

AN EVALUATION OF A CHARACTER EDUCATION
PROGRAM FOCUSED ON FOURTH AND
FIFTH GRADE STUDENTS

by

Sara Fenstermacher

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Field Study Chair

Field Study Committee Members:

The Graduate College
University of Wisconsin-Stout
December, 1999

The Graduate College
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, Wisconsin 54751

Abstract

Fenstermacher, Sara J.

An evaluation of a character education program

focused on fourth and fifth grade students

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_____The purpose of this study was to evaluate a character education program that was focused on fourth and fifth grade students. Students were taught about various character traits, including trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. Group discussions and activities were involved that helped to facilitate the students' learning. This was a qualitative study and data was gathered through student interviews and parent surveys. The information found in this study has limited generalizability to other schools and programs. The data was used to evaluate the Character Education program to determine how it has impacted students' knowledge about values and the treatment of others. It also provided information necessary to determine program changes and needs for following years.

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Table of Contents

| | | |
|------------|------------------------------------|----|
| Chapter 1: | Introduction | 1 |
| | A. Purpose of the Study | 3 |
| | B. Research Questions | 4 |
| | C. Assumptions | 4 |
| | D. Definition of Terms | 5 |
| | E. Limitations | 5 |
| Chapter 2: | Literature Review | 6 |
| | A. Historical Perspective | 6 |
| | B. Current Issues | 8 |
| | C. Quantitative Evaluations | 11 |
| | D. Qualitative Evaluations | 14 |
| Chapter 3: | Procedures | 18 |
| | A. Selection of Subjects | 18 |
| | B. Description | 19 |
| | 1. Education for Character | 19 |
| | 2. Recognition for Character | 24 |
| | 3. Remediation for Character | 24 |
| | C. Research Design | 25 |
| | D. Ethical Issues | 27 |
| Chapter 4: | Results and Discussion | 29 |
| | A. Student Interviews | 29 |
| | 1. Table 1: Most Enjoyed Activity | 30 |
| | 2. Table 2: Least Enjoyed Activity | 30 |

| | |
|----------------------------|----|
| 3. Table 3: Learned Most | 32 |
| 4. Table 4: Most Difficult | 32 |
| B. Parent Surveys | 34 |
| C. Informal Assessments | 36 |
| Chapter 5: Summary | 37 |
| A. Conclusions | 39 |
| B. Implications | 41 |
| References | 43 |
| Appendix A | 46 |
| Appendix B | 47 |

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The American family structure is changing. Family structure in the past typically consisted of two parent households with one parent making money while the other parent raised the children. However, this standard is no longer typical. Today, family structures vary from single parent families to double income households where both parents work outside the home. With the changing families, our society's attitudes and tolerance towards violence and disrespect has become more liberal as many children receive less guidance from their parents (Brandt, 1993; Lickona, 1993). Children are growing up faster but not taking on the responsibilities of an adult. They believe that it is acceptable to take drugs, drink, and have sex because it is what they see adults doing, either in their lives or on television (Brandt, 1993; Lickona, 1993). Children are lacking the morals and values needed to make good judgments and appropriate decisions that can affect their entire life (Remboldt, 1998).

Schools have also been changing with the changing needs of the family and society. What was once a place to learn reading, math, and writing is evolving. The three R's are no longer enough to lead students in the right direction from childhood through adolescence to adulthood (Lickona, 1993). Since the family structure is changing and parents may be less available to their children, schools have been adapting to meet the needs of children that parents no longer meet (Lickona, 1993). Years ago schools began teaching about maturation and sex education as the need

arose in society. In addition, schools began educating against drugs and drinking. In today's society, schools are educating against violence and gangs, and teaching respect and tolerance. These topics have become standard in elementary curriculum in addition to learning academics. Schools are taking on more and more that family education is lacking (Lickona, 1993).

Currently, some schools are equipped with metal detectors, have police liaisons within the building, perform random locker checks for weapons and drugs, and have surveillance cameras (Remboldt, 1998). These solutions are adult based and are not teaching children how to make appropriate decisions. Most people believe that this violence occurs with teenagers at the high school level. However, schools are being faced with weapons and violence even at the elementary level. We have been shocked by violence and shootings in schools that have taken the lives of innocent students and teachers. How many lives need to be lost before we take action against our society's attitude towards violence? What are schools and communities doing to fight against violence?

To answer these questions, many schools already have programs in place such as individual counseling, group counseling, and peer mediation that teach children to talk through their problems and resolve conflicts with other students in a nonviolent, rational way. Unfortunately, as good as these programs are, they are made available to students after a problem has started, rather than as a proactive approach to avoiding

conflicts that lead to violence. By taking a proactive approach, we can teach the skills that children need to accept and respect others, listen to others' opinions, and live peacefully with differences (Lickona, 1993).

One proactive approach to teaching respect and tolerance is through character education. Character education programs are becoming more popular in schools. Educators are teaching children how to respect themselves and other people (Lickona, 1993). With today's changing society and family structure, there is a need for schools to be teaching morals and values when they are not being taught in many homes. By teaching respect we are attempting to protect ourselves, our children, and our society from violence and intolerance. We are hopefully learning to be open-minded and accepting so that we can live and work cooperatively with all people.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate a character education program that was focused on fourth and fifth grade children. In this program, fourth and fifth grade students at Hancock Elementary School learned how to treat others as they themselves want to be treated through hands-on experiences. These students were taught about trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship by the school psychologist and the school principal in their classrooms during the 1998-1999 school year. Teachers and other staff supported the program by promoting and modeling good character each day. The program is being evaluated to determine whether students are gaining

knowledge about these character traits and what it means to be respectful and tolerant of others. Also, it will be determined if students are generalizing this knowledge to other aspects of their life outside the classroom. This evaluation is significant to determine necessary changes so the program can be more effective in the future.

Research Questions

There were several questions that needed to be answered to determine whether Character Education was being effective and successful.

1. Was the Character Education curriculum developmentally appropriate for fourth and fifth grade students?
2. Did the students show an understanding of good character?
3. Were the parents generally satisfied with the Character Education program?
4. Was the school environment positively affected by the Character Education program?

Assumptions

The current study is based on the assumption that teachers, parents, and community members want children to learn and demonstrate good character in their lives. Also, it is assumed that fourth and fifth grade students are better able to self-evaluate than younger students.

Definition of Terms

_____The current program used several terms that were defined for the study to clarify their meaning and relationship to the program.

Character Education - refers to the curriculum title that educates students about caring, citizenship, fairness, respect, responsibility, and trustworthiness.

Values - refers to the judgement of the goodness or badness of human action.

Character - refers to the judgement of the goodness or badness of human action.

Caring - being kind; generous; helpful.

