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EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF TEACHING THE CHARACTER TRAIT OF
RESPECT TO STUDENTS IN GRADES 4 AND THE IMPACT IT HAS ON
BEHAVIOR DURING RECESS.

by
Adrian C. Cora-Waters

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Masters of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
May, 2004

Approved by
Professor

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ABSTRACT

Adrian C. Cora-Waters

Character Education
2004
Dr. Robert Kern
Educational Leadership

The purpose of this project was to determine if Character Education lessons on respect presented to fourth grade students could reduce the number of discipline referral forms and reduce inappropriate behavior during the lunch recess hour. The elementary school selected for this research project was Larchmont Elementary School. Larchmont School is an ethnically and academically diverse school located in South Jersey. The students, who received lessons through Developmental School Counseling Lessons, were in grade four (N=100). The students who participated in lessons consisted of regular education students, special education students, ESL students, as well as gifted and talented students. The researcher had developed and used various instruments to complete the project. Qualitative measures were used to determine program effectiveness including lunch discipline reports, observations, and interviews with teachers and administrators, surveys and anecdotal discussions. The project illustrates that teaching Character Education lessons to fourth grade students with an added emphasis on respect for eight weeks has the potential to affect student behavior and to decrease discipline referral forms.

MINI-ABSTRACT

Adrian C. Cora-Waters

Character Education
2004
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The purpose of this project was to determine if Character Education lessons on respect presented to fourth grade students could reduce the number of discipline referral forms and reduces inappropriate behavior during the lunch recess hour.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Bonaro W. Overstreet (as cited in Watson 1951) states, “If I can line up the people who, back through the ages, have gone at life in ways I greatly admire, then I can feel their strength supporting me, all their standards and values pointing the way in which I am to go.” The author of this thesis project desires to express sincere gratitude to her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ for being a timeless source of inspiration for humanity throughout the ages and for granting her the strength and wisdom to accomplish this goal. The author also wishes to thank her family members for their love and encouragement as well as her University Mentor and colleagues for their support. Sincere gratitude is extended to Florence, David, Jerry, Stacey, Clyde, Christopher, and Amani. It is truly a blessing to be supported by people you love. The author also wishes to extend a very special thank you to her mother, Florence Cora.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The catastrophic event that occurred in New York City on September 11th continues to linger in the minds of millions of people worldwide. On that day, millions of people around the world experienced a kaleidoscope of emotions as they were mentally saturated with images and print media, which reminded them of the fallen and debilitating condition of the human race and society as a whole.

On that horrific day, they watched the physical structure of two buildings crumble. As those buildings eerily descended into a cloud of smoke, onlookers were horrified and gripped with fear as they searched their hearts and minds trying to make sense of what had occurred. The common question, in the minds of many, was why. How could evil ambitions drive anyone to the point that they would embrace any movement that promoted hatred forfeiting regard for humanity at any cost?

What has happened to basic respect and regard for humanity? Are these virtues a thing of the past as society continues to witness individuals who promote their dogmatic ideologies that self-advancement, sane or evil ambitions, greed, and unorthodox religious beliefs should supercede human life or the human experience? Do people care about other people, or has humanity become a regimented group of social creatures? Creatures that have been conditioned to engage in behavior periodically which appears to be caring, but in reality is nothing more than counterfeit acts of kindness. Acts, which attempt to

soothe their own, wounded and seared consciousness and inner souls. Do people sincerely trust others, or do they navigate their way through life paranoid and overly suspicious of the circles they travel in, the establishments who employ them, and the relationships they form? Does honesty and integrity prevail, or have these virtues been overshadowed and compromised as people hear about countless officials and ordinary people who have been “caught with their hand in the cookie jar”?

Over the years, the morals and values of society appear to be deteriorating to the point of utter decay. In that vast accrual of decay is a myriad amount of unanswered questions about what is the solution to a problem that could be described as antediluvian at best.

