THE EFFECTS OF CHARACTER
EDUCATION ON POSITIVE SELF-ESTEEM
AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

By

Stacie Mollman

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Investigation Advisor

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout
January, 2004

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

ABSTRACT

| | Mollman | Stacie | E |
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The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of character education on positive self-esteem and academic achievement. This study includes a comprehensive review and critical analysis of research and literature associated with character education and effective ways to create positive learning environment for teachers and students. A summary was presented and recommendations made that provides insight to administrators, school board members, counselors and students regarding anti-discrimination, equal access to education and school activities, and mult-culturism. The goal is that these recommendations may serve to create an awareness of methods that can be used to improve the school climate and create a positive learning environment.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

This study has been inspired by a need to improve the ninth-grade curriculum at Phillips High School by improving the students' morale through character education. The philosophy that bringing character education into the curriculum will contribute to student success in various forms is the connection the researcher will be trying to make.

The success of schools is usually measured by the student's academic achievement; however, there is more to education than just academics. Kohlberg (1984) confirmed there is also the social and psychological development that shape children's character and personality. Educators can help young people become caring, contributing, healthy, productive, and responsible citizens by incorporating different character traits into their curriculums.

The author will further define character education and show that it is a growing concept. The literature will show that student academic success is achieved through different aspects of character education such as school climate, asset building, caring environments, positive adult relationships, and social and emotional education. These factors create a positive, social environment which enables schools to maintain a safer environment and students to build on their positive self-esteem.

*Statement of the Problem*

Student success has been measured in various ways; however, character education has not been traditionally used as a means of measuring student success. Consequently, students who lack that nurturing classroom environment continue to receive negative results, and those students continue to get pushed to the side. Their self-esteem continues to diminish, and their academic success continues to spiral downward. Therefore, a clear and adequate picture of student success is not presented due to some vital character measures that have been overlooked.

*Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is two fold: first, is to make a connection between student success and character education amongst high school students; Second, to draw conclusions from the literature and make recommendations that will provide insight into ways to incorporate character education into the classroom and create positive self-esteem and academic success. This study includes a comprehensive review and critical analysis or research and literature associated with academic success and character education. The author of this paper will use outside research as a method of evaluating the effectiveness of character education. This research will be continuous since the curriculum is in the beginning stages of development.

*Research Questions*

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. What exactly is character education, and why is it an issue?

2. Is character education a useful tool in re-installing values into our students?

3. How is character education and student success linked?

4. Does school climate have an effect on academic success?

5. Do caring environments contribute to student's morale?

6. Does asset building through the search institute have an effect on academic success and character education?

7. Why is social and emotional education important?

*Definition of Terms*

The following key words were defined to further clarify the content research paper:

1. Character education- anything that schools might try to provide outside of academics especially when the purpose is to help students become good people. A particular style of moral training, one that promotes instruction and indoctrination of specific values (Watson, 1998).

2. Developmental assets- consist of forty factors that are essential to young people's success. These assets are opportunities, skills, relationships, values, and self-perceptions that all young people need in their lives. The assets are both external (things that other people provide for youth) and internal (things that develop within young people themselves). The four categories of external assets are support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time. The four categories of internal assets are commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity.

3. School climate- a positive influence on the health of the learning environment or a significant barrier to learning.

4. Self-esteem- belief in oneself; self respect.

5. Social and emotional competence- the ability to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of one's life in ways that enable the successful management of life's tasks such as learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, and adapting to the complex demands of growth and development. It includes self-awareness, control of impulsivity, working cooperatively, and caring about one and others.

6. Social and emotional learning - the process through which children and adults develop the skills, attitudes, and values necessary to acquire social and emotional competence.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

*Introduction*

A lack of character education in the classroom has hampered many student

attempts to achieve positive self-esteem and academic success. This lack of student self-

esteem has led to many student failures. Teachers spend more hours with students

during the school year than parents spend with their kids at home. Based on the many

pressures outside of school, is it necessary for educators to create a nurturing

environment in the classroom in order to create a positive domino effect for academic

success? A review of literature outlines the positive extensions of character education

such as asset building, school climate, emotional literacy, positive adult relations, self-

esteem, and social and emotional growth. The topics that the author explores will show

that students are more successful when given a chance to learn and grow in positive

settings and situations.

*Character Education*

For generations, wise teachers have sensed the significant and positive

relationship between a student's concept of himself and his performance in school. They

believed that the students who feel good about their abilities are the ones who are most

likely to succeed in school. There is no denying that teachers are a major source of the

self-concepts of their students. Obviously, much of how the child feels about himself is a

direct result of his contacts with parents and teachers; the only question is whether their

influence will be positive or negative. Unfortunately, schooling as we know it today is

largely a negative experience for many students. Mitchell (1985) believed that for too many students, the school is a high risk neighborhood. It has been established that during twelve years of schooling, a single child will be bombarded with as many as fifteen thousand no's, don'ts, and cannots. Add to these the many hundreds of negative communications they hear in the home from significant adults elsewhere. The overall picture is of a childhood dominated by warnings and statements that emphasize life's downside risks more than its upside potential. Perhaps we should not find surprising the research report that although 80 percent of children entering school have positive self-images, only about 20 percent still do by the fifth grade, and only about 5 percent feel good about themselves by the time they are high school seniors.

Mitchell (1985) emphasized that most research findings support the view that students are more than likely to perform as their teachers they will. Children form images of themselves by their perception of adults' reactions to their behavior, through expressions of approval or disapproval, and these adults all too frequently have expectations for performance that are far below the child's potential. In a famous experiment conducted by Robert Rosenthal, a developmental psychologist at Harvard University, this tendency of adult expectations was graphically demonstrated. In Rosenthal's experiment, a group of students were randomly selected from a class and identified to their teacher as "exceptional" children who could be expected to do above-average work. They were, in fact, no different from the rest of the students in the class, but because the teacher expected them to do well, and interacted with them as if they were superior students, they responded to that expectation by performing at a significantly higher level than the other students (Reimer & Hersh, 1983).

The phrase character education refers to almost anything that schools might try to provide outside of academics, especially when the purpose is to help children become good people. At the heart of character education is a belief that there are specific values that should be a part of education for all students (Howard & Johnson, 2000).

Likona (1998) stated that character education holds, as a starting philosophical principle that is widely shared, pivotally important core ethical values- such as caring, honestly, fairness, responsibility, and respect for self and others- that form the basis of good character.

Character education is not a quick-fix program; it is part of school life. The question becomes who is responsible for reinforcing age-old qualities of character? The classroom could be one arena to reinforce, model, and practice positive character traits on a daily basis; therefore, the teacher is central to character education. The processes (classroom strategies utilized and environment created) within the classroom are critical. Effective lesson plans for today are not the lesson plans of yesterday (Anderson, 2000). If educators want students to exhibit positive character traits, it is obvious a different way of thinking regarding the educational system can allow students to "grow" with character and dignity. Educators provide an innovative teaching and learning environment that continuously incorporates our common core of traits: respect, responsibility, fairness, and hard work (Nucci, 1989).