Citizenship - taking care of the community; working together; obeying rules and laws.

Fairness - sharing; following rules.

Respect - values others for their character; treating others how you want to be treated.

Responsibility - doing what you are supposed to do; reliable.

Trustworthiness - honest; loyal; truthful.

Limitation of the Study

The information found in this study will have limited generalizability to other schools and programs. Other schools will need to evaluate their character education program to determine its impact on their students.

Literature Review

Character education has been a part of American education for many years. The literature review will summarize the history of character education and discuss how it has evolved to the present day. Current issues and concerns in character education include questions regarding what to teach and how to teach it. Evaluating the effectiveness of character education programs has been controversial and will be addressed through examples of quantitative and qualitative studies.

Historical Perspective

Character education is not a new concept in schools. Historically, education's goals have included teaching to be smart and teaching to be good. In the late 1880s and early 1900s, moral education was primarily concerned with conduct and behavior and day-to-day moral issues, for example, telling the truth, being polite, and obeying authority. It also believed that moral education was the responsibility of the whole society, not solely teachings in the classroom. To help teach discipline and morality, the Bible was often used as a guideline of moral behavior. However, in the 1920s and 1930s, there were negative opinions about the relationship between good conduct and character education. Therefore, formal character education teaching slightly declined in the public schools (Lickona, 1993; Wynne, 1985).

During the 1950s, with the increase in youth suicides, homicides, and teenage pregnancies, teaching morality in schools was restored to help youth disorder (Wynne, 1985). However, in the 1960s teaching

morality in schools declined again due to society's views of autonomy and individual rights. At this time, whose values should be taught and violating the separation of church and state became central issues to character education (Lickona, 1993).

During the 1970s, character education resurfaced as values clarification and Kohlberg's moral development (Lickona, 1993). Values clarification indicated that values should not be imposed on children, but that students need help choosing their values freely (Lickona, 1993). Kohlberg indicated that students need to develop their moral reasoning so that they can determine which values are better than others (Lickona, 1993). These approaches were not as concerned with conduct as earlier theories. Conduct and behavior were thought to be too difficult to change. Instead, values clarification and Kohlberg focused on moral reasoning and judgments, and were taught in classrooms by teachers as part of the curriculum. These approaches sought to teach students how to make good choices and appropriate decisions through moral reasoning (Lickona, 1993; Wynne, 1985).

During the late 1980s and in the 1990s, character education returned again, trying to restore "good character" in students. The return of character education has been primarily based on the decline of the family structure (fewer two biological parent families), the decline of youth behavior (increase in youth violence, homicides, and suicides) and the

increase in society's view to approach morality together, as everyone's problem, to save our children (Lickona, 1993).

Current Issues

The current character education wave has caused some dilemma over what should be taught and how it should be taught. Since public schools educate all students, there was a controversy about what behavior all people consider to be moral (Beane, 1985). Then, in 1992, the Josephson Institute of Ethics joined school, church, and community leaders to devise the Aspen Declaration on Character Education, which developed eight principles of character education. In 1993, the Character Education Partnership was formed which also brought together people from businesses, churches, and schools to focus on character education. The Partnership believes that character education is an essential element of successful school reform because it helps reduce negative student behavior, improve academic performance, and prepare young people to be responsible citizens (Berreth, 1993, p. 8). These committees headed the beginning of the current character education programs that are now the focus in many schools.

When schools are implementing an effective character education program, it is essential that they provide appropriate class instructions and activities that educate and encourage each character trait they are teaching. This includes defining character by thinking (what good character means), feeling (how good character affects each person), and behaving (what people of good character do and say). Also, students

need opportunities to develop and practice each trait. In order to do this, school staff must be committed to character education, model good character in their own lives, and be involved in and responsible for the character education curriculum. (Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis 1997; Benninga, 1991). Character education needs to be a comprehensive approach that encompasses all aspects of the school environment (Lickona, et al., 1997; Benninga, 1991).

In addition, schools need to take academics and discipline seriously to be effective character educators (Wynne & Walberg, 1985). This includes clearly written behavior discipline plans and recognizing students for demonstrating good character and achievement. Furthermore, academic achievement needs to be promoted for all learners and developing intrinsic motivation in students for good character and academic achievement is necessary. In addition to the school component, the involvement and commitment of parents and community members is needed for a program's success. Finally, to insure an effective program, an evaluation should be conducted to assess the character of the school, the staff as character educators, and student character (Lickona, et al., 1997; Benninga, 1991).

Evaluating character education programs is necessary and controversial. This is a sensitive area since it is important that the school assesses the program without applying individual and personal values. In the past, suggestions for evaluation included teacher observations of students during class discussions and activities, and teachers using open-

ended questions to help facilitate students' ability to reason and problem-solve. Other methods of evaluation may include audio or video taping students learning and participating, and examining students written assignments to show development and progress in reasoning and problem-solving skills. In addition, long-term class projects and student journals help to document progress and information learned (Silver, 1976).

Another method of tracking student progress on character education is by using a checklist to analyze each student's behavior and his/her progress in character development. This could be completed by charting or documenting examples of good character and analyzing results for an increase in positive behavior. Conversely, a teacher could also chart negative behavior and analyze the results for a decrease in severity and number of incidents (Fulda & Jantz, 1975).

Since the most recent return of character education, there has been a lack of evaluating program effectiveness. Many schools have implemented character education programs but have not determined the impact the program has had on children through a formal evaluation (Leming, 1993). For example, *Lessons in Character* (Young People's Press, 1996) is a character education program that was developed specifically for the elementary school level. It uses *Books of Responsibility* and six pillars of character. These six pillars include trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. Each lesson and the *Books of Responsibility* provide activities and suggestions to promote critical thinking in students. It utilizes the STAR

approach to problem-solving (Stop, Think, Act, and Review). It also encourages, through materials and curriculum activities, cooperation, conflict resolution, and community service (Young People's Press, 1996).

Lessons in Character evaluates each lesson through informal assessments provided with the material. Students demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of each value through assignments and class projects. This program does not incorporate a formal assessment, however, a variety of opportunities are used for students to demonstrate their awareness and knowledge of the values (Young People's Press, 1996).

Quantitative Evaluations

A more formal method of evaluating a program's effectiveness is goal-based using controlled, experimental designs that compare students who are involved in a program to students who are not involved in a program and concentrate on behavior changes (Leming, 1993; Posavac, 1992). However, there are challenges when trying to complete effective evaluations of character education programs. For example, each program has different goals and objectives to achieve and assess, and a variety of variables to control. Defining operational definitions to measure good character and finding valid and reliable instruments to assess the outcome of the program are difficult. Therefore, evaluations that are conducted do not generalize well to other programs. Because of

these challenges, very little research on character education evaluations has been published in research journals (Leming, 1997).