Focus of the Study

The focus of this study is to explore one solution schools have embraced to rectify and strengthen morals and values in children, that is Character Education. Larchmont School, similar to many others academic institutions, has sought to indoctrinate and inculcate students with appropriate morals and values through character education programs. These programs often attempt to heighten a student’s morals with the expectation that application of moral virtues will be observable within the boundaries of the academic setting and beyond. The focus of this study is to determine if teaching the character education trait of respect to children, in grade four, had a positive impact on behavior during the recess hour at Larchmont Elementary School.

Purpose of the Study

At the “educational core” of this thesis project was the research conducted to determine if teaching the character education trait of respect to children, in grade four,

had a positive impact on behavior during the recess hour at Larchmont Elementary School.

Qualitative data was collected through, discipline reports, administrative and faculty interviews and observation for analysis. This project had the potential to help students develop healthy morals and values as well as, to determine if teaching a specific character education trait to students had a positive impact on behavior during the recess hour.

The researcher desires to teach the character education trait of respect to students in grade four in large group instruction to determine if teaching this trait had a positive impact on student behavior during the recess hour.

Definitions

During the writing and composition of this project, specific, terminology, phraseology and “educational jargon” was used to convey points, concepts, and thoughts. These terms may be ambiguous or misinterpreted by the reader. To alleviate such confusion, specific terms had been defined and discussed to afford the reader an opportunity to read through the thesis projects without perplexity or misunderstanding of any terms noted in the thesis.

Character Education: Programs, which attempt to strengthen and develop moral virtues.

Developmental school counseling program: Comprehensive school counseling programs that promote and enhance student learning. The program’s focus is on the three broad and interrelated areas of student development: academic, career and personal/social development. Each encompasses a variety of desired student learning competencies, which forms the foundation of the developmental school-counseling program.

K-4 Setting: A school setting where the grade configuration is made up of students in grades kindergarten through fourth grade.

Character Education trait: An attitude or belief that impacts a person's behavior in a given situation.

Large Group Instruction: A large group of students instructed on a specific topic in a specific academic setting.

Stakeholder: One who had a vested interest in the research project at Larchmont School.

ASK Test: The Assessment of Skills and Knowledge Test was taken by all third and fourth grade students at Larchmont Elementary School.

Terranova Test: A standardized test taken by all second, third and fourth grade students at Larchmont Elementary School.

Limitations of the Study

One of the main limitations in this project is that the emotional stability, home life, parental involvement and "life baggage" may vary significantly among individual students; therefore affecting their ability to demonstrate an appropriate character trait even when taught.

Other limitations which must be considered is that students will participate in eight weeks of Character Education lessons, behavior modification programs, assemblies and projects during this study. The limited time for Character Education instruction may be a limitation, as the character education instructor will be attempting to accomplish a monumental task trying to implement, organize, instruct, review, and evaluate the program in a short amount of time.

Setting of the Study

This research project had commenced and concluded at the Larchmont Elementary School located in Mt. Laurel, New Jersey. The Larchmont School is nestled in a quiet and premiere community located just off Route 38 & Larchmont Boulevard. Mt. Laurel, a beautiful and serene community that extends 22.2 square miles, was once covered by lush forest and scarcely populated by the Lenni Lenape Indians. This community is now home to more than 31,082 residents. Of the citizens who reside in Mount Laurel, 27,416 are Caucasian, 2,236 are African American, 688 are Hispanic, 688 are Asian, and Pacific Islander and 54 are American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut. In this community, the average home cost approximately \$218,00, and the average residency is 7.1 years. The local government consists of a mayor and four council members. The majority of the community members are White-collar workers, 79.6% while 20.4% are Blue-collar workers. The average household income is \$75,000-\$99,999 according to Richard Pearsall, writer for the Courier Post.

“With exemplary marks on annual state report cards, a diverse student population of 4,400 that attends elementary, intermediate and middle school from kindergarten through 8th grade, and a committed group of teachers, parents and local businesses, Mount Laurel's public schools are unique.” states Daniels of the Courier Post newspaper.

