderer collector trading cards, realistic video games of violence, interactive cybersex, and access to everything on the Internet as contributors to the desensitization of society's children. In view of the problems society faces today, there is a public outcry for a renewal of character education.

Arguments for Character Education

In the mid 1990s, former Secretary of Education William Bennett's *Book of Virtues* was on the New York Times bestseller list for almost one year (Lockwood, 1997). All one needed to do was pick up a magazine or newspaper, search the Internet, look at recent book reviews, or listen to the President in his address on education to see that values and character were at the forefront of educational issues. Children faced dilemmas every day on what was right and wrong and the debate continued on whose responsibility it was to teach what is right. The obvious answer was the family; but the family in many respects has disintegrated. According to Whitehead (1993), the majority of children born today will not live continuously with their own mother and father throughout their childhood and many children will experience a family break-up two or more times before they complete school. Lickona (1993) stated that no entity had experienced the impact from the disruption of the family unit more than schools. Children of divorced and single mothers were more likely to be poor, have emotional and behavioral

problems, fail academically, become pregnant before they complete school, abuse alcohol and drugs, get in trouble with the law, and be sexually and physically abused. Whitehead wrote:

Across the nation, principals report a dramatic rise in the aggressive, acting-out behavior characteristic of children, especially boys, who are living in single-parent families. Moreover, teachers find that many children are so upset and preoccupied by the explosive drama of their own family lives that they are unable to concentrate on such mundane matters as multiplication tables. (p. 47)

Schools, therefore, must teach the values that the children have not learned at home in order for teaching and learning to occur (Lickona, 1993). The violence in schools across the country that has been televised around the world has resulted in a variety of short-term solutions, from see-through book bags to guards or school resource officers, to modified dress codes, to metal detectors. However, many parents and educators are looking for long-term solutions to making schools safe again, and character education is receiving attention. Character education focused on the root causes of violence and anti-social behavior and helped schools create an environment where these types of behaviors could not flourish but could be detected and thwarted early (Schaeffer, 1999). According to Ryan (1993), development of a child's character was clearly not the sole responsibility of the school; however, historically, schools had been major contributors because of the amount of time children spend at school. Harned (1999) argued that character education could help prevent the types of violent incidents that are occurring in schools today. Schaeffer (1998) stated that too many children are growing up in conditions that do not provide the moral or ethical framework required to develop good character; however, almost every state specified the responsibility of schools in developing moral or democratic values in students, as well as academic knowledge. In addition to the responsibility, and possibly more important, the obligation of public education is to develop good citizens--good individuals, who understand their rights and responsibilities in society. Although these arguments are persuasive, there are still prominent individuals in America who believe that character education is not the answer.

Arguments against Character Education

Most school activities designed to build character have little effect on how students act at school and outside of the school setting (Black, 1996). According to Lockwood (1993), students who had been in character education programs had typically performed well on assignments, such as worksheets or activity booklets, but when it came to real life situations these same students acted like they had no instruction at all in honesty, sharing, cooperation, and other character traits. Other studies have reached the same conclusions. Leming (1993) stated that character-building activities in schools had little effect on the students when it came to practice; their behavior outside of the character-building activities was the same as it had been before. Black also questioned whether schools have the ability and the right to teach character at all. She argued that it was not fair to require teachers, most with little or no training in the area, to attempt to squeeze another subject into a curriculum that is already overloaded.

Lasley (1997) stated that character education is just the latest cure-all for the crisis of values because parents wanted the school to accomplish what had not occurred in the home. He went on to compare character education with drug and sex education and argued that children learn more from what they have seen than from what they have heard. Furthermore, he posited that the character education movement was not flawed, but that American adults were fundamentally flawed and proud of it. His argument was based on his view that the American media have emphasized the worst in human beings, that television programming and commercials have depicted many more acts of violence and pro-drug messages than altruistic values, and that the values that have been promoted are selfish and self-serving. However, his most damaging statements of the character education movement were related to schools and teachers. Lasley maintained that the school environment and teachers actually taught values through their actions, which were opposite of what the character education movement was trying to accomplish. For example, he stated that teachers ranked students according to their performance--then told them to cooperate; that teachers told students to respect others--then

called on boys the majority of the time; and that teachers advocated critical thinking--then labeled those students who thought critically as difficult children. To him, the problem was not with the children, but with the adults with whom the children interacted; that values were not taught, but caught and practiced. Nash (1997) concluded that the current character education programs were inadequate to prepare students to live in a culturally diverse society.

Finally, one of the most prominent critics of the character education movement condemned the program as political indoctrination of the conservative right. Kohn (1997) argued that the movement was a collection of didactic teaching, which promised extrinsic rewards and was designed to make students work harder and do what they were told. Drilling students and indoctrination were the norm instead of critical reflection and discussion, which he advocated. He also stated that the practice of extrinsic motivation, which was so common in character education programs, actually eroded intrinsic motivation, which should be the goal of character education. Kohn described five basic questions to consider relative to the character education programs and proposed answers to each. First, he questioned at what level the problems would be addressed. He noted the argument that social problems could be explained by the lack of traditional values, as most of the character education programs proposed, was not valid. He further stated that if people committed crimes primarily because of their lack of character, then political and social problems were irrelevant and would not need to be addressed. Kohn also stated that how a person acted was directly correlated to the environment. Rather than attempt to change the child, one should attempt to change the school and the classroom. Second, Kohn suggested that one ask how the proponents of character education programs view human nature. He argued that the entire concept was based on the idea that children were inherently bad and needed to be changed; that human nature was selfish, cruel, and mean; and that the underlying belief was the religious doctrine of original sin. The third question Kohn proposed dealt with the ultimate goal of character education programs. He noted that the underlying agenda of such programs was the neo-conservative concern for social and economic stability.

Fourth, Kohn wanted to know which values should be taught. He agreed that honesty and fairness were reasonable, but found that the emphasis was on conservative values such as diligence, obedience, and patriotism as well as the Protestant work ethic; that is, children should work hard and complete the job even if they do not want to, and that they should never question the value or meaning of what they were doing. He noted that respect, responsibility, and citizenship were suspect because in practice they masked the real goal of uncritical deference to the authority of the school and teachers. Fifth, Kohn deemed it important to question how the values are taught. He argued that the majority of the programs were didactic, largely engaged in exhortation and directed recitation and primarily telling and compelling students to do what was right according to the program. He saw a major contradiction in that teachers who knew these techniques did not work in academic subjects but swallowed the whole concept and practice when it came to character education. This type of indoctrination was compared by Kohn to Nazi Germany in the 1930s. He concluded with the argument that character education was composed of three ideologies: behaviorism, conservatism, and religion. These arguments against character education appeared to be in the minority; with increased support from the public, more and more states are requiring character education in school.

From the late 1960s to the early 1980s, society embraced the romantic idea that all values were oppressive; educators went along with it, maintaining almost a neutral official stance on values. However, right or wrong, the escalating moral problems in the United States have brought about a new consensus from private citizens and public organizations, both liberal and conservative, urging schools to teach morals. These people firmly believed that schools could not stand by and do nothing while violent behavior and bad language increased but must do what they can to improve the character of the students and the moral health of the nation (Lickona, 1992). Sichel (1988) reported that all formal education was imbedded with morality and that teachers, along with family, were the primary sources for helping children deal with moral dilemmas. According to Vessels and Boyd (1996), opinion polls in 1993 and 1994 indicated that

the majority of Americans believed that communities could agree on a set of values to teach students; furthermore, 90% favored the teaching of values such as honesty, respect, democracy, persistence, fairness, compassion, and civility. In 1994, the United States Congress passed Public Law 103-301, in support of character education. In addition, in 1994, President Clinton endorsed character education in his state of the union address. In September 1995, The U.S. Department of Education awarded character education grants to California, Iowa, New Mexico, and Utah. Partnerships, coalitions, and corporations emerged as initiators and supporters of character education. There were still those who stated that public schools should not be in the business of teaching character and morals. To silence these critics, Haynes (1994) argued that there was a triad of social virtues emanating from the First Amendment, including freedom of conscience, or rights, the obligation to guard this freedom for oneself and others, or responsibility and the need to maintain a dialogue by considering how and what we discuss or respect. Furthermore, Bitensky (1995) explained that there had been several Supreme Court decisions that supported character education in public schools. In these decisions, character education was not the primary focus, but the decisions disclosed supportive views of many Justices regarding the role of public schools in teaching values. Other decisions that clarified rights of students regarding free speech also established the constitutionality of values education. For example, in *Board of Education v. Pico* (1982), Justice Brennan stated that schools must be permitted to constitute the curriculum in order to transmit community values and that there was substantial community interest in promoting respect for authority and traditional values including social, moral, and political (Vessels & Boyd, 1996). In *Bethel School District No. 403 v. Fraser* (1986) and *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* (1988), the values education as part of the curriculum was upheld against student claims of free speech violations. Finally, in *Ambach v. Norwick* (1979), the court stated that the responsibility of public schools in preservation of the values of society has long been recognized by court decisions (as cited in Vessels & Boyd). This

widespread support has led to the character education programs that have emerged across the country.

Current Character Education Programs

If schools are to teach character, there must be a common definition on which everyone can agree. Aristotle defined good character as the life of right conduct in relation to others and to oneself (Lickona, 1992). According to Elkind and Sweet (1997), character is defined as the types of choices people make. Finally, Lickona stated that good character was defined as moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior. In other words, knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good was what constituted good character. Therefore, character is based or judged on how one behaves through the choices or decisions he or she makes. The next step would be to define character education. Rusnak (1998) stated that character education was the development of a language with students that instilled universal values that were worldwide. Vessels and Boyd (1996) defined character education as strategic instruction that promotes social and personal responsibility and the development of the good character traits and moral virtues that make this possible. Fertman and van Linden (1999) defined character education as formal instruction in honesty, trust, cooperation, respect, responsibility, hope, determination, and loyalty. According to Tomaselli and Golden (1996), character education was everything the school did to help students make better, more effective choices and decisions; the students must identify, understand, and learn how to act on their own values. Schaeffer (1999) cited the definition developed by the Character Education Partnership, a national coalition of individuals and organizations concerned about children's character development. Schaeffer defined character education as "the long-term process of helping young people develop good character, i.e. knowing, caring about, and acting on core ethical values such as fairness, honesty, compassion, responsibility, and respect for self and others" (p. 3). Elkind and Sweet (1997) defined character education as teaching students how to make good choices. However, the

definition developed by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) Panel of Moral Education was the most comprehensive. ASCD defined it as whatever schools did to influence how students think, feel, and act regarding issues of right and wrong (Mathison, 1998). With this definition in mind, there are currently three major types of character education programs in practice across the United States.

One method of teaching character is the Socratic Approach, which primarily involves discussion and simulation. Elkind and Sweet (1997) described the Socratic method as a technique by which the teacher asked a series of questions that led the students to examine the validity of the belief. This method was derived from the Socratic *Dialogues* of Plato, in which Socrates forced individuals to go to great extremes to defend a belief or truth. The individual would answer a series of what seemed to be innocent questions, which led the individual to a logical conclusion that was not compatible with the individual's stated belief. This method of teaching character was powerful because it actively engaged the student and forced a critical analysis of ethics, values, and other character aspects. This approach, although dramatic and entertaining, had been criticized by prominent individuals in the field of character education. Wynne (1988) argued that the concern with how students reasoned or thought about moral issues was misguided. He insisted that the emphasis should have been on observable behavior rather than moral reasoning.

The second major type of character education is the integrated program. Integrated character education was based on how students acted, both morally and academically. It went beyond the discussion and simulation of the Socratic approach and included action. The main purpose in this type of program was to infuse character education throughout the school environment. Wynne (1988) was involved in the "For Character" program in the Chicago area. This program recognized and honored schools, both public and private, where students demonstrated a high degree of positive conduct and academic effort. The participating schools used throughout the curriculum an extensive list of character building activities and, within each

school, recognized individual students, groups, and entire classes for demonstrating good character. Sometimes this was based on some type of service activity, but it could have been for some type of academic activity as well. Rusnak (1998) emphasized that character education was not a separate subject but a part of every subject. The programs he reviewed all stressed focusing students' attention on the ethical dimension of stories, leading students to thoughtful consideration of ethical principles, focusing attention on the moral aspects of history, applying the moral of a story to a student's own life, and building the skills of moral discussion. Rusnak described several different programs across the country, including Project PAVE (Partners Advancing Values in Education) in the Milwaukee public schools, Project Essential in the Kansas City school system, and Project PREP (Personal Responsibility Education Process) in the St. Louis schools. Each of these programs integrated character education into all aspects of the curriculum and school environment and each reported higher student achievement as measured by standardized tests.

