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# An ethnographic study of participants' perceptions of character education including students, parents, teachers, club sponsors, administrators, and community support people

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**AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF  
CHARACTER EDUCATION INCLUDING STUDENTS, PARENTS,  
TEACHERS, CLUB SPONSORS, ADMINISTRATORS,  
AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT PEOPLE**

by

Lily Stopplesworth, B.A., M.A., M.E.

**A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education**

**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined character education within one educational setting. The researcher created a holistic, narrative description of the extent, quality, and impact of character education at one North Louisiana high school. An emergent design was utilized to examine inductively participants' perceptions of character education initiatives within this single, educational site.

The research questions in this study were: (a) How do participants (students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community members) define character education, and what do they perceive its value to be? (b) How do participants perceive character education in relation to values? (c) How is character education viewed by the participants in relation to attempts to regulate morality? (d) What is the scope of the character education movement within the school site? (e) How has character education impacted the climate and culture of the site, as well as the overall education of the students? and (f) How has character education affected the attitude and behavior of students?

This research was based on the naturalistic inquiry process. Purposeful sampling was used to maximize information from 42 participants. The researcher, a participant-observer, administered structured and unstructured interviews, gathered and analyzed relevant documents, and made regular, on-site observations of participants. Information from observations, document analysis, and interviews were coded and categorized to

reflect the emergent themes. This research approach provided a rich description of the perceptions of administrators, guidance counselors, community-resource people, club sponsors, teachers, parents, and students regarding character education efforts at their school.

The majority of participants defined character education as an attempt to improve the morality and/or values of students. Most stakeholders expressed that the traits promoted through character education are similar to, if not the same as, values and that they did not view character education as an attempt to regulate morality. Descriptions of character education efforts at this school included both extracurricular and classroom efforts. The predominant belief among participants was that character education had a positive impact on the climate, culture, and educational environment of their students.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Any society depends on the presence of individuals who share its culture, who take active roles, who are tied together by a set of codes and laws that are in part determined by tradition, and who have a sense of morality and conscience. How a person develops socially is predominately based on the way he or she interacts with society. Character development, of any kind, involves a strong social component, for what is considered right or wrong reflects the nature of society. While educators cannot guarantee any educational outcome – let alone the development of good character – within adolescent students, educators' potential contribution toward this end is significant.

### An Overview of the Problem

By the standards of any previous generation, today's young people exist in a self-focused, pleasure-dominated world of turn-on escapism (through MTV, sexuality, drugs, or simply *hanging out*). Only rare and fortunate teenagers encounter the kinds of experiences that help them break out of this envelope of self-interest and learn to contribute to others. These experiences often come through academic and athletic programs offered by schools (McKinney, 2000).

Research documents the record-breaking rates of distress afflicting young Americans. In a national survey of American adults, 72% of respondents said there was an excess of “drugs and violence in their local schools” (Johnson & Immerwahr, 1994). In 1994 annual death rates of 15- to 19-year-old white males by homicide and suicide were the highest since national record keeping began. The rates of illegitimate births to 15- to 19-year-old white females were also at or near their highest points since national record keeping began in 1946. These high rates have occurred during an era of more accessible contraception, abortion, and sex education (U.S. Department of Health, 1994). The Center for Disease Control reported in 1997 that “nearly three quarters of all the murders of children in the industrialized world occur in the United States” and that the U.S. had the “highest rates of childhood homicide, suicide, and firearms-related deaths of any of the world’s 26 richest nations” (Haveman, 1997, p. 34).

A review of the 1994 Phi Delta Kappa Gallop Poll revealed that the American public perceived a decline in the prosocial character traits of public school students. Thirty-five percent of respondents believed that lack of discipline and violence were the greatest problems facing schools in their community. Approximately 70% of respondents attributed those problems to the increase in drug and alcohol abuse, gang activity, availability of weapons, and breakdown of the family as a stabilizing unit (Elam, Rose, & Gallop, 1994). Forty-nine percent favored schools teaching ethics and character-education courses, and 39% were opposed.

An overwhelming majority of respondents specified certain character traits as being acceptable for schools to teach. For example, 94% felt that “respect for others” was a

character trait that public schools should teach. Other character traits that received an approval rating greater than 90% from respondents were “hard work,” “fairness in dealing with others,” “compassion for others,” and “civility and politeness” (Elam et al., 1994, p. 50).

According to the 27th annual Phi Delta Kappa Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, the American public named “lack of discipline” as the biggest problem for local public schools (Gallup & Rose, 1999). According to the August 24-26, 1999, Gallup Poll of parents of K-12 students, 48% thought that public schools should require all students to take a character education program. Forty-two percent thought it should be offered but not required. Only 7% thought it should not be offered at all; 3% had no opinion (Gallup, 1999).

Character education remains a controversial issue. However, many educators are calling for an infusion of character education into public schools. Many principals believe that introducing character education programs into schools partially fulfills the need for socialization (Wentzel, 1991) and the need to counteract a breakdown in the behavior of America’s young people. Etzioni (1983) and Ginsberg and Hanson (1992) reported that students who were self-disciplined, hard working, or who valued learning scored higher on achievement tests.

Wynne and Walberg (1986) argued that good character ought to be the primary focus of schools because it is a goal in reach of more children than is high academic achievement and can result in less alienation from school. Indeed, character education has a direct and positive relationship to high standards of academic responsibility, more

homework, clear criteria for grade promotion, tracking of students, and rigorous examinations (Lickona, 1988; Wynne & Walberg, 1986).

Gardner (1985) and Cavazos (1990) asserted that unless American public schools address the values vacuum that prevails in their classrooms, America's moral heritage will be lost. Gardner stated that those who supported the removal of character training from public schools believed that a values-neutral environment would result. In reality, the prosocial values that were once present as an integral part of the schools have been replaced with unsanctioned antisocial values and behaviors. Children should be prepared for life when reason will influence their conduct. Until that time, a strong foundation of habit-oriented moral instruction and practice should be provided (Greer & Ryan, 1989; Wynne, 1986).

Improving the conduct of American youth through character-building programs will help to reverse the rise of a variety of social problems (such as, drug abuse, suicide, homicide, and illegitimate births), as well as improve students' achievement test scores (Hanson & Ginsberg, 1988; London, 1987; Wynne & Hess, 1986). Ginsberg and Hanson (1992) provided evidence of a critical link between values and success of youth at risk of failure in school and in life. Wynne (1985) contended that the increase in antisocial behavior of young Americans can be attributed to the spread of nontraditional values in public schools. To correct this situation, educators are beginning to turn toward character education programs in large numbers. The absence of such instruction may ultimately mean that young people will acquire their values by way of television, advertising, gangs, the drug culture, or other questionable means (Hess & Shablak, 1990; McClellan, 1992).

The fact that the character of young people is not always ideal is rarely disputed. In fact, there has been a growing trend for several years now toward the incorporation of character education into the core curriculum of public schools. Very little research has been conducted to determine what effect, if any, the myriad of character education programs and initiatives is having on young people, their schools, and their communities.

In 1998 the Louisiana legislature mandated that character education be implemented within the core curriculum of Louisiana's public schools (House Bill No. 102). However, the only built-in method of analysis for this mandate is a statement of assurance from Louisiana's district superintendents in which they are required to state their district's compliance. Interpretation of the mandate has left large discrepancies between the efforts of individual school districts.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain a holistic view of the impact of character education within one educational setting. The researcher created a narrative description of the extent, quality, and impact of character education at one North Louisiana high school. Currently, there exist numerous programs and initiatives that are labeled as character education. The researcher utilized an emergent design in order to examine inductively participants' perceptions of the inner workings of several of these character education initiatives within a single educational site.

## Justification for the Study

In the face of enormous cultural shifts, teachers must take deliberate steps to instill positive character traits into the lives of students. It is crucial that teachers do not neglect the conscience and character of children. Academic excellence alone does not guarantee success (ChildHeart Resources, 1999).

The higher standards needed most are not academic. The higher standards needed most are moral, and until that is understood, the schools and the general culture are going nowhere but down (Kelly, 1999). The immense power of modern technology extends globally. Many hands guide the controls, and many decisions move those hands. A good decision can benefit millions, while an unethical one can cripple the future (Institute for Global Ethics, 2000). In response to the moral crisis of American culture, character education has become what is perhaps the fastest growing educational movement in the country today (Lickona, 1998).

Through the triangulation of interviews, document analysis, and observations, the researcher created a narrative description of the extent, quality, and impact of character education at the school site. Although the implementation of character education became a state mandate (House Bill 102) for Louisiana public schools in 1998, no evaluation method for this mandate has yet been set. This case study was an attempt to explore how one school has dealt with compliance to the recent mandate.

Site selection was based on careful scrutiny of selected criteria – that being the components of character education. For the purpose of this study, character education was defined as classes, programs, clubs, or initiatives that promote or enhance the values of

honesty/integrity, work ethic, responsibility, respect for fellow human beings, kindness, and citizenship. Based on initial site visits, a high school was selected because it was believed to be a rich source of character education data. Field efforts included in-depth interviews with parents, students, teachers, resource personnel, and community members. By gathering and conveying the perceptions of various stakeholders, the researcher constructed a meaningful dialogue concerning the insiders' perspectives of character education.

### Research Questions

For the purpose of this study, the following research questions were proposed (additional questions emerged and were addressed as the study proceeded):

1. How do participants (students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community members) define character education, and what do they perceive its value to be?
2. How do participants perceive character education in relation to values?
3. How is character education viewed by the participants in relation to attempts to regulate morality?
4. What is the scope of the character education movement at the school site?
5. How has character education impacted the climate and culture of the site, as well as the overall education of the students?
6. How has character education affected the attitudes and behaviors of students?

In addition to the aforementioned questions, participants were asked to describe specific elements of, and to compare and contrast, character education programs in which they had been involved and of which they had knowledge.

### Theoretical Base

Society could not function without rules that tell people how to communicate with one another, how to avoid hurting others, and how to get along in life generally. Just as children differ from adults in cognitive and personal development, they also differ in their moral reasoning. The main focus of character education is to help young people become familiar with those basic rules that will enable them to enjoy successful lives (Ryan, 1996). George W. Bush, during his 2000 presidential campaign, supported character education when he said, "Our children must be educated in reading and writing – but more importantly in right and wrong" (Roth, 1999, p. 11A).

Erikson (1963) postulated that during each stage of personal and social development people are faced with a psycho-social crisis that results from interaction with the social environment. During the industry-versus-inferiority stage (6 to 12 years of age), adolescents try to achieve ego identity by striving to find direction for the future. Piaget's (1965) stages of moral development begin around age 6, when children develop heteronomous morality, that is, being subject to rules imposed by others. The second stage is autonomous morality, when rules are no longer seen as automatic but what individuals want them to be.

According to Nucci and Murray (1998), Piaget was among the first psychologists whose work remains directly relevant to contemporary theories of moral development.

Piaget's theories assert that individuals construct and reconstruct their knowledge of the world as a result of interactions with the environment. Piaget determined that morality can also be considered a developmental process, based on his observations of children's application of rules when playing (Piaget, 1965).

Kohlberg's (1969) theory of moral development is based on children's responses to moral dilemmas. Kohlberg was more interested in the process of moral decision-making than in the content of moral values (McClellan, 1999). There are three primary stages in Kohlberg's theory. The preconventional stage is when children simply obey authority figures to avoid being punished. The conventional stage is when children consider feelings of others in making moral decisions. The postconventional stage is when people realize that laws and values are somewhat arbitrary and relative to each society. Kohlberg expanded the development of moral judgment beyond the ages studied by Piaget, and he determined that the process of attaining moral maturity took longer and was more gradual than Piaget had originally proposed (Nucci & Murray, 1998).

Stage theorists view development as a series of steps in which clear changes occur from one level to the next. Adults can help children advance to the next stage of cognitive or moral development by allowing them to freely explore problems, at the same time challenging their reasoning by introducing concepts from the next higher stage (Slavin, 1986). It is hoped that character education can be used as an aid in assisting adults in this quest.

In his Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry, Sullivan (1953) postulated that human behavior is shaped by an individual's attempt to maintain comfortable relationships with

significant others. According to Sullivan, security of relationships is the most important human need and governs and motivates social behavior and development. An important concept in Bandura's (1969) social learning theory is self-regulation. Bandura hypothesized that people observe their own behavior and judge it against their own standards. To make these judgments, students must have expectations for their own performance. According to Meichenbaum and Goodman (1971), it is possible to train students to monitor and regulate their own performance.

A wide variety of character education initiatives have recently been implemented within public education systems. While there has been an increased amount of educational research, most has focused either on the influence of educational leaders or on the outcome of specific program implementation. This study was designed toward further understanding of a total program of character education within a singular school setting. This, as opposed to previous studies (which have mainly focused on single, site-based, character education programs), is thought to be an appropriate addition to the current body of knowledge regarding character education. Through the use of qualitative methods, the researcher's aim was to broaden the scope of knowledge pertaining to character education beyond the previous, more common level of quantitative analysis.

### Qualitative Paradigm

The intent of qualitative research is to understand a particular social situation, event, role, group, or interaction (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1987). It is largely an investigative process where the researcher gradually makes sense of a social phenomenon by contrasting, comparing, cataloguing, and classifying the object of study (Miles &

Huberman, 1984). Marshall and Rossman (1989) suggested that the researcher enters the informants' world and through ongoing interaction seeks the informants' perspectives and meanings.

The researcher utilized an ethnographic research design. The intent of ethnographic research is to obtain a holistic picture of the subject of the study with emphasis on portraying the everyday experiences of individuals by observing and interviewing them and relevant others (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990). The ethnographic study includes in-depth interviewing and continual and ongoing participant observation of a situation (Jacob, 1987) and, in attempting to capture the whole picture, reveals how people describe and structure their world (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990).

The case study method of inquiry was selected based on the nature of the topic to be studied. In a case study, the researcher explores a single entity bounded by item and activity and collects detailed information by using a variety of data collection procedures during a sustained period of time (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994). The constructivist approach was utilized in order that the researcher could be guided by the research into areas of intense interest and concern, as determined by the participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained the constructivist approach as one in which the researcher attempts to construct the definition, impact, and meaning of that which is being studied based on participants' perceptions.

### Limitations of the Study

The study was bounded by the following limitations:

1. Only one educational setting was included in the study.

2. Results may not be generalizable.
3. Qualitative studies are often tainted by researcher bias.

### General Definitions

The purpose of this section is to (a) discuss the varied nature of character education and its associated terminology, and (b) to clarify character-education-related definitions as used for the purposes of this study. First, a brief synthesis of the variations in meaning of key terms will be presented. This will be followed by a list of intended meanings for terms used throughout the remainder of this study.

### Character

To understand character education and why various groups are calling for it to be reinfused into America's public schools, it is first necessary to have an understanding of what is meant by the word *character*. Its present meaning can be traced to the Greek word *charassein* which means "to scratch, engrave or give a distinguishing mark" (Mish, 1983). The term *charassein* is associated with the writings of philosophers, such as, Plato and Aristotle.

Although the origin of the word *character* is not debated, there is an ongoing debate to identify those specific aspects of a person's beliefs or behavior that should be included in the definition of good character. Definition sources include history, dictionaries, and original creations. Definitions of good character often begin with the idea of moral goodness, a concept explored centuries ago by Aristotle (Smith, 1911).

Dictionary definitions are varied. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) defines *character* as “the sum of the moral and mental qualities which distinguish an individual” (p. 231). The *Random House Dictionary* (1987) defines character as “qualities of honesty, courage, and the like; integrity” (p. 109). The first of these definitions could refer either to positive or negative character, but the second obviously defines character as a distinguishably positive trait.

The traits that define good character are also widely debated. Good character has been defined as consisting of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good – habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of action (Lickona, 1991). The Communitarian proposal of good character stresses only two essential traits: self-discipline and empathy (Etzioni, 1983). The Dayton, Ohio, School District proposed 36 different traits, a majority of which are considered essential for good character (Scott, 1992). Christianson (1977) made a similar effort to outline good character. His list included (a) self-discipline, (b) being trustworthy, (c) telling the truth, (d) being honest, (e) hard work, (f) courage, (g) using honorable means, (h) sportsmanship, (i) respect for the law, and (j) respect for democratic values. Good character has been promoted as consisting of only four basic components: moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral character (Rest, 1990). Most commonly, positive character has been defined as a basic set of values, morals, and ethics which (a) have existed for a long time, (b) are correct by virtue of their history and tradition, (c) differentiate clearly between right and wrong, and (d) are agreeable to all stakeholders (Bean, 1985/1986; Griffith, 1984; London, 1987; Walberg & Wynne, 1989).

Character is closely linked to, yet somewhat distinct from, virtues, values, morals, and ethics. The Heartwood Institute (1992) offered definitions that clarify these distinctions.

Virtue is defined as a good or admirable quality or property. Values are concepts and beliefs that direct an individual's behavior, and when held in common with others, shape a culture's ideals, customs, and institutions. Morals can be viewed as both public and private. Public morality refers to a common societal core of universal concepts of beliefs and behaviors; private morality is more closely linked to an individual's religious or family beliefs. The word ethics refers to standards of moral obligation, which determine the difference between right and wrong; ethics involves a commitment to do what is thought to be right. (p. 26)

These terms are often used interchangeably in discussions of character education. More often than not, character is referred to as a combination of all of the above, woven together, which defines an individual's unique set of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.

### Character Education

Another term that has been plagued with ambiguity is *character education*. Good character has been promoted for decades by a variety of groups and organizations; including the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, YMCA, YWCA, religious organizations, and sports associations. Character development is also impacted by friends, the media, school experiences, and socio-economic environment.

A character education program adopted by a school district or school principal is systematically taught to all students (McQuaide, Fienberg, & Leinhardt, 1995). Recognition of the formal and systematic nature of character education programs is often the extent of agreement among scholars and researchers who define character education and its primary function in a variety of ways. Character education programs include

aspects of modeling character and values and are considered to be an integral part of all educational experiences (Dewey, 1938; Durkheim, 1925; Jackson, 1986; McClarin, 1995; Ryan, 1993).

A widely accepted definition of character education came from the California School Board Association in 1982: the teaching of values and conduct is necessary for the orderly functioning of a society and includes elements that are unifying as well as those that express the society's diversity (Heartwood Institute, 1992). Character education is the long-term process of helping young people develop good character; for example, knowing, caring about, and acting upon core ethical values – fairness, honesty, compassion, responsibility, and respect for self and others (Character Education Partnership, 1994). Character education, also called character training, involves learning about good conduct. It is about the development of character, including the stable qualities of a person that are revealed in his or her actions. The concept of character training combines the ideas of values as internal beliefs and skills as practical behaviors that can be taught (Childress, 1989).

According to John Dewey (1916), all education is character education to the extent that it enables students to participate more actively and meaningfully in social life. Good character is developed through persistent and pervasive reinforcement by the use of such things as ribbons, awards, and ceremonies (Wynne, 1985); teachers and other authority figures who are character models for students (Bennett, 1991; Greer & Ryan, 1989; Joseph, 1986; Lickona, 1988; Ryan, 1996; Schaps, 1990); and rigorous instruction exposing the students to historical and literary figures who display desired values; such

as, honesty, courage, kindness, and compassion (Bennett, 1991; Wynne & Walberg, 1986).

Character education is a broad term used to describe society's attempt to transmit and instill values from preceding to succeeding generations. Church, family, and schools have all been utilized as agents for this important but often controversial venture (East, 1996). Character education is not the same as all other social skills programs, although there are traces and elements that are common to all.

### Moral Autonomy

Moral autonomy (also called moral competence) is probably one of the most misunderstood terms within the character education movement. Some believe that the term moral competence is a self-contradiction; because according to Bloom's (1956) very influential classification of human behavior into two domains, this term belongs to two mutually exclusive categories. Although morality is assumed to belong to the affective domain, competence falls under the cognitive domain.

A second misunderstanding concerns the relationship of moral autonomy to social rules, norms, and conventions. In modern societies the idea of morality has become disassociated from ideas like norm, law, and convention (Durkheim, 1961). However, this does not mean that each child invents his or her own moral values without the assistance of others. If so, children would never be able to cope with the complexities of present-day life.

Persons who are in total opposition to social norms are not called autonomous but amoral, which means lacking moral sensibility and not caring about right or wrong.

Autonomy development means that a child has both to assimilate and to accommodate external moral knowledge (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Individual moral autonomy is essential for maintaining, and sometimes also for correcting, the social order. As Durkheim (1961) showed, only if a person becomes morally autonomous, can he or she also be competent to take over high responsibility for others or for himself or herself.

This competence includes self-sustaining moral-cognitive development, that is, the ability to get the skills and competencies necessary for solving moral problems without the guidance of other people. Moral autonomy is not an all-or-none variable but a matter of degree, and moral competencies can vary within a person from one area of life to another. According to Schulman (1995), only moral autonomy leads group members to question policies and practices that are potentially destructive to other groups or their own group or are contrary to essential values.

If a democratic society is to prevail, it seems necessary that all citizens take ownership in basic democratic principles, such as, social justice and respect for human dignity. Individuals should become morally autonomous and, for example, resist unethical conventions like racism and abusive authorities (Kohlberg, 1984; Milgram, 1974). Character educators assert that a fundamental mission of the school is to indoctrinate students with the community's very best values (Ryan, 1996).

There is little argument that education is important, both for fostering moral-cognitive development and for making it self-sustaining. Yet, there continues to be considerable debate regarding which features of the educational environment might best be utilized in the acquisition of an optimum effect. Piaget (1965) and Kohlberg (1984)

asserted that opportunities for role-playing are crucial for promoting moral judgment competence; whereas, advocates of character education suggest that direct teaching and guidance are equally important (Lickona, 1991; Ryan, 1996; Wynne, 1985).

### Universal Values

In spite of American pluralism, there are certain values that Americans hold more or less in common, and accepting the value of rational moral discussion presupposes agreement on certain basic values (Pritchard, 1988). Within the character education field, definitions of good character are united by this set of shared assumptions – that there exists a core set of values. Philosophers are not in agreement on the exact formulation of valid moral or character principles, though they do agree that such formulations should center around notions like “the greatest welfare” and “justice and equity for all.” Most also maintain that certain values or principles ought to be universal and that these principles are distinct from the rules of any given culture. A principle is a universal, impartial mode of deciding or judging, not a concrete cultural rule. For example, the “Golden Rule” that admonishes all individuals to do to others as they would have others do to them has been espoused by various religious leaders (including Jesus, Buddha, and Mohammed) as a principle. It is a guide for choosing among behaviors, not a prescription for behavior. As such, it is free from culturally defined content. Hence, it has universal applicability (Kohlberg & Turiel, 1971).

Whether or not educators deliberately adopt a character education program, educators are always promoting, through example, some form of values or, more specifically, virtues. Proponents for character education recognize that no single virtue

should dominate. Historical figures, who are considered to have been virtuous (for example, George Washington, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mother Theresa) all possessed a measure of the Socratic virtues: wisdom, temperance, justice, and courage. A certain well-roundedness is desirable, and an excess in any virtue can lead to imbalances (Cohen, 1995). For example, the fictional character Hamlet was reflective and loyal, but indecisive. Richard Nixon was diligent and hard-working, but also vindictive.

Also related to the discussion of values is the notion of social relativism (Fullan, 1993). The doctrine of social relativism maintains that values are always relative to and based upon the standards of individual cultures. In keeping with this idea, it is advised that when adopting a character education program, a school principal should begin by clarifying the school's or community's definition of core values, including virtues that formulate good character. According to Fullan (1993), change will most likely be accomplished if it is based on building a shared vision of what students should know and be able to do and on defining desirable character traits of students.

Therefore, maintaining that character education promotes values may not always portray the same picture to all stakeholders. One community might infer from this that the purpose of a new character education program will be to improve student behavior. Yet another community might conjure up images of character education as a vehicle for teaching civic rights and responsibilities. Defining the vision is the first step toward success (East, 1996).

