

The Importance of Character Education: a Study of Increased Structure and Focused Character
Education in Morning Meetings

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine whether increasing the structure of morning meetings with a character education focus would reduce office referrals among students with behavior problems. This study used a retrospective pre-experimental design with a variant of a one-group pretest-posttest design. Subjects (n= 19) served as their own controls. Subjects were selected based on a “high” score on the dependent variable under the first condition in that they had two or more office referrals in the first semester of the school year and were considered frequent offenders. Dependent variable data was collected over the first semesters of the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years in an elementary school. In 2011-2012 study morning meetings were unstructured but in 2012-2013 they were structured with a character education focus. There was no significant difference between the mean number of office referrals in the first semester of the school year among frequent offenders under nonstructured (Mean = 3.58, SD = 1.54) and structured (Mean= 2.37, SD = 2.31) morning meeting conditions [$t(18) = 1.99, p > .05$]. Implications are discussed including that more funding is needed to provide every classroom teacher with a research based character education program and materials and the need to conduct more rigorous research to assess the effectiveness of the intervention.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

In the United States, high stakes testing and accountability seem to be the most commonly used phrases in the education field. National discourse places an emphasis on academic standardization, eliminating the achievement gap, teacher accountability, and standardized testing. However, due to the failing family structure along with other important variables, children lack social skills and display inappropriate behaviors in the school setting. Children need to be taught how to act in order to be successful in the academic setting.

Over the past seven years, this researcher has been employed as a fourth and fifth grade teacher in two different Title I elementary schools. In both schools, class sizes fluctuated between 18 to 28 children yearly due to high mobility rates. However, one main problem seemed to remain in all classroom settings-- limited positive interpersonal character traits and social skills. In the elementary classroom, it is difficult for a teacher to increase learning and eliminate the achievement gap with multiple challenging behaviors in the environment. Additionally, educators must take time away from their teaching in order to intervene or instruct a student on how to display appropriate behaviors and how to work with others. The positive behavior intervention supports (PBIS) system is used in Title I public schools to help parents, administrators, and educators monitor student behavior. It is intended to improve school wide behavior by positively reinforcing appropriate behavior. Unfortunately, it can cause more frustration, anger, verbal arguments, and negativity between the teacher, parent, and students.

Over the past seven years, even though students in the researcher's school have used a PBIS reward based color system for their behavior, students have continued to fall behind both

academically and behaviorally. To improve school productivity in academic performance, the school administration decided that the PBIS would remain in place for students, but teachers would also introduce values and morals into morning meetings. In the 2011- 2012 school year, educators began each school day with a classroom meeting with a curriculum that was organized based on teacher discretion. In the 2012- 2013 school year, teachers began implementing values and character based topics into their morning meetings. The hope was that morning meetings became more structured and elementary school-wide with the use of character education, then time on task and student behavior should improve.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine if increasing the structure of a character education program during morning meeting would reduce and/or eliminate problem behaviors and poor social skills.

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis is that there will be no significant difference in the mean number of office referrals among frequent offenders when morning meetings are less structured and are not focused around character traits in the 2011- 2012 school year and when morning meetings are more structured and focused around specific character traits in the 2012-2013 school year for students attending a low socioeconomic status elementary school.

Operational Definitions

The term morning meeting is used to describe one component of the Responsive Classroom approach to teaching. This is an approach to discipline in the classroom, which promotes student responsibility, classroom community, increases student investment, and improves social skills. Morning meetings are taught directly after morning announcements and serve as daily gatherings for teachers and students to greet one another, share information, complete a group activity, and share a morning message. In morning meetings, fifteen to twenty minutes daily were devoted to teaching students personal and civic virtues, such as respect for self, empathy for others, a sense of responsibility, trust, fairness, and a love of learning. In 2011-2012, the morning meetings were not structured around specific positive character traits. Rather, the meetings were designed based on teacher discretion for what their class needed. In 2012-2013, the morning meanings were structured around specific positive character traits in that they were designed to target social skills and values selected by the school administration. A particular trait was addressed for one week.