The third major type of character education programs is based on service learning. Service learning is just that; students undertake some type of service project with the purpose typically to assist others or make the community a better place to live. Woehrle (1993) described the program at Friends Academy, a Quaker school located in Locust Valley, New York. It included three-year-old preschool through grade 12 students. The program was based on Robert L. Selman's developmental stage theory of social perspective, which was similar to Kohlberg's stages of moral development. The service activities ranged from feeding birds, to making decorations for nursing homes, to wrapping Christmas presents for the needy, to raising money for "Save the Children," to cooking and serving meals in a homeless shelter. The purpose of these activities was to develop social responsibility in the students; in other words, the development of good character. Similarly, Howard (1993) described Maryland's approach to service learning. Maryland was the first state to mandate community service requirements as prerequisites to graduation. The program allowed students in grades 6 through 12 to earn service

credits through activities sponsored by religious groups, social groups, community organizations, medical institutions, libraries, or school sponsored clubs and organizations. Teachers prepared the students through class discussions, research projects, and written proposals. The purpose of this service was to develop or reinforce community values such as justice, compassion, and civic responsibility as a part of character education (Howard). Finally, Switala (as cited in Rusnak, 1998) argued that community service was one of three initiatives used in the Bethel Park School District in Pennsylvania to develop character. It involved service projects in both the school and the community and included peer tutoring, assisting in labs, serving as safety officers, assisting in child care, helping the handicapped, fund-raising for charities, cleaning up the environment, and working in nursing homes. The goal was to develop values, social skills, and responsibility as well as citizenship. Although character education programs like these have been implemented throughout the United States, one of the major criticisms has been the lack of research on their effectiveness.

Effectiveness of Current Programs

During the 1990s, character education programs spread across the United States; much has been written about these programs, both positive and negatively. However, the most common criticism throughout the literature has been the lack of research on the effectiveness of these programs, particularly quantitative research. Some researchers looked at how the programs have affected the students, some looked at how teachers feel about the programs, and some looked at how the students feel about the programs.

Williams (1993) conducted a pilot study to determine how students in the classroom learned moral values. She surveyed, observed, and interviewed teachers, students, administrators, and parents in different school settings, both public and private, over the course of one school year. Because respect was identified by the students as the highest priority, the research focused on this one value. The findings indicated that teachers' perceptions of the

success of the program were quite different from the perceptions of the students. Whereas all teachers noted that teaching character was part of their responsibility and all considered that they had been successful, the students disagreed. Williams found that respect was best taught through modeling and quality teaching rather than through formal lessons. Students judged some teachers as insincere and inconsistent, as holding double standards and giving preferential treatment. The students indicated that they learned respect by how they were treated by the teacher rather than what the teacher taught about respect.

In another study, Mathison (1998) looked at how teachers felt about character education. Her study included 159 teachers from 4 metropolitan areas across the United States and 137 student teachers at San Diego State University. Although there were several other areas of interest in the study, the primary purpose was to assess the attitudes of teachers and student teachers toward character education in the classroom. The study used a Likert-scale survey format consisting of 20 items for teachers and 7 additional items for student teachers. For teachers, additional information was gathered on number of years teaching, grade level and subjects currently assigned, and location. All participants were provided the opportunity to provide their thoughts about character education in public schools. The responses were quantified and converted to percentages for the entire population--the teachers as a group and the student teachers as a group. The study addressed four major questions dealing with general attitudes toward character education, professional responsibilities, preparation to teach such issues, and perceived obstacles. The findings suggested that teachers considered character education as important and necessary, although they differed on exactly what constituted character education and how it should be taught.

Some researchers looked at how character education affected a student's attitude and behavior. According to Leming (1993), the most comprehensive research on the effects of character education was conducted by Hartshorne and May from 1928 through 1930. The results showed that there was little, if any, effect on students' behavior and ended character education

for the next 20 years. However, the character education programs of the early 20th century were quite different from the current programs because they relied heavily on direct instruction, namely, telling students what was right and wrong and expecting them to act accordingly. Many of the programs currently in existence rely heavily on involvement of students in character building activities in order to change behaviors.

Leming (1993) stated that contemporary character education programs have been evaluated from two basic approaches. First was an informal evaluation that either surveyed teachers and administrators or collected anecdotal evidence. In this type of approach, the potential for bias on how students behaved was great and there was no comparison between students in a character education program and those who were not. Leming cited several studies that purported impressive results. One was the American Institute of Character Education in San Antonio, Texas. With 18,000 classrooms in 44 states, supporters reported that the program had reduced alcohol and drug abuse, encouraged attendance, and discouraged vandalism. However, this research was based entirely on testimonials. Another program evaluation was conducted by the Jefferson Center for Character Education and involved 31 elementary and middle schools in the Los Angeles area. The report stated that discipline problems declined, student morale increased, parent involvement increased, and student behavior had improved. However, the study was based on telephone interviews with 25 administrators from the schools included in the program.

The second evaluation approach described by Leming (1993) used experimental designs, focused on behavior of students, attempted to control for bias, and compared program participants with nonparticipants. The Weber County Character Education Project in Utah involved 3,000 students and 109 teachers. A two-year longitudinal study reported a statistically significant reduction in disciplinary problems whereas behavior problems in the control schools actually increased. Another study was conducted by the Child Development Project in San Ramon, California, where a character education program had been implemented in three

elementary schools. The longitudinal study tracked the students for seven years from kindergarten through sixth grade. The study involved hypothetical-reflective interview measures of social problem-solving skills and observational data on four types of classroom behavior. After five years, the study showed improvement in student understanding or beliefs, but no difference was found in the number of incidences of negative behavior between the program participants and nonprogram students. As one can see from these studies, changing students' belief or increasing awareness of what is right or wrong does not necessarily change their behavior, which must be the primary goal.

Character education is a noble endeavor, but if it does not change the behavior of the students then, from a practical standpoint, it is of questionable value to the schools. It appears that little research has been done linking character education to how a student behaves. Tattner (1998) looked specifically at respect and self-control and examined the effects of character education on character formation. It was limited to students in grades five through eight in a small parochial school in east central Florida. This quantitative study used an experimental group, which participated in an intensive character education program for eight weeks, and a control group that did not participate. The results showed a significant difference between the two groups on pre- and posttests regarding perception of respect and self-control.

Primm (1998) examined the effects of character education on behavior of elementary students in two rural school districts in Missouri. The study included a control group comprised of 26 teachers with no character education program in 1 school district and an experimental group with 29 teachers who had implemented a character education program in the other district. All 55 teachers completed a pretest and posttest survey concerning the behavioral characteristics of the students. The statistical analysis revealed no significant difference between the two groups on how teachers perceived the character-related behaviors of the students. Finally, Olsen (1995) looked at the effectiveness of a school-wide character education program on student behaviors and attitudes as perceived by the teachers. The school had kindergarten through grade

six with a student population of 642. The school was located in a small town in Arkansas. Olsen administered a pre- and post-program survey to the 29 classroom teachers at the school. The two-page questionnaire covered five categories of character including respect for authority, respect for others, courtesy, self-respect, and responsibility. The study concluded that student behavior improved after the implementation of the character education program according to teachers' perceptions.

In summary, character education has always been a responsibility of public schools, although schools have not always accepted this responsibility. From teaching stories from the Bible in Colonial America, to the McGuffey reader of the 1800s, to moral reasoning and values clarification of the 1960s and 1970s, to modern day programs, which vary greatly on methods and teaching strategies, character education has changed dramatically over the years. The research conducted during the 1900s has been inconclusive, with some studies suggesting that character education programs change students' behaviors and attitudes and other studies suggesting that character education programs have failed. This inconclusive research confirms the need for further study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The purpose of this multiple-case study was to determine how character education affects students' behavior. This chapter describes how the research was conducted, the participants, the instrumentation used, how the data were collected and recorded, how the data were analyzed, logistical issues, and how trustworthiness of the data was assured.

Research Design

This was a multiple-case study of how character education affects students' behavior. Case study research, according to Yin (1994), is characterized by three conditions: the type of research questions posed, the extent of control and access to behavioral events, and the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events. Yin argued that “how” and “why” questions are explanatory in nature and typically lead to the use of case studies, histories, and experiments. This study dealt with “how” character education affected students' behavior and therefore meets the first condition. The second condition described by Yin is the extent of control over and access to behavioral events. Experimental research typically exerts a great deal of control and manipulation of behavior, whereas there is little control of behavior in both historical and case study research. There was no control or manipulation of behavior in this study; therefore, it met the second condition described by Yin. This researcher described how students behave and how they perceived the influence of the character education program on that behavior, how teachers perceived student behavior and the influence of the character education program, and how parents perceived student behavior and the influence of the character education program. The third condition described by Yin is the degree of focus on contemporary events as opposed to historical events. What was studied was a contemporary event. The

researcher studied student behavior at school where the character education program was in its fourth year of operation. It, therefore, met the third condition described by Yin. Case study research is similar to historical research except that it can include direct observations and systematic interviews that are usually not available in historical research. This research included both. In summary, this research attempted to describe how character education affected students' behavior; there was no attempt to control or manipulate behavior during the study; and the focus was on contemporary rather than historical events.

Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) stated that case study research has four main characteristics. The first characteristic is the study of phenomena, or programs, by focusing on specific instances or cases; this study focused on the effect of the character education program by focusing on specific students, teachers, and parents. The second characteristic is in-depth study of the case or cases; similarly, this study focused on the behavior of 10 students and the perceptions of these students, their teachers, and their parents. The third characteristic is the study of the phenomenon in its natural context; this study was conducted at the school where the students were enrolled. Finally, the fourth characteristic is the representation of the emic perspective; accordingly, this study focused on the perceptions of the students, the teachers, and the parents.

Participants

The participants of this study were selected from an intact group, which included all students in grades three and four (approximately 250) at this school and the parents of these students. All teachers at the school in grades three and four, as well as the school counselor, the librarian, and the physical education teacher (approximately 15) were asked to identify a student or students to include in the study. The school was located in a rural area in East Tennessee in a county school system where the economy is based heavily on tourism. Approximately 54% of the students were on the Free and Reduced Lunch Program, approximately 24% received special education services, and the school had been identified as a Federal Chapter I school. The school

had the highest growth rate in the county, at approximately 10%, as well as the highest transient rate at 30%. The high rate of growth and transience tended to produce a wide variation in values held by the students and parents.

Successive Phases of the Inquiry

The study was conducted over a period of one school year. The researcher began by interviewing 11 teachers to determine perceptions of the effects of the program on students' behavior and to identify students and parents to be interviewed. The next step was to interview 10 students and their parent or parents to determine their perceptions of the effects of the program. Extreme or deviant case sampling, as described by Gall et al. (1996) was used to select students to interview. Although the program was implemented school-wide, this study concentrated on students in grades three and four. Many of these students had been exposed to the character education program for all, or almost all, of the time they had been enrolled in school. Teachers interviewed were asked to recommend students to be interviewed based on observations of changes in that student's behavior. The parents of these students were interviewed to determine if changes in behavior observed at school were carried over to the home and to determine their perceptions of the effects of the program. Extreme or deviant case sampling focuses on cases that are unusual or special. The cases included in this study were "special" because the teachers had identified these students as having either positive or negative behavioral changes during the year. Data analysis was ongoing during the study. The last phase consisted of summarizing the findings and conclusions and making recommendations for practice and further research.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation used in this study included interview guides for interviewing teachers, students, and parents (see Appendices A, B, and C). Teachers were interviewed using

the general interview guide approach as described in Gall et al. (1996) to determine perceptions of program effect on students' behavior. Students were interviewed using a similar guide to determine how they perceived the effects of the program on their own behavior. Finally, parents were interviewed using a general guide to determine perceptions of program effects on his or her child's behavior.

Data Collection and Recording Modes

The data were collected through observations, interviews, and the review of archival and documentary evidence as recommended by Yin (1994). The researcher collected all data personally. Observations of students were recorded by making descriptive field notes both during the observation and immediately thereafter, along with reflective information (Gall et al., 1996). Interviews of teachers were conducted and note taking occurred during the interview. The student interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed immediately after the interview. Both audio recording and note taking were used during the parent interviews. Recorded interviews were transcribed immediately following the interview.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data collected were analyzed on a continuing basis by the researcher. A contact summary sheet, as described in Gall et al. (1996), was used to summarize each observation and interview. The researcher attempted to identify constructs, themes, and patterns through reflective analysis, as described by Gall et al. The information collected was triangulated from the three sources of data and further substantiated by a review of records. Patterns or themes identified during interviews with teachers were validated by attempting to corroborate the information with patterns and themes identified from analysis of interviews with the students and the parents, as well as reviewing the disciplinary records.