Lately more and more politicians, state education departments, parents and schools are looking for ways to effectively incorporate a character education. Anderson (2000) expresses that it has been suggested that the ongoing debate about how to teach morals, ethics, values, or good character in the schools really comes down to a

competition between the product desired and the process by which that product is to be achieved .

Wilson (1993) believed that all good work is worthy of our dedication, and the most worthy is what changes lives profoundly- in mind, body, and spirit. For a professional educator to change student's lives profoundly requires generosity of time and a spirit of commitment. Students are directly affected by the generosity bestowed to them by professional educators in numerous ways. The active attitude of generous giving to enhance professionalism and student achievement will generate an attitude that staying with the status quo is unacceptable. Generosity is also exhibited as educators devote personal time for professional growth. Lang (1995) suggested that professional development should be at the heart of every professional with action plans for improvement developed and implemented.

*Character Education Movements*

Virtually every major social movement in this nation has begun with individuals making a personal commitment to addressing a need or a cause in their own lives, communities, or their world. Benson (1997) states that the seeds for public schools, libraries, civil rights, and many other important traditions in our society were planted by individuals who saw a need and took personal responsibility for action, mobilizing others, and creating needed change.

One of the fastest growing movements in education today is character education. For years states did not emphasize character education in their curriculum. Today, fifteen states require character education programs in their schools, and most states require what might be considered aspects of character education to be taught in their schools.

(Robinson & Hayes, 2000) stated that the federal government is supporting this movement through grants from the Department of Education, and in the four years since its inception the program has funded almost twenty state initiatives. Counselors and educators across the United States are united in their concern for the well-being of today's children. With the recent rash of school shootings, the nation has focused its attention on violence in schools, therefore focusing directly on the character development of children. Kirschenbaum (2000) questions whether these violent incidents are signs of a national crisis of character.

On July 7, 1998, Vice President Al Gore announced ten states had received a total of 2.7 million in grants to from partnerships with local school districts and the community to help youth incorporate good citizenship into their learning experiences. Gore believes that schools should also reinforce parental efforts to teach children good character and basic American values- including respect, responsibility, fairness, and hard work. Content is not the espoused curriculum, but a mere map by which we navigate students to an understanding (Anderson, 2000).

The past decade has witnessed the development of character education efforts in many schools across America. The development of desirable character traits has always been a central concern of education. The Character Education Partnership (CEP) states in its widely distributed Eleven Principals of Effective Character Education that there are widely shared core ethical values as the basis of good character. It explicitly names caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect as values that must be endorsed, manifested, and upheld by all members of the school community. The first principle

concludes by stating both the social and democratic rationales for the development of these values. The validity of these values derives from the fact that such values affirm our human dignity, they serve the common good, and they define our rights and responsibilities in a democratic society (Lewis, 1998).

The social rationale for character education is further reinforced in the fourth principle which states the school itself must become a microcosm of the civil, caring, and just society we seek to create as a nation. Others of the Eleven Principles stress a variety of tenets concerning the involvement of staff and parents; the idea that character education must be comprehensively defined to include cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of moral life; the importance of intrinsic motivation; the need to provide opportunities for moral action; and the need for a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum. Character-education programs include the importance of knowledge, the appreciation of community, cooperation, and an endorsement of inclusiveness, communication, diversity, trust, participation, and leadership (Hoge, 2002).

The development of character education has become a growing concern of many people in our nation today. The public school system has responded to this concern for the moral development of children and youth with efforts to strengthen or to reclaim its historical role in the character formation of children. Pritchard (1988) stated that the estimate in 1995 by John Martin, former executive director of the Character Education Partnership, shows that one out of every five school districts has such a program that may well be too conservative today. The recurrent shocking incidents of in-school shootings resulting in children across the country, including small-town America, injuring and

killing other children and their teacher's suggestions that character education programs that attempt to teach respect for others, responsibility for one's actions, and peaceful resolution of conflict will not soon be abandoned. The existence of an extensive literature in both professional journals and popular press attests further to the importance attached to this movement in our nation today ( Weber, 2002).

One cannot pinpoint an event that caused a rush of demands that schools take on character education, but publications and conference agendas were suddenly awash with calls for and news of character education programs. Children were growing up amoral, some observers claimed, causing all sorts of problems for teachers and schools (McVoy & Welker, 2000). Therefore, the proposed solution was often to package character education into curriculum.

Such programs are well meant, and some are very creative. Congress jumped into the action with one million dollars to create pilot programs using partnerships for character education. California, Iowa, New Mexico, and Utah received the initial funding from Congress for programs in selected districts. California has promised to work in four districts to improve student achievement in "caring, civic virtue and citizenship, justice and fairness, respect, responsibility, and trustworthiness." New Mexico is seeking, among other goals, to use a packaged program called "Character Counts" as a means of supporting students as they strive to meet challenging state standards (Lewis, 1998).

Educators need to provide instruction on broadly supported traits of good character and affirm their practice. They must make the all important connections to students through personal and frank discussions about aspects of a good character. Educators should listen to their students about how they are treated. In many schools a

walk down the hall is appalling. It's amazing that anyone's self-esteem is intact at the end of the day (Beal, 2001).

In order to pass on a coherent and constructive worldview to children and adolescents, socializing systems (family, school, youth organizations) need to be on the same page. If we want to nurture the value of environmental responsibility, our success is enhanced when youth are exposed to multiple places that articulate and model this core value (Benson, 1997).

*Effective Character Education Programs*

In an effective character education program, character is broadly conceived to encompass the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of the moral life. Good character consists of understanding, caring about, and acting upon core ethical values. The task of character education therefore is to help students and all other members of the learning community know "the good," value it, and act upon it. Piaget (1962) believed as people grow in character, they will develop an increasingly refined understanding of the core values, a deeper commitment to living according to those values, and a stronger tendency to behave in accordance with those values.

Schools committed to character education look at themselves through a moral lens and see how virtually everything that goes on in school affects the values and character of students. An intentional and proactive approach plans deliberate ways to develop character, rather than simply waiting for opportunities to occur. A comprehensive approach uses all aspects of schooling- the teacher's example, the discipline policy, the academic curriculum, the instructional process, the assessment of learning, the

management of the school environment, relationships with parents, and so on- as opportunities for character development (Lickona, 1998).

*Emotional Blues, Emotional Literacy*

Kilpatrick (1992) stated that for young people to lead fulfilling, productive lives, they must first experience the fullness of themselves. They need to know who they are, how they function, and how they relate to others. Young people also need to believe in themselves. Because of that lack of personal depth, young people are going down the wrong path.

In 1990, compared to previous two decades, the United States saw the highest juvenile arrest rate for violent crimes ever. Goleman (1995) found that teen arrests for forcible rape had doubled; teen murder rates quadrupled, mostly due to an increase in shootings. During those same two decades, the suicide rate for teenagers tripled, as did the number of children under fourteen who are murder victims.