Larchmont Elementary School is a part of an exceptional group of schools within the district. This elementary school built in 1990 is now home to approximately 485 students. Approximately twenty percent of the students have IEPs (Individualized Education Program regardless of placement/programs. The average class size is approximately twenty students per class. On average, ninety-seven percent of the students are present on

average each day at Larchmont School. Faculty members are present ninety-six percent on average each day. With a professional staff, this school serves a diverse community and student population. Larchmont School is unique in that it serves students from many parts of the world and of course Mt. Laurel students. A dedicated staff meets the student's needs on a daily basis. The faculty and staff at Larchmont Elementary School consist of one building administrator, one school counselor, one full time nurse and one part time nurse, thirty-one teachers, and nine support staff as well as one full time secretary and one part time office aide. The educational level of teachers varies at the Larchmont School. Approximately seventy-four percent of teachers possess a bachelor's degree and twenty-six percent of teachers possess a master's degree. The length of the school day at Larchmont Elementary School is six hours and twenty-five minutes and students are engaged in instructional time five hours and twenty-five minutes.

The Parent Teacher Organization is a strong and energetic voice in the school. They have supported technology in learning, reading, mathematics, mentoring programs, student council, school beautification, assemblies, and much more. Students also do well on standardized testing such as the Terranovas and the ASK Test. The Larchmont School also gives children the opportunity to participate in Math, Social Studies, Science, Reading, and Technology programs throughout the school year.

Significance of the Study

The goal of this study is to explore whether teaching the character education trait of respect will have a positive impact on student behavior during the recess hour. The students could benefit as they engage in lessons on this character trait. The character trait taught could expand the students' understanding of the moral virtue of respect. Students

who demonstrate positive character traits contribute to positive school community and climate.

Organization of the Study

Chapter One lays the groundwork for the study, which moves into Chapter Two, The Review of the Literature. This chapter focuses on literature which supports and refutes the topic introduced in chapter one as well as gives information for the rationale of the study. Chapter Three focuses on the Design of the Study. General descriptions of the research design and methodology will be explained in this chapter. Descriptions of the development and design of the research instruments used will be clarified, and descriptions of sampling techniques, the data collection approach and the analysis plan will be explicated. Once there is a compilation of relevant information and data related to this study, a conclusion will be articulated. The conclusion in Chapter Five will bring the information together so that readers are enlightened about whether or not the questions posed in the study have been thoroughly and comprehensively answered.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

Introduction

There is an old wise saying; “There is nothing new under the sun.” The same wise saying holds true for issues related to morals and values. As long as humankind has existed on earth, issues related to moral virtues and how they impact and influence behavior has been a concern. The concept of promoting and developing appropriate character traits in people, a specific population or society as a result of systematic methods, teachings and other modus operandi is not an original or innovative initiative. Fundamentally, the concept of character education has been around for a prolonged period of time to say the least.

According to Alan Lockwood, “In the 1920’s, a concerted and deliberate effort to focus on issues related to good character took root in American schools, prompted by concerns about the erosion of society launched the character education movement.” (Lockwood, 1997). However, research proved that no matter how valiantly schools tried to improve moral behaviors, individuals continued to exercise their individual freedom in terms of making their own choices about situations even if they were wrong. Despite the lack of success schools had in advancing this concept, they continued to press on and move forward with their movement despite the fact that their initiative appeared to be dismal.

In the 1960's and 1970's, character education became "moral education" (Lockwood, 1997). This was nothing more than an old term with a new name. Current character education advocates deliberately choose different terms to describe their efforts and goals-quite possibly because they have distanced themselves from what they perceive as ill-conceived efforts to develop moral reasoning or clarify values in youth. As a result, they have settled on the term character education as the semantic vehicle to carry their aspirations. (Lockwood, 1997).

What is Character Education?

If character education was to be the sole vehicle to carry their aspirations, the thought leaves room for speculation. Since the concept of Character Education has been around for so long, it is fair to presume that most people have a clear understanding of the concept. On the contrary, Character education appears to be a global concept without a universal definition. Thomas Lickona (as cited in Friend, 1999) states, "Character education typically defines right and wrong in terms of core ethical values such as respect, responsibility, honesty, caring, fairness, and self-control. Many argue that these core values have objective moral worth because they are good for the individual, good for schools, good for society, and consistent with universal moral principles. When we do not set in accord with these basic values, we create problems for others and ourselves."