Two published program evaluations were found to use controlled, experimental designs. In San Ramon, California the Child Development Project improved character traits and academic skills (Schaps, Solomon, & Watson, 1985). The goal of the program was to combine and increase cooperative activities, help and share activities, set positive examples, promote social understanding, and use positive discipline. Teachers incorporated these ideas into the existing curriculum and other school events, such as assemblies and charity drives (Developmental Studies Center, 1996).

The evaluation of this program was longitudinal. Three schools adopted the program into the curriculum, while three other schools were used for comparison study. Each year trained observers went into the classrooms using and not using the program to determine how well the concepts were being implemented. It was found in the first year that schools who implemented the program taught the concepts to a significantly greater degree than schools who did not implement the program.

In addition, interviews and small group sessions assessed students' pro social attitudes, motives, and behavior (Schaps, et al., 1985, p.35). They found that students in the program schools performed significantly better than the comparison schools in social problem-solving skills, cooperation skills when playing, and were more supportive of each

other on specific tasks. This study suggested that the effects of this program would accumulate over the years since there were more significant results from the second year compared to the first year. Furthermore, teachers who were interviewed after the third year about the program's effectiveness indicated positive results in character development and academic achievement of their students (Schaps, et al., 1985).

The second program that was evaluated using an experimental design was the Weber County Character Education Project in Utah. This character education program used the SMILE model to educate students about being responsible, caring, and good citizens. SMILE involves stimulating interest about a value, modeling the value, integrating the students' prior knowledge to emphasize the value, linking parents and homework assignments, and extending the values to real-life experiences (Weed, 1993).

This was also a longitudinal evaluation carried out by the Institute for Research and Evaluation of Salt Lake City, Utah. The evaluation was conducted over two years in classrooms where the program was implemented and in classrooms without the program. At the end of two years, program classrooms indicated statistically significantly reduced problem behaviors in students. Non program classrooms reported an increase in student problem behaviors (Weed, 1993).

Qualitative Evaluations

A more common method for evaluating character education program effectiveness is through a qualitative or naturalistic model. This method includes gathering anecdotal information or using surveys for staff, parent, student, and administrator input. For example, in the late 1980s, in San Antonio, Texas, the American Institute of Character Education evaluated their character education program. The program used stories and posters to show a variety of values (i.e. being honest, kind, and generous). The classroom teachers were responsible for reading the stories and facilitating discussions with their students. Positive reports of the program indicated that drug and alcohol abuse was reduced, school attendance was encouraged, and vandalism was discouraged (Goble & Brooks, 1983).

Also in San Antonio, the Character Education Curriculum educated students about universal values, such as generosity, kindness, truthfulness, respect, etc. This curriculum used the premise that knowledge, self-awareness, feeling, and action guided students into good character. The curriculum was primarily based on discussions, role playing, and group work. Parent involvement was encouraged and specific suggestions were provided for parents (Character Education Institute, 1996).

This qualitative evaluation included responses to questionnaires from students, teachers, and principals about the program's effectiveness. Data from the questionnaires and testimonials indicated

that problem behaviors in students had decreased. In addition, respondents were highly satisfied with the Character Education Curriculum (Character Education Institute, 1996).

Another character education program that was evaluated using a qualitative model was the Jefferson Center for Character Education. This program taught the value concepts of honesty, perseverance, respect, and tolerance. Classroom teachers educated their students on what these words meant and helped them to recognize these concepts in behavioral actions and practiced using these concepts themselves (Satnick, 1991).

This program's effectiveness was evaluated using school administrators' input gathered over the phone. Overall, the administrators indicated that there were less discipline issues, higher student morale, and increased parent-school involvement and student responsibility (Satnick, 1991).

Furthermore, in Jacksonville, Florida counselors implemented character education programs (Stone & Dyal, 1997). Students were taught about self-respect, empathy, self-control, conflict resolution, and responsibility. Counselors taught one character trait a month. They introduced each trait at the beginning of the month by performing on the school-wide television. The counselors used literature, hands-on activities, and discussions to teach each character trait. This character education program also incorporated a public service component so students could apply what they were learning (Stone & Dyal, 1997)

A qualitative evaluation was conducted to determine this character education program's effectiveness. One hundred percent of the teachers supported the program. Ninety-five percent of the teachers reported that their students were learning and retaining the lessons. Ninety-four percent of the teachers reported that they have observed positive behavior changes, such as increased homework completion, better class preparation, and an increase in following school rules (Stone & Dyal).

Finally, *Creatures of Character* (Cali, 1997) was a program implemented by a school counselor that used the association of animals to teach about character traits in nature. For example, "Responsible Benjamin E. Beaver" showed how to be responsible by building his dam, staying on-task, and completing his work. These teachings helped students to transfer this information to their own personal experiences and they learned how the character trait would benefit them in their own lives. Each month had a designated character trait, such as responsibility, courage, fairness, and citizenship integrated into the curriculum using puppets, stories, hands-on activities, community service, and academics. Parents were also encouraged to teach each character trait at home and were provided with workshops and suggested teachings to use. In addition to the school and home education, students were recognized each day by their teacher for demonstrating their knowledge of the character trait (Cali, 1997).

The *Creatures of Character* program's effectiveness was evaluated through a qualitative design. Students, parents, and staff

completed open-ended questionnaires and surveys about the program. Positive results were found from all respondents. Teachers reported that students were excited about each lesson and teachers felt that learning through association with animals helped the students retain the information. Parents were supportive of the program and reported that children seemed to relate well to the animals. Attitude changes in staff and students were also noted, in addition to an awareness of positive decision making by students (Cali, 1997).

In addition to these programs, other programs such as the Community of Caring (Community of Caring, 1996) and An Ethics Curriculum for Children (Heartwood Institute, 1992) have found positive results from the qualitative evaluations of their programs' effectiveness.

Overall, these programs each focused on a designated set of character traits that could be integrated into the existing curriculum. Involvement of parents and the support of the community was a common theme in most effective character education programs. Also, a school wide commitment to character education was important. The wide variety of research methods and results showed that one model for evaluating character education programs has not been developed and is difficult to develop. However, to increase the generalizability of character education programs and their effectiveness, a more focused approach to curriculum planning and evaluation is needed (Leming, 1997).

CHAPTER 3

Procedures

The procedures involved in evaluating the Character Education program included the selection of the subjects that participated in the study and the description of the program and curriculum. Also, the research design and the ethical considerations involved in the study were part of the procedures to be described in this chapter.