More teenage girls are getting pregnant. As of 1993 the birthrate among girls ten to fourteen has risen steadily for five years in a row. Rates of venereal disease among teenagers have tripled over the last three decades. While these figures are discouraging, if the focus is on African-American youth, especially in the inner city, they are utterly bleak-all the rates are higher by far, sometimes doubled, sometimes tripled or higher. For example, heroin and cocaine use among white youth climbed about 300 percent over the two decades before the 1990's; for African-American youth it jumped to a staggering thirteen times the rate of twenty years before.

Goleman (1995) found that the most common cause of disability among teenagers is mental illness. Symptoms of depression, whether major or minor, affect up to one

third of teenagers; for girls, the incidence of depression doubles at puberty. The frequency of eating disorders in teenage girls has skyrocketed. Finally, unless things change, the long-term prospects for today's children marrying and having a fruitful, stable life together are growing more dismal with each generation .

Damon (1996) expressed that the reason young adults are depressed is because the educational system is trying to make them conform to a single standard, as if every human being is the same. Children are not the same physically, emotionally, or intellectually. Education must be designed so that it conforms to the needs of each student because it is an unrealistic dream to think that all children are the same. Damon (1996) stated that the educational system is a failure, and our society is in denial about it. Educators continue to be apathetic to their students' emotional needs.

Based on parents' and teachers' assessments, there is a steady worsening. No one problem stands out; all indicators simply creep steadily in the wrong direction. Children, on average, are doing more poorly in these specific ways: withdrawal or social problems, anxiousness and depression, attention or thinking problems, and delinquency and aggression. Goleman (1995) expressed that in the absence of good support systems, external stresses have become so great that even strong families are falling apart. The hectineness, instability, and inconsistency of daily family life are rampant in all segments on our society, including the well-educated and well-to-do. What is at stake is nothing less than the next generation, particularly males, who in growing up are especially vulnerable to such disruptive forces as the devastating effects of divorce, poverty, and unemployment. The status of American children and families is as desperate as ever. Millions of children are deprived of their competence and moral character.

Goleman (1995) expressed this is not just an American phenomenon but a global one, with worldwide competition to drive down labor costs creating economic forces that press on the family. These are the times of financially besieged families in which both parents work long hours, so that children are left to their own devices or the TV baby-sits; when more children than ever grow up in poverty; when the one-parent family is becoming ever more commonplace; when more infants and toddlers are left in daycare so poorly run that it amounts to countless small, nourishing exchanges between parent and child that build emotional competences.

Without that nurturing exchange between parents and child, many children become aggressive. The family life of such aggressive children typically includes parents who alternate neglect with harsh and capricious punishments, a pattern that makes the children a bit paranoid or combative. Not all angry children are bullies; some are withdrawn social outcasts who overreact to being teased or to what they perceive as slights or unfairness. The one perceptual flaw that unites such children is that they perceive slights where none were intended, imagining their peers to be more hostile toward them than they actually are. The typically see themselves are victims and can recite a list of instances when teachers blame them for doing something when in fact, they were innocent. Another trait of children is that once they are in the heat of anger, they can only think of one way to react which is lashing out (Elias, 1997 ).

The prototypical pathway to violence and criminality starts with children who are aggressive and hard to handle in first and second grade. Typically, from the earliest school years their poor impulse control also contributes to their being poor students, seen as, and seeing themselves are, "dumb". Children who on entering school already have

learned in their home a "coercive" style- that is, bullying- are also written off by their teachers, who have to spend too much time keeping the children in line. The defiance of classroom rules that comes naturally to these children means that they waste time that would otherwise by used in learning; their destined academic failure is usually obvious by about third grade (Goleman, 1995).

By fourth or fifth grade these kids-by now seen as bullies or just "difficult"- are rejected by their peers and unable to make friends easily, if at all, and have become academic failures. Feeling themselves friendless, they gravitate to other social outcasts. Between grade four and grade nine they commit themselves to their outcast group and a life of defying the law: truancy, drinking, and drugs (Elias, 1997).

Particularly in young people, problems in relationships are a trigger for depression. The difficulty is as often in children's relationships with their parents as it is with their peers. Depressed children and teenagers are frequently unable or unwilling to talk about their sadness. They seem unable to label their feelings accurately, showing instead a sullen irritability, impatience, crankiness, and anger- especially toward their parents. This, in turn, makes in harder for their parents to offer the emotional support and guidance the depressed child actually needs, setting in motion a downward spiral that typically ends in constant arguments and alienation (Goleman, 1995).

*School Safety and Parent Involvement*

Saunders (1999) emphasizes that schools are special places-bridges between the security of home and the harsh realities of life. Plans, dreams, and a love of learning are all nurtured there. No matter how ruthless the streets may be, or the depression that may occur as a result of low positive self-esteem, there should be no question a bout the safety

inside schools. Edwards (1986) stated that it is at the schools that young people with divergent backgrounds and experiences come together to develop personal competence, skills, and to compete for academic rewards, peer acceptance, and social status. Violence in this context disrupts the learning and skill acquisition process, seriously undermining the central mission of the school. The goal of raising young children is not just to keep them safe; it is to empower them so they can avoid the violence they will face throughout their lives. Peace-building in schools provides young people with knowledge about alternatives to violence so they can make choices that will contribute to creating a peaceful world.

Certain programs have been offered to teach depressed children that sadness, anxiety, and anger just do not descend on people. The point expressed is that one change the way he feels by the way he thinks. Because disputing the depressing thoughts vanquishes the gathering mood of gloom, it's an instant reinforcer that becomes a habit. Goleman (1995) expressed that learning emotional skills as the cusp of adolescence may be especially helpful. The children seem to be better at handling the routine teenage agonies of rejection. They seem to have learned this at a crucial window for risk of depression, just as they enter the teen years. And the lesson seems to persist and grow a bit stronger over the course of the year after they learn it, suggesting that kids are actually using it in their day-to-day lives.

Saunders (1999) found that when parents get involved, they look to school principals to prevent these unfathomable crimes. However, principals cannot solve every school climate problem. They need to the support of the parents. Most parents want to know how to be more active in their child's school and also how to keep their

children safe in school. Parents can do many things to help promote a safe, positive environment for their children: talk to their children, visit the school, volunteer for a parent organization committee, attend parent organization meetings to hear what's going on, talk to other parents, read local newspapers for information about the school, form a safety advocacy parent group that meets regularly to discuss and address problems as they come up, and introduce themselves to the principals, superintendent, and school board members. School safety, which is along the lines of promoting a positive student climate, can affect a child's emotions in many ways.

Goleman (1995) expressed that the causes of all such emotional problems of children are complex. No single kind of intervention, including on targeting emotions, can claim to do the whole job. But to the degree emotional deficits add to a child's risk, attention must be paid to the emotional remedies and not to the exclusion of other answers, but along with them. The new departure of bringing emotional literacy into schools makes emotions and social life themselves topics, rather than treating these most compelling facets of a child's day as irrelevant intrusions. Emotional learning becomes ingrained as experiences are repeated over and over (Elias, 1997). The brain reflects them as strengthened pathways, neural habits to apply in times of duress, frustration, and hurt. And while the everyday substance of emotional literacy classes May look mundane, the outcome-decent human beings-is more critical to our future than ever.

