

Meeting Student Needs:

What must students' develop in order to be a positive contributor in the world?

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What must students' develop in order to be a positive contributor in the world?

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Abstract

This thesis is centered on the following question. "In your opinion, what must students' develop in order to be a positive contributor in the world?" The research gathered information from three different groups of people through the stated question. The first participants were taken from a "convenience sample" gathered from a webmail base and asked via the email. The participants in the second group were collected from a random sample of one hundred Sherman County residents. The teachers at Sherman Elementary School comprised the third and final group for this project. Six teachers participated in this project and represented the following grades; kindergarten, first, second, third, fifth and Structured Learning. Data was gathered by the participants in the first and second group through a survey, which was comprised from the thesis question. After the calculations, categorizing, and analyses were made it was discovered that three main themes developed. These themes, listed in order of priority, were; positive sense of self, activity in the community, and communication skills. Teachers from Sherman Elementary School were then asked to analyze current curriculum and teaching practices where these traits were represented. Through the educators responses it was found that positive sense of self and communication skills were being instructed at school. The area for improvement was activity within the community. A recommendation for future research focuses on the question, how can teachers determine the success of school wide character and citizenship education programs in the long term?

Section I: Introduction

My desire to be an educator has been an ongoing process for almost a decade. This process began in the state of New Jersey and has continued to develop and mature over the years. As an undergraduate student my focus was on the completion of various courses, with no real aspirations, other than to graduate. The early stages of my post-graduate career came as a substitute teacher. It was during this stage that my thoughts and ideas extended beyond immediate circumstance and dwelled into future queries. These queries have been based on the premise that education is in the need of reform. The reform that I was seeking became more apparent through teaching experiences and graduate course work.

It was during a reading research course that the heart of my thesis inquiry was designed and created. The initial question that I posed was, "How is school perceived in the eyes of educators, parents, and students?" The purpose in this inquiry was to see how school was understood within our society. As a teacher there are times that I feel that parents merely look at school as a daycare system. There also seems to be a lack of interest within our country for education. I say this for the reason that athletes and entertainers are paid millions while those who educate them are given a minimal wage. I believe that we compensate what we value. This view is more of an extreme perspective, but it was the beginning of what my thesis is today.

The transformation that has occurred since this initial question has been a focus on the achievement of students in the long term. My thesis is centered on this question, "In your opinion, what must students' develop in order to be a positive contributor in the world?" My research gathered information from three different groups of people through a similar question. I asked these groups their views on what attribute(s) students need to develop in order to contribute to society. Through the responses of these three various groups, this broad question

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was narrowed to the point of being applicable to Sherman Elementary School curriculum. The purpose of this research is to take real views of education and compare that to what is actually being taught, or not, within Sherman Elementary School.

Overall my desire was to find out how to better our educational system. I realize that this is a lofty goal, but I also see a need for change and the time has been long overdue. As an educator I do not want our students entering the world unprepared. This is not to say that school is the only form of education that our students receive, or the only area where reform is needed. However, school can be the catalyst where change can ripple into other aspects of student life and create an atmosphere for real growth.

The literature review that follows examined the ways in which schools have worked to implement citizenship and character education programs, which assists in preparing students to be better prepared for life during and after school.

Section II: Literature Review

Meeting Student Needs: What Must They Develop in Order to Contribute to a Global Society?

The inquiry that preceded this paper asked what students must develop in order to be a positive contributor in the world. Much has been looked at in regards to promoting qualities and characteristics in students for the betterment of society. Although the question is broad, these views have been localized to two main concepts: citizenship education and character education. Teachings in these topics can be broken down into many subcategories and principles. Among them are service, responsibility, leadership, decision making, critical thinking, and communication skills, to name a few. These principles can be displayed and exemplified throughout communities, homes and schools. Educators, parents, family members and citizens play a vital role throughout the world.

The terms and principles mentioned above may be adaptable to any location. Firmin and Wilhelm (2008) echoed this concept as they shared the need for values taught within character education to be defined by the "local communities" (p. 184). However, these small locations in our society have become globally linked through internet, telecommunications, and travel. These various forms of media have shrunk our world to the push of a button.

This section will share insights and perspectives that can be readily applied throughout communities. It will explore and define the participatory roles of communities, parents and educators within citizenship and character education. As parents, educators and citizens we share in this responsibility of building a better future.

Citizenship Education Defined

In order to understand citizenship education, one must understand citizenship. Brewer (2006) defined citizenship as the "roles that the citizen plays within the norms, rules, and laws"

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(p. 3). Brewer suggested a place to begin this study when he stated, "social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world" (p. 1).

In the classroom is one place that citizenship education begins. Winton (2007) stated, "the very nature of citizenship education, with its goal of creating citizens, is concerned with producing and encouraging certain attitudes, values, and behaviors" (p. 4). These principles, and citizenship education, have been long enduring and were addressed in an article dated back to 1976. Anderson, Remy, and Snyder (1976) discussed the need to "revitalize civic teaching" (p. 31) within the educational system. This would be accomplished by giving students experiences and opportunities to learn, by doing, what it meant to be a citizen (Anderson, Remy, & Snyder 1976). Becoming a citizen was displayed in the program, "Citizenship Decision Making" (p. 33), created at Ohio State University. This program was comprised of mini-lessons to be supplemented within upper elementary grades. Anderson et al. (1976) believed that the younger years of education were a critical period in fostering and developing "citizen responsibility" (p. 31).

Johnson and Vanneman (2001) defined citizenship through a series of questions, which were administered to a group of fourth grade students. These questions spanned from being able to identify a picture of the Statue of Liberty to being able to answer facts in regard to taxes. Students were also assessed on knowledge of the law, democratic governance, and "civic responsibility" (p. 2). These assessments were centered on the query of "how well American youth are being prepared to meet their citizenship responsibilities" (p. 1).

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Character Education Defined

Firmin and Wilhelm (2008) state that "Character development, at least at the conceptual level, is at the heart of all education" (182). They defined character as "developing in students a desire for good..."(p. 182). Revell (2002) discussed character education with the intent of changing "values or behaviour of children" (p. 421). Character education, formerly defined, has had implications within schools and communities for some time. Alegra and Sink (2002) shared that early practice of character education, or virtue, had been practiced in the days of "Jesus, Confucius, Plato, or Aristotle" (p. 162). The teaching of character traveled across the ocean and landed with our nation's founding fathers (Alegra & Sink, 2002). Character education continues today in a variety of methods and programs.

Leming (2000) evaluated the Heartwood curriculum, an approach to character education (CE), and shared insights to the beginnings of CE. He discussed the implications that the "puritans with the use of the hornbook," (p.414) played in the development of CE. Bodenhorn and Skaggs (2006) echoed the history of CE, but only dated it back to 1950 when this methodology began to be eliminated due to "fear that teaching morality would be equated to the teaching of religion" (p. 84). The teaching of character has begun to be revitalized due to growing concerns of student misbehavior and other harmful actions seen by the public (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2006; Mehlig & Milson, 2002). However, there are concerns that researchers have suggested in this revitalization of character education.

Bulach (2002b) reiterated a question posed by Business Week (1997) which asked, "whose values should be taught...and how can character be measured accurately?" (p.79). Alegra and Sink (2002) question the research that has been done within CE and share the lack of

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consensus for what principles should be taught. Further insights into opposing views and other concerns will be addressed later in the challengers section.

