

Implementation of a Student-Led Character Education Program
and its Effects on Individual Character Transformation

by

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ABSTRACT

A seemingly apparent decline in character is being observed in schools nationwide. Character education programs vary in degrees of successfulness, but one avenue relatively undocumented is peer-led programming within schools. The literature review examines the wide-ranging severity of decline in character, highlighting potential benefits of a peer-led delivery system to curb cussing. The paper describes implementation of a peer-designed program that used a modified version of *Character Counts Six Pillars* to determine perceived character need. Results indicated a greatest weakness in the area of Respect, specifically the use of inappropriate language. It goes on to explain the upperclassmen created activities and implementation during a one-month period. Post-survey results revealed some change and evidence to suggest peer-led programs are effective.

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Chapter I: Introduction

In 1963 when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. addressed the March on Washington, little did he know that his “I Have a Dream” speech would echo today. “I have a dream, my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character” (1963). Just as his yearning decried a currently less-than-perfect state of the nation, the state of individual *character* in schools, workplaces, and the nation remains in-need. Repeat offender underage drinking tickets, Turnitin.com websites monitoring student plagiarism, and lost instructional time due to discipline are just some evidence that *reacting* to engrained behavior by punitive means is not *solving* the deeper-seeded problem of character.

“Universities and schools are seeing increasing amounts of cheating and academic dishonesty, despite numerous rules attempting to reduce such behavior” (Galles, Graves, Sexton, & Walton, 2003). Georgia Southern found that 52.8% of its students admitted to academic dishonesty (Pino & Smith, 2003). The battle of policing and monitoring academic policies of misconduct is exhausting, expensive, and indicative of both time and energy wasted. Clearly character development, specifically individual academic honesty, is lacking in college preparation at the high school level.

Street crimes, drugs, alcohol abuse, and teen pregnancies are some of the visible evidence that deeper seeded issues exist, but individuals involving themselves in these are hardly the exception to poor character display. “Employee theft is a pervasive and expensive problem for organizations; it has been reported as 10 times as costly as America’s street crime” (Greenberg, 1997). The FBI named employee theft as the fastest growing crime in America (Schulman, 2007). In the same posting, “The U.S. Chamber of Commerce estimated nearly 75% of all

employees repeatedly steal from employers.” It is guesstimated that US companies alone lose nearly \$400 billion a year in *time theft*, or lost productivity. The saddest figure is not about lost money, it is about degradation in character allowing such actions to become a norm in a society that is clearly suffering from its collective disregard to choosing a moral, ethical and civil higher road.

In 1998 the U.S. Commissioner of Educational Statistics reported that 57% of public schools reported at least one violent incident or crime that necessitated reporting to officials (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998). In the same report, the top three serious problems of secondary schools were student tardiness, skipping, and physical conflicts. It is likely that in schools today 75% of pupils receive bullying to some degree (Glover, Gough, & Johnson, 2000). So many of these problems in the realm of education, society, and the world at large stem from a breakdown in character, which is one explanation for a necessary rise in effective character education.

Since the 1990s many schools have implemented various character-building programs, like Character Counts, Teen Leadership, Center for Advancement of Character Ethics, amongst others, with varying degrees of success. Though morality cannot be legislated, more effective character education is attainable, especially in schools with Freshmen Mentor Programs. But placing teachers at the head of change is not the answer; a new angle must be explored.

A constructivist approach to a character-building program with a peer-led component is an avenue lacking research and implementation, yet all arrows point to it as a potentially character-changing, life-altering, option. “Unfortunately, many character education initiatives do not engage the desires and aspirations of young people or show them the value of effort required to attain good character or account for the complexity of moral growth” (Bohlin, 2005,

p.2). Intentions are admirable but implementation is lacking. Teachers are often the leaders of such programs, and though some are heading effective initiatives, a peer-led arrangement may in fact bring about more significant change. Just as peer pressure is often associated with the negative, using it in a positive way *could* lead to meaningful behavioral change *because* it is peer-driven in nature.

When given the opportunity to be in leadership roles many students accept and rise to the challenge and will bring about a relationship dynamic unattainable in standard teacher-student relationships (Dreis & Rehage, 2006). “It takes an adult 7 days to 7 weeks to make an impact on a student’s life, but it takes another student of their age or slightly older 7 seconds to 7 minutes to make a difference” (Anonymous). Further research into peer-led character development programs is necessary.

Statement of Problem

Ideally, schools wouldn’t necessitate any time spent on character education; such behavior would be instilled at home. However, in a society where teachers and peers are likely to spend more time with students than parents in a typical day, schools need to consider a revamped curriculum. Religious or morality-neutral pillars of decent humanity-based traits are realistic *and* necessary to the whole-education of students in any school setting, public or private. Schools that supplement their curriculum with character education courses are headed in the right direction, but education is more relevant when students are empowered. Placing students in control of the teaching process could have lasting effects on both individual character and overall school climate. Failing to explore the potential impact of a peer-led character education program could result in an even greater decline in overall character. Harnessing the power of specific

students who recognize a need for more positive character traits may in fact produce changes in others. In this sense “The Dream” of Dr. King lives on.

Research Hypothesis

Based on the literature concerning peer-led groups and the perceived necessity of character-building programs, the researcher’s predicted outcome of this study would be an increased sensitivity to the chosen character trait and a recognizable, measurable change in individual character. The six character traits measured will be based on the six Character Counts pillars: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship (Josephson Institute, 2008). The upperclassman student leadership team recognized the category of respect, with the sub-category of inappropriate language, as the greatest area of weakness in the polled freshman group as the target for change. This study will then seek to implement a student-led action plan that seeks to increase respect by specifically heightening awareness and sensitivity to language.

Furthermore the researcher’s hypothesis asserts that if students are focusing on changing or improving this specific character trait, other related character traits will potentially improve. When people intentionally deal with improving specific aspects of their lives, change seldom happens in isolation; increased sensitivity to other like-topics should be expected. In short, positive change should foster more positive change. Given enough time and school-wide adoption of a peer-led character education program, the effects could be measurable in the overall school climate also.

Assumptions/Limitations

The first assumption is that utilizing specifically chosen upperclassmen as facilitators will, in fact, spark within students a desire to improve character. It is entirely possible that a *key*

student in the eyes of the facilitator is not a *key student* in the eyes of his or her peers. Likewise the researcher is assuming that the chosen area of study is seen as an area of need; for if they do not deem it significant, it will likely appear as inconsequential to the freshmen group, thereby limiting potential results.