There are many sources that offer specific suggestions as to which virtues should be considered for inclusion as universal. One such set is embodied in the principles

outlined in the United States Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and other founding documents (e.g., justice, the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and freedom of religion). Another set of answers is the common core of virtues alluded to most consistently through the majority of current character education programs (e.g., honesty, love, compassion, duty, respect, responsibility, and diligence). A third set of answers might be found in the growing number of communities that have adopted the six pillars consented to by the leaders of a number of industrialized nations in the Aspen Declaration of 1992: caring, civic virtue and citizenship, justice and fairness, respect, responsibility, and trustworthiness (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 1992).

Since their inception, American public schools have successfully and regularly resolved conflicts over what should be taught. Such disputes are the daily routines of democratic processes. Differences are scrutinized, pros and cons are subjected to public debate, compromises are negotiated, and votes are cast (Vincent, 1995). Debate should strengthen the relevance and soundness of the character education movement, not be used as an excuse to avoid it. Regardless of the outcome of individual debates over the definition of values, societal consensus suggests that once they are decided upon, these values must be taught by parents, schools, and communities in order to be understood, desired, and acted upon by children and adolescents.

## Definitions for the Purposes of this Study

### Administrator

This category includes the school principal and the District Safe and Drug Free Schools Coordinator for the 2000-2001 school year.

### Character Education

Character education includes classes, programs, clubs, or initiatives that promote or enhance the values of honesty/integrity, work ethic, responsibility, respect for human beings, kindness, or citizenship.

### Club Sponsor

A club sponsor is a member of the high-school faculty who also served as an adult leader for a school-sponsored club during the 2000-2001 school year. Interview participants included the First Priority, FBLA, and 4-H club sponsors.

### Community-Support Person

A community-support person is a member of the community who had a direct relationship with the high school students during the 2000-2001 school year. Interview participants from this group included (a) the district extension agent from the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center, (b) one resource officer from the local sheriff's department, (c) one juvenile probation officer who serves the area, and (d) two church ministers from the area.

## **Morals**

**Morals for the purpose of this study are defined as that entity that serves to transmit community-held values from one generation to the next (Hess & Shablak, 1990).**

## **Values**

**Values for the purposes of this study are defined as those beliefs that a certain group of people hold in high regard or esteem (Irwin, 1988).**

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a range of opinion as to when the literature should be consulted during qualitative research (Yin, 1994). Glaser (1978) believed it best to wait until data have been collected. Creswell (1994) postulated that if no research can be found, the investigator should review literature that is broadly related to his or her topic. Creswell used an inverted triangle to symbolize literature support with broadly related literature at the bottom and studies specifically in-line with the topic at the top. In the case of this study, there were very few empirical studies prior to 1999. This was due to the nature of the topic being studied and a wash of new programs resulting from recent mandates.

With little hard evidence either to support or to negate the effectiveness of the many and varied character education initiatives, the literature triangle for this study was, for a time, very wide toward the bottom with almost nonexistent entries toward the top. Fortunately, a great deal of empirical data pertaining to character education has emerged. For this reason the reader will find that broadly related literature has been gathered, synthesized, and included within this chapter; and the most recent information (rigorous educational studies, both quantitative and qualitative in nature) was also referenced and incorporated into the report.

## General History – Through Late 1980s

From the time of the ancient Greeks to the late 19th century, a singular idea prevailed: education's larger purpose was to shape character, to make men (and later, women) better people (Doyle, 1997). Education and training were not confused. Training was narrow and functional. Education imparted fundamental knowledge and was both essential and instrumental. Throughout time, civilized people have deemed it important to teach their children how to behave in their particular societies. This instruction is common across all cultures. Scholarly debate on moral development and character formation extends back to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Socrates' *Meno* and continues through to modern times (Nucci, 1989). In the late Middle Ages, the term *character* came to be used in a more figurative sense. Character was used to describe "the sum of moral and mental qualities which distinguish an individual, the individuality impressed by nature and habit on man or nation" (Huffman, 1993, p. 24).

In the last several hundred years, character education has been seen as a primary function of educational institutions. For example, John Locke, the 17th century English philosopher, advocated education as education for character development. By the 18th century, the figurative usage of character had further developed to mean "moral qualities strongly developed or strikingly displayed" (Simpson & Weiner, 1989, p. 257). This theme was continued in the 19th century by English philosophers: John Stuart Mill, who said, "Development of character is a solution to social problems and a worthy educational ideal" (Miller & Kim, 1988, p. 133-144); and Herbert Spencer, who said, "Education has for its object the formation of character" (Purpel & Ryan, 1976, p. 114).

American education focused on character development from its inception. The vast array of European people who settled the American colonies brought a commitment to moral education and a variety of approaches to the task (McClellan, 1992). During the nation's first 150 years, this effort to make students virtuous was carried out in a straightforward and deliberate manner. Originally, efforts toward character development were largely intertwined with Judeo-Christian religious beliefs.

George Washington compiled and learned early a set of 110 "Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation," which thereafter governed his private behavior and tempered his impulses (Brookhiser, 1996). Various versions of this theme have echoed repeatedly over the course of American history. Thomas Jefferson understood the importance of personal virtue, believing that if democracy were to survive in the fledgling republic, its citizens had to possess both intelligence and high moral principles. Consider the moral implications of the following quotes by Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Theodore Roosevelt (Hofstadter, 1974). Jefferson said, "Citizens must have feelings of patriotism, respect for the law, respect for the rights of others, and concern for the common good" (p. 82). Madison postulated, "Is there no virtue among us? If there be not, we are in a wretched situation. No theoretical checks, no form of government, can render us secure" (p. 82). Roosevelt claimed, "To educate a man in mind and not morals is to educate a menace to society" (p. 83).

American philosopher John Dewey (1938), an influential philosopher and educator of the early 20th century, saw moral education as central to the school's mission. School texts, such as *McGruffey's Readers*, that incorporated tales of heroism and virtue were

used in the learning experience (Lickona, 1991). Epic tales from the Bible were used as well. Capitalizing on the notion that the mother was the source of moral instruction in the family, 19th century schools employed single, female teachers. Serving as positive and virtuous role models for their students, they imparted training along with the three R's (Lickona, 1991; McClellan, 1992).

As schools of the late 19th and early 20th centuries expanded their functions, moral education was forced to compete for a place in an increasingly crowded curriculum (McClellan, 1992). According to McClellan, debates about how moral education ought to be provided have engaged many of the best minds in education and stirred public controversies throughout American history. Some advocates of moral education are concerned that its place in the curricula of schools may not be as solid and secure as it once was or should be (Butts, 1988).

During the 20th century, there have been numerous attempts by educators to identify the personality traits that constitute good character. McClellan (1992) stressed the importance of self-control, good health, kindness, sportsmanship, self-reliance, duty, reliability, truth, good workmanship, and teamwork. Dewey (1916) maintained that the school itself is, in essence, a miniature community, complete with social situations that are typical of those students will encounter outside the walls of the school. He differed from Mann as he did not believe that matters of a spiritual nature have a place within the school. However, Dewey did postulate that the shaping and molding of the character of students is an important responsibility. He stated, "It is a commonplace of educational theory that

the establishment of character is a comprehensive aim of school instruction and discipline” (p. 180).

Another attempt at defining character came with Durant’s (1929) *Mansions of Philosophy* in which he said that character is the “sum of inherent dispositions and desires; it is a mosaic of instincts colored and rearranged by environment, occupation, and experience” (p. 23). In the late 1920s, Hartshorne, May, and Maller (1929) of Columbia University Teachers College conducted a large-scale investigation to search for consistent patterns in children’s moral behavior. This project, called “The Character Education Inquiry,” yielded varied results on both the positive and negative common character traits of children.

Character education was not to escape the 1920s without a serious blow. In the late 1920s, the European philosophy of logical positivism gained a wide following at many American universities. Logical positivists believed that a fundamental difference existed between fact and value. A person’s values were statements of opinion rather than fact. Consequently, values were increasingly considered more of an individual concern and less of a societal concern (Lickona, 1991).

Through the 1930s and into the 1940s, a growing emphasis developed on the school’s role in addressing the cognitive dimension of a student. Americans began to call upon their schools to place a greater emphasis on intellectual development and academic achievement. This was necessary because of the need for high-level technical and scientific skill which came about due to the revolution in electronics, physics, and medicine (McClellan, 1992).

Hartshorne, May, and Shuttleworth's (1930) research findings undermined public confidence in character education, in general, and particularly in reliance on the traditional, didactic method of teaching character. Concurrently, the notion of logical positivism was gaining ground and sharpening the distinction between fact and feeling. Value judgments of any kind were in disfavor and were considered to be "relative to the individual, situationally variable, and essentially private" (Lickona, 1991, p. 38). This attitude continued into the 1950s.

Throughout this period of decline of formal character education in public schools, there remained a few staunch supporters of the crucial need for its resurgence. Mason (1950) called for American educators to remain true to the real purpose of education which, as he described, was to provide their young charges with the skills and competencies necessary for coping with and solving societal problems of the present and future. In 1951 the National Education Association and the American Association of School Administrators released a document that enumerated 10 basic moral and spiritual values to be cultivated by schools. Attempts such as this, however, were complicated by the ever-shifting and dynamic cloud of religious pluralism that did, and does, exist in American society (McClellan, 1992; McClusky, 1958).

McClusky (1958) contended that only in a utopian society can there be a truly successful approach to the moral side of the educational process. However, he conceded that citizens of a society, in spite of their different cultural and religious beliefs, do hold similar values and ideals. Specifically, a society must function cooperatively and peacefully, and the citizenry "must give at least implicit allegiance to the framework of

legal sanctions which protect the exercise of individual rights, resolves conflicts of right” (p. 1).

Kohlberg's 1958 dissertation revived interest in the study of moral learning. Kohlberg proposed that there are six predictable and sequential stages of moral development through which people pass – although not all people progress to the higher levels – and that through discussions of moral dilemmas, teachers could guide students from their current moral-reasoning stage to the next higher stage.

The values clarification movement debuted in 1966 with the publication of *Values and Teaching* (Raths, Harmin, & Simon, 1966). This movement introduced value-laden issues for classroom discussion throughout much of the 1970s. As in the evaluation of Kohlberg's moral-discussions approach, evaluations of values clarification showed no significant changes in student behavior (Leming, 1987).

Kohlberg's (1969) work on the development of moral reasoning was the most influential work during the 1960s and 1970s. Kohlberg's theory of moral development gained significant attention from other scholars who were enthusiastic about the possibility of accelerating students' passage through the developmental stages. Beck (1971) argued that developing the capacity to reason morally is an important and necessary condition of human development. He stated that students do not benefit from inner conflicts they experience, because they are unable to interpret moral dilemmas intellectually. As a result, opportunities for intellectual moral growth go unrecognized. Beck felt that the inner conflicts, which arise from one's desire to do what is right and to do something else, could be enhanced if students were provided assistance in understanding values from an

intellectual perspective. According to Beck, the ideal place in which to provide that assistance is the school.

The Kentucky Department of Education (1977) identified several common core values as being appropriate for inclusion into the classroom experience at particular grade levels and in specific courses. For example, teachers in grade 9 might develop lessons aimed at addressing such values as honesty, loyalty, cleanliness, obedience, respect, and integrity. In the 12th grade, teachers could place emphasis on the cultivation of values; such as, honesty, integrity, responsibility, respect for life, respect for others, and the importance of freedom.

Rokeach (1973) conceded that the word *character* is difficult to define precisely in an educational setting because of its closeness to words such as values, ethics, civics, and morals. But Rokeach did stress that all of those terms serve to denote the good, the bad, and the desirable actions of human behavior. This explanation came in response to the general decline of the direct teaching of character education in public schools.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, character education advocates attempted to introduce new means of character education that might be less intrusive. Several value-analysis approaches were tried. These too came under fire as members of conservative religious groups felt that such teachings constituted the tenets of a religion known as secular humanism; therefore, they objected to their children being exposed to it (Goldberg, 1987).

The philosophical split within the character education movement was becoming more distinct. Scholars debated the effectiveness of programs that were based on

developmental theory and that emphasized moral reasoning, versus those that were based on traditional theory and that focused on the habituation of desired behavior (Bennett, 1993; Wynne, 1986). This controversy was not limited to the field of education but spread into the political arena as well. By the late 1970s, strong negative reactions to the relativist nature of values clarification were voiced by political conservatives, liberals, and moderates. Liberals, rejecting the notion of absolutes, advocated a policy of taking all discussions of values out of the classrooms. Among political conservatives there was a powerful group known as the religious right that objected to the notion of relativist public values being discussed in the classroom. Public outrage at values clarification continued to build until values clarification largely disappeared from the school setting (Damon, 1988; Lickona, 1991). Throughout most of the 1980s, little arrived in the way of formal programs to fill this gap.

During the 1980s, teachers were advised to avoid discussing virtues, morals, values, or the issue of character in order to avoid community and parent controversy. The paradox, recognized by many even then, is that the absence of values was a value. There is, by definition, no such thing as a value-free educational environment (Dewey, 1916; Durkheim, 1925; Etzioni, 1983; Hlebowitsh, 1994; Jackson, 1986; McClarin, 1995; Ryan, 1993).

In an effort to counteract societal and school youth problems, schools tried a wide variety of social skills programs throughout the 1970s and 1980s. These programs focused on specific social issues or problems; such as, drugs (*Just Say No*), alcohol (*Students against Drunk Driving*), and discipline. Despite the addition of these problem-specific

programs to the curriculum, conditions continued to worsen (Lickona, 1991; Wynne & Ryan, 1997).

Gockley and Gockley (1997) determined that educators and parents shied away from character education, during the early 1980s, in the spirit of being politically correct. As in all of the decades since the 1920s, a few proponents continued to speak out for character education even during the 1980s. One of the staunchest supporters of character education during this time was United States National Secretary of Education William Bennett (1993). Bennett wrote several books through which he stressed the crucial need for character education (e.g., *Book of Virtues* and *The Moral Compass*).

### Traditionalist Approach

Character education traditionalists believe it is necessary to create opportunities for children to practice behaviors related to good character (Ryan, 1988), and they believe in rewarding good behavior as a means of reinforcement, thus promoting habit. This approach is not seen as one of indoctrination, but rather as inculcation of a society's values. Evidence of a child's understanding is presumed to be found only in the child's behavior.

Bennett (1991) argued that being simple and straightforward about moral responsibility is not the same as being simplistic and unsophisticated. Existentialist educators view morality as something beyond cognitive processes. They associate morality with such social psychological processes as personal sensitivity, feelings, and openness to others (Boulding, 1975) and, therefore, are also considered traditionalists in so far as character education is concerned.

Wynne and Hess (1986), traditional in approach, believed that in order to recognize what constitutes good character, educators must start with a concept of visibility – that is, what they see enacted as good character. Wynne believed that the acceptance of the concept of visibility lays the foundation for identifying good character, measuring it, and understanding how classrooms should be properly managed. Conduct is visible and can often be observed. It is important that character traits be observable. Educators can help form the character of the young if they have an efficient form of feedback. Another noted traditionalist, Ryan (1989), contended that children are better served by a more traditional approach through which they learn to accept rules and live accordingly.

### Cognitive-Developmentalist Approach

Kohlberg advanced ideas of cognitive development into a theory of moral development. According to Kohlberg (1976), all individuals pass sequentially through three levels of moral reasoning: preconventional, conventional, and postconventional. Piaget was also an early supporter of the cognitive developmental view of morality – that there is a considerable amount of reasoning in moral judgments and behavior (Piaget, 1965).

Although Kohlberg and Piaget agreed in their support of the cognitive development of morality, they differed on specifics. Whereas Piaget (1965) stressed that there are real differences in the way children think about morality at different ages, Kohlberg (1976) found considerable overlaps at the various ages. Both agreed that social arrangements in society play a major role in the moral development of adolescents.

Although Kohlberg's work is most commonly known, his is not the only developmental cognitive approach. The ill-fated values-clarification movement was also based on the assumption that thinking and talking about one's values would accelerate the growth of moral reasoning. Other developmental cognitive approaches can be found in some of the current programs that emphasize the teaching of ethical concepts. It is believed that through deep intellectual understanding of concepts or attributes such as love and loyalty, children will learn to want to do good. Generally, these programs do not include behavioral aspects as expected student outcomes (Day, 1995).

According to cognitive developmentalists, moral autonomy is more than just an orientation or an attitude; it is a cognitive competence that develops and requires sophisticated instruction and long practice. Considering current-day traditionalists to be neo-Aristotelians, Power, Higgins, and Kohlberg (1989) contended that Bennett's charge that moral education has been over intellectualized echoes the one raised by Aristotle against Socrates. They further argued that a proper understanding of Aristotelian character education demands a far greater appreciation of the role of cognition in character development.

Cognitive curricularists maintained that moral development combines social standards or norms with personal choices (Naisbitt, 1982). Since the cognitive developmental approach incorporated both content and process, it held a greater appeal to teachers and parents than did value clarification. Murphy (1988) affirmed that moral development can be expedited by education through a variety of approaches.

Though not without its critics, the cognitive-developmental approach did make a major contribution to the character education field as it sought to understand children's moral behavior. Lickona (1991) stated that as children progress to successfully higher stages of moral development, they are "better able to stand in the shoes of others, integrate conflicting perspectives on a moral problem, appreciate the consequences of a chosen course of action and make a decision that respects the rights of all parties" (p. 24).

### Integrated Approaches

Although the developmental-versus-traditionalist debate continues, it has been expanded and extended to include fostering student understanding of ethical attributes through literature, student awareness of political or citizenship rights and responsibilities, and teaching specific skills for success. Some programs emphasize moral reasoning; some target specific values. Some programs are based on developmental theory (e.g., Kohlberg, 1969); others are based on traditionalist theory (e.g., Bennett, 1991; Wynne, 1986); and still others combine elements of both (Schaps, Solomon, & Watson, 1985).

In terms of their goals, some programs (e.g., Heartwood Institute) emphasize understanding personal ethical attributes. Others (e.g., Center for Civic Education) emphasize political or citizenship goals, such as, democratic values. The character education label has even been extended by some to include teaching interpersonal, social techniques, such as, conflict resolution and self-esteem (Schaps et al., 1985).

Today's theories of character education usually incorporate both traditional (behavior-oriented) and cognitive-developmental theories of learning. The current character development theory of learning most often relies on an integrated approach,

combining the cognitive realm with the words of action. Either alone is seen as insufficient. Highly developed moral reasoning without appropriate accompanying behavior is not evidence of good character; and the ability to recite all the codes and rules, and conform to those rules in one specific setting, is not necessarily evidence of a tendency to behave ethically in other situations (Harris & Hoyle, 1990).

Leming (1993) reached the following conclusions concerning integrated approaches to character education:

1. Didactic methods alone (codes, pledges, teacher exhortation, etc.) are unlikely to have any significant or lasting effect on character.
2. Development of students' capacity to reason about questions of moral conduct does not result in a related change in conduct. Apparently, one cannot reason one's way to virtuous conduct.
3. Character developments within a social web or environment. The nature of that environment, the messages it sends to individuals, and the behaviors it encourages and discourages are important factors to consider in character education. Clear rules of conduct, student ownership of those rules, supportive environment, and deep lasting satisfaction that results from complying with the norms of that environment shape behavior.

Just as Lemming's had done, Jackson's (1986) research supported the idea that the entire school experience affects the ways in which children view ethical behavior. According to Jackson, total behavior is not just the result of moral discussions, moral lessons in literature, or a recitation of moral conduct rules. More and more, those in character education have accepted Dewey's (1916) and Durkheim's (1925) concept that

students have opportunities to observe or enact ethical behavior in all school experiences. Thus, character is developed by exposing children to desired behavior that is modeled by adults, as well as by providing explanations of why certain behaviors are to be desired. As Ryan (1989) explained, "Along with example and explanation, environmental expectations, evaluation, and experience are equally important" (p. 14).

Some researchers have issued a caution regarding the mix and match approach to character education. As discovered in research by McQuaide et al. (1995), programs that were used side by side often competed with one another and offered confusing messages. Lockwood (1993) also raised serious questions concerning the integration of various approaches. Regardless of these warnings, as of the mid-1990s, the consensus in the character education field seemed to be that the most effective programs reflected a broad range of choices.

Calabrese (1990) agreed with Ryan and Greer, as he argued that public schools have a civic duty to transmit more than just cognitive knowledge. Schools must perpetuate those values that, when taught, will serve to sustain democratic society. Calabrese proposed that school is the social organization that serves as the socialization agent for society. School prepares young people to enter the work force, interact with other people, and appreciate and transmit traditions and values inherent in society. According to Durkheim (1925), above all else the school has the function of linking the child to society.

Schools that build a climate of caring are sometimes referred to as prosocial environments. These school communities emphasize acquisition of social skills (Charney, 1992; Elliot, 1993; Higgins, 1989; Lipsitz, 1995; Lyons, 1989; Noddings, 1992). In

prosocial schools teachers are expected to be well acquainted with, and to care about, all of the students; children are expected to care about one another. Cooperative learning is often employed as a means of having children become well acquainted and to foster student interactions. Advocates of prosocial schools believe that they are providing students with tools necessary to be good citizens. However, the spirit is more one of cooperation and consensus building, rather than a strictly democratic policy of one person/one vote (Schulman, 1995).

Calabrese (1990) called for schools to become ethical democratic communities. He maintained that teaching ethical values through civics classes is insufficient and that schools must infuse ethical principles throughout the school's culture. Calabrese insisted that schools, as ethical democratic communities, should be places where justice prevails, equity is cherished, integrity is a driving force in all relationships, full participation is an expectation, inclusion is the norm, and members are allowed to redress grievances. The notion of preparing children to participate in society is also behind the efforts to create schools that are moral communities where "children know each other; they respect and care about each other; and they feel membership in, and accountability to, the group" (Lickona, 1991, p. 69).

### Religious Aspect

The role of religion in character education is greatly debated. To some it is the very foundation of the movement. For others, it is totally unrelated except for the overlapping traits that are commonly emphasized by both. Researchers (e.g., Wright & Cox, 1967) have found fundamental moral ideals that have strong religious associations stressed in a

majority of character education programs. McClusky (1967) contended that the atmosphere of a religiously oriented school reinforces and hastens the development of the moral learning process, although few studies have actually demonstrated this relationship.

Several early studies evaluated the relationship between religious education and various aspects of moral reasoning. Boehm (1962) and Moran and Jennings (1983) found that Catholic students made more intention-based judgments. Similarly, Wright and Cox (1967) found that students who had received religious-based education were more advanced in moral evaluation of given situations.

In contrast, Armsby (1971) found no difference between religious school students and secular students in the ability to make intention-based judgments. Turiel (1966) observed that parochial school children actually lagged behind their secular school counterparts in their progression through the stages of moral development. Recent studies of morality differentiate moral reasoning, including religious-based reasoning, from moral behavior (Heilburn & Georges, 1990). As Hoffman (1963) put it, "Simply because a person has strong moral influences does not mean or assure that he or she will behave morally" (p. 304). In fact, several studies have found little relationship between religious-based moral reasoning and moral behavior (Guttman, 1984; McLaughlin & Stephens, 1974; Santrock, 1975). Other studies found that a person's level of moral reasoning is related to his or her elicited behavior (Heilburn & Georges, 1990; Lickona, 1988).

American schools do have Judeo-Christian roots, which have given growth to a kind of civil religion or a pattern of traditional values. Many of these traditional values have become established because they are deemed reasonable, are widely practiced, and

have proven consistent with America's political democracy. Development in religious thought is related to structural transformations in other domains, including moral reasoning and ethical decision making (Day, 1995).

In Durkheim's (1951) view, morality and religion, the collective conscience as he called them, are the bonds that hold the social order together. A breakdown of these views, he believed, would lead to social instability and individual feelings of anxiety and dissatisfaction, sometimes resulting in depression, suicide, and other forms of disorder. However, other researchers such as Nucci (1989) have shown that children's moral understandings were independent of specific religious concepts and that both secular and religious children focus on the same set of fundamental interpersonal issues.

Most educators' training in character education comes, at least in part, from their religious backgrounds (Ryan, 1989). Therefore, educators need training in the fundamentals of other religions so they can promote the legitimacy of values and character traits they are emphasizing to all members of their community. Additionally, any understanding of moral education reflects views of human nature and development (Simpson, 1989), and these are heavily influenced by views of spirituality.

