

IS A WORD TO THE WISE SUFFICIENT?
CHARACTER EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Student perceptions of a character education program utilized at a southeastern North Carolina public high school were gathered and analyzed from an initial exploratory survey. The instrument gathered student responses to statements regarding character education, school climate, and factors that influence students' decision-making processes. Results showed that while students were generally positive about school climate and personal interactions at school, they do not perceive that the character education program influences their school climate or their decision-making processes, at least on a conscious level. Recommendations for possible modification of the character education program are proposed, as well as avenues for further research in this area.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my wife, Susan, and daughters, Amanda and Alison, who gently, firmly, and persistently pushed me back in the direction of the computer. The words are mine, but any merit for the fact that it was completed at all is theirs.

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INTRODUCTION

Overview

Even as I prepared the final copy of this thesis for my oral defense in Spring, 2003, a full-length feature documentary was being shown in “art house” theaters across the United States. The film, Bowling for Columbine, was produced and directed by “guerrilla documentarian” Michael Moore. Bowling for Columbine is an examination of America’s preoccupation with firearms and its seemingly pervasive “culture of violence.” The title is, in part, a reference to the April 1999 mass murder of thirteen individuals at Colorado’s Columbine High School, perpetrated by Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris.

Moore himself explains the title on the movie’s official Internet website:

The title is taken from the little-known fact that the two killers, Dylan and Eric, were supposed to be in bowling class at Columbine High School on the morning of the murders. ... One reason the film is called “Bowling For Columbine” is that, after the massacre, all the pundits and experts started blaming all the usual suspects that are wheeled out for blame whenever a school shooting occurs--evil rock music (in this case Marilyn Manson), violent video games, and bad parenting. My point is that those scapegoats make about as much sense as blaming bowling. After all, Eric and Dylan were bowlers, they took bowling class at Columbine--was bowling responsible for their evil deeds? If they bowled that morning, did the bowling trigger their desire to commit mass murder? Or, if they skipped their bowling class that morning, did that bring on the massacre? Had they bowled, that may have altered their mood and prevented them from picking up their guns. As you can see, this is all nonsense, just as it is nonsense to blame Marilyn Manson. (Moore, 2002, ¶ 3 ff.)

Moore’s film does not focus on the Columbine massacre; rather, it analyzes America’s “gun culture,” the NRA, and the fascination of the vast majority of the population with violent behavior. The film does, however, implicitly redirect our nation’s attention to extreme acts of school violence and the questions of why such tragedies take place and whether or not they can be prevented. Is there a way to ensure

that youth do not become disaffected and take out their hostile feelings in abusive, and often fatal, ways? And perhaps more importantly, what role should public school systems take in transmitting the values our culture perceives as “good” and “worthwhile”?

The fact that these issues are still on the minds of local individuals is evident from a recent letter to the editor of the local newspaper The Wilmington Morning-Star. It is worth quoting at length from the letter by correspondent Moorad Alexanian, printed March 8, 2003:

Our public schools must be places of academic learning, but also where character building is an integral part of the curriculum. Students’ disrespect towards teachers and/or their peers should not be tolerated.

Unfortunately, many students are not ready or able to function in a normal, academic environment.

The School of Science and Mathematics in Durham and any good military school serve as excellent models for our public schools. Students who are motivated, disciplined and ready to learn should attend the former type of school. Those who need to gain appreciation, motivation, and respect ought to be sent to the latter.

Let us not waste time and money with half-baked solutions. Witness the fiasco over the use of ID by students and catastrophic exodus of teachers from our classrooms. These events prove that the situation in our public school system is desperate. (Alexanian, 2003, 8A)

The perception on the part of at least one member of the local community is that the school system is not teaching character, or, at least, not teaching it effectively. In addition, the writer perceives a “desperate” situation that calls for the regimen of a military school to correct.

These perceptions, along with the troubling issues raised by Michael Moore’s documentary Bowling for Columbine, highlight the necessity for re-examining the question of character education in America in a new millennium. Is it possible for a

character education program to make a difference, especially at the secondary level? Is there any sort of documentation that shows character education programs to be a useful, effective component in socializing our nation's youth? What is the state of character education, particularly in North Carolina's New Hanover County? And (although this is not a question I am prepared to investigate at this point) does character education, by contrasting negative values with those positive, in some perverse way, elicit the very immoral behavior it seeks to repress?

History of Character Education

Although never completely absent from schools, character education is a concept which oscillates in terms of how much explicit attention it is receiving. During certain periods, discussion of morality seems to vanish from American classrooms, leaving only "core content" behind. At other times, such as the 1990s, educators seem to be focusing on little else. Writer and educator Mary M. Williams (2000) states character education is "the fastest growing reform in education today" (¶ 3).

From earliest times, educators have been aware of the need of an ethical component to their instruction. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle all address morality and ethics in conjunction with transmission of knowledge. During the Middle Ages, education and ethics were inextricably intertwined. Up through the nineteenth century, universities mandated chapel services and Sunday worship attendance (Heft, 1995, ¶ 11).

The atrocities of World War I seared the consciences of most of the world's populace, including educators. Observed Wood (1999), "The 1920s was called the golden age of character in United States education" (¶ 3). Rich (1991) describes the late

1920s' Character Education Inquiry, during which Hartsborne and May administered 170,000 tests to over 8,000 public school pupils between the ages of eleven and sixteen. Students were placed in a variety of settings in which they had the opportunity to cheat without being caught or to choose their own welfare over those of others. Surprisingly, the researchers found that students would cheat in some circumstances and would remain honest in others. In addition, these patterns held true over several testing situations. "This led the investigators to the rather startling conclusion that behavior is highly specific, depending upon the specific case; there is no such thing as honest and dishonest children but only honest and dishonest acts. Thus little evidence was found of unified character traits or generality in moral behavior" (§ 5). Due to the results of this study, explicit character education evaporated for the next several decades.