The first limitation is recognizing that the study's measured change will happen in a safe environment with twelve peers during thirty minutes of the day and may not carry over into hallways immediately. Change takes time. The researcher recognizes that four weeks of focus, twice a week, may simply not be enough time to change habits that have been engrained over a lifetime. The second limitation is how receptive students will be to character development; typical freshmen new to high school may be overwhelmed with all other changes, so much so that fundamental character changes may not be within their realm of desire. Another possible limitation may be appropriately motivating students to affect change. When dealing with change in character, intrinsic motivation is key. For ethical reasons (and fundamental reasons of this research), grades and extrinsic rewards will not be tied to outcomes.

Another significant limitation may be training-related. Given time and resources, it is possible that peers may not be trained in the most effective teaching methods that would encourage the most positive retention. What is known about best teaching practices may not be performed by students. But quite possibly the only legitimate limitation is that the program will only be as effective as the commitment level involved. If it is treated as *just another program*, likely effectiveness will be instantaneously limited.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The topic of character education is not new to education in the United States or elsewhere. The long-standing debate, nationally, is more of what role the school should play versus the role of the family, given this potentially morality-related topic. Evidence suggests that regardless of whose job it may have traditionally been, character education is necessary, especially in this day and age (Josephson Institute, 2008; Pino, & Smith, 2003; Davies, Gorard, & McGuinn, 2005; Althof & Berkowitz, 2006). Horace Mann, founder of American public education, noted that moral education was of utmost importance; the Founding Fathers believed democracy would one day be in danger if citizens failed to practice a civil code (Benninga, & Wynne, 1998).

Implementing effective character education is significant. Existing programs such as Character Counts, Community of Caring, Educating for Character, and Love and Logic, to name a few, offer ready-to-use ideas (Skaggs, & Bodenhorn, 2006). Incorporating these with a peer-led component potentially offers viable solutions for life-changing behavior (Prince, 1995; Story, Lytle, Birnbaum, & Perry, 2002; Davies, Gorard, & McGuinn, 2005). Involvement of peers in the process transfers ownership of the material and incorporates a positive peer pressure component.

The Need for Character Education

Cheating and academic dishonesty are on the rise, despite attempts to curb such behaviors (Galles, Graves, Sexton, & Walton, 2003). The battle of policing and monitoring academic policies of misconduct are exhausting and indicate both time and energy wasted. Georgia Southern's campus found that 52.8% of its students admitted to academic dishonesty (Pino & Smith, 2003). Character development, specifically academic honesty versus cheating, is lacking

in college preparation at the high school level possibly because few-to-no high schools require character education for graduation; character education is all but dropped past middle school (Davidson, & Lickona, 2007).

The gap between where character *is* and where people *want it* is gaping, and research shows it doesn't end at high school. 47% of secondary students admitted to shoplifting in the past year and 70% confessed to having cheated in school at least once in the past year (Harms & Fritz, 2001). Given those figures it is shocking that 91% of the students polled were satisfied with their own character and individual sets of ethics. Yet 97% claimed that it was important for them to have good character. Admitting to cheating and adopting that as acceptable behavior reveals a breakdown in fundamental character.

The media is sure to document teen street crimes, drug and alcohol abuse, and teen pregnancies, but these are hardly an exception to deprived character in young adults alone. Employee theft is reported as 10 times more costly than America's street crimes (Greenberg, 1997). The FBI cites it as "the fastest growing crime in America." The U.S. Chamber of Commerce estimated 75% of employees steal (Schulman, 2007). It is guesstimated that US companies alone lose nearly \$400 billion a year in time theft, or lost productivity, when employees surf the web, make personal phone calls, to seemingly well-intentioned use of the company's copy machine. Evidence of poor character knows no bounds and is evident in every sector of the western world.

In 1998 the U.S. Commissioner of Educational Statistics reported that 57% of public schools reported at least one violent incident or crime that necessitated reporting to officials (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998). In the same report, the top three serious problems of secondary schools were student tardiness, skipping, and physical conflicts. Clearly

these problems need to be addressed at a more proactive level. Reacting to them is not in itself an answer.

Inappropriate language

Specific to the focus area of this research is the seeming decline in respect, with specific attention to inappropriate or otherwise negative language. Physical altercations, racial slurs, and inappropriate language stem from a declining lack of respect for others. In July of 2005 Ryan Sandberg was inducted into baseball's Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. "As [he] was inducted Sunday into baseball's Hall of Fame, [he] refused to sugarcoat the absurd behavior of today's highly paid, pampered, selfish players who show little respect for the game and its fans" (Hal, 2005). He felt the compelling need to address his concern of poor behavior at the national level, the very behaviors to which many high school students aspire. He was responding to a problem deeply rooted in character: respect. Lack of respect often has many ways of showing itself; for some it is revealed in attitudes, others in behaviors, and in many, language.

Fifteen-year-old McKay Hatch ("Clean Sweep," 2009) decided he'd heard enough inappropriate language in the halls of his middle school so he began the No Cussing Club. At first he challenged his friends, but soon it bloomed into a solid club of more than 50. When he transferred into high school it grew to over 100 members very quickly. And just as quickly hate mail, bullying, and threats bombarded him. "At first, the reaction was pretty bad at school. But after a while, people congratulated me and were nice about it." His change took time, but it all began with simply acknowledging the problem.

McKay's observations are not isolated. In 2004 the Federal Communications Commission looked to reduce instances of inappropriate language occurring on national television air waves. In 1998 "the 'f' word aired once in prime time. By 2007, it aired 1,147

times. The 's' word was uttered twice in 1998 and 364 times in 2007" (Richey, 2008). The overall effect is that of desensitization and is making it more difficult to take a stand against offensive language. There is a problem: the message is clear that deteriorating language is becoming more prevalent. As Saint Augustine said, "What is down in the well will come up in the bucket." And it's no wonder when what is fed into students in media, movies, pop culture, pro sports, and music is littered with proverbial garbage. A school in Hartford, Connecticut has apparently heard enough and has decided to issue \$103 fines for inappropriate language ("The Curse of Bad Language," 2006). The article further asserts that the measures taken to curb behaviors in schools are punitive in nature, from suspending students' field trip privileges to reprimands in private. Though these programs hold students accountable for their actions, they only prove further that punishment is not solving the problem but masking a deeper seeded one.

Program Details

A common difficulty with character education stems from a perceived crossing of morality lines in the public school sector. However, most programs boil down all traits to socially acceptable terms resembling those of Character Counts: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship (Josephson Institute, 2008). Universities, homes and workplaces show a desire for students and workers alike to display such traits (Pino, & Smith, 2003; Schulmann, 2007). It then makes sense to create a program that fosters them

Since the 1990s many schools have implemented various character-building programs in their curriculum, like Character Counts, Teen Leadership, Center for Advancement of Character Ethics, amongst others, with varying degrees of success. Programs of character education generally cease beyond middle school, yet high schools and colleges demand traits of quality character in order for students to be successful (Skaggs, & Bodenhorn, 2006). Teachers expect

and tell students they'll perform better if they're organized, responsible for making up work, diligent, able to set goals, and a plethora of other character traits, but time isn't spent teaching those qualities, per say; instead class time is devoted to content specific to subject areas while it is *implied* that students can figure out the *other* pertinent skills and information on their own (Davidson, & Lickona, 2007). Educators already feel a crunch in time to deliver content-specific instruction, so time spent on character education only exacerbates already limited time. Giving teachers "one more thing to do" is not the answer.