In the end the desirability of a highest stage of development rests on a consensus of subjective judgments about what human qualities are desirable (Campbell & Bond, 1982). It is important for educators and the public to engage in an extended dialogue regarding these issues and begin to place as much emphasis on character development as is placed on academic achievement. This must be done in such a way that schools, families, and religious organizations can legitimize what the other social institutions are

doing. Otherwise, the benefits of focusing on character development in schools may be lost in the controversy and conflict that ensues. Kohlberg's (1984) research yielded no important differences in the development of moral thinking among Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Buddhists, Moslems, and atheists. Kohlberg also noted that religious values seem to go through the same stages as all other values.

Greer and Ryan (1989) asserted that most Americans derived their idea of right and wrong and what is good and bad behavior from religious teachings. From this assertion they concluded that, in reality, there existed a substantial overlap between the values of various religions and denominations and the civic values necessary to maintain a democratic republic. They maintained that the values, attitudes, and behaviors needed to form a good citizen and to sustain a democracy are usually the same ones strongly endorsed by religions and that the dictates of one's religious conscience and the precepts of democracy tend to reinforce each other.

### General History – Late 1980s to Mid 1990s

Although some form of character education has existed in the United States since the 1600s (McClellan, 1992), the current character education movement began to take shape in the late 1980s. Increased interest in, awareness of, and attention to character education came in response to societal changes. Statistics on the high incidence of youth homicide, suicide, drug use, and teenage pregnancy caused growing concern among Americans during the late 1980s (Fox, 1994; Wynne & Hess, 1987).

Regarding the character education needs of the local district and community, one of the most common starting points is the Aspen Declaration, the product of a 1992

character education conference convened by the Josephson Institute of Ethics (Josephson, 1992). This statement lists six values: (a) respect, (b) responsibility, (c) trustworthiness, (d) caring, (e) justice and fairness, and (f) civic virtue and citizenship. These six virtues share a common place within the foundation of a majority of character education programs now in existence.

The popularity of character education programs increased dramatically between 1985 and 1995 (Leming, 1993; Martin, 1995; McClarin, 1995). There are estimates that by 1995 character education programs were used in 20% of schools in the United States (McClarin, 1995). Greer and Ryan (1989) contended that the reason for the resurgence in character education was “because we are concerned about the marks being put on the young and the kinds of habits they are acquiring” (p. 26).

By the mid 1990s, activity in the field of character education had become well organized, publicized, and energized (Abrahms, 1992; Lickona, 1993); and character education was considered by some the hottest educational trend of the decade (Martin, 1995). At steadily increasing rates, classroom teachers, individual schools, school districts, state departments of education, and national educational organizations joined the movement promoting character education policies, curricula, and programs (Brandt, 1993). New character education curricula have been developed locally in cities throughout the country.

Because the field has been expanding so rapidly, it would be difficult to uncover all of the currently available character education programs and curricula. The Character Education Partnership has been developing a comprehensive list of available programs,

recognizing that principals and other school officials need to have this information. States which have received federal grants in character education are expected to develop clearinghouses for the purpose of collecting and disseminating such information. Louisiana is one such state (*Louisiana Clearinghouse for Character Education*, 2000).

In March 1992 a group concerned about character education convened in Wisconsin at the Johnson Foundation's Wingspread facility. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (1996) and the Princeton Project 55 initiated a conference entitled "The Effective Implementation of K-12 Character and Values Education" (Boyd & Beneth, 1992). Conference participants recognized the need for a national coalition to mobilize efforts in character education. As a result of that meeting, the Josephson Institute of Ethics reconvened the group in Aspen, Colorado, in July 1992 to determine whether a common ground and common language could be found regarding key aspects of character education. This meeting lasted 4 days, after which a statement referred to as the Aspen Declaration was endorsed (Josephson, 1992).

Along with increased activity in the character education movement came an increase in the number of publications from organizations – such as, the Character Education Partnership, the Center for the Advancement of Ethics, and the "CHARACTER COUNTS!" Coalition – and from many program developers promoting new programs and curricula. Publications such as *Educating for Character* (Lickona, 1991), *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong* (Kilpatrick, 1992), and *The Book of Virtues* (Bennett, 1993) became commercial successes with a wide audience of both educators and parents.

New character education curricula appeared alongside the longer established ones of the Jefferson Center for Character Education and the American Institute for Character Education. Programs are now being developed locally in cities throughout the country, providing curricula and guidelines that are relatively easy to implement. One example is the Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP), a school-business-community partnership in St. Louis that emphasizes improvement in school climate, improvement in community environments, and development of intelligent and responsible citizens for the future work force (Network for Educational Development, 1993).

Another organization, the Communitarian Network founded by Amitai Etzioni, plays an active role in the promotion of character education. This organization emphasizes the development of community and the need for people to work together at the local level to solve community problems. Character education was added to the Communitarian agenda as an important way to involve youth in concerns for one another and for the community (Etzioni, 1983).

There are many unresolved issues within this rapidly expanding field. Attention needs to be given to defining better the intent of specific programs and curricula, to determining effective methods of implementation and teaching, and to assessing whether the programs are effective. There is a need, critical to the effective functioning of character education programs and to principals as the key consumers of character education programs, to obtain information from principals who know what is needed in their particular schools. It is important to understand whether principals have access to program choices, are getting information from the field, are familiar with sources for

**character education information and activities, and have sufficient information for sound decision making (McQuaide & Pliska, 1995).**

### **Synthesis of Organizations**

**There are character education programs and material being offered by a wide array of sources. The diversity of these programs, people, institutions, and organizations provides the field of character education with new perspective and fresh ideas. A review of the literature indicates that the key organizations that are defining the field come from diverse perspectives with different backgrounds and different (but overlapping) goals.**

**Among these various combinations of sources are:**

- 1. The developers of specific character education curricula (e.g., the Developmental Studies Center, the Jefferson Center for Character Education, the American Institute for Character Education, San Antonio, the Heartwood Institute).**
- 2. Previously established groups that have turned attention to character education (e.g., ASCD, Communitarians, Ethics Resource Center, National School Boards Association).**
- 3. Religiously affiliated organizations (e.g., National Association of Evangelicals, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism).**
- 4. Centers that are recent additions to colleges and universities (e.g., the Character Education Institute at the University of Pennsylvania, the Center for the 4th and 5th Rs at the State First University College in Cortland, New York).**

5. **Private and corporate foundations (e.g., Kennedy Foundation, McDonnell Foundation, Scaife Family Foundation).**
6. **Individual school districts or geographical areas (e.g., Dayton, Ohio; Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania; Sweet Home School District, New York).**
7. **Groups of individuals, or partnerships, committed to common core ideas of character (e.g., “CHARACTER COUNTS!” Coalition, Character Education Partnership).**

### **Governmental Support**

The current wave of interest in public schools’ teaching character education had a federal initiative. In the summer of 1994, through the efforts of the Communitarian Network, the White House hosted a “Conference on Character Building for a Democratic, Civil Society.” In June 1994 a bipartisan group from Congress passed, and President Clinton signed, a resolution declaring one week in October as “National CHARACTER COUNTS! Week” (Clinton’s Call to Action, 1997). The core elements of good character listed in the resolution matched the six pillars of character of the Josephson Institute of Ethics (Josephson, 1992). Another White House conference on character education was held in May 1995 and was addressed by former Secretary of Education William Bennett, Secretary of Education Richard Riley, and President Bill Clinton (Clinton’s Call to Action, 1997).

Character education was a focus in President Clinton’s 1996 State of the Union Address in which he challenged all schools to teach students basics of good character. Toward this end, Clinton hosted three White House conferences on character education

and encouraged development of character education through the Improving America's Schools Act (Clinton's Call to Action, 1997). In 1995 the United States Department of Education began awarding \$1 million grants to state departments of education to plan, implement, and evaluate pilot education programs through a partnership with local schools or other agencies. This grant program has been re-funded annually. As grant recipients, state departments are expected to develop curriculum materials and provide teacher training. Awarding federal money for character education programs was indicative of national attention on character education (Clinton's Call to Action).

### Recent History – Mid 1990s to 2000

A study conducted by Public Agenda found that most Americans believe there has been a “moral meltdown” in the country (Dobbs, 1997, p. 54). Dobbs attributed this moral meltdown to mass media filled with antisocial messages and gratuitous violence. He felt children today have far fewer role models of kind, caring, and responsible behavior.

Some people believe families are responsible for the moral education of children, but as Close (1997) explained:

We are all members of the moral community; we are all affected by the decisions and behaviors of others. So every person, as well as every institution, shares the responsibility to grow good children into good adults. If moral education is reserved solely for families, we turn our backs on children whose families are dysfunctional, whose parents don't have, or will not take, the time to teach them right from wrong. (p. 93)

Historically, schools reinforced the moral teachings of parents and the church, but over time this reinforcement has deteriorated (Glanzer, 1997).

Today there is a renewed interest in character education as the perception grows that many American youth are getting out of control. Drugs and gangs, teenage pregnancy and suicide, school shootings, and laxity of school discipline have led many educators and political leaders to look once again to the schools to educate, not only the minds, but also the consciences of children (Cunningham, 1999). According to King (1999), implementation of character education into public schools is a historical distortion that seems to be in the process of righting itself, especially in the United States.

Hoffman and Lee (1997) listed reasons for implementing character education into the curriculum of public schools. First, "Character education is needed to complement the efforts of parents, families, religious and civic organizations, and businesses in developing those qualities which ensure the continuity of a free and democratic society." Second, "Character education is needed to assist in a community wide effort to reduce violence and other destructive behaviors within our society" (p. 53).

Ryan and Bohlin (1999) believed that virtues-centered approaches are best, because in analyzing the virtues of specific characters, students are learning what it is to live and behave in an honorable way. They are then able to see the power of virtue in shaping individual lives. In this way students begin to understand that character comes not from acquiring particular points of view or values, but from developing a set of ideals upon which to base one's life.

Texas Commissioner of Education Jim Nelson and Michael Josephson, president and founder of the Josephson Institute of Ethics, announced on October 22, 1999, the launching of the nation's largest and most comprehensive character development program

ever (Nelson, 1999). This initiative to help reduce youth violence, crime, unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and other antisocial conduct was a key element of Governor George W. Bush's Lone Star Leaders Initiative for the state. Under the terms of a 2-year, \$900,000 state grant to the nonprofit, nonpartisan Josephson Institute, Character Counts teamed up with the Texas Education Agency to develop materials and programs designed to help young people learn core ethical values. In all, more than 40 training programs and seminars were developed and administered for about 5,000 Texas educators, coaches, and other youth-development professionals. There has been no attempt to mandate the program. Each school district will determine how and whether it will use the resources (DeCair, 1999).

Project Wisdom, Inc. was founded by Leslie Matula after recognizing a need for positive messages following the Los Angeles riots (Matula, 1999). It markets a character-building program that has become a national success because of the ongoing feedback and input of educators, students, and parents. Project Wisdom is an independent, nonsectarian, nonpolitical, for-profit organization. It is not funded by or affiliated with any other organization. The Project Wisdom Program is a collection of thought-provoking messages designed to be read over the public address or in-house television system during morning announcements. The messages are intended to inspire, motivate, and teach. Each message takes less than 1 minute to broadcast. Other components of the program include reproducible, weekly journal activities and weekly themes (Matula, 1999).

Another example of the same type of program is at Appleton, Wisconsin's Wilson Middle School. On Tuesday and Thursday mornings at the opening of the school day,

music teacher Doug Dahm reads a short story to the student body over the public address system. These are not random stories. Dahm has selected each for the character trait it portrays, hoping to impart bits of wisdom about goodness, the Golden Rule, conscience, attitude, and integrity (*Wise ones say*, 1997).

The primary form of character education research since 1998 has been in the form of doctoral dissertations. Both quantitative and qualitative research studies have been conducted on a wide range of character education themes. Some of these recent studies have focused on the implementation of character education through federal programs, such as, the United States Army (Brand, 1999) and the Americorps National Civilian Community Corps (Hajdo, 1999).

The purpose of Brand's (1999) descriptive study was to determine the components of an effective curriculum for instilling character and values in United States Army basic trainees. Two randomly chosen intact groups, each with 25 trainees, were included in the study. One group was exposed to the active learning model, while the other was relegated to traditional forms of character inculcation. The action learning model, which incorporates the key elements of modeling and student participation, while supporting the idea of values inculcation, was found to be an appropriate instructional model. According to Brand, drill sergeants should instruct the trainees in values and assess the effectiveness of instruction through observation and formal oral testing of soldiers. It was further recommended that the Army provide officers to model its values. Brand concluded that the Army must establish standards of instruction for values education that formalize the training process and provide timely and accurate assessment methods.

Hajdo (1999) attempted to define the civic character of those who join Americorps' National Civilian Community Corps and whether that civic character changed after service. A survey was designed by Hajdo to measure the theoretical concepts of civic character. These theoretical concepts were defined according to two groups of theorists. The first, the critics of liberalism, focused on civic virtue and the demands of participatory democracy. The second group, American civic-virtue theorists, offered a model of citizenship which focuses more broadly on a set of virtues or habits and dispositions that form the character of a desirable citizen in the American republic. This survey was administered to Americorps participants at Perry Point, Maryland, shortly after they joined and again at the end of their 2 years of service. Hajdo was unable to determine a uniform set of criteria that was common among a majority of participants. Findings indicated statistically significant changes on 4 variables, including a measure of civic virtue, but there was no significant change in attitudes from pretest to posttest. The civic character of these respondents most closely fit the public-spirited model of citizenship.

Others have focused on the perceived character education views of past leaders in the field of education, like John Dewey (Haegle, 1999), or ways to implement character education through specific community programs for youth, like Lochearn Camp for Girls, in Lochearn, Vermont (Maxson, 2000). Although these studies had no direct relationship to the current study, they do lend themselves as evidence of the growing focus on the importance of research in the field of character education.

According to Haegle (1999), the central aim of John Dewey's philosophy of education and democracy was the instillation of democratic character in young people.

Dewey developed a rich, subtle, and suggestive account of the nature of democratic virtues and their connection to democracy. He insisted that the inclusion of moral ideals into all facets of academic instruction was crucial to all adolescent achievement.

Maxson (2000) presented a systematic review and comparative analysis of moral and character education literature, strategies, and empirical research from selected character education programs. He integrated available theories, research, and strategies to establish a comprehensive model of character education suitable for summer camps and other educational institutions. This analytical paper began with a presentation of the two major schools of thought regarding children's moral education: the socialization model and the cognitive-developmental model. The socialization model defines morality in terms of adherence to social conventions and moral development as the process of internalizing culturally acceptable moral habits and standards. The cognitive-developmental model views moral development in terms of the progressive development of moral judgment regarding what is just and fair.

Maxson concluded that neither the socialization model nor the cognitive-developmental model was sufficient to address the full complexity of human character. In an attempt to construct a more comprehensive model of moral and character education, Maxson drew primarily from the work of Lickona (1991) and Damon (1988). These scholars promoted an integrated view of the moral child which included the child's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, as well as the child's social relationship with the community.

Maxson carefully reviewed four character education programs that concurrently addressed multiple aspects of children's emerging character and the mutual relationship of child and community. Each program reviewed also had a strong, controlled research base that focused on participants' behaviors. Maxson conducted a comparative analysis of these programs and then presented the underlying theories, assumptions, and generalizations that emerged. This analysis provided the framework for a comprehensive character education program which integrates developmental and traditional approaches to moral education, along with knowledge from the character education movement. Maxson described how this integrated approach has been successfully applied at Lochearn Camp for Girls.

Along with the generally related themes mentioned above, there has also been a recent increase in studies that specifically target character education efforts within America's public schools. Williams (1999) implemented quantitative measures in order to determine the relationship between principals' preferred leadership styles and levels of implementation of character education programs. Williams' study was conducted to determine if there was a relationship between the independent variable, leadership styles of West Virginia's Kanawha County Schools (KCS) principals, and the dependent variable of implementation levels of character education programs. The sample used for the study included all principals in KCS ( $n = 87$ ). The instruments used for collection of data in the study included: Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire, Character Assessment Checklist, and Demographic Survey of KCS Principals. The respondents were encouraged to complete the instruments in an open and honest manner, and anonymity was

insured for the respondents and their schools. The Statistical Product Service Solutions package was used to analyze the data. A linear regression, *t*-test, and frequency distributions were used to determine relationships. The results of the *t*-test indicated that there were no significant differences between the groups. However, the linear regression indicated there was a significant relationship at the .05 alpha level. The linear regression indicated that as the principals' initiating structure score increased, as measured by the Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire, there were significantly higher levels of implementation of character education.

Similarly, East (1996) analyzed and described South Carolina public high school principals' perceptions of character education programs. A total of 126 public high school principals responded to a comprehensive survey, which was developed and administered by East. The 5 variables analyzed were (a) principals' personal and professional characteristics, (b) principals' level of acceptance of principles of character education, (c) principals' level of training in the principles of character education, (d) principals' perception of character education as a legitimate function of public high schools, and (e) principals' perception of character education as an effective means of addressing the problems of discipline and violence in public high schools.

The results of East's survey indicated that South Carolina public high school principals were supportive of the principles of character education but were not very well trained in them. This support appeared to cross both personal and professional characteristics of the principals. The principals also indicated that they viewed character education as a legitimate function of the public high school and that character education

could be an effective deterrent to school violence and to discipline problems (East, 1996).

In 1999 Freado conducted a study to determine what strategies or elements of the process for implementing a comprehensive character education program were considered by South Carolina middle school principals to be important. Specifically, this study was intended to determine if the 16 most widely used strategies (as determined by Freado) would be validated by principals who had implemented comprehensive character education programs. The Eleven Principles Survey of Character Education Effectiveness was used to determine the schools whose programs were considered by their principals to be comprehensive. Seven of the 22 schools with the highest overall average score on the survey participated in the second phase of the study. The principals of the seven schools completed a second survey which asked them to rate the importance of the 16 strategies using a Likert Scale. Follow-up interviews with the respondents were conducted in order to clarify and confirm the responses and to gain further insight in the respective experiences.

The descriptive findings essentially validated the use of all 16 strategies. Although all of the strategies were rated as important or very important by a majority of the principals, several stood out as essential. The leadership of the building principal and the inclusion of all stakeholders were confirmed as essential to each strategy studied. The use of consensus building as a decision-making technique also proved to be important, according to the respondents. Collaboration, inclusion, and leadership were common to each strategy and were discussed at length in each review.

Researchers have also focused on the role of teachers regarding character education implementation (Milson, 1999; Pope, 1999) and even on the influence of state curriculum on character education (Zarra, 1999). Milson attempted to describe the perceptions of social studies teacher educators regarding common themes of contemporary character education, the scope of character education, and the importance of the inclusion of character education issues in a curriculum/methods course. The sample consisted of 298 members of the National Council for the Social Studies who indicated involvement in either elementary or secondary teacher preparation on their membership form. The data were collected by mailing a questionnaire to all subjects and conducting follow-up telephone interviews with approximately 10% of the respondents. The questionnaire was created by the researcher; however, levels of validity and reliability were not clearly established. The descriptive findings suggest support among social studies teacher educators for the themes of contemporary character education, for a broadly conceived scope for character education that includes social studies goals, and for including character education as a topic in a curriculum/methods course.

Similarly, Pope (1999) attempted to determine if a relationship existed between the personal demographics of Mississippi Family and Consumer Sciences teachers of Family Dynamics and the degree of emphasis that they placed on teaching selected state-mandated character education objectives. Family Consumer Sciences teachers who were employed to teach Family Dynamics during the 1998-99 school year were asked to complete a personal demographics questionnaire and a Family Dynamics questionnaire. The questionnaire included questions concerning the teachers' gender, race, ethnicity, socio-

economic status, family size, and marital status. A total of 220 questionnaires were mailed and 134 were returned. Regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses. Results of the study indicated that no relationship existed at the .05 alpha level between the personal demographics of Family and Consumer Sciences teachers of Family Dynamics and the degree of emphasis that they placed on teaching selected character education objectives.

The major purpose of Zarra's (1999) study was to analyze the extent to which character education is addressed and aligned, in terms of state (a) policy goals, (b) curriculum frameworks and standards, and (c) assessments. The state documents for the study were limited to history-social science and English-language arts curriculum frameworks and content standards for five states. Each of the state documents was analyzed within and between states, focusing on three components: (a) purposes of character education, (b) core values of character education, and (c) process of character education. This analysis determined alignment of each state to itself and other states. State documents were analyzed according to a Character Education Conceptual Framework developed by the researcher for this study. Personal interviews with state-level education leaders assisted in clarifying the content analysis of each state's documents.

Zarra (1999) found considerable discrepancy between each state's character education policy goals and its actual curriculum frameworks and content standards. Character education expectations did not meet curriculum or standard requirements. State history-social science and English-language arts policy documents emphasized the purposes of character education over core values and the process to achieve character education. Four of the five states included character education as an adjunct in their history-social

science documents. Generally, it was classified as civic education or citizenship training. Character education in state English-language arts documents was virtually nonexistent. State documents neither required nor emphasized national character education achievement testing or any state-level assessment for character education. Such determinations were left to the local education communities. Furthermore, there was no state guidance system in place to monitor the delivery or implementation of character education curriculum in the states (Zarra).

Most often, specific programs have been researched in an effort to determine the value of implementation efforts (Childers, 1999; Corley, 2000; McKinney, 2000). For example, the purpose of Corley's study was to discover if students' standards of right and wrong change after completing a character education course. The study was a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design and participants were 26 ninth-grade students who completed a 3-week character education course. Corley concluded that there was no statistically significant difference in students' standards of right and wrong between students who completed the character education course and those who did not.

Childers' (1999) study examined whether or not participation in a high or low implementation character education program would affect pretest to posttest results on a number of measures relating to the social/relational aspects of psychological wellness measures (relationships with teachers, social support, belongingness). The psychological effects of a character education program with specific reference to perceptions of the social/relational aspects of psychological wellness were explained. Sixth-grade students ( $n = 48$ ) participated in the study. A *t*-test indicated that there were no significant

differences for any of the measures of psychological wellness for boys. The pattern of results was different, however, for girls. These data suggest that for girls (a) mean scores for perception of student-to-student support in high and low implementation character education groups decreased and (b) scores in the low implementation group showed a statistically significant decrease when compared to scores for girls in the high implementation group. For teacher-to-student support, (a) scores for girls in the high implementation group showed a statistically significant increase, (b) scores for the girls in the low implementation group significantly decreased, and (c) the mean score for girls in the high implementation group was significantly higher than that for girls in the low implementation group.

In an effort to increase Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) scores and improve behavior, the faculty at Giesinger Elementary School and Mendel Elementary School decided to begin a character education program. Whereas Giesinger's program originated at the campus level, Mendel's program originated at the district level and was mandated for all schools in the district; however, each school designed its own program. These two schools formed the sample for McKinney's (2000) naturalistic study of elementary character education programs. McKinney's research questions were:

1. What are the frameworks of the character education programs used by Giesinger and Mendel Elementary school in the Conroe and Houston Independent School District?
2. What is the role of parents, teachers, administrators, and students in initiating, developing, implementing, and evaluating the character education programs?

3. **How does the interplay of school, home, and culture affect the educational and character development of students at both schools?**
4. **What patterns of behavior and achievement are exhibited by the students that can be traced to the character education programs at both schools?**

**This research used the naturalist inquiry process. Purposive sampling was used to maximize information from 88 students, 12 faculty, and 6 administrators. The researcher, a participant-observer, administered structured and unstructured interviews to the 106 participants. The information collected from classroom observations using the Stallings Observation System, interviews, and other sources formed critical incidents that were unitized and transferred to index cards. These cards were categorized to reflect the emergent themes. From these themes the final report was developed.**

**This research approach provided a description of the perceptions of the students and teachers of Giesinger Elementary and Mendel Elementary Schools concerning the introduction of character education. The students, parents, and teachers at Giesinger Elementary, the school that initiated its own character education program even before the district mandated that this be done, were found to be more enthusiastic and were putting forth more effort toward character education than the students, parents, and teachers at Mendel Elementary. McKinney concluded that the character education program at Giesinger Elementary was, therefore, superior to Mendel Elementary's character education program (McKinney, 2000).**

**Berkowitz (1999) reported that the Child Development Project has led to a broad array of character gains. Middle school longitudinal follow-ups to this elementary school**

program have shown delayed gains in academic achievements that are now appearing. These delayed gains in attitude and academics have been deemed statistically significant (Berkowitz, 1999).