Selection of subjects

Character Education was implemented at Hancock Elementary School in Red Wing, Minnesota. All of the students in the school were involved in the Character Education program as part of the curriculum during the 1998-99 school year. Hancock was a small school with approximately 125 students in first through fifth grades. Fourth and fifth grade students were involved in the evaluation as they were older and may be better able to self-evaluate. The 51 students in the fourth and fifth grade classrooms came from lower to middle class white families. The families varied in structure and size.

Participation in this evaluation was completely voluntary. The parents of fourth and fifth grade students were mailed an explanation of the evaluation and a permission slip for their child to participate in the evaluation. The 12 female and 6 male students (9 fourth graders and 9 fifth graders) who returned the signed permission slip to school were interviewed about the program and their behavior by the school psychologist.

In addition, the parents of all 51 students were mailed a survey that they were asked to complete to help the school gather more information about the program, its effectiveness, and the impact it had on their child. Fourteen parent surveys (8 parents of girls and 6 parents of boys; 6 fourth grade parents and 8 fifth grade parents) were returned.

Furthermore, informal assessments were made by staff throughout the Character Education curriculum. Changes in behavior and attitude that were noticed by the teachers were documented in this evaluation.

Description

The Character Education program was implemented into the school-wide environment. The program has three components: education for character; recognition for character; and remediation for character.

Education for character

The Character Education curriculum was developed and taught by the school psychologist and the school principal once a month in each classroom for students in first through fifth grade. This Character Education program specifically taught students about trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship (Young People's Press, 1996). Students learned what these words and concepts meant, what they looked like, and how they felt.

As part of the curriculum, after each Character Education class, students were asked to write a statement about what they learned on a strip of colored construction paper. These strips were collected and formed into a chain link. This chain link connected each student's

responses by grade for each character trait. It was hung around the school as it grew with posters that designated and defined each trait. The purpose of the chain was to signify the learning and bonding that was occurring across all grade levels and throughout the school environment.

The first character trait taught was trustworthiness. The word and definition of trustworthiness were introduced to the students. They were asked what they thought it meant, how it might look if someone was being trustworthy, and how it felt to be trustworthy. Students gave examples of trustworthy behavior in their own lives. After the introduction, students engaged in a blindfolded trust walk with a partner (Akin, Dunne, Palomares, & Schilling, 1995). Before beginning the trust walk, they needed to discuss with their partner how they would communicate where to go and how to keep each other safe. After each student had a chance to be blindfolded, a group discussion was facilitated by the school psychologist and the principal. Students were asked how it felt to be blindfolded and how it felt leading their blindfolded partner. Also, students were asked if they felt they could trust their partner and what helped to gain and keep their trust. On the chain strips, students needed to write how they showed that they were trustworthy at home and at school.

The second character trait taught was respect. Students were asked what respect meant and what it looked and felt like when people are respectful. The group activity was a "Recipe for Respect" (Akin, et al., 1995). Initially, the definition of a recipe was discussed and the students were told that their school needed a recipe for a respectful

environment. Fourteen behavioral actions were written on single sheets of paper so the students could read them (i.e., borrowing something from someone without permission; saying "I'm sorry" after bumping into someone; walking away from someone who is talking to you; and offering to share your snack with someone). As a group, students were asked to identify if the action they read was respectful or disrespectful. If the action was disrespectful, it was crumpled up and thrown in the garbage. If the action was respectful, it was put into a large mixing bowl and stirred up with a spoon as part of the recipe for respect. After these examples, groups of four students wrote or drew two respectful and two disrespectful actions on paper. Each group then role played one or two of their actions for the class and the class identified if the action was respectful or disrespectful. On the chain strips, students were asked to write how they showed respect at home and school.

The third character trait taught was responsibility. As a group, the definition of responsibility was discussed and examples of responsible behavior were given by the students. The students watched the video "Thought, Word, and Deed" (Thought, Word, and Deed, 1994) which explained how each person is responsible for what they think, say, and do. After the video, a group discussion was facilitated about how what you think, say, and do are all related and affect others. On the chain strips, students were asked to write how they showed that they were a responsible person at home and school.

The fourth character trait taught was fairness. The word and concept of being fair were introduced to each class. Students were asked to give examples of what it meant to be fair. An exercise, "Take on Tolerance" (Schwallie-Giddis, Cowan, & Schilling, 1993) was conducted by briefly excluding some students from the group based on irrelevant differences (i.e., blue eyes, white socks, long hair). As a group, the students discussed how it felt to be excluded and included based on these differences. As an activity, groups of four students completed a "Fair Statement" worksheet (Knoblock, 1997) answering questions about fair and unfair situations. Each group discussed with the class the reasons for their choices. On the chain strips, students wrote how they treated someone fairly.

The fifth character trait taught was caring. As a group, students were asked what it meant to be caring and how it felt. The first part of the activity involved groups of four completing a "Put-down Survey" (Schwallie-Giddis, et al., 1993). This involved making a list of statements they remembered people saying that put others down. These examples and reasons why people put others down were discussed in the large group. Students explained how they felt when they were put down by someone. The second part of the activity was "Validations" (Schwallie-Giddis, et al., 1993). Students were asked what it meant to give and receive compliments. The activity involved taping a piece of construction paper on each student's back so that other students could write a compliment or validation. Students were asked to write at least one

compliment on each student's back. At the end of the activity, students took the paper from their backs and read their compliments. Group discussion involved how they felt giving and receiving compliments. On the chain strips, students wrote a sentence describing how they felt when they received the compliments.

The last character trait taught was citizenship. The word and concept of citizenship were introduced. Discussion about being part of a group and a community was facilitated. Ideas on how to respect the school, community, and environment were emphasized as being a good citizen. Students gave examples of their own citizenship. To learn and see citizenship, the students watched the video "Buttercream Gang" (Buttercream Gang, 1991). This video was about a group of children who form a gang to perform good deeds in their community and some of the influences that affected other children in negative ways. On the chain strips, students wrote how they showed that they were a good citizen.

In addition to the curriculum, the staff committed to promoting a positive, safe, and respectful school environment for students to learn. An effective program with a supportive school climate should make a positive impact on children when they are on the playground, in the cafeteria, on the bus, at home, and in the neighborhood (Brooks & Kann, 1993). In the day to day operation of Hancock, all adults helped educate

children regarding these traits. Teachers emphasized these traits and the Golden Rule in their classroom environments.

Recognition for character

To recognize good character, students had the opportunity to receive "Golden Kid" awards for demonstrating positive behavior while they were at school. Each month teachers selected two children per classroom whose actions exemplified good character. The child's photo and a description of what he or she did were placed on a school bulletin board, in the school newsletter, and their name and good character actions were announced in school.

In addition, to further recognize students' good character, the school held an all school special event each month. For example, a magician, storytellers, the high school band, and a singing group performed. All children who did not receive a "Character Violation" that month were able to participate in the special event.