Some schools attempt to mesh both content area and character education with curriculum inclusions like *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens* and morally sound novels like *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Tuesdays with Morie*. But delivery of character education is not uniform and is at the discretion of individual teachers in most instances (DeRoche, & Williams, 1998). Schools can only hope to see profound change if they are willing to advance student character throughout the whole school, not just in random classrooms (Benninga, & Wynne, 1998). Adoption of programs proves effective when schools have increased buy-in, standards, leadership, training, and adopted programs to curtail their individuality (Skaggs, & Bodenhorn, 2006). In such instances of curtailed adoption, Character Counts programs have helped reduce behavior instances by 60% in one juvenile justice center (Josephson Institute, 2008).

But when students fail to see the direct relevance of programs, they often become disengaged and lose momentum. This can be noted by Bohlin (2005):

Unfortunately, many character education initiatives do not engage the desires and aspirations of young people or show them the value of effort required to attain good character or account for the complexity of moral growth. Lacking a clear moral vision or purpose, these efforts can sometimes give rise to a character education that focuses too

narrowly on stamping out problem behaviors or preparing an honest and efficient future workforce to secure a more robust economy. (p.2)

This problem may be combated by changing the focus from a teacher-driven agenda to one driven by peers. Just as peer pressure is often negative, the converse *could* potentially lead to positive behavioral change *because* it comes from peers. Rather than implement a program based on administrative desire to stamp out foul language in the hallway, getting students, who recognize the importance of the issue, to lead the battle seems to be a probable solution. If the ones leading have ownership in and are cognizant of changes needed, relevance may not be lost. Teachers may have discovered the most important vehicle to delivery the solution: students.

Peer-led delivery

Today's youth are drawn to credibility, role models, and attractiveness, especially in peers (Story, Lytle, Birnbaum, & Perry, 2002). Young adults show a more natural attachment with peers at this age. In a peer-led nutritional education program, 85% of participants indicated that *because* their peers led the workshop, they were engaged and learned more than if it would've been adult-led. Furthermore, two-thirds of the peer leaders, themselves, indicated they were eating healthier *because* they were leaders and seen as leaders; when put in positions of leadership, the teens often indicated more significant change, themselves. Peers who have control of their tongues, or are willing to work on taming them, are a daily, visible reminder to students hoping to change. The cornerstone of effective change lies in empowering the individual, allowing him/her to have ownership.

Prince (1995) found similar results when same-age peers delivered smoking intervention programs at the high school level. He went on to note that students who surrounded themselves with peers displaying desired outcomes were more successful in maintaining their desired

behaviors. In each of these programs the participants benefited, but peer leaders, themselves, indicated change that was equal to or surpassed that of peers partaking in the program.

Forrest, Strange, and Oakley (2002) revealed higher student engagement, enjoyability, more questions, and usefulness by peer-led Sex & Relationship Education courses than those conversely led by adults (p.199). General educational theories indicate that the higher the engagement or involvement, the higher the expected retention of any given material. Simply giving knowledge about content is not the same as living and applying it (Althof, & Berkowitz, 2006), which indicates why peer-led programs seem to succeed.

Community-service and service-learning programs have encountered similar results; involving students with the actual programs enhanced knowledge and a greater sense of ethics in service (Althof, & Berkowitz, 2006). Allowing students to undertake responsibility for their own actions and behavior stimulates positive change and encourages pro-social character traits (Benninga, & Wynne, 1998). It doesn't make sense if changes are hoped to be made at the level of character, as specifically seen in language, to use anything but a joint approach by those hoped to be affected. Theories indicate that placing ownership on the shoulders of students may be central to success. Again, when given the opportunity to be in leadership roles, many students accept and rise to the challenge, and will bring about a relationship dynamic unattainable in teacher-student ones (Dreis & Rehage, 2006).

Take for instance McKay Hatch and his No Cussing Club (Clean Sweep, 2009). What began as an issued challenge to his immediate friends grew into a 50 member club, to a 100 member club, to a now 30,000 member nation-wide club. In fact Los Angeles County will celebrate its second annual "No Cussing Week" the first week in March in recognition of

Hatch's efforts. Given support of adults and drive by the students, the program has already had a resounding impact.

Limitations will ultimately be the responsibility of each participant in a character education program, but family conflict and upbringing may prove problematic (Davies, Gorard, & McGuinn, 2005). Students raised in a home for fifteen years where things like language have gone unchecked are likely to face a more difficult journey of change than someone who has been raised in a more word-sensitive household. Character isn't something that can be checked in and out at the front door of a learning institute, so a joint effort on the home front and school front may ultimately need further consideration. The elements of "performance character" and "moral character" (Davidson, & Lickona, 2007) must be displayed by teachers and students alike. Therefore staff and student ownership of enhancing character remains central to the success of this program.

Conclusion

"Character education remains a phenomenon difficult to define, as it includes a very wide range of outcome goals, pedagogical strategies and philosophical orientations" (Althof, & Berkowitz, 2006, p.498). But utilizing the power of peer and social responsibility may be a potential method of successful change until students are able to make choices for the benefit of themselves with the greater good in mind. The Greek word for *character* means to mark or engrave (Benninga, & Wynne, 1998). It will take time, energy, and focus to engrave habits, but if students are the ones leading the engraving process, it just might lead to more intentional, conscious change.

Chapter III: Methodology

The Overview

The study explored the relationship between a student-led character building program and overall effects on individual character. Upperclassmen, who volunteered to partake in Logan High School's Freshmen Mentor Program (FMP), were trained to build community in the months leading up to our research proposal (this was already a school implemented program that aligned with intent of this research). At the onset of research, mentors then led three separate groups of ten-to-twelve freshmen in bi-weekly activities for a month. The activities were designed to create positive change in respect, one of the six pillars of character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. The study was overseen by the researcher, two other teachers overseeing their FMP groups, and administration, but the implementation of activities was by upperclassmen, as was the purpose of the research.

A pre-program, anonymous, Qualtrics survey through UW-Stout was administered, listing the six different character traits/pillars, along with a rating chart of current perceptions of those traits (see Appendix A). Once data was compiled it yielded numeric totals indicating which area of character development was considered weakest along with a specific sub-question that became the focus area. The initial survey established a baseline measurement of perceived character traits in individuals; the area of greatest need became the focus for the three FMP groups. Students then embarked upon the peer-led time of exploring, learning about, and developing their character trait through a peer-decided set of activities.