A low socioeconomic status school is defined as a school that is classified as Title I.

Title I is classified by the Maryland State Department of Education as

“a federal program that provides financial assistance to local school systems and schools with high percentages of poor children to support the academic achievement of disadvantaged students. All twenty-four local school systems in Maryland receive Title I funds which are distributed to high poverty schools within their districts so the schools can provide additional academic support and learning opportunities to help low-achieving children master challenging curricula and meet state standards in core academic subjects. Title I funds support extra instruction in reading and mathematics, additional teachers, materials of instruction, as well as after-school and summer programs to extend and reinforce the regular school curriculum. There are currently 412 Title I schools in Maryland.”

The term frequent offender is used to describe students who receive two or more office referrals in the first semester of the 2011-2012 school year. Office referrals are discipline forms used to write up a student that has misbehaved within the school setting and violated one of the school/county policies for students. Office referrals identify problem behaviors in the school setting, as well as possible motivation, other students involved and administrative decisions. The educator must fill out an office referral to refer a student to the behavior specialist and/or principal. Office referrals are tracked and data is organized in the School-wide Information System (SWIS). The data in SWIS is used to identify frequent offenders and track their referrals by problem behavior and setting.

Positive rewards are given out on a daily basis in all classrooms in the research school. Eagle Bucks are given out to scholars who display the four school rules: respect for learning, positive attitude, good thinking, and good manners. Eagle Bucks are paper tokens that can be used to purchase rewards at the weekly school store. Additionally, students can use their Eagle Bucks to pay for monthly celebrations; such as extra recess, a school-wide movie, board games, and other extra rewards.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

One of the major concerns of educators, administrators, community members, and families alike is the decline in positive character qualities displayed in school-age children. This literature review examines the need for the implementation of character education programs in schools. Section one describes problematic behaviors for teachers within the school setting. In section two, current behavior management practices and interventions put in place to curb problematic behaviors are discussed. Lastly, section three describes evidence about the effects of character education programs in conjunction with behavior management systems.

Problematic Behavior

A major concern in schools is the decline in positive behavior by students and an increase in behaviors interfering with learning. Areas of particular concern are aggression, violence, bullying, and noncompliance with adult directions in specific school settings such as classroom, cafeteria, recess, and bus transportation (Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 1998). Research has shown that children's behavior problems, including externalizing behaviors, are predictive of academic underachievement and under attainment. Externalizing problems are often defined as uncontrolled behaviors that are manifested in the form of hyperactivity, impulsivity, aggression, disruptiveness, and defiance (Kwon, Kim, & Sheridan, 2012). Additionally, other disruptive classroom behaviors that exist include, out-of-area behaviors, talking during instruction, off-task behaviors, inappropriate vocalizations, and non-compliance with requests (McKissick, Hawkins, Lentz, Hailley, & McGuire, 2010). Problematic behaviors are "not in accordance with the unity of the classroom community or are contrary to the well-being of the classroom community, including behaviors that distract the instructor or other students, disrupt classroom

learning, discourage the instructor from teaching, discourage other students from participating, derail the instructor's goals for the period, etc.” (Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010, pg. 16). Such behaviors can lead to decreased academic learning time, decreased academic performance, and lowered standardized test scores.

Behavior Management

Many elementary schools use behavior management strategies to promote a positive school climate whereby all students are actively taught behavioral expectations and are acknowledged for appropriate behavior. Behavior management is a strategy for teachers to use to promote positive behavior and address negative actions in their classrooms. It is a critical part of educating youth, meeting grade level expectations, and maintaining adequate academic performance on mandatory assessments. As classrooms become more diverse in nature, the need for classroom management techniques that can be used with both individuals and groups of students becomes more critical. A positive school climate should be supported by a program that encourages positive social, emotional, and behavioral growth in all students (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012). Effective classroom management enhances student achievement and reduces classroom disruption. Managing student behavior "is part of a school's culture of responsibility, in which everyone from the principal on down, is expected to model and encourage appropriate behavior” (Goodwin & Miller, pg. 82, 2012). Some of the best approaches to behavior management are not reactive, but are proactive.