Remediation for character

A "Character Violation" was a behavior that was in contradiction to good character that needed to be remediated. The goal of the remediation was to help increase children's problem solving skills and help them learn how they could use the six character traits to guide their actions.

If a student received one violation, they received one day of noon detention. During noon detention the child completed a reflection paper. The paper allowed the child to write about his/his actions, and what he/she could do differently to exemplify the six character traits. The principal or the school psychologist reviewed the paper with the student and a copy of

the paper was sent to the child's parent. If a second violation was made, the student had two days of noon detention and again completed a reflection paper that was reviewed and sent to his/her parents.

After a third violation, the student completed a reflection paper and attended five days of noon detention. During those five days, the student needed to stay after school with the principal or the school psychologist to attend a character class. The purpose of the class was to emphasize the character traits that the student was violating and help him/her to demonstrate positive behavior. Once a child completed his/her noon detention and the character class, the child started over with a clean slate; a new violation was then considered a "first" violation.

Research design

A qualitative design was used to determine parental input, students' knowledge of the values taught, and ideas for future changes. After the completion of the curriculum, the outcome was assessed through anecdotal reports from students and parents. This information was gathered through structured student interviews (see Appendix A) and parent surveys (see Appendix B) about the program.

In the student interviews, students were asked which activity they enjoyed the most and the least. This information helped to determine which Character Education lesson, if any, should be changed or deleted from the curriculum in future years and which lessons promoted student interest. Students were also asked which character trait they felt that they learned the most about and which was the most difficult to understand.

This information provided the students' perspective of their own learning. It also informed the school which concepts may require additional or different lessons to teach the trait more effectively. Also, by comparing each student's favorite activity with the concept they learned the most about, it could be determined if the activity was educating students about the trait it claimed to teach. Similarly, if each student's least favorite activity was compared to the concept they found most difficult to understand, it could be determined if there was a relationship between those variables.

In addition, students were asked what they have learned about the treatment of others to determine what information about the lessons the students were retaining. Also, to determine if a student's learning had generalized to other aspects of their life beyond the class lesson, they were asked how the Character Education information has helped them in school and at home.

The parent survey asked the parents if and what their child discussed with them about the curriculum. This helped to determine student and parent interest in the curriculum. Parents were also asked about any noticeable changes in their child's actions or attitudes to provide information about the generalizability of the lessons. To gain information about future changes in the program, parents were asked for their input, including suggestions and concerns.

The school psychologist analyzed the findings of the interviews and surveys for trends in the responses and behavioral changes reported. Also, any noticeable differences between fourth and fifth grade students or boys' and girls' responses were documented.

The results of the evaluation will be used to make appropriate and necessary changes in the Character Education program so that it is more effective in the future. Based on these results, additional Character Education programs may be implemented throughout the school district. However, the results will have limited generalizability to other schools and programs.

Ethical issues

As this evaluation was conducted, there were a few ethical issues to take into consideration. First of all, it was very important to keep the student interviews and the parent surveys confidential. To insure confidentiality to the students, the school psychologist did not report the student names on the interview questions or share any student's responses with anyone. To insure confidentiality to the parents, they were not asked to sign the surveys nor were they able to be identified by any other means.

Secondly, parents and students giving informed consent to participate in this study was an ethical issue to be considered. The permission slip provided in detail the purpose and intent of the evaluation and the student interviews. Parents had the option to call the school for questions and/or concerns about their child's participation in the interview

process. The students themselves were also asked for their permission before conducting the interview.

Thirdly, an ethical consideration was using an unbiased interviewer. Since the school psychologist was one of the program directors and the interviewer, this person needed to be aware of personal attitudes and opinions of the character education program. Only information reported by the teachers, students, and parents was used to document the program's effectiveness.

CHAPTER 4

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the current Character Education program was being effective in educating students about good character. The results of this study included anecdotal information about the Character Education program. This data was collected through student interviews, parent surveys, and teacher reports.

Student interviews

The first findings of the student interviews showed the activities that students enjoyed the most and the least. This information was helpful to determine whether the lessons should be changed and which lessons promoted student interest. Of the six activities, the trustwalk and the video "Buttercream Gang" were rated to be the most enjoyed. The video "Thought, Word, & Deed" and the fairness worksheet were not chosen by any students as their most enjoyed activity (See Table 1). Fifth graders primarily chose the trustwalk, while fourth graders primarily chose the citizenship video as the most enjoyed activity. There were no noticeable differences found between boys' and girls' responses to their most enjoyed activity.

The fairness worksheet was chosen by nearly half of the students as the least enjoyed activity (See Table 2). No noticeable differences were documented between fourth and fifth grade students. Girls chose the role plays more often than boys as their least enjoyed activity. Two children indicated that they enjoyed all of the activities and did not