Upon completion of the month-long peer-led activities, the anonymous Qualtrics survey was reissued to measure if/how perceptions of character traits changed. Comparing the raw data from before and after yielded mean scores and percentages to then analyze; these numbers served

as the quantitative data for analysis. An open-ended response section also allowed for voluntary, anonymous elaboration and reflection to include a qualitative element to the research. The researcher and other teacher advisors also had the opportunity to make anonymous observations as the activities progressed. No specific names were used, nor were individual survey results traceable to students. Survey results were compiled electronically and open-ended responses were electronically transferred.

Selection and Description of Sample

The students chosen for this study were three sets of upperclassmen leaders involved with the Freshman Mentor Program (FMP) at Logan High School, La Crosse, WI, along with their three perspective groups of freshmen. Groups met every Monday and Wednesday for a month but likely saw each other in the hallways on a daily basis. Since groups were small and consistent, it was easy to observe small class sizes and monitor activities. Not only did this provide simplicity when setting up participation in activities, it gave the researcher a chance to make direct observations throughout the program.

Logan High School is a Title One school with approximately 46% of its 1016 students on a free/reduced lunch plan. Students in FMP groups were exclusively freshmen and ran the spectrum of honors-bound to significant special educational need students. Though Caucasians made up the majority of the student body (75%) a significant minority of Southeast Asian students (15%) accounted for much of the rest. Logan High School services mostly blue-collar families, whereas its sister school, Central High School, tends to service more white-collar families.

Instrumentation

The researcher-adapted survey, measuring individually perceived character traits, served as the basis for numeric measurement. Using existing FMP (Freshmen Mentorship Program) groups allowed for small, measurable sets. Teachers were able to monitor activities, hopefully encouraging more on-task behavior and honest responses. Since success ultimately depended on the program being student-designed and student-driven, activities and discussions were largely curtailed to fit each classroom.

Data Collection and Analysis

The Character Education survey (see Appendixes A and B) served as a comparison point for both pre- and post-program analysis. Besides the quantitative results, surveys included an open-ended response section where students could have included other qualitative information for consideration. No separation of data by gender, ethnicity, or other was necessary.

Limitations

When dealing with character change, it is wise to recognize that change in traits takes more time than others. It is also worthwhile to note that success may be limited to the quality of peer leaders, too, as well as the honesty of individuals involved. It was not possible to designate extensive time for peer led activities, so time constraints may have limited the study's outcome as well. Likewise the FMP leaders were not given ample time to create elaborate activities. Though brainstorm sessions were efficient, more detailed plans may have been devised given more time. Whenever student perceptions are the subject being analyzed, one must recognize that perceptions, because they're based on emotions, change. But the biggest potential limitation may have been student ownership. If individual students did not perceive a need or desire for change, positive results were likely limited.

One FMP leader dropped out of the program after taking the initial survey. She did not complete the post-survey, which caused some variation in final numbers.

Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not a peer-led character education system was a worthy method of changing character traits in individuals. The literature reviews indicated the effectiveness of this relatively new methodology could produce successful results.

The initial character survey indicated an overall strong self-perception of most character traits, but the category of greatest weakness was noted as *Respect*, most notably in the area of inappropriate language. As shown in Table 1, twenty-four of the thirty-seven polled showed a propensity to inappropriate language to some degree, therefore the greatest potential impact area for change was determined to be in the area of respect, specifically dealing with inappropriate language.

Table 1

Pre-program survey results for Respect category

#	Respect Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Responses	Mean
1	I treat everyone with equal respect.	9	16	12	0	37	2.08
2	I tolerate differences always.	11	21	5	0	37	1.84
3	The language I use is never inappropriate.	3	10	19	5	37	2.70
4	My manners towards adults and peers are appropriate.	12	20	5	0	37	1.81
5	I always handle disagreements peacefully.	5	17	15	0	37	2.27

The FMP mentors' (the ones who led freshmen groups in activities) initial reaction was one of collective skepticism as to the possibility of changing such a deep-seeded issue in their peers; they were already aware of the language problem in their hallways. Once fears were assuaged that they needn't worry about the outcome, only the process, they devised a plan that began with simply raising awareness of the problem through story-telling, observation, and recording hallway behaviors. An environment was established where mentors, peers, and teachers alike were able to share comments and stories. Once establishing language as the topic, peer mentors shared results of the initial survey to show the severity of the problem within the research group. Overall students began to recognize a need, even within themselves; they were then challenged to take a ten minute walk in pairs to simply listen and keep track of inappropriate language used in the hallways and commons areas in a typical morning. One group recorded an average of ten instances of inappropriate language per minute in their ten minute span. Another group recorded a range of words used, from mildly offensive to extremely offensive, again in just a ten minute time period. Most freshmen returned to the group in genuine shock of just how many instances of disrespectful language were used on a daily basis, especially in such a short amount of time. Initial laughter gave way to looks of surprise, and in some cases, disbelief to the widespread nature of flippant language use.

Students were then challenged to record instances and types of inappropriate language for the next twenty-four hours, bringing their results to the next session. Again, mentors led a discussion and story-sharing session. The next student-created challenge was to use a bracelet-switch activity. With each inappropriate word spoken by the individual, students were to move their FMP bracelets to the opposite wrist whenever their own language prompted for one day. The mentor rationale was that students would recognize in themselves, not just their peers, when

and how often their own language was not appropriate. One student remarked that the FMP mentor had his bracelet on the other hand the next day, which opened an honest dialogue about leaders even struggling with control over vocabulary. Another student remarked that after awhile he got sick of changing his bracelet, so he would simply cuss again to avoid having to switch wrists; when challenged by his mentor he conceded that his choices were not in line with trying to change his behavior.

For the final group activity, all three FMP groups were reassembled and divided into intermixed teams of four or five. Each team was given a situation to devise a skit to be acted out in front of the group. Guidelines were established and the word “pickle”, or a derivative of it, was to be used in lieu of inappropriate language. During the course of the mixed group skit-planning, the researcher observed several note-worthy occurrences: from disengaged members becoming active participants; to leadership being taken by otherwise reserved members; to overall respectful attitudes and behaviors by a few members who hadn’t been positively participating much to this point. When skits were performed, products ranged from mildly engaging to semi-insightful; no group presented what would be considered a practiced, polished skit. Overall effort in skits reflected lack of practice, but each group displayed apparent effort and dialogue during the process. Lastly, mentors took turns commenting on their observations throughout the unit and teacher-advisors did likewise.