Qualitative attempts to convey the perceptions of participants who have been directly involved in character education initiatives have also been conducted (Beck, 1999; Crawford, 1999; Gresham, 1999). These are the types of studies that most directly related to the current study. They were, therefore, drawn upon for methodological guidance throughout the research process and were referred to, where appropriate, during final analysis of research efforts.

The purpose of Beck's (1999) descriptive study was to determine the elements of a character education program specifically for Eader Elementary School in California. Beck conducted extensive on-site interviews and found that although the sample population of teachers, the administrator, and parents felt good character was a high priority at Eader Elementary School, they were not overwhelmingly interested in a specific character education program. According to Beck, this implied that the staff at Eader Elementary would prefer students to have good character but were unwilling to invest the time to teach this subject.

The objective of Crawford's (1999) study was to listen to how students perceived the influence of a character education program upon their moral development. Seventh grade students attending a public junior high school during the school years 1997-1998 and 1998-1999 served as the participants. This study was a descriptive case utilizing a qualitative research design. Informal data collection activities, informal interviews with

adult stakeholders, on-site observations, and 45 student interviews occurred between May and December 1998. The results revealed that a majority of students perceived their character education experience as positive and as an important part of their education. Students expressed concern about peer relationships and peer pressures. Students also demonstrated confusion over the terms *morality* and *values*. This study did not produce data to support a link between teaching character and moral change.

In Gresham's (1999) study, the changes in teachers' and students' perceptions of school and classroom climate were investigated as a result of implementing a character education program in three 4th-grade classrooms for 6 weeks. The sample consisted of 54 students and 3 teachers from a mostly African-American, inner-city school in Gadsden, Alabama. Three strategies were used to gather data for measurement. First, teachers completed a 100-item school climate survey. Second, students completed a 34-item classroom climate scale and a student character questionnaire. Third, some of the factors to determine the quality of the classroom community were identified through classroom observations.

Multivariate analysis of variance was employed as the quantitative measure for comparing groups in Gresham's study. Data revealed statistically significant differences within groups in teachers' and students' perceptions of school and classroom climate after character education implementation. Posttest results were deemed more positive for both groups. Results of the study implied a need to determine and measure teachers' and students' perceptions of school and classroom climate as part of research on character education programs.

Although a few of the larger character education initiatives have been described, it is important to note that most of America's character education programs have not been tested for effectiveness. Of the few studies that have been conducted to clarify program results, most are qualitative and seem largely subjective. According to Berkowitz (1999), the character education field is fighting the battle to demonstrate empirically that character education has the intended effects on child development. Funders, school administrators, and others are currently hesitant to embrace character education if it cannot be demonstrated that it not only promotes character development, but also promotes academic achievement (Berkowitz, 1999).

Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis (1997) listed 11 principles of effective character education programs that could be used to plan a character education program at a school site or to evaluate an existing program.

1. Character education promotes core ethical values as the basis of good character.
2. Character must be comprehensively defined to include feeling, thinking, and behavior.
3. Effective character education requires an intentional, proactive, and comprehensive approach that promotes the core ethical values in all phases of school life.
4. The school must be a caring community.
5. To develop character, students need opportunities for moral action.

6. **Effective character education includes a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners and helps them succeed.**
7. **Character education should strive to develop students' intrinsic motivation.**
8. **The school staff must become a learning and moral community in which all share responsibility for character education and attempt to adhere to the same core values that guide the education of students.**
9. **Character education requires moral leadership from both staff and students.**
10. **The school must recruit parents and community members as full partners in the character-building efforts.**
11. **Evaluation of character education should assess the character of the school, the school staff's functioning as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character. (pp. 29-31)**

### Louisiana's Approach

The Louisiana legislature (ACT No. 149, House Bill No. 102, 1998) required the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to provide a clearinghouse for information on character education programs, to permit city and district school boards to offer character education curriculum, and to oversee dissemination of character education information to city and district schools systems. The legislature mandated that character education be augmented and reinforced by public schools. The legislature also required that beginning January 1, 1999, the state superintendent of education annually provide a progress report on the implementation of the provisions of character education

and its effectiveness to the House Committee on Education, the Senate Committee on Education, and the governor.

The first annual Board of Elementary and Secondary Education report on character education (Louisiana Board, 1998) was made available to the governor in February 1999 and then disseminated to each of Louisiana's school districts (Louisiana Department of Education, 1998/99). The report included an informal survey conducted by the Department of Education in 1997, which revealed a strong interest in and a variety of activities and programs available to students at all grade levels throughout the state. Noted activities reported in this survey included: "CHARACTER COUNTS," "Character First," special elective classes in high schools, state content standards with embedded character education elements, Social Skills Training, Transition for Youth with Disabilities, school counseling models that reflect development of character traits, and personnel development sessions at various conferences that introduce strategies and techniques for infusing character elements in curriculum areas. According to the report, these services were delivered through such established entities as 4-H Youth Development Division of the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Services, Louisiana Learn and Serve, Drug Free Schools, vocational student organizations, ROTC, GUMBO (Games Uniting Mind and Body), Even Point and Starting Points, and The Louisiana Center for LAW Education.

The report also included actions in compliance with House Bill 102. First, district and city superintendents received notification of legislation during an annual meeting with the state superintendent of education. Then, a planning/discussion meeting was held involving all program areas within the Department of Education that offer programs and

activities supportive of character education. Another meeting was held with the Department of Education's webmaster to explore options for development of an electronic clearinghouse. Work is continuing through individual and committee efforts to collect information for the clearinghouse. Work is also being done to establish process and procedures for determining ongoing maintenance of the clearinghouse. A survey was made of school systems to assess programs and activities currently operating and ongoing meetings and conversations were held with the governor's liaison for character education. Department of Education personnel are also assisting in implementation of the Governor's Character Education Award Program (Louisiana Department of Education, 1998/99).

The Governor's Character Education Award Program began in 1999. This program is designed to award school personnel who have taken the initiative to enact character education programs within their schools or communities. The program is fully funded by a portion of Governor Foster's designated salary, which he has refused to take for himself. The program's goal is to recognize the efforts of 12 educators with cash prizes totaling \$20,000 (Foster, 1999). Additional evidence of Governor Foster's continued support for character education was included in a recent letter to the researcher (see Appendix A).

### Controversy

Throughout the 20th century, the field of character education was fraught with controversy. As early as 1929, studies by Hartshorne and colleagues showed that particular techniques of character training, such as, in-class discussion or even practicing helping activities, bore little or no significant relationship to pupils' later patterns of

moral conduct. Educational controversies over character education flourish today just as they have in the past.

Disagreements within the character education movement also include more specific issues. One of these issues is teaching tolerance (Fege, 1994; McQuaide & Pliska, 1995); another relates to sex education (Lickona, 1993). Problems arise when certain groups feel a moral imperative toward the teaching or not teaching of a controversial issue. The controversial nature of teaching values causes many to distrust character education programs and often impacts the adoption or rejection of them (Starratt, 1991).

Perhaps the most significant point of negative contention for the character education movement is that few studies have been conducted to determine if programs are effective and, if so, which ones and how (Leming, 1993). Lockwood (1993) pointed to numerous studies that question whether a direct link really exists between values education and behavior.

Character education is more of a political concern than a research-based or historical concern. Lockwood (1993) suggested that there are two reasons for this phenomenon. First, once one does the research, school boards pay attention to the fact that something is being done with morals and values, which could easily cause discord within a district. Secondly, research is rarely 100% positive. If confronted with negative findings, program developers need to utilize that information. Lockwood pointed out that the perceived failure of liberalism has coincided with the agenda of character educators. This is evidenced by the fact that William Bennett's *Book of Virtues* was on the *New York Times* bestseller list for almost a year.

According to Purpel (1999), public discussion of character education has come to the point where it has become an overtly partisan political issue, serving as a metaphor and code for those interested in pursuing neoconservatives' social and cultural agenda. Morality is structured by concepts of harm, welfare, and fairness (Nucci & Murray, 1998). One of the major reasons for all of this disagreement is an ongoing lack of social consensus on moral and ethical issues (Cunningham, 1998). What is taught, how it is taught, and whose values are taught are largely integrated into the curriculum as a campus decision (McKinney, 2000).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The focus of this study was to gain a holistic view of the impact of character education within one educational setting. The researcher created a narrative description of the extent, quality, and impact of character education at one north Louisiana high school. Currently, there exist numerous programs and initiatives that are labeled as character education. The researcher utilized an emergent design to examine inductively the inner workings of several of these character education initiatives within a single educational site.

#### Research Questions

For the purpose of this study, the following research questions were proposed. As with any inductive, qualitative inquiry, additional questions emerged and were addressed as the study proceeded.

1. How do participants (students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community members) define character education, and what do they perceive its value to be?
2. How do participants perceive character education in relation to values?

3. How is character education viewed by the participants in relation to attempts to regulate morality?
4. What is the scope of the character education movement within the school site?
5. How has character education impacted the climate and culture of the site, as well as the overall education of the students?
6. How has character education affected the attitudes and behavior of students?

In addition to the aforementioned questions, participants were asked to describe specific elements of, as well as compare and contrast, character education programs in which they had been involved and of which they had knowledge.

### **Research Design**

This was an ethnographic case study. Ethnographic research emerged from the field of anthropology (Jacob, 1987). The intent of ethnographic research is to obtain a holistic picture of the subject of study with emphasis on portraying everyday experiences of individuals by observing and interviewing them and relevant others (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990). The ethnographic study includes in-depth interviewing and continual, ongoing participant observation of a situation (Jacob, 1987) and, in attempting to capture the whole picture, reveals how people describe and structure their world (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990).

### **Site Selection**

The school that was chosen as the site for this case study was selected because it was a data-rich source. Programs at the school that include elements of character education were both plentiful and varied. The school had 509 students in 2000-2001. According to

the principal, approximately 75% of them were exposed to some form of character education. The student body was 60% black, 35% white, and 5% Hispanic. The school had 41 teachers and operated on a 4x4-block schedule.

For the purposes of this study, character education was defined as any class, program, club, or initiative that directly promotes or encourages values including (a) honesty/integrity, (b) work ethic, (c) respect for fellow human beings, (d) responsibility, (e) kindness, or (f) citizenship. School classes, programs, clubs, and initiatives that promoted these values included (a) Fellowship of Christian Athletes, (b) First Priority, (c) Character Counts, (d) code of ethics for each sport, (e) leadership class – an elective open to juniors and seniors, (f) district-wide no-tolerance drug and weapon policy, (g) mock elections, (h) student council, (i) 4-H, (j) Future Business Leaders of America, (k) community-service projects by the cheerleaders and dance line members, and (l) combined efforts by members of the English department to promote responsibility and work ethic. Methods varied greatly among the individual efforts; however, the common thread of character education remained strong.

Clubs were not included simply based on their charter statements, but only after examination of past activities justified their inclusion in this study of character education. Because character education, as previously defined, is often interwoven with more direct initiatives, it is often not labeled as such. For that reason, analysis of the aforementioned initiatives was necessary to accurately portray the status, depth, importance, and participant understanding of character education. Club inclusions were based on past activities and initiatives as described by club sponsors and club members. The absence or

presence of community-service activities served as a key factor in determining a club's inclusion in the research phase of this project.

Assistance in securing appropriate interview participants was requested from guidance counselors and administrators. The names of students, teachers, and community-support people who were thought to have knowledge of character education efforts were submitted by each. Based on availability, 42 of the people who were suggested as participants were interviewed. Letters of support for character education research at the site were rendered by the principal (see Appendix B) and the district superintendent (see Appendix C). In his letter the principal agreed that full access to school grounds and school records would be granted so long as regular classroom instruction was not compromised; therefore, participants were readily observable and relevant data easily attainable. Interviews were conducted at the convenience of selected participants.

For the purposes of this study, 42 informants were selected to participate. This sample size was believed small enough to manage the reconstruction of the various multiple realities that would emerge. Care was exercised to include a sample of students who represented a variety in terms of age, gender, race or ethnic background, and academic achievement. Administrators, parents, community-support personnel, teachers, and club sponsors were also included as participants.

### Data Collection

Prior to the collection of data, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Human Use Committee at Louisiana Tech University (see Appendix D). During the data collection procedure, the researcher (a) made weekly site visits; (b) gathered

observational notes by conducting observations as a participant or observer; (c) conducted unstructured, open-ended interviews and audio-taped and transcribed them; (d) kept a field log during the research process which included descriptive information from site visits; (e) analyzed documents that pertained to the incorporation, interpretation, and effect of character education; and (f) recorded weekly reflective notes including her thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of each week's interviews, observations, and document analysis. Descriptive notes included narrative portraits of the participants, reconstruction of dialogue, description of the physical setting, and accounts of particular events and activities. Reflective notes included the researcher's personal thoughts – such as, speculation, feelings, problems, impressions, hunches, prejudices, and ideas – as suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1992). Data were triangulated through the use of observations, interviews, and document analysis.

### Procedural Details and Data Analysis

Data were collected from November 2000 through March 2001 and included forty-two, 30-minute recorded interviews with participants (see Appendix E for interview questions and Appendix F for biographical information about interview participants), analysis of documents (see Appendix G), and bi-weekly 2-hour observations of character education activities (see Appendix H). Merriam (1988) and Marshall and Rossman (1989) contended that data collection and data analysis must be a simultaneous process in qualitative research. Qualitative data analysis primarily entails classifying things, persons, and events, as well as the properties that characterize them. Data were coded and indexed as they were collected. Jacob (1987) suggested that data should be indexed using

as many categories as possible. Creswell (1994) stressed that the process of qualitative analysis should be based on data reduction and interpretation. According to Agar (1991), the role of the qualitative researcher is to identify and describe patterns and themes from the perspective of participants and then attempt to understand and explain these patterns.

Interviews were unstructured and consisted of a minimum of 30 minutes each. Interviews began with an explanation of the study and collection of biographical information (see Appendix F). Participants were given the opportunity to respond according to their own view of what to stress in addressing each interview question. Participants focused on specific factors considered to be of importance to them through their perception of their own unique experiences. Where appropriate, the researcher probed and questioned for further clarification and elaboration.

During data analysis, interview transcripts were studied carefully to determine elements which could be identified as central themes. These themes originated and grew from the six research questions of the study. Once major themes were identified, excerpts corresponding to them were identified. Data were organized categorically and chronologically, reviewed repeatedly, and continually coded. A list of major ideas that surfaced was chronicled, as suggested by Merriam (1988). Descriptive and reflective field notes were regularly reviewed; and the coding procedure was determined based on the scope, sequence, and magnitude of the data.

## Verification

To ensure internal validity, the following strategies were employed:

1. **Triangulation of data** – Data were collected through multiple sources, including interviews, observations, and document analysis.
2. **Member checking** – An ongoing dialogue regarding the researcher's interpretations of the participants' reality and meanings was used to help ensure the truth value of the data.
3. **Long-term and repeated observations at the research site** – Regular and repeated observations of character education initiatives occurred on-site over a 5-month period.
4. **Peer examination** – A teaching colleague served as a peer examiner (an objective party who was not directly involved in the study), whose role was to read research report pages and to provide constructive feedback to the researcher.

The primary strategy utilized in this project to ensure external validity was the provision of rich, thick, detailed descriptions of participants' perceptions of character education so that anyone interested in transferability would have a framework for comparison (Merriam, 1988). Multiple methods of data collection and analysis strengthened reliability, as well as internal validity. Toward this end, data collection and analysis strategies have been reported in detail to provide a clear and accurate picture of the methods used in this study. Still, there will be limited generalizability of findings from the study (external validity). According to Merriam, the intent of qualitative research is

not to generalize findings, but to form a unique interpretation of events. Like the issue of generalizability, the uniqueness of a study mitigates against replicating it exactly in another context, thus forming a built-in limit on reliability.

### Interpretation

Although data collection and analysis strategies are similar across qualitative methods, the way findings are reported is diverse (Lofland, 1974). Miles and Huberman (1984) suggested that narrative text has been the most frequent form of display for qualitative data. Because this was an ethnographic case study, the results are presented in descriptive, narrative form rather than as a scientific report. Qualitative research narratives present information in text or image forms. This method includes use of text-embedded and intertwining quotations with the researcher's interpretations (Creswell, 1994).

### Presentation of Data

The data are presented in thematic categories. Many descriptions contained overlapping categories of information in which case excerpts were included, where they seemed most relevant or appropriate. To present excerpts from the transcripts, each participant was identified with a code number. A code was inserted in parentheses at the end of each quotation to identify the participant from whom it came. Each code includes a number indicating the order in which the participant was interviewed and a letter code representing descriptive information.

The letters within each code stand for specific descriptors. The letter "S" indicates that the participant was a student, "T" a teacher, "A" an administrator, "P" a parent,

“CS” a club sponsor, and “CSP” a community-support person. Where appropriate, two descriptors were used, separated by a hyphen. For example, the code 4-T-P,4:12 would indicate that the respondent was the fourth participant interviewed regarding character education, and he or she was both a teacher and a parent of one of the school’s students. The portion within each code that follows the comma indicates where each piece of information may be found among all of the data that were collected, compiled, and organized for the purposes of this study. This includes the set of information, as well as the page or card within that set.

## CHAPTER 4

### PRESENTATION OF DATA AND ANALYSIS

Data from the interviews were analyzed and grouped with reference to each of the six research questions of this study. Presentation of the implications is subsequently divided into six categories, one for each of the six research questions. Subdivisions of the six research-question categories were made using specific interview questions. For each of the subdivisions, interview responses, observation data, and document-analysis data have been included as appropriate, according to individual themes.

Biographical information for each interview respondent has been included in Appendix F and can be located using the code number that follows each response. Not all participants responded to all interview questions, and this is reflected in the number of total responses reported in regard to specific interview questions.

The school that was selected as the site for this case study was chosen because it is a data-rich source. Programs at the school that include elements of character education are both plentiful and varied. These include (a) school-sponsored clubs such as 4-H, Future Business Leaders of America, Drama Club, and FCCLA; (b) district-sponsored Character Counts program; (c) classroom activities and efforts, some of which are mandated by state curriculum guides; and (d) sports-related initiatives.

## Participants' Definitions of Character Education and Perceptions of Its Value

The first research question was “How do participants (students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community members) define character education, and what do they perceive its value to be?” Pertaining to this research question, two interview questions were asked of participants: (a) “What is your definition of character education?” and (b) “What do you believe is the value of character education?”

### Definitions of Character Education

Four themes emerged from participants' responses to the question, “What is your definition of character education?” These four themes were: (a) definitions which included improvement of morality or values, (b) definitions focusing on improvement of specific traits, (c) definitions concerning improvement of the whole person, and (d) definitions focusing on enhanced preparation for adulthood.

Of the 36 participants who responded to the question, the majority defined character education as initiatives focused on the improvement of morality or values. Eight stated that character education is any program in which specific character traits of students are improved. Eight others believed that the main purpose of character education is to improve the whole person, and eight felt that the main goal of character education is to prepare students for adulthood.

Improvement of Morality or Values. The 12 respondents who defined character education as an attempt to improve morality and values were (a) 1 administrator;

(b) 1 guidance counselor; (c) 3 teachers, including 1 who is also a parent and 1 who is also a club sponsor; (d) 3 community-support people, including 1 who is also a parent; (e) 1 other parent of a school student; and (f) 3 students. The administrator (16-A, 16:1) defined character education as “a systematic approach to instill ethical and moral standards in students through example and education. Sometimes this means specific programs and sometimes it’s just a matter of being around adults who care enough to be positive role models.” The guidance counselor (19-GC, 19:1) noted that “Character education is not only teaching kids what is right and wrong, but how to make the proper choices that will be morally right.” He added that morality is crucial to the success of any character-building effort.

Of the three teachers who focused on morals in their definition, responses included the following:

Character education is a program that focuses on the moral development of children in our society so that they may grow up to be good, productive people in our society. (14-T, 14:1)

Character education should involve a curriculum centered around morals and ethics. Decision-making skills which focus on responsibility should also be a core part of this course. (5-T-CS, 5:1)

Character education, to me, is basically teaching students to do what is morally right and do unto others as you would have them do to you. (2-T-P, 2:1)

Additional statements which supported the improvement of morality or values as key in their definitions of character education came from community-support personnel. Their definitions of character education included (a) “Character education is any initiative utilized either directly or indirectly by the school system that promotes a positive value system” (12-CSP, 12:1); (b) “a class that teaches moral values” (11-CSP, 11:1); and (c)

**“a curriculum that stresses honesty, morality, and responsibility. It should build on many of the traditional values exemplified in the early years of our country” (10-CSP-P, 10:1). It is interesting to note that character education was described by the three community-support people who responded as three different things: an initiative, a class, and a curriculum. It seems clear that there are varying opinions regarding what constitutes character education.**

**Students’ responses, which include morality and values within their definitions of character education, included the following:**

**Character is your credibility as a person based on your choices and values. Character education is the encouragement and examples to be the best person you are capable of being. (19-S, 19:1)**

**Character education teaches morality and social skills. Or at least this should be the goal of it. Some people get away from the morality part, but that should be most important. (18-S, 18:1)**

**Character education is to counsel and teach those that are in need or that will accept maintaining high moral standards. It basically presents how one should conduct themselves and pursue excellence. (29-S, 29:1)**

**Improvement of Specific Character Traits. Of the eight respondents who defined character education as any program that improves specific character traits, there were (a) two teachers, (b) one parent, and (c) five students. The first teacher (15-T, 15:1) stated, “Character education is educating students in responsibility and principles or rules of conduct.” The second teacher (19-CS, 19:1), who also serves as a club sponsor, noted that character education is “a movement to instill ethical values such as respect, honesty, trustworthiness, citizenship, and responsibility in America’s school children.” According**

to the parent (27-P, 27:1), character education is “education that promotes honesty and develops strong, competent, caring, and responsible citizens.”

The majority of respondents who viewed character education as an attempt to improve specific character traits were students. Students’ statements that are supportive of this theme include the following:

Character education is the attempt to teach students how to act right, as in manners and morals and stuff like that. (26-S, 26:1)

I would define character education as a class, group, or club that build self-character. It is something that offers a person the chance to grow in many ways, such as learning how to have respect, integrity, self-confidence, and much more. (17-S, 17:1)

Character education is classes, programs, clubs, or initiatives that promote or enhance the values of honesty, work ethic, responsibility, respect for fellow humans, kindness, or citizenship. (34-S, 34:1)

Character education is classes, programs, and clubs that promote the universal values of honesty, integrity, and work ethic. Things like that and promoting those things is what character education is all about. (33-S, 33:1)

My definition of character education is students being involved; this includes responsibility, how they treat fellow classmates, and being honest. (13-S, 13:1)

**Improvement of the Whole Person.** The eight participants who defined character education as being focused on improving the whole person included one teacher, who also served as a club sponsor and seven students. The teacher defined character education as “anything that would help positively mold a student.” Student responses within this theme were varied and included the following:

Character education is when students learn to help other students out. (42-S, 42:1)

**Character education is classes and programs that help a young adult to be a better person. By the learning things such as responsibility, kindness towards others and those types of things. (30-S, 30:1)**

**Character education is learning more about one's self, getting to know the real you. Everyone has character. Character education helps to bring it out. (21-S, 21:1)**

**My definition of character education is anything that will help broaden your horizons and help you mature. (22-S, 22:1)**

**Character education is getting to know and learn about people so that you can get along better with everyone. If you don't learn this you're gonna have problems no matter who you are. (38-S, 38:1)**

**Character education is showing a good example and not doing anything that is disobeying the rules. So whatever helps you do that is part of character education. (36-S, 36:1)**

**Character education is classes, programs, and clubs hoping to help better you. Some do and some don't but all that stuff is part of character education. (41-S, 41:1)**

**Enhancement of Preparation for Adulthood. Participants who named preparation for adulthood as the major focus of character education were (a) one administrator, (b) one guidance counselor, (c) one community-support person, and (d) five students. The administrator (3-A, 3:1) defined character education as “the teaching of characteristics that promote distinctive traits and positive actions in life, the goal of which leads to productive and concerned citizens.” According to the community-support person, “It (character education) prepares kids for life outside the high school walls.” Student comments included, “So we'll be better people when we get out of here”; “The focus of character education is on the whole person that we need to become.”**

## Participants' Perceptions of the Value of Character Education

Seven themes emerged from participants' responses to the question: "What do you believe is the value of character education?" These themes were (a) improves specific character traits, (b) helps students become better people, (c) improves overall educational environment, (d) fills a gap not filled at home, (e) prepares students for life in a democratic society, (f) helps students make better choices, and (g) there is no value.