According to Bulach, "Some observers attribute the pattern of harmful behavior to the breakdown of the family and the lack of moral training in the home. As a result, more and more school systems are introducing curricula to address this concern. This training is often called "character education".

Alan Lockwood (1997) defines Character Education as any school-initiated program, designed in cooperation with other community, institutions, to shape directly and systematically the behavior of young people by influencing explicitly the non-relativistic values believed directly to bring about that behavior.

Today, society is plagued with a copious number of problems. Broken religious connections from God, crime, violence, decline in ethics, substance abuse, neglect and urban blight have made our society a peculiar place in which to live, one that is complex and problematic to say the least. Rebellion against authority is rampant and acts of aggressiveness have quickly replaced acts of kindness at an alarming rate. Lickona (as cited in Cohen, 1998) identifies the following as factors indicating a considerable need for character education programs in today's schools: increasing youth violence, dishonesty, disrespect for authority, peer cruelty, bigotry and hatred, egocentrism, self destructive behaviors such as alcohol, sex and drug abuse, ethical illiteracy, a degeneration of language and the work ethic, and decline in personal and civic responsibility.

What are the Principles of Character Education?

According to Peterson, et al., 2001, there are basic principles that contribute to and form the ethical platform on which to build the character education movement and shape behavior.

1. Trustworthiness. Be honest; do not deceive anyone, cheat or steal. Be reliable-do what you say you will do. Have the courage to do the right thing. Build a good reputation. Be loyal; stand by your family, friends and country.
2. Respect. Treat others with respect; follow the Golden Rule. Be tolerant of differences. Use good manners, not bad language. Be considerate of the

feelings of others. Do not threaten, hit, or hurt anyone. Deal peacefully with anger, insults and disagreements.

3. Responsibility. Do what you are supposed to do. Persevere: Keep on trying! Always do your best. Use self-control. Be self-disciplined. Think before you act. Consider the consequences. Be accountable for your choices.
4. Fairness. Play by the rules. Take turns and share. Be open-minded; listen to others. Do not take advantage of others. Do not blame others carelessly.
5. Caring. Be kind. Be compassionate and show you care. Express gratitude. Forgive others. Help people in need.
6. Citizenship. Do your share to make your school and community better. Cooperate. Stay informed. Vote. Be a good neighbor. Obey laws and rules. Respect authority. Protect the environment.

For many years, schools have attempted to develop children's moral character. The moral responsibility of the school, and of those who conduct it, is to society. The school is fundamentally an institution erected by society to do a certain specific work, which is to exercise a certain specific function in maintaining the life and advancing the welfare of society. The child must be educated for leadership as well as for obedience. He must have power of self-direction and power of directing others, power of administration and ability to assume responsibility (Dewey 1959). It was believed that teaching children moral education was beneficial. As a result, they would not only contribute and apply their learned morals and values in their current surroundings, but also to the greater good of society.

According to Andrew Goldstein, columnist for Time magazine (2001) "there is no evidence that the federal government, regardless of how much it spends can make sure these traits actually get taught" (2001). James Hunter (as cited in Goldstein 2001) argues, that the effectiveness of character education programs is highly dubious, even the best of

these programs are unimpressive-not only in their long term effects but also in their short-term effects. At least they salve our conscience that something constructive is being done. Cletus R. Bulach states, “The citizens of some school systems have objected to this process because the desired character traits are often in the eyes of the beholder, that is, one community may emphasize character traits that are not valued by citizens of another community. In the October 27, 1997 issue of *Business Week* as cited in Bulach, they questioned whose values should be taught and how can character be measured accurately? Some critics believe that Character Education programs commence with good intentions; however, they make very little difference for students. Schaps, Schaeffer and McDonnell hold such a position. These authors state, “Unfortunately, too many programs that say they are developing character and call themselves “character education” are aimed mostly at promoting good manners and compliance with rules, not at developing students of strong independent character. What are these problematic character education programs? They are generally of four varieties: “cheerleading”, “praise and reward”“define and drill”, and “forced formality”. These four approaches may well produce certain limited benefits, such as calling attention to matters of character or bringing some order to a chaotic environment. But they will not yield deep and enduring effects on character. They aim for quick behavioral results, rather than helping students better understand and commit to the values that are core to our society or helping them develop the skills for putting those values into action in life’s complex situations.”