The final meeting took place to complete the Qualtrics survey. The one FMP mentor who dropped out did not complete the post-survey. Resulting statistics in each of the six categories (Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring, Citizenship) did not show large variations in mean scores but numerically speaking, every category showed positive change. The greatest mean score change was in the Respect category in regards to prompt “My

manners towards adults and peers are appropriate.” Mean scores rose by .28, the greatest positive mean score change of the research. Likely, student awareness of language, a manner to most, became something students tried to be aware of. Likewise, the researcher determined that a numerical compilation of pre- and post- scores in the positive, that is a response of Strongly Agree added to a response of Agree, should be compared to pre- and post- scores in the negative, a response of Strongly Disagree added to a response of Disagree. Every category showed evidence that at least three students, and as many as six, noted positive change.

Trustworthiness

The first question of the survey “I am always honest” yielded 73.7% of students falling into the agree side prior to the activities whereas only 69.4% agreed afterward. It is likely that the activities, discussions, and observations of peers helped some students recognize that they may not be as honest as initially assumed.

Respect

Questions 1, 4, and 5 (see Table 2) noted significant gains. Pre-survey scores for question 1 showed 67.6% of students seeing themselves as generally respectful; upon completion of the program 77.8% recognized themselves as more respectful. Question 4 recorded 86.5% of students deeming their manners as appropriate; after activities 97.2% said their manners were more appropriate. Question 5 noted 59.5% of students regarding their disagreement tactics as peaceful and 72.2% said so by the end of the group activities. Statistically speaking positive change did in fact happen. Question 3, the focal point of activities, oddly recorded no significant shift, possibly indicating what peer leaders already noted: changing language is extremely difficult.

Table 2*Post-program survey results for Respect category*

#	Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Responses	Mean
1	I treat everyone with equal respect.	11	16	8	0	35	1.91
2	I tolerate differences always.	6	25	4	0	35	1.94
3	The language I use is never inappropriate.	1	10	17	7	35	2.86
4	My manners towards adults and peers are appropriate.	17	17	1	0	35	1.54
5	I always handle disagreements peacefully.	6	19	10	0	35	2.11

Responsibility

The question dealing with being held accountable for actions showed 86.5% of students believing they were accountable for their actions, whereas only 77.8% thought so afterward. Likely, students observed language in the hallways and language within themselves as something relatively unchecked thereby causing an observable drop in self-perceived accountability. This drop reflects a positive awareness in actions.

Fairness

In pre-activity surveying 45.9% had a difficult time blaming others; afterward 55.6% had a difficult time casting blame upon others. Activity organization began with peers looking outward and ended with activities being more self-reflective. Quite possibly some people began seeing things, such as casting blame, more introspectively.

Caring

The category of Caring yielded some of the most striking, and potentially correlating scores within the study. Practicing kindness on a daily basis was something 83.8% claimed prior to activities. Only 75% claimed to practice kindness by the end. Once again students may have noticed their initial perceptions were not quite what they truly were after focusing on their own behaviors for a month. When asked to consider their ability to easily forgive peers, 54.1% claimed they did, but by the completion of activities nearly 70% said they did. Likewise 83.3% tended to help others in need prior to the activities and 91.9% claimed they did by the end of the study. These positive shifts suggest that students gained a greater appreciation for considering their own actions, as was corroborated by the open-ended, anonymous responses.

Citizenship

Not surprisingly, this category recorded almost no change in recorded behaviors.

FMP leader reflections

The majority of the leaders felt the need to reiterate at the conclusion of the study that language is “a really hard area to change,” yet all conceded that it is quite important to discuss. The leaders vouched that they would have been disappointed if there were no positive results but even they agreed that it was still worthwhile. Two of the mentors said the increased ownership in this activity reinforced their desire to pursue further leadership roles in the future; one went so far as saying the responsibility and ownership he felt with his group, because of this research, confirmed his aspirations to become a teacher. Most found themselves wanting more positive change for their FMP students than what they felt was being achieved. The leaders ended in accord: that if even one student was changed for the good as a result of their efforts, it was time well spent.

Their reflections corroborated existing research that those placed in positions of leadership often undergo the most significant change. Since they felt ownership over the activities they were creating, personal investments and outcomes weighed on their minds. Because survey responses were anonymous it isn't possible to determine if the leaders' actions changed in greater degree than their underclassmen peers, but qualitative responses indicate they definitely found themselves being more sensitive to the words they were using.

Chapter V: Discussion

I set out to explore the effectiveness of a peer-led character education program by devising a way to totally empower effective FMP mentors. They were given generous liberty and some guidance with regards to their activities, but activities and discussions were entirely peer-led, peer-created. Through discussions, observations, interactive activities, skits, and reflections, students became aware of inappropriate language and its effects.

Limitations

As has been noted, change takes time. The program activities happened over the course of a month, a relatively short amount of time when compared to character traits and behaviors that have likely been practiced for years. Success may have been limited by the quality of peer leaders, not to mention the honesty of individuals involved. Also the FMP leaders were not given ample time to create elaborate activities. Though brainstorm sessions were efficient, more detailed plans may have been devised given more time. Also whenever student perceptions are the subject of analysis, recognizing that something based on feelings can vary dramatically based on a plethora of reasons. But the biggest potential limitation might have been student ownership. If students do not perceive a need or desire for change, results aren't likely to drastically change.

One FMP leader dropped out of the program after taking the initial survey. She did not complete the post-survey, which may have caused some variation in final numbers.

Conclusions

In five of the six categories measured positive change happened. Though statistical means scores initially show no substantially significant gains or losses (except in the category of appropriate manners towards peers and adults), grouping students in generally positive versus generally negative response categories shows some important change. Likewise qualitative

observations, open-ended anonymous responses, and question-answer responses tell a similar story. The statistical results, combined with the qualitative comments, revealed that students, in many cases, began the process of recognizing the significance of their own actions, word choices, and behaviors, even if in the specific area of inappropriate language, inconclusive results were measured.

Peer mentors set out to create a student-directed plan that initially heightened awareness of language. They were fearful the battle would be uphill and potentially unchangeable, yet many freshmen came back from the initial peer-created activity genuinely understanding that language use is out of control, especially in everyday peer language. McKay Hatch discovered with his No Cussing Club that flippant language isn't easy to change, but with time it does. The students involved with this research made the first step in change by acknowledging the problem.

Of the sixteen students who chose to make open-ended, anonymous comments on the post-survey, fifteen were positive and one was simply off-topic. Students said such things as:

- “I thought that the program helped me think about the different aspects of respect and responsibility.”
- “I think this survey really opened peoples’ eyes.”
- “I think it was a good experience for all of us to undergo, and I think a lot of people now realize how hurtful some peoples’ words can be.”
- “I think doing these activities was a great way of practicing what you should do.”
- “I thought this program was worthwhile and it taught me how to respect others. I will from now on think before I act, and/or say something.”
- “This time was very helpful in getting people to realize the words they say and how they sound.”