*Power of Positive Self-Esteem*

High school is the time when most students are developing their sense of identity. Students are finding out about themselves and figuring out what it means to become a responsible adult. High school teachers initiate new expectations in which the students

are responsible for getting work done, showing up for class, and asking questions when necessary (Weber, 2002). Prioritizing and responsibility are brought to a new level as students are in charge of their new world. It can be very overwhelming. In addition to all of this, students are trying to make friends and be "accepted" by peers. This is the time when self esteem is very much needed (Mitchell, 1985).

Self-esteem is important to everyone. We all need positive self-esteem to feel good about ourselves. Positive self-esteem if feeling good about who we are, liking ourselves regardless of our successes or failures. Positive self-esteem means that we don't judge ourselves based on what others think or say, or how much we accomplish. Positive self-esteem is being comfortable in one's own skin. It means knowing that one is a good person and feeling good about it (Loehrer, 1998).

Low self-esteem can affect your life as well. If one does not like himself, it is difficult to truly like others. School can also be affected. With low self-esteem, one may lack the motivation and confidence to succeed in school. One may hold back from finishing projects and even self-sabotage so that personal success cannot be achieved. When one feels bad about himself, he tends to feel as if nothing positive should happen in his life. He feels as if he doesn't deserve anything (Walberg & Wynne, 1989).

Some students who feel this way cover it up by drinking, using drugs, and being the life of the party. Others are angry, isolated, and can their mood out on others around them. The real truth is that these individuals are most likely very sad inside and need support and encouragement to change these destructive ways (Singh, 2001)

It's often been heard on the news recently that several children were excluded from school last year. The government responded by saying that the "lack of discipline"

is to blame. The assumption here is that children misbehave simply because of a lack of discipline. This is simply inaccurate due to the fact that all students would be excluded if the problems were just disciplinary. Instead of looking at how teachers can introduce more strict discipline in order to make unruly students conform to our ideal of how they should behave, teachers need to look at the difference between those who choose to learn and those who do not (Stallings, 1978).

The answer is self-esteem. Studies show that poor school achievement, truancy, crime, violence, alcohol and drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, suicide and susceptibility to peer pressure all have strong links to poor self-esteem. If certain areas such as the causes of aggression, bullying, withdrawal, failure, showing-off, etc., it will be discovered that lack of self-esteem is at the root of all of this anti-social behavior (Coladarci & Cobb, 1996).

Numerous studies have been done to show the positive effect that focusing on raising student's self-esteem has on reducing the problems previously mentioned. Teachers must nurture positive self-esteem. Positive communication to let the students know that they are special can be done in many ways: pep rallies, fun bulletin-boards, newsletters, special calendar, buttons, teachers becoming actively involved in school spirit events, etc. And yet, the majority of teachers and schools in this country still see raising student's self-esteem as secondary importance to getting good grades- not seeing the important link between the two. Schools are under enormous pressure these days to produce good academic results ( Purpel & Ryan, 1976).

Mitchell (1985) found that although teachers now face a great challenge of building the bridge between self-esteem and academic achievement, it is not the sole

responsibility of our schools to raise children's self-esteem. The main source of nurturing and development is parents. When children are born, they have total self-belief. They believe they are unique, and that they are the most valuable being in the world. Their world revolves around them. As they grow older and more aware of others, they have to come to terms with the fact that other people inhabit their world and have their own needs.

There are three principals of self-esteem that have been initiated in a South Carolina school system: a child's sense of self-worth is highly related to his achievement in school and other areas, positive self-esteem can be taught, and the responsibility for teaching it lies with both parents and educators, both at home and in school. These three principles are supported by reams of psychological and educational research. William Purkey, and educational psychologist at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, is perhaps the most lucid spokesman for the importance of self-esteem in the child's achievement. He stated that for generations, wise teachers have sensed the significant and positive relationship between a student's concept of himself and his performance in school. They believed that the students who feel good about themselves and their abilities are the ones who are most likely to succeed in school (Mitchell, 1985).

The principles of building self-esteem can be of enormous value to the millions of parents who find themselves in frustrating situations. Responsible parents see themselves as partners with the school in producing an effective future adult, and the best job is obviously done when the child is getting the same signals, living in the same emotional climate, seeing displayed the same attitude, both at home and in school.

To do the job thoroughly, then, we must not only develop positive schools but positive homes as well. The self-esteem training in which the teacher engages must be matched at home by positive parenting- a conscious, ongoing attempt by parents to deal with a child in a way that builds his sense of self-worth (Ryan, 1989).

Mitchell (1985) believes that self-esteem is learned by the means of three experiences: conditioning, modeling, and positive reinforcement. An effective home, like a positive home, must be arranged so that all three of these constantly occurring experiences contribute to the child's positive feelings about himself rather than to his negative feelings about himself. Every child is being shaped every day by conditioning, modeling, and reinforcement. The question is not whether these three experiences will exist in his environment, but whether they will be such a nature as to produce high self-esteem.

Repetition is the key to conditioning. What one hears and sees repeatedly, the concept of the mind is the same. If the mind is bombarded often enough with a message, it is eventually accepted. If students are constantly reminded that they are people of worth and value, they will not be able to escape those positive message-builders.

Modeling is another powerful learning tool that operates in the development of a positive self-image. The power of modeling is especially important in very young people. One child psychologist, Albert Bandura, is an impressive recent study, has shown that children gradually come to exhibit the characteristics even of television characters on programs they watch frequently. They model particular mannerisms and attitudes they see on the screen; in addition, they most often model themselves after those characters that they admire and perceive as being most like themselves.

Imitation is a conscious process by which a person intentionally copies another person's behavior. Modeling, on the other hand, takes place unconsciously. It is the process in which one individual gradually takes on the characteristics of someone else, especially someone whom he likes or admires. Modeling is one of the most common types of learning among young children; much of the growing child's everyday learning occurs as he quite naturally picks up the behavior of an adult.

So many of our attitudes, feelings, and ways of looking at things are learned this way, and the process occurs so naturally and automatically that many psychologists believe that modeling is even more important than genetics in explaining why people within the same families are so similar to one another (Reimer & Hersh, 1983).

Mitchell (1985) stated that the final way that self-esteem is learned is through positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement is simply another way of describing an award. People who tend to get good things for doing something tend to do it more often. Positive reinforcement takes many forms: a smile, an approving nod or pat on the back, emphasis on correct answers rather than wrong ones, display of projects well done, notes of encouragement well done, letters sent home to parents recommending a child's effort and success, etc. The only limit to the types of positive reinforcement is the imagination of the parent or teacher.

Metcalf (1971) states that research done on the effects on self-esteem on educational level has shown that those with a higher level of self-concept tend to do better in school and receive more education. Maple Valley High School staff has a full-blown mission statement which revolves around positive self-esteem. They believe building positive self-esteem within the school is the key behind academic success.

They believe that positive self-esteem in students provides the foundation for becoming productive citizens who take pride in themselves, their community, and the work around them.

