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ABSTRACT

An action research project developed and implemented a program to improve student social skills. The targeted population consisted of students in fourth grade, sixth grade, and special education classrooms (n=46) in three different school districts. Income levels varied among school districts. Targeted behaviors included fighting, defiance, being off-task, and other disruptions. An examination of probable causes for this lack of social skills revealed that societal influences did not encourage positive character development. Poor peer relationships kept students from making intelligent choices. There was also a lack of consistency and expectations to develop these skills in the different environmental settings in which the students lived. After observing classroom behaviors and reviewing professional literature, a decision was made to select three interventions. The researchers developed and implemented a series of lessons focusing on different character traits. Outside speakers visited and encouraged the students to recognize the importance of these character traits. Results of post-intervention data indicated that direct instruction and reinforcement of positive character traits lowered incidences of fighting, defiance, off-task behaviors, and other distractions to their learning. Peer relationships also improved, but students still lacked in respecting others, and more work is needed in this area. (Contains a table, 3 figures, and 22 references. Seven appendixes include a character education survey, behavior checklist, and student activities.) (Author/BT)

IMPROVING STUDENT SOCIAL SKILLS THROUGH
CHARACTER EDUCATION

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Jennifer Johnson
Veronica Swift

An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

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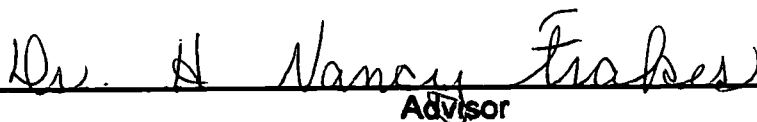
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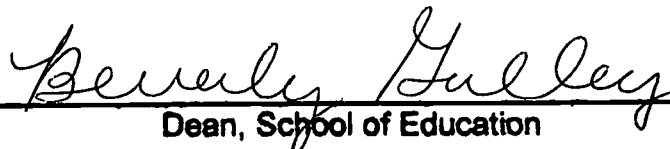
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ABSTRACT

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This report described a program to improve student social skills. The targeted population consisted of students in 4th grade, 6th grade, and Special Education classrooms in three different school districts. The income levels of the families in the different schools varied, the students' social skills needed improvement in the three schools involved. The targeted behaviors that were documented through this intervention were fighting, defiance, off-task, and other disruptive behaviors.

An examination of probable causes for this lack of social skills revealed that societal influences did not encourage positive character development. Poor peer relationships kept students from making intelligent choices. There was also a lack of consistency and expectations in the different environmental settings in which the students had to live to develop these skills.

After observing classroom behaviors and reviewing professional literature, a decision was made to select three interventions. The researchers developed and implemented a series of lessons focusing on different character traits during the intervention period. Periodic reward and recognition events encouraged the building of positive character traits. Outside speakers visited and encouraged the students to recognize the importance of these character traits.

The results of the post intervention data indicated that direct instruction and reinforcement of positive character traits lowered incidences of fighting, defiance, off-task behaviors, and other distractions to their learning. Peer relationship also improved, but students still lack in respecting others and more work is needed in this area.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General statement of the Problem

The intermediate students in the targeted schools had displayed disruptive behavior, which interfered with their academic and social growth. Evidence of this behavior was documented through anecdotal records, discipline referrals through school personnel, and assessments that indicated students' levels of achievement.

Immediate Problem Context

School A, one of the targeted schools that participated in the social skills research-project, was located in an urban setting. The area consisted of approximately 24,000 people. The 1990 census for this area showed that 6.6 % of the people who were 16 years and older were unemployed. Out of the 24,320, people 20,000 were White, 2,000 were Black, 90 were American Indian, Eskimo and Aleut, 200 were Asian and Pacific Islander, 30 were of other races, and 2,000 were Hispanic. Some additional economic characteristics for the area included median rent at \$324, median housing value at \$47,500, and median household income at \$25,200. The people above poverty level were 19,800, and people below poverty level status were 3,620.

School A was a kindergarten through fourth grade building that consisted of about 400 students. Out of these 400 students 66.9 % were Caucasian, 9.4 % were African

American, 22.4 % were Mexican-American, 1 % were Asian and Pacific Islander, and .3 % were Native American. The percentage of students with a low-income background was 32.6 % and the students with a limited English proficient background consisted of 9.4 %. The student attendance at this school was 95 %, the mobility was 29 %, and chronic truancy was 2.3 %.

The average class size for school A was 19 students per grade. The time devoted to the instruction of teaching core subjects each day in a five-day week were 60 minutes of mathematics, 15 minutes of science and social studies, and 180 minutes of language arts. During the course of the year there was a high percentage of contact between parents and teachers. Contact included parent-teacher conferences, parental visits to the school, school visits to homes, telephone conversations, and written correspondence. The faculty consisted of 18 full time teachers, 3 special teachers, 2 reading teachers, 2 bilingual teachers, a speech teacher, a librarian, and 2 aides. Out of the 26 teachers 15 had a master's degree or higher. The average teacher in this school made \$42,000 per year and the average teaching experience was 16.3 years.

School A provided special before and after school programs for those students whose parents worked and for those struggling with reading. The first program was for students who needed care before and after school while their parents were working. The students were able to arrive at 6:30 A.M. and needed to be picked up by 5:00 P.M. The students were fed breakfast before school and received a snack after school, the program was monitored by the YMCA staff. The second program offered to the students was for those who needed extra support in reading. It was offered three times a week for an hour

and a half and was taught by various staff members. Their teachers recommended the students that attended the after school reading program.

In the past year school A students had 88 referrals, 6 suspensions, and 54 detentions. Illinois Goals Assessment Program (IGAP) scores had shown middle ranges in reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, and science. These scores stayed in the middle range during the years of the IGAP testing.

School B was an elementary school in a district serving 680 students in one elementary school and a middle school. School B was in a primarily urban community of 7,000 residents. The district employed more than 50 certified personnel. The community was 82% Caucasian, 14% Mexican-American, and 4% African American. The largest employers were in the surrounding metropolitan area, but the once thriving industrial areas and the rail industry had diminished significantly. The school district economy was based on incomes from a number of small businesses. A major railcar remanufacturing facility was still in operation, but the local foundry, a farm machinery manufacturer, and a horseracing track had closed down. The median cost of a home was \$60,000. The district population was 33% low income with a 21% rate of mobility with Title I eligible students at 21%.

Two housing developments and a Tournament Players golf course (TPC) added to the tax base of the city, but neither was included in the boundaries of the school district.

Strong community support for the school had been shown in the passage of local referendums, most recently in 1987 and in 1992. The buildings were in excellent repair and the grounds were well maintained. The latest Life Safety survey completed in 1992 showed that all district facilities were in compliance. There was a nationally recognized

monument for the sacrifices and contributions of the Mexican-American community in all major military conflicts.

The school district was active in the community. The district housed the local visually impaired program and several special education programs. Students were involved in Junior Achievement and the Drug Awareness Resistance Education Program (DARE). Children at different grade levels caroled to senior citizens, or entered the Festival of Trees competition, a major fall fundraiser for the Quad City Arts. The junior athletics program and the Y-program provided opportunities for parents and former students to coach for the district and help in the social development of the children.

School B had a gifted program and special teachers for music and physical education classes. There were three to four classes for each level from kindergarten through fifth grade. School B shared a librarian and an aide with the middle school. There had not been a bilingual program for the few limited English speakers for many years. There was a hot lunch program for all students. Most students paid \$1.25 for a hot lunch and milk, 30% were fully subsidized and 9% paid a reduced rate. The district owned and ran a bus service for students who lived more than a mile from the school. Attendance records indicated 95.4% attendance and 1% chronic truancy. Seventy-eight percent of the teachers had a bachelor's degree and 22% had a master's degree or higher.