Collection of literature

Literature for this review was gathered from several sources including; EBSCO Education Search (within the Pierce Library), National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) website, peer-reviewed journal articles, and other sources found on the internet. The journal articles consisted of research study based references, meta-analytical research, journal reviews, and opinions that reflected researched subjects. Suggested key terms from the EBSCO search focused on; elementary schools, citizenship education, United States, and Curriculum (Connie Johnson, Answerland at Pierce Library). These terms were combined in various ways and resulted in multiple findings. As terms were more narrowly defined the search produced limited results. The key terms that produced the most results focused on the themes of this paper; citizenship education and character education. The term 'character education' was the result of random subjects submitted within EBSCO and articles reviewed from within these boundaries. As these articles were read for content, a reoccurring theme evolved and character education was born. Journals that were reviewed yielded much in their reference sited page. These references produced multiple articles and information. However, there were references that could not be located in my search. Further information and clarification could be obtained from a more thorough search of these references. The majority of articles used in this piece were gathered from search combinations; citizenship/citizenship education and elementary and research, as well as character education and elementary and research.

Format of Literature Review

The information shared in this review revealed that citizenship and character education may contain traits that can be taught for the betterment of society. Societies are developed through individual interactions. As individuals learn specific principles they can interact in a way that promotes quality of life. Attributes such as leadership, conflict resolution, and communication skills have the ability to promote equality and justice within a community (Bickmore, 2001). The remainder of this paper will focus on the characteristics found within citizenship and character education. Through various articles these main ideas have been broken down into three subcategories; community involvement, educator involvement, and parental involvement. Educators will not be limited to the profession of 'teacher', but rather the structure of the school system as a whole. It must also be noted that in the discussion of parental involvement references are made to the home environment, which includes all those within the confines of this structure.

This review will look at the ways in which these subcategories are involved with and affect character and citizen education. Information will be shared on various programs found within each theme, relating an overview of programs that are available. As this literature review evolved, there were facets discovered in character/citizen education that have stirred controversy. This controversy will be discussed as I share opposing views and their suggested improvements.

The literature has also revealed specific traits within character and citizenship education that have professional implications (Bulach, 2002b; Gallavan, 2003; Mehlig & Milson, 2002; NACE, n.d). These implications will be discussed as I share the findings of the National Association of Colleges and Employees (NACE) and relate them to the findings of researchers

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within the field of character and citizenship education. Let us begin with the characteristics of citizenship and character education.

Characteristics of citizenship and character education

Winton's (2007) characteristic for citizenship was in the need for knowledge. She proposed the need for citizenship education to be one that educates students and then moves them toward action. Part of this knowledge, or awareness, needs to be of the various components of democracy, which she termed as "justice, freedom, dissent, due process, the rule of law, equality, diversity, loyalty..." (p. 4). Johnson and Vanneman (2001) echoed the need for knowledge through their study. This research was on behalf of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 1998 Civics Assessment. They surveyed fourth grade students to inquire about their knowledge of National symbols, democratic principles, comprehension of law, and government agencies. The students' response which received the highest percentage of accuracy on the assessment, next to recognition of the Statue of Liberty, was in regards to the role that the United Nations plays. Students were asked the meaning of the phrase, "They work together to keep peace in the world" (p. 2). The students appeared to have the knowledge that the United Nations task was to assist with conflict resolution. Working through conflicts was another aspect found within the literature review.

Peer conflict was discussed in part by Bickmore (2001) who shared the various ways that "one peer mediation model was implemented in six different elementary schools in the same urban school district" (p.137). The article asked three main questions. The first stated, "what values do the various schools' implemented peer mediation programs embody in relation to peacemaking, community, nonviolence, and the roles of diverse students?" (p. 140) Bickmore found that the power of these programs "was their emphasis on strengthening communities," (p.

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158). However there was not sufficient time in the classroom due to an emphasis on state testing. The second asked, "how do diverse student mediators become involved in critical thinking and problem solving?" (p. 141). It was discovered that this area was a "weak link in nearly all of these programs" (p. 158). The final question shared was, "how do conflict resolution advisors, other school staff, and school context factors facilitate and/or impede the active involvement and self-determination of various students in conflict mediation related activities at each school?" (p. 141). The answer to this inquiry was found in time restriction. There was simply not enough time allocated for proper instruction. Bickmore stated, "sustainable and transferable learning requires frequent opportunities for guided critical reflection and problem solving" (p. 159).

The ability for students to resolve concerns and create a common good could be defined as teamwork. DeSilva, Nabors, and Proescher (2001) conducted research that looked at the results from the Empowerment Zone (EZ) project during a summer program. This project incorporated various concepts like; "conflict resolution, productive steps for problem-solving, coping with stress...and activities for improving self-esteem..." (p. 5). Teamwork was one of the activities that students learned. Results from this study showed a positive effect of behavior and communication skills with those that participated. DeSilva et al. shared that students enjoyed the project and parents shared "that they perceived improvements in children's functioning over the course of the summer program" (p.13). Teachers felt that the activities taught could be implemented into their classrooms. According to DeSilva et al. the highlight of the program was the ability to integrate the concepts "into the school program, as part of the children's character education training" (p. 13).

Characteristics found within character education varied within the research studies, but there were common threads intertwined. An underlying theme that authors used to describe

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character education was with the term, "value" (Mehlig & Milson, 2002; Muscott & O'Brien, 1999; Revell, 2002). The American Heritage College Dictionary (1993) defined value as, "a principle, standard, or quality considered worthwhile or desirable" (p. 1490). Along with values, Bulach (2002b), shared that character traits are dependent upon individual people.

In an earlier research study Bulach (2002a) compared students enrolled in a Junior Reserve Officer Training Corp to those who were not. The reason for the inquiry was to see the effectiveness of character education within these programs compared to other character education programs. Bulach (2002a) found that results favored the JROTC program because of the focus on behavior, compared to character education programs where the spotlight was "knowledge base" (p. 563). This study revealed the importance of implementing an action program within character education.

In an evaluation of a mentoring program, Muscott and O'Brien (1999) related former President of the United States Bill Clintons views of character education. In his State of the Union address in 1996 President Clinton stated, "I challenge all our schools to teach character education, to teach good values, and good citizenship" (p. 374). This challenge was a call to communities all across the country to take action. It was noted within this research that "states and individual districts have begun to require some form of character education for all students..." (p.374).

The program that Muscott and O'Brien assessed was the " SO (Service-Learning Opportunities) Prepared for Citizenship" (p. 377). The target for this program is to help primary and middle school children learn "social skills and attitudes that will build character" (p. 377). The research showed that students had a positive experience and felt that they had learned or improved during the program. Participants "saw themselves as citizen-leaders who could impact

the lives of others..." (p. 387). Students helping within their community was also seen within the literature reviewed.

Community Involvement

Community involvement relates to the need for students to see what character and citizenship traits are needed within their circle of influence (Bickmore, 2001). Because of the variance of each community, these attributes will be determined through the interaction and examples witnessed. Bodenhorn and Skaggs (2006) noted the decline of character education programs within the school system. As a means to counteract this restructuring, "community service" (p. 84) became a means to teach character education. Through character education students learn qualities and attributes that a community deems as 'good'. This training, according to Firmin and Wilhelm (2008), must begin with those who are in positions of authority. There must be a common thread, or goal among these members and ask what is most valuable in our community and how are we representing this to the community?

The notion of individuals coming together for a common good was common throughout the literature on citizenship education and defined by Hodge (2002) as "civic participation" (p. 103). Hodge also stated the need for "developing... active citizens" (p. 107). Winton (2007) agreed that citizenship education must instill democratic principles and the need for the voice of the people to be heard. As individuals model equal rights and the voting process within their community, students are able to see the value that is placed in these practices.