TABLE 1: MOST ENJOYED ACTIVITY

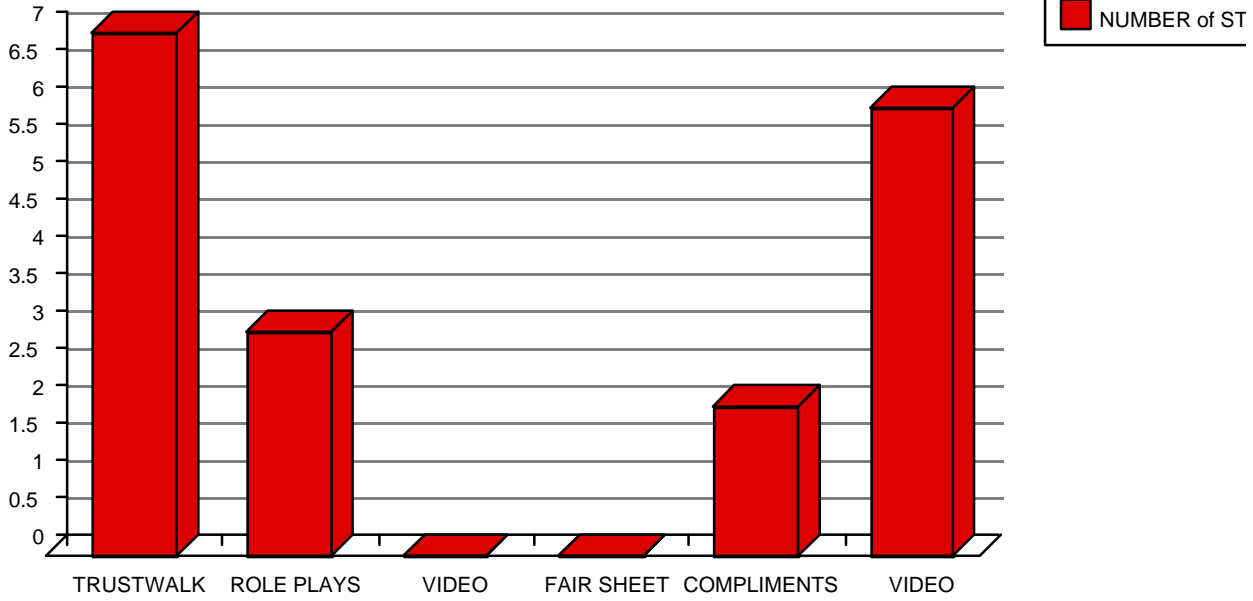
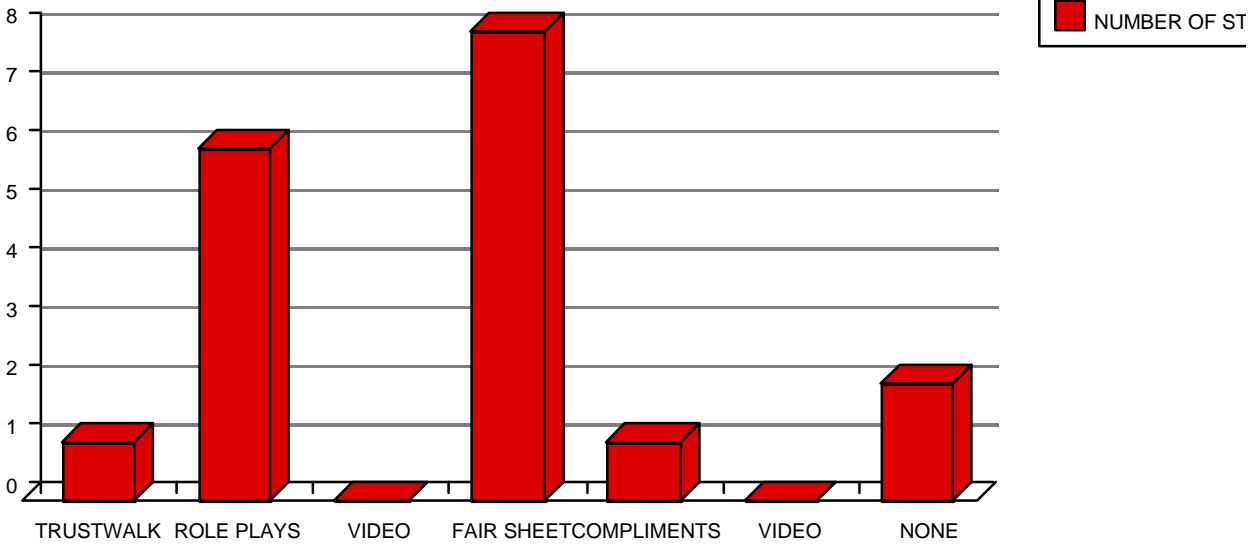


TABLE 2: LEAST ENJOYED ACTIVITY



choose a least enjoyed activity. The citizenship video and the responsibility video were not rated as least enjoyed by anyone.

In addition to what the students enjoyed and did not enjoy, they were asked which character traits they felt that they learned the most about and which traits were the most difficult to understand. The majority of the students rated the concept of citizenship as the trait they learned the most about (See Table 3). Fifth graders rated citizenship more often than fourth graders. It may be important to note that citizenship was the last trait taught and the most recent in relation to the interview. Also, the video needed two lessons to complete as opposed to one lesson for the rest of the activities. Therefore, the citizenship information may be more fresh in the students' minds than other activities. No students rated responsibility as the trait they learned the most about. Also, there were no noticeable differences found between boys' and girls' responses.

There were no traits indicated as overwhelmingly difficult to understand compared to others (See Table 4). In fact, more students, primarily fifth graders and primarily girls, reported that they understood all of the traits taught rather than choosing a "most difficult" trait. This information suggests that the lessons appear to be educating the female fifth grade students about each trait as intended and at a level that the students understand.

Overall, it seemed that the trait of responsibility and the corresponding "Thought, Word, & Deed" video had the least impact on students. This was not rated as the "most enjoyed," "least enjoyed," or

TABLE 3: LEARNED MOST

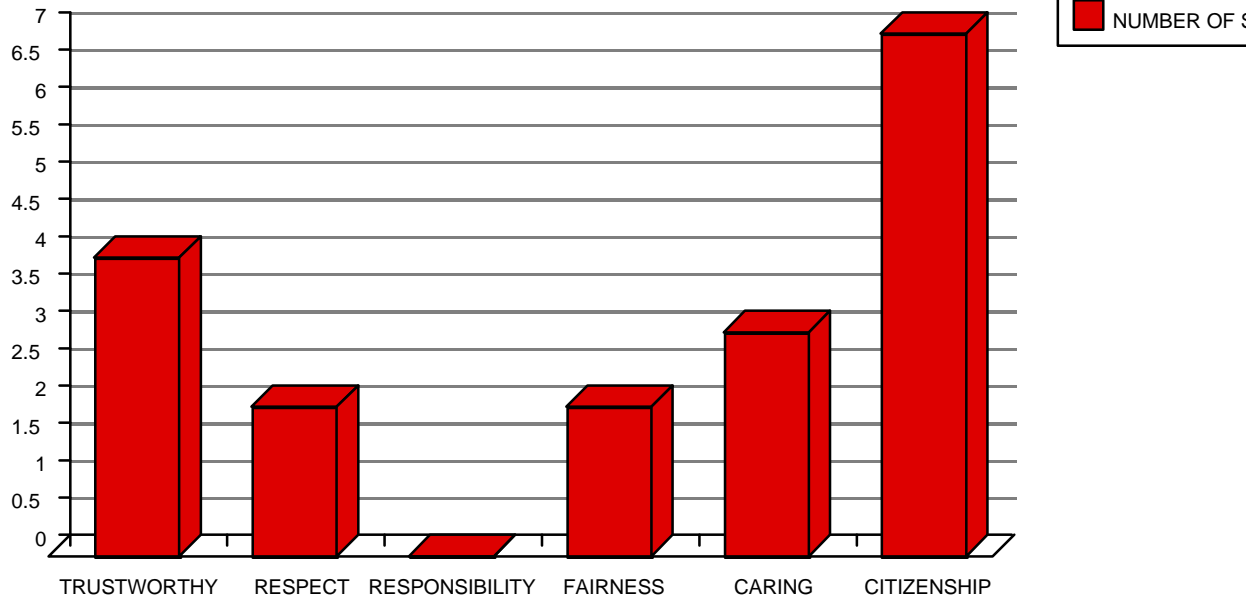
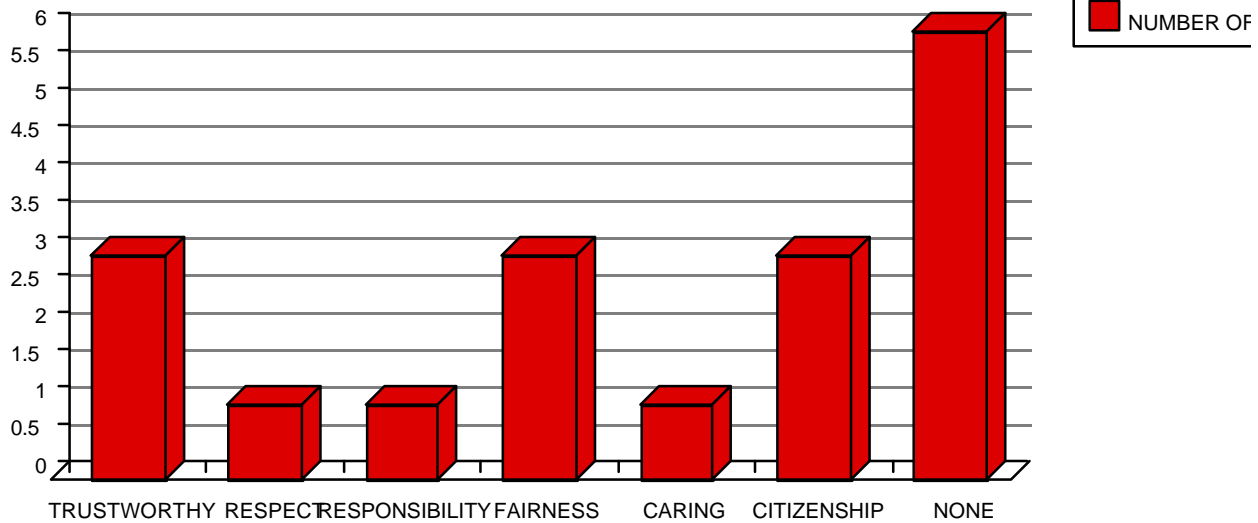