- “I personally think this was a great opportunity to think outside our daily views of life. We thought harder about our actions and of course our words.”
- “This survey made me think about using language I usually don’t think about when I use it.”
- “After everything was said and done there was an over all increase respect and honesty amongst the students.”

It’s not possible to dismiss the fact that comments corroborated with the intended outcomes FMP mentors hoped to achieve. It is true, desensitization to obscene language is happening; movie ratings changing standards are evidence to that. Yet even with peer mentors who thought the battle would be too difficult ended up affecting many students, causing them to at least consider the impact of their language. When asked if students would likely remember the lessons from the activities three in five students indicated there was no doubt they would. Change happens in sometimes very noticeable degrees, other times it is slow.

Being a teacher I found myself occasionally dismissing effectiveness of some activities simply based on observed effort, especially as was true for the group skits. Yet when I asked students about most memorable parts, the overwhelming majority indicated the skits. In fact every activity developed was mentioned several times by different participants, giving testimony that when you put key students in charge, they are likely to have an impact that adults can’t. Though I thought doing activities differently would have been even more positive, having peers in charge absolutely made a difference. Nearly two-thirds of students in an anonymous casual poll at the end of our activity time revealed they were more inclined to work on their character because it was led by upperclassmen and *not* teachers. It goes to show that, “You just never know whose life you might touch. You just never know what change you might initiate and what

impact you might have. You just never know when that critical moment might come. What you do know is that you can make a difference. You can leave this world better than you found it" (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, p. 181). Putting peers in a position to do that resulted in positive change that may have been otherwise difficult for teachers to affect.

Recommendations

It is recommended that further research be done in the area of peer-led character enhancement programs taking place over an extended course of time. The changing of behaviors and actions is something that simply takes time to develop and change. Since the positive changes observed in a one-month program with high school freshmen, then it is possible that a longer duration could yield even more positive results. Also, further research into most effective peer-delivery methods and specific character-development implementations should be done. Arguably a program combining a joint effort between the home and school may be an alternative avenue of study for further consideration.

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Appendix A: *Pre-Character Education Student Survey*

Reply to each section honestly. For each response circle: **Strongly Agree (SA)**, **Agree (A)**, **Disagree (D)**, **Strongly Disagree (SD)**

I am always honest.	SA	A	D	SD
I almost always do the right thing.	SA	A	D	SD
I try to build a positive reputation.	SA	A	D	SD
Loyalty to family and friends is extremely important.	SA	A	D	SD
I treat everyone with equal respect.	SA	A	D	SD
I tolerate differences always.	SA	A	D	SD
The language I use is never inappropriate.	SA	A	D	SD
My manners towards adults and peers are appropriate.	SA	A	D	SD
I always handle disagreements peacefully.	SA	A	D	SD
Perseverance in difficulty is something I possess.	SA	A	D	SD
I always put forth my best efforts.	SA	A	D	SD
I am always held accountable for my actions.	SA	A	D	SD
Self-discipline is apparent in all areas of my life.	SA	A	D	SD
I think before I act.	SA	A	D	SD
I know and follow the school rules.	SA	A	D	SD
I consider myself VERY open-minded.	SA	A	D	SD
My friends say I'm a good listener.	SA	A	D	SD
I don't take advantage of my peers or teachers.	SA	A	D	SD
It's hard for me to blame others.	SA	A	D	SD
I practice kindness daily.	SA	A	D	SD
I always display compassion to my classmates.	SA	A	D	SD
Expressing thanks is easy for me.	SA	A	D	SD
I'm quick to forgive others.	SA	A	D	SD
When I see people in need, I help out.	SA	A	D	SD
My teachers would say I'm very cooperative.	SA	A	D	SD
I am well informed of community & world events.	SA	A	D	SD
I pick up trash, no matter how small, whenever I see it.	SA	A	D	SD
I respect adult-figures always.	SA	A	D	SD
The school's environment is something I respect.	SA	A	D	SD

Appendix B: *Post-Character Education Student Survey*

Reply to each section honestly. For each response circle: **Strongly Agree (SA)**, **Agree (A)**, **Disagree (D)**, **Strongly Disagree (SD)**.

I am always honest.	SA	A	D	SD
I almost always do the right thing.	SA	A	D	SD
I try to build a positive reputation.	SA	A	D	SD
Loyalty to family and friends is extremely important.	SA	A	D	SD
I treat everyone with equal respect.	SA	A	D	SD
I tolerate differences always.	SA	A	D	SD
The language I use is never inappropriate.	SA	A	D	SD
My manners towards adults and peers are appropriate.	SA	A	D	SD
I always handle disagreements peacefully.	SA	A	D	SD
Perseverance in difficulty is something I possess.	SA	A	D	SD
I always put forth my best efforts.	SA	A	D	SD
I am always held accountable for my actions.	SA	A	D	SD
Self-discipline is apparent in all areas of my life.	SA	A	D	SD
I think before I act.	SA	A	D	SD
I know and follow the school rules.	SA	A	D	SD
I consider myself VERY open-minded.	SA	A	D	SD
My friends say I'm a good listener.	SA	A	D	SD
I don't take advantage of my peers or teachers.	SA	A	D	SD
It's hard for me to blame others.	SA	A	D	SD
I practice kindness daily.	SA	A	D	SD
I always display compassion to my classmates.	SA	A	D	SD
Expressing thanks is easy for me.	SA	A	D	SD
I'm quick to forgive others.	SA	A	D	SD
When I see people in need, I help out.	SA	A	D	SD
My teachers would say I'm very cooperative.	SA	A	D	SD
I am well informed of community & world events.	SA	A	D	SD
I pick up trash, no matter how small, whenever I see it.	SA	A	D	SD
I respect adult-figures always.	SA	A	D	SD
The school's environment is something I respect.	SA	A	D	SD

PLEASE use the space provided to give any feedback that you think might be important or helpful:

**University of Wisconsin Stout
Protection of Human Subjects in Research Form**

Data collection/analysis cannot begin until there has been IRB approval of this project.

Directions:

- Individuals who have completed the UW-Stout Human Subjects Training and can prove certification are eligible to file this form.
- This form must be filed and approved prior to any student (undergraduate or graduate), faculty, or staff conducting research.
- Complete this form on-line and print. Handwritten forms will not be accepted. For your benefit, save your completed form in case it needs to be revised and resubmitted.
- Send or take the completed form, with required signatures and required materials attached, to Research Services, 152 Voc. Rehab. Building.
- This is a professional document; please check spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Research is defined as a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge.

A human subject is defined as a living individual about whom an investigator obtains either 1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual; or 2) identifiable private information.