With the decline of moral values, the American Association of School Administrators and National School Board Association (as cited in Friend 1999) approved a joint statement endorsing character education in the nation’s schools. It read:

“Nations rise and fall with the character of their people. If our nation is to survive and prosper, then present and future citizens must be committed to high ethical standards and values that support a free, democratic and civil society.

Children should understand the need to be responsible for their own actions and that their actions affect the lives of others. They should emerge from the education system valuing honesty, integrity, effort, trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship. They should be prepared to resolve conflict through reasoning rather than violence. They should also understand and celebrate the diversity that ultimately enriches our society.

Therefore, the AASA and the NSBA endorse the continuing need for character education in the nation’s public schools. Knowing that character drives personal, professional and civic decisions, and understanding, we realize that character education programs are most effective when they are developed in concert with the local school community.”

Ron Kinnamon stated another interesting position. Kinnamon states, “Kids didn’t just wake up one day and decide that they will no longer be respectful or responsible or caring. Children learn to be respectful or disrespectful from the adults in their lives. We adults teach and demonstrate the values our children possess. This is why I say that we don’t have a youth problem, we have an adult problem.”

An old saying reminds a man not to take a speck out of his neighbor’s eye when there is a plank within his own. Such a man is wise to abstain from making another individual’s shortcomings the focal point of his attention without first examining the core and inner qualities at the hub of his own soul. Quite often adults observe and remark on

the behavior and lack of respect they feel children demonstrate. According to Dr. Wendy Mogel, “Our thoughts and feelings belong to us; it is our behavior towards others that counts in the world. By requiring respect from our children, we are not feeding our parental ego but are helping them build good character traits that will serve them throughout their lives.”

· With the lack of respect that is witnessed on a daily basis among children, it appears to be imperative to teach them this character trait. Anne Leedon states, “Respect is not only necessary when dealing well with others, but the virtue of self-respect is critical for kids to succeed and feel good about themselves and their choices throughout their lives.” Many parents do not realize the level of disrespect the average child is subjected to daily. According to Dr. Michele Borba, author of *Building Moral Intelligence: The Seven Essential Virtues that Teach Kids to Do the Right Thing*, Jossey Bass 2001, as cited in Leedon, by the time a child reaches the age of seven, 98 percent of parents have verbally lashed out at them. One out of three called their kids belittling names and swore at them. In order for students to embrace the fundamental concept of respect, they need to be taught through the example of those entrusted with the task of being instrumental in helping them to grow and develop. David Stader concludes, “Respect and responsibility can only be achieved when they become part of the everyday norms and values of the students and teachers.”

According to Borba, “Our children’s self respect has steadily decreased over the past decades, and this decrease in self-respect leads them to act disrespectfully toward others as well as themselves and to engage in such disrespectful behaviors as incivility, discourtesy, thoughtlessness, flouting of authority, rudeness and vulgarity.”

Borba maintains that children only learn to respect others when they respect themselves. There appears to be a crisis in terms of children and the respect they demonstrate. In a survey by Child Magazine as cited in Borba, 12 percent of the two thousand adults polled felt that kids commonly treat others with respect; most described them as “rude,” “irresponsible,” and “lacking in discipline.” Dr. Thomas Likona, renowned educator and author as cited in Borba states, “The large numbers of children showing attitudes of disrespect and defiance toward authority is one of the ten most troubling youth trends and warns that it is a clear sign of moral decline”.

Chapter Three

The Design of the Study

General Description of the Research Design

Using Action Research, the primary purpose of this study was to ascertain whether teaching children about the character trait of respect could have an affirmative impact on student behavior during the recess hour as well as reduce the number of lunch/recess discipline referrals. Using information from the book, *Building Moral Intelligence* by Dr. Michele Borba (Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2001), the researcher sought to determine whether teaching the character trait of respect to students in grade four could positively impact student behavior during the lunch/recess hour.