The district was in the process of implementing a community-based technology plan with a great deal of help from the parent organization, local businesses, and state and federal grants. Teachers had more than two weeks of training in using various computer programs. All regular classrooms and many other classrooms had access to sets of calculators, at least two computers, a large screen monitor, and access to the Internet.

Besides the classroom computers, students used computers with their own teachers in a computer lab and in another lab with a computer teacher.

The technology plan was part of the overall school improvement plan. The plan identified areas for improvement in all the curricular areas. There were plans to increase scores on state achievement tests. Further teacher training in technology and other areas was offered and encouraged. Teachers were included in the plan to help implement better communications with the community. There was recognition for the efforts of teachers participating in online communication services for teachers seeking to improve the mathematics curriculum.

Discipline had become a concern over the last ten years. There was a school-wide discipline policy and a discipline committee. Homework policies were consistent at the various grade levels. There were no identified Behavior Disorder students in 1987. At the time of the research project there were nine identified Behavior Disorder students in the grade school which were served by three different special education teachers and inclusion in the regular classroom. Some behavior problems were so severe that three students attended a program at another campus. The school had an in-school suspension classroom staffed by a certified teacher serving school B and the middle school. For the past two years a dean of students was hired to help the teachers with the severe behavior disruptions. In 1997-98 school B had 300 referrals to the in-school suspension, 250 to the dean of students, and 10 out of school suspensions.

School C was located in a rural area with approximately 400 students in the elementary building. The grade school served pre-kindergarten through sixth grade students. The ethnic background of the students' was 99.2% Caucasian and .8% other.

The attendance rate was 96.0%, with the mobility rate at 13.3%, and truancy rate at .3%. The percentage of students on low-income was 22.4%, with English being the primary language spoken in each household. One hundred fifteen students received free or reduced cost lunches. School C transported approximately 280 students by bus. Some students who lived north of a major highway were declared by the state to live in a hazardous area because they would have to cross that major highway. This hazard allowed them to ride the bus to and from school. The average class size ranged from 17-25 students per grade, with the lower class sizes in grades 1 through 3. School C had 22 full-time teachers, 7 full-time special teachers, 10 program assistants, a parent coordinator, a Bright Beginnings coordinator, a program for children in the district between ages 1–3, a technical coordinator, a social worker that who worked two days a week, and 2 therapists who worked with our special education students two days a month. Of the 29 full-time teachers 5 % of the teachers had a master’s degree. Approximately 125 minutes per school week were devoted to language arts, 45 minutes were spent on mathematics, and 35 minutes were spent on social studies and science. School C’s IGAP scores over the past three years had maintained the same level as the state or had shown an increase in some subject areas. The teachers were 100% Caucasian teachers with 3 % being male. The average teacher’s salary was \$32,500 with a beginning salary at \$21,900. Several grants and state funds helped supplement the schools’ needs. School C had received approximately \$30,000 for Reading Improvement, another \$10,000 for Professional Development, \$7,000 to use for the Gifted program, and approximately \$135,000 for all of the Title Programs. A Goals 2000 grant helped to implement the new

computer lab. School C had also received a grant to help the parents in the community with parenting classes, which were held once a month for anyone in the community.

A variety of programs were offered to help the students with special needs. The school offered Title I mathematics and reading for grades 1 through 6, with the teachers either going into a classroom or the students being pulled out of class for more direct help from the Title I teacher for a half-hour four times a week. Twenty percent of school C's students were involved in a Title I program. There were two special education teachers, one for the lower grades and one for the upper grades, to help students who had a need for a different type of instruction other than that given by the teacher. A speech teacher was also available for students who needed help improving spoken language, as well as two special education teachers that helped teach the physically handicapped students from other communities who attended classes in the building. Another way school C helped some students was by providing a social worker twice a week. The social worker divided time between several different schools. Along with the help of the special needs students, there was a program for the higher achieving students. Once a week four teachers took turns teaching the higher achieving students. There was also a two week program during the summer for students with special needs and for the higher achieving students.

School C had a variety of other activities for the students to participate. The fifth and sixth grade students had the opportunity to participate in band and choir. The elementary band took some top honors in Illinois Music Education Association (IMEA) as well as other competitions. There were winter and spring concerts in which the students performed for the community. Much of the students' artwork was displayed

throughout the area, in many small businesses as well as the courthouse. The sixth grade students were a part of the DARE program, as well as part of a program put on by the social worker to promote self-awareness in themselves as well as their peers. For young future students school C offered a Bright Beginnings program. Twice a week the teacher met with parents and their children for hands-on activities and social interaction with other children. Twice a week the parent coordinator opened the doors to the computer lab after school and allowed students to use the computers, check out games or puzzles, and even did some crafts during the holidays. The program was also available during the summer hours.

Most parents actively supported school activities by volunteering for many school activities. One of the big supporters was a parents club (PC). Every other year PC held a carnival for the community. The proceeds were used to help buy new play equipment for the outside playground, media equipment for the district, and funds for teachers to spend on classrooms. Another non-profit organization within the district was the Academic Foundation. The purpose of the organization was to help improve the academics of the district. The interest the Academic Foundation gained from the endowment fund was spent on projects such as calculators for the fifth and sixth grade classrooms, computers for the library, and software for all grade levels. The parents become involved by volunteering to be room mothers, teachers' aides, and Music Boosters. The community parents also volunteered to coach several after-school activities, such as soccer, baseball, softball, basketball, and little league football. School C also used the older generation of the community through grandparent volunteering. Several of the senior citizens in the

community enjoyed working with the teachers by reading with the students who might not get the help at home that they needed to improve their reading ability.

The population of the community was approximately 2,000 people, with the primary source of revenue for the taxpayers coming from agriculture and agribusiness. Agriculture and agribusiness were the main sources of revenue, 55% of the people were employed, 22% were self-employed, 11% were homemakers, 8% of the community were students, and 6% were enjoying retirement life. The average household income for the area was \$40,000-\$49,000. The area was comprised of one major business building modular homes and several small locally operated businesses. The community was involved in the updating of the main street businesses, which had helped to bring a new look to an older community. Another aspect of the main street project brought about the opening of the School Shop. It was operated by the sixth grade students of school C and was supervised by one of the faculty members. The students were able to use the computer, which had access to the Internet, view artwork done by fellow students, purchase school supplies, as well as check out computer games for home use. School Shop was open three times a week and was run by volunteers.

Although the community was small in size, it still had its share of problems. Discipline within the school setting had grown in the past ten years. There were more students serving in-school suspensions, and more students sitting on the bench during recess time or in the office during recess because they were unable to handle themselves in an unstructured setting such as recess. The teachers sat with the classes during lunch, because the manners and the noise level of the students were out of control. The lack of respect for a person in authority had increased. The students seemed to think they were

in control and some parents no longer wanted to deal with their children's problems. School C did have a discipline program that was implemented within the building, but some discipline problems had gone beyond the acceptable behaviors of the society.

The Surrounding Community

This action research project took place in northwestern Illinois. School A was located in an urban area, school B was comprised of urban and rural students and school C was located in a rural area. The area had many different attractions, which included several convention centers. The largest convention center was used throughout the year to host several top rated professional sports and entertainment. There were numerous museums and art centers for the young and old. A family museum of arts and sciences, which provided many activities for all ages, was one of the newest attractions to the area. Another attraction was a farm implements museum, which celebrated the farm-based economy.