Investigator(s):

Name: Matthew A. Weege ID: 476801 Daytime Phone # (608) 769-5134 Program: On-line Masters in Education Graduate Student: Undergraduate:
e-mail address: weegem@uwstout.edu Signature: _____

Name: ID: Daytime Phone # Program: Graduate Student: Undergraduate:
e-mail address: Signature: _____

Name: ID: Daytime Phone # Program: Graduate Student: Undergraduate:
e-mail address: Signature: _____

For students:

Research Advisor's Name: Lynn Laventure Department: School of Education

Signature: _____ Date of Approval: _____

Research Advisor: Have you completed UW-Stout's Human Subjects Training? Yes No .

Reminder: You must have completed the new training after January 2, 2007.

Project Title: Peer-led Character Education

Sponsor (Funding agency, if applicable):

Is this project being supported by Federal funding? Yes No

You must answer all of the following questions completely and attach all required forms.

1. Describe the proposed research/activity stating the objectives, significance, and detailed methodology (approximately 250-500 words; descriptions are to be written in future tense).

Objectives:

Determine the effectiveness of a student-led character education program and measure its change in one of these six specific areas: Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring or Citizenship.

Significance:

Research shows most teacher-led character education programs aren't turning out lasting results; utilization of positive peer-led mentoring may be a viable alternative. It may increase student ownership and yield more meaningful results in personal development.

Detailed Methodology:

The study will explore the relationship between a student-led character building program and overall effects on individual character. Upperclassmen, who have volunteered to partake in Logan High School's Freshmen Mentorship Program (FMP), will be trained to build community in the weeks leading up to our research proposal -- this is already a school implemented program and has no direct bearing on our research. At the onset of our research, mentors will then

lead three groups of twelve freshmen in bi-weekly activities for a month. The activities will be designed to create positive change in one of the aforementioned areas of character. The study will be overseen by the researcher, two other teachers overseeing their FMP groups, and administration, but the implementation of activities will be student-led as is the purpose of the research.

A pre-program, anonymous, qualtrix survey through UW-Stout will be administered, listing the six different character traits, along with a rating chart of current perceptions of those traits. Once data is compiled it should yield a simple numerical percentage indicating which area of character development was considered overall weakest in the group. This will establish a baseline measurement of perceived character traits in individuals; the percentage of greatest need will become the focus for each of the three FMP groups. Students will then embark upon a peer-led time of exploring, learning about, and developing their character trait through a peer-decided set of activities. Upon completion of the month-long peer-led activities, the anonymous qualtrix survey will be reissued to measure if/how perceptions of character traits have changed. Comparing the simple data from before and after should yield a statistical measurement to then analyze; these numbers will serve as the quantitative data for analysis of this research. However, an open-ended response section will also allow for voluntary, anonymous elaboration and personal reflections to include a qualitative element. The researcher will also have the opportunity to make anonymous qualitative observations as the activities progress. No specific names will be used, nor will individual survey results be traceable to students. Survey result will be compiled electronically and open-ended responses will be electronically transferred to a sheet, offering no way of tracing comments to students. All files, percentages, and surveys will be shredded once appropriate data is collected.

2. **Is this research?**

- (a) Is your activity intended for public dissemination? Yes No
(b) Can it reasonably be generalized beyond the research sample? Yes No

If you answered "no" to both a and b, do not continue with this form. Stop here and submit form.

3. Does your research involve human subjects or official records about human subjects? Yes No

If yes, continue with this form. If no, stop here and submit form.

4. Are you requesting exemption from IRB review in one of the federally approved categories? **If no, skip to Question #5 regarding Human Subjects Training.** If yes, please select the category below that applies and continue with the form. The IRB will assess qualifications for exemption status based on your responses. If you have questions, more information about the exemption categories can be found on the OHRP website:
<http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46.htm#46.101>.

The following categories of research are exempt from this policy:

- (1) Research conducted in *established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices*, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.
- (2/3) Research involving the *use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior*, unless:
(i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; **AND** (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.
- (4) Research involving the collection or study of *existing* data, documents, records, or pathological or diagnostic specimens, **if these sources are publicly available OR** if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that **subjects cannot be identified**, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.
- (5) Research and demonstration **projects which are conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads**, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine:
(i) **Public benefit or service programs**; (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs; (iii) possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; or (iv) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs.
- (6) Research involving *taste and food quality evaluation* or consumer acceptance studies.
5. Human subjects training must be completed prior to filing this form. Have you completed UW-Stout's Human Subjects Training (<http://www2.uwstout.edu/rs/hstraining/index.htm>)? Yes No
6. Please note that research cannot begin until this project has been approved by the IRB. When is the data collection for the research *intended* to begin and end? **October, 2009 to December, 2009** (enter month/year)

7. Can the subjects be identified directly or through any type of identifiers? Yes No If yes, please explain.
Students who are in current FMP classes are noted on class rosters, so someone could potentially identify them simply on class rosters. However, each of those individuals will be in a larger group sampling of 42 students, so it is highly unlikely that individual identification will even be possible. It is my understanding that Qualtrics does not attach identifiers to survey-takers, so their numerical data will be completely untracable, even if they choose to respond to the open-ended prompt.

8. Special precautions must be included in your research procedures if any of these special populations or research areas are included.

Are any of the subjects:		Does the research deal with questions concerning:	
(a) minors (under 18 years of age)? (consent from parent & subject required)	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	(a) sexual behaviors?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(b) legally incompetent?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(b) drug use?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(c) prisoners?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(c) illegal conduct?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(d) pregnant women, if affected by the research?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(d) use of alcohol?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(e) institutionalized?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
(f) mentally incapacitated?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		

9. Voluntary participation/consent form:
 Expected Number of Participants 42

Describe the method:

(a) for selecting subjects.

Three groups placed in the Freshmen Mentorship Program groups. Two other teachers have volunteered both their FMP mentors and mentees to partake in the activity. These other groups saw the potential for genuine positive change in Logan High School as a result of this research study and are committing to volunteering their time.

(b) for assuring that their participation is voluntary. If subjects are children and they are capable of assent, they must give their permission, along with that of their parent, guardian, or authorized representative. NOTE: A school district cannot give permission or consent on behalf of minor children.

Signed permission slips to be documented. (Please see attached permission slip for parents)

10. Procedures: Describe how subjects will be involved in detail.

Upperclass mentors, who have already been chosen and approved as Logan High School Peer Mentors, will lead three separate groups of twelve freshmen in various team building and community building activities, all overseen by myself and two other Logan faculty members. At the beginning students will take an anonymous survey utilizing the Qualtrix program. Data will be analyzed so that upperclassmen will then oversee a character-changing project. Mentors will run a small collaborative group-think session where students will be encouraged to give input to take maximum ownership of their team's project. Each of the three groups will then carry out their group-determined plan of action, all the while being overseen by the upperclassmen mentors. Active participation in the planning, implementation, and reflection stages will be expected on the parts of the students. (For example if the peer mentors, after receiving input from their freshmen group, decide to increase Respect in school by writing letters to individuals in the school, each student will be expected to follow through with the peer-led, group-agreed upon action of writing the letter during the time period already allotted to our FMP time. Each group will then reflect upon their chosen activity to determine whether or not their action was successful in increasing their levels of respect.) At the termination of the research, each of the three groups will then revisit the anonymous post-survey with optional open-ended responses. Once survey results are submitted, the data will be purely numerical and available for analysis by the researcher.