Logistical Issues

The researcher was the principal of the school where the study occurred and was, therefore, familiar with the building, campus, faculty, students, and many parents. Permission to conduct the research was granted by the school superintendent (see Appendix F). Individuals interviewed were employees of the school, students of the school, and parents of the students; most were readily available and willing to participate. Permission forms were sent to the parents of students who were to be interviewed (see Appendix D) as well as an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix E) that was signed by both parent and student. The telephone numbers and addresses of parents to be interviewed were readily available to the researcher. Teachers selected for interviews were invited to participate with the understanding that their participation was voluntary. Teachers selected were also requested to sign an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix E). The only logistical problems were arranging interview times for the parents because of work schedules and the transient nature of the students.

Ensuring the Trustworthiness of the Data

Trustworthiness of the data was established based on Guba's techniques to establish trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Creditability was established based on prolonged engagement, triangulation, and member checking. The study covered a period of one school year. Ten cases were included in the study, which involved interviewing the student, the teacher, and the parent or parents and reviewing the disciplinary records of each of the students for the past three years. The data collected were triangulated based on the interviews of the students, teachers, and parents and then a comparison was made with the disciplinary records and the data collected through interviews. Each individual interviewed was given the opportunity to review the interview for accuracy, correct interpretation, and the patterns identified.

Transferability of the information was established through a thick description of the school, its climate, and the participants. Dependability and confirmability were established

through an audit of the data by an individual completely independent of the school to assure accuracy and completeness (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). The auditor's report is presented in Appendix G.

The researcher was the principal in the school; had 16 years experience in the field of public education, 10 as an administrator; and was instrumental in initiating the character education program in the school. Additionally, the researcher was a participant observer during the course of the study, all of which must be taken into consideration in reviewing this study.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

The purpose of this multiple-case study was to determine how character education affects the behavior of students. The researcher attempted to determine the perceptions of teachers, students, and their parents regarding the effects of the character education program. This study used the general interview guide approach, as described by Gall et al. (1996) to determine perceptions of program effects. Fifteen teachers were given the opportunity to participate in the study, including all teachers in grades three and four, along with the guidance counselor, librarian, and physical education teacher. Of these, 11 agreed to be interviewed but only 8 were recorded in this study. One of the 11 stated she had not done a good job of teaching character and could not name a student in whom she had seen a change in behavior. The second one identified a student, but the student's mother did not want him to participate. The third teacher identified one student, but he moved to another school before the interview could take place. The 8 teachers recorded in this study identified 10 students whose behavior had changed significantly during the year. As stated in Chapter 3, the students and their parents were selected through extreme or deviant case sampling techniques. These students were identified by the teachers through the interview process as being special--by having shown changes in their behavior during the year.

Accessibility of the participants varied. Teachers and students were generally easily accessible and willing to grant interviews. It was more difficult to schedule interview time with parents because of conflicts with their work schedules and the transient nature of the school population. Some were reluctant because the Informed Consent form stated that their child's feelings might be hurt during the interview process. By far, the students were the most difficult to interview; I would sometimes get shrugs from them indicating they did not know the answer.

I would have to rephrase the question to be more specific, and I had to be extremely careful in the manner in which I asked questions so as not to “lead” them to the answers they thought I wanted. I also originally identified four females and six males; however, during the course of the study, two of the females and two of the original male students moved and thus were no longer available. To replace these students, I went back to the teacher interviews as most of the teachers had identified more than one student whose behavior had changed. I originally chose to interview the first student identified by the teacher. When that student was no longer available, I chose the second student identified by that same teacher.

Also included in this chapter is a brief description of the school culture. Perhaps this will help the reader to better understand and appreciate the depth and intensity of the program.

A Culture of Character

From 1991 to 1998, the school population doubled from approximately 450 students to over 900 students in kindergarten through grade 8. During this time, there were eight new classrooms and three portable classrooms, but the population continued to outgrow the facilities. Serious disciplinary problems occurred daily. These included fist fights, bullying, threats of bodily harm to other students and staff members, bomb threats and hoaxes, theft, destruction of school property, and the possession of weapons on school grounds. The tremendous growth in population led to the construction of a new middle school. In the spring of 1998, grades six through eight moved into the new school. A year later, the fifth grade moved to the middle school as well. With kindergarten through grade four remaining at the elementary school, the types of disciplinary problems changed because of the age of the students. However, there were still a large number of disciplinary referrals to the office and many were of a serious nature. These included threats to other students, extreme behavioral and psychological problems, threats of suicide, uncontrollable behavior, crude and vulgar language, and rude and disrespectful behavior.

The rapid growth of the school population was primarily because of the establishment of several large mobile home parks in the community. This rapid growth was accompanied by an increased transient rate. For example, during the 1998 school year, approximately 200 students moved out and 200 new students moved into the school district to replace them. Along with this influx of new students came a high percentage of students who were qualified for special education services (24%). Additionally, over half of the students were from families at the lower socioeconomic level as evidenced by the number who qualified for free or reduced priced meals (54%). During these changes, the faculty remained relatively stable. From 1992 through 2002, approximately five classroom teachers voluntarily transferred to other schools, whereas the total number of faculty members increased each year along with the increased student population.

The Character Counts program was initiated at the school in August of 1998 and was basically a “canned” program, for which commercially prepared lesson plans were given to the teachers and all teachers were provided with training. The program involved the emphasis of six “pillars” of character, which included respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, caring, citizenship, and fairness. A different pillar was emphasized each six weeks. Over the next three years, the program evolved from lecture and demonstration to true involvement and ownership by the teachers and students. As one walks in the front door of the school, the first thing one sees is a large sign that describes what character is and includes verses from a song composed by one of the teachers. The main hallway is decorated with graduation pictures of kindergarten students in classes dating to the late 1980s. As one moves through the school, he or she will see the walls decorated with murals illustrating the pillars of character, the classroom doors decorated with different character themes, and the walls and bulletin boards showcasing student work depicting character in their everyday lives. Outside each classroom door is posted a picture of the “student of the week,” an award based on demonstrating good character. In the cafeteria and gym, one sees large attractive metal signs that describe rules for behavior based on character. A trophy case outside the gym displays all the service projects in which the students have been involved

during the year. The school's chorus is composed of third and fourth grade students who perform character-related songs, some written by their director, along with patriotic songs at special programs throughout the school year. As one visitor commented, "You can feel the caring and love as soon as you walk in the building."

Although the culture of the school had changed since the establishment of the character education program, there were still students with behavioral problems. However, the nature of these problems had changed from violent and disrespectful behavior to scuffles on the playground and writing on the bathroom walls. Additionally, the total number of disciplinary referrals to the office declined over the three-year period after the introduction of the character education program, dropping from 274 during the 1999-2000 school year to 235 during the 2001-2002 school year while during the same period, the school population increased. Along with the increase in school population, the transient rate of the students remained approximately 30%. These transient students may not have had any exposure to character education programs prior to enrollment at this school.

Case Studies

Each case presented includes comments by the teacher or teachers, responses from the students, responses from one or both of their parents, and a summary of disciplinary records for each student. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the students.

Case 1: Elise

Elise was a 10-year-old female who had just completed the fourth grade and had attended this school since kindergarten. She had two older brothers who also attended this school. She had always been a very shy and withdrawn student and had struggled academically since first grade.

Elise's teacher, Mrs. W, had been teaching for 11 years at this school. When asked how she taught character in her classroom, she stated "I integrate it into the subject being taught. I bring out the pillars of character based on the situation or story. For example, we talked about President Clinton's lack of integrity and President Bush admitting to driving while intoxicated." When asked how character education is incorporated into her discipline program, she stated "Any discipline problem is related to Character Counts; we talk about being examples for the younger kids in the halls, cafeteria, etc. We also talk about the 'Golden Rule' when they tease, taunt, or gossip."

Mrs. W indicated that Elise had changed more than any other student in her class; she stated:

At the beginning of the year, Elise would not complete her work, would not ask questions, and was not very responsible when it came to keeping up with either her assignments or her personal things. Now, Elise is more responsible, she keeps up with assignments in class as well as homework, she does all her work and turns it in, and, if she has questions, she asks me. She is more confident, has better self-esteem, and seems happier.

When asked to what she attributed the changes she saw in Elise, Mrs. W responded, "We have promoted responsibility and respect from day one. I think some of it has to do with Elise maturing, but I think the majority of it comes from the daily reminders about character."

When Elise was informed of what the teacher had said and asked why her behavior had changed, she responded:

Kind of like Character Counts. I usually listen to it. Other kids, like, have stuff to play with; and they are beside me with, like, necklaces and stuff, and I did not have any necklaces on. I just listen to it. It wasn't that boring, but it was OK, I was listening. It, like, taught me responsibility, trustworthiness . . . that's how I got the trustworthiness award.

When asked what trustworthy meant, she responded, "Yeah, I forgot; oh, it means trust people. I get my homework done here and I have more time to play on the computer at home. I just like Mrs. W; she's one of my favorite teachers. She's really nice."

When asked who influenced her behavior most, Elise asked “Teacher?” When told it could be a teacher or anyone else, she responded:

Mrs. L and Mrs. W. Mrs. L taught me a lot and Mrs. W did too. I got in trouble; and that’s a lot how I learned, ’cause I got in trouble, and I didn’t want to get in trouble. I wanted to try to be my best, so I tried not to be in trouble anymore. Mrs. L taught us all kinds of stuff; and I thought fourth grade teachers were real strict, but Mrs. W was good. How she is nice to us and how she treats us. It’s like letting your teacher down when you’re bad.

When asked if she knew what the Character Counts program was about, she responded:

Yes, it is what my momma said we were going to talk about. Mrs. L was the teacher who did the character counts songs and stuff. I think I just felt touched in the fourth grade. I don’t know what...it was Mrs. W.

When asked if it affected how she behaved, she said “Yes, I used to fight with my brothers for no reason; now I only fight with them when they fight with me. It taught me respect and responsibility; now when I get stuff out, I put it back up.”

Elise’s mother was interviewed. When asked if she had observed any changes in Elise’s behavior this year, either at home or at school, and if she could give me specific examples, she responded:

Yes, she has matured a lot. When she accomplishes something on her own, she will say that that is ‘responsibility’; and, where she has done better in her studies this year...and little things like getting herself up in the mornings and doing her homework. It really started around the first of the third grade.

When Elise’s mother was asked what led to the changes the last two years, she responded:

Well, she had a really good teacher this year; Mrs. W was really good with her, and she had a good teacher the year before; and the year we spent at Sylvan [Leaning Center], she just really matured a lot. We attend church regularly, and it has always been a part of Elise’s life.

When Elise’s mother was asked if Elise ever talked about the Character Counts program, her mother responded:

Oh yes, she talks about it a lot. She did get, what was that she got on graduation day? She got a certificate for trustworthiness, and she was so tickled about that; but Elise is real compassionate and worries about other people anyway. You know certain kids in the class that don’t have anything, she worries about them a lot; and, she makes a response about other kids who aren’t trustworthy in the class and makes comments about that a lot.

You know, the last two years she has had really good teachers, and she has talked about how they ‘cared’ about her and the other kids. With Mrs. L, she would tell me about things she would do; and I would say, Well, why do you think she did that? And she would say, "Oh, she just cares about kids."

When Elise’s mother was asked if she thought the program had had any impact on Elise, she responded:

Yes, what I like about the program is how it is weaved into the day. Elise shows respect for Mrs. W and she says she has respect for you. That’s what she told me last night; and on the day they graduated fourth grade, she cried when you were telling her that it was their last day here, and she was crying when she said she wouldn’t get to see Mrs. W anymore. That says a lot right there. Elise feels better about herself this year; she has a lot more confidence, and it makes a big difference with the teacher making her feel that way.

There was no record of Elise's being referred to the office for disciplinary reasons.

Case 2: Cory

Cory was an 11-year-old boy in the 5th grade. He began attending this school in the second grade and was constantly a behavior problem--everything from disrupting the classroom, to being disrespectful to the teacher, to fighting. He had a younger brother who also had been a behavior problem.