TABLE 4: MOST DIFFICULT



the "most learned." This lesson may need to be deleted and replaced by a different activity on responsibility. In addition, the fairness activity was highly rated as a "least enjoyed" activity and not at all as a "most enjoyed" activity. However, it was rated by a couple students as the "most learned" trait and by three students as the "most difficult" trait. Therefore, the fair activity may need to be modified to be more interactive and less of a paper-pencil activity so the students enjoy it and understand it more.

In addition to what the students enjoyed and learned about the traits and activities, students commented on what they learned about the treatment of others through the Character Education curriculum. By analyzing the comments made, four areas of behavior were narrowed down: respecting others; treating others how you want to be treated; being more responsible; and being more fair with friends. The two primary behaviors reported were respecting others (7 respondents) and treating others how they want to be treated (8 respondents). There were no noticeable differences between boys' and girls' or fourth and fifth graders' responses. Overall, the responses showed that students are thinking about how they are treating others and also how they themselves are being treated and what that feels like. Hopefully, this will lead to changes in their own behavior.

When students were asked how this information has helped them at home and in school, they were allowed to give more than one response. Half of the respondents reported that they are more respectful of others and are getting along better with peers. One third of the students felt that the Character Education program helped them get along better with their siblings and parents at home. Several students reported that they are controlling their feelings more often. Other responses included that they have made more friends and are more responsible. One student did not report any changes at home or school. Another student reported that after watching the citizenship video, she did many projects around her neighborhood. She reported that she helped an elderly woman plant flowers and helped a man carry wood to make a shed and hammered nails for him. She also indicated that she was planning to help her neighbors more and rake their yard. She additionally indicated that she wanted to start a club (like the Buttercream Gang) on her block. This student's response indicated the extent to which the Character Education curriculum can influence students.

Parent surveys

_____As part of the survey, parents were asked which trait, if any, their child discussed with them at home. Eight of the 14 surveys indicated that the students did not discuss the activities or traits at home. Of the 6 students who did discuss this at home, 5 were girls. Also, 3 of the 6 students were fourth graders and 3 were fifth graders. Caring and trustworthiness were the only concepts and activities that children

discussed with their parents. These activities would be considered to be the most socially interactive activities.

Nine of the students' parents did not notice any changes in their child's actions or attitudes. Of the 5 parents who did notice changes, responses included that their child was more respectful of others, made more friends, thinks about their actions more, is friendlier, and is not as angry at others. There were no noticeable differences reported between boys and girls or fourth and fifth graders.

To help improve the curriculum, parents were asked for their input, ideas, and concerns about the program. Parents were not limited in the number of ideas or concerns they could report. Many of the parents did not have additional ideas for the program. Several parents indicated positive support for continuing the Character Education program and felt the current curriculum was appropriate. Five parents made suggestions for future curriculum changes that included teaching more about: being polite; accepting personal responsibility; problem-solving skills; and respect and loyalty to our country. These ideas are indirectly taught with various traits, but more emphasis about each of these can be incorporated. One parent indicated that teaching about God, the Bible, and the Ten Commandments are the only ways for students to learn how to treat each other. However, it is unlawful to teach these ideas in public education settings.

Overwhelmingly, parents reported that they wanted to be more involved in the curriculum. Some parents wanted to know more about the Character Education program and a preliminary parent meeting was suggested. Many suggested that providing activities to do at home would be beneficial. Based on this information, home involvement appeared to be an area that was lacking in the current Character Education program and changes for future programs need to be made.

Informal assessments

In addition to the interviews and surveys, informal assessments about students' learning and behavior were observed by a variety of staff. Teachers noticed that children used and referred to the traits more often as they learned about them and the traits became a part of their vocabulary. Students were observed to practice more appropriate problem-solving skills with peers in and out of the classroom. Also, students appeared to be more conscientious of the school environment as a whole community. They more willingly helped to keep their classrooms, the hallways, and the bathrooms clean. They were also more excited about helping the younger students in the building. Overall, teachers reported improvements in day-to-day interactions and common courtesies between students. All of these actions support that the Character Education program was effective and successful and contributed to making Hancock Elementary a more safe, caring, and positive environment.

CHAPTER 5

Summary

Due to the increase in violence and intolerance in schools and the changes of the family structure in America, schools are taking on the role of educating students about good character. As a proactive approach, character education programs in schools have become part of the education curriculum.

With the many current programs that are available to implement, evaluation of program effectiveness is necessary and warranted. A few programs have conducted quantitative evaluations. However, it is difficult to operationally define how to measure good character and find appropriate instruments to assess program effectiveness. More often, qualitative evaluations have been conducted to determine character education program effectiveness.