Many school discipline systems, however, continue to rely on consequences and depend on punitive or reactive strategies such as detention and suspension to curb behavioral violations. They attempt to teach behavioral expectations and set classroom expectations, but do not encourage students to get in touch with their own ethical and moral values. Behavior

management programs attempt to curb the problem behaviors through the use of interventions, such as behavior intervention charts or plans (Benninga & Quinn, 2011). Traditionally, educators focus on student behaviors without considering the thought that precedes the action (Allred, 2008). Classroom management techniques can help a student understand what is expected of them in school through rules and procedures. They still may not understand, however, morally how to act and/or how their actions affect others. Moral development is important because it is based on relationships with others and includes an understanding of the impact of one's behavior (Marshall, Caldwell, & Foster, 2006).

Character Education

Effective instruction depends on a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. Educators can try to create effective behavior management procedures for their students, but still struggle to instill student values and limit disruptive behavior problems. In the upper elementary grades, students misbehave because they often are trying to impress their peers and lack strategies to monitor their behavior. These students lack motivation to do well in school, or lack guidance from home to know how to behave appropriately. Teaching children the skills and strategies they need to manage their behavior does not simply occur in school; it can occur at home through parental modeling and discipline. However, parental support, necessary for modeling positive behavior at home may not be present in the child's life (Fallon, O'Keeffe, & Sugai, 2012).

Character and civic education address goals of social responsibility in an effort to foster better citizens. Character education can be defined as "teaching, training, or practices that promote positive behavior traits within students...character education teaches our students how to be better citizens, more respectful human beings, and kinder peers... (Moorefield-Lang, 2012)."

Research is constantly providing new methods and ways for educators to teach social skills. Social and emotional learning through the use of character education programs can teach children to be moral, civic, well-mannered, non-bullying, socially acceptable people. One such program, The CHARACTER*plus* Way, provides a comprehensive whole school and community approach along with data-based planning and collaborative classroom practices that foster moral, ethical, and social development in elementary to secondary students (Marshall, et. al, 2011). When teachers implemented The CHARACTER*plus* Way or other character based programs, the students had more positive perceived behavior and fewer suspensions at the elementary and middle school levels (Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006). Teachers reported feeling more bonded with parents of children in their classes and experienced a significant improvement in student emotional self-regulation, social competence and conduct problems (Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Stoolmiller, 2008).

Although critics argue that character education programs take up valuable instruction time and do not always affect academic achievement, research has shown that student behavior and school climate have improved through the use of values based education (Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006). At all grade levels, class meetings (morning meetings) facilitated by school staff help build relationships and establish social guidelines for students to follow within the classroom. Class meetings can provide students with opportunities to reflect on their morals and engage in conversations about classroom issues (Marshall, et. al, 2006). Students can be encouraged and taught to be fair, equitable, caring, respectful, and empathetic individuals.

National interest in character education programs is apparent; however, schools are leery of engaging in supplementary initiatives that might detract from the primary focus of increasing academic achievement (Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, & Smith, 2006). A character education

program can successfully be implemented if there is buy-in and support school -wide from all stakeholders; teachers, counselors, administrators, and families (Lewis, Robinson, & Hayes, 2011). At an elementary school in San Francisco, CA, administrators, faculty, and staff teach character education through a series of programs and activities designed to instill positive core values in students. According to the principal, Dexter Martin, “Character education is an important and ongoing process at our school. Our goal is to develop leaders of tomorrow by promoting good character values and practices in our daily lessons and activities” (Character counts, 2011, Pg. 37).