This principle of value was seen in the Heartwood curriculum, a character education program reviewed by Leming (2000), focused on "seven universal" (p. 414) beliefs within their course. These values were; "courage, loyalty, justice, respect, hope, honesty and love" (p.414). As students observe these values within their community, or "social world" (p. 138) as stated by

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Bickmore (2001), they will learn these core principles shared in the Heartwood curriculum.

Bickmore believed that it was in the observing and acting out of principles, or ideas, that students learned. One location where students come in direct contact with observation and practice is within the school system.

Educators' Involvement

The involvement of educators was prominent throughout the research articles (Bickmore, 2001; Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2006; Mehlig & Milson, 2002; Muscott & O'Brien, 1999). This participation came through program implementation of schools, teacher modeling, and training by those who took part in the various studies.

Bickmore (2001) shared that "one goal of elementary education is to help children develop the skills, knowledge, and values associated with citizenship" (p. 137). Bulach (2002b) found in his research that these skills must be modeled by all those involved in the program in order to produce lasting results. He went on to say that "an effective character education program involves the entire faculty, staff, parents, and community" (p. 81). This basis of understanding led him to the belief that character education programs are not meeting this mandate. However, this criteria was being met by those who were involved in the JROTC program. A program mentioned previously.

Bodenhorn and Skaggs (2006) research was comparing schools with CE programs and those that did not have them. The study was centered around the following two questions. First, "is there a relationship between the presence of a character education program and perceptions of student and staff behavior, behavior indicators, and school achievement?" (p. 85). Second, "is there a relationship between the degree of implementation of character education and measures of perceptions of student and staff behavior, behavior indicators, and school achievement?"

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(p.85). Bodenhorn and Skaggs shared that the research showed "evidence that introducing CE was related to perceptions of improved student and school staff character-based behavior" (p. 111). They also discovered schools that have vastly developed their CE programs have an even "higher level of perceived behavior and lower suspension and dropout rates" (p. 112). The most interested findings were shared at the conclusion of the paper. The authors related that the importance of finding a CE program is not as key "as the process of implementation" (p. 112).

In Revell's (2002) research of character education programs noted that citizenship, along with character education, "aim to make a difference to the values or behaviour of children" (p.421). It is interesting to note that in this same study Revell referred to these aims as "ambitious educational projects" (p.430). What students need are educators equal to the task and who believe in the programs they are instructing.

Teachers' confidence was what Mehlig and Milson (2002) researched in their study of "efficacy beliefs of practicing elementary school teachers regarding character education" (p. 47). This investigation looked into teachers' perceptions of how they viewed their ability to model and teach various character traits. Mehlig and Milson discovered that teachers have the assurance in their abilities to model and teach within a character education program. However, Mehlig and Milson shared that teachers "typically receive little training for this task" (p. 52). The confidence is there to instruct, but it appears that there may be a be short of guidance and preparation. Revell noted earlier that the implementation of character and citizenship education programs can be lofty, but the success of this transformation may contain the "health of democracy" (Revell, p. 430).

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The implementation of CE and citizenship programs at school are reaching students for only a portion of the day. Parental involvement, or the home situation, can also contribute to the effect of character and citizenship education.

Parental Involvement

The influence of parental involvement is portrayed through an evaluation of a JROTC program. Bulach (2002a) found that the examples of senior cadets assisted in behavior development of those younger recruits. Just as the senior cadets had an influence over junior recruits, homes can also have an impact on how character and citizenship is modeled. Parental involvement is found through the discussion of current events, democratic principles, National symbols (Johnson & Vanneman, 2001), and everyday occurrences. This involvement takes on new light through a home schooling program.

Although not directly connected with citizenship and character education, there was research that focused on the reasons parents homeschooled. Green and Hoover-Dempsey (2007) conducted research into the reasons for home schooling. Among these reasons were parents want their children to have positive efficacy and "positive perceptions of life..." (p. 264). These findings are similar to those presented by Brewer (2006) in respect to citizenship education. He shared that "social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good..." (p. 1). These thoughts parallel in their perception of having a positive impact on those around them.

Home-school programs also have implications within communities because they are the learning environment. Green and Hoover-Dempsey noted that parents who home-school do so to instill specific values. These values could be those listed in the Service-Learning Opportunities

program such as; "trustworthiness, respect, cooperation, teamwork, self-respect and responsibility" (Muscott & O'Brien, 1999).

These values, along with countless others, are complex principles to teach. Mehlig & Milson (2002) agreed when they shared the views of Likona (1993) who said, "Character education is far more complex than teaching math or reading; it requires personal growth as well as skills development" (p. 52). Attributes and skills such as; teamwork, self-respect, justice, courage, and leadership were presented in several various programs within citizenship and character education (Bickmore, 2001; Leming, 2000; Muscott & O'Brien, 1999).

Programs

Bickmore (2001) analyzed the "peer mediation model...designed to foster leadership..." (p. 137). The overall study looked at the influence that peer mediators had within conflict resolution. Peer mediation is when a "neutral third party (mediator) facilitates a process of problem identification and resolution" (p. 141). This mediation process requires volunteer behavior from all those involved with the central notion of communication. The results to this research was addressed earlier, but to recap, Bickmore found that more time was needed within "the formal classroom curriculum" (p. 159). One article reviewed shared a CE program which was designed for classroom instruction.

Leming (2000) evaluated the Heartwood curriculum, which is a character education program "designed to develop children's understanding of the attributes" (p. 415). There are seven attributes; "courage, loyalty, justice, respect, hope, honesty and love" (p.414). These attributes are taught from 14 children books, within three packets. Leming reported that the "strongest programme effect...was with regard to cognitive outcomes" (p. 422). All students from grades one to six "demonstrated higher levels of ethical understanding than comparison students"

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(p. 422). Leming also noted the need for a greater understanding of "character and how it is learned" (p. 426) in relation to making improvements to such programs.

Another program evaluated looked at the effectiveness of mentors in teaching various traits of character education. Muscott and O'Brien (1999) related information from the Service-Learning Opportunities Prepared for Citizenship. This program was used with a large community during an after-school course with first to six grade students. SO is designed to promote certain qualities of character, among these attributes are; responsibility, self-control, cooperation, teamwork, and respect (Muscott & O'Brien, 1999). Muscott and O'Brien's (1999) research found that students who participated in the program believed they understood what a "citizen leader" (p.382) was and "defined citizen leaders as someone who listens, behaves and helps others" (p. 383). The overall success in this study was that students "learned something from the program" (p. 382). Among the concepts learned were; "how to cooperate to solve problems and complete activities...be a part of a team...read better...how to share" (p.382-383).

DeSilva et al. (2001) studied the outcome of implementing a "mental health and health prevention services" (p. 3) within a summer character education program. Although the Empowerment Zone (EZ) project was not a CE program, it is interesting to note the supplement programs that character education can incorporate. The EZ "project provided an opportunity for at risk children to participate in mental health and health prevention activities" (p. 13). These activities conducted in behalf of students "promote the social and emotional development of children" (p. 16). This development was seen by Revell (2002) who shared that character education has the intent of changing "values or behaviour of children" (p. 421). As children are instructed in mental health they are being taught values or behaviors that can impact how the student develops and corresponds with others.

But who's values should be taught? And what instruction needs to be given in order for these values to be learned?