The purpose of the current study was to qualitatively evaluate the Character Education program that was implemented at Hancock Elementary School in Red Wing, MN. The program was school-wide where all of the children in first through fifth grades participated as part of the school's curriculum.

As part of the curriculum, students were taught about six character traits: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. These traits were taught by the principal and the school psychologist once a month in each classroom. An additional part of the curriculum included the students making a chain link for each character trait that was hung around the school to symbolize the cooperation and learning that was taking place. Teachers also incorporated the character traits in their classroom lessons and environments.

In addition to the curriculum, recognition of students' good character was included in the program. Also, remediation for character infractions was a necessary component to help children problem-solve and learn from their mistakes when they made poor choices.

The qualitative evaluation consisted of interviewing fourth and fifth grade students about the program. Also, parents of fourth and fifth grade students completed surveys about the program. Additionally, staff provided informal assessments of the program's effectiveness. This information was analyzed for trends in responses to determine whether or not the program was effective in educating students about good character and affecting their behavior. The data also suggested whether students were generalizing their learned information beyond the classroom. Additionally, ideas for future program changes were provided by parents.

Overall, the results showed that the trustwalk and the "Buttercream Gang" video were the most enjoyed activities by students. The least enjoyed activity was the fairness worksheet. The video

ÒThought, Word, & DeedÓ appeared to be the least effective activity and may require significant changes.

Students mostly reported that they learned how to respect others and treat others how they want to be treated. Specific examples of generalized behavior were reported by students, parents, and staff. The primary suggestion for future programs provided by parents included increasing parent awareness of the program and ideas for home involvement.

Conclusions

Based on the student ratings of the most enjoyed activity, it can be concluded that the trustwalk and ÒButtercream GangÓ video will be a continued part of the Character Education program. The least enjoyed activity was the fairness worksheet which was the least interactive activity that involved the most seat work. This data showed that students enjoyed activities that did not involve the typical paper-pencil tasks. Also the trait of responsibility and the corresponding ÒThought, Word, & DeedÓ video had no apparent affect on students, neither positively nor negatively. An activity that allows the students to act responsibly and give them reinforcement for responsible behavior might be more effective. Since none of the character traits were highly rated to be difficult to understand, it can be assumed that the curriculum was appropriate for the age and grade level. Activities in future years can be more challenging as they learn and build from the current activities.

Other changes that can be included for future years is in the parent involvement aspect of the program. To keep parents more involved, they need to be made more aware of the program and be provided with additional activities and ideas to promote their child's learning about character traits at home. Additionally, more activities and ideas should also be provided to classroom teachers to assist in continued learning in the classroom.

Since all but one of the students reported that the curriculum helped them learn more about respect and tolerance for others, it can be concluded that the Character Education program was successful in educating these students about good character. Also, parent and student reports of behavior and attitude changes showed that positive character traits were being generalized beyond the classroom for the students involved in the study. It appeared that this program helped these students change their behavior at home and in their neighborhood.

Furthermore, the informal assessments reported by teachers were positive. The informal assessment reports indicated that Hancock was a more positive and nurturing learning environment as students were more helpful to each other and respectful of the property. Students looked forward to the lessons taught and watched the growing chain link as they increased their knowledge about Character Education.

Based on the results reported by the students about the activities, it can be concluded that the Character Education program has been a positive experience. Recognizing students for good character supported

the positive experiences that children learn from in the program. Also, by remediating for good character, students may have felt that they were learning from their mistakes rather than being punished.

Implications

Based on the results and the conclusions of this evaluation, several recommendations can be made to improve the program's effectiveness. First of all, to be certain that all of the activities and traits are well taught, the concept of fairness needs to have a more interactive and hands-on activity. Also, the current responsibility activity needs to be deleted from the curriculum and replaced with a more influential activity.

Secondly, to continue to promote recognition of good character, more of the bulletin boards around the school could include the character traits and specific behavioral examples of each trait. Also, in addition to recognizing students for good character by announcing it in school, on the bulletin board, and in the school newsletter, students' good character could also be noticed in the city paper. This would emphasize the importance of good character and increase community knowledge of the program.

Thirdly, to increase parent knowledge and involvement in the program, an informational meeting about Character Education could be held at the beginning of the next school year. Parents would be informed of the program and ideas and suggestions for home activities would be

provided. Additionally, a summary of the trait and activity that will be taught each month could be reported in the monthly school newsletter.

Furthermore, to help teachers increase involvement in the Character Education program within their classroom, the Heartwood Institute program (Heartwood Institute, 1992) could be used. This program provides numerous books about courage, loyalty, justice, respect, hope, honesty, and love that can coincide with the six character traits. This could help to improve the entire school environment.

Finally, an additional way to improve the school environment is to implement peer mediation into the Character Education program. Peer mediation would allow students to use and practice their problem-solving skills in real-life situations. Also, peer mediation would be another method of remediating character when students have conflicts with peers.

Although the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this evaluation are specific only to the current Character Education program, they support the positive results found in other evaluations. With these initial findings, more in-depth evaluations should be conducted each year as part of a longitudinal evaluation. With the current results of this evaluation, the Character Education program will continue and expand to other schools in Red Wing.

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Appendix A

Student Interview
Character Education

| | |
|-----|------|
| Boy | Girl |
| 4th | 5th |

| | | |
|------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| | <u>Value</u> | <u>Activity</u> |
| Deed | Trustworthiness | blindfolded trustwalk |
| | Respect | recipe for respect/role play |
| | Responsibility | Thought, Word, & |
| | Fairness | tolerance/fair sheet |
| | Caring | put downs/compliments |
| | Citizenship | Buttercream Gang |

1. What activity did you enjoy the most?
2. What activity did you enjoy the least?
3. What value did you learn the most about?
4. What value was the most difficult to understand?

5. What did you learn about the treatment of others?

6. How has this information helped you in school and at home?

Appendix B

Parent Survey Character Education

Listed below are the values that your child has been learning about and the activity that accompanied each value.

| <u>Value</u> | <u>Activity</u> |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Trustworthiness | trust walk blindfolded |
| Respect | role play/skits |
| Responsibility | video/discussion |
| Fairness | fair worksheet in groups |
| Caring | put downs/compliments |
| Citizenship | video/discussion |

My child is a boy or girl. (circle one)

My child is in 4th or 5th grade. (circle one)

1. Has your child discussed any of the activities or concepts of the Character Education curriculum with you? If so, what have they shared with you? _____

2. Have you noticed your child's actions or attitude to be affected by the Character Education curriculum? If so, how? _____

3. What other concepts or activities do you feel could be helpful to include in future Character Education programs? _____

4. Do you have any concerns with the current Character Education program? _____