Summary

Character education was a major part of the public schools' mission until the 1950's and has been phased in and out of the curriculum since that time in favor of standards-based lessons (Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006). With problematic behaviors on the rise within the school setting, research supports the value in morals education; as well as the improvement in behavior and school safety associated with it. In order to improve school quality and safety, students must learn to appreciate, respect, and conduct themselves as responsible young citizens (Character Counts, 2011). By implementing a character education program in conjunction with current behavior management practices, students will be aware of their morals, values, rules and expectations in school and improved behavior and achievement should logically follow.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

This study used a retrospective pre-experimental design with a variant of a one-group pretest-posttest design. Subjects served as their own controls. Dependent variable data was collected over the course of two different interventions. Subjects were selected to be included the study based on a “high” score on the dependent variable under the first condition.

Across the elementary school building, there are children in Pre- K through fifth grade who struggle with following expected student behaviors. Due to lack of social skills, self control, attentiveness, and frequent classroom outbursts, these students are given multiple reminders to follow classroom rules and routines. Additionally, class disruptions, unwillingness to cooperate with others, fighting, and chronic disrespect towards peers and adults have forced teachers to make frequent office referrals. To attempt to decrease problematic behaviors in the classroom of all scholars, especially the frequent offenders, morals and values were implemented into daily morning meetings. The plan included fifteen to twenty minutes daily devoted to teaching students personal and civic virtues, such as respect for self, empathy for others, a sense of responsibility, trust, fairness, and a love of learning. The reinforcement of the foundations built at home in coordination with direct teaching and modeling of good character would hopefully decrease referrals and off-task behaviors.

Subjects

In the research school, each grade level has a heterogeneously mixed group of students and each teacher has a similar number of students enrolled in his/her classroom. Students are grouped based on their academic level, behavior, special education needs, and by

parent or teacher requests. Since the research school has qualified for Title I services, class sizes are smaller and most grade levels have four classroom teachers.

In the 2011-2012 school year, there were four hundred fifty-seven (457) students enrolled. Of those four hundred fifty-seven (457) students, three hundred eight-two (382) were African American, thirty-seven (37) were Hispanic, sixteen (16) were White, and thirteen (13) were Multi-Racial. The number of males enrolled was two hundred thirteen (213) and the number of females was two hundred six (206). Eighty-four and seven tenths (84.7) of students received Free/Reduced Meals. Eight percent (8%) of the general education population received special education services. In the 2012-2013 school year, the research school had four hundred seventy- six (476) students enrolled. Of those four hundred seventy- six (476) students, three hundred ninety- four (394) were African American, eighteen (18) were Hispanic, seventeen (17) were White, and seventeen (17) were Multi-Racial. Each grade level (Pre-Kindergarten through Fifth Grade) had three to four teachers at each grade level and approximately 15- 28 students per class. In addition to the classroom teacher, Pre-Kindergarten had a para-professional, and each classroom has a teacher's assistant or special educator that rotates from classroom to classroom at various times.

The subjects chosen for participation in this study were all the students from grades kindergarten through fourth grade with two or more office referrals in the first semester of the 2011-2012 school year. There were forty-one (41) students that met these criteria. The rationale for selecting these children was that they represented a population that would benefit from strategies to improve behaviors and character. Students with only one office referral were not included since an office referral could result from highly situational factors. It was assumed that if a child was a frequent offender, they likely had consistent behavior problems. However,

the researcher's school had a very transient population, which resulted in a group of nineteen (19) students that had two or more referrals in the 2011-2012 school year that continued to be enrolled at the researcher's school for both semesters. The participants in the study consisted of one (1) student from kindergarten, four(4) students from first grade, four (4) students from second grade, five(5) students from third grade, and five (5) students from the fourth grade (Grade placements listed are from the 2011-2012 school year). The group was comprised of fourteen (14) males and (5) five females. All students from the experimental group were promoted to the next grade level for the 2012-2013 school year.