Mrs. M was Cory’s fourth grade teacher. She had taught seven years, six of which were at this school. When asked to describe how she teaches character in her classroom, Mrs. M stated:

We talk about character constantly; I use everyday examples in class and discuss how it relates to character, and we discuss. If someone lies, we talk about the importance of being truthful; and if someone leaves his or her homework at home, we talk about responsibility. I use classroom jobs as rewards or privileges and give students responsibilities in class based on their behavior. This includes collecting aluminum cans throughout the school, distributing messages, participating in Earth Day activities, and other daily activities.

When asked how character education is incorporated into her disciplinary program, Mrs. M stated that she “uses positive rewards, such as jobs and privileges, rather than negatives.”

Mrs. M was well aware of Cory's past behavior when he entered her fourth grade classroom. By the second six weeks, she began to see a change in his behavior. When asked to describe these changes, Mrs. M stated:

At the beginning of the year, Cory would not do his work in class, he would not do his homework, and he would not take responsibility for his actions. During the year, he changed; he began completing class work and homework; and that before he did something, he would stop and think about what he was about to do. Cory does not want to disappoint his teacher; he knows the expectations and receives positive reinforcement from everyone. I reinforce respect and responsibility with him daily.

Cory was interviewed approximately six months after he left Mrs. M's class. He was informed of what his teacher had said about him and when asked why his behavior changed, Cory responded:

Just that I just straightened up in school and did good. I didn't want to get in trouble in school no more, because what affects what I do now is what affects my life when I get older, when I get a job and stuff.

When asked who had influence on him, influence on how he behaved, he responded "Mrs. M." When asked in what way, he responded, "She helped me out with my work and everything." When asked if he felt like she cared about him, he responded "yeah," and when asked if that was why he tried to please her, he nodded his head affirmatively. When asked if he knew about the Character Counts program, he responded "yes"; and when asked if it affected the way he behaves, he responded, "Well yeah, it learned me how to straighten my life up and do unto others as they would do unto you and all those things." When asked which had the most influence on him, his teacher or the program, he responded "Mrs. M."

Cory's mother was asked if she had observed changes in his behavior during the school year, either at home or school. She responded, "Yes, I have not had nearly as many problems with him at home or at school. He is more polite and is in less trouble at school." When asked what she thought had led to the changes in his behavior, she responded "His relationship with his fourth grade teacher, Mrs. M, the way she treated him. When he started at the middle school, he begged to go back to her class at the elementary school."

When Cory's mother was asked if he had ever discussed the Character Counts program, she stated:

He would never really discuss what was going on at school. He did talk about doing yard work at school and collecting cans, but when I would try to talk to him about respect and responsibility, the boys [he and his brother] would mock me.

When she was asked if the program affected how her child behaved, she stated:

It gets through to them with the hands-on experiences, and it affected him last year [when he was in Mrs. M's class], but he has changed [since going to the middle school]. His attitude at home and toward school has changed [for the worse], and he has been in trouble [at school]. I have started working again, and that might affect his behavior.

In reviewing Cory's discipline record during the 1999-2000 school year, he was referred to the office eight times, suspended from the bus once and from school twice. During the following year--the year in which he was in Mrs. M's class, he was referred to the office three times, none of which resulted in suspension. During the 2001 to 2002 school year, he was referred to the office at the middle school (grades 5 through 8) for disciplinary reasons nine times for fighting/horseplay, inappropriate remarks, and vulgar language. He was suspended from the bus once, received in-school suspension six times, and was suspended from school once.

Case 3: Sonny

Sonny, Cory's brother, was nine years old and in the third grade. He had attended this school since kindergarten. His teacher, Mr. Y, was in his second year of teaching, his first at this school. When asked how he teaches character in his classroom, Mr. Y stated, "I approach character in the classroom through daily classroom rules. These rules encourage responsibility, citizenship, fairness, respect, and caring by interweaving these guidelines into journal writings." When asked how character education is incorporated into his disciplinary program, Mr. Y responded, "Character education is incorporated through positive decision making on the part of the students." In describing changes in behavior that he has observed, he stated, "I feel that character in the classroom has encouraged a few overactive students to make good decisions."

He identified Sonny as one of his students whose behavior has changed significantly in a positive manner.

I have observed Sonny informally throughout the year. I have seen him open the door for visitors, walk away from a fight when provoked by another student and report the incident to his teacher, and treat others with respect (i.e. saying “sir” and “ma'am,” saying “thank you,” and going out of his way to help a teacher and student). When I informed him that I had seen a big improvement in his behavior over the last two years, especially this year, and asked him if he could tell me why, he shrugged his shoulders. When asked if his behavior at home had improved as well, he shook his head yes and said “uh-huh.” When asked why, he responded, “I don’t know right now.” When asked who had had the most influence on him in improving his behavior, he responded “my Dad and my Mom.” When asked how, he responded, “They ground me and take away my play station.” When asked if he knew what the Character Counts program was, he responded “no.” When asked if he had ever heard of it, he responded “yes.” When asked if he knew the different pillars, he responded, “The pillars are like states and stuff.” When I explained to him that it was like “respect and responsibility,” he responded “careness, respect, responsibility, kindness.” When asked if the program affected him at all, he responded “a little bit.” When asked if it had made him more responsible or made him a better citizen, he responded “a little bit.”

When Sonny’s mother was interviewed, she was asked if she had observed any changes in Sonny’s behavior at home or at school. She responded “Oh yes, some of it has sunk in with Sonny. He is much more respectful and more courteous to adults.” When asked what she thought led to these changes, she responded “The influence of his teacher here at school. He still has good days and bad days, but the good days are by far more frequent now.” When asked if her son had ever discussed the Character Counts program, she stated, “He talks about what he is doing at school all the time; he is more open than his brother. He has talked specifically about respect and responsibility and how important they are.”

Sonny's referrals to the office have dropped significantly over the last two years. During the school year 1999 to 2000, when he was in the first grade, he was referred to the office for disciplinary problems 10 times. These incidents were serious enough to result in bus suspension, corporal punishment, and suspension from school requiring a hearing before the superintendent. During the 2000 to 2001 school year, Sonny was referred to the office only twice, neither requiring serious disciplinary action. During the 2001 to 2002 school year, Sonny has not been referred to the office for disciplinary reasons.

Case 4: Donny

Donny was a nine-year-old male starting the fourth grade. He had a younger brother and they both lived with their mother. He had been a student at this school since first grade.

His third grade teacher, Mrs. F, was asked to describe how she taught character in her classroom. She responded:

At the beginning of the six-weeks, my class divides itself into three communities. Each community elects a mayor and a vice-mayor who take many responsibilities toward class management and discipline. The communities are in constant competition to be the best at everything from keeping a clean community to reading the most books. Each student becomes accountable to the community for many things during the school day, including maintaining acceptable character.

For each pillar of character, Mrs. F stated:

I find a story to read to the class that illustrates the trait. It may be a story that we are reading in class anyway, or it may be some other appropriate title, or it could be a movie. I use a character in the story to start the discussion about the new pillar of character. After the discussion, each student writes a couple of paragraphs about the characterization depicted in the story and illustrates it. During the second or third week of the emphasis, each student draws a pillar in his or her Character Counts Journal, colors it appropriately, draws something to illustrate that pillar of character, and writes about it. One lesson is usually based on a skit from *Frank Schaeffer's Skits for Character Counts*. Students read the skit, then perform it for the class. During another lesson, students work in small groups to write their own skits and act them out. Occasionally, we sing songs about character. I have written a couple of songs that tell what character is, name the pillars, and cite times when character counts at our school.

When asked how character education is incorporated into her disciplinary program, Mrs. F responded:

When a student is cited for inappropriate behavior, he or she is instructed to write about the incident in his or her Character Counts Journal. The event must be reported and the behavior analyzed according to the Character Counts standards. I have a written statement about character and appropriate behavior that students have to write for some infractions.

Mrs. F was also asked to describe any changes in behavior that she had observed. She stated:

I have had students write in the journals, with no prompting from me, about incidents that happened at home or on the bus. I hear students correcting each other, saying things like “You’re not being very caring.” Most of my students seem to know when they have not shown good character and initiate their own punishment. I use play money for rewards and fines. Students very often bring a dollar to pay a fine for something I didn’t even know about. When we have elections, almost every candidate will mention the pillars of character and promise to abide by them. When the Singing Cougars [a choir made up of third and fourth grade students] sang at another school and went to MacDonald’s for lunch, the manager told us that he had been at MacDonald’s for 14 years and that our students had behaved the best of any school he had ever seen. On another field trip, the people in charge said that our students behaved better than most. When a new student moved into my class last year, she was misbehaving quite badly. A student who had been in the class all year, and who was often in trouble himself, told me that the new student needed to learn about all that Character Counts stuff.

Mrs. F stated that she had observed changes in Donny’s behavior this year. She stated:

Donny is usually cooperative and pleasant. However, when someone picks on him, he comes up fighting mad very quickly. We have discussed it many times and he has written himself up several times. Recently, I have seen him think longer about his actions. He still gets mad, but seems to be handling it better.

When Donny was informed of this, he responded “Yeah, ’cause, well I just don’t like people making fun of my teeth.” When asked why, what had changed, Donny responded “She [his teacher] just told me, just don’t say nothing to them, just ignore them and that’s the same thing my mom says.” When asked if he saw any other changes, he responded, “Uh, I know that my grades went down.” When asked if he did better toward the end of the year, he responded “Yeah, I did a whole lot better.” When asked if he got into as many fights as he did last year, he responded, “naw”; and when asked if he was better on the bus, he responded by shaking his head

affirmatively. When asked if he saw any changes in his classmates this year, he responded, “They got better, they’re nicer.”

When asked who had the most influence on him, Donny responded, “[friend's name]. We was playing kickball in the gym and I got the ball and Logan just came up there and pushed me down and started kicking me and stuff.” When asked what the teacher did that helped him, he responded “just try harder, and stuff, and uh.”

When asked if he ever heard of Character Counts, he responded, “yes;” and when asked if Mrs. F ever talked about it, he said, “Yes, she said if you treat people with respect then they’ll treat you with respect--they didn’t treat me with respect. . . .” When asked if anyone had treated him with respect, he responded, “Yeah, [friend's name]. He didn’t say a word about my teeth. ____ was a real friend. So was [friend's name].” When asked if the teacher talked about being honest and being able to trust people, he responded, “Yeah, but ____ lies a lot; he lies to Mrs. F.”

When Donny’s mother was asked if she had seen any changes in his behavior this year, she responded, “Sure, he’s been a whole lot better. Sometimes he can come home from school feeling better than when he left.” When asked if he ever talked about Character Counts, she responded:

Yeah, he’s talked about it, things like that. Like when they had the little boy who brought the bullet to school, they talked about it, and he felt fine about it. I think I was more worried than he was. He has just really, like, grown. I don’t know, it’s a change, a whole lot.

When she was made aware that his behavior had improved at school during the year, she responded:

Yeah, he has at home; he acts a whole lot better. When he first started school, he felt like everybody was picking on him. I guess, where he was an only child [before his brother was born], or whatever, little things would hurt his feelings; and, uh, he had a lot of problems on the bus, and I’d have to go out there, and I’d have to get on the bus, and I’d ask them not to hit him and hurt him and stuff. He’s finally come around, you know, I think the talking in the class and everything like that really helps.

When asked if it was something the teacher did, she responded, “Especially with the, they had their own little communities like. I think she really did good with that, ’cause I think a lot of them could have got really scared, but I think she did really well with it.”

When Donny’s mother was asked if she thought what the teacher was doing in class affected Donny, she responded:

Oh yeah, I’m sure it did. I don’t have any doubt about that. Just like the situation we talked about before with the little boy, I think Donny would have been terrified, because he, I mean we, have guns at home, but they are all the time locked up. And I tell him if he sees someone with it you, don’t stand around, you run; and if they’re shooting, you hit the floor. I think she did really well because he wasn’t scared at all.

When she was asked how the program affected how Donny behaved, she responded:

He’s more happy, just at ease, it helps him more than any of them because Donny’s grandfather is on a heart transplant list...and I think if it wasn’t for him loving this school and everything about it he wouldn’t be as good as he was.

Most of Donny’s disciplinary problems were minor and handled by the classroom teachers. During the 2000 to 2001 school year, he had no referrals to the office for disciplinary reasons. During the 2001 to 2002 school year, he was referred to the office once, in September, for fighting. Both boys claimed the other one was at fault. He has had no other referrals.