If the study:

- (a) involves false or misleading information to subjects or
- (b) withholds information such that their informed consent might be questioned, or
- (c) uses procedures designed to modify the thinking, attitudes, feelings, or other aspects of the behavior of the subjects, describe the rationale for that, how the subjects will be protected and what debriefing procedures you will use.

N/A

11. Special precautions must be included in your research procedures if you are doing an online survey.

Are you doing an online survey? Yes No

If yes, please answer the following questions. If no, please skip to the next question.

- (a) Will your survey results be posted on a website that could be accessed by individuals other than the investigators?
Yes No
- (b) Does the URL for the survey include information that could identify individuals, such as a student ID?
Yes No
- (c) When you send out an email inviting subjects to complete the survey:
Will you place all of the email addresses in the "bcc" line? Yes No
Will you have the "read receipt" function turned off? Yes No
- (d) If your survey contains questions where the subjects choose from a drop-down menu, do they have the option to choose "no response" or to leave the question blank?
Yes No No drop-down questions

If, in question #11, you answered "yes" to question (a) or (b), or if you answered "no" to question (c) or (d), please address your reason(s) when completing question #12.

12. Confidentiality: Describe the methods to be used to ensure the confidentiality of data obtained.
Researcher will be utilizing the UW-Stout survey tool found on www.uwstout.edu/survey/. Confidentiality is part of the set-up when using Qualtrics. No identifiers are attached in qualtrix, so students will simply be able to copy and paste the appropriate URL into an internet explorer page and take the survey. Students choosing to respond to the open-ended response will not be identifiable. It is understood that Qualtrix compiles data from the questions and submits information in purely numerical form. Individual student tracing will be impossible.
13. Risks: Describe the risks to the subjects and the precautions that will be taken to minimize them. (Risk includes any potential or actual physical risk of discomfort, harassment, invasion of privacy, risk of physical activity, risk to dignity and self-respect, and psychological, emotional, or behavioral risk.) Also, address any procedures that might be different from what is commonly established practice for research of this type.
No risks are anticipated. Since there is not attachment to grade, social stigma, or otherwise, there are legitimately no risks foreseen. If at ANY time in the peer-led activity time behavior is observed that could potentially risk privacy, physical activity, risk to dignity or self respect, the Logan faculty overseeing the three groups will take immediate measures to protect the participants.
14. Benefits: Describe the benefits to subjects and/or society. (These will be balanced against risk.)
Character-related behavior may change for the positive, thereby helping them in the quest to being a better human being. If activities are taken to heart, subjects may become better people overall.
15. Attachments to this form: (NO ACTION WILL BE TAKEN WITHOUT THESE FORMS)
- (a) Consent form(s). Form(s) should include explanation of procedures, risk, safeguards, freedom to withdraw, confidentiality, offer to answer inquiries, third party referral for concerns, and signature (only if the subjects can be identified by any means). If the survey is strictly anonymous, then a signature is not required). Sample consent forms can be found at <http://www.uwstout.edu/rs/documents/cform.doc>
- (b) Questionnaire/Survey Instrument. The final version of the Questionnaire/Survey instrument must be attached. Also, if the survey is being conducted verbally, a copy of the introductory comments and survey questions being asked must be attached to this form. If your survey includes focus group questions, a complete list of the questions should be attached. For research using a published/purchased instrument, a photocopy of the complete survey will suffice.
- (c) Printed copy of the UW-Stout Human Subjects Training Certification.

The project or activity described above must adhere to the University's policies and institutional assurance with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regarding the use of human subjects. University review and approval is required. **REMINDER: You are in violation of UW-Stout, UW System, and federal government policies if you begin your study before IRB approval is obtained.**

"It takes an adult 7 days to 7 weeks to make an impact on a student's life, but it takes another student of their age or slightly older 7 seconds to 7 minutes to make a difference."

-Anonymous

Title: Student-led Character Education

Investigator:

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(608) 789-7700 ext 7764

Research Sponsor

Lyn LaVenture
UW-Stout Faculty
(715) 309-8860

Description: Our new FMP (Freshman Mentorship Program) is seeking to change the experience of high school freshmen by helping them create positive relationships with upperclassmen and teachers who want to make a difference in lives of freshmen, the overall climate of Logan High School, and the La Crosse Community at large. The research your student is about to embark upon is simple: My research thesis asserts that character change driven by peers and self is more effective, meaningful and life-changing than character change driven by teachers. Your students, with the guidance of student FMP mentors (and, of course, overseen by Logan faculty) will attempt to create positive change in one of six general character pillars: Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring or Citizenship. We will poll students to determine overall "weakest" character area, and for one month develop and carry out a project that will foster change in their FMP groups. Upon completion we'll re-administer the character poll to determine if our efforts were, indeed, successful in creating positive change.

Risks/Benefits: It is possible that your student will show an increase in one or many of these character pillar areas: Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring or Citizenship. It is also possible nothing will change. At any rate, their participation in this non-graded, voluntary program has no foreseen risks, either socially, academically or otherwise. The benefits, however, could be life-lasting

Special Populations: You are receiving this letter is because your son/daughter is a minor and by research standards, any participating minor must have guardian permission.

Time Commitment: Since this research is taking place during our normal FMP time on Mondays and Wednesdays, there is no time commitment necessary that goes beyond what our current FMP program has already structured for mentors and mentees.

Confidentiality: No names will be included on any documents. We do not believe that individual students can be identified from any of this research. This informed consent form will not be kept with any of the other documents completed with this project, nor will the polls taken at the beginning and end of our research be traceable to specific students.

Right to Withdraw: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. Should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, you may discontinue your participation at this time without incurring adverse consequences.

Requested Participation: Evaluation and reflection of this project is completely anonymous, non-graded, and voluntary. Since this research involves the participation of your child, a minor, your signature of approval to partake in the above activity is requested. Students may choose to opt out of this activity, in which case an alternative assignment of acceptable content will be provided.

IRB Approval: This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

Investigator:

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Logan High School English teacher
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(608) 789-7700 ext 7764

Research Sponsor

Lyn LaVenture
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IRB Administrator

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152 Vocational Rehabilitation Bldg.
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715-232-2477
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Statement of Consent:

By signing this consent form you agree to participate in the project entitled, *Student-led Character Education*

Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of parent or guardian _____ Date _____