Two predominantly stressed themes emerged from the 41 participants who responded to the question, "What do you believe is the value of character education?" Twelve respondents expressed that the greatest value of character education was the improvement of specific character traits, and 10 others felt that its greatest value lies in helping students to become better people.

Improvement of Specific Character Traits. The participants who cited improvement of specific character traits as being the greatest value of character education were (a) one guidance counselor; (b) two community-support people; (c) one teacher, who also serves as a club sponsor; and (d) eight students. The guidance counselor (2-GC, 2:2) stated that character education "instills the values of each and every person and that differences are not a bad thing, and so for that reason, it is very valuable." One community-support person (24-CSP, 24:2) shared his perceptions of the value of character education with the following statement:

The value of character education is obvious to me. Even though everyone has varied and different moral and religious beliefs, all of us respond to the six character pillars of the Character Counts program. I believe we will all be better off if everyone practiced the character traits in their every day lives.

The teacher (9-T-CS, 9:2) had this to say: “So many students have lost any feeling they may have had concerning responsibility, honesty, trustworthiness, and respect in the classroom. Hopefully, character education can restore these values.”

Eight students also defined specific character-trait improvement as being the greatest value of character education. The most prominent traits that were listed as being improved were respect, honesty, responsibility, and work ethic. Students’ comments that were supportive of this theme included the following:

The value of character education is to promote and enhance kids to do better in life and to be honest, respectful, and responsible for the things they do. (34-S, 34:2)

The value of character education is that it teaches responsibility, kindness, work ethic, and citizenship. So, I definitely believe in its worth and value. (30-S, 30:2)

The value of character education is to teach responsibility and to get students to care about and to be involved in their own education. (13-S, 13:2)

The value of character education is, in my opinion, to help students decide their self-confidence, respect, honesty, and integrity. (17-S, 17:2)

Character education is a way to teach kids to show respect and honesty for others. Respect is a basic thing for us and any program that teaches that will probably save lives. So, if we become better people in the process, that’s just a plus. (35-S, 35:2)

The value of character education is that it stresses working hard and that if you don’t do very well, you know that you gave it your best. It teaches you to be proud of who you are no matter who gets down on you. (36-S, 36:2)

The value of character education is that it can teach you to be a better person and respect people. (38-S, 38:2)

The value of character education is that it promotes positive self-esteem and better learning by teaching us to value and appreciate all of the things that are positive in our lives, and this helps people to be strong when life can be mean and you want to quit, but you don’t because you know that everything will be okay. (41-S, 41:2)

**Helping Students Become Better People.** The 10 participants who named helping students to become better people as the greatest value of character education were (a) 1 guidance counselor; (b) 3 teachers, 2 of which also serve as club sponsors and 1 who is also a parent; (c) 1 other parent, and (d) 5 students.

As the guidance counselor (1-GC, 1:2) explained, “Character education is of great value because a person with a good education and no morals of conscience is as bad, if not worse, than a less educated person with high character.” All three teachers and the parent included the word *life* in their descriptions of the value of character education with a focus on improving the quality of life. Their comments included the following:

I believe if done properly (exposed to every student), character education can make a difference in how students approach life. So, I believe it can be extremely valuable and even crucial to student development. (5-T-CS, 5:2)

This type of education gives students something that they can truly take with them into the real world to help them with day-to-day living. It is something that they can take to college, to work, or into relationships. Character education is what we all should be passing down to our children and grandchildren. Many times in life, it’s not what you know or who you know, but who you are that brings success. (14-T, 14:2)

In some cases, it reminds students of the values of our society; yet in other cases, it teaches students the values necessary for life, because they haven’t had the qualities and values instilled or even emphasized any place else. (28-T-P, 28:2)

Character education gives life a meaning, a purpose for the future. Students will know right from wrong. They will respect the rights of others and become responsible citizens. (27-P, 27:2)

Five students contributed to the theme of character education’s greatest value being that it helps them to become better people. Although there is some mention of specific values, the theme of each of their responses seemed to be an overall improvement in the lives of participants. Students’ responses included:

**The value of character education is being able to interact in all phases of life. Hard work and dedicating yourself shows self-discipline. (21-S, 21:2)**

**Character education can be beneficial in more ways than one. It can help you become a stronger person, to overcome obstacles. It helps people decide their future and put their minds on the right track. (22-S, 22:2)**

**I believe the value of character education is to help us have a higher standard of morals so we don't sell ourselves short in life. (37-S, 37:2)**

**Character education is a great addition to the lives of most young adults. We as role models should continue to display the great standards that we do. As most of us have realized, students do what they want to do. If a student plans to excel they will and character education is yet another additive to help those who are not sure. In closing, character education is a positive and a negative in that some look up to the role models and others sit in envy thinking that only a certain class can achieve. (20-S, 20:2)**

**Character education is a great way for students to learn everything they need to know. Values are things that are essential for life; without them, you have a chance of nothing. These values prepare you for the big world when you're out there on your own. You learn and you grow. (21-S, 21:2)**

### **Improvement of the Educational Environment.** Five of the participants

commented on the value of character education as being its positive effect on improving overall education and the educational atmosphere. Of these five, there were two teachers and three students. Teacher comments (from 14-T, 14:2 and 15-T, 15:2) included, "Without character education, there is no quality education because educators would not be able to teach, and students would not turn into responsible employees"; and "Without character education any school would be in chaos, as would any society, and no employer would want to hire a person with no moral code of rule of conduct - only the illegal variety." As one student (33-S, 33:2) noted, "The value of character education is that it improves morale and teaches students to respect teachers, principal, and students."

**Filling a Gap Not Filled at Home.** Four participants felt that character education's greatest value was that it fills a gap created when character training has not been adequately addressed at home. Of the four, one teacher and three students supported this theme. As the teacher (14-T, 14:2) put it, "I believe that character education is of great value to our students because many of our children are not getting these lessons at home or from society at large." Student responses that focused on filling a gap not filled at home included the following:

With youth the way they are today, character education is very valuable. If it is not given at school, they might not get it at all. (19-S, 19:2)

I believe that it is imperative to have character education. So many people don't get it at home. Whether or not they accept it at school is another story, but they are at least around it. (23-S, 23:2)

The value of character education is that it teaches positive character traits that students may not learn anywhere else. Sometimes parents just aren't doing their jobs. (18-S, 18:2)

**Preparing Students for Life in a Democratic Society.** None of the four participants who cited the value of character education as being the preparation of students for life in a democratic society were students. Participants who supported this theme were (a) one administrator; (b) one community-support person, who is also a parent of a student; (c) one teacher; and (d) one other parent. The administrator (3-A, 3:2) commented that the value of character education is that it "provides an avenue for young people to learn the skills necessary to be productive and positive citizens." The community-support person (10-CSP-P, 10:2) described character education as "providing the common glue that holds our society together." The teacher (6-T, 6:2) said, "It helps people to get along

in society. If we engage in good character training, we'll have better citizens." The parent (25-P, 25:2) had this to say: "The value of character education is that it is an investment in our future toward a positive end. Strong morals and good character in today's youth insures a future of honorable leaders and citizens of tomorrow."

**Helping Students Make Better Choices.** One administrator, one community-support person, and one teacher stated that the value of character education is that it helps students to make better choices. According to the administrator (16-A, 16:2), "In order to develop a strong basis for decision making, we must instill basic, moral values." The community-support person (12-CSP, 12:2) was in agreement with the administrator and commented, "Students must be given sound values on which to draw from when faced with decisions." The teacher (8-T-CS, 8:2) expressed that character education can help all students, and some teachers, to make better choices. As she (8-T-CS, 8:2) explained, "Even good students can use bad judgment."

**Character Education Has No Value.** The three participants who saw no value in character education were all students. Their comments included the following:

I see no value in character education. It limits a person's creativity and doesn't let a person be themselves. (7-S, 7:2)

I think the value of character education should be morals. I don't think the teachers, for the most part, actually care about character education, therefore there is no value. I think they just do it because the principal wants them to. (26-S, 26:2)

There is no value in character education. Character education does not matter anymore. The world has been eroded down to a nub of morality. Character flaws overcome me. My life revolves around character defects and flaws. (4-S, 4:2)

## Participants' Perceptions of Character Education in Relation to Values

The second research question was, "How do participants perceive character education in relation to values?" Pertaining to this research question, the following interview question was asked of participants, "How are values – such as, honesty, responsibility, and respect – the same as character education and how are they different?" For the purpose of reporting, the responses were divided into groups: one focusing on perceived similarities between character education and values and the other focusing on perceived differences between character education and values. Of the 33 participants who responded to this question, 25 focused on the similarities between character education and values, while 8 focused on the differences between the two.

### Similarities Between Character Education and Values

The 25 participants who focused on the similarities between character education and values were (a) 1 administrator; (b) 2 community-support people; (c) 5 teachers, 2 of which also serve as club sponsors, and 1 who was a parent of a student; (d) 2 other parents; and (e) 15 students. According to the administrator (16-A, 16:3), traits are the basis of a character education program. One of the community-support people (24-CSP, 24:3) said, "These similar values are vital to insure that our society can work and play together." The other (12-CSP, 12:3) concluded, "These values are obviously pillars of any character education initiative."

All five teachers (5-T-CS, 5:3) shared similar views that included from, "I believe they should be one in the same" to "Character education encompasses those values"

(28-T-P, 28:3). Most teachers seemed to support the statement, “Both are guidelines for conduct and, therefore, are similar” (by 15-T, 15:3). One parent (27-P, 27:3) expressed that character education and values were the same because they are taught in homes, churches, schools, and communities, although sometimes for different reasons. The other parent (25-P, 25:3) similarly expressed a citizenship-minded opinion when he said, “Honesty, responsibility, and respect work together to form the personalities and behavior of individuals.”

The largest group of participants that felt character education was more like values than different from them were students. There were 15 in all, with a wide range of degree to which they saw the two as similar. As one student (30-S, 30:3) shared, “Character education promotes all universal values, and they are not different because character education includes programs that focus on those positive values.” From another student (36-S, 36:3), “Everyone should treat others the way they want to be treated no matter what you want to call it, because right is right and wrong is wrong and right is good and wrong is bad.”

Several of the students’ comments (18-S, 18:3; 26-S, 26:3; 32-S, 32:3; and 33-S, 33:3) shared similar wording in their expression that character education and universal values promoted the same positive character traits and were, therefore, considered to be the same. One example of such a response was, “I don’t believe there is any difference between the two because values such as honesty, responsibility, and respect are what you get from character education.” (32-S, 32:3) Other student responses that focused on similarities between character education and values included the following:

With honesty, responsibility, and respect, you are taught and sometimes a person just knows how to respect others, take responsibility and be honest. Character education basically helps a person become honest, respectable, and take responsibilities. I really don't know any differences that occur between the two. (17-S, 17:3)

Through character education, honesty and respect are earned. Responsibility is accepting the goals that are set forth individually, if the foundation has been laid and you do not make an attempt to use the values. However, they are more alike than different. (22-S, 22:3)

Being the same, these values are applied to every day life and are therefore incorporated as a part of character education. They both focus on improving overall character. (21-S, 21:3)

The character education and universal values like honesty, responsibility, and respect are alike in showing how to be truthful and showing how to get along. It's important to do and be those things by any name. (35-S, 35:3)

Values are the same as character education because this education promotes or enhances such accepted values. It is sad to me because some groups don't promote them. Some kids or students that are at our school don't get taught honesty, responsibility, and respect. (34-S, 34:3)

Values are the same as character education because they try to teach good manners so that you won't turn out to be a bad person. Some people do anyway but those efforts do help some people. (31-S, 31:3)

### Differences Between Character Education and Values

Of the eight participants who focused on the differences between character education and values, (a) one was an administrator, (b) two were guidance counselors, (c) two were community-support people, (d) one was a teacher, and (e) two were students.

According to the administrator,

They are different because more traits (qualities) are taught in character education – citizenship, fairness, and caring. For a person can be honest, responsible, and respectful but lack the knowledge and actions that make us willing to assist others and the community. (3-A, 3:3)

Both guidance counselors noted differences between character education and values. The first (1-GC, 1:3) said that the two are different because “What the world views as okay is generally not what is truly moral or based on high character.” The other guidance counselor (2-GC, 2:3) shared that character education does not just state what is acceptable but that it helps in educating young people to incorporate values into their lives. The community-support person, who was also a parent of a student, shared a similar view as follows: “Values are an important aspect but not complete. These values plus others must be taught and then give students opportunities to practice them.” The other community-support person (9-CSP, 9:3) pointed out that although universal values and character education both try to teach positive values, they are different because values are determined by how an individual views each of these values. The teacher (6-T, 6:3) added that different cultures have different definitions for values. Student responses that focused on differences between character education and values included the following:

Although character education strongly encourages students to strive for excellence, not only as students but citizens, they differ because the values listed above are adapted on personal levels, you can't force someone to have values. Therefore they are more different than alike. (19-S, 19:3)

I don't think they are the same. Those values and character education are about more than just these basic values. It's about being the best you can be, not just a law-abiding citizen. (23-S, 23:3)

### Participants' Perceptions of Character Education as Regulation of Morality

The third research question was, “How is character education viewed by participants in relation to attempts to regulate morality?” Participants' interview responses to this question were divided into two categories: (a) those who perceived character

education as an attempt to regulate morality, and (b) those who did not perceive character education as an attempt to regulate morality. Of the 30 participants who responded to this question, 17 considered character education to be an attempt to regulate morality; 13 did not. Twelve others stated that they did not know, as their reason for not answering the question.

### Character Education as an Attempt to Regulate Morality

The 17 respondents who considered character education to be an attempt to regulate morality were (a) 3 teachers, 2 of whom also serve as club sponsors; (b) 1 parent; and (c) 13 students. Teacher and parent comments focused on the need for improvement of conduct. Although each of these participants definitely viewed character education as an attempt to regulate morality, none of them expressed negative feelings about that. In fact, each gave supporting comments for why an attempt to regulate morality was viewed positively, as shown below:

Character education is an attempt to regulate morality in the sense that our kids need this more than ever. Many are not receiving it at home and it is our vision to have our students become productive members of society. (5-T-CS, 5:4)

I believe that character education is an attempt to regulate morality. Morality is defined as “principles or rules of conduct.” So, good character requires one to adhere to a standard of rules so society will run smoothly. (15-T, 15:4)

I do believe that character education is an attempt to regulate morality because character education should enhance a parent’s attempt to raise children with good morals. And that’s not a bad thing. In fact, it’s needed in more cases than not. (8-T-CS, 8:4)

Character education is a positive step forward. Anything that we as a society can do to better our morality rating would be advantageous. (25-P, 25:4)

Of the 13 student respondents who viewed character education as an attempt to regulate morality, not all agreed that this was a good thing. One student (7-S, 7:4) commented that he did not think character education should be taught at school, but rather should be taught at home. Two other students (26-S, 26:4 and 37-S, 37:4) expressed that they felt the two were the same, but they did not comment as to the nature of this similarity.

The other 10 students, as did the adults, included supportive comments with their assessment of character education as being an obvious attempt to regulate morality. As one student (31-S, 31:4) stated, "Character education does try to regulate morality so that you will know how to handle things in the correct manner both now and in the future." Another student (38-S, 38:4) said, "Yes, I believe that character education is an attempt to regulate morality because it is trying to teach you to be a better person." Other student responses that focused on character education as an attempt to regulate morality included the following:

**I think it is. We have a lot of classes such as child care and law studies. Things that show us consequences of our actions. They help us to think before we act. (23-S, 23:4)**

**I think that character education is an attempt to regulate morality. Being that morality is virtue and doing what's right, character education can help you realize that life is more than the way you live. The actions and the way you bring yourself forth is the biggest concept. (21-S, 21:4)**

**Character education is an attempt to instill morality. We are created for a purpose, and each has a special talent that needs to be nurtured. Character education helps to do that. (22-S, 22:4)**

**Yes, character education is an attempt to regulate morality because it changes a lot of acts and motives that some students use. To have the clubs and groups has persuaded them to do better. (34-S, 34:4)**

**I think it is good when someone is telling us about life even though it's about sex or drugs. In the long run, it will help us out. So yes, I guess it is an attempt to regulate morals. (36-S, 36:4)**

**I think that character education is an attempt to regulate morality because they are trying to mold you into the responsible and considerate person that you should be. (30-S, 30:4)**

### **Character Education as a Non-Attempt to Regulate Morality**

**Of the 13 participants who did not consider character education to be an attempt to regulate morality, there were (a) 2 administrators; (b) 3 teachers, 1 of whom also served as a club sponsor, and another who was a parent; (c) 2 guidance counselors; (d) 1 community-support person, who was also a parent; (e) 1 other parent; and (f) 4 students. It is interesting that twice as many adults reported that they did not view character education as an attempt to regulate morality as those who did, including two administrators and two guidance counselors. Could it be that these respondents were more aware of the intense pressures toward separation of church and state and that the relationship between morality and religion might have influenced responses? When asked if character education is an attempt to regulate morality, one administrator (3-A, 3:4), answered flatly, "No, character education is about life skills that promote positive choices for one's own actions for self and towards others." The other (16-A, 16:4) seemed almost defensive as he responded, "I do not believe character education is an attempt to regulate morality. However, if it was viewed as such, so be it. Our country needs an adjustment in morality." The teacher and guidance counselors responded with similar answers, such as the following:**

**No, character education is an attempt to help students that receive no moral training at home to have a chance to make good choices in life. (1-GC, 1:4)**

**No, I don't consider character education to be an attempt to regulate morality. I believe character education is an opportunity to expose children to values they may not experience elsewhere. (2-GC, 2:4)**

**No, I see character education as an effort to preserve morality, not to regulate it. (28-T-P, 28:4)**

**Not really; I think it will help improve values and the obligation to uphold these values if more people practiced them (9-T-CS, 9:4)**

**No, I believe that character education is an attempt to educate and encourage students to make good personal choices for themselves and their behavior. Also they will be able to recognize poor morals and their consequences. (14-T, 14:4)**

**Students who did not view character education as an attempt to regulate morality seemed mostly supportive of character education efforts. For example, character education was described within responses as “an attempt to teach respect not only for others, but also for yourself” (19-S, 19:4); as “helping those who want to be directed in a better direction” (17-S, 17:4); and as promoting a positive attitude and outlook on things in general. There was one student respondent who exhibited a certain bit of negativity as he shared in the following:**

**Schools focus too much on trying to make a perfect student. Khaki pants, white shirts, penny loafers and ID badges. School systems have gone to amazing lengths to properly design the perfect student. Morality is the least of their concern. Therefore, my answer is no. (4-S, 4:4)**

### **Character Education at the School Site**

**The fourth research question was, “What is the scope of the character education movement at the school site?” Pertaining to this research question, two interview questions were asked: (a) “What is the scope of the character education movement at this school?”**

and (b) “How do you feel about character education being included in the curriculum of public schools?”

Description of the scope of the school’s character education movement includes excerpts from interviews with participants and information drawn from analysis of various documents. Divisions of information pertaining to the scope of character education efforts at the school include general descriptions, which have been analyzed according to the following subdivisions: (a) district-wide efforts, (b) the school’s administrative philosophy, (c) club information, (d) curriculum information, (e) sports-program information, (f) community support, (g) positive interview comments, and (h) negative interview comments.

### Scope of the School’s Character Education Movement

District-Wide Efforts. In October of 1999, the local school board unanimously approved support of the Character Counts program for use in the district’s schools. The Character Counts program focuses on the promotion of six pillars: (a) honesty (b) respect, (c) hard work, (d) citizenship, (e) responsibility, and (f) kindness. The program is sponsored and overseen by the Louisiana State University’s Cooperate Extension Service (3-A, 3:5).

Upon acceptance of the Character Counts program by the school board, Character Counts materials were distributed to teachers and a mentoring program was established. High school students were selected, trained, and sent into elementary and junior high schools to conduct and direct skits, entertainment, and activities which promote the

program' s six pillars. Selected high school students served as mentors to junior high school students on a bi-weekly basis throughout each school year (16-A, 16:5).

Character lessons provided through the Character Counts program are weekly lessons aligned with the state standards and benchmarks and are intended to help prepare students for the new Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) test. The 10-minute, life-application lessons can be integrated at any point during the day or week. The Character Counts program is the only character education program that has been officially endorsed by the local school district. It is also among the most widely recognized programs by district residents, and it specifically targets character improvement in young people (3-A, 3:5).

**The School's Administrative Philosophy.** It is important to note that the Character Counts program is not in any way the totality of efforts toward improved character at the high school. This is evidenced in the following excerpt from the administrative policy found in the school's *Student Handbook*.

We believe that pupils should be taught subject matter aimed at enabling them to establish goals, to clarify values and beliefs, and to utilize resources for successful personal and family living in a democratic society. They should possess intellectual, moral, and spiritual values, as well as good physical and mental health.

**Club Information.** Other than the district-adopted Character Counts program, another rich source of character education was found in school clubs and school groups. The promotion of good character was found within the mission statements of each of the following groups: (a) Drama Club, (b) Future Business Leaders of America [FBLA], (c)

4-H, (d) Future Career and Community Leaders of America [FCCLA], (e) Future Teachers of America [FTA], (f) Future Farmers of America [FFA], (g) Key Club, (h) Student Council, (i) Foreign Language Club, (j) Youth Art Council of America [YACA], and (k) the Lusiannes, a dance line. In cases where evidence of club activities supporting the club's character-laden mission statement was found, it has been included in the specific club information that follows.

The sponsor of the school's Drama Club (9-T-CS, 9:5) reported that the mission of the club includes "the promotion of dedicated, hard-working, and cooperative members" and that, in addition to this, they "learn responsibility and respect for others through the constant need to give and take constructive criticism." A portion of the FBLA's mission statement reads, "to promote civic and personal responsibility." The local FBLA club at this school fulfills that portion of its mission with several annual activities. Operation Santa Claus provides an opportunity for members to volunteer at a local homeless shelter and to collect donations from local businesses and families, which are used to purchase gifts for the children at the shelter. Other members routinely volunteer at the local Boys and Girls Club. Members also annually make a donation to the St. Jude Telethon and participate in the local Walk America, sponsored by the March of Dimes organization.

The 4-H club maintains a community service committee, which guides monthly efforts toward helpful outreach programs. The 4-H mission statement explains the focus of 4-H as being the improvement of the "heads, hearts, hands, and health" of its members; and the club's slogan is to learn "by doing." Members help their neighbors

and their neighborhoods through club activities. Efforts have included (a) the creation of crafts for nursing home distribution, (b) a canned-food drive for the homeless shelter, (c) participation in "Coats for Kids," (d) collection of toys for the "Toys for Tots" program, (e) "Valentines for Senior Citizens," and (f) teacher appreciation efforts. One student-respondent shared his feelings about what being involved with 4-H for 9 years had meant to him.