Case 5: Ira

Ira was a nine-year-old male going into the fourth grade. He was an only child living with both biological parents. He had attended this school since kindergarten. His third grade teacher, Mrs. S, had been teaching for three years, all at this school.

When Mrs. S was asked how she taught character in her classroom, she stated, “I tie in the Character Counts program with our reading stories. For example, we discuss how a character in the story exhibited trustworthiness, responsibility, and so forth.” When she was asked to describe how character education is incorporated into her disciplinary program, she responded, “When we have a major blow up in class, I show how it ties in with Character Counts. I ask the students if it shows caring, or respect, or good citizenship when they act that way.”

Mrs. S was asked to describe any changes in behavior that she had observed for individual students, her class as a whole, and the school as a whole. She stated:

When a student commits an act, they apologize for being disrespectful; they acknowledge that when you steal you are not being trustworthy; and things like that. I see it all the time. The program works more with kids whose parents reinforce or teach the same concepts at home.

When asked which students she had observed the most significant changes, she stated:

Ira's behavior has improved. He doesn't interrupt as much, he stays in his seat, he participates in class, he completes his work now, and he is much more respectful. He went on medication for hyperactivity midway through the year but even after medication, rewards work really well with him.

When I told him what his teacher had said, and asked Ira why he had changed so much during the year, he responded:

Because I didn't feel good sitting back there in the corner without anybody to talk to when I'm done; so, like, during snack time, I was talking to everyone because that was the only chance I got, except outside. But sometimes we didn't get to go outside.

When asked what else changed him he responded:

I think the most thing that changed me is my medicine; and if I work with it, it will change me; and that's why the doctor put me on it, to see if I could work with it; and it has changed a lot of me.

When asked who had had the most influence on him, he responded, "Can it be a different classmate?" When told it could be a classmate, teacher, parent, or anyone, he responded:

I'd have to say that would be Mrs. S, because whenever I first came to school last year, I wanted Mrs. S, and then I had Mrs. B, and then I got really mad 'cause I didn't get Mrs. C, because you moved Steven, and you said you'd move me to a different classroom, and I'm really glad I got Mrs. S.

When asked if Mrs. S did anything special, he responded, "Um yeah, she did something special; whenever, I mean one time I was back there being quiet and I earned three dollars that one day and, uh, I got moved up to the front."

When Ira was asked if he knew what the Character Counts program was, he responded:

Yeah, caring is like caring about someone. Fairness is like when you lose you don't have to be mad, you just have to be fair. Trustworthy means you need to tell the truth every time. Responsibility means you need to take responsibility of other people's stuff and if

it breaks don't say someone else did it. Respect [he was prompted on respect] means respect other kid's stuff.

When asked if he participated in the "math-a-thon" he responded "yes" and when asked what that was for, he responded, "It was to help people at St. Jude's hospital."

When asked if the program affected how he felt or thought or how he acted, he responded "Yes, that's one thing that changed me because every time I did something wrong I felt bad. So I started telling the truth, respecting other kid's stuff, and I was helping people and a lot of stuff."

Ira's father indicated that he had observed changes in Ira's behavior during the year both at home and at school. He stated "Ira was always on the edge of exploding. Now, he is a lot more content, he is able to control his emotions a lot better." When asked what he thought led to these changes, he responded "the medication." When asked if his child ever discussed the Character Counts program, he stated, "Yes, Ira keeps us informed on what he is studying at school. He talks about the Character Counts program a lot and how it relates to his behavior and the behavior of the other students." When asked if the program affected his child's behavior, and if so, how, Ira's father stated, "It brings attention to the child's behavior. It keeps it in his mind, fresh. It's a reminder to him that we should show respect and responsibility."

Ira's discipline record over a three-year period showed that during the 1999 to 2000 school year, Ira had one incident when he was referred to the office. During the 2000 to 2001 school year, he was referred to the office five times, but the last entry was in mid-December (about the same time he went on medication). During the 2001 to 2002 school year, he was not referred to the office for disciplinary reasons.

Case 6: Kandy

Kandy was a nine-year-old female. She lived with both biological parents and had one younger sister who had not yet started school. She had been at this school since kindergarten and had a history of behavior problems. Her teacher, Mrs. F, had been teaching for 36 years, 6 of which have been at this school.

Kandy was identified by the guidance counselor, Mrs. K, as well as her classroom teacher, Mrs. F, as being a student in whom they had observed significant behavioral changes during the school year. When Mrs. K was asked how she taught character in guidance, she stated:

I try to include at least a 30-minute character lesson with each of the six pillars. Then, in all other lessons (small groups, etc.), I try to stress making the right choices, choosing to be an example of good character. I do this in both lessons taught and behavior management. By continuously reminding students how character is always in use, I feel they do not separate the six pillars from everyday life. Character is not an individual subject, but part of everything. Every opportunity I have to mention character issues, I do, on both directed lessons and in discussion with students. This way, I am always reinforcing the concepts we are all teaching and modeling.

When asked how character education is incorporated into her disciplinary program, Mrs. K responded:

Since I am in every classroom, when possible I use the teacher's discipline program (i.e. mark-out, red/green light, stars, etc.). I always talk about how misbehavior is a choice that has consequences. For example, you choose your behaviors and therefore the consequences that go with it. I continuously have opportunities to discuss respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, fairness, and citizenship. I always try to mention caring and to model it.

When the guidance counselor was asked to describe the changes she had observed in Kandy, Mrs. K stated:

Kandy's behavior continues to be challenging, but she can always tell what she is or is not doing in the character department. She certainly 'talks the talk' but still has a challenge in making it work for her! She accepts her consequences well when she deserves them. This is an improvement [over years past]."

When Kandy was informed of Mrs. K's comments and asked why her behavior had changed this year, she responded:

I don't want to get in trouble that much. I used to, last year, first grade, I was really good. I made honor roll for the whole first grade. In second grade, they said I didn't make honor roll at all because I didn't know social studies. I always used to make, this year I made one 'F' and that's all, one 'F,' and it was in social studies; but it was the hardest thing for me.

When told that she used to get in trouble all the time but had not been in trouble this year, she responded, “It’s because Ms. F is really nice and I like her.” When asked if the teacher did anything special that made Kandy want to be nice for her, Kandy responded:

Yes, she gives me prizes for what I did, um, she gave me a prize for, um, she gave this math test that was fifty problems on times tables and I am the only one who made a hundred, and she gave me a prize.

When asked if there was anyone else in the class who was very responsible, very respectful, showed good citizenship, she responded, “a lot of people did;” when asked why, she responded, “I don’t know.”

When asked who had influenced her the most in being responsible and respectful, Kandy responded, “In that class I had a few friends, like _____.” When asked what they did that made her want to be like them, she responded, “They started being my friend and they taught me how to be respectful and citizenship and all that stuff.”

When asked if she knew what the Character Counts program was and if the teacher ever discussed it with her, she responded, “I don’t remember.” When reminded of the pillars of character, she responded, “In some of them programs I learned from them too, like when ‘old MacDonald’ came up, it taught me a lot of stuff [the Ronald McDonald program on character].”

Kandy’s mother and father were interviewed together. When asked if they had noticed any changes in Kandy’s behavior at home and if they could give specific examples, her father responded:

Like cleaning her room; I’m not saying you have to force her to do it, but you have to ask her several times; but when she does it, she does a pretty good job. I’ve noticed she takes care of her stuff a lot better, too. I mean, she has CDs now and a computer.... Last year when she’d get something, she’d pull it apart; she just wasn’t responsible.

When asked why she changed, her mother responded, “Part of it is she is maturing as she ages; and part of it is when I left work, I was able to come here and be with her more and monitor her classes.” Her father stated “I think church has been positive for her too.” When asked if she had ever talked about Character Counts, her father responded:

Sometimes she does. She has talked to me about it a couple of times and a couple of times she's come home upset because, like when they did cotton candy for the Character Counts kids and she was upset because she didn't get any; and she said, "I can't ever get any because I can't get the Character Counts stuff right." She was really excited about all the privileges she would get. Ms. F worked with her really well, giving her umpteen chances to be able to do things, making sure she had some type of job; and that's one of the Character Counts things, but Ms. F always made sure she had some job to do.

When asked if they thought how the teacher handled her and the Character Counts program affected Kandy, they both responded, "Sure it did." Her father stated, "She tried very hard for Ms. F, but Ms. F would just have to remind her, and she would straighten out." Kandy's mother responded:

Ms. F would ask them if they were misbehaving and tell them it was 'on their honor'; and when I was in there volunteering, nine times out of ten, those that were misbehaving would tell her truthfully that they were. It is good that she made them individually responsible rather than the class as a whole. It makes them responsible for their own actions.

During the 1998 to 1999 school year, when Kandy was in the first grade, she was referred to the office twice. Once was for biting another child on the bus. The other was for stealing from the teacher. During the 1999-2000 school year, when Kandy was in the second grade, she was referred to the office nine times, ranging from not following the rules, to being disrespectful, to cutting another child's hair. During the 2000 to 2001 school year, Kandy was referred to the office four times; however, the last referral was on October 2, barely into the second six-weeks of school.

Case 7: PJ

PJ was a 10-year-old male in the fourth grade. He had attended this school since kindergarten and began experiencing academic and behavioral problems in the second grade. Because of the academic problems, he was retained in the second grade. He had three older sisters; who were good students academically; one was in the gifted program.

The guidance counselor identified PJ while he was in the third grade. When asked how his behavior had changed at the end of the third grade, the guidance counselor stated:

Although he still gets in trouble frequently, the intensive character environment in his classroom has had a positive impact on his behavior. He does behave better than previously. He also seems to understand that he is making the choices that result in his punishment. Continuing in this manner, I hope he will improve enough that the misbehavior/attention getting comments will be less and less frequent. The incentives provided by his classroom teacher have given PJ a goal to work toward that is contingent upon behavior showing good character. He has chosen to work toward these goals.

When asked how his behavior had changed during the fourth grade, his teacher, Mrs. M, responded:

I have known PJ for the past four years. During this time, I watched him struggle to succeed in school not only academically, but also with his behavior. I was very apprehensive about having him in my class this year, partly because of his reputation and having had his three older sisters. Now, as this year is closing, I feel honored to have had the opportunity to watch PJ have success and show his true character.

When his fourth grade teacher was asked what she thought contributed to the changes, Mrs. M stated:

I believe many factors have contributed to PJ's great year. He has been shown by the faculty and staff what is expected of him, and he has responded positively; he has also matured socially and academically. Testing has shown he has a learning disability and he now knows there is a reason he struggles. He has been given responsibilities throughout the school such as washing tables in the cafeteria, tutoring and reading to kindergarten students, collecting cans, watering plants, and helping out when needed. He knows he has to be trustworthy and responsible when given these tasks. He also knows what he does helps the school, which shows citizenship and caring.

When PJ was informed of the comments made by his teachers and asked why his behavior had improved so much during the year, he responded, "I had to. All my sisters had Mrs. M, and I'm the last one, and I just wanted to be good." When asked if his behavior had improved at home, he responded, "yes." When asked why, he responded, "A couple of things, actually, [oldest sister] is threatening to move out." When asked who had had the most influence on him, he responded, "Friend-wise, family-wise, teacher-wise?" When told it could be any of these, he responded, "Mrs. M, [friend's name], and [oldest sister]." When asked what they had done to influence him, he responded, "[Oldest sister] has helped me do my homework and everything else, [friend's name] is just my friend, and Mrs. M has been really nice to me." When asked if he knew what the Character Counts program was, he responded, "no." When told it was

the program where we talk about respect, responsibility, and caring, he began shaking his head affirmatively; when asked if he now understood what the program was, he responded, “yes.” When I informed him of some of the service projects his teacher and her class had done through the year, he named other projects they had done, both this year and last year. When asked if the program had changed him at all, he responded “kind of.” When asked how, he responded, “I don’t know.”

When asked if she had observed any changes in PJ’s behavior during the school year, his mother responded:

I have seen a tremendous change in behavior at home. He is more considerate of others, more open to discuss problems, and doesn’t lose his temper as much. He controls it better. He also realizes that we don’t have control over all events.

When PJ’s mother was asked what she thought had led to these changes, she stated:

I think the school family has had a big influence on him, along with maturing some. His teacher, the way she treats him, has had a big effect. She and I talked before school started and she was reluctant to have him because of his reputation of threats to himself and his sulking; but, she has done a wonderful job with him and he has had his best school year ever.