Instrument

The instrument used for this study was the office referral form (See Appendix A). The form was created by the principal, vice principal, behavior specialist, guidance counselor, and social worker. The office referral form is filled out by the classroom teacher or adult in charge of the students when an incident has occurred. The office referral form includes the problematic behavior, a brief description of how school rules were broken, a brief description of the student's actions, possible reasons, as well as time and place of the misbehavior. The referral form is then transferred from the teacher to the behavior specialist and possibly the principal. The referral is discussed with the student and actions are taken by the behavior specialist or principal to prevent future behavior problems. The referral is completed by the behavior specialist with recommendations for the next steps and the data is imputed into the School-wide Information System (SWIS). The office referral forms and processes for recording misbehavior remained the same under both morning meeting conditions. There is no reliability or validity in the data for the office referral form.

Procedure

There has been a positive behavior supports intervention (PBIS) school-wide management system for ten years. The program focuses on encouraging positive behavior goals and making correct choices within the school setting. Students are rewarded for their behavior by earning Eagle Bucks and by moving their clip on a color chart. Eagle Bucks are given out to students who display the four school rules: respect for learning, positive attitude, good thinking, and good manners. Eagle Bucks are paper tokens that can be used to purchase rewards at the weekly school store. Additionally, students can use their Eagle Bucks to pay for monthly celebrations, such as extra recess, a school-wide movie, board games, and other extra rewards.

Students who struggle with following school rules and routines are written referrals, written up on a violation sheet, visit the behavior specialist for strategies, and given a phone call/email home to parents based on the situation.

Even with the positive behavior intervention supports (PBIS) in place, teachers continued to lose control of their classes due to misbehavior. Consistent outbursts, arguments, and disruptions from students limited the amount of time students were on task and actually learning. Each year, the research school has continued to grow in terms of enrollment and discipline problems. By the end of the 2011-2012, the school staff wrote a record number of referrals, over eight hundred (800) and distributed over fifty (50) out of school suspensions. The school continued to put supports in place for struggling students, including, the Gentleman's and Young Ladies Club and the "Better Me" afterschool program. Both of these groups were put in place to help prevent misbehavior.

Due to the growing population and the increase in behavior problems, the school PBIS team decided to implement morning meetings into the school's daily routine. In the 2011-2012

school year, morning meetings were not structured around specific positive character traits and may have looked different from class to class and grade level to grade level. During the 2012-2013 school year, the morning meetings were structured around specific positive character traits that were presented weekly on morning announcements. All subjects participated in the daily morning meetings under the not structured and structured conditions. None of the subjects or administrators knew at the time of the interventions that outcome data would be used in a research study. Other than this researcher, who knew that she would be using the data with just three weeks left in the second condition, none of the educators knew that outcome data would be used in a research study.

In the 2011-2012 school year, teachers were given a twenty minute training by the school's vice principal on morning meetings and were given "The Morning Meeting" book by Kriete published on June 1, 2002 to read on their own. Each teacher was assigned a morning meeting partner from around the building in order to foster relationships among staff and students. Morning meeting partners were resource teachers, teacher assistants, special educators, and teacher specialists assigned to classrooms by the vice principal. Teachers were expected to conduct morning meetings for twenty (20) minutes daily at the beginning of the school day. Many teachers felt unprepared to take on this new endeavor due to the lack of resources and guidance. Most teachers had never heard of morning meetings, were unsure how to structure them or what to teach in the time block.

In response to the growing need for more structure, morning meetings and behavior management took on a new look in the 2012-2013. As in 2011-2012, the time allotted for morning meetings was twenty (20) minutes and all teachers were assigned a morning meeting partner. Similar to the previous year, teachers were still encouraged to start morning meeting

with a greeting. There were, however, important changes made to the program. Teachers were presented with a folder of information about the new morning meeting layout. The civic virtues were created and aligned with the school schedule by the assistant principal. On Mondays, the assistant principal introduced the character trait on the morning announcements and provided an inspirational quote to go with the skill. The character/ethical values rotated each week with a new value introduced on the first day of the week. Teachers were instructed to discuss, model, provide examples, and role play the positive character traits, values, and virtues with their students over the last four days of the week.