The staff works to reverse that process by creating a climate of mutual respect, tolerance, and individual responsibility. The staff accepts students for who they are as they come into a new school setting. Past behaviors and experiences with school are not important. Students are invited to let go of attitudes and behaviors that may have kept them from being successful. Maple Valley High School's philosophy is to accept the student where they are today and move ahead. They teach students to be themselves, take control, be good to themselves, get involved, become self-reliant, and to set goals.

*Asset Building*

In the fourth century B.C., the philosopher Menander wrote that health and intellect are two blessings of life. Today, we understand the compelling connection the ancients could only intuit between healthy bodies and healthy minds. Blue-ribbon groups and commissions such as the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, Congress's Office of Technology Assessment, and the National Education Goals Panel have detailed the connection between health and student academic success. No educator would dispute the common-sense notion, backed up by reams of research, that healthy children and youth attend school more, are more interested in their schoolwork, and achieve at higher levels than their less-healthy peers (Ginsburg & Hanson, 1986).

But what do us as educators focus on when it comes to students' health? We concentrate on alcohol and other drug abuse prevention, largely because of the funding that schools receive from the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities program and

because of public opinion polls that consistently rank drug abuse near the top of local

school programs (Lemming, 1993). We also focus on violence, in part because of the

school shootings at schools in Colorado, Oregon, Kentucky, Arkansas, and Mississippi.

Both of those concerns are vitally important, of course, but beyond the sense that

survival has to come before self-actualization. There are other dimensions of student and

school health that are equally compelling and yet have commanded far less attention. For

example, the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health reported that school

connectedness-students' sense of being treated fairly at school, feeling close to people at

school, and feeling as if they are part of their school protected them from a range of

health risks such as depression, loneliness, substance use, violence, and sexual

intercourse (Brown, 1998). In general, school connectedness was a more reliable

predictor of student health than were average daily school attendance, dropout rates,

whether the school was public or parochial, or average classroom size, among other

school characteristics (Scales, 2000).

Our nation is embroiled in a contentious debate about education. On one side,

people contend that schools provide too many social service "frills" and need to get "back

to the basics" of academics. Others fear that schools are doing too little to overcome the

environmental challenges that keep many youth from doing well academically. The

debate goes to the heart of education. What are schools expected to do? Successful

schools reflect what research says: Young people need both challenging content and

emotionally and socially supportive school environments to achieve academically. They

are not competing priorities, but reinforcing aspects of total student development (Scales,

1999).

Research by Search Institute brings clarity and practicality to this concept. The Search Institute, a private, not-for-profit organization based in Minneapolis that conducts research on children, youth, and families, has found much the same results in its research over the last decade, collectively involving more that one million six through twelfth graders in more than 1,000 U.S. communities. The source of this data is the institute's survey of nearly 100,000 students from 213 U.S. communities during the 1996-97 school years. Through that work, the institute has identified forty specific "developmental assets."

Developmental assets help children and youth not only survive, but thrive and move closer to achieving their full human potential (Scales, 2000). Some of the forty assets reflect the relationship and opportunities that are provided to young people- a positive school climate, parental involvement in schooling, high expectations from parents and teachers, and participation in co-curricular activities. Other assets measure the self-perceptions, values, and skills that young people develop to guide themselves- for example, achievement motivation, behavioral restraint, good planning and decision-making skills, and skills to resist pressure (Scales, 2000).

The assets focus on the things young people need to grow-up healthy, principled, and caring: developmental assets. The Search Institute identifies two categories of assets: internal and external. Internal assets include "commitments, values, and competencies that help and individual thrive competently and responsibly when on one's own. External assets include issues of support, control, and structured time use. The assets fit into six broad categories: support, boundaries, structured time use, educational commitment, positive values, and social competencies (Scales, 1996).

The more of these assets youth experience, the more likely they are to make positive choices and avoid unhealthy behaviors. The key to asset building is a shift in thinking- a shift toward promoting the positive, a shift away from a problem-solving approach in education (Scales & Taccogna, 2001).

Asset building provides a framework for thinking about a school's mission that isn't confined to a set of rules, procedures, or formulas. It gives an opportunity to re-examine every aspect of school life. Search Institute has identified ten strategies to consider in integrating asset building into a schools mission: build a shared vision and commitment, assess current needs, structures, and resources; create a positive, safe school climate; establish and enforce consistent boundaries; involve students in structure activities; promote education commitment; articulate and nurture positive, shared values; develop social competencies; engage parents in their child's learning; and build bridges with the community (Roehlkepartain, 1992).

Giving options and affirming different types of participation can open doors to involvement for parents who may not fit the traditional involvement structures (Search Institute, 1997). Researchers at Johns Hopkins have identified five types of family-community-school partnerships, which provide a helpful framework for exploring options: first, schools helping families with their basic responsibilities of health and safety, parenting, and providing a learning-rich environment at home; second, school-home communication that keeps families informed about school programs and student progress with letters, phone calls, memos, report cards, conferences, and other methods; third, families help schools through volunteer activities in the classroom and elsewhere in the school and also through their support for school activities; fourth, involvement in

governance, decision-making, and advocacy through parent associations, advisory committees, advocacy groups, and school improvements; and fifth, create relationships-parents are more likely to connect with schools when they have personal relationships with staff and faculty. Building ongoing relationships between one teacher and a family, seeking and supporting parental values and preferences in the school, and making schools more "family friendly" can all help create an atmosphere in which parents are more comfortable relating to school and teachers (Edwards, 1986)

There are some assets that educators cannot do much about. Thankfully, there are specific actions that educators can take in school organization and structure, curriculum and instruction, co-curricular programs, support services, and community partnerships to build on certain assets such as school engagement, achievement motivation, positive peer influence, time in co-curricular programs, time spent on homework, peaceful conflict resolution, restraint, other adult relationships, resistant skills, cultural competence, planning and decision-making skills, and reading for pleasure (Scales, 2000). The key is for parents, educators, youth workers, and others in the community to all see themselves as members of the team that is working together to raise healthy, competent young people. Creating a sense of teamwork, mutual respect, and shared concern is the key to creating healthy family-school partnerships. Positive relationships are key to changing troubled realities (Sergiovanni, 1994).

*Positive Adult Influences*

Despite conventional wisdom, most teenagers want and need adults in their lives. And though they may be embarrassed to hug Dad in front of their friends, most young people long for supportive relationships with adults. A study of 5,000 fourth

through twelfth graders sponsored by the Girl Scouts found that young people are most likely to turn to their parents for advice. Next came relatives and adults with whom young people have regular contact (Scales, 1996).

Search Institute research supports this finding, noting that young people most often turn to adults when facing major life choices. Relations with adults have many positive benefits for teenagers themselves: youth who have access to and conversation with caring adults are less likely to engage in at-risk behaviors, teenagers who have good relationships are more likely to serve others, and many young people turn to adults for advice about sexuality or drugs (Scales, 2000).