Challengers

One of the underlying themes for those challenging character education was the difficulty in assessing and defining what needs to be taught (Alegra & Sink, 2002; Bulach, 2002b). Alegra and Sink (2002) also emphasized the lack of research within character education and shared, "many character education programs fail to be well-grounded in a well-researched conceptual framework" (p. 166). Bulach (2002b) shared that character education programs failed due to the focus on character words and not character behavior. Lipe (2004) was more direct when he denounced moral education due to it being, "(1) it is extremely superficial; (2) its definition of value is inadequate; and (3) it relativizes moral issues." (p. 20)

Browne (1973) looked at the lack of citizenship education within schools and discovered room for improvement. He found this through a discussion with the staff of one particular school district. The staff shared that more emphasis was placed on core subjects and not on the teaching of "responsibility or citizenship" (p. 154). He also found that citizenship education tends to be more "lip-service" (p. 149) than practical application. Bulach (2002b) agreed with Browne's need for staff involvement. His feelings were in the need for "school leadership" (p. 81) to take an active part in character education. This participation would result in teacher support and program success. Support should also come from community members who set examples of principles and ideas taught within character education programs (Alegra & Sink, 2002).

As educators and communities reflect on Bulach's comment that "character traits are often in the eyes of the beholder" (p. 79). They will be able to develop the characteristics and attributes most applicable to their situation and circumstance.

Professional Implications

These traits that communities and schools implement can be seen to have professional implications. Along with character and citizenship education there is a program that does assist educators in helping students become prepared for professional life.

Gallavan (2003) conducted research that examined career education within the elementary school. This study involved "Bandura's belief about self-efficacy as applied to career paths" (p.15). The project asked several teachers to investigate a question of their choosing that applied to career education. They were then asked to prepare a lesson plan to teach what they learned. Through this research teachers found the value of this program and the need to implement it into their classrooms. One teacher noted, "career education is really what school is all about" (p. 17). Another stated, "I want my students to fully understand the importance of contributing to their environments and feeling good about what they are doing—for themselves as well for the people around them" (p. 19).

Along with career education students also receive support through The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). This support comes in the form of "information about the employment of college graduates" (NACE). They pose several qualities that were listed as the top traits that students should possess. Among these are: communication, strong work ethic, teamwork skills, initiative, and analytic skills. These values were represented within various character and citizenship education programs (Bickmore, 2001; DeSilva, 2001; Muscott & O'Brien, 1999; Winton, 2007).

Citizenship and character education programs are influenced by responsible citizens actively participating within their communities. They are gaining knowledge to make educated

decisions, judgments which look at the greater whole, and seeking ways to increase leadership within their communities and profession.

Conclusion

Within the literature reviewed there arose a theme of community building, citizen responsibility, active participation and the need for communication skills (Alegra & Sink, 2002; Bickmore, 2001; Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2006; Bulach, 2002a; Bulach, 2002b; DeSilva, 2001; Gallavan, 2003; Johnson & Vanneman, 2001; Muscott & O'Brien, 1999; Winton, 2007). There was also the idea to take necessary action (Anderson et al., 1976; Brewer, 2006; Bickmore, 2001; Bryan & Vavrus, 2005; Firmin & Wilhelm, 2008; Winton, 2007). Bulach (2002a) revealed in his study of the JROTC program that it is not enough to talk about desired character traits, but these traits must be transformed into behaviors that can be observed. Browne (1973) showed that educators must put their words into actions and not simply let citizenship be "whatever goes on in the classroom" (p. 158). Firmin and Wilhelm (2008) agreed with Browne and felt that attributes which define our character are those that move us to action.

There was also the idea presented by Bickmore (2001) who discussed "conflict resolution education" (p.138). This instruction teaches students how to think through their differences and come to a resolve. It can be composed into three components; critical thinking, decision making and communication skills (Bickmore, 2001; Winton, 2007). Johnson and Vanneman (2001) conducted a survey centered around the query of "how well American youth are being prepared to meet their citizenship responsibilities" (p. 1). Students who develop the characteristics formerly mentioned; conflict resolution, communication skills, take action, build the community and responsible citizens have the tools necessary to accomplish what Johnson and Vanneman assessed.

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This expression or reflection of one's ideas and beliefs was another point made within the literature reviewed (Bickmore, 2001; Lipe, 2004). Lipe's study looked into values clarification and moral education. Values clarification is the idea that individuals assist others in helping "them think through life's confusions so they might be less confused and so they might learn skills of self-direction that will serve them in the future" (p. 7). Character and citizenship education, as discussed previously, were seen to be taught in a similar fashion. Ideas and assistance were given through the guidance of a mentor, which could have been educators, parents or members of the community. The clarity from the programs came through specific traits and attributes, which were derived by those in authority.

Although there has not been an overwhelming consensus in behalf of character citizenship education (Alegra & Sink, 2002; Browne, 1973; Bulach, 2002b; Lipe, 2004) there does appear to be a growing desire to implement these programs (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2006).

For future implications, there appeared to be no recent evaluations to the claims made by Browne (1973). Clearer understanding into citizenship education could be made through a comparison of updated research to the findings in this study.

The information gathered through the literature review was used as a catalyst to ask a convenient sample and the residents of Sherman County, "In your opinion, what must students' develop in order to be a positive contributor in the world?" The proceeding chapter will discuss participants, location, and procedures for the thesis project.

Section III: Research Question

One of the traits that challengers expressed against implementing character education was the difficulty in assessing and defining what needs to be taught (Alegra & Sink, 2002; Bulach, 2002b). This evaluation was one of reasons for the direction of my research. I felt that I could determine an underlying theme(s) as what individuals believe should be taught through my thesis question, "In your opinion, what must students' develop in order to be a positive contributor in the world?" There were two groups involved with the thesis question, convenience sample (webmail) and Sherman County Residents. The third group, Sherman Elementary staff, were asked to find curriculum or teaching practices that contained a trait/principle, which the surveys' showed to be most prevalent. The underlying theme for this thesis question is an action research where steps will hopefully be taken towards the betterment of Sherman Elementary students. If there is a trait/principle that the surveys' found to be significant that is not being taught, then my hope is corrections can be made and principles can be taught.

The remainder of this chapter will describe the participants, the area in which they were sampled from, procedures of the project and the data analysis process.

Participants

The first participants were taken from a "convenience sample" gathered from a webmail base and asked via the email. These individuals consisted of educators, business professionals, colleagues, personal acquaintances and family members from areas covering the United States and a small part of Australia, within my personal email address file. Ages of these participants were not inquired. The purpose of this sample was to give differing perspectives into the study. Suter (1998) cautions the use of a sample based on "convenience rather than representativeness" (p. 132). This concern was in reference to "external validity... [or] how well the findings in a

sample can be generalized to a larger population” (p.132). Due to the nature of this project there was no need to connect the findings to any other location. Rather, the findings were gathered for Sherman Elementary School alone. It was important to compare the views from a broader sample to see if their responses were in alignment with those from the rural community of Sherman County.

The participants in the second group were collected from a random sample of one hundred Sherman County residents. Sherman County is located in north central Oregon, thirty miles east of The Dalles, and has an estimated population of 1,638 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Agriculture is the primary source of revenue, with a recent expansion of wind towers bringing in additional income to the county. Of the one hundred participants, I had 46 responses of which 19 were male and 27 were female. The ages of these individuals ranged from 25-88, with an average of 62.6. Occupations varied with farmer to retired from fish counter to housewife, with everything else in between. In chapter four I will share a more detailed analysis of the characteristics of this second group and how their responses correlated with the convenient sample participants.

The teachers at Sherman Elementary School comprised the third and final group for this project. Six teachers participated in this project and represented the following grades; kindergarten, first, second, third, fifth and Structured Learning. Our school is small and consists of grades kindergarten through sixth grade and structured learning center, with a student population of approximately 130. Staff experience ranges from one year to thirty-one years. Due to recent funding within education, our school has been reduced from a north and south elementary campus to one site. This consolidation has created quite a stir within our community,

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having some parents choose alternative forms of education through private schooling and online academies. The thesis project was already underway when this school transformation occurred.