There were many city, county, and state parks, which provided indoor and outdoor family activities including two botanical centers. The area also featured festivals and activities that were continuous throughout the year. The area was host to a Jazz memorial festival, which attracted several out of state and foreign competitors to run the 7.6 mile race. An area zoo had expanded and improved and became a nationally recognized zoo. A recent addition to the area was a sports and recreation center, which provided hours of fun and skill development for ice skaters, hockey players, and soccer players. Another exciting attraction was the TPC golf course that was host to the annual golf tournament. There were three casino riverboats along with other river based recreation. For those that enjoyed the arts, there were live theater shows, which could be

seen at several area theaters. Other performance attractions throughout the area included a new movie theater, a symphony orchestra, and a professional ballet organization.

There were four main industries that help support the area communities. The industries include two farm-based factories, an aluminum manufacturer and a military installation. Other contributors to the economics of the area were many small and large businesses, including two new steel manufacturers. Despite the closing of other businesses the unemployment rate was relatively low.

The population of this part of Illinois was around 150,000. This population was made up of 88.65% Caucasian, 6.2% African American, 4.1% Mexican American and 3.3% Other. The median income per family was roughly \$28,400 per year. The median cost of a home was \$51,100.

The area had two universities, one liberal arts college, and study center access to other major universities and two community colleges. There were also many technical and trade schools throughout the area. Within the area there were nine public high schools, two Catholic high schools, numerous middle schools, elementary schools, and pre-schools serving 30,000 students. Approximately 80% of the adults had a high school education or higher.

National Context of the Problem

“With their diverse populations and social and academic problems, schools are unique arenas for learning how to thrive in the civilized society” (Parker, 1997, pg.1). Educators needed to realize that they are not alone and the lack of social skills is a nationwide problem. Although addressing the social skills takes time out of the teaching day, in the long run time spent teaching social skills helps students acquire the skills necessary

in society. In addition to the academics, many of the social skills that were once taught at home are now expected to be taught in the classroom (Calloway, 1999). Everyday conflicts occur that interfered with the students' abilities to learn. Such interference causes the teacher to lose valuable teaching time, because the interruption needs to be addressed. Therefore, the students' abilities to comprehend important information falters.

Educators need to be able to know when to turn some conflicts into positive learning experiences (Briggs, 1997). Teachers also need to be able to recognize problems that occur outside of the school setting that are affecting the students' learning. Teachers need to be able to address this problem in a way that students will learn socially necessary skills to handle future problems.

In a society where some children hear or see violent and tragic incidences, the need to know what is acceptable behavior becomes important. Students need to realize they are ultimately responsible for their own actions. The students need to realize there are consequences for the choices they make. By learning how to respond to the problems, students should feel self-confident and continue to make wise choices.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

The targeted group involved in this study consisted of a total of 46 intermediate grade students who exhibited disruptive behavior and poor academic and social growth. The evidence for this problem included anecdotal records, discipline referrals, and assessments that indicate students' levels achievement.

Anecdotal records were used for a twelve week period to document the disruptive behaviors of the students and establish base line data. These records consisted of student/teacher conferences, parent contacts, and office referrals. The researchers also developed an observation checklist and an attitude survey. The group was divided among three schools that had different discipline and behavior policies, which were documented throughout the research.

Probable Causes

In reviewing each School Report Card, the researchers found that the schools had nearly the same percentage of low income students. Of the school A targeted students, 4 or 80%, received free lunches. In school B, 8 or 36%, received free or reduced lunches and in school C, 8 or 38%, received free or reduced lunches (See Table 1).

Table 1

Current Class Statistics

Group	School A	School B	School C
Males	100%	50%	51%
Females	0%	50%	49%
Non-Traditional Families	80%	36%	49%
Free Lunch	80%	23%	29%
Reduced Lunch	0%	14%	10%

In reviewing the most recent ISAT scores for the different schools, the researchers found that most of the students had difficulty in the written portion of the test. In schools B and C more than 50% of the students fell below state standards in writing and in school A only 41% fell below state standards in writing. In all schools more than 40% of the students scored either in the warning or below standards level in reading and mathematics on the ISAT test. In looking for a cause for so many students achieving below state standards, the researchers believed teachers were having to spend too much time solving social disputes and less time teaching academics.

Parent involvement was encouraged in all three schools. At the first event welcoming parents at the beginning of the school year, the attendance showed probable cause for concern with a lower amount of parent involvement at two of the schools. School A had 20% parent attendance at an Open House. School B had 50% parent

attendance at a parent orientation night. School C had 95% parent attendance at an Open House. Although parent involvement was low at the two schools events, student attendance at school had not been a problem. Roughly 50 % of all the students in the three targeted classes come from a non-traditional home, a home where a child was not living with both natural parents. The researchers know this can affect the consistency of discipline and responsibility of the students in the home. Difficulties here may carry over into the school setting (Likona, 1993).

The researchers searched through current publications to determine whether or not the lack of social skills was a nationwide problem. Society has been overwhelmed with news about students involved in drug sales, acts of violence, and stealing. In an everyday routine such as listening, reading, or watching the news media, listening to music lyrics, reading magazines, or exploring the Internet, students are saturated with unhealthy morals and values. Therefore, some of them are unable to make socially healthy decisions. In today's society, in many families, both parents need to work, or there is a single parent in the household. The students are left home unattended and have to make choices on their own. Some of the choices may include when to come home, what to eat, when or if to do homework, which television shows to watch or radio stations to listen to, and when to go to bed (Thomas and Roberts, 1994). In the researchers' observation some of the students who are making these decisions are of kindergarten age. "It takes a village to raise a child," goes the African proverb. Society needs to work together to make sure the younger generation is exposed to positive role models and is able to make healthy decisions.

According to Tyree, Vance, and McJunkin (1997), students are facing a more complex world and are more tempted to make wrong decisions than previous generations. Students are having to make more decisions without having the background knowledge taught by parents, teachers, or others in positions of responsibility in knowing what is right or wrong. Students need to realize that there are right and wrong decisions to be made and they need to know there are people to whom they could turn to help make moral decisions.

In order to find out about student attitudes, the researchers developed a survey in regard to students' feeling safe at home and at school, relationships with their peers, and taking their responsibility towards work and study. Figure 1 shows the results of the students' surveys from the three classrooms involved in the research.