The 4-H club has helped to develop my character in many ways. First of all, when I joined 4-H nine years ago, I was very shy and 4-H has helped me to open up and be more outgoing. Through doing many skits, speeches, and presentations, I have learned that being in front of a crowd is fun. I have changed from a shy little boy who sat in the back to an outgoing teenager who is the first one on stage. 4-H has also helped me to learn responsibility. Not only do I have to take care of the animals which I show, I must also be sure that entry forms are turned in on time. I also serve as a camp counselor, where I am responsible for about 50 to 60 4th-graders. 4-H has also taught me leadership. As a state officer and a camp counselor, I have learned affective and ineffective ways to encourage others to become involved. I have had some of the best times of my life and met some of my closest friends through 4-H. It is truly an experience I wouldn't take anything for. (37-S, 37:5)

According to the club sponsor (5-T-CS, 5:5), the FCCLA Club (formerly known as Future Homemakers of America) has included in its mission statement that their focus is, in part, to "promote personal growth and leadership development through character development and to provide opportunities for making decisions and assuming responsibilities" and to "prepare for the multiple roles of men and women in today's society." FCCLA members make three annual donation drives for the local homeless shelter, volunteer time to help with the St. Jude Auction, and assist the city's Chamber of Commerce with the city's Christmas decorations. The club also participated in the Spring 2000 regional project, which benefitted the Center for the Blind in a neighboring

community. A common theme among all character education initiatives found within the school-sponsored clubs was the promotion of community service.

Students belonging to several of the clubs or organizations that included character building within their mission statements failed to exhibit the enactment of such character during interviews or observations. Document analysis of previous club meetings and activities also failed to produce evidence of character-building efforts. A common theme among all character education initiatives within the school-sponsored clubs was promotion of community service. Clubs which fell into this category were (a) FTA, (b) FFA, (c) Key Club, (d) Student Council, (e) Foreign Language Club, (f) YACA, and (g) the Lusiannes.

**Curriculum Information.** Upon examination of state curriculum guides, standards and benchmarks were found that directly promoted character education. A prime example of this was found in the specific civics standards and benchmarks which require that good citizenship skills – such as, obeying laws and respecting diversity – be taught. Responsibility is also a focus of civics instruction, as the importance of voting and volunteerism is stressed. One-half semester of Civics is required for all Louisiana high school students. The promotion of civic responsibility is also required within the state social studies curriculum guidelines.

Beyond specific curriculum requirements, each of the eight teachers interviewed said they made a conscious and regular effort to promote character education in their classrooms. Examples of these efforts most commonly included building responsibility through the strict enforcement of homework and tardiness guidelines. As one teacher-participant explained,

**It never ceases to amaze me that students rarely enter high school with a firm understanding of what the word deadline means. Whether we're talking about club dues or term papers, that's one word that I make sure they understand before they leave my classroom. (15-T, 15:5)**

**In addition to the individual efforts of teachers, there was also a leadership class offered to junior and senior students. Although this class was offered as an elective, the curriculum used had numerous character education activities. These activities specifically encouraged respect for fellow humans, kindness, and responsibility. Units on conflict resolution and promoting pluralism were also included (16-A, 16:5).**

**Sports Program Information. Character education was also found within the high school's sports program. Expectations for athletes are clearly outlined in the athletes' Code of Ethics. The Code of Ethics must be signed by each player and by a parent, in order for the student to participate in sports. A portion of the expectation for athletes reads as follows:**

**As representatives of this high school, you will be expected to act as ladies and gentlemen at all times. Not only must you perform well in sports to be successful, but you must also be a positive example of quality and class outside of sports. You must always show other authority figures the same respect that we will demand you show us. If you fall below these standards, you will be dismissed.**

**Other portions of the athletes' Code of Ethics require the commitment to refrain completely from (a) consumption of alcoholic beverages; (b) cursing, using foul language or gestures; and (c) gambling. One male athlete (21-S, 21:5) made the following comment about the Code of Ethics: "It's just something for the coach to fall back on when he's trying to keep us on our toes."**

Informal conversations with members of the school's coaching staff revealed that some coaches more consistently used the Code of Ethics than others. For example, the boy's basketball coach would not allow students to participate without their own and a parent's signature on the Code of Ethics before the season started, although the football coaches commented that it was nice to have something in writing in case a problem arose. The head football coach said that he used the Code of Ethics as an "up front manual of expectations and requirements for conduct" that both his players and their parents are "made well-aware of."

**Community Support.** According to one participant, one of the largest shows of community support for character education efforts at the school was at the September 2000 prayer rally. According to the principal, the rally was held in the high school's stadium in an effort to "get the year started off right" (3-A, 3:5). The district superintendent, the high school principal, and several area ministers mentioned their commitment to and desire to promote positive values through educational efforts. The nondenominational rally was purposely held on a regularly scheduled church night (Wednesday), and church members were asked to attend the prayer rally instead of their regular services. Approximately 300 community members were in attendance at the prayer rally. Although it is expected that the prayer rally held different meaning for various participants, one teacher-participant commented that the rally "just got the school year off to a good start" (6-S, 6:5). Another teacher (15-T, 15:5) stated that the rally was "inspirational." When asked to elaborate on that description, she explained that the prayer rally brought people of all races, ages, and denominations together in support of education.

The focus of the prayer rally was on promoting a safe and academically productive year through community support and encouragement.

The local sheriff's department and the local Louisiana State University extension agent also demonstrated support for character education at the high school during the 2000-2001 school year. The sheriff assigned two resource officers to serve the high school. These officers made themselves available to students on a regular basis through drug and alcohol awareness programs and weekly visits to the school. The district extension agent coordinated efforts to bring Character Counts training sessions to teachers and student mentors within the district.

Positive Interview Comments (General). The participants' responses included in this section were deemed positive in that they seemed to be supportive of district, school, community, and club policies and efforts toward the promotion of character in school. Of the 20 positive descriptions of character education efforts at the school: (a) 1 was from a guidance counselor; (b) 3 from community-support people; (c) 3 from teachers, 1 of whom was also serving as a club sponsor; (d) 2 from parents; and (e) 11 from students. Several of these comments mention the Character Counts program, which is the specific district-adopted program of character education.

The predominance of this program (or at least publicity about it) is evidenced in the statements of participants who seemed to be under the impression that the Character Counts program made up the totality of character education efforts. For example, one community-support person when asked about character education efforts in general, commented on one specific part of Character Counts program as follows: "Student

mentors are used to teach character education to other students. This is known to be an effective method; kids will listen to other kids” (24-CSP, 24:5). One of the other teachers and two students also made similar comments, perhaps demonstrating either their lack of knowledge that there were other character education efforts taking place or that the Character Counts program was, in their opinion, the dominant mode of character education. The guidance counselor said, “All of our efforts try to get students to lead by example and appreciate the diversity of our enrollment” (2-GC, 2:5)” One community-support person focused on the important contribution of character education toward the development of each student’s decision-making process. Another of the community-support people commented that this school has “more character education going on than any other school I know of” and, therefore, deemed the school to be headed the right direction (11-CSP, 11:5).

Teacher comments regarding the scope of character education seemed to be supportive of the school’s administrative policy. Teacher comments included the following:

We have programs for the student body. We have former students come talk to our football team. We have a committee that goes to other schools. Most of our teachers are examples of how we should be. (6-T, 6:5)

All teachers teach responsibility. All have rules of conduct. However, the campus also has organizations many students belong to and all of these stress good moral character. (15-T, 15:5)

Most of my children’s teachers on a weekly basis will tie in some form of character education to the lesson at hand. Spur of the moment occurrences warrant these value lessons. (25-P, 25:5)

Student descriptions of the school's character education efforts, which were positive in nature, included, "We are constantly getting new programs, clubs, and classes that help our character and the way we act" (33-S, 33:5). Another student said, "We are always getting new classes to help better ourselves in the future" (13-S, 13:5); and from another, "We have many clubs and programs to help us be better all-around people" (41-S, 41:5). Other positive descriptions of character education efforts at the high school were:

Most teachers try to form clubs or programs that will help us in the future and provide discipline for us, so that when we go out in the world we are already prepared. (22-S, 22:5)

There are more counseling teachers available, as well as more programs are being brought into school to promote the well being of young adults than there were two years ago. (20-S, 20:5)

The scope of character education, in my opinion, is broad and can only get better. We have a lot of options of things to get into that will help us grow as people. (19-S, 19:5)

The high school offers leadership classes, numerous clubs, and a mentorship program. (18-S, 18:5)

We have a lot of people involved in many sports, and our teachers remind them all the time to keep their noses clean. We also hear a lot about good character in the classroom. (34-S, 34:5)

There is a class where if you smoke you have to go to this smoking class. That's a good thing because there are a lot of students who need that class but won't admit it. All you have to do is go in the bathrooms and you will smell and see all of the smoking evidence. (42-S, 42:5)

#### Negative Interview Comments (General). Participants who negatively

described character education efforts at the school were (a) one guidance counselor; (b) one teacher, who was also a club sponsor; and (c) two students. The guidance counselor's comments were considered negative only in regard to the fact that he felt not enough

character education was being provided. As he explained, “Many of our teachers work hard toward character development, but others do nothing” (1-GC, 1:5). The teacher’s (8-T-CS, 8:5) comments were similar in that the only negative portion was that “Many teachers could do a better job in all areas.”

The two students’ responses were much more easily categorized as being negative. As you will see from the quotations below, the latter of the two responses is disturbing.

Only a few of the students here are involved in clubs and other school activities. The majority of the school doesn’t care about their education. They are only there for the food, drugs, or sex. These are the things that teachers don’t see or don’t care about. (13-S, 13:5)

This school sucks. This school should be blown up by kamikaze pilots, the grass stripped in the yard, the concrete blasted with dynamite and that would show the school’s character. (4-S, 4:5)

### Character Education in Public Schools

Thirty-two participants responded with an opinion concerning the inclusion of character education into the curriculum of public schools. Of the 32 respondents, the majority (25) were supportive of the inclusion, while 7 were opposed. The 25 respondents who indicated being supportive of the inclusion of character education into the public school curriculum were (a) 1 administrator; (b) 2 guidance counselors; (c) 3 community-support people; (d) 6 teachers, 3 of whom also served as club sponsors and 1 who is a parent; (e) 2 other parents, and (f) 11 students.

Reasons given by participants for supporting the inclusion of character education in the public school curriculum were varied; however, most either stated or eluded to the

comprehensive, positive influence that character education had as a curricular additive. As an administrator said, “I feel that it fits in well with comprehensive, health-mandate hours since it is about mental health and proper, healthy choices for life” (3-A, 3:6). One of the guidance counselors (2-GC, 2:6) shared that, although unfortunate, character education has become a necessary curricular inclusion.

Other comments that emerged from responses by these participants, in favor of the incorporation of character education into the public school curriculum, were hopes for (a) enhanced preparation for work environments and (b) decreased incidents of school discipline. A final, common thread among responses was the reference to a lack of home training which leaves a void that needs to be filled somewhere. Comments in relation to this theme included the following:

I believe it is a must and the only hope for our future. Most youth are not receiving proper training from the home largely due to the high divorce rate and the working mothers. (25-P, 25:6)

I think character education is something that our kids need to hear because a lot of them are not being taught this at home. (1-CSP, 1:6)

I agree that character education should be included in the curriculum because so many students are coming to us with very little home training in values and morality. This training is essential to our society. (14-T, 14:6)

All students need to be taught a code of conduct. This code has always been taught both in the home and at school until now. Something must be done to compensate even if that means more work for us (teachers). (15-T, 15:6)

I believe that there should be a class for those students whose parents don't teach them character at home. (13-S, 13:6)

I think character education is an important part of public schools. The students whose parents could care less don't get it at home, so the only place they can get it is at school (37-S, 37:6)

**I feel it is a good thing because some people do not have guidance in their lives at home, and school is the only way to get it. (32-S, 32:6)**

Other students' interview responses that were supportive of including character education in the curriculum of public schools included, "I think it's good that someone cares enough to try to help us at school so we can better ourselves" (31-S, 31:6). One student said, "I think that it is great that character education is included in the curriculum of our school because it teaches us many different things that we don't normally know about" (39-S, 39:6). As another student stated, "It will be a benefit to students who normally do not participate in activities outside the regular classroom" (22-S, 22:6). Other student comments, which were supportive of including character education in the public school curriculum, were:

**I have no problem with character education being included in the curriculum of public schools. Its possible, positive effect far outweighs any possible, negative effect. (17-S, 17:6)**

**I think character education would be a great addition to the curriculum. It certainly wouldn't hurt anything to try it. (19-S, 19:6)**

**As long as it is offered as an elective, I would have no problem with it being included. Having it as a requirement would not be so cool because some of us just don't need it. (4-S, 4:6)**

Of the 32 participants who responded to this question, 7 felt that character education should not be included in the public school curriculum. These seven included six students and one administrator. The administrator explained that teachers are already overworked and underpaid and any addition to the current workload was a burden. Responses of student participants, who were not supportive of including character education in the curriculum of public schools, included, "They could teach it at school,

but it should be taught at home and if it's taken care of at home then we don't need any of it at school" (40-S, 40:6). Two other students commented, "It really doesn't affect me, so I don't care what they do" (21-S, 21:6); and "It might help but I don't believe character can be taught" (38-S, 38:6). Other student responses, which were not supportive of including character education in the curriculum of public schools, were:

Well, it's like this. Students should be taught character education at home. If they are not going to listen to their parents or if their parents don't care enough to teach them about good character, then they are not going to listen to some lame teacher. (26-S, 26:6)

I don't think it should be included in the school's curriculum because it defeats the purpose. This type of education gives you someone to look up to. It is usually someone older that you look up to. So, lets keep it to where the older counsel the younger. (20-S, 20:6)

Character education should not be included in the curriculum of public schools as a mandatory class. If a student asks for it, then it would be okay. (7-S, 7:6)

### Impact of Character Education on School Climate and Culture and the Overall Educational Program

The fifth research question was, "How has character education impacted the climate and culture of the site, as well as the overall education of students?" Pertaining to this question, two interview questions were asked. These were: "How has the climate/culture of the site been altered by the inclusion of character education initiatives?" and "How has character education contributed to the overall educational experience of the school?"

## Impact on Climate and Culture

Four themes emerged from responses to the question, “How has the climate/culture of the school been altered by the inclusion of character education initiatives?” These four themes were (a) general, positive changes have emerged; (b) student relations have improved; (c) students are better prepared for adult life; and (d) there has been little or no effect on the climate/culture. Of the 28 participants who commented on the effect of character education on the climate and culture of the school, (a) 8 indicated that general, positive changes have emerged; (b) 8 stated that student relations have improved; (c) 5 felt that students are better prepared for adult life; and (d) 7 said that character education had no effect on the climate or culture of this school’s students.

General Positive Changes. The eight respondents who said that character education has affected the climate and culture of the high school by facilitating general positive changes were (a) one administrator; (b) one community-support person, who was also a parent; and (c) six students. The administrator (3-A, 3:7) made specific reference to the district-wide Character Counts program as having “enabled the promotion of positive peer role models through class instruction.” He added that character education “has also resulted in a more positive atmosphere overall, both in the junior high classrooms that are visited and among the high school mentors.” The community-support person (10-CSP-P, 10:7), who was also the parent of a student had this to say: “By allowing religious, community, and school-based clubs and activities, peers provide guidance to one another. The result has been a stronger school and a stronger community.”

Student responses that focused on character education having resulted in general, positive changes included, “I think that character education has helped keep a lot of students out of trouble, and I also think we could use more character education. Then the school might be even better, and the kids might be more respectful” (37-S, 37:7). Another student commented on growing student involvement with the following comment: “More students are getting involved in more activities because they know that these programs and clubs will help them in the future with discipline and respect to obtain their goals” (22-S, 22:7). Other responses from students that focused on character education as having resulted in general, positive changes were:

Most of the ones that just didn't accept it dropped out, which is good. They could have been holding someone back. The rest of us are trying to be better and to do better. (23-S, 23:7)

I have a friend that if she was not on the dance line she would be in trouble all the time. Instead she's on the honor roll so I know for some people that the high standards that focus on character in order to be involved in stuff has really helped. (32-S, 32:7)

This school has changed a lot. More and more students want to be involved in activities and to try to stay out of trouble so that they can participate in things that are offered. (13-S, 13:7)

I think the climate and culture of this school has changed for the better. The reason I think that it is better is because everyone is now wanting to learn and try to take better care of the school and each other, even though the school is old and dumpy. (36-S, 36:7)

**Improved Student Relations.** Of the eight participants who indicated an improvement in student relations, there were (a) one administrator, (b) one guidance counselor, (c) one teacher, and (d) five students. The administrator (16-A, 16:7) cited an improved awareness by older students of the impact that they have on the attitude and

actions of younger students, as being one of the positive culture changes. According to the guidance counselor,

There is now better appreciation of diversity than there used to be. My first year to teach here, we had a big problem with racial tension and even some really big fights because of it. That's been about three years ago and it already seems to be a lot better. (2-GC, 2:7)

A teacher (15-T, 15:7) observed that more students were behaving responsibly and attending regularly since character education lessons had been incorporated into classroom instruction.

Three of the five students who noted obvious improvement in climate/culture resulting from character education efforts specifically mentioned a decrease in fighting as one result. These three statements, similar in length and structure, each included the words "fewer fights." Comments made by the other two students were as follows:

From my observations, the climate is more easy going and there aren't as many arguments over stupid stuff as there used to be. (19-S, 19:7)

People get along better now than they used to. Either some of us are learning from all the character education stuff or else we're just growing up some. (18-S, 18:7)

The above comment raises the point that although some participants attributed positive changes to character education, many other facts – such as, maturity – could account for climatic and cultural changes that have impacted student relations.

**Better Preparation for Adulthood.** The five participants who felt that character education has resulted in students' being better prepared for adulthood were (a) one guidance counselor, (b) three community-support people, and (c) one teacher. All five included within their responses at least some reference to preparing students to make better

life choices. For example, a guidance counselor made the following comment: “The primary goal of character education is to help our students to be able to function as adults; this includes getting along in society and feeling good about it” (1-GC, 1:7). Additional participants’ responses that focused on students being better prepared for adulthood included the following:

I think students are more aware of the choices that they are making because of character education being taught through our schools. I believe these students will carry these lessons with them throughout their lives, at least I hope so. (11-CSP, 11:7)

It [character education] offers students a positive alternative to socializing with negative peer groups. It also helps many students make important choices in their daily lives. (12-CSP, 12:7)

The students are more aware of their choices and the fact that their choices not only affect them but others as well. (14-T, 14:7)

Little or No Effect. Participants who expressed the belief that character education had little or no effect on the climate or culture of the school were (a) one teacher, who was also a club sponsor; (b) one parent; and (c) five students. Three of these seven respondents simply answered, “No,” while the other four included specific reasons as to why they felt that character education had little or no affect on the climate/culture of the school. From one parent and three students, the responses were as follows:

From my children’s perspectives, character education has not greatly affected the overall tone of behavior at the high school yet, but it seems to be going in a more positive direction. (25-P, 25:7)

Our climate here has changed only for those who let it change. That’s the same for character education. It has changed the people who let it change them. (21-S, 21:7)

No, no one pays attention to these efforts, so it does no good. Nothing has changed because kids just don't care. (7-S, 7:7)

The climate has actually not been affected at all by the initiatives, in that the school's culture has endured throughout with great character and high moral standards from the very beginning. (20-S, 20:7)

### **Impact on Overall Educational Program**

Analysis of responses to the interview question, "How has character education contributed to the overall educational experience of the school's students?" resulted in the designation of three themes. These themes included (a) more positive learning environment, (b) students better prepared for adulthood, and (c) character education has not contributed to the overall educational experience of the students. Thirty-one participants commented on the effect of character education on the overall educational experience of the students. About half of these (15) cited that a more positive learning environment has occurred as a result of character education. Twelve participants expressed that students are better prepared for adulthood and four felt that character education had no effect on education at the school.

**More Positive Learning Environment.** Of the 15 who noted a more positive learning environment as being the primary contribution of character education to the overall educational experience at the high school, the respondents included (a) 1 administrator, (b) 1 guidance counselor, (c) 2 community-support people, (d) 1 parent, (e) 1 teacher, and (f) 9 students. The administrator commented that character education "has

given students the opportunity to work with others and thereby increase their own social skills” (16-A, 16:8).

According to one community-support person, “Involvement in extracurricular activities serves as a means to balance the negative influences that often face our young people” (12-CSP, 12:8). The teacher commented, regarding character education, that she has seen it “increase student success” (16-T, 16:8). Other comments from adults, regarding a more positive learning environment, included the following:

I believe you can not educate without respect and discipline. Education is helped since teacher and student relationships are enhanced. (10-CSP-P, 10:8)

Special guests have inspired students. When the teacher acts like she really cares about you and your moral well-being, then it makes the educational part of school more beneficial. You feel like they really care. (25-P, 25:8)

Student responses that focused on character education as having provided a more positive learning environment included, “It has helped by making it easier for students to come to class and learn” (39-S, 39:8). Other comments were, “Students seem to be learning more since they are now acting better” (31-S, 31:8) and “It has helped most kids with their attitudes toward school as well as home” (30-S, 30:8). Additional responses from students that focused on character education as having provided a more positive learning environment were:

Character education has made the education at this school interesting and fun. (35-S, 35:8)

I experienced character education in an introduction to teaching course which we got a chance to teach at the elementary school for a semester. The results I got from that were rewarding. (32-S, 32:8)

**Being in the choir has helped me in a lot of things. We get to go to Washington in June. We worked very hard to get where we are at so we have definitely double dosed on the work ethic thing. (36-S, 36:8)**

**Teaching students what's right from wrong and letting them know how to control themselves in different situations has occurred. (41-S, 41:8)**

**Better Preparation for Adulthood. Of the 12 respondents who attributed better preparation for life to character education in the school, there were (a) 3 teachers, 1 of whom also served as a club sponsor; (b) 1 community-support person; (c) 1 parent; and (d) 7 students. One teacher (6-T, 6:8) commented, "It has educated our students so they can go into society and live as a productive individual." One teacher said, "I believe that it teaches the students how to deal with life and its dilemmas. It teaches them that they can be all that they can be. It also teaches students that character does count" (14-T, 14:8). The community-support person commented, "They'll be ready to join us in the real world of work" (11-CSP, 11:8). The parent noted, "Social responsibility will not be a new concept for graduating seniors" (25-CSP, 25:8).**

**Positive student responses regarding the role of character education included, "During the last two years of high school, character education really plays a big part in the students' lives. This happens because they realize that it's time to take responsibility" (21-S, 21:8). Another student commented, "When you encourage character growth anywhere, there is always going to be an improvement; so yes, it has contributed to the overall experience" (19-S, 19:8). Additional positive student responses regarding the role of character education were:**

**I think character education helps those students who want to make somewhat of a change in their lives. And those that don't really care shouldn't participate in learning character education. (17-S, 17:8)**

**Character education helps one to believe in oneself and have the necessary knowledge that obstacles can be overcome. (22-S, 22:8)**

**Character education has contributed very well with our organizations, classes, and things because we are getting better, as people, as the days go by. (34-S, 34:8)**

**Character education makes us want to be better students and people, and it makes us want to be better role models. (37-S, 37:8)**

**People who are in character education and stuff have been made better people. (38-S, 38:8)**

**No Effect. Each of the four responses in which participants expressed that character education has not contributed to the overall educational experience of the school came from students. These comments included,**

**Character education actually hasn't contributed that much because only the students who want to succeed do so. Most students don't even take advantage of the opportunities that we are allotted. As young adults, we control our overall educational experience and it's up to us what we do with it. (20-S, 20:8)**

**Additional student responses that indicated character education had no effect on the educational experience at the school were:**

**I don't think it has. The students don't seem to let what they learn affect what they do. Therefore, it doesn't make them want to learn the necessary things like science, math, and history either. (26-S, 26:8)**

**Some students don't want to be in anything, and so they get out what they put in - nothing. Even in regular classes and all the stuff we do. (42-S, 42:8)**

**People in band, choir, or Character Counts are all dorks and dweebs, geeks and freaks. (4-S, 4:8)**

## Impact of Character Education on Student Attitudes and Behaviors

The sixth and final research question was, “How has character education affected the attitude and behavior of students?” Pertaining to this research question, two interview questions were asked: “How do you think character education has impacted or affected students at the school?” and “How have incidents of discipline been affected by character education at the school?”