Human subjects protection

Due to the method used for this project there was no need for permission to be obtained. Permission was granted upon the receipt of email responses and compliance with the phone survey. It should be noted that I received authorization to conduct my thesis within the school from our building principal and district superintendent (see attachment C).

Procedures

The question that I posed was not intended to be biased or worded in such a way that would benefit one viewpoint. It was a simple question left up to the individual for interpretation and to decide the best response. I had no intention of dissecting and defining each word or phrase within the question. Each individual involved has a myriad of life experiences that has helped them mold who they are and what they stand for. I did not want to deviate from these perspectives or limit the views that a certain individual may have had in regards to the thesis question.

The question, "In your opinion, what must students' develop in order to be a positive contributor in the world," was first asked to the convenience sample. This survey was presented to this group through the internet, via the email. The email sent to each participant was as follows:

Hello all-

I am working on the start of my master's thesis and am seeking input. Please respond to the following question ASAP: In your opinion, what must students' develop in order to be a positive contributor in the world?

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Thank you- I look forward to reading your responses.

Brandon Hammond

This convenient sample consisted of 97 email addresses, some of which were personal acquaintances, others were professional in nature.

In order for the second sample to proceed I needed to ensure that I was receiving a random sample of people throughout Sherman County. This was achieved through a table of random numbers found in *Primer of Educational Research* (Suter,1998). The table had four columns of fifteen numbers, with five number combinations. My wife randomly chose one number. This number was then used for the last four digits of a telephone number. Sherman county has four different prefixes; 565, 442, 333, and 739. Each prefix represents a different town within the county. I began to apply our randomly selected number to each prefix looking for a phone number that was in service and was connected to a current resident. Our randomly selected number consisted of five digits therefore, I used the first four digits and if no phone number was found I then used the last four numbers. For example, the first number selected from the table was 93372. I called all the prefixes using 9337 as the last four digits. There were no numbers found using this combination. I then used the prefixes with 3372 as the last four digits. The process of finding a working number took two randomly selected numbers. Once a number was located in the phone book and found to be in service, fifty numbers above and fifty numbers below this number were selected. With the phone numbers selected the next step was to make the calls.

Phone calls were made each night from seven p.m. until eight p.m. This process began on September 8th and lasted until the 14th. The thesis question was presented as written and we did our best to not sway their answers and share our interpretation of the question. Accommodations

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that were made came in the form of restating or saying the question more slowly. Those who participated and responded to the question were asked for their age and occupation, gender was determined through our conversation.

After data was collected from Sherman County residents an analysis was made from the responses in each sample group. The purpose of this analysis was to look for comparable findings shared by the convenience sample and those in Sherman County. This data analysis will be related in the next section.

The data analysis yielded three main topics of interest. These topics were related to the third group, teachers from Sherman Elementary School. The subsequent two emails were sent out to twelve staff, including our principal/superintendent, as follows:

For my thesis project I asked people in Sherman County "In your opinion, what must students' develop in order to be a positive contributor in the world?" This question was also asked to a group of people in my personal email account. I found three responses that had the most duplicates. They are: 1. Positive sense of self 2. Communication skills 3. Activity in the community.

With these three main ideas in mind the next part of my thesis is to ask you how these concepts are being taught in the school. This is not mandatory, but any input would be appreciated. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thanks

Brandon

The response from this initial email was limited so the next email was delivered to eleven staff members, I did not include principal/superintendent, as follows:

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Here are the questions to ponder.

1. How do we help students have a positive sense of self?
2. How do we help students better their communication skills?
3. How do we help students have activity within the community?

There does not need to be concrete answers for each question. If there is room for improvement then let me know. Thank you for your time,

Brandon

Following this second attempt the teachers' responses were still quite low. The final step to increase participation was through a paper letter containing the exact wording as the email (see appendix B). The teachers' replies will be used for future growth and achievement at Sherman Elementary School. The process that has occurred through this thesis has given teachers a voice from the people as to what implications and accommodations should be made within the school.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this project had two parts. First, analyze the responses made from groups 1 and 2. This analysis yielded common traits that the convenience sample and Sherman County residents felt were contributors to successful students. These findings then triggered the second phase of the analysis, which was done through participating teachers. The educators were asked to analyze current curriculum and teaching practices at Sherman Elementary School that implement the contributing factors suggested by groups 1 and 2. This process revealed what principles/ideas are already in place or need to be implemented at Sherman Elementary School.

With the subjects and procedures covered I will now articulate the findings from the thesis project.

Section IV: Findings

The motivation for this study was to discover traits that would help students become a positive contributor in the world. Through my initial research I found two programs, character and citizenship education, which closely resembled my inquiry. There was nothing formally stated or promised in regards to students' becoming positive contributors, but I believed the principles taught within these programs could assist towards this endeavor. However, challengers towards these programs shared the difficulty in assessing and defining what needs to be taught (Alegra & Sink, 2002; Bulach, 2002b). The findings that proceed in this chapter are explicit ideas and principles that could be shared within a character or citizenship education program.

Data

There were a total of 197 surveys distributed through email and telephone calls, with a response rate of 41%. Of these 197 surveys, 97 were email, with 100 telephone calls. Responses received from email were 36%. The email survey asked, "In your opinion, what must students' develop in order to be a positive contributor in the world?"

Telephone surveys had a response rate of 46%. Of the 100 phone calls made 52% were disconnected (D/C), did not answer the phone (N/A), or would not respond. Of these 52 calls, 19% were not interested or would not respond; 25% were D/C and 56% N/A.

Those who participated in the phone survey were asked, "In your opinion, what must students' develop in order to be a positive contributor in the world?" as well as their age and occupation, gender was determined through the conversation. Of the 46 respondents, 41% were male and 59% were female. Mean age = 62.6 Median age = 62.5 Mode age = 57 Range age = 63, the youngest participant was 25 and the oldest was 88 (both of which were female). Occupations

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varied from self-employed to hotel manager and fish counter to barber. The most frequent occupation recorded was retired, which was 37% of the professions listed.

Responses

Eighty-one responses were received from email and telephone surveys. These responses were analyzed and categorized into three subheadings; Citizenship traits, Character traits, and Educational traits. Winton (2007) stated, "the very nature of citizenship education, with its goal of creating citizens, is concerned with producing and encouraging certain attitudes, values, and behaviors" (p. 4). Revell (2002) discussed character education with the intent of changing "values or behaviour of children" (p. 421). These two statements helped to guide which responses would go into Citizenship or Character traits. Educational traits were filled with those responses that could be found within the school curriculum. Participants' responses were gathered and compiled from both the email and phone surveys. Within each response there were several thoughts and suggestions shared. Of the eighty-one replies, 170 suggestions were calculated and categorized, 15% were classified under Educational traits, 30% were noted to be Citizenship traits, and 55% were placed under Character traits. The next sections will highlight individual responses to the inquiry, "In your opinion, what must students' develop in order to be a positive contributor in the world."

Examples of Educational traits

An underlying theme that arose within educational traits was the need for students to 'get or have education.' This view received 23% of the total within educational traits. Few participants elaborated on education, other than needing to grasp the core subjects; reading, writing, math, science and English. One respondent, a retired 82 year old female, stated a student must get "as much education as he can afford." A retired 75 year old male shared that students

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need a "good education" and they should "stay in school." One retired 82 year old female relayed the importance to "study and do their homework." A 67 year old housewife shared the need for "whole education, all subjects." An email respondent shared the need for "common sense to compliment their education." A professor from Eastern Oregon University related that students "need an attitude of lifelong learning and a curiosity about the world." This love of learning and the need to explore was shared in two or three responses. One response shared from a male 45 year old hotel manager defined education as "the building blocks of our society." An in-depth analysis of educational traits will be provided in section V.