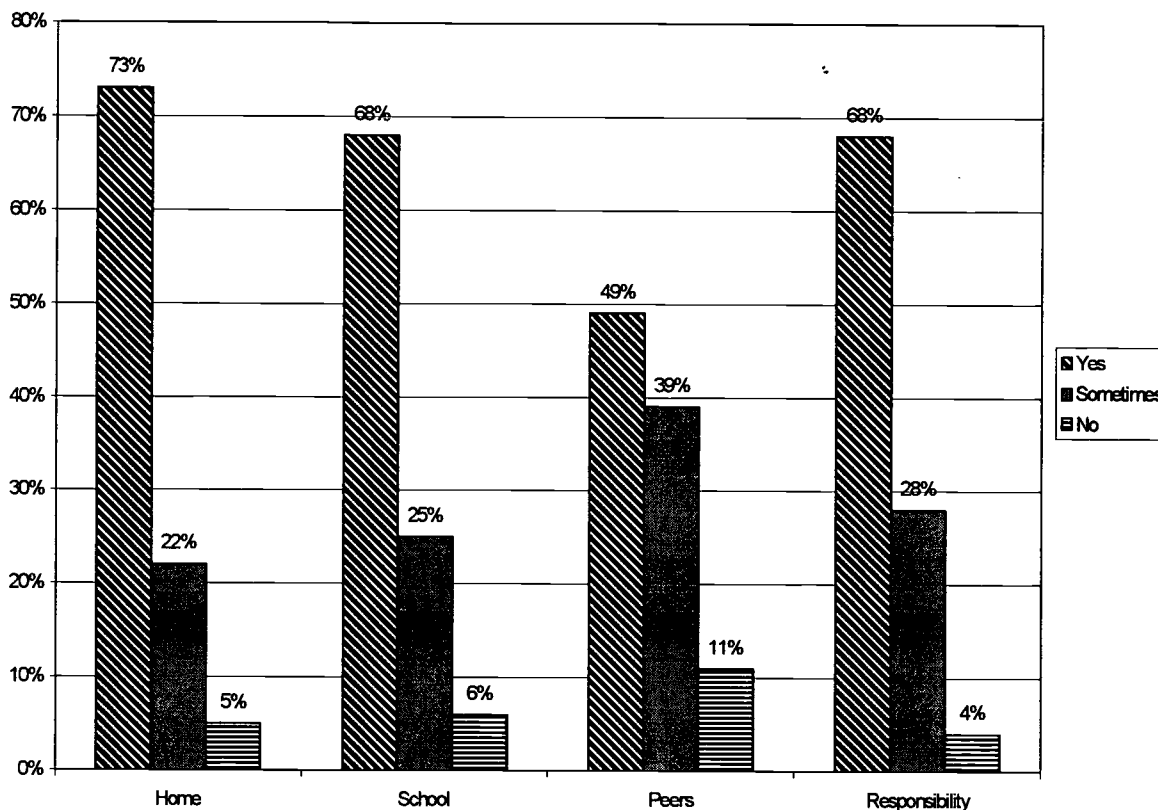


Figure 1 Character Education Survey

The relationships with peers showed the lowest percentages of positive responses. The researchers felt the reason for the low response was because of the lack of respect the students showed towards each other. They hoped that during the action research project, peer relationships among the students would improve.

Some states are implementing statewide character education programs. At the state level, legislators and state school board officials feel that it will make schools safer, but it will not solve all behavior problems. Even though schools and states are encouraging character education programs, such programs have not become a part of teacher education programs at the college level. It is difficult enough for an experienced teacher to implement character education; inexperienced teachers must find it more difficult because some have not been properly prepared for these programs. Children respond well to songs and plays that help incorporate character education; therefore the

teachers at the elementary level should incorporate such activities into their curriculum. Teachers seem to feel that students involved in extra curricular and other school related activities are often the students who show the connection between character education taught in the schools and their real world activities (Jacobson, 1999).

Sylwester (1997) stated that there were many negative behaviors that affected the educational processes. A student with a low self-esteem may have had many personal or social problems that triggered an impulsive act of violence or recklessness. The news media feature many shootings, riots, suicides, assaults, and gang-related violence in schools, which might have an effect on a student's academic performance. Although tragedies are not the norm of social interaction that is what many students are exposed to on a daily basis.

In looking at the information regarding the problems with students' behavior, the researchers wanted to help the students improve on their abilities to show respect towards each other as well as improve on their levels of academic achievements. The researchers consulted current literature to find assistance in developing a plan to address improvement of students' behavior and the development of students' abilities to make wise decisions.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

The teacher researchers examined many educational articles and books to help create their own lesson plans to increase the positive social skills of their students. In doing the research, the researchers hoped to find many valuable tools that they would be able to share with the colleagues. Many students today have to make difficult choices at a young age. Unfortunately, many students are not properly taught how to make the right choices. In a perfect world there are many positive role models teaching and influencing all students. Since that is not the case the researchers felt they must try to do their best to make a difference in each student's life. Many students are being influenced by peers to make the wrong decisions and society is backing those choices through music, television, and other entertainments. The researchers wanted students to recognize that they are responsible for making their own choices and must live with the decisions that they have made and will make in the future. The researchers found many of the articles to be very useful in the study of improving behavior through character education.

“Being accepted by a peer group is almost a biological drive, like hunger” (Burke, 1999, p. 2). Many students become frustrated if their peers do not accept them. Peer rejection causes confusion and harm to some students, which even goes so far as

developing into hate and violence. When some students were isolated from parents or caregivers they become vulnerable to peer influences which causes many emotional problems.

Many teachers have noticed a decline in the student's work ethic. These teachers say it is increasingly difficult to get the students to care about their work and have noticed a peer-group norm against working to hard. Students are drawn to easy pleasures, and in fact, the United States continues to have the highest rate of teenage drug use of any industrialized country. Lickona (1999) cited an Associated Press story about a contradiction to this trend in a seventh grade boy who was consistently offered drugs at school. His resistance is credited to a high level of family presence, involvement, and encouragement to have other interests outside of the school setting.

Research has shown that character education does make a difference. The following is a scenario relating an incident wherein character education has made a difference. Dennie Briggs (1996) started every day with a group planning session. At the end of the day the group discussed the events of the day. On one particular day some boys seemed preoccupied in the morning and didn't want to discuss what was bothering them. By the end of the day they seemed ready to discuss the problem, but then wouldn't. He noticed after school that several of his boys were still outside his classroom. After talking with the students he finally got a select few to discuss the problem with him. It turned out that some boys from another class had challenged them to a fight. His students were hoping that he would stop the fight, but instead he walked them to the battle line, sat down and asked the other group to join them. Most of the challenging group walked away, but two students chose to stay. Eventually Mr. Briggs

(Mr. B) asked the two boys to join them in the class. With the cooperation of the principal and the other teacher the two boys spent a week in Mr. B's class, to see how the class spent the day. In the discussion during class talks the boys felt that each of them needed to recognize their bullying behaviors and realized it needed to stop. Briggs felt this was a valuable experience, because the boys became models for constructive leadership. A conflict had turned into a win-win situation and became an opportunity for learning. The author felt that this indicated the importance of creating classrooms that encouraged social learning.

Often behavior is learned by observation without direct instruction. Children are motivated to imitate models they respect. Teachers and peers can have a great influence on moral behavior. Models must be consistently truthful (Perry, 1996).

Peers are one part of the problem regarding some of the students' behaviors. Peers' interaction with each other as well as society as a whole can play a role in influencing some students. Students must realize they are responsible for their choices and will pay the consequences for their decisions, good or bad. Society must also realize it plays a major role in helping to create the future of the world.

Society views a person as having tendencies for being both good and evil. A person is influenced by one's own self and the surrounding environment. In character education students need to recognize both virtues and vices. Students need to see virtues as strength and vices as a destructive power (Ryan, 1996).

Bronfenbrenner (as cited by Berman 1996) felt that no society can develop without being sensitive, motivated, and skilled in caring for other human beings. Berman agrees with Bronfenbrenner in that families, communities, and young people can not

develop into caring individuals without the developed skills of sensitivity, motivation, and skill. People lack the confidence that helps make a difference in today's society. Young people need to learn to reach out to other people through empathy, ethics, and service to better understand themselves and the feelings of others. Society needs to connect the youth with the community to help these people achieve a better understanding of society and their place in it. Society also needs to help these young people learn to appreciate other people by becoming a better model for the students (Berman, 1996).