The researcher worked in collaboration with administrators, teachers and other faculty members to accomplish the project. The collective synergy among all stakeholders was instrumental and critical to the completion and success of the project. The fundamental design of the research design explains the thought process involved and the manner in which the research was organized. Two main questions were posed. The researcher wanted to know whether teaching the character trait of respect could affect student behavior during the lunch/recess hour. The researcher also desired to know whether teaching the character trait of respect reduced the number of discipline referral forms. The researcher surveyed the teachers to collect baseline data about the character traits they felt the students needed assistance with. The researcher collected information from lunch/recess discipline forms to determine how many infractions were committed as a direct result of

lack of respect. The researcher then presented developmental school counseling lessons on the character trait of respect for eight weeks to students in grade four for 30–45 minutes in large group instruction. The researcher would monitor the project for the entire eight weeks and analyze all data collected and use the results of the data to make improvements and or modifications.

Development and Design of Research Instruments

The researcher had developed and used various instruments to complete the project. Qualitative measures were used to determine program effectiveness including lunch discipline reports, observations, and interviews with teachers and administrators, surveys and anecdotal discussions. After developmental school counseling lessons were presented to the students, stakeholders were interviewed to measure the effectiveness of the program and to determine where changes should be made.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The elementary school selected for this research project was Larchmont Elementary School. Larchmont School is an ethnically and academically diverse school located in South Jersey. The students, who received lessons through Developmental School Counseling Lessons, were in grade four (N=100). The students who participated in lessons consisted of regular education students, special education students, ESL students, as well as gifted and talented students. The lessons began in October of 2003 and commenced eight weeks from the start date.

The researcher presented eight developmental school counseling lessons on the character trait of respect to the students. Students were instructed in large group instruction in the Instructional Media Center. Students were instructed once a week for

30 –45 minutes. Students participated in lecture, discussions, role-plays, games, and projects about respect.

Data Collection

The researcher used multiple tools to gather data to determine if the project was effective. Effectiveness was based on whether the data collected answered the questions posed earlier. Effectiveness was based on whether teaching the character education trait of respect helped to impact behavior during the lunch/recess hour in a positive manner and whether there was a decrease in the amount of lunch discipline referral forms.

Discipline referral forms had been examined to determine how many infractions were committed as a direct result of lack of respect among students. Interviews and informal discussions were conducted. According to Posey, Davidson and Korpi, “It is important that school collect multiple measurements (e.g., surveys, school records and testimonials) from multiple stakeholders on an ongoing basis.”

Data Analysis

The researcher will analyze the data to be able to show trends, give percentages and establish patterns. Data analyzed from the discipline referral forms can generate interesting comparisons among various groups (e.g., discipline among grade levels, gender etc). Such data helped the researcher set up interventions and assistance with specific groups.

Other evaluation tools, such as interviews, school records and observations also required analysis. The researcher used the concept of “Concept Mapping” to analyze this data. According to Posey, Davidson and Korpi, “Concept mapping is a means of categorizing and prioritizing data responses. As feedback is received from the school

community, the researcher can look for common themes among the responses.” After the data was analyzed, the researcher presented the findings of the project.

Chapter Four

Presentation of Research Findings

On a daily basis, a copious number of schools across the nation pursue, explore and investigate methods, innovative ideas and strategies to promote and develop the moral character of their students. The Mt. Laurel Township School district has embraced the Character Education movement for students in all grade levels.

The research project conducted at Larchmont Elementary School answered two fundamental questions. The researcher sought to ascertain whether teaching the character trait of respect could have a positive affect on student behavior during the lunch recess hour for fourth grade students. Another primary question explored was whether teaching the character trait of respect helped to reduce the number of discipline referral forms on file.

The information in Chapter four conveys what information was found and what did the information mean in regards to the project. Robert Collier once wrote, "Success is the sum of small efforts repeated day in and day out." If there is any credence in that quote, then the results of the research indicates that success can be achieved when the sum of small efforts are combined and accumulated even if the sum of the efforts can be considered diminutive. Information was primarily collected from short informal conversations with teachers to determine what character traits they felt were important. Information was also obtained from discipline referral forms, interviews with teachers,

administration and other faculty members as well as playground aides and lunch monitors.