Citizenship traits

There were several topics that both email and phone surveys agreed upon within citizenship traits. 14% of those surveyed agreed that one of these traits needed were good communication skill. A 56 year old male farmer stated the importance of "good communication" to solve problems. Another response echoed by a 62 year old retired female shared that students need to "develop their minds with good communication skills and reading." An email response shared the need for "good communication skills in order to be able to effectively share their beliefs with the world."

The next themes shared by several responses were the need for good work ethic, which accounted for 12% of the total, and responsibility, which had 10%. A 47 year old female insurance agent/owner shared the need for students to have a "responsibility of tasks [and to] develop life skills to hold a position." Another response was similarly related by a 50 year old female homemaker who stated the need for students to have a "sense of responsibility for themselves and their actions." A retired 77 year old female shared the need for responsibility in students and that "teacher(s) need to help build these." An idea in regards to work ethic shared

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through an email response was honesty. The respondent stated, "If you were to take experiences in school...what dishonesty can do to a student--- receive F's, get kicked out of programs, schools, etc. and then take that same characteristic into the workforce... honesty is essential for students to learn the value of [being] positive contributors in the world." A female teacher continues this thought by suggesting that "work ethic includes doing a job right the first time, working hard even when you're tired, never leaving a job until the job is done (right of course). They need to understand as part of this work ethic that it might not always be something they like doing but has to be done anyways, so might as well enjoy it."

Another topic that was highlighted within citizenship traits was being active in the community. This was defined by an 81 year old retired male who said that students' need to "pay more attention to the elders...be more constructive and not too self-centered." Another comment was made by an 80 year old male who shared "we are losing sight of people." A 57 year old male asked the question, "Are they (students) helping, offering to help out in the older community?" One man shared a quote from Gordon B. Hinckley (2002) who stated that we need to "Be involved." Other responses made reference to having a "sense of community," and the "ability to see more ways to help others."

Character traits

Of the 170 comments made through email and phone surveys 93 were classified under character traits. 16% of these suggestions were directed toward students' needing a "positive sense of self." The topic that ranked second, positive attitude, had 6% of the total. Responses that were tagged under positive sense of self included; self-confidence, self-assurance, self-esteem, and self-worth. An Australian man noted that students' need to have "self confidence to work with others and by themselves." One woman related the power of self-esteem by sharing "Too

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often (especially in sports) the younger kids learn that they're all winners...and then they get into the more advanced grades, and realize that in reality, they're losers. What a crushing blow to their already fragile self esteems! If only they would be taught that sometimes there are winners, and sometimes there are losers...and that all it takes is to get up and try again." Another female response shared through an email, "I think self-worth is very important. It seems to buoy up an attitude of 'I can do it.' It also fosters leadership qualities. I have seen very young people start out great, all on the same level and then quite often as time goes by there is a split that seems to define who has a sense of self worth and those who lacking or with a weaker sense of it. The ones who have a greater sense of self worth seem to excel and do much better in school, sports and citizenship. It is interesting to note that that line can cross back and forth as we journey through life. One with less sense of self-worth may feel a need to prove himself and work harder, thus becoming more successful in his endeavors. Another whose sense of self-worth may have been greater may assume themselves right into a pickle. Difficulty getting out of that pickle may undermine their growth, and sense of self-worth."

Responses that were also note worthy included; compassion (4%), selflessness (4%), respect for others (5%), ambition (5%) and kindness (4%). An in-depth analysis of educational traits will be provided in section V.

After the calculations, categorizing, and analyses were made it was discovered that three main themes developed. These themes, listed in order of priority, were; positive sense of self, activity in the community, and communication skills. The three traits found through email and phone surveys were then submitted to the teachers at Sherman Elementary School. The next section reports the responses and suggestions, in regards to these three traits, made by the teachers.

Teacher comments

Teachers' were first emailed the outcomes of the survey's and were asked, "With these three main ideas in mind, the next part of my thesis is to ask you how these concepts are being taught in the school. This is not mandatory, but any input would be appreciated. Please let me know if you have any questions." The only response that I received was from a teacher who had been instructing for 21 years. She disagreed with the need for positive sense of self and shared, "Do you know that people in prisons were found to have the most self-esteem? It is esteem of others that needs to be emphasized, not focusing on oneself." This teacher added that classrooms "emphasize the 4 'Be' rules--be respectful, be safe, be responsible, be kind." She concluded that community projects were organized at the high school level. In order to increase teacher participation I sent out an additional email that asked:

1. How do we help students have a positive sense of self?
2. How do we help students better their communication skills?
3. How do we help students have activity within the community?

From this email and a paper copy that was made I increased from 1 contributor to 6, eleven teachers were asked to participate, which represented a compliance rate of 55%. Experience of teaching ranged from 1 to 26 years, with a mean of 16.3 years of experience.

Teachers had several thoughts in regards to how positive sense of self was taught or increased within individual students'. A teacher of 23 years felt that positive sense of self was promoted through "positive words and...encouragement whether a child is doing poorly or well." This thought was echoed by a teacher in her second year who said to "encourage success in all area and celebrate it." A common thread was found by three teachers who shared that positive sense of self was enhanced "by discussing manners," "cleanliness," and promoting "healthy life

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skills." One teacher of 26 years related the efforts that were in place academically. She shared, "School wide we reward for reading points, math masters, good kid slips, student of the quarter...We place kids in reading and math blocks where kids can work at a level where they will feel successful." Finally, a teacher of 25 years shared that there is a "caring staff that truly cares for the kids here at school."

The second step was to locate areas where students were instructed on communication skills. "Modeling" was a suggestion given by a teacher in her second year. A teacher of 23 years shared the following, "Invitation, invite the students to solve concerns and problems, model, role play and use... diverse vocabulary." The use of vocabulary, along with "complete sentences," was reiterated by a teacher of 25 years. She also shared that there needs to be "time to share (speak) write (journal and assigned writing activities) and read." A teacher of 26 years gave several suggestions on ways students can share; "group presentations, individual reports in front of the class, role playing, running for student council office or reps...[and] student ran assemblies." Lastly, a teacher in her third year shared that "we work a lot with problem solving skills...using manners in the classroom...[and] practice 'I' statements."

The final task was to find areas where students were given opportunities to be involved within the community. As mentioned earlier the teacher with 21 years experience shared that high school offered service for the community. A teacher of 2 years had no input on this subject and when asked if this meant we needed to work on this area, she agreed. The need for improvement was also shared by a teacher of 26 years who said, "I think we could do better on this." There was also a myriad of responses. The teacher of 25 years suggested, "take walks in town...display artwork at post office...articles in husky handout and The Dalles Chronicle...sporting events...literacy nights...[and] performance invites to school." These

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suggestions were similar to those shared by a teacher of 26 years who shared, "...invite public in for assemblies, concerts, plays, performances, ball games etc. Encourage kids to join 4-H." A teacher in her second year added, "modeling...have volunteers come in...set up activities within community...[and] we need to provide opportunities." Some of the opportunities provided were mentioned by a teacher of 23 years who related, "for two years we have had success with our greenhouse project, students and community." This teacher also shared the resource of "the incredible amounts of talents within staff and community at large. Tap into our wonderful sources of human interest and bring it in! Share!"

The final section will finalize this thesis with a summary of the project, a discussion of the research and recommendations for future study.