Lickona (1993) is disheartened by the breakdown of the family, civility, greed, the high number of children living in poverty, sleaze, and the resulting corruption of youth. The 1992 National Research Council reported that the United States was the most violent of all industrialized nations. Lickona identified three causes for the groundswell of character education. The first was the decline of the American family showed neglect unique among developed nations. Children of marriages that end in divorce or children of single mothers are more likely to suffer from poverty, behavior problems, low academic achievement, early pregnancy, drug abuse, trouble with the law, and sexual and physical abuse. Schools are driven to the character education movement. Educators have to teach values in order to conduct teaching and learning because students are not learning values at home. Schools must become caring moral communities that help these children focus on their work in order to become responsible students.

A second cause is the troubling trends in youth character. Even children from traditional families often have the wrong kind of adult role models. They see sex, violence, and materialism portrayed in the mass media and suffer the pressures of peers.

Some troubling trends are found in youth violence, dishonesty, disrespect, cruelty, bigotry, laziness, sex, self-centeredness, lack of civic awareness, ethics, and self-destructive behaviors.

The third impetus is the recovery of shared ethical values. Society realizes that we shared a basic morality that is necessary for our survival. By serving as models, adults can promote morality by teaching the values, respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, fairness, caring, and civic responsibility. By not teaching core values adults are doing a disservice to the youth of America (Likona, 1993).

Huffman (1995) also felt the students who were not being nurtured in the home should be given the opportunity to receive character education at school. Some students need to learn to respect other people even if it is not taught in the home. The school should not succumb to the temptations of a society that sometimes seems ready to throw its hands up in the air in defeat.

“Do you have to pee? Put your butts on the rug,” were some phrases heard by Mann (pg. 16,1998) from the lips of a new kindergarten teacher in an affluent community. Researchers have all heard certified educators and others working within the school system say “Shut-up”. Is this a good example for our students to follow? The researchers felt that if students got into trouble for speaking inappropriately, then teachers should model the appropriate behavior. Teachers need to recognize that they serve as role models and should have been aware of what they are saying and how they are acting around our students. Teachers need to be responsible for their actions as they create new lesson plans, teach students, and present themselves as being positive role models. Students also need to learn how to be responsible for their actions, finish homework, and

be a positive role model to other students. The poor examples that are cited are rare, but they do exist and many students are aware of them. Although responsibility should be taught in the school, it should begin in the home.

By parents setting a good example in the home, children should learn to accept positive actions at an early age and learn to follow in their parent's footsteps. Parents need to listen to their children in order to teach the children to listen to them. Parents need to teach their children to ask to be excused from the table and ask to go to a friend's house and not to be told that this was what they were going to do. Parents need to let their children know that parents are in charge and that they make the decisions, whether or not the children show they are able to distinguish it is right or wrong. By having the children be responsible for certain chores around the house, the children should become competent, confident, and responsible people (Kelly, 1999).

According to Lickona (1996) students needed caring relationships with adults and each other. The students from the caring classrooms feel valued as people. If a student practices respect and care all the time, values will soon become a part of their character. Lickona also explains that families were the most important influences on a child's character, and schools could not fully repair any damage the family had done. Schools could do far more than they were doing now to develop good character in people. To help parents develop good character in their children, many schools and counseling had put into place a parenting program.

Behan (1999) feels that teaching ethics at a young age is crucial to the development of responsible children. By not learning ethics a child becomes more aggressive, has trouble dealing with peers, and is more likely to have trouble dealing with

other people in a social setting. Parents are often encouraged to show affection to their children at a young age and acknowledging their cues when the child needs them. Behan cited Zigler's (as cited in Behan, 1999) first steps in helping a child become a part of the family of humankind. Simple things that we say like "don't touch", "come here", and "it hurt when you hit Michael", may seem little but they help a child to develop empathy. A parent who always encourages the use of "please" and "thank you" and who gives their child opportunities to play with other children helps encourage moral development. A parent can also teach their children to be responsible by assigning simple chores, such as setting the table, taking out the trash, and making their beds. By assigning these chores parents are again encouraging good moral development.

Etzioni (1998) wants schools leaders to take on the task of ensuring positive character development. He feels that schools need to take a look at how they distribute grades are they showing that a students has learned from their hard work or is there another message being sent to them. He also wants schools to note the emphasis they are putting on school sports. Are schools taking a win at all costs attitude or are they helping students to consider how to play the game and teaching good sportsmanship? He also feels the community needs to take a look at the message they are sending to the children of their community. If the community enforces the laws they have set regarding social matters, such as noise ordinances, they set an example for their school to attend to the smaller infractions before they turn into major problems.

Goleman (1998) cites many examples of positive results from practicing responsibility. Integrity in sales jobs strengthens relationships vital to repeat business. Even in the aggressive sport of football, coaches rate players who practice self-control as

being more motivated, having better abilities, being better leaders, and easier to coach than those with low levels of restraint.

Responsibility also plays a big part in the work force. As students become adults and take their place in the work force they need to be aware of their emotional intelligence. Most employers are looking for people who are competent and are able to manage emotions. An employee should also be able to handle encounters well, be able to work with a team, and have leadership qualities. These attributes are more important now than they ever have been in the past.

Any parent should be able to identify with Paul McCartney, when asked what he most wanted to be remembered for he said, “My values. In my case, family values. Linda and I always say that our greatest achievement is how our kids turned out” (Behan, 1999, p. 66).

While reading the literature on the promises of character education, the researchers came across an article by Kohn (1997). The article was filled with warnings that looked like character education might only have been an inducement to make children behave as an authoritative person wanted them to behave without question. In finishing the article, the researchers found great hope for character education from a broad perspective that would help children turn into good people. Armed with a belief that the researchers could make a difference with the students even beyond the researchers’ classrooms, they set about with plans and interventions strategies. Through documentation, they kept track of the actions implemented and recorded them along with the results.

Problem Objectives and Processes

Objective 1

As a result of increased use of lesson plans dealing with character development, during the time period of September 1999 through January 2000, the targeted 4th, 6th, and primary special education classrooms will increase the students' ability to make more appropriate interpersonal decisions through cooperative learning and self-reflection.

Processes to be used to implement this objective include the following:

1. Develop and incorporate lesson plans dealing with character development.
2. Incorporate the lessons into the researchers' curriculum.
3. Allow time during the day for self-reflection.

Objective 2

As a result of using positive rewards and recognition events given throughout the intervention time period of September 1999 through January 2000, the targeted 4th, 6th, and primary special education classrooms will increase the students' use of positive social interactions as measured by the use of a behavioral checklist.

Processes to be used to implement this objective include the following:

1. Develop a reward and recognition system using a checklist.
2. Incorporate a reward and recognition system into the researchers' curriculum.
3. Allow time during the week to reward the students.

Objective 3

As a result of using motivational speakers and other outside resources through the time period of September 1999 through January 2000, the 4th, 6th, and primary special education classrooms will influence the students' use of positive social interactions measured by classroom discussion, journal writing, and anecdotal records.

Processes to be used to implement this objective include the following:

1. Incorporate speakers and other sources into the researchers' curriculum, which will make students more aware of the need for appropriate social skills.
2. Discuss the character topic the speaker addressed.
3. Allow time to write thank you notes and journal entries.

Action Plan

During each week of the twelve weeks of interventions, the targeted teachers will teach at least two lessons a week of direct instruction of social skills that will last approximately 20 to 40 minutes. Each four-week period the lessons will focus on one character trait. Respect, honesty, and caring are the character traits each targeted classroom will be implementing, through journal writings and classroom discussion; teacher directed lessons involving student interaction, and the use of motivational speakers and other outside resources.

Lessons

Weeks 1 – 4

A. Introduce character education

1. Brainstorm ideas of what is character education.
2. Administer student survey of choices that reflect character education.