Student behavior on playground fields and in the cafeteria throughout the nation is a challenge. The intern sought to develop character education lessons for fourth grade students to determine if such lessons would reduce and or curtail the quantity of disciplinary infractions and discipline forms being documented and generated during the lunch recess hour. The intern developed lessons, taught the lessons to the fourth grade students for eight weeks, collected information from discipline forms, interviews and informal conversations and analyzed the information to determine if teaching character education lessons to fourth grade students could affect student behavior and condense the number of infractions and discipline forms being written during the lunch hour.

It may be worthy to note that the conclusions and findings presented in the project may have been impacted by various restrictions beyond the researcher's control. These restrictions may have ultimately had an effect on the success of the project. Had these restrictions been omitted, the outcome of the end product could have been enhanced. The limited amount of time the researcher had to conduct the research and the mammoth amount of work outside of the project as well as the lessons being restricted to fourth grade may have made a difference in terms of the conclusions, implications and findings in the project. Therefore, the researcher has determined that teaching character education lessons to fourth grade students, at Larchmont Elementary School, in an effort to affect student behavior and decrease the number of discipline referral forms during the lunch recess hour could be described as hopeful and a project that had the potential to support students.

Qualitative data was collected through discipline reports, administration and faculty interviews and observation for analysis for this project.

At the commencement of the project, the researcher examined discipline reports from September of 2003 to December of 2003. The number of discipline reports and infractions written for fourth grade students was thirty-five. Thirty discipline forms document that the disciplinary infraction was written as a direct result of the student demonstrating disrespect. Five discipline forms written document that the disciplinary infraction was written as a direct result of the student demonstrating an act that could be classified as irresponsible. Students were then taught various character education lessons with an added emphasis on respect, in October of 2003 until December of 2003. The discipline forms written for fourth grade students was again examined to determine if there was any improvement in the number of forms being written. The number of discipline forms written for fourth grade students from January until March of 2004 was twenty-one. Twenty-one discipline forms written document that the disciplinary infraction was written as a direct result of the student demonstrating disrespect. As an additional note, January of 2004 was the start of a School Wide Behavior Modification Incentive program. Students receive discipline forms for a variety of infractions and for violating the code of conduct for the school. The building Principal and the Student Intern issued discipline forms for the 2003-2004 school year.

The intern conducted brief interviews with classroom teachers and administrators to determine their perception about the level of respect children demonstrated. According to teachers, faculty and administrators, the following data was reported: During informal conversations with the administration and teachers, many felt that students' actively

participating in Character Education lessons and or programs was essential and relevant. Many of the individuals interviewed stated that an added emphasis should be placed on teaching the character trait of respect. Many of the individuals interviewed and those who shared information through informal conversations stated that although some students attempt to make a concerted effort to demonstrate respect, this was a character trait that needed improvement as it related to student behavior.

Albeit the success of the project was not immense, the number of disciplinary forms written did decrease even if on a small scale. Despite the results of the project, there are strengths to report and expound upon. Students had an opportunity to participate in large group instruction on various character traits, which emphasized respect. The entire student body participated in a School Wide Behavior Incentive program to enhance student behavior and augment student morale. Fourth grade students worked in cooperative groups to complete classroom projects, which centered on respect. Students attended school wide assembly programs on the subject of respect sponsored by the McDonald's corporation. Students were also recognized for demonstrating positive character on bulletin board displays throughout the school.

Many of the stakeholders the Intern spoke with indicated that there appears to be a need to continue efforts to develop moral character among students.

Chapter Five

Conclusions, Implications and Further Study

Conclusions

There may be various and opposing views about whether character education programs benefit children in terms of helping them develop good character.

With the decline of moral values, the American Association of School Administrators and National School Board Association (as cited in Friend 1999) approved a joint statement endorsing character education in the nation's schools. It read:

“Nations rise and fall with the character of their people. If our nation is to survive and prosper, then present and future citizens must be committed to high ethical standards and values that support a free, democratic and civil society.

Children should understand the need to be responsible for their own actions and that their actions affect the lives of others. They should emerge from the education system valuing honesty, integrity, effort, trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship. They should be prepared to resolve conflict through reasoning rather than violence. They should also understand and celebrate the diversity that ultimately enriches our society.