Adult relationships help kids feel like "I matter" and that they can make a difference. Young people who have challenging adults in their lives tend to perform better in school and have stronger reasoning abilities. This research finding speaks to the power of teaching and tutoring programs in which professionals and other adults work with at-risk young people to cultivate learning skills and motivations (Roehlkepartain, 1992).

The best way to predict a student's tendency toward positive or negative behavior is to look at important adults in that student's life. Students learn to think about themselves not just from what adults tell them about themselves but from watching adults express their own positive or negative feelings of self-worth. Parents with high self-esteem tend to have children with high self-esteem.

Parents or teachers can lecture children endlessly about the need to have self-confidence, but if those adults themselves do not exhibit a positive self-concept, the words are largely wasted. An aphorism is in child psychology that states, "Attitudes are

caught, not taught." A positive approach to life is best communicated to the child by exhibiting it, not by lecturing about it.

*School Climate*

A healthy school climate contributes to effective teaching and learning. School climate is an ever changing factor in the lives of people who work and learn in schools. Much like the air we breathe, school climate is ignored until it becomes foul. School climate can be a positive influence on the health of the learning environment or a significant barrier to learning (Singh, 2001). Thus, feedback about school climate can play an important role in school reform and improvement efforts. Without continual and varied sources of feedback, reforms may lose a sense of direction and suffer from a lack of knowledge about school. Measuring the influence of change-directed activities on the climate in which teaching and learning occur should be a key factor in improving and sustaining educational experience (Freiberg, 1998).

The elements that make up school climate are complex, ranging from the quality of interactions in the teachers' lounge to the noise levels in the hallway and cafeterias, from the physical structure of the building to the physical comfort levels (involving such factors as heating, cooling, and lighting) of the individuals and how safe they feel. No single factor determines a school's climate. However, the interaction of various school and classroom factors can create a fabric of support that enables all members of the school community to teach and learn at optimum levels. Further, making even small changes in schools and classrooms can lead to significant improvements in climate (Freiberg, 1998).

Positive school climate equals positive children's behavior. The social-emotional climate of the effective schools has a profound effect on the school. Schools are encouraging, welcoming, and supporting places. Interactions among students and between students and teachers are encouraged. Not only do teachers make themselves available to students, they engage in conversations. Teachers are present in the school life of students. Students are encouraged when teachers see them perform at events outside of school. An attitude of caring in the school is almost palpable. When someone returns from a sick day, people make an effort to ask how he or she is doing. The schools are secure places. One of the most evident qualities of a social-emotional environment is that the students feel safe in the school from physical harm or psychological abuse (Johnston, 2000).

When a teacher focuses on creating a caring community in the classroom, he or she is not just providing the optimal context for character development. The processes involved in creating a caring community requires far more than the teacher being fair and caring; it requires teaching the children the skills and attitudes they need to be fair and caring. Creating caring communities in schools and classrooms is neither automatic nor easy, but is well worth the effort.

Students acquire the values, sensitivities, motives, and skills that are central to good character (Hayes & Hagedorn, 2000). For example, children who describe their schools and classrooms are caring communities show greater empathy towards other's feelings, greater concern for others, greater enjoyment in helping other's learn, stronger motivation to be kind and helpful to others, more frequent helpful behavior –with no

promise of personal reward, greater ability to resolve conflicts fairly and without force, and fewer acts of delinquent behavior (Watson, 1998).

People of good character care about others as well as themselves, are aware of the feelings and needs of others, understand the moral implications of their actions, possess the self-control and skills to act in ways that benefit others, and do so out of concern for others and the desire to behave in fair, kind, responsible, and honest ways. People of good character do not harm or take advantage of others, are honest with others, offer help when it is needed and possible (Beal, 2001). And when people of good character do harm others, they try to repair or make-up for any damage or distress they may have caused.

To develop the kind of good character described above, children must feel connected to those who model and teach such values. Children will feel connected to their teacher and eventually to their classmates if they find them nurturing and sensitive to their needs. A caring learning community also helps meet children's need to feel a sense of belonging, a sense of control over their environment, and a sense of competence-fundamental human needs (Bartz & Matthews, 2001).

Giving students a "say" in shaping the life of their classroom and school gives them a sense of control over their environment, and offering opportunities to acquire valued skills and important knowledge supports their quest for competence (Brown, 1998). Finally, in an environment in which students feel cared for and are treated with fairness and kindness by both teachers and classmates, children learn the logic of reciprocity and develop the desire to treat others as they are being treated (Watson, 1998).

Classroom life offers constant opportunities for learning and practicing lifelong habits of good character. For example, in the classroom students can learn such skills as how to resolve conflicts through fair reasoning rather than force. Being part of a caring classroom community powerfully affects children's character development in two ways: children experience and identify with values and goals of such a community; and, in working to create the community; the teacher helps students acquire the judgment, sensitivity, self-control, and skills to be able to treat others (Watson, 1998).

When time is used well in schools, not only does the climate of the school improve, but the opportunity for learning increases. Along the lines of school climate in general, one needs to also be aware of a scheduling advantage towards promoting a favorable classroom climate. Block scheduling not only improves school climate, but it also increases opportunities for learning and levels of achievement. Recent studies show that teachers and administrators are generally satisfied with the block schedule because it seems to enhance indicators of positive school climate. Longer blocks of time enable teachers to conduct activities more efficiently, create better student relationships, pinpoint individual student needs more accurately, and create a positive morale in the classroom (Wiley, 1997).

The block scheduling that is increasingly used in schools supports small learning communities, interdisciplinary teaming, and career-centered curricula because it enables teams to adjust schedules. Recent studies have found that students in block-scheduled schools score higher on standardized subject tests than comparable students in non-block-scheduled schools. Block schedules also help increase on-time graduation rates, college

attendance, and improved test scores. It also contributes to reductions in discipline referrals and class tardiness (Coladarci, 1996).

Principals have noted a more relaxed environment for teachers and students and that block scheduling cut down on unsupervised movement within the school. They noted a decline in a discipline referrals to the administrative offices. Teachers indicated that they witnessed fewer fights. Administrators suggested that block scheduling improved teacher morale and had a positive impact on teacher attendance. One of the greatest assets of block scheduling is the flexibility to use time to meet the needs of at-risk students. It's a very positive schedule when all students can be reached (Sergiovanni, 1994).

Researchers have also noted that student attitudes and behaviors are more positive in smaller schools, with minority and low socioeconomic status students most profoundly affected. Multiple studies have associated small schools with students' positive attitudes toward school, as well as with lower incidences of negative social behaviors such as truancy, classroom disruption, vandalism, aggressive behavior, theft, substance abuse, and gang participation (Stevens, 1999). Smaller schools support academic achievement. Students' academic achievement in small schools is equal to or higher than their achievement in larger schools. Students do better on measures such as school grades, test scores, honor roll membership, subject-area achievement, and higher-order thinking skills assessments (Coladarci & Cobb, 1996).

According to Mahoney (2001), extracurricular participation rates are higher in smaller schools. This is doubly significant because extracurricular participation is associated with other desirable outcomes, such as positive attitudes and positive social

behavior. Students in small schools generally enjoy participating in extracurricular activities more than students in large schools because their participation is valued more when there is a smaller pool of potential participants.