B. Introduce character education focusing of respect.

1. Create a T-shirt or poster depicting phrases and graphics relating to respect.
2. Established classroom rules.
3. Guest Speaker
4. Everyone learns in different ways.
5. Respect yourself, family, environment and animals.
6. Videos
7. What is Respect?
8. Myself

C. Prepare Materials

1. Behavior Checklist
2. Student Journals
3. Materials needed for lessons
4. Arrange guest speakers
5. Prepare materials for rewards

Weeks 5 – 8**A. Introduce character education focusing on honesty.**

1. Honesty bookmarks.
2. Line graph design.
3. Video
4. Guest Speaker
5. Honesty taking tests.
6. When the teacher leaves the room.
7. Getting the teachers attention.
8. Honesty journal writing

B. Prepare materials

1. Behavior checklist
2. Student journals
3. Check out videos
4. Materials needed for lessons
5. Arrange guest speaker
6. Prepare materials for rewards

Week 9 – 12

A. Introduce character education focusing of caring.

1. Service Project
2. Cookbooks
3. Bio-poems
4. Caring quilt
5. Bulletin board
6. Video
7. Christmas Program
8. Summarize character education within their journal.

B. Prepare materials

1. Behavior checklist
2. Materials for lessons
3. Student journals
4. Prepare materials for rewards
5. Check out videos

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, a student survey will be developed, as well as a behavior checklist and students' will keep a self-reflection journal throughout the intervention period.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to improve students' social skills and increase their academic level of achievement. Character education lessons were selected to be used as interventions in this project (Appendices C-G). The students were involved in creating classroom rules and consequences that related to improving social skills.

A survey was administered to the students at the beginning and the end of the intervention period. The survey dealt with student attitudes towards home, school, responsibility, and peers (Appendix A).

Character education lessons were designed to help students develop an interest in social awareness. The faculty had developed a character education program in which each month instruction was focused on a different character trait. The researchers incorporated lessons that dealt with each trait. The three traits that were taught during the intervention period were: respect, caring, and honesty. The action plan called for two half-hour lessons to be presented each week.

During weeks one through four the targeted students worked on improving the character trait of respect. Weeks five through nine the targeted students worked on

developing the character trait of caring and weeks ten through twelve the targeted students worked on developing the character trait of honesty. Each four week period began with activities that included brainstorming on what the students thought respect, caring, and honesty were. Lessons were taught reinforcing respect, caring and honesty. Videos were used to lead to discussion about respect, caring and honesty, and self-reflection about the different traits.

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, a survey created by the researchers was given to the students prior to the interventions and again at the end of the intervention period. In addition, a student self-reflection journal was kept throughout the intervention period. A checklist was also developed to track the students' undesirable behaviors. The areas tracked were verbal disagreement, physical fighting, off-task behavior, defiance, and inappropriate behavior. Students misbehaviors were recorded tabulated weekly. The action plan was followed as planned and no deviations were made.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effects of the character education lessons, a daily checklist was used to document the inappropriate behaviors of the targeted students. In Figure 3 the results are presented on a weekly basis. The observations were done while the students were with the teacher researchers. In School A, five students were observed in a special education setting. In School B, 22 students were observed in a fourth grade setting, and in School C, 21 students were observed in a sixth grade setting.

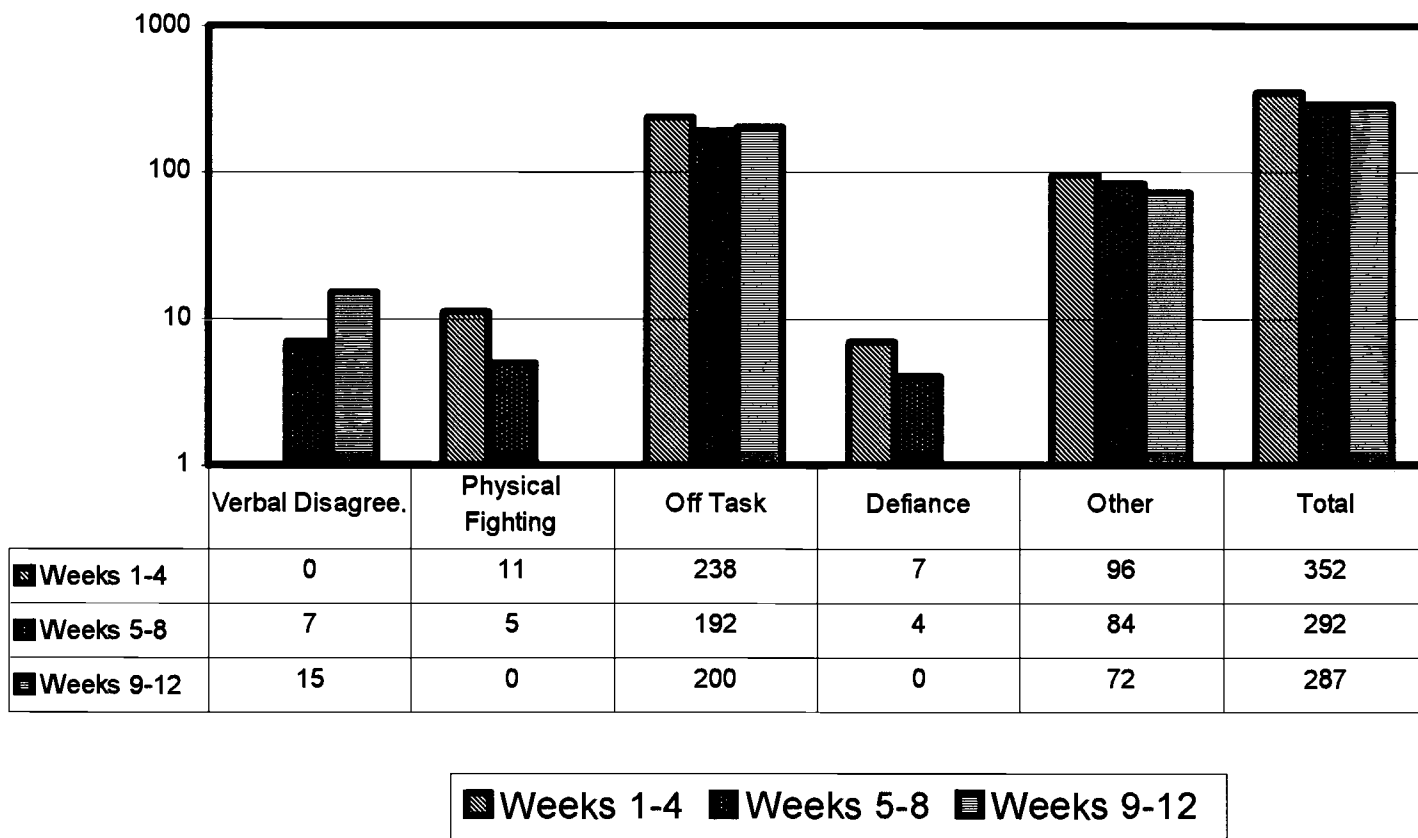


Figure 2. Weekly Behavior Incidents

The overall total number of incidences showed a decline in inappropriate student behavior. The biggest decline came within the “other” category, dropping by 12 incidences. The students became more responsible towards the end of the intervention due to parent/teacher conferences being held at the end of the second four-weeks of the intervention. Several parents at this time were made aware of the importance of signing and checking assignment books. The largest increase came within two areas, “verbal disagreements” and the “off task” category. The last four weeks of the intervention came

between Thanksgiving and Christmas. The students were very excited and were ready for break.

The Character Survey (Appendix A) was once again given at the end of the intervention period to compare the students' attitudes towards school, peers, home and responsibility. The results are shown in Figure 3.