The focus of the project and research conducted at Larchmont Elementary School was to teach and have students actively participate in character education lessons. The intern taught lessons to the students to determine if such lessons could impact and reduce the number of discipline referral forms for fourth grade students.

The intern has arrived at three fundamental conclusions based on the findings in the research project. The intern had determined that teaching character education lessons to students has the potential to affect student behavior and reduce behavioral infractions even if the reduction was a small amount. The intern has also concluded that the development of a Behavioral Modification program for the students may have had a positive impact on the project.

Implications

There are times that despite our finest efforts to achieve a goal, reach a certain level of expectation or accomplish a monumental feat, we experience results which are not as we desired or intended. Despite the results we attain, we need to celebrate our accomplishments whether they are immense or modest. As a direct result of the project, discipline referral forms decreased slightly from thirty-five discipline forms being written before the project began to twenty-one discipline forms being written after the project. Students were able to be active participants in the academic arena by being involved in lessons, which helped to shape their moral character. Teachers, parents, students and administrators were able to merge their collective efforts together, while working in tandem, to develop a Behavioral Modification program for the students. This program enhanced the character education project while motivating and inspiring children to demonstrate appropriate behavior in the school setting. Students were eager to demonstrate appropriate character traits with the hopes of earning a tangible reward on a specified date and time. Our school has benefited from the number of discipline referral forms decreasing and by creating an opportunity for all stakeholders and active participants to work together to develop a Behavioral Incentive Plan for the students.

Working together on the project and the plan helped to elevate morale within the boundaries of the school setting.

Further Study

There appears to be a call to action for further work to be done to develop, teach, implement and engage in school wide activities, which will seek to expand, create an upsurge and mature the moral character of our students. There appears to be a need to continue exploring ideas, strategies and activities to enhance student behavior during the lunch and recess hour. As a result of the project, many teachers and the administration feel that there is a great need to continue the momentum and our movement to continue our Character Education campaign. Time restraints posed various problems, as the intern was unable to teach all grade levels consecutively at one time. Further study is needed to determine if teaching character education lessons to all students has the potential to affect student behavior and reduce discipline forms on a school wide level. Presenting character education lessons, with an emphasis on respect, to all students could have had the potential to affect student behavior and reduce discipline infraction forms further thus producing positive student behavior in their academic community. Students participating in the research project for an entire academic school year could have also had the potential to enhance results regarding the project. The intern believes that the project, which was started, has the potential to develop further and produce even more significant and impressive results in the upcoming school year. In an effort to continue the movement, the Intern will incorporate plans into a Personal Improvement Plan for the 2004-2005 academic school year to develop a comprehensive character education program for all students in an effort to positively affect student behavior and further reduce

discipline infractions during the lunch hour. The Intern will continue to conduct character education lessons, attend workshops on character education, read literature and books on the subject, network with schools in neighboring districts to determine their best practices for the subject and encourage and motivate stakeholders to remain committed to the challenge of helping our students to develop positive character traits.

I believe that nations do rise and fall with the character of the people. It is the responsibility of schools to raise the torch, accept the challenge and rise to the occasion to help develop citizens who are educated and possess quality character traits. If we develop citizens who possess moral values, they will have a foundation to build upon not only for the moment but also for a lifetime. As we read papers and enlighten ourselves through various modes of media, there appears to be a moral decline and decay interwoven into the very fibers of our country and way of life. When we educate children at an early age to value and respect mankind and humanity, in essence we teach children to value and respect God who is “Alpha and Omega”, according to The Word in Life Study Bible. Students and adults who demonstrate basic respect in school settings are instrumental in contributing to a positive climate within school setting. The collective synergy from students and stakeholders who participate in character education programs has the potential to bring forth an increase that ultimately benefits everyone. I believe character education programs are beneficial not only to children but to all people from all walks of life. It is important to help children develop a healthy character. A man’s character is far more important than his reputation. Character truly defines the real man; for our reputation is what we do when everyone is watching, but our character speaks to who we are when not a soul is watching.

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