### Impact of Character Education on Students

Participants responded in one of three ways to the question, “How do you think character education has impacted or affected students at the school?” The three themes that emerged were (a) improved attitude and behavior of students, (b) limited effect or impact, and (c) no effect or impact. Thirty-nine respondents believed character education had impacted or affected the students. The majority (21) of those 39 cited an improvement in the attitude and behavior of students as being the biggest change. Fifteen participants commented on the limited visible effect that character education had on students, and three participants reported having seen little or no change that they deem attributable to character education efforts.

Improved Attitudes and Behaviors. Of the 21 informants who considered improved student attitudes as the most obvious effect of character education, there were (a) 1 administrator, (b) 1 community-support person, (c) 3 teachers, (d) 2 parents, and (e) 14 students. The community-support person (29-CSP, 29:9), who worked for the police

department, shared that the police department had far fewer calls from the school than in previous years. She attributed that change in the efforts of the current principal to incorporate character-building programs as preventative measures against school problems. The administrator (16-A, 16:9), referring to the Character Counts program, commented that character education had given high school students an opportunity to help younger students in their feeder schools.

Comments from teachers and parents that cited an improvement in attitude and behavior included the following:

We have a very positive atmosphere here. I have seen a marked improvement in student behavior over the years. (14-T, 14:9)

With more emphasis on character, I have seen students that didn't care turn into responsible, caring individuals. (15-T, 15:9)

I think it helps our students to know that no matter what race you are or where you come from that your character makes a difference in how you get along with others in society. (6-T, 6:9)

Fights seem to be at a minimum. In classes where teachers focus on character education, the students seem more willing to cooperate. (25-P, 25:9)

Some students are involved in co-curriculum activities that promote character education, and as a result they have become reliable and responsible citizens. To belong to certain clubs or organizations, students must meet some of the criteria for character education. (27-P, 27:9)

While there was a wide variation in the way in which students expressed this theme, many of them (14) made statements supporting that there has been an improvement in attitude or behavior which they attributed, at least in part, to character education efforts. These comments included, "It has led to a more positive and spirited attitude among students" (18-S, 18:9). Other students said, "Character education has no other choice but

to positively impact the students because it's not like it's going to do any harm to try to get good messages across; best case scenario, some of it just might sink in" (19-S, 19:9) and "It has affected many students in that they see students such as myself exemplify character and continue to pursue excellence and if one student sees another attempting to do well, they will try and do the same thing" (20-S, 20:9).

One student (30-S, 30:9) noted that she has learned how to interact better with others. Two others (23-S, 23:9; 33-S, 33:9) attributed a decrease in fighting as being a major improvement in behavior that was due to character education. As a senior student noted, "If you were to sit back and just observe the people of this school, you can see those that are torn between different identities, but there are a majority of those that have seen the light through character education" (21-S, 21:9). Additional student comments that supported having witnessed an improvement in attitude and behavior, as a result of character education, were:

Positive morale has been the greatest improvement due to character education. If a student is able to exhibit individuality, peer pressure will become less important. (22-S, 22:9)

I believe that character education programs have done wonders for the students involved in them. It helps keep those students in line and helps them to reach for and to attain their goals. (32-S, 32:9)

It has impacted us positively because we never give up on anything and are always striving for the best. I really think it has had a good affect on us. (34-S, 34:9)

In a way, it has given the students something to look forward to, and the good programs are a healthy way to keep busy while at the same time allowing yourself to be bettered overall. (35-S, 35:9)

I think character education brings everyone closer together because you just care more about yourself and what's going on around you and everybody that's close to you. (36-S, 36:9)

**I think it's helped them to see what's expected of them and has shown them a new way to look at this life. Without it, they might not even be in school anymore. (37-S, 37:9)**

**Character education has probably made people more aware and more respectful. They are more confident about themselves. (38-S, 38:9)**

**Limited Effect or Impact. The 15 participants who felt that character education had a limited effect on students were (a) 2 guidance counselors; (b) 4 community-support people, 1 of whom was also a parent; (c) 3 teachers, who also serve as club sponsors; and (d) 6 students. One of the guidance counselors felt that character education had a positive impact for "only those students who are involved in activities outside of the regular classroom" (2-GC, 2:9). This is the same guidance counselor who also stated that not nearly enough character education was being done at the school. The other guidance counselor shared a similar opinion with the following statement:**

**For those that listen and take it seriously, it has made a positive impact. But, it needs to be broader based. It should be included in all classrooms because having good character is far more important than being able to diagram a sentence or solve a quadratic equation. (1-GC, 1:9)**

**This belief, that character education is helpful but that it could be enhanced and broadened, was a predominant theme among all of the participants who noted the limited effect of character education. Participants expressed the belief that the effect had been the greatest for those students who were most directly involved in character education activities. Examples of this notion include the following:**

**I think those involved in 4-H and who know something about it and the counselor's mentors probably practice it more than anyone else, but that's a start. (9-T-CS, 9:9)**

**I think it may have impacted some, but probably it has impacted the members of the Character Counts program the most. Those are usually the kids that every one of us calls on if we need help getting something done. (8-T-CS, 8:9)**

**Those who are involved in school activities that include character education have benefitted more than those who don't choose to get involved in anything except what they have to do. Those who are involved care more about their education and care more about succeeding in life. They also seem to understand that the only way to succeed is by learning and knowing how to get along with other people. Character education helps you to know how to do that. (13-S, 13:9)**

**I only know what I've heard from students and teachers. Generally, those who mentor to the junior high students get the greatest benefit. Most kids are receptive, but some are not and the mentoring group is only about ten kids. It's too bad that all the older kids, who are deserving, can't have the same chance to work with the younger ones. (24-CSP, 24:9)**

**Other participants felt that the impact of character education had been limited for various reasons. The last five comments listed are those of students. They are perhaps the most insightful, because students certainly spend more time at school than the community-support people, whose comments will be listed first. Responses that denoted the limited impact that character education had on students included, "I believe it has had a positive impact; however, only a small percentage of students internalize what is being taught and put it into practice" (12-CSP, 12:9).**

**Another of the community-support people stated, "I think it has affected some students through organizations that bring them together with like interests that teach them to work as a team" (11-CSP, 11:9). The only teacher in this group of respondents commented that character education had "probably affected only those students that didn't really need it to begin with" (9-T-CS, 9:9). Additional responses that referred to the limited impact of character education were:**

Not all [students], but many have been helped. Several kids hang out at our home. Their values and morals have been strengthened through involvement in these activities. (10-CSP-P, 10:9)

In a way, I think [character education is] good, but it probably hasn't affected those who would not let it affect them. (31-S, 31:9)

In some ways it has helped students, but in other ways it has had no affect. Kids are still hateful and mean to me when teachers aren't around, even those who act so good in front of them. (41-S, 41:9)

It has helped a handful of people, but for the most part no one cares about what the teachers think or what they tell us to do. We act how we want to because that's our right. (7-S, 7:9)

Well, we have a little more student involvement in activities than we used to. I notice that the clubs this year [2000-2001] have mostly grown in numbers. This could be a good sign if character is being pushed but in some clubs it doesn't seem to be a big deal how you act. (42-S, 42:9)

Character education may not have affected all students but it has had a good affect on me. Some people just won't listen no matter what you do because they don't care about anyone or anything but themselves and they never will because this is how they've been brought up. (17-S, 17:9)

**No Impact or Effect.** One administrator and two students felt that character education had in no way affected or impacted students. According to the administrator (3-A, 3:9), he had seen very little change in observed behavior that could be attributed to character education efforts. Student responses which indicated that participants felt character education had no impact or effect on students were as follows:

I don't think it has. Most students don't care what teachers teach them as far as their character is concerned. Students will do whatever they want to do, not what someone tells them to do. (26-S, 26:9)

Character education hasn't affected most of them because people around here are still trashy. (39-S, 39:9)

Observations also supported that character deficits still existed at the school. Although most observations by the researcher yielded few field notes that could be even loosely interpreted as recordings of exhibited character, a few discipline incidents were observed. For example, the following observation was made during a lunch-time visit.

Two young men, one black and one white, emerged from the cafeteria area arguing over the theft of a roll. The larger, white student said, "I ain't gonna let no Nigger put his hands in my plate and get away with it." After that comment many of the bystanders surrounded the two students, who seemed on the verge of fighting. The principal emerged, seemingly from nowhere, and directed the two students into the building. The principal was heard a short while later through his office door saying loudly, "We are not going to have this mess on this campus. You keep your hands out of people's plates, and you keep your filthy mouth shut. Do you two understand me? The very idea!" The principal then swung the door open and announced through the intercom (to two separate teachers) that the students would be returning to class. The bell rang before he had finished talking with the students. On their way out, the principal admonished them that if he was to hear of any more trouble, he would be calling their parents. There had definitely been a lack of respect for others exhibited by both, with the theft of the roll and the racial slur. There was dishonesty in the theft as well.

### Impact on Disciplinary Incidents

Information regarding the interview question, "How have incidents of discipline been affected by character education at the school?" consists of participants' responses and discipline data from the school-district central office. Responses have been categorized

using three themes: (a) incidents of discipline have decreased, (b) effects of character education on discipline are questionable, and (c) incidents of discipline have not been affected by character education.

**Decreased Incidents of Discipline.** The 17 participants who suggested that incidents of discipline had decreased due to the incorporation of character education were (a) 1 administrator; (b) both guidance counselors; (c) 3 community support people, including one who was also a parent; (d) 4 teachers, one of whom also served as a club sponsor; (e) 1 other parent; and (f) 6 students. The administrator (16-A, 16:10) commented that although it is difficult to attribute a reduction in students' misconduct to any single factor, suspensions had been reduced since the incorporation of character education. One of the guidance counselors noted, "There appear to be fewer conflicts between students and fewer office referrals" (1-GC, 1:10); and the other counselor said, "To a small degree, more of a willingness to talk things out has emerged" (2-GC, 2:10).

Comments from community-support people, teachers, and parents who felt that character education had led to a decrease in bad conduct included, "There seem to be fewer problems and teachers and administrators seem better equipped to communicate and enforce expectations" (10-CSP-P, 10:10). Another community-support person said, "I think they know what's expected of them and what the consequences are for non-compliance" (11-CSP, 11:10). Teacher's comments included, "I have noticed fewer incidents requiring discipline" (15-T, 15:10), and "It has been less because of simply respecting the rights of others" (16-T, 16:10). Additional comments from teachers and one parent who felt that character education had led to a decrease in bad conduct were:

**I believe that without some type of character education to reinforce what is being taught at home, our problems could be a lot worse. In some cases, character education is needed to teach good character to those individuals without proper structure and discipline in the home. (12-CSP, 12:10)**

**I have had less discipline problems in my classroom since we were asked to begin incorporating character lessons into our regular courses. I guess the focus is more on appropriate behavior than it used to be. (14-T, 14:10)**

**I know that my 4-H members and the Character Counts mentors are usually well-behaved students and don't get into trouble. They also behave in class and set a good example for other high school students. (9-T-CS, 9:10)**

**When a situation arises, the teacher sometimes explains the reasoning behind the reprimand. The students seem to better accept this when an aspect of character building and moral examples is used. (25-P, 25:10)**

**Student responses focused mainly on a perceived decrease in smoking and fighting.**

**One example of this was, "There is less smoking in the bathrooms and less fights in the halls and during breaks than there was before we had everybody trying to get focused on the character stuff, especially the teachers and the principal" (38-S, 38:10). Two other student responses which suggested that incidents of discipline decreased due to the incorporation of character education have been included below:**

**Situations have been better handled recently. Teachers can't just say to be kinder and more understanding without being that way themselves. I think they are forced to practice what they preach because they know we are watching and that we might throw it back in their faces if they're not what they're telling us to be. (30-S, 30:10)**

**It has definitely been a success. There are rules you have to follow to take part in any of the fun stuff here at school. Even to play sports, you have to maintain good character. Those rules and the prestige you have when involved in the mentor program have helped me to make better choices. (32-S, 32:10)**

**Further evidence that there had been fewer incidents requiring punishment was found in the discipline files at the school district office. In the 1999-2000 school year,**

incidents of disrespect at the school decreased from 42 to 34, compared to the previous school year. Also during the same time period, (a) immoral acts were down from 2 to 0, (b) possession of tobacco products dropped from 26 to 15, (c) incidents of school disturbances decreased from 117 to 101, (d) weapons possessions went from 2 incidents to only 1, and (e) fights dropped from 78 to 71. As explained by the district Safe and Drug Free Schools coordinator (3-A, 3:10), the manner in which incidents of discipline are defined was left to the discretion of each school principal. For example, one might interpret a theft as an immoral act, while another might consider the same type of incident to be a school disturbance. Each incident must be reported under only one category. The current high school principal (16-A, 16:10) commented that while he considered all incidents requiring discipline to be immoral, he attempted to fit each one into a more defined description of the event.

The researcher acknowledges that character education alone may not have been the sole factor in improvement in these areas. However, participants regularly credited character education as having played an important role in the decrease of discipline problems; therefore, the perceived affect has been positive.

Questionable Effect on Discipline. Respondents who expressed that character education had a questionable impact on discipline were two teachers, who also served as club sponsors, and six students. Teachers' comments included, "Students just mature over time" (5-T-CS, 5:10) and "Students with good character are never discipline problems regardless of exposure to specific programs" (8-T-CS, 8:10). Student responses which expressed that character education had questionable results included,

In these times, you really can't tell what's going on but people have matured and are beginning to get things done now. People realize that their old ways of doing things aren't solving the problems. You learn and you grow regardless of character education or the lack of it. (21-S, 21:10)

Another student commented, "This school does have strict discipline and character education might help to enforce those rules" (36-S, 36:10). Additional responses from students who felt that character education had questionable results were as follows:

This is an area in which character education has not played much of a role. Once you have reached high school, most students have reached that maturity level to where there aren't many conflicts anyway. This school really doesn't have many discipline problems because we have many focused students. (20-S, 20:10)

Discipline often turns people on the right track, and with the help of some programs, lives can be put on the right track to a prosperous future. This might include some positive effects of character education, or it might just be the effect of discipline or maturity. (22-S, 22:10)

Well, some of the students just get carried away with the way they act. Some are just sweet little angels all the time supposedly. Character education probably helps those who are borderline the most. Some folks are just evil no matter what. (40-S, 40:10)

They have strict discipline to keep the students in order here so it's hard to tell about what effects have to do specifically with what character education has done and what we would have been doing anyway just to stay out of trouble. (35-S, 35:10)

**Lack of Effect on Discipline.** A total of 28 participants responded to the question regarding the impact of character education on incidents of discipline. Of the 28 participants, only 3 respondents concluded that character education had no effect on incidents of discipline. Each of these three were students, and their comments were as follows:

It hasn't affected discipline to me. I say this because everyone I know, including me, still gets in trouble all the time for little, nit-picky stuff. (38-S, 38:10)

**We get in more trouble for being late to class or skipping class than for having fights, drugs or sex at school. Of course, they don't always know everything that goes on either, and I'm sure most of them don't even want to know most of what's going on. It would blow their minds. (13-S, 13:10)**

**I feel it hasn't because I am a good student and sometimes I am harassed by faculty members for no good reason. (39-S, 39:10)**

**Within the discipline files at the school district office, there was also evidence found to support the fact that certain incidents of discipline had not decreased. A comparison of data from the 1999-2000 and the 1998-1999 school years revealed that certain incidents requiring punishment had actually increased. For example, (a) incidents of profanity usage rose from 6 to 14; (b) possession of controlled substances went from 1 to 5; (c) there were more incidents of students leaving campus without permission; and (d) students cited for habitual tardies increased from 19 to 27. Finally, the total number of incidents requiring discipline referrals at the school rose from 308 to 314.**

### **Additional Information**

**Additional information gathered from participants (other than that pertaining specifically to the six research questions of this study) was divided into two categories. These categories were (a) recommendations for the expansion or improvement of existing character education efforts at the school and (b) general comments concerning character education efforts within the school district. Recommendations made by participants regarding the expansion or improvement of character education efforts at the school included the following:**

**In order for character education to flourish, we must (a) have prayer allowed back in school, (b) promote the teaching of abstinence rather than "safe sex," (c) reward students for honesty and good moral choices, and (d) allow the teaching of Christian beliefs in our schools. (1-GC, 1:11)**

**They should put you in character classes based on the way that people act. For example, if someone is fighting, they should have to take a class on what can happen if fighting is going on out in the streets, such as you might be going to jail and stuff like that. (41-S, 41:11)**

**Knowledge without character can be harmful. We need to make character a key point in all of our educational efforts by incorporating it into each and every aspect of our educational process. (10-CSP-P, 10:11)**

**I think we should have better extra-curricular activities at school to fit more people, but as far as character education and teaching morals, let a person develop themselves and their own sense of morals. People always tell us to be ourselves, but then when we do, we are punished or ridiculed by the faculty. I personally believe that if we could be allowed to be ourselves the school would be more fun and more educational for those who want to learn. If a student doesn't want to learn, don't force them to come to school and don't punish their parents for not making them come. Basically, it should just be left up to us. If we want to throw our lives away let us. Trying to make a person change will only cause them to mess up even more. If we could be left alone, we will turn out good. We will develop morals on our own and we will turn out better in the long run. It's our life. Quit teaching us what you think is right. The schools are based on the way people felt in the 1800s. They need to change with the times. Now, more than ever, it is important to be ourselves. Let us do that. Let us live our lives. If teachers and parents can do that, then why can't we? I think the whole school system needs to be altered to fit the times of today, not 200 years ago. (7W-S, 7:11)**

**General comments concerning character education within the school district included the following:**

**I believe strongly in the value of character education. Every teacher in this parish could easily incorporate examples of character education into her daily lessons. This would definitely be a step in the right direction. (25-P, 25:11)**

**I hope our school system will continue to develop comprehensive programs that will expose more young people to the importance of character and how it can affect their lives in a positive way. (12-CSP, 12:11)**

**Character education in this parish's schools has grown from a tiny beginning to a full-fledged program that affects all students. It's certainly a program that all students have had some contact with even if it's only been in the regular education classroom. Hopefully, it will make a difference in their actions. (24-CSP, 24:11)**

**Character education certainly serves an important role in developing students academically, socially, and morally within our parish. (27-P, 27:11)**

**The schools in this city, including this one, have access to a resource officer from the Sheriff's Department. The outlying schools in the parish don't have that luxury. That might account for some of the cut down on campus crimes lately. See, they've only had that officer servicing them for about two years now. He also does some drug programs out there. (29-CSP, 29:11)**

**I personally feel that character education should be part of the curriculum of all of our schools in this parish. Students at all levels, especially high school, could benefit from it. Seemingly, more emphasis is placed on it in the lower grades, but there is a definite need for it on the high school level. High school students, many of them, do appreciate such courses. (28-T-P, 28:11)**

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REMARKS**

This study sought to provide a framework that would allow for a broad, holistic understanding of character education. An open-interview approach was employed in order to explore character education through an examination of participants' own descriptions of the interpretations and perceptions of their knowledge and experiences. The intent was to gain access to the factors which participants themselves identified as significant, to report those factors, and to interpret them.

One of the major advantages of the qualitative approach is being able to report direct information, as it was delivered by respondents themselves (Patton, 1980). It is assumed that the reader will be able to make personal interpretations, draw conclusions, and form insights of his or her own. This process was supported through the incorporation of thematic categories which were used to assist in the interpretation and description of information. It is intended that final interpretations will be made based on the perceptions and experiences of the reader.

## Conclusions

In keeping with the naturalistic paradigm, the researcher served as the primary instrument for gathering data by observing campus events, looking at school and school-district records and documents, conducting interviews, and using purposeful samples with persistent triangulation to promote trustworthiness. To provide maximum consistency, the researcher conducted all interviews. The member checks were in the form of summarizing conversations and providing various stakeholders a copy of the final report for comments and verification. Both formal and informal interviews were conducted.

Data within and between sources (including interviews, observations, and documents) were mixed. While most data were interpreted as generally supportive of character education, there were notable discrepancies in basic definitions of character education, its scope, and its impact. Following is a summary of primary research findings pertaining to each of the six research questions of this study. Within each, explanations of findings are presented and inconsistencies discussed.

### Definition and Value of Character Education

Character education was most commonly described as including initiatives that focus on the improvement of morality or values. The most prevalent perceived value of character education included making students better people and the improvement of specific character traits; however, a few adults and students considered the district-wide program Character Counts to be the entirety of character education efforts at the school. This group seemed unaware that clubs, sports, and classroom teachers were also a part of

their school's character education movement. One possible explanation for the discrepancy in definitions might be that the term *character education* is relatively new.

Most participants noted the improvement of specific character traits – such as, honesty, kindness, and respect for fellow humans – as being the most valuable effect of character education. Stage theorists who have studied moral development (Erikson, 1963; Kohlberg, 1969; Piaget, 1965) would most likely agree with this assessment, because each noted a specific stage in which moral development was defined, either for better or worse, depending on environmental circumstances.

Only 3 of 41 interview participants concluded that character education was of no value to students. Although most participants agreed that character education efforts at the selected site were, at least in part, valuable, there was great variation regarding both the perceived level and the significance of that value. For example, when asked what the value of character education was, some said that it was to make things better at school, but others said that it was to prepare students for life in a democratic society. Still other participants said its greatest value was that it instilled values that were not being taught at home. It could be argued that because all of these are considered valuable efforts, subtle discrepancies are inconsequential. Perhaps more noteworthy were the varying degrees of value that participants attributed to character education programs.

### Participants' Perceptions of Character Education in Relation to Values

Within their interview responses, the majority of participants (25 out of 33) focused on similarities between character education and values and considered the two to be more

alike than different. Many interview participants mentioned the necessity of including values in character education programs. The only official district-wide program is built around six of the most common values. The school's administrative policy, as well as the mission statements of various clubs and the school's sports code of ethics, also adhere to, and seem limited to, basic values.

Related literature supports the popularity of virtues-centered approaches to character education (Ryan & Bohlin, 1999). It is common for these approaches to include deference to basic values; such as, integrity, positive work ethic, and compassion (Matula, 1999). Even those who are noted as being the earliest advocates of character education (i.e., Plato, Aristotle, Confucius, and Buddha) stressed that it was crucial to include basic values in education (Ryan & Bohlin, 1999). Therefore, it is not surprising that the majority of stakeholders focused on similarities between character education and values.

### Participants' Perceptions of Character Education as an Attempt to Regulate Morality

Of the 30 interview participants who responded to the question, "How is character education viewed by participants in relation to attempts to regulate morality?" 17 (57%) did not view character education as an attempt to regulate morality. Although a substantial majority of students (81%) concurred with this assessment, the majority of adult respondents (56%) saw it as an attempt to regulate morality. It is possible that students might have regarded an attempt to regulate morality as negative, due to the recent increase in publicity regarding the separation of church and state and the possible, related violation of first amendment rights. Analysis of school-district and school-level documents revealed

carefully worded statements regarding character education, supposedly so as not to encroach upon the delicate separation of church and state matters.

Due to an increase in teen violence, there have been calls for an increase in moral teachings within the public school system (Close, 1997; Glanzer, 1997). A recent study conducted by Public Agenda found that most Americans believed there has been a “moral meltdown” in the country (Dobbs, 1997, p. 54). Dobbs attributed this moral meltdown to mass media filled with antisocial messages and gratuitous violence. He felt children today have far fewer role models of kind, caring, and responsible behavior. Although most of the interview participants did not consider character education to be an attempt to regulate morality, many expressed that they would not at all be offended, even if character education were an attempt to do so.

### The Scope of Character Education at the School

Descriptions of character education efforts at the school site included both extracurricular and classroom efforts. The majority (78%) of interview participants responded that character education should be included in the public school curriculum. Only four of the participants negatively described character education efforts at the school.