Section V: Summary

This thesis began with the thought of moving education further and helping students to achieve greater heights. I asked a convenience sample, comprised from my personal email contacts, "In your opinion, what must students' develop in order to be a positive contributor in the world?" This same question was proposed to a random sample of residents located in Sherman County. The information gathered from these two surveys' was compiled, analyzed, and searched for significant correlations. There were three main themes that arose through the surveys and answered what students' need to contribute in the world. They were positive sense of self, communication skills, and activity in the community. These results were then given to the teachers at Sherman Elementary School who were asked to locate teaching practices or curriculum where these traits were taught.

For the remainder of this section I will share a brief overview of my project, insights and discoveries found within the data, a discussion of the process and procedures of this project, and give further recommendations to future studies of a similar nature.

Summary

It was during a reading research course where thoughts of my thesis inquiry began. My initial thought was, "How is school perceived in the eyes of educators, parents, and students?" The reasoning behind this inquiry was to see how school was understood within our society. A transformation occurred over a period of time and moved this idea towards a focus on the achievement of students in the long term. Through this alteration, my thesis, as discussed previously, is centered on the following question. "In your opinion, what must students' develop in order to be a positive contributor in the world?"

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With this question in mind the first step was to locate literature that could provide insights into how this might be accomplished. This initial search proved extremely valuable as I was able to successfully narrow these terms to; citizenship education and character education. These terms revealed programs that teach students character and citizenship traits.

Character education was shown, through the literature, to have the underlying theme of "value" (Mehlig & Milson, 2002; Muscott & O'Brien, 1999; Revell, 2002). It was also made known by Firmin and Wilhelm (2008) to have implications towards "developing in students a desire for good..."(p. 182). Citizenship was defined by Brewer (2006) as the "roles that the citizen plays within the norms, rules, and laws" (p. 3). There was also literature on citizenship that expressed a need for the knowledge of National symbols, comprehension of law and democratic principles such as "justice, freedom, dissent, due process, the rule of law, equality, diversity, loyalty..."(Winton, 2007). Winton (2007) also stated, "the very nature of citizenship education, with its goal of creating citizens, is concerned with producing and encouraging certain attitudes, values, and behaviors" (p. 4), but what ideals and manners should be taught?

These concerns were expressed by Bulach (2002b) who reiterated a question posed by Business Week (1997) which asked, "whose values should be taught...and how can character be measured accurately?" (p.79). Alegria and Sink (2002) questioned the research that had been done within character education and shared the lack of consensus for what principles should be taught. This lack of agreement and the need to define what needs to be taught (Alegria & Sink, 2002; Bulach, 2002b) was the springboard for my thesis project.

In order to find answers to those questions posed by researchers (Alegria & Sink, 2002; Bulach, 2002b; Lipe, 2004) I developed a question, which I posed to two groups. The question was, "In your opinion, what must students' develop in order to be a positive contributor in the

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world?" Out of the eighty-one responses, 170 suggestions were evaluated and categorized. Three categories were used; Educational traits, Citizenship traits and Character traits.

It was found that character traits had the majority of responses, ninety-three, while educational had the least with only twenty-six. This information revealed to me the importance, those surveyed, placed on moral development in lieu of academics. The question of what should be taught in school seemed to point towards character and citizenship traits. This lopsided view could be due to individuals surveyed assuming that academics would be covered, thus looking at the question as what additional requirements do students need to succeed. Success for students was resoundingly found through the surveys by having a good self-esteem. Positive sense of self was agreed upon by fifteen people sampled. This may not seem a very significant finding, but the closest trait had only a consensus of nine. Common qualities linked to positive sense of self were; self-confidence, pride in self, self-esteem, self-assurance and self-worth. According to those surveyed, students who are given opportunities to increase their self-esteem will contribute positively to their environment.

Finding the next attributes became more difficult due to the closeness in number of responses received. To alleviate this I simply tallied the amount of responses and included only the top two traits. Both of these traits were categorized under citizenship as activity in the community and communication skills. It was interesting to note the importance placed on activity in the community in relationship to those who were surveyed within Sherman County. The average age was 63 years and the majority of respondents were female. The responses connected to this trait were having a sense and connection to their community, the need to help other people, having the ability to see more ways to help others, being involved, being attentive to their elders, the need to not lose sight of people, and getting to know other people. Not all of

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the responses connected to this trait were from Sherman residents, but having an older community appears to reflect, in a minor way, the need to be engaged and involved within the community.

The final trait, communication skills, was the last trait receiving a majority of the responses, although there were several others in the same proximity. Among these were respect for self and others, positive attitude, work ethic, responsibility and ambition. As mentioned earlier, these responses are a combination of both the convenience sample and Sherman County residents.

The traits shared throughout this study were not newly discovered or the latest fad. They represent an ideal that most community members desire of their neighbors. They are tried and true principles that I as a parent work to instill in our children, and I believe most families are working towards. I believe that most parents do not wake up desiring to be bad parents and feel this holds true to members of a community. Communities want to promote work ethic, responsibility and ambition. They want students to be involved and serve within the community and be successful at school. In order for progression to be made there must be a starting point.

The three attributes found through this inquiry are the commencement for development at Sherman Elementary School. They are also an answer to those challengers of character and citizenship education who questioned which values should be instructed. Challengers also questioned who decides upon the value. Wilhelm (2008) shared that values taught are decided by the "local communities" (p. 184). The traits: Positive senses of self, activity in the community and communication skills were developed by Sherman County residents, along with a convenience sample.

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Teachers at Sherman Elementary School were then given these traits and asked to find areas of their curriculum or teaching practices where these traits were instructed or reinforced. The comments shared on promoting sense of self drew from various components of education. One aspect given was that of academic achievement. Teachers suggested that positive sense of self was taught or helped through tutoring and having leveled reading and math blocks. These ideas were centered on the notion that students who were properly instructed could feel success as they progressed academically. The better they were able to perform on their school work, the better their self-esteem.

Parallel to this view was through the use of verbal praise. Teachers shared the need to use encouraging words. The use of these words connect to the suggestions of manners, positive rewards, and a compassionate staff that use their demeanor to express kindness, respect and give a feeling of safety, all of which were given as attributes held at Sherman Elementary.

Both the verbal and academic success of the students is linked to the suggestion of one teacher who believed that positive sense of self at our school was helped through intrinsic motivation. As students' feel success or are given positive responses they have the opportunity to use these statements to build the desire to succeed from within. This teacher also shared the Second Steps Program. I was interested to know which staff currently uses this program and discovered that first grade was the only classroom.

The next question asked teachers to find areas where students are taught or helped to better their communication skills. Again, there were academic sources such as vocabulary words, using complete sentences in assigned writing, giving reports, group presentations, running for student council/office and meeting with our speech specialist. Academic responses accounted for the majority of ideas shared. These suggestions show how many different aspects

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communication skills are represented within the curriculum. Teachers also shared that communication skills were taught through problem solving. Problem solving could be found through academics, but is generally created through real-life scenarios. These scenarios can be teacher generated with role plays or found in students' everyday interactions. This form of communication, in my view, has the greatest impact towards future application. Here students are able to work through difficult situations which can simulate future experiences at home or in their chosen profession. But, students must be given the tools necessary to succeed. This need for instruction was given by one teacher who made reference to the importance for new communication skills to be taught. Too often students are left alone and assumed to understand the fundamentals of good communication. As teachers take an active role in this pursuit, students will be better equipped to handle future implications of this vital talent.

Finally, teachers were asked to locate how students were being actively involved within the community. When reviewing the responses from the teachers my first thought was I could see a need for improvement in this area. There did not seem to be a strong consensus or theme represented, except for performance events held within the school. Events such as concerts, public assemblies, plays, community garden and sporting events were among the responses that appeared more than one time. These opportunities are excellent ways for students and community members to interact, although the interaction appears more as a spectator situation than a time to work together. One teacher mentioned the need to "tap into our wonderful sources of human interests and bring it in!" I echo this sentiment and feel there needs to be more opportunities where students and community members are mutually engaged in a project.