When asked if he ever discussed the Character Counts program, PJ’s mother responded:

He talks about the program and brings cards and other information home. We discuss the pillars at home. He talks about what they discuss in class, and we discuss different ways of showing or demonstrating the six pillars of character. Manners is a big thing for me, being polite and respectful.

When asked if she thought the program had affected how PJ behaved, she stated:

PJ would not have done as well in a more rigid system. He has been affected by how he has been treated at this school; that is, he has been treated with respect, caring, and trusting. He has been thinking, reasoning, and applying the character concepts that have been presented to him here at school.

The 1998 to 1999 disciplinary records were not available. During the 1999 to 2000 school year [repeating the second grade], PJ was referred to the office for threatening another student and refusing to apologize [he told a girl he would put a bullet through her head]. He was also referred to the office for opening an umbrella up and hitting another girl in the mouth. During this time, he was a bitter, angry child and threatened to hurt himself many times. During

the 2000 to 2001 school year [third grade], PJ was referred to the office twice for disciplinary reasons. The first incident was for bringing a shotgun shell to school and giving it to another student. The second was for being disrespectful to the bus driver. However, his anger and bitterness continued sporadically and he threatened suicide more than once. During the 2001 to 2002 school year [fourth grade], PJ was referred only once to the office by a teacher on bus duty. He and another boy were accused of making inappropriate sexual remarks to two girls. They both claimed it was the girls who were making the remarks and they were only responding. During this school year, none of the anger or bitterness seen in previous years was present.

Case 8: Macky

Macky was a 12-year-old boy in the fifth grade. He was an only child being reared by his maternal grandmother and had attended this school since kindergarten. His mother was in and out of the house, but her involvement with him was limited. He was identified by his fourth grade teacher, Mrs. C, as having exhibited positive changes during the school year. He was an unusual boy, not very popular, with red hair and freckles. He had a very light complexion. He was teased a lot by the other students, and when confronted by a teacher, he would cry and scream, throw things, and then become unresponsive to questions.

When his teacher, Mrs. C, was asked how she taught character in her classroom, she stated:

Throughout the school year, I spend very little instructional time on character. Most of my character education is through incidental learning. If two students are arguing about something, we can use this as a time to talk about character. At the beginning of the school year, we do spend about a half-hour a day on the pillars and the behaviors that accompany 'people of character.' After we finish our standardized tests in the spring, I spend one hour each day discussing the pillars. I think character is easily incorporated into the curriculum for fourth graders, because I expect them to be much more responsible, etc. than they were in third grade. They are responsible for turning in their work. I don't make a checklist and check them off each day. The concepts are reinforced daily through behavior management.

When asked how character education is incorporated into her disciplinary program, Mrs.

C responded:

The number one rule in my class is ‘Be a person of character.’ My students helped me develop the rules at the beginning of the year, and we all felt that this statement covered it all. When my students lose or gain dollars [she uses play money, which can be redeemed for merchandise at her ‘classroom store’], it is usually due to the number one rule. I also have students who are not able to ‘Celebrate Dollars’ write a paragraph which includes the pillars of character. I feel like the pillars are a basis for my behavior management system.

When Mrs. C was asked to describe the changes she had observed in Macky, she stated:

Macky has become much more responsible and respectful. I have had people [previous teachers] ask me if he has ‘thrown fits’ on me this year, which surprises me because he doesn’t do that this year. He is also very much more responsible for his actions. He didn’t turn in any work for me at the beginning of the year, but now he turns in most, if not all.

When Mrs. C was asked to what she attributed the changes, she responded:

With Macky, I attribute the changes to maturity and to a weird bond he and I seem to have. I think that because I respect him for his idiosyncrasies, he respects me and behaves accordingly. I am able to discuss logically any problems he has and he will help me come to a solution. I really feel that a large part of Macky’s positive behavior is my respect for him and his intelligence. Because I recognize him as an intelligent child, he sees me as an intelligent teacher; mutual respect.

When asked why he behaved the way he did, Macky shrugged his shoulders. When I told him what the teacher had said about her showing him respect and he in turn respected her, he agreed but would not offer anything else. When I asked who influenced him most, he responded, “my grandmother, Mrs. C, and you, of course.” When I asked why, he responded, “You two taught me right from wrong.” When I asked if he knew about the Character Counts program, he responded, “Yes, sir, I do.” When I asked if the program affected him at all, did it have anything to do with how he acted, he responded, “umm, half and half.” When asked again if it affected him, and how, he stated:

Yes, sir. A lot of what Mrs. C did, she tried to live by those rules. She tried to not only teach you about respect, but treat you with respect as well; show caring to you and the other kids in the class, too.

When asked if he thought she did a good job at that, Macky shook his head affirmatively.

When Macky's grandmother was asked if she had observed any changes in his behavior during the school year, she responded:

During this school year, Macky has changed dramatically. Before, the other children didn't understand him and his teacher didn't understand him either. He's always behaved well at home; school was the only place where he had problems. He would throw fits on the teachers and sulk up and sulk.

When asked what she thought led to these changes, she stated:

This year, his teacher understood Macky better; she showed him respect, and she got Macky's respect in return. When she saw Macky was getting upset over something, she would give him space and time to himself. She wouldn't force the issue on him. She let him cool off. Then, she talked to him like she would an adult. This made Macky realize that she accepted him as he was. Macky is different from the other kids; in ways, he is much more mature. But the other kids always made fun of him and teased him. Mrs. C did not let this happen in her class.

When Macky's grandmother was asked if he ever discussed the Character Counts program, she responded:

Macky talked about the Character Counts program a lot. He would tell me what was going on at school with the program, and he would bring information home from his teacher describing what they were doing at school. Macky loved his teacher.

When she was asked if the program affected how Macky behaved, she stated:

I think the teacher probably affected how Macky behaves as much as the program has. Macky knows about trust and respect and the other parts of the character program, but it was how the teacher implemented the program, how she treated the kids, that changed Macky.

There are no records of Macky's being referred to the office for disciplinary reasons while he was at the elementary school. However, since going to the fifth grade at the middle school, he was suspended for threatening other students.

Case 9: Sammy

Sammy was a nine-year-old boy in the fourth grade. He lived with his mother and older brother in a small house in a quiet neighborhood. He had a long history of behavior problems. His third grade teacher identified him as showing the most improvement in his behavior during the 2000 to 2001 school year.

When his teacher, Ms. B, was asked to describe how she taught character in the classroom, she responded, “I constantly incorporate character education throughout the curriculum. We discuss character in everything we do, whether it is reading, spelling, or language arts.” When asked to describe how it is incorporated into her classroom disciplinary program, she stated:

I use rewards and awards on a daily and monthly basis. We discuss appropriate and inappropriate behavior rewarding positive behavior, isolating negative behavior, and withdrawing rewards. Our emphasis is on the class rules and how character plays a part in our actions.

When asked to describe the changes she had observed in Sammy, Ms. B responded:

Sammy was constantly in trouble throughout the year. He was involved in horseplay, harassing other students, and disrupting the classroom by talking, singing, or arguing. He hit, kicked, and threw things at other students. He refused to do his assigned work in class and at home. He was disrespectful, uncooperative, and rude. He misbehaved daily in the cafeteria. He brought toys and electronic games to school to play with during class, and he rarely came to class prepared. Then, around the beginning of the fourth six weeks, his behavior changed.

When asked what she thought caused the changes in his behavior, she stated:

He realized that he was missing out on a lot of rewards and privileges due to his behavior. As his behavior improved, I spoke with his mother and told her I was considering giving him the ‘Most Improved’ student award at the end of the year. Well, he was like a different kid. He stopped harassing the other students, began completing his assignments, and his grades improved dramatically.

I informed Sammy that Mrs. B had stated that his behavior had improved dramatically during the last part of the year, that he controls himself, that he tries to do all his work, and that he tried to please her. When Sammy was asked why, what changed him, he responded, “Because my mom told me I was going to get the ‘Most Improved’ award if I would be good the rest of the year, and I wanted to do that.” When asked if he had responsibilities at home, such as making his bed, taking out the trash, washing dishes, feeding pets, or cleaning his room, he responded, “no,” to each question. When asked if there were other students in his class who acted responsibly, he mentioned one boy and stated, “He always acts that way.” He also mentioned several girls and stated, “They always act that way too.” He mentioned another girl and stated,

“She started off being mean to some of the kids at the beginning of the year. Then, uh, we told her to stop being mean to us and she started being nice.”

When asked who had the most influence on his changing his behavior, he responded, “I have no idea.” When asked if it was his teacher, he responded, “un-un.” When asked if it was his mom, he responded, “She told me [that he might get an award].” When asked if he knew what the Character Counts program was, he responded, “uh-huh.” When asked to explain it, he responded, “I don’t know much about it.” When asked why we did the program he responded, “To be trustworthy and to treat other people the way you want to be treated.”

When asked if any aspect of the program affected him, Sammy responded, “Uh-huh, I helped clean up around the school.” When asked if he participated in the math-a-thon, he indicated that he did; when asked if he knew what it was for he responded, “yeah, for children’s hospital.” When asked what next year was going to be like, Sammy responded, “like this year.” When asked which part of this year, he responded, “the last part.”

When Sammy’s mother was asked if she had observed any changes in his behavior during the school year, she responded:

Yes, both at home and at school. He is more mature, more responsible, and I get fewer phone calls from the principal. I can trust him now, where I couldn’t before. He will do what I say. He cleans his room, and he has done much better in school. I really think he could do better in his schoolwork, but he wants to be the first one finished all the time.

When asked what she thought led to the changes in his behavior, she stated:

The main reason he changed was his teacher called me and promised the ‘Most Improved Student’ award if he maintained good behavior the remainder of the year. After that, he just kept improving his behavior. This year, he wanted Ms. W for fourth grade. He has loved her since kindergarten. Since he has been in her room, his behavior has continued to improve. He is also very excited about perfect attendance.

When asked if he had ever discussed the Character Counts program, she responded:

He talks about specific things his class does at school but doesn’t relate it to the character program. For example, when his class collected things for needy families at Christmas, he was excited about it but did not relate that to Character Counts.

When asked if she thought the program affected how her child behaved, she stated, “Probably. He now says things to his brother like ‘You are not being very respectful’ or, ‘Mom can’t go anywhere because you’re not trustworthy’.”

Sammy’s fourth grade teacher was interviewed at the end of the school year. When asked how she taught character in her classroom, she stated, “I integrate it into the subject being taught. I bring out the pillars of character based on the situation or story.” When asked how character education is incorporated into her discipline program, she stated, “Any discipline problem is related to Character Counts; we talk about being examples for the younger kids in the halls, cafeteria, etc. We also talk about the ‘Golden Rule’ when they tease, taunt, or gossip.”

When asked if she had observed changes in Sammy’s behavior during the year, she stated:

Yes, his attitude has changed from being negative about everything to being positive. Sammy was not a reader when school started, but we set a goal of him reaching 50 points in Accelerated Reader before the school year ended. We had intervening reward levels, and he worked hard to achieve each one. He started reading books from the library every chance he had. He now reads during bus duty, at lunch, and any time he has a few minutes. In the spring, Sammy’s behavior reverted back to being disrespectful and mad at the world. However, I learned that his older brother had attempted suicide by drinking gasoline, and I believe this is the reason he went back to being angry and mad at the world.

When Ms. W was asked why she thought his behavior had changed, she stated:

I think he wanted to please me. I gave him the emotional support he needed and he responded. After the episode with his brother, he knew he could take out his anger on me and I would still love him. He felt comfortable showing his emotions to me.

When Sammy was in the first grade, he was referred to the office for disciplinary reasons four times. The problems ranged from leaving school without permission, being disrespectful, pulling another child’s pants down, and making obscene gestures with a hot dog in the cafeteria. The next year, 2000 to 2001, he was referred to the office 13 times for disciplinary action and was isolated in the office almost daily until March 28, which was the last incident in the record. This corresponded to the time frame his teacher indicated a change in his behavior. During the 2001 to 2002 school year, he had not been referred to the office for disciplinary problems.

Case 10: Danny Joe

Danny Joe was an 11 year-old boy in the 5th grade. He was an only child and lived with his mother. Danny Joe attended this school from kindergarten through fourth grade. He had behavior problems until he began the fourth grade, and his behavior was excellent until midway through the year.