An additional resource was given to each grade level; one (1) binder of printable character education materials found for free on the internet was created for each grade level. The resources were written for students on a first grade reading level and teachers were expected to share the binder among their teams. Teachers, however, were still expected to find their own materials for their lessons and plan their own lessons.

In order to gain a more positive response to character training, teachers used Eagle Bucks as a reward. When students displayed the character trait discussed in the morning meeting, they were awarded an Eagle Buck and praised for their use of civic virtues.

Under both conditions, students were written up on an office referral form immediately for physical aggression. Teachers followed the PBIS procedure in their classrooms to write an office referral for chronic problematic behaviors such as disrespect, defiance, insubordination, class disruption, and bullying. Under both conditions, the consequences for office referrals remained the same.

This researcher identified the students who received two or more referrals in the first semester of the 2011-2012 school year by using the SWIS system. The frequent offenders were

comprised of forty-one (41) students that received two or more referrals during the first semester of the first school year. However, only 19 of those students remained in the school in 2012-2013 and were included as study subjects. - The mean number of office referrals in the first semester of the school year among frequent offenders under the structured and non-structured morning meetings was compared using non-independent sample t-tests.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The results of the data failed to reject the null hypothesis that there will be no significant difference in the mean number of office referrals among frequent offenders when morning meetings are less structured and are not focused around character traits in the 2011-2012 school year and when morning meetings are more structured and focused around specific character traits in the 2012-2013 school year for students attending a low socioeconomic status elementary school. There was no significant difference between the mean number of office referrals among in the first semester of the school year among frequent offenders under nonstructured (Mean = 3.58, SD = 1.54) and structured (Mean= 2.37, SD = 2.31) morning meeting conditions [$t(18) = 1.99, p > .05$]. See Table 1.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and t-test Results Comparing Mean Number of Office Referrals Among Frequent Offenders under Nonstructured and Structured Conditions

Condition	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	p value
nonstructured	19	3.58	1.54			
structured	19	2.37	2.31	1.99	18	.06*

*Non-significant at $p \leq .05$

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The researcher set out to determine whether or not a change in morning meeting procedure with the implementation of more structured and trait focused character education lessons would positively affect the behavior of students attending a low socioeconomic status elementary school. The null hypothesis stated that there will be no significant difference in the mean number of office referrals among frequent offenders when morning meetings are less structured and are not focused around character traits in the 2011- 2012 school year and when morning meetings are more structured and focused around specific character traits in the 2012-2013 school year for students attending a low socioeconomic status elementary school. The results of this experiment failed to reject the null hypothesis, and the mean number of office referrals among frequent offenders did not significantly change over the two semesters.

Comparison to Prior Research

The classroom challenges prevalent in this study-- hyperactive students, poor social skills, poor behavior, struggles with classroom management, and limited parent involvement -- are common struggles for teachers in low socioeconomic status schools. Previous research (Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 1998) shows that areas of particular concern in schools are aggression, violence, bullying, and non-compliance with adult directions. In the 2012- 2013 school year, most referrals written in the researcher's school were for aggression, violence, and fighting which is consistent with the concerns reported by Lewis et al.

The results of the current experiment differ from the study completed in San Francisco, CA (Lewis, et al., 2011) who implemented a series of character education programs and activities. Their principal reported that the program was a success because there was buy-in and

support school- wide from all stakeholders in the school. Teachers, students, and families did not buy in to the morning meetings in 2011-2012 because of the lack of direction, lack of materials provided, and an unclear message on the structure of the program. Additionally, many teachers opted to skip morning meetings on certain days or not do it at all. In the 2012- 2013 school year, teachers were given some direction and a topic based around character education, but continued to complain about the lack of resources and planning time. During both years, students and families were not informed about the purpose for morning meeting or the topics being discussed. Due to the ongoing needs of the school, more teachers bought in to the idea of structuring morning meetings around character traits, however, the implementation of the idea faltered by the end of the first quarter. The additional support for the structured program was not sufficient enough to lead to a significant decrease in office referrals. Character based education programs appear to be more effective when all stakeholders in the school buy in to the program and implement it on a regular basis.