The overall responses of the teachers were excellent in view and understanding of the values and traits given. There was a general desire and concern for the well being of the student.

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The majority of responses were made by teachers with over twenty years of experience. In analyzing the responses made by the individual teachers there was nothing of significance to relate in the thoughts proposed. However, there did seem to be some correlation in the manner in which the views were presented. The beginning teachers of one to two years shared their views as power points or bullets, while the veteran teachers answered with more descriptive and paragraph responses. Experienced teachers also appeared to have a greater understanding of school practice and curriculum within Sherman County School District. They were able to make stronger connections to the three traits and how they are presented and taught at Sherman Elementary. In contrast, teachers with less experience, two years in the district and less than three years as a teacher, are still becoming acquainted with the school practice and curriculum.

Although there appears to be differences between these two groups of teachers, there is also a similarity in which teachers need to create a unified atmosphere within character and citizenship education. We as teachers must be on the same page and actively working together to create a character and citizenship education program that fits our students needs.

Discussion

Looking back over the past several months of researching, gathering, analyzing and surveying, there are a few aspects that have left a mark. The most profound has been the ability to readily apply the findings from this study to Sherman Elementary School. Sherman now has the information where they can use this thesis to implement and improve current teaching practices. They also have data to see where success can be found and future growth made for Sherman County students. This project has been one that was intended from the start to be applicable to Sherman County School's classrooms. The findings are not obscure references proposed for college professors or meant to be kept on the library shelf. They are discovered

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traits intended to be applied and implemented. The simplicity of this study and the excitement that I felt as the data unfolded was another highlight.

During the planning stage I needed to find a way to get a random sample of Sherman County residents. This was accomplished through a discussion with my professor and the use of a random table of numbers. It was at this discovery and method where I began to feel like a real researcher. I had successfully succeeded at one of the pivotal aspects of researching, having a random sample. Through this sample I believe strongly that the information gathered was a true glimpse into the thoughts of the general population of Sherman County residents. Surveying this sample group was the next pleasant portion of the project.

Researching as a local teacher offered, in my view, a higher rate of responses and a more detailed view of residents' thoughts. If there were any outside influences that swayed the data it would be this aspect. Living within the community allowed me to gain access to more reluctant participants. I felt that being a teacher at Sherman Elementary helped greatly in gathering more data. Being an outsider making the same phone calls, I believe, would have yielded less data. I felt empowered as I said, "Hello, my name is Brandon Hammond and I'm the Title I teacher at Sherman Elementary. How are you doing?" I think that those surveyed allowed me a few minutes of their time because I was not a complete stranger.

Gathering data from Sherman County residents as well as the convenience sample and seeing how the two groups aligned was another rewarding experience. However, there was difficulty during the analyzing process and being consistent as I interpreted the responses. It wasn't until I began sorting the data using the topics; educational traits, citizenship traits, and character traits that the data became clearer. There were also thoughts that were ambiguous. For future reference I would have asked for more explanations and had the participants expand on

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their thoughts. But due to the nature of the convenience survey, which I did not ask for more detail, I decided to keep the two groups aligned as much as possible and not ask for further clarification of the Sherman group.

As the data unfolded and distinctions emerged from the responses I began to see the light at the end of the tunnel. It was as if the pieces of a puzzle were beginning to represent more than a mess on the table. I was seeing an image. This representation aligned with portions of what the literature review stated about the three traits discovered from the two surveys.

The literature reviewed discussed general ideas towards values within character and citizenship education. Winton (2007) stated, "the very nature of citizenship education, with its goal of creating citizens, is concerned with producing and encouraging certain attitudes, values, and behaviors" (p. 4). Firmin and Wilhelm (2008) defined character as "developing in students a desire for good..."(p. 182). Revell (2002) discussed character education with the intent of changing "values or behaviour of children" (p. 421). But who determines the values? Bulach (2002b) shared that character traits are dependent upon individual people.

Through this research it was discovered that self-esteem, communication skills, and activity within the community are values or traits that should be taught. Self-esteem was mentioned by DeSilva, Nabors, and Proescher (2001) who conducted research that looked at the results from the Empowerment Zone (EZ) project during a summer program, which used "activities for improving self-esteem..." (p. 5). Brewer (2006) suggested "social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world" (p. 1), which is aligned with the results for more activity within the community. Although dated, this thought of

community involvement was shared by Anderson et al. (1976) who felt that students need experiences and opportunities to learn, by doing, what it means to be a citizen.

Within the literature reviewed, there arose a theme of community building, citizen responsibility, active participation and the need for communication skills (Alegra & Sink, 2002; Bickmore, 2001; Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2006; Bulach, 2002a; Bulach, 2002b; DeSilva, 2001; Gallavan, 2003; Johnson & Vanneman, 2001; Muscott & O'Brien, 1999; Winton, 2007). There was also the idea to take necessary action (Anderson et al., 1976; Bickmore, 2001; Brewer, 2006; Bryan & Vavrus, 2005; Firmin & Wilhelm, 2008; Winton, 2007). Bulach (2002a) revealed in his study of the JROTC program that it is not enough to talk about desired character traits, but these traits must be transformed into behaviors that can be observed. These articles share similar viewpoints with those surveyed. The values and traits recommended are for students at Sherman Elementary School. The data supports these ideas and now it is up to the teachers and community within the county to ensure the instruction takes place.

Recommendations

As this study comes to a close I see the need, as mentioned by Bulach (2002a), to locate ways that can measure and assess character and citizenship traits taught. This form of assessment does not come at the state or national level, but rather locally. How can teachers determine the success of school wide character and citizenship education programs in the long term? What correspondence is needed at the middle and high school level? What are the best methods to teach values and citizenship traits? Lastly, I conclude where I began.

This research was one of action and implementation. I recommend the process discussed, within this study, in your own school. What do your students need to succeed? The communities in which you live know the students. They are their friends, mentors, parents, grandparents and

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leaders. The knowledge and ideas shared may have the key to unlock the door of change at your school.

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Appendix A

Email sent to convenience group

Hello all-

I am working on the start of my master's thesis and am seeking input. Please respond to the following question ASAP:

In your opinion, what must students' develop in order to be a positive contributor in the world?

Thank you- I look forward to reading your responses.

Brandon Hammond

Appendix B

Email sent to teachers (1st attempt)

For my thesis project I asked people in Sherman County "In your opinion, what must students' develop in order to be a positive contributor in the world?" This question was also asked to a group of people in my personal email account. I found three responses that had the most duplicates. They are: 1. Positive sense of self 2. Communication skills 3. Activity in the community.

With these three main ideas in mind the next part of my thesis is to ask you how these concepts are being taught in the school. This is not mandatory, but any input would be appreciated. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thanks

Brandon

Email sent to teachers (2nd attempt)

Here are the questions to ponder.

1. How do we help students have a positive sense of self?
2. How do we help students better their communication skills?
3. How do we help students have activity within the community?

There does not need to be concrete answers for each question. If there is room for improvement then let me know. Thank you for your time. Brandon

Appendix C



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August 24, 2009

Dr. Allan Evans
Eastern Oregon University

The Sherman County School District is in support of Brandon Hammond's thesis project. He will be surveying parents of our school district to see what they think teachers should be teaching their children. He will then talk to our teachers to see if their curriculum includes those topics.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ivan Ritchie", written over a horizontal line.

Ivan Ritchie
Superintendent/Principal
Sherman Elementary

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