His fourth grade teacher, Mrs. C, identified Danny Joe as a student whose behavior had changed negatively during the school year. When asked how his behavior had changed during the year, Mrs. C responded:

Danny Joe has a hard time controlling his anger. He has been in several fights and is constantly bullying the other kids. His teacher last year observed the same behaviors in the latter part of the year. He was very nice and sociable at the beginning of the year, but now he is hard to judge. Somedays he is angry, and some days a perfect angel!

When asked to what she attributed the negative changes in his behavior, Mrs. C stated:

With Danny Joe, I attribute the changes to a couple of things. First, I believe personal problems at home have been a factor. Secondly, I feel that as Danny Joe gets more comfortable with me, as the year has progressed. He has let more of his feelings out. He is a sweet boy who has difficulty controlling his emotions.”

Danny Joe was interviewed six months after he left Mrs. C’s class. I informed him that his teacher indicated that he had started out the year real happy, real cheerful, and helpful. Then, during the middle of the year, he changed. When asked why there had been a change in his behavior, Danny Joe responded:

I think that I lose my temper a lot. People make me real mad. I think that mostly the Character Counts program is a good way to help children, and calm their feelings down, and help them be more considerate of others. And, to help them stop losing their tempers and start respecting their teachers, friends, and classmates.

When asked if there was anyone in particular who had influenced him, he responded:

Um, mostly, um, it was my cousins. I would go around them, and they would teach me to do bad things; but, then, in the middle of the year, they could do what they want, but I wanted to treat others the way I want to be treated.

When asked if there was any one person who had influence on him, either good or bad, he responded:

Mostly I looked up to my parents, my dad and my mom. I looked up to them because I knew they were the ones who, on through the years, were raising me to be like the person who cares for others and respects their teachers. I just looked up to them a lot.

When asked if he knew what the Character Counts program was, he responded, “yes.”

When I began naming the pillars, he reminded me of the ones I had omitted. When asked if the program affected how he behaved, he responded, “yes.” When asked how, he responded, “It made me be a better person.” When asked for examples, he responded:

When the Character Counts program started, I got into a little trouble, but not as much as I used to, because I took anger management for a couple of years [the anger management class was taught by the guidance counselor in conjunction with the Character Counts program]. The teacher taught us how to control our anger and we studied the six pillars. I learned that you shouldn’t ever judge people by their clothes, or how their hair looked, or the way they think. You should judge them by what kind of person they are.

When Danny Joe’s mother was asked if she had observed changes in his behavior, she stated, “Yes, he is rowdier and loses his temper quickly.” When asked what she thought led to the changes, she responded:

I don’t know. I consider myself a good mother. Nobody’s perfect. He has an awful temper, but there is something deeper bothering him. There is something there that is bothering him, and we are in the process of getting him counseling.

When she was asked if Danny Joe ever discussed the Character Counts program, she stated:

He has, some; he talked about the food drives and planting trees and flowers. He is not a mean kid; he just has a temper. He has a good heart, but has a temper. Sometimes he would remind me that he had to wear old clothes to school because they were planting flowers that day.

When she was asked if the program affected how her child behaves, she responded:

It has had a positive effect; it reinforces what is taught at home. I think he had a wonderful relationship with his fourth grade teacher last year. She really tried. She cares about him, and he knew it. He has told me that he would go back to Mrs. C’s class if he could.

During the 1998 to 1999 school year, when Danny Joe was in the second grade, he was referred to the office eight times for fighting, horseplay, making vulgar gestures and comments, being disrespectful, and refusing to follow commands by the teacher. The next year, Danny Joe was referred to the office three times. During his fourth grade year, Danny Joe was referred to

the office twice in September, right after school started, for fighting and horseplay. He was not referred to the office again until May, just before the school year was over. It was at this time that Danny Joe indicated that a cousin had sexually molested him periodically since before kindergarten and that it had recently resumed. During the 2001 to 2002 school year, while Danny Joe was in the fifth grade, he was referred to the office at the middle school four times during the year for pushing and making threats, possession of a cap pistol, being disrespectful to the teacher, and inappropriate language.

Summary

In summary, this chapter presented case studies of 10 students whom teachers identified as exhibiting changes in their behavior during the school year. Each study included an interview with the teacher, the student, and one or both of the student's parents, along with a summary of disciplinary records from this school as well as the middle school when applicable. Chapter 5 includes analysis of the data.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The data collected were analyzed on a continuing basis throughout the study. The researcher was searching for patterns, themes, and constructs related to how character was taught, how the character program was incorporated into the disciplinary plan, the nature and degree of changes in behavior, and the basis for behavioral changes (or what participants perceived may have caused the changes, if any, in behavior). Observations of students' behavior by the researcher confirmed what had been reported by the parent, students, and teachers and in no case substantially differed from those reports; therefore, little emphasis was given in the reporting of results to these informal observations.

Teaching Character and Discipline

All of the teachers integrate the character education program into the curriculum and some teach it separately, as well. From selected readings to journal writing, to art, to the regular reading program, to everyday discussions of current events and what is happening in the classroom or school, the teachers weave the pillars of character into their lessons on a daily basis. Although their disciplinary programs were different, there was a common pattern of basing the programs on the pillars of character. All of the teachers indicated that when a child broke one of the class rules, the pillar of character associated with the infraction was then discussed. Whether the infraction was coming to class unprepared, stealing from another child, not telling the truth, bullying other children, or disrupting the class, the teachers consistently brought character into the discussion of the student's misbehavior.

Changes in Behavior

When parents were asked if they had observed any changes in their child's behavior during the year, they all responded affirmatively. All but one identified positive changes in their children's behavior. Although one identified negative changes, the mother still described the positive effects of the program and the teacher. Both the teachers and the parents were asked what types of changes in behavior they had observed in their student/child. The most prevalent change in behavior dealt with responsibility. All of the teachers indicated that the students had become more "responsible" during the year. This included responsibility for assignments and homework as well as their behavior and actions. Fifty percent of the parents described more "responsible" behavior in their child. This included completing chores at home and taking care of their possessions as well as completing their homework assignments at school.

The second most prevalent change dealt with "respect." Fifty percent of the parents and almost half of the teachers specifically cited "respect" as a change in observed behavior; or, they described changes in how the children treated other people, including their peers, teachers, siblings, and parents.

Finally, 4 of the 11 parents interviewed indicated that they observed changes in their child's attitude toward school. This included being "happier," "loving their teacher," and "loving this school." Two of the teachers interviewed cited improved attitude or increased self-esteem as being changes they had observed during the year.

Influences on Behavioral Changes

The students were asked who had the most influence on the changes in their behavior. Three of the students indicated that the teacher had influenced them most. Two other students mentioned the teacher as having influenced them but stated that others had influenced them as well (family members, peers, etc.). Two students stated that family members (cousins, siblings, and/or parents) had the most influence on them, and one student stated that his peers had

influenced him most. Another student specifically cited her peers as having the most influence on her but then went on to say that the reason she did not get into trouble anymore was because her teacher was “really nice” to her. Finally, one student could not identify anyone as having influenced his behavioral changes. Interestingly, it was the parents who gave much of the credit to the teachers for influencing the changes in their children’s behavior.

Reasons for Changes in Behavior

The teachers, students, and parents were asked why there was a perceived change in the child’s behavior. The teachers credited the program, or certain aspects of the program, as being the primary factor. The students and parents credited the teacher and their relationship with the student as a major factor.

Although stated in a variety of ways, the teachers who observed positive changes in student behavior credited the character education program, or some aspect of it, as contributing to the changes in student behavior. Some stated it was the daily “reinforcements” or “reminders” of the pillars of character and what was expected of the students; others stated it was the “incentives” or “rewards” or “privileges” provided by the program; and still others credited the “responsibilities” given to the students or the “mutual respect” the program involves. Three teachers also mentioned the relationship they had with the student as being a contributing factor in behavioral changes. They described this relationship as “a crazy bond” between the teacher and the student, the student “wants to please me,” and the student does not want to “disappoint me.” Finally, two of the teachers stated that the student having “matured” somewhat during the year was also a contributing factor.

When parents were asked what they thought had affected the behavior of their child, they all mentioned the “teacher” as being one of the primary factors. Some stated it was how the teacher “treats” their child; others stated their child had a “good teacher” or their child just “loves” his teacher. Half of the parents also stated that the character education program also had

an effect on the behavior of their son or daughter. Three of the parents also stated that their child had “matured” during the year, and they felt that was a contributing factor as well. When asked specifically if the program had affected their child’s behavior, all of the parents responded that it had. Even the parent whose son was experiencing negative changes in his behavior stated the program had a positive effect on him.

When the students were asked why they had changed during the year, four of them gave credit to the character education program or some aspect of it. Two of these students specifically stated that the Character Counts program affected their behavior, one stated he “didn’t like missing the privileges” provided by the program, and the other stated he behaved himself in hopes of receiving one of the “awards” given at the end of the year. Four of the students also gave credit to the teacher for affecting their behavior. Whether it was not wanting to disappoint the teacher or how the teacher “treated” them, the responses indicated that the teacher was the “reason” the behavior had changed. One other student indicated he “didn’t know” why his behavior had changed; the other student indicated he “didn’t want to get in trouble” as being the reason.

Disciplinary Referrals to the Office

A review of the office records on discipline was made on each student. There was evidence of improvement in the behavior of 7 of the 10 students studied. Some showed not only a drop in the number of referrals but also the reasons for referral were less serious. Three of the students had no referrals to the office for disciplinary reasons during the time they attended this school. Two students went from double-digit referrals to no referrals at all during the most recent school year. Three other students’ behaviors improved by the end of the first six weeks of the most recent school year, as evidenced by no referrals after that time (except for one who had referrals in September and no more until the end of the school year). Finally, two students improved their behavior at this school (as shown by the nature and number of referrals to the

office), but began having serious disciplinary problems again after they moved to the middle school. The third student, who is now at the middle school, had no office referrals at this school but was suspended from the middle school for threatening a student.

Summary

The character education program appeared to be well integrated into the curriculum at this school and was the basis for classroom management and rules. Responsibility and respect were the two most prevalent changes in behavior identified by the teachers, a claim supported by the parent interviews. Another change identified was that some of the students had improved their attitude toward school or were “happier.” Although this is not specifically a behavior, it does contribute to how a child behaves and is worth noting. Of the 10 students in the study, 5 stated the teacher was an influencing factor in how they behaved. When asked specifically why they changed their behavior, four gave credit to the teacher and four gave credit to some aspect of the character education program. In contrast, the teachers unanimously credited the character education program, to some degree, in affecting how the students behaved, whereas the parents all mentioned the teacher as being one of the primary factors. Finally, the disciplinary records indicated improved behavior for 7 of the 10 students in the study. The other three had no record of referral for disciplinary reasons. However, the records indicate that referrals to the office increased once the student left this school. Conclusions and recommendations for practice and further research are described in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This chapter describes conclusions from the study, recommendations for practice, and recommendations for further research. The findings of this study were compared to similar studies described in Chapter 2.

Conclusions

Previous research about the effects of character education programs does not yield clear conclusions. In this study, based on teacher comments, parent interviews, and disciplinary records, it appears that following the implementation of a character development program in this elementary school, student behavior improved. Because all the parents and almost half of the students credited the teacher as a primary factor for the changes in behavior, and all the teachers credited the character education program as a primary factor, one could logically conclude that the character education program contributed to the improved behavior. This was further supported by the perceptions of the parents (50% gave some credit to the character education program) and the students (40% credited the character education program) that the character education program contributed to the changes in student behavior. The disciplinary records might be interpreted as supporting this conclusion. Seven of the 10 students included in the study had been referred to the office for disciplinary reasons over the last three years. All seven showed a decrease in the number of referrals during the study, along with a decrease in the seriousness of the referrals. These findings are similar to those reported by Leming (1993) in a longitudinal study of the Weber County Character Education Project. This study described a reduction in disciplinary problems in schools where character education programs were in effect

as compared to schools without a program. It is also similar to the findings of Olsen (1995), who reported that teachers perceived student behavior to have improved after the implementation of a character education program.