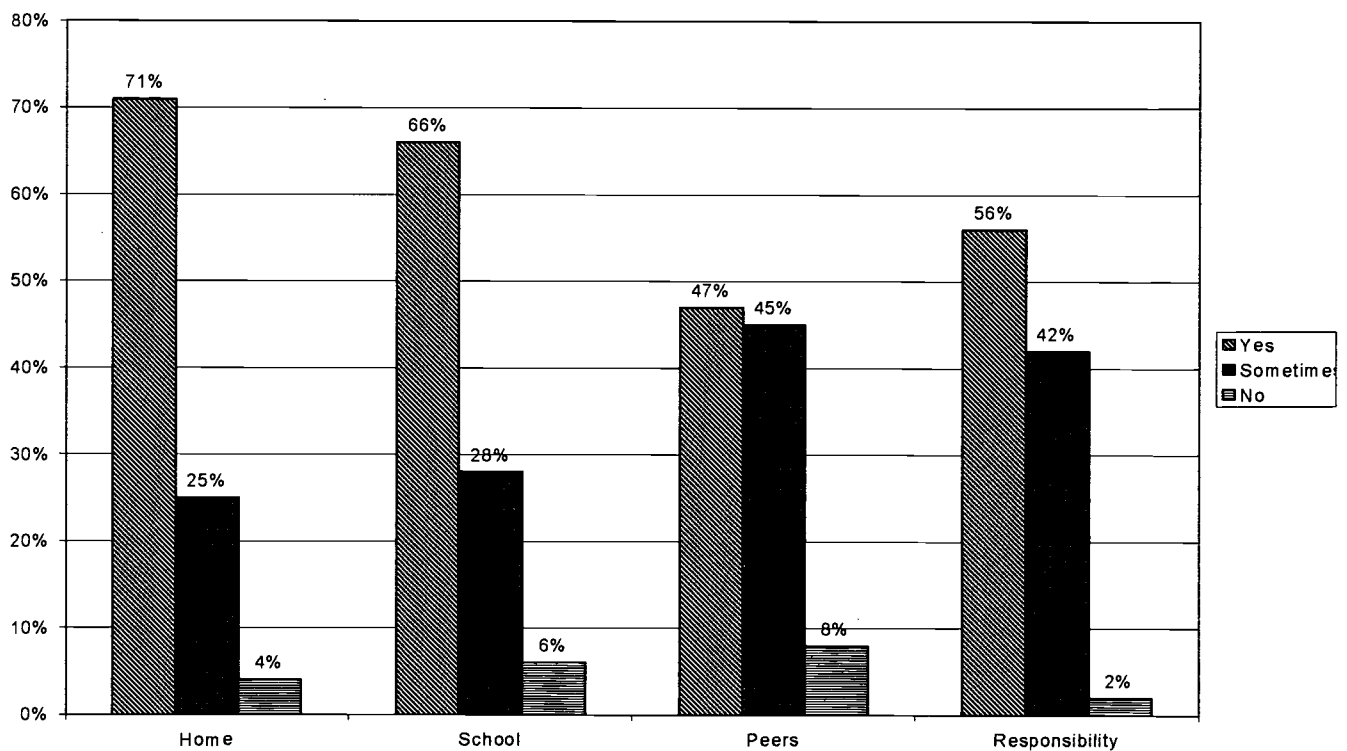


Figure 3. Character Education Survey

In comparing Figure 1 with Figure 3, the researchers noticed that the percentages decreased in the “Yes” category. However, the researchers also noticed the percentages decreasing in the “No” category. The decrease showed that some students benefited from the interventions. The statements grouped under peers reflected the greatest concern at the beginning of the intervention. The results show a decrease in the “No” category, but peer relations continue to be a concern. The researchers plan to continue the program

through the remainder of the school year. With this continuation the students are expected to acquire more skills that will help them to get along with their peers. The results showed that some students had indeed realized that they were either getting along better with their peers, or they had benefited from the interventions. The changes in the “Yes” and “Sometimes” categories may reflect the students’ understanding of their own behaviors rather than deterioration in coping skills.

Responsibility followed the same pattern as the Peer category. Again, the decrease in “No” was pleasing to the researchers. It showed that some students had become more responsible through the intervention period, but the decrease in the yes category showed that many students recognized the area of responsibility needed improvement.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the study of character education, implemented strategies, and interaction with their students, the researchers concluded that character education does have a place in the school curriculum. As more and more schools recognize that positive human interaction is essential on all levels from school to the business world, as well as the outside world, leaders of society; parents, teachers, politicians, business people, and workers, need to continue to place emphasis on building character.

The researcher at School A thought that one of the contributing factors to the decrease in inappropriate behavior was due to having a shorter amount of time spent with the researcher for misbehaviors to be tracked. Also, the students were taking turns talking, raising their hands, and being considerate toward others. One of the students had a behavior disorder; the classroom teacher noted an improvement in the classroom for

that student. Each day the students brought their daily planners and the researcher marked behaviors while the students were in the special education classroom. The homeroom teachers also noted the decrease in inappropriate behaviors.

Many students were becoming more comfortable with each other during the intervention period. Verbal disagreements were clustered around the middle of the intervention period and always included one student who attended for only four weeks. These disagreements always involved unkind remarks, which ceased when the student moved away. The physical fighting decreased after the first four weeks. This decrease was caused by separating certain students in the hallway. There was an increase in off task behaviors during the second and third four-week periods. The last four weeks included testing, conferences, and several holidays. There was also an increase in cooperative learning lessons during those weeks which may have caused some students to be off task as they adjusted to working in groups. There were no incidences of defiance during the intervention period. There was a decrease in the category marked "other." This included having assignment books signed and ready. During the second and third set of four weeks, the researcher did not get to look at these books every day. Phone calls to parents may have contributed to the decline of these numbers.

Although the numbers in some areas increased from the first four weeks of the intervention to the second and third four weeks of the intervention period, the students' overall attitude changed. There was very little verbal fighting that went on during the intervention period, the numbers that appear involved one student who was having trouble adjusting to school and having to follow rules. That student has since been a real joy to have in class and chooses to exercise self-control. Physical fighting was not a

problem for School C. School C showed an increase in off-task behaviors from the first four weeks to the second and third four weeks of the intervention period. The students were settling in to the routine of school and becoming more comfortable with their surroundings. The third four weeks period showed the biggest increase, with Thanksgiving and Christmas break occurring during this time span the students were anxious for break. There was no problem with students being defiant towards the teacher or each other during the twelve week intervention period. School C showed an increase in the category “other.” “Other” referred to making sure homework was finished, assignment books signed each day, getting into trouble in art, music, or physical education, or from another teacher. The teacher was surprised by the increase in numbers because the students have really improved within the classroom. Often everyone had their homework done and assignment books signed, but the increase came from outside of the classroom. Many students were getting into trouble during art, music, and physical education areas in which the students need to improve in on their behaviors.

Overall, the students had made an improvement in some of their social skills, but needed to improve on others, such as peer relationships, caring and being kind to others

The programs implemented in each targeted classroom were beneficial and necessary to help students develop an awareness and improvement of their character. The researchers recommend that character education be included in school curriculums on an ongoing basis. Student reaction to character education was positive. The implemented lessons became prior shared experiences to which the researchers could refer when inappropriate behaviors occurred.