Additionally, the results of the current experiment differs from those of a study that used the CHARACTER *plus* Way program (Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006). That study found that student behavior increased positively and suspension rates went down in the elementary and middle schools. Teachers also reported feeling more bonded with the parents of the children in their class and experienced improvement in the conduct problems of students. The CHARACTER*plus*Way program was more highly structured and more research based than the structured morning meetings at the researchers' school. Thus, it appears that character education is more effective when a research based character education program is provided for teachers to use within their classrooms.

Implications of Study

The results of this study did not provide compelling evidence that a more highly structured character education program is more effective than a less structured program. Consequently, the study does not have significant theoretical implications. However, the results of the study have practical implications. While there was not a statistically significant difference between the two conditions, there were less referrals in 2012-2013, and with a p value of .06, the data was trending in the right direction. With the encouraging trend in the data, and researcher observations of students treating each other more kindly, referencing calming down strategies, and recognizing feelings of themselves and others, the current results suggest it is worthwhile to continue to try to use a structured approach while additional information is collected to provide validation.

An additional implication of the study is that consideration needs to be given for the demands placed upon the teacher. In the 2011- 2012 school year, morning meetings were very unstructured and inconsistent across the school building. At first, teachers tried to find resources online and spent time planning morning meeting, but, once academic planning took precedence, teachers began to run morning meetings without planning or did not teach morning meeting at all. However, in the 2012- 2013 school year, morning meetings were supposed to focus on values and virtues that school administrators wanted displayed within the community. The teachers and administrators began the school year implementing the value of the week and discussing it during the morning announcements. As the school year progressed, many teachers ran out of materials quickly and the planning of academic lessons took precedence over the planning of morning meeting. Many primary teachers spent their morning meeting time conducting their calendar lessons, while intermediate teachers used the time to do a read- aloud

or something which required less planning. Without a research based program or materials, many teachers in the researcher's school found it too time consuming and difficult to implement character education lessons. If teachers are being asked to provide character education, they need training in its implementation, time to plan for the lessons, and research based materials. In addition, administrators should try to insure that all teachers are implementing the program. Additionally, making parents aware of the values and virtues being instilled in school could help with reinforcement at home. Students may be better able to control their behavior and use appropriate social skills if they hear the same language being used throughout the school and at home.

Limitations of Study

There are some threats to the validity of this study. One concern that would affect the interval validity of the study, is that there may have been errors in the recording of the office referral data. During the 2011- 2012 school year, the data was put into the SWIS system by three different people depending on who was available at the time. In the 2012- 2013 school year, the data processing was controlled by one person, the behavior assistant and learning lab monitor. She was responsible for inputting all the office referrals into the SWIS system. Since data entry was more consistent in 2012-2013 than in 2011-2012, a greater proportion of behavior problems were likely recorded in 2011-2012, which would reduce the likelihood of rejecting the null hypothesis.

Another concern is that not all teacher created referrals were given to the personnel performing data entry. Teachers reported writing office referrals and never receiving a copy of them in their mailbox. It is unclear what happened to those referrals. Additionally, some referrals were not entered into the system if school administrators or the behavioral specialist did

not consider the offense sufficiently severe after speaking with the student. This reduced the reliability of the data within the SWIS system because the data did not reflect all the behavioral offenses that were perceived as referral worthy by teachers. Instead, the behavior specialist and school administrators determined what data would be entered. Since referrals for less severe behavioral offenses were less likely to be entered into the system, this study was not very sensitive to the effects of the more structured character education program on relatively mild behavior problems.

Another factor that influenced the validity of the results was the consistency of the implementation of the intervention. It is possible that findings could have been more compelling if teachers had consistently provided character education during the scheduled morning meeting period.