Perhaps the greatest level of inconsistency fell among data sources pertaining to this research question. Depending on the source (i.e., school-district documents, interview statements, and observations of club meetings), the scope of character education at the site could be interpreted to be as vast as being all inclusive of every facet of student life or as

narrow as revolving around the officially adopted Character Counts program. This was most evident within interview data regarding the scope of character education at the school. Comments ranged from “That’s mostly just for the 4-H students who do the Character Counts program” (34-S, 34:6) to “We have all sorts of character building programs here from classroom initiatives to clubs and sports and even community-service projects that involve the whole school” (13-S, 13:6). It became obvious that some students and adults appeared to be more aware of what went on at the high school, including character education efforts, than others.

### Impact of Character Education on School Climate and Culture and the Overall Educational Experience of Students

Twenty-one of 28 interview participants felt that character education had positively impacted the climate and culture of the school site. Of the 31 participants who commented on the overall impact of character education on students, only 4 expressed the opinion that character education had no effect. Each of the remaining 27 respondents included at least some educational benefit in their descriptions. None of the participants cited any negative educational effects of character education efforts.

The common thought regarding this research question seemed to be that the climate and culture of the school probably had improved. Although student discipline records indicated improvement in some areas (precharacter education versus postimplementation data), other areas of discipline referrals had actually increased. Findings in similar studies (e.g., Matula, 1999; Nelson, 1999) have also shown mixed results.

### **Effect of Character Education on Attitudes and Behaviors of Students**

The majority (92%) of interview participants felt that character education had improved attitudes and behaviors of students and that it had led to a decline in incidents requiring disciplinary action. Fifteen of the 36 respondents described the improvement as being a small one. None of the participants noted any negative consequences resulting from the inclusion of character education, and only three said they felt it had no effect on students.

Sullivan (1953) postulated that human behavior is shaped by an individual's attempt to maintain comfortable relationships with significant others, and Bandura (1969) hypothesized that people observe their own behavior and judge it against their own standards. To make these judgments, students must develop expectations for their own performance. These early theories could account for the positive changes in behavior that the majority of stakeholders attributed to character education at the school. According to Meichenbaum and Goodman (1971), it is possible to train students to monitor and regulate their own behavior.

Most participants perceived an improvement in attitudes and behaviors and further expressed the view that regardless of whether that improvement could be directly attributed to character education efforts, the efforts should be continued. Only a few students seemed to be bothered by the inclusion of a comprehensive character education program. It could be, as is the case with many teens, that those students were bothered by any and all things that required utilization of critical thinking skills and extracurricular effort.

## Summary

At the selected high school site, character education meant different things to different people. For some students, it was an integral part of their school experience. These were students who are considered joiners – athletes, as well as members of several other clubs and organizations. Such students were exposed to character education initiatives to a greater degree than other students, simply because they were involved in more areas of school life. Students who simply attended school and then went home had less involvement in character-building educational activities. The students may or may not have encountered a classroom teacher who chose to incorporate character lessons into daily instruction. Some subjects – such as, social studies and English – seem to lend themselves more readily to this effort than others, such as, mathematics and science.

The school's administrators seemed to be torn between the recent state mandate to incorporate character education and the strain of already overwhelmed classroom teachers. Although the administrative philosophy was certainly supportive of molding good character, the school still lacked a comprehensive plan regarding the implementation of school-wide character education efforts.

Although the researcher spent a good deal of time conducting on-site observations, she found character education to be a difficult thing to observe. Without usually being close enough to hear student conversations, interpretations of observations were often relegated to weighing such things as smiles versus frowns, groups versus loners, and peaceful hallways versus loud and rowdy areas. Her overall perception was that the school

seemed to be a pleasant place. Things were not perfect, but no one seemed to be overbearing or excessively rude.

Some teachers seemed extremely supportive of character education efforts, both in and out of the classroom, but others did not seem to understand what character education means. Three refused to discuss their perceptions of character education, even though the principal had asked that everyone be truthful and cooperative. Time constraints were mentioned by some as being the reason for their lack of cooperation. Research efforts were greatly aided by the openness of the principal, who provided unlimited access to all requested documents, facilitated faculty interviews and extended an invitation for daily observations.

While there seemed to be some lack of uniformity among the various character education initiatives at the school, this was not necessarily viewed as a negative characteristic. Although character-building efforts which are instilled through daily classroom instruction might prove completely ineffective for a particular student, he or she might readily adhere to a sports code of ethics which could instill healthy, life-long habits.

### **Implications and Recommendations for Practice**

Based on the findings of this study, three weaknesses of the school's current character education efforts were identified. The first weakness was the lack of detailed and comprehensive planning toward the incorporation of character education into educational efforts. Even though the school district had officially adopted the Character Counts program in an effort to comply with the recent legislative mandate (House Bill 102),

administrators and teachers at the school were left to incorporate as much or as little character education as each personally deemed appropriate. This created a wide discrepancy among the experiences of individual students, as to the quantity and quality of character education that each was exposed to while at the high school. The broader the range of experiences, classes, and activities students were involved in, the greater their exposure to character education seemed to be.

The researcher recommends that a character education committee be formed to investigate specific ways to implement the elements of a comprehensive character education plan that will involve students on a more inclusive basis. The committee should be charged with the task of implementing, maintaining, evaluating, and adjusting a site-specific, comprehensive, character education effort. Since personal and political agendas can influence policy in ways that either facilitate or establish barriers to success, it is better to leave character education decisions in the hands of groups rather than individuals (Fullan, 1993). A committee effort might help to synthesize individual efforts by the teachers, parents, and community-support people who are most concerned with the formation of positive character within their students.

Members of the committee should first gather information by observing successful programs that have been implemented at other schools and by researching various programs on the Internet and other resources. Committee research should then be synthesized, analyzed, and discussed, in order to determine the most appropriate plan of action. From the input of all sources, the committee could create an implementation plan and then present it to the staff of the school for additional suggestions. As each element

is implemented, it should be constantly evaluated to determine possible enhancement or improvement opportunities.

The second weakness that was identified was the lack of appropriate professional development of faculty in the area of character education. In general, the teachers who were interviewed were supportive of the character education initiatives at the school; however, the degree to which each actively participated in them varied greatly. Even among the two guidance counselors, who had been trained in the use of the Character Counts program, one was implementing the program and the other was not. Of the nine teachers who were participants in this study, all offered different definitions of character education and expressed a wide variety of opinions concerning appropriate character education efforts that should be included in the school program. Only two of the nine were aware that character education had recently been mandated by the Louisiana legislature for inclusion in the educational efforts of all public schools.

Students and teachers demonstrated a wide range of knowledge regarding character education efforts at their school. By first recognizing exactly what is and what is not currently being done, educators might then be able to implement additional useful and appropriate character education activities (Zarra, 1999). The researcher recommends that faculty professional development activities be conducted by administrators or counselors to educate and inform teachers about how to implement a more uniform and structured character education program.

The third and final weakness that needs to be addressed is the lack of parental and community involvement in the school's character education efforts. For the most part,

parents of students who participated in this study had very little knowledge concerning character education efforts at the school; however, most seemed concerned and fully supportive of character education implementation. Heightened awareness within the community might be attributed to new studies on character education programs and literature on the subject, which are increasing in response to the disturbing events taking place in society. The researcher recommends the involvement of parents and community members to a greater degree, perhaps as voluntary members of a character education committee.

### Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the wide range of character education efforts that were found at the selected school site, additional studies need to be conducted to determine which character education programs have proven most beneficial and in what ways those programs have been beneficial, specifically targeting academic and social effects. As an extension of this effort, other single-site and multiple-site studies, focusing on the analysis and comparison of comprehensive, public school character education programs, should be conducted. It is further recommended that future researchers explore ways to incorporate a broader and more efficient use of observation data than was accomplished in this study.

### Concluding Remarks

According to the August 24-26, 1999, Gallup Poll of parents of K-12 students, 48% thought that public schools should require all students to take a character education program. Whether character education will become a fixture in American schools remains

to be seen. According to Kelly (1999), the higher standards educators need most are not academic but moral; and until that tenant is accepted, the schools are going to deteriorate.

A variety of cultural forces affect the conscience and character of children, some positive and some negative. Along with current educational reform in academic areas, it is critical that attention also be given to the education of young people regarding character. In the face of enormous cultural shifts, deliberate steps must be taken to instill positive character traits into the lives of students. It is crucial that the conscience and character of children not be neglected. Although the methods of implementation and promotion vary greatly, there is a set of shared assumptions regarding the universal benefit of character education (Ryan, 1996). Therefore, the problem for educators is not so much what character traits to stress, but rather how honestly and realistically these traits can be taught (Bennett, 1991).

**APPENDIX A**  
**LETTER OF SUPPORT FROM GOVERNOR**



M. J. "MIKE" FOSTER, JR.  
GOVERNOR

State of Louisiana

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Baton Rouge

70804-9004

POST OFFICE BOX 34004  
(225) 342-7013

June 1, 1999

Lily Stoppleworth  
133 Stoppleworth Ln.  
Homer, LA 71040

Dear Ms. Stoppleworth:

I have received your e-mail requesting my views on character education and thank you for writing me.

As you may know, I have made character education a top priority of my administration and we must do everything we can to develop and educate our youth to lead our world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Basically, character education is about instilling within our children a sense of respect for themselves and others, honesty, integrity, fairness and responsibility. We, as parents and educators, must teach them how to live by these core values and I feel that the best place for this is our schools. In fact, we introduced and passed legislation creating a Character Education Clearinghouse for public schools and this year, as you have stated, I have dedicated part of my salary to fund "Character Education Awards". These awards recognize outstanding teachers and others in our public school system who have successfully implemented character education programs.

I recognize the primary role of parents in shaping the moral character of children; however, I believe that it is also vital for our schools to teach and inspire civic and civil virtues. It is the shared responsibility of everyone in our community to demonstrate and exemplify high moral character and civic virtue.

Again, thank you for taking time to write me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M.J. Foster, Jr.", written over the word "Sincerely,".

M.J. "Mike" Foster, Jr.

cs/cjs

**APPENDIX B**  
**LETTER OF SUPPORT FROM PRINCIPAL**

[Redacted]

[Redacted]  
Vice-Principal

[Redacted]  
Vice-Principal

September 26, 2000

[Redacted]

Dr. Randy Parker  
Chair, Dissertation Committee  
Louisiana Tech University  
Ruston, LA 71272

Dear Dr. Parker,

Lily Stoppleworth has made me aware of her choice of [Redacted] High School as a possible research site for Character Education. I have informed her that she will be granted full access to teachers and students so long as classroom instruction is not interrupted. We, at [Redacted] High School, are fully supportive of Mrs. Stoppleworth's research efforts and are willing to assist her in whatever manner possible.

Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

[Redacted] Principal  
[Redacted] High School

"An Equal Opportunity Employer"

**APPENDIX C**  
**LETTER OF SUPPORT FROM**  
**SUPERINTENDENT**

[Redacted]  
[Redacted]  
[Redacted]

[Redacted]  
President  
[Redacted]  
Vice-President

[Redacted]  
Superintendent  
[Redacted]  
Asst. Superintendent

4 October 2000

Ms. Lilly Stoppleworth

[Redacted]

Dear Ms. Stoppleworth:

In response to your note of 9 September 2000, we will be happy to assist you with research in regard to your doctoral program.

Please work with [Redacted] who coordinates this program in our system. I would ask that if students are involved, no instructional time would be used.

The old [Redacted] High campus has been transferred to the Town of [Redacted]. You might want to check with [Redacted] to see what plans they have for the old building.

Sincerely,

[Redacted]

xc: [Redacted]

**APPENDIX D**  
**HUMAN USE COMMITTEE APPROVAL**

**STUDY/PROJECT INFORMATION FOR HUMAN USE SUBJECTS COMMITTEE**

**TITLE :** An Ethnography: Understanding Participants' Perceptions of Character Education

**PROJECT DIRECTORS:** Lily Stoppeworth  
Dr. Randy Parker

**DEPARTMENT(S):** Curriculum, Instruction and Leadership

**PURPOSE OF STUDY/PROJECT:** To explore the extent, quality, and impact of character education at ██████████ High School as perceived by various stakeholders.

**PARTICIPANTS:** ██████████ High School students, teachers, administrators, and resource personnel, along with various community members.

**PROCEDURE:** Approximately 15 participants will be individually interviewed at length in order to determine their perceptions of various character education initiatives that are taking place at ██████████ High School. Observations will be made of the various character education initiatives to determine participant involvement and interaction, and both internal and external documents pertaining to the programs will be reviewed.

**INSTRUMENTS AND MEASURES TO INSURE PROTECTION ON CONFIDENTIALITY, ANONYMITY:** Data will be gathered through observational field notes, reflective journals, interview transcripts and a review of documents. Coding of responses will be utilized in order to protect the identity of the participants.

**RISKS/ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS:** There are no risks associated with participation in this study. There are no alternative treatments. Participation is voluntary.

**BENEFITS/COMPENSATION:** None

**SAFEGUARDS OF PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING:** This study involves no treatment or physical contact. Interview information will be collected on a volunteer basis with parental consent secured before minors are questioned.



LOUISIANA TECH  
UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH & GRADUATE SCHOOL

MEMORANDUM

TO: Lily Stoppeworth  
Randy Parker

FROM: Deby Hamm, Graduate School

SUBJECT: HUMAN USE COMMITTEE REVIEW

DATE: December 6, 2000

In order to facilitate your project, an **EXPEDITED REVIEW** has been done for your proposed study entitled:

“An ethnography: understanding participants’ perceptions of character education”  
Proposal # I-UE

The proposed study procedures were found to provide reasonable and adequate safeguards against possible risks involving human subjects. The information to be collected may be personal in nature or implication. Therefore, diligent care needs to be taken to protect the privacy of the participants and to assure that the data are kept confidential. Further, the subjects must be informed that their participation is voluntary.

*Since your reviewed project appears to do no damage to the participants, the Human Use Committee grants approval of the involvement of human subjects as outlined.*

You are requested to maintain written records of your procedures, data collected, and subjects involved. These records will need to be available upon request during the conduct of the study and retained by the university for three years after the conclusion of the study.

If you have any questions, please give me a call at 257-2924.

A MEMBER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA SYSTEM

P.O. BOX 7923 • RUSTON, LA 71272-0029 • TELEPHONE (318) 257-2924 • FAX (318) 257-4487 • email: [research@LaTech.edu](mailto:research@LaTech.edu)

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY UNIVERSITY

## HUMAN SUBJECTS CONSENT FORM

The following is a brief summary of the project in which you are asked to participate. Please read this information before signing the statement below.

**TITLE OF PROJECT :** An Ethnography: Understanding Participants' Perceptions of Character Education

**PURPOSE OF STUDY/PROJECT:** To explore the extent, quality, and impact of character education at Minden High School as perceived by various stakeholders.

**PROCEDURE:** Approximately 15 participants will be individually interviewed at length in order to determine their perceptions of various character education initiatives that are taking place at ██████████ High School. Observations will be made of the various character education initiatives to determine participant involvement and interaction, and both internal and external documents pertaining to the programs will be reviewed.

**INSTRUMENTS:** Data will be gathered through observational field notes, reflective journals, interview transcripts and a review of documents. Coding of responses will be utilized in order to protect the identity of the participants.

**RISKS/ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS:** There are no risks associated with participation in this study. There are no alternative treatments. Participation is voluntary.

**BENEFITS/COMPENSATION:** None

I, \_\_\_\_\_, attest with my signature that I have read and understand the following description of the study, "An Ethnography: Understanding Participants' Perceptions of Character Education," and its purpose and methods. I understand that my participation in this research is strictly voluntary and my participation or refusal to participate in this study will not affect my relationship with Louisiana Tech University. Further, I understand that I may withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any questions without penalty. Upon completion of the study, I understand that the results will be freely available to me upon request. I understand that the results of my interview will be encoded in order to insure anonymity. I have not been requested to waive nor do I waive any of my rights related to participating in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant or Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** The principal experimenters listed below may be reached to answer questions about the research, participants' rights, or related matters.  
Mrs. Lily Stoppeworth (318) 927-3678 (Home)  
(318) 377-2133 (Work)

Members of the Human Use Committee of Louisiana Tech University may also be contacted if a problem cannot be discussed with the experimenters:

Dr. Terry McConathy (257-2924)

Dr. Don Wells (257-2948)

Mrs. Deby Hamm (257-2924)

**APPENDIX E**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

For the purposes of this study, participants were asked the following interview questions.

1. What is your definition of character education?
2. How are values – such as, honesty, responsibility, and respect – the same as character education and how are they different?
3. Do you believe that character education is an attempt to regulate morality? If so, in what ways?
4. What do you believe is the value of character education?
5. How do you feel about character education being included in the curriculum of public schools?
6. What is the scope of the character education movement at the school?
7. How do you think character education has impacted or affected students at the school?
8. How has the climate/culture of the school been altered by the inclusion of character education initiatives?
9. How has character education contributed to the overall educational experience of the school's students?
10. How have incidents of discipline been affected by character education at the school?

**APPENDIX F**  
**PARTICIPANTS' BIOGRAPHICAL**  
**INFORMATION**

**PARTICIPANTS' BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION****#1-GC**

Age: 32

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 9

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Guidance counselor, Character Counts coordinator, sends students to elementary and junior high for D.A.R.E programs. Provides speakers to discuss character-related subjects.

**#2-GC**

Age: 35

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 35

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Guidance counselor, Character Counts coordinator. This group is in its second year of participation. The past two years it has consisted of eight to ten senior students who coordinate and present programs about character to the students at the junior high school.

**#3-A**

Age: 43

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 15

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: District Safe and Drug Free Schools Coordinator; involvement with Character Education is through coordination of training for mentors and dissemination of materials. Also assists with training of teachers.

**#4-S**

Age: 16

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 13

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Student, member of Youth Art Club of America and Art Group.

**#5-T-CS**

Age: 27

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 17

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Teacher, First Priority sponsor, and FCCLA sponsor.

**#6-T**

Age: 53

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 22

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Teacher, head coach girl's basketball.

**#7-S**

Age: 19

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 19

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Student, member of Choir, Jazz band, and agriculture classes.

**#8-T-CS**

Age: 44

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 38

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Teacher, accompanies students to Character Counts programs, FBLA club sponsor.

**#9-T-CS**

Age: 51

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 0

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Teacher, 4-H Club Sponsor, Drama Club Sponsor.

**#10-CSP-P**

Age: 44

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 11.5

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Daughter participates and leads in many clubs and activities that stress good character traits, community Pastor, active in various school activities.

**#11-CSP**

Age: 39

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 34

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Local youth pastor who visits the campus.

**#12-CSP**

Age: 31

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 31

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Juvenile Probation Officer, has knowledge of Character Counts curriculum and numerous clubs: FCA, FBLA, FTA, and FFA.

**#13-S**

Age: 18

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 14

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Student, involved in FCCLA freshman year. Has knowledge of FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America) and YACA (Youth Art Club of America) through other students.

**#14-T**

Age: 42

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 4

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Teacher, involved in selection of student leaders who make presentations at elementary and junior high schools concerning character.

**#15-T**

Age: 49

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 7-year teacher in the district, not a resident.

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Teacher, incorporates character education in lessons almost daily. Has seen students involved in organizations that build character and responsibility. Witnessed other faculty members involved in character education as well as school board personnel. Discusses choices made by characters in literature and discuss the consequences of their choices.

**#16-A**

Age: 44

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 43

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Principal.

**#17-S**

Age: 18

Race: Black

Number of years lived in this school district: 18

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Student, not a member of First Priority, but has attended some meetings.

**#18-S**

Age: 17

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 1.5

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Student, enrolled in Leadership Class and Character Counts program.

**#19-S**

Age: 18

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 4

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Senior student, holds offices in Student Council, FTA, FCA, NHS, and Cheerleading. Member of FBLA, and is a Character Counts mentor.

**#20-S**

Age: 17

Race: Black

Number of years lived in this school district: 17

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Student, member of Character Counts program. Devotes time to and counsels junior high school students.

**#21-S**

Age: 18

Race: Black

Number of years lived in this school district: 17

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Student, with knowledge of character education efforts through clubs, sports, committees, Character Counts team, and through personal involvement.

**#22-S**

Age: 18

Race: Black

Number of years lived in this school district: 18

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Student, member of Student Council, FTA, FBLA, Steering Committee, Key Club.

**#23-S**

Age: 17

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 13

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Student, member of First Priority, FCA and Jazz Band.

**#24-CSP**

Age: 46

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 24

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Employed with LSU Agriculture Center, District Extension Office. Initiated the Character Counts program in the district by working with guidance counselors in conjunction with the School Board office.

**#25-P**

Age: 47

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 12

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Parent of four children, two have graduated from the school, and two currently attend.

**#26-S**

Age: 17

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 14

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Student, member of First Priority and art class

**#27-P**

Age: 53

Race: Black

Number of years lived in this school district: 20

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Parent of student attending the school.

**#28-T-P**

Age: 50

Race: Black

Number of years lived in this school district: 29

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Teacher and parent of student attending the school.

**#29-CSP**

Age: 43

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 43

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Police Department Juvenile Resource Officer for the school.

**#30-S**

Age: 17

Race: Black

Number of years lived in this school district: 17

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Student, member of First Priority, FCA, FBLA, FCCLA, Adult Responsibility, and Child Development.

**#31-S**

Age: 16

Race: Black

Number of years lived in this school district: 16

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Student, Band member.

**#32-S**

Age: 18

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 18

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Student, member of Student Council and Red Wave (pep club).

**#33-S**

Age: 18

Race: Black

Number of years lived in this school district: 18

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Student, not a member of any extra-curricular activities.

**#34-S**

Age: 16

Race: Black

Number of years lived in this school district: 12

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Student, member of band, Foreign Language Club, and FBLA.

**#35-S**

Age: 17

Race: Black

Number of years lived in this school district: 17

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Student, member of band, Foreign Language Club, and FBLA.

**#36-S**

Age: 18

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 2.5

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Student, member of the Choir.

**#37-S**

Age: 17

Race: White

Number of years lived in this school district: 17

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Student, member of FFA, 4-H, and FBLA.

**#38-S**

Age: 17

Race: Black

Number of years lived in this school district: 17

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Student, not a member of any extra-curricular activities.

**#39-S**

Age: 18

Race: Black

Number of years lived in this school district: 13

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Student, member of FCA, basketball, and track.

**#40-S**

Age: 18

Race: Black

Number of years lived in this school district: 18

Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Student, member of FCCLA.

**#41-S****Age: 19****Race: Black****Number of years lived in this school district: 19****Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Student, member of FCCLA, and FBLA.****#42-S****Age: 17****Race: Black****Number of years lived in this school district: 17****Description of involvement, and/or knowledge of, character education efforts at the selected school site: Student, member of band, FBLA, and Student Council**

**APPENDIX G**  
**DOCUMENTS THAT WERE REVIEWED**

**DOCUMENTS THAT WERE REVIEWED**

- 1. Athletic Code of Ethics**
- 2. Student / Parent Behavior Contracts**
- 3. Leadership Class Curriculum**
- 4. Mission Statement of Clubs/Organizations**
- 5. Discipline Records of students involved in one or more character education activities as opposed to those who are involved in none**
- 6. Minutes of Club Meetings**
- 7. Activity Ledgers for Character Counts Programs**
- 8. District-wide policy on Character Education**
- 9. Minutes of district school board meetings**
- 10. Back issues of the local newspapers for articles focused on character building community and school activities**
- 11. Financial records of the district school board to determine how much money is designated toward implementation of mandated Character Education programs**

**APPENDIX H**  
**OBSERVATION SITES AND GUIDELINES**

## **OBSERVATION SITES**

- 1. General Assemblies**
- 2. Sporting Events**
- 3. Regular Classroom**
- 4. Cafeteria**
- 5. Hallways**
- 6. Club Meetings**
- 7. Commons Area During Breaks**

## **OBSERVATION GUIDELINES**

**For each observation the following information will be recorded.**

**Date:**

**Time:**

**Location:**

**Participants:**

**Scheduled Activity:**

**Description of speech and actions:**

**Which of the six parts of character (based on the definition for the purposes of this study) were exhibited during this observation and how?**

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## VITA

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