Small schools foster a sense of belonging and minimize student alienation. This is especially important because students who feel alienated from their school tend to lack confidence, self-esteem, and responsibility for self-direction. Alienated students also participate less in extracurricular activities (Mahoney, 2001).

Stevens (1999) believes that smaller learning communities benefit students, teachers, and parents by making effective communication easier. Opportunities for collaboration and encouraging meaningful relationships between students and adults are emphasized. Research confirms that smaller schools are more productive and safer because they can address students' needs more personally, reducing feelings of alienation, and connecting students with caring adults. All of these conditions create an environment that contributes to positive student outcomes.

Attendance is higher and dropout rates lower in smaller schools. Attendance also improves for individual students who transfer from a large to smaller schools. Small schools have a relatively greater effect on the attendance of minority and low socioeconomic status and lower dropout rates and higher graduation rates than large schools.

Smaller schools provide challenging curricula. The increased variety of courses that larger schools can support tends to include a broader range of introductory courses in non-core areas rather than higher-level courses in, for example, math or foreign

languages. Also, only a small percentage of students take advantage of the extra courses in large schools (Mahoney, 2001).

*Social and Emotional Education*

In recent years, character education has received a great deal of attention including mention in President Clinton's 1997 State of the Union address. The best character education and social and emotional education programs share many overlapping goals. The Character Education Partnership in Alexandria, Virginia, defines character education as "the long term process of helping young people develop good character, i.e., knowing, caring about, and acting upon core ethical values such as fairness, compassion, responsibility, and respect for self and others (Elias, 1997).

Whereas many character education programs promote a set of values, social and emotional education efforts typically have a brooder focus. They place more emphasis on active learning techniques, the generalization of skills across settings, and the development of social decision-making and problem-solving skills that can be applied in many situations. Moreover, social and emotional education is targeted to help students develop the attitudes, behaviors, and cognitions to become healthy and competent overall- socially, emotionally, academically, and physically- because of the close relationships of these domains (Elias, 1997).

Both character education and social and emotional education aspire to teach our students to be good citizens with positive values and to interact effectively and behave constructively. The social and emotional education of our children may be provided through a variety of diverse efforts such as classroom instruction, extracurricular

activities, a supportive school climate, and involvement in community service (Elias, 1997).

Research has indicated that it is not possible to attain true academic and personal success without addressing social and emotional learning skills. Studies of effective middle schools have shown that the common denominator among different types of schools reporting academic success is that they have a systematic process for promoting children's social emotional learning. There are school wide mentoring programs, group guidance and advisory periods, creative modifications of traditional discipline procedures, and structured classroom time devoted to social and emotional skill building, group problem solving, and team building (National School Board Association, 1987). Of course they have sound academic programs and competent teachers and administrators, but other schools have those features as well. It is the SEL component that distinguishes the effective schools (Elias, 1997).

The importance of social emotional learning for successful academic learning is further strengthened by new insights form the field of neuropsychological. Many elements of learning are relational (or, based on relationships), and social and emotional skills are essential for the successful development of thinking and learning activities that are traditionally considered cognitive (Elias, 1997). Processes we had considered pure "thinking" are now seen as phenomena in which the cognitive and emotional aspects work synergistically.

Brain studies show, for example, that memory is coded to specific events and linked to social and emotional situations, and that the latter are integral parts of larger units of memory that make up what we learn and retain, including what takes place in the

classroom. Under conditions of real or imagined threat or high anxiety, there is a loss of focus on the learning process and a reduction in task focus and flexible problem solving. It is as if the thinking brain is taken over (or hijacked) by the older limbic brain. Other emotion-related factors can be similarity distracting (Kohlberg, 1984).

The basic skills of social emotional learn are for students to be able to take full advantage of their biological equipment and social legacy and heritage. As schools provide the conditions that allow even the students most at risk of failure to become engaged in the learning process, new possibilities open up and new life trajectories become available to students. Effectively promoting social and emotional competence is the key to helping young people become more resilient to the lure of drugs, teen pregnancy, violent gangs, truancy, and dropping out of school (Elias, 1997).

To anyone who has been around adolescents, it is clear that they are generally more focused on themselves, their peers, and their outside lives than they are on the school curriculum. Their strong feelings compete with the teacher for their attention and more often than not, the feelings win. But when teachers allow those feelings to take a constructive place in the classroom and then use the concerns of the students as a bridge to academic assignments, they are providing the "missing piece" to students' learning. They are integrating social and emotional needs with academics (Kohlberg, 1984). This process allows students to personalize and internalize their learning in ways that high school teachers are most accustomed to seeing from students taking electives, from "gifted and talented" students, or from those who are in an academic or vocational track to which they feel genuine commitment (Elias, 1997).

Most people would agree that social and academic success and a sense of personal well-being and efficacy that enable students to participate in school, home, family, workplace, and community life with skill, thoughtfulness, and integrity are high on the list of what we want students to achieve (Kagan, 1981). There are certain tasks that students need to master along the way, certain competencies needed to accomplish those tasks, and certain values and attitudes they need to develop. Knowledge, skills, values, or attitudes by themselves are insufficient; they must all work together, be nurtured and encouraged, and occur within a supportive climate (Elias, 1997).

In the example above, the teacher is creating a receptive climate for learning that reflects the developmental stages of high school students. Such a climate is urgently needed in the schools. Media influences, a powerful consumer culture, and household pressures compete with our hope that family life will inculcate in children a love of learning and respect for academic routines, traditions, and requirements. The teacher in our example was tired of swimming upstream, of fighting the forces of development within the students. By going with the flow of social and emotional development, educators have found that academics as well as interpersonal success is enhanced (Elias, 1997).

*Summary of the Literature Review*

In conclusion, the teacher, or the parent, who takes the time to teach a child that he is a somebody, and not a nobody, will ultimately need to spend less time teaching that same child how to conjugate a French verb. By building the child's self-esteem, we create a more efficient learning machine, and all the skills we wish to teach him will then come more easily.

We cannot continue to design programs on instruction and impose them upon our children as if their self-concepts had little bearing on their success or failure as students and human beings. Art Combs, professor emeritus at the University of Florida, and a distinguished educator, once commented, "For us to say, ' I know self-concept is important, but I don't have time to deal with that in my classroom,' is about as stupid as saying, 'I know my car needs a carburetor, but I'm going to run mine without one.' Attitude is an inseparable part of the learning process, and it can be taught as surely as mathematics and history.

It makes good practical sense to spend time on the child's attitude for two reasons: first, as an end in itself, to make a happier child, and second, because the self-confident child will learn everything else more readily. When we take the time to teach kids to like themselves, we get the best of both worlds.

Positive self-concepts are important not only in the classroom but in the many social skills that the child must master to function well. Discipline in both school and at home is an area directly affected by the child's sense of self-worth.