Another validity concern is that frequent offenders were the only subjects used for research and data collection. Individuals who present an extreme level of a particular characteristic are expected to move towards the norm in the characteristic. Thus, some reduction in referrals could be expected. In addition, the results can be generalized only to frequent offenders and not the whole school population.

An additional concern with the validity of the results is that the dependent variable may not have been sensitive to some of the effects of the intervention. The character education program implemented increased prosocial behaviors among students, but did not focus on insubordination, defiance, and other problematic behaviors for which students received office referrals.

Since the study took place over two different years, there could have been a change in the students' lives over that period of time that may have influenced patterns of behavior. For

example, if a child's parents were going through the process of divorce during part of the study, the child's behavior may have been impacted. The students had different teachers during the two data collection periods which may have also influenced their behaviors. Different teachers vary in their level of tolerance for inappropriate behavior.

Implications for Future Research

Since conducting this experiment, the researcher has gained a clearer understanding of the different needs of students and educators. Educators do not want frequent offenders to continue to disrupt the learning in their classrooms, however they do not have the time or materials available to them to effectively instruct character education lessons into morning meetings. The data from the study did not yield statistically significant results, but the trends in the data imply that the structured morning meeting should be continued, rather than going back to the nonstructured condition, and that additional research should be conducted to provide validation for the structured condition

In the future, studies should be conducted with a larger sample size to increase statistical power. With a larger sample size, a researcher would have a greater likelihood of rejecting the null hypothesis.

In future research, classrooms could be randomly assigned to conditions so that the structured and less structured condition can be compared during the same timeframe so that there are less threats to validity due to history. Random assignments to groups also increases the external validity of the study.

Future research could also include an even more structured character education program. The researcher school should look into purchasing a research based character education program, such as Second- Step or CHARACTER^{plus} way, in order to increase uniformity in

language, materials and teaching methods across the school. This would also reduce the need of teachers to take time away from planning academic lessons to plan morning meeting. With the level of consistency provided by a formal character education program that does not require high levels of teacher planning, there would be greater reliability and validity to the study. In addition, by having a non-structured, more structured but not formal program, and a formal program condition, a study could be more sensitive to the effects of increased structure.

Future research could also consider the impact of increasing the investment and accountability of administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals. One example of a change could be that administrators conduct informal observations during morning meeting, a non-academic area, as well as during academic lessons. Additionally, the principal and vice principal should continue to discuss the value of the week during the morning announcements. A change that could be made to the broadcast would be the addition of student highlights on character education. For example, good deeds conducted by students could be mentioned, a student who displayed the value of the week could be highlighted, or students could create skits about the value of the week and perform them on the announcements. The differential effectiveness of structured character education programs under high school personnel investment/accountability and low school personnel investment/accountability could be examined.

A future study should also make sure the data collection process is reliable and valid. The behavior assistant should continue to input all the referrals into the SWIS system. In addition, all referrals need to be processed. Not only would this increase the reliability and validity of the research study, but this data would help the school psychologist, guidance counselor, social worker, and behavior specialist to target the students that continue to be frequent offenders and provide them with small group supports. Additionally, future research

should include different dependent variables such as teacher and parental satisfaction with the program and the frequency of pro-social behavior. The school climate should be monitored quarterly through surveys.

Summary

This study did not yield statistically significant evidence that structured morning meeting character education programs are more effective than nonstructured morning meetings in reducing office referrals among frequent offenders. However, there were many limitations to the study. Observations and data trends suggest that increasing the structure of character education programs could potentially decrease problematic behaviors amongst frequent offenders in a low socioeconomic status elementary school. Practical implications include the need to provide funding for a research based character education program and materials for every classroom teacher and to conduct more rigorous research to assess the effectiveness of the intervention. Hopefully, the investment in a structured character education program will prove to be a cost-effective and long-lasting tool to help students develop critical social skills for the classroom environment and their community.

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