However, other factors could also have contributed to the changes in behavior. One of these factors was the “teacher.” The parents identified the teacher as being a primary factor in the changes in student behavior. Additionally, four of the students also credited the teacher for affecting behavior. The teachers, however, credited the character education program. Because the researcher was primarily responsible for introducing the character education program into the school, the teachers may have, consciously or unconsciously, credited the program with the changes in student behavior, rather than their own actions, because they believed that was what the researcher wanted to happen. In some ways this is similar to the findings of Williams (1993) who reported that the teachers viewed the character education program successful, but the students believed how the teacher treated them was more important than what they were taught. However, in the Williams study, the students were critical of some of the teachers for being hypocritical, whereas in this study, the students and parents gave credit to the teachers for changing student behavior based on how they treated the students. The “loving” and “caring” personality of the teachers involved in this study and the modeling of good character by these teachers (how they treated the students) could be completely unrelated to the character education program. The improvement in behavior could possibly be attributed to the differences in how these teachers treated the students, as compared to the treatment the student received from his or her past teachers. The influence of the teacher on their students' behavior is further supported by the disciplinary records. Three students included in this study, who are all now at the middle school, have had an increase in the number of office referrals for disciplinary reasons since they left this school. This may suggest that once they were no longer under the influence of the fourth grade teacher, negative behavior resumed. In conclusion, the positive and the negative changes in student behavior may have occurred even without a character education program in place.

Another factor that may have affected the behavioral changes is “maturity.” Two of the teachers stated that the student “maturing” during the year contributed to the behavioral changes. Additionally, three of the parents stated that the child had “matured” during the year. There is no way to determine if this was a result of the character education program, or if it was a natural occurrence that contributed to the changes in behavior and completely independent of the character education program. None of the reviewed studies specifically considered maturity levels of the students as a factor. However, the results of the longitudinal studies reported by Leming (1993) might have been possibly affected by maturity levels because of the duration of the studies. These factors must be taken into consideration in reviewing the findings of this study and planning future research.

Extrinsic rewards also may have affected the behavioral changes. Three students specifically mentioned the rewards and incentives of the program and one of these students mentioned an end-of-the-year award as factors contributing to the changes in behavior. These external reinforcements may have contributed to the behavioral changes, even in the absence of a character education program. This may explain why there was a negative change in the behavior of other students once they moved to the middle school (where the external reinforcements were no longer available).

Finally, there may be inherent biases in this study because of the researcher's being primarily responsible for introducing the character education program into the school and his continued interest in and support of the program. For example, the teachers might have been more inclined to report cases of positive behavioral changes, rather than negative ones. Similarly, the parents might have more readily credited the character education program for changes in student behavior because they were aware of the researcher's involvement and support of the program. Although the researcher attempted to report the findings in an unbiased manner, the reader must recognize that the potential for bias in this study does exist because of the intense daily involvement the researcher had in the program.

In summary, it appears that the character education program may have had a positive effect on the behavior of the students in the study based on the perceptions of the teachers, parents, and students. The disciplinary records of the students included in the study support this conclusion. However, other factors may have affected student behavior as much as, or even more, than the character education program.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that the character education program continue as an integral part of the curriculum of the school. All of the teachers interviewed incorporated the character education program throughout the curriculum including art, music, and classroom disciplinary programs. The results of the study indicated improvement in the behavior of some students and it appears that the character education program may have been a primary factor in this improvement. Rusnak (1998) emphasized that character education was not a separate subject but an integral part of every subject. Students' attention should be focused on the ethical dimensions of stories, the moral aspects of history, and applying the moral of a story to the student's own life. All of the programs reviewed by Rusnak integrated character education into all aspects of the curriculum and school environment. Olsen (1995) also concluded that student behavior improved after the implementation of a character education program.

It is also recommended that the school continue to expand the hands-on activities of the students in performing service projects. This will provide students the opportunity to be truly involved and develop a sense of ownership of the program. This is based in part on the findings of this study and in part on the literature review. The program began at this school as a separate subject, with commercially developed lesson plans and student activities. As the program evolved, it became more "service" oriented, getting the students involved in activities that helped their school, their community, and beyond (such as the flood victims in North Carolina, the police and firefighters in New York City, and the children of Afghanistan). The disciplinary

records of the students included in this study steadily improved as the program became more service oriented. Service learning is also a major element of the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development's character education initiative (Howard, 1993). According to Kuykendall (1992), service learning is a means to motivate those students who are not motivated because it promotes nonacademic skills. Finally, Howard (1993) stated that service learning involves students in activities that result in real assistance to others, promotes personal growth, and reinforces accepted community values. Whether the students recognize the character education program as a program in itself is immaterial. It is, however, important to develop long-lasting character traits that will result in a responsible and productive adult.

Recommendations for Further Research

Although one could logically conclude from the results of this study that character education may have had a positive effect on the behavior of the students included in this study, it is not conclusive and there are still questions that need to be answered. In the absence of a character education program, what types of teacher behavior most affect the behavior of students? Further research should be conducted comparing schools where character education programs are not present to schools where character education is an integral part of the curriculum. In addition, studies should examine the extent to which the age and maturity level of the students affects behavior, with, and without a character education program in place. Another recommendation would be to conduct case studies of those students whose behavior did not change when exposed to a character education program. The study should focus on the influence of the teacher, the home situation, the manner in which the program was implemented, and the student. Further research should also examine the influence of extrinsic rewards on behavioral changes. Finally, further research should consider the role parents play and the effects their actions have on the behavior of students both with and without a character education program in place.

It should be noted that the cases selected by the teachers were generally positive changes in behavior and that the researcher, as principal, observed other, less positive changes in some students who were not investigated in this study. Therefore, further research should examine the types and percentages of students who change behavior as a consequence of character education programs or effective teachers and the types and percentages of students who do not.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Guide for Teachers

Teacher's name:

Years teaching:

Years teaching at this school:

Grade:

1. During this school year, for which student(s) have you observed the most significant changes in behavior (positive or negative)?
2. Describe the changes you have observed in this child (or children).
3. To what do you attribute these changes?
4. Describe how you teach character in your classroom (i.e. your approach, amount of time, materials used, incorporation into the curriculum, reinforcement of the concepts, etc.).
5. Is character education incorporated into your disciplinary program? Describe how it is incorporated.

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide for Students

Student's name:

Grade:

Length of time at this school:

1. (Insert child's name), I noticed you/your teacher noticed you (Insert behavior observed or behavior reported by the teacher), can you tell me why you did this?
2. What else have you done lately that is similar to (insert behavior observed or behavior reported by the teacher)? Can you tell me why you did this?
3. Have you seen any of your friends or classmates do anything like (insert behavior observed or reported by the teacher)? Who? Why do you think they did this?
4. Who do you think has most influenced you to (insert behavior observed or reported by the teacher, positive or negative)? What has (insert answer from previous question) done said to influence you to (insert behavior observed or reported by the teacher)?
5. Do you know what the "Character Counts" program is? How has this program affected you?

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide for Parents

Name:

Child's Name:

Grade:

Years at this school:

1. Have you observed any changes in your child's behavior during this school year, at home or at school? Can you give me examples?
2. What do you think led to these changes in his/her behavior?
3. Has your child ever discussed a program at school called "Character Counts"? Can you describe what information your child has shared with you concerning this program?
4. Has this program affected how your child behaves? How?

APPENDIX D

Parent Permission for Students

Dear Parents:

As a part of my doctoral dissertation, and in an effort to improve what we are doing at school, I am conducting research to determine how the character education program affects student behavior. As a part of this research, I will be interviewing students and parents. I am requesting permission from you to interview your child. His or her name will not appear in the dissertation in any way. He or she will only be identified as male or female and third or fourth grade.

For me to interview your child, East Tennessee State University requires you to complete and sign the attached "Informed Consent Form." This form is required for all research conducted through the university. It can be an intimidating form because it is the same form used for many medical studies. Please be assured that I truly care about your child and my questions will not hurt him or her in any way. Attached is a copy of those questions for you to review.

As I mentioned earlier, I would also like to interview you as a part of the research. You would not be identified in the dissertation in any way except as the parent of a third or fourth grade child.

If you will allow me to interview you and your child, please complete and sign the attached form and return to me.

Sincerely,

Bill Thompson, Principal

APPENDIX E

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

East Tennessee State University
Veterans Affairs Medical Center

Informed Consent for a Research Project

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Bill Thompson, Principal

TITLE OF PROJECT: The Effects of Character Education on Student Behavior

This Informed Consent will explain about being a research subject in an experiment. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to determine how the character education program affects the behavior of the students. It will involve observations of students, interviews with teachers and students, and interviews with parents. The results will be used to determine the effectiveness of the character education program and make possible modifications to the program.

DURATION: Each interview should be completed in one hour or less.

PROCEDURES: The study will include observing how students behave, interviewing teachers concerning their impressions of how the character education program has affected the behavior of the students, and interviewing students concerning their impressions of how the character education program has affected their behavior and the behavior of their classmates. It will also involve interviewing parents concerning their impressions of how the character education program has affected the behavior of their child or children. These interviews may be audiorecorded.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS: The possible risks and/or discomforts of your involvement include: no known risks, side effects or inconveniences are expected. However, it is possible that some students' feelings may be hurt as a result of discussing poor behavior with that student and/or his or her parent. **You may choose not to answer any question(s) that make you feel uncomfortable.**

POSSIBLE BENEFITS and/or COMPENSATION: The potential benefits as a result of this study include a safer school and improvement in student behavior. A broader potential benefit of this study includes the knowledge base created concerning character education programs. There are no other direct benefits to the individual subjects and there will be no compensation paid to any subjects.

April 22, 2002

Subject's initials _____

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Bill Thompson, Principal

TITLE OF PROJECT: The Effects of Character Education on Student Behavior

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS: If you have any questions, problems or research-related medical problems at any time, you may call Bill Thompson at xxx-xxxx or Debra Cline at xxx-xxxx. You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at xxx/xxx-xxxx for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Every attempt will be made to see that the study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in the office at Northview Elementary School for at least 10 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the East Tennessee State University/V.A. Medical Center Institutional Review Board, the Food and Drug Administration, and the ETSU Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis have access to the study records. The records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

COMPENSATION FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT: East Tennessee State University (ETSU) will pay the cost of emergency first aid for any injury which may happen as a result of your being in this study. They will not pay for any other medical treatment. Claims against ETSU or any of its agents or employees may be submitted to the Tennessee Claims Commission. These claims will be settled to the extent allowable as provided under TCA Section 9-8-307. For more information about claims call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board of ETSU at xxx/xxx-xxxx.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: The nature, demands, risks, and benefits of the project have been explained to me as well as are known and available. I understand what my participation and/or the participation of my child involves. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to ask questions and withdraw from the project at any time, without penalty. I have read, or have had read to me, and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A signed copy has been given to me.

Your study record will be maintained in strictest confidence according to current legal requirements and will not be revealed unless required by law or as noted above.

April 22, 2002

Subject's initials_____

SIGNATURE OF
VOLUNTEER/DATE_____

SIGNATURE OF PARENTS OR
GUARDIANS/DATE_____

SIGNATURE OF
INVESTIGATOR/DATE_____

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS/DATE_____

APPENDIX F

Request for Superintendent Approval

Mr. Jack Parton, Superintendent
Sevier County School System
226 Cedar Street
Sevierville, Tennessee 37862

Dear Mr. Parton;

As you know, I am in the doctoral cohort program at East Tennessee State University. As a part of the program, I am required to write a dissertation. The topic I have chosen for my dissertation is “How character education affects student behavior.”

I am requesting permission to conduct a study at Northview Elementary School to determine how the character education program affects student behavior. The study will include observing the behavior of students throughout the school setting, interviewing teachers and students concerning their perceptions of the effects of the program, and interviewing parents to determine their perception of the effects of the program. The identity of all participants will be kept confidential and will not appear anywhere in the final copy of the study.

As you can see, the study will not only satisfy a requirement from the university, but will also prove useful to Northview Elementary School and possibly the system as well. I look forward to your decision on this request.

Sincerely,

William G. Thompson

APPENDIX G

Auditor's Letter of Attestation

I attest to having conducted an audit in order to establish the dependability and confirmability of the qualitative study conducted by William G. Thompson that describes the effects of character education on student behavior.

I examined an audit trail consisting of raw data (audiotapes, interview transcriptions, field notes, collected documents) and records containing pattern coding, “notes on notes,” interpretations and analyses, reflective journal entries, and the dissertation.

(Auditor)

(Date)

WILLIAM G. THOMPSON

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Tennessee Technological University, Cookeville, TN, 1972
B.S, Secondary Education

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Classroom Teacher, Overton County Schools, TN
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Classroom Teacher, Sevier County Schools, TN
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Northview Elementary School, 1991-1993

Principal, Sevier County Schools, Kodak, TN
Northview Elementary School, 1993--Present

Investigator, U. S. Civil Service Commission, Knoxville, TN
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Personnel Advisor, U. S. Office of Personnel Management,
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