CHAPTER THREE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*Summary*

Character education is about celebrating what's right with young people while enabling them to develop knowledge and life skills for enhancing ethical and responsible behavior. Lickona (1998) stated that good character has three interrelated parts- moral knowing, moral feeling and moral behavior. Schools, in conjunction with the home, are essential partners in raising moral human beings. Positive self-esteem and academic success are built upon integrating values into the curriculum, teaching respect and responsibility, creating a moral community in the classroom, and conducting moral discussions and teaching children to solve conflicts. Stallings (1978) expressed that teachers must be as responsible for children under their care as are the best parents. Teachers must strive for practical wisdom- knowing what to do and when.

*Conclusions*

Today, the vast majority of Americans share a respect of fundamental traits of character: honesty, compassion, justice, courage, perseverance. Yet, in today's world, all children face great uncertainties in a complex and sometimes troubled society. These traits are not always readily apparent and easy to grasp or learn. Therefore, our challenge is to provide youth with the self-esteem, stamina, and support they need to survive, be successful, and develop into strong, competent, caring, and responsible citizens.

Giving life meaning, purpose, and a future is the collective message educators are sharing with youth in a curriculum that stresses togetherness. Embedded in character education are guidelines for successful living. The language of respect and responsibility

navigates the journey to ethnical fitness. Students explore education as life and life as learning positive approaches for setting and achieving goals. Students learn that living each day to its fullest means more than waiting for moments here and there. Character education creates positive self-esteem by presenting life with context, inviting students to listen, share, explore, and reflect. Cultivating knowledge for purposeful living, students learn through literature, art, humanities and throughout the existing school curriculum benefits and consequences of behavior. They learn the power of choice. They learn to appreciate the qualities of being human and to share their appreciation at home, in school, and in the community.

Achieving academic success and positive self-esteem through character education is learning that reaches far beyond just basic objectives. Character education touches the hearts, minds, and lives of students in far-reaching ways that can transform a future of failure to a life of success. Understanding that some goals cannot be fully measured during our tenure as educators, however, we continue to plant seeds of integrity, honesty, respect, self-discipline, and responsibility. Teachers and parents work together as collaborators in creation, knowing that there will be reciprocal return on our investment in current students, future generations, and society.

Through character education we teach students a variety of life-long lessons: to develop good self-esteem as a product of responsible behavior, assume responsibility for their actions, know right from wrong, respect the rights of others, maximize their use of time and talents, work cooperatively with others, develop decision-making and problem-solving skills, use self-discipline to achieve goals, and resist negative peer pressure.

Dragan (2001) expressed that there needs to be a renewed emphasis on the education of character. We need to focus on the development of good people are well as good learners. He stated that the dangerous pattern of violence and low self-esteem occurs because good people do bad things because they lack the information and understanding that lead to empathy. It's possible that students would behave like good people if they knew that hundreds of students commit suicide each year because of harassment. Maybe fewer students would be less tempted to act out their frustrations in negative ways if they were shown how to be kinder to each other.

Schooling, as we know it today, with its emphasis on competition, academics, and "being on top" often does nothing to promote generosity or a commitment to the welfare of others. To the contrary, students are graduating thinking that being smart means looking out for themselves. Dragan (2001) expressed that many factors contributed to the atrocity in Columbine High School and other schools around the country. One is the fascination with violent media. Another is easy access to weapons. A third is *flawed character*. It is unlikely that by itself, no element will turn a brooding student into a killing machine. But taken together, all three elements spell trouble.

No longer can teasing and harassment be thought of as "kids being kids." In today's society, such taunting can create a hostile environment causing some students to feel hatred and plot revenge. If schools fail to develop and implement policies reasonably designed to bring incidents for harassment to the attention of appropriate officials, they are missing opportunities to create safer learning environments and shape better people. Violence in schools cannot be totally prevented due to character issues, but a proactive intervention process can help curtail such violence. By intervening and

creating a positive learning environment, students will improve their self-esteem, learning will take place, and safer schools will occur.

*Recommendations*

These recommendations are made to increase community awareness of the goals of the educators to help create a more positive environment through creating safe schools. It is hoped that these recommendations may assist school administrations to provide staff with ways to effectively control a violent school setting. Ultimately, the goal of these recommendations is to improve the school climate and create a positive learning environment. By creating a safer environment and enforcing positive self-esteem through character education, students will learn ways to better deal with violence.

*Administrators and School Board Members*

The support of the administration helps form the building blocks of promoting a safe, positive environment for students and staff. Without guidance and direction from the administration, teachers are left without blanket policies. The following list of recommendations serves to assist school districts and the staff through the process of promoting a positive, safe environment. Written, formal school policies help prevent discrimination, harassment and verbal abuse of students. Administrators and board members should address the policies that deal with anti-discrimination, equal access to education and school activities, and multi-culturism.

*Teachers, Administrators, Counselors, and Students in Violence Prevention*

To reduce incidents of harassment and violence, teachers, administrators, school counselors, and students must be trained. To become certified or re-certified, teachers, counselors and administrators should be required to receive training in the following areas:

1) Violence prevention- how to intervene when students who are different are harassed or threatened by other students.

2) Crisis Intervention- how to respond to students who seek help because of isolation or emotional and physical problems.

3) Counseling referrals- how to make appropriate referrals for students to counselors, including family counselors and youth service agencies.

4) Diversity workshops- how to meet the needs of students who are different, isolated or have a history of being harassed.

*Develop School-based, Peer Support Groups for Students*

Students are best supported by other students. Isolation and loneliness can lead to suicide attempts, running away, dropping out and a host of behavioral problems. Weekly support groups help to counter isolation and give an ongoing voice to young people who need to talk about their feelings and self-image. The following should be considered when starting any support group:

1) Groups should be open to all students.

2) A faculty advisor trained in the needs of troubled-students must be assigned to attend each meeting, listen to students, and communicate their needs to the administration.

3) The existence of peer support groups should be widely publicized within the school to all students, faculty and parents.

4) Faculty advisors and their peer groups should work with school counselors, who aren't specially trained to help the untrained counselor gain experience to reach out to students who are becoming isolated.

*Diversity Issues- Connection with Isolated Students*

The classroom is at the heart of the school experience. Discussion of student issues and recognition of the contribution that all students can make to the school community should be integrated into all subject areas and departments in an age-appropriate fashion:

1) Diversity programs which addresses a variety of prejudices such as those against race, sex, and age.

2) Academic departments should research ways to include the experiences and contributions of all types of individuals as they pertain to their disciplines.

3) Schools should identify students who aren't in a minority group but are still isolated and develop programs of inclusion.

*Parents Involvement in School Safety*

It is paramount that parents get involved with school safety. Parents obviously play an important role in their child's development. Their connection with the school and school officials is crucial in focusing on character and helping maintain a safe and positive environment. Some basic ways for parents to get involved in school safety is as follows:

1) Talk to your children.

2) Visit the school.

3) Attend parent organization meetings to hear what's going on.

4) Talk to other parents.

5) Listen to your children.

6) Introduce yourself to school officials.

7) Be realistic about the pressures your children are facing.

8) Be an active community member.

9) Look at the children while they are talking.

10) Really listen with your heart.

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