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Appendix A

Character Education Survey

	Yes	Sometimes	No
1. I feel safe at school.	_____	_____	_____
2. I feel safe at home.	_____	_____	_____
3. I feel safe playing outside.	_____	_____	_____
4. My teachers care about me.	_____	_____	_____
5. I get along with the students in my school.	_____	_____	_____
6. Other students have always helped me learn.	_____	_____	_____
7. It is important to me that I do well in my studies.	_____	_____	_____
8. My parents make sure I do my homework.	_____	_____	_____
9. I can get help at home with my homework.	_____	_____	_____
10. I always hand in my work on time.	_____	_____	_____
11. I listen to the teacher.	_____	_____	_____
12. I ask questions when I don't understand my teacher.	_____	_____	_____
13. I like to work with others in my class.	_____	_____	_____
14. I follow directions.	_____	_____	_____
15. I listen to others ideas.	_____	_____	_____

**Appendix B
Behavior Checklist**

	Name	Verbal Fight	Physical Fight	Off Task	Defiance	Other
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
11						
12						
13						
14						
15						
16						
17						
19						
20						
21						
22						
23						
24						
25						

Appendix C

Lesson Name: Me T-Shirt

Targeted Intelligence: Intrapersonal

Supporting Intelligence: Visual/Spatial, Verbal/Linguistic and Naturalist

Thinking Skills: Inventing

Social Skills: Giving and receiving words to help build positive self-esteem.

Content Focus: Self-awareness

Materials: Large piece of construction paper, crayons or markers (may substitute and use a real T-shirt instead of construction paper).

Task Force: Each student will design a T-shirt that reflects him or her through the use of adjectives, strengths, and goals that they have set. His or her fellow classmates will give adjectives to add to the design.

Product: T-shirt

Problem: How to think about themselves as a good person or a positive role model.

Activity:

1. Give each student a T-shirt pattern or have each student bring in a white T-shirt.
2. Give the following directions:
 - a. Put your name in the center of the T-shirt in graffiti style.
 - b. On one sleeve, draw two things you like to do in your spare time.
 - c. On the other sleeve draw ways you like to learn.
 - d. In one of the bottom corners, draw what or who you want to be in ten years.
 - e. In the bottom of the other corner, draw and write about a goal that you have set for yourself this school year.
 - f. Under your name write an adjective that describes the way you want others to describe you.
 - g. Design the rest of the front of your T-shirt with sketches, doodles, and colors.
 - h. When finished, the students will have three minutes to go around the room and ask others to give them a word that describes you, when they give you a word you must give one back.
 - i. When time is up, write them on the back of your T-shirt in graffiti style.
Only Positive Words!
 - j. Display or wear your T-shirt.

Reflection:

1. Make a journal entry about how you felt when creating your T-shirt and how you felt when your friends were giving you positive words about you.

Appendix D

LESSON NAME: Happy face/Sad face

TARGETED INTELLIGENCE: Intrapersonal

SUPPORTING INTELLIGENCES: Verbal/Linguistic

THINKING SKILLS: Following directions, folding, insulting, reassuring

SOCIAL SKILLS: Caring, cooperating

CONTENT FOCUS: Assembling a poster

MATERIALS: A large piece of paper with a large smiling face drawn on it.

TASK FOCUS: Students will say something unkind to the picture and fold it. Later, they will say something kind and unfold it.

PRODUCT: A wrinkled poster with a smiling face

PROBLEM: Students try to undo the damage of an unkind remark with a kind remark.

ACTIVITY:

1. The poster is given a name and is passed around the room. Each child says something mean that has been said to him or her and folds the picture.
2. When the poster has gone around the room a discussion is held about the character must feel by now. Students should make suggestions to improve the situation until it is clear they should say something nice and unfold the picture.
3. Each child says something reassuring to the picture and unfolds one crease. If the picture is fully unfolded, the remaining children will make a kind remark and try to press out the wrinkles.
4. Depending on the group, follow up may include putting the completed poster on the wall, using the phrase, "Are you putting a wrinkle in me?" as a response to unkind remarks, and referring to the poster occasionally during the rest of the year.

REFLECTIONS:

1. Ask how they feel when they hear unkind remarks until they identify the wrinkles in the poster as the damage done by unkind remarks.
2. Ask how the smiling character feels after the exercise until students note that even though it is smiling, the damage is not completely healed.
3. How did this exercise show a need for caring and the importance of being careful with what we say?

Appendix E

LESSON NAME: Jumbled Picture

TARGETED INTELLIGENCE: Mathematical/logical

SUPPORTING INTELLIGENCES: Interpersonal,
Verbal/Linguistic

THINKING SKILLS: Concentrating, following directions,
assembling a puzzle

SOCIAL SKILLS: Respecting, cooperating

CONTENT FOCUS: Assembling a puzzle

MATERIALS: The same line drawing should cut into nine equal rectangles or squares, one for each child in a group of three or four.

TASK FOCUS: Students will work cooperatively to assemble the puzzle until all members of the group have a completed puzzle.

PRODUCT: A completed puzzle for each student

PROBLEM: Students use the logic skills to assemble the puzzle. They will also respect the needs of their group members to assemble the puzzle.

ACTIVITY:

1. Group leader will pass out nine mixed up pieces to each member of the group.
2. When students have attempted to assemble as much of the puzzle as possible, the caller will say, "Pass." All students will pass one piece to the right. This process will repeat itself until all members have an assembled puzzle. A member must pass a piece even if his or her own puzzle is complete.

REFLECTIONS:

1. What were we supposed to do?
2. How did this exercise show a need for cooperation?
3. How did this exercise show a need for respect?
4. How will we do the exercise differently if there's a next time?

Appendix F

Everyone Learns in Different Ways

Objective:

The student will identify several different learning styles exemplified by characters.

Rational:

Although students will often find themselves lumped together in a group or class, they should realize that students (like teachers) are individuals and have individual needs. The purpose of this lesson is to create an awareness of individual differences in learning. This is something that a teacher must deal with, and it is helpful for a student to have that awareness.

Thinking Questions:

1. What is something that you learned how to do in the past few weeks?
2. How did you learn to do it?
3. Do you think it is harder for some people to learn?
4. Why do you think it is harder for some people to learn?
5. If someone wanted to teach you how to draw a horse, what are some ways he or she might go about doing that?

Activity:

Directions: Read the directions to students from the worksheet. They are to figure out which of the four students who are making cakes match the style of learning stated at the top.

Answers: 1. Dana 2. John 3. Max 4. Carol

Follow-up: the example on the worksheet involved making a cake, but what are other examples of tasks that can be completed in a variety of ways?

What are some ways to help learn something that students can use or have used? Why is it helpful for a student to know what strategies are helpful for him- or herself?

Appendix G

What is Respect?

Objective:

The student will state that respect means treating someone as a valuable person.

Rational:

Everyone wants to be treated with respect. Often, however, students unthinkingly make comments that are disrespectful about teachers because they are angry, want to show off, or simply are rude. This lesson demonstrates ways to treat the teacher with respect, while still letting your feelings out.

Thinking Questions:

1. How would you feel if I slammed the door in your face?
2. How would you feel if I knew that you were in a hurry at the store and I let you go through the line first?
3. Which if those examples show having respect for someone else?
4. What does respect mean?
5. What are some ways that students show respect for their teacher?
6. How do you think a teacher feels when the students show respect?

Activity:

Directions: Have students consider the responses or action of the students on the worksheet. They are to circle the students who are showing respect to the teacher and X the ones who are not.

Answers: 1. Circle 4. Circle 7. X
 2. X 5. Circle 8. X
 3. Circle 6. X 9. Circle

Follow-up: Go through the cartoons and discuss why the student was or was not showing respect. What could the X'd students have done differently to express their frustration or anger without being disrespectful?



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