The forties and fifties were characterized by an emphasis on practical application of course content. Rational, scientific advances took precedence over more abstract, ethical notions. Generally speaking, the economy was doing well and societal institutions were respected. Students generally did "what they were told." Teachers explicitly told their charges "this is right, and this is wrong." "The role of the teacher as moral educator ... was relatively clear" (Ryan, 1986, ¶ 7).

In the sixties a "sea-change" forever altered the way Americans looked at both youth and societal institutions. Although the decade began with the burst of optimism centered on John F. Kennedy and the "Camelot" ideal, his assassination deflated the nation's spirit. The "major break with explicit moral education can conveniently be marked by the 1963 Supreme Court decision which struck down the practice of reciting the Lord's Prayer and reading aloud sections of the Bible for religious purposes in the

public schools” (Heft, 1995, ¶ 14). Almost immediately following, the Civil Rights and “flower power” movements, although conducted peaceably, undermined the accepted foundations of American culture. “Values” were shaky; nothing was certain; everything was open to question. The catch-phrase “Never trust anyone over thirty” eroded the respect adults, especially educators, once enjoyed. Nixon’s resignation was the death-knell of the public’s faith in federal institutions. Teachers “retreated to the role of technician” (Ryan, 1986, ¶ 10).

A 1970s attempt to recapture the moral imperative was “values clarification.” Educators presented ethical dilemmas to their pupils, who then worked through their ramifications. Although the student might arrive at a morally questionable conclusion, the process, not the end point, was perceived as the raison d’être. Teachers kept students on track but did not offer input (Ryan, 1986, ¶ 11).

In 1970’s The Philosophy of Moral Development, Lawrence Kohlberg proposed a “morality of principles.” Perceiving a difference between moral traits and moral principles, he proposed that the latter is “a rule of choosing which we want all people to adopt always in all situations” (Ryan, 1986, ¶ 12). He outlined three levels of moral growth (with two stages at each level): preconventional, conventional, and postconventional. The preconventional level consists mainly of habit formation (and hopefully the child is picking up positive habits). The conventional level consists of an awareness of “conscientiousness” and the generalized “other” which will evaluate one’s actions. The postconventional level consists of the attainment of an awareness of “justice,” Kohlberg’s highest moral value (Ryan, 1986, ¶ 13). Due to the perceived lack

of an “objective right-ness,” most contemporary educators prefer to stay far away from either of these two philosophies (Leming, 1997, ¶ 14).

The 1980s saw at least a partial return to an upbeat economy and a willingness to engage in “old-fashioned” values. In terms of character education, the most important individual in this period was William Bennett. First director of the National Endowment for the Humanities and then Secretary of Education, he “reaffirmed both the right and the responsibility of the schools to teach the traditional American values of love of country, courage, and respect for parents, teachers, and other adults” (Ryan, 1986, ¶ 22). Bennett wanted children to “become not only smart, but also good” (Ryan, 1986, ¶ 22). In 1993, Bennett published the highly influential The Book of Virtues: A Treasury of Great Moral Stories, which sparked not only a nation-wide discussion of the value of moral education, but also an animated cartoon series.

The nineties saw a widespread interest in character education programs. Numerous companies offered “ready-made” character education programs with slightly different emphases. Some of these programs include: AEGIS, Character Education Curriculum, Child Development Project, Community of Caring, Project ESSENTIAL, Ethics Curriculum for Children, Giraffe Program, Lessons in Character, Lions-Quest, and Responsive Classroom (Leming, 1997).

Even the federal government became involved in the character education reform movement. In 1998, the government dispersed \$2.7 million in grants to ten states to form partnerships between local school districts and the community in order to foster strong ethics. According to then-Vice President Al Gore, “Schools should also reinforce

parental efforts to teach children good character and basic American values--including respect, responsibility, fairness, and hard work” (Anderson, 2000, ¶ 7).

Due to the dramatic rise in the occurrence of “high-profile” violent incidents in public schools across the country--most notably Colorado’s Columbine massacre--it is not likely that discussion of character education will go away any time soon. Whether or not character education can prove itself effective in diminishing the number of these incidents and aid our country in forming more caring citizens is, however, a question that remains to be answered.

What is Character Education?

According to Thomas (1991), “schools can never be free of values” (¶ 1). Most professional educators would agree that morals and ethics are being transmitted to students, no matter what the specific content of the course material. It is impossible to divorce a moral component from even the most mundane, daily activities in our public schools. Even the concept of public education presupposes a particular moral ethos. The question becomes, then, not whether to transmit ethics and values, but how much emphasis to place on their explicit inculcation.

Unlike other educational programs with quantifiable outcomes, character education is a concept with varying interpretations. It is difficult to come up with one definition that satisfies all aspects and all participants. This very lack of consensus makes it extremely difficult to arrive at any firm conclusions regarding the effectiveness of character education, since its definition is likely to vary from district to district.

Indeed, one of the precepts of character education is that a program must reflect local values and mores.

In 1996, Kevin Ryan, founding director of the Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character at Brown University, stated “character education is based on a more classical view of the person as having the potential for both good and evil and as being influenced both by one’s own inner life and by one’s social milieu” (¶ 18). His overview, “Character Education in the United States,” is more focused on what character education is not, rather than what it is. In 1997, Gholar defined character education as “a planned, comprehensive, and systematic approach for teaching self respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, and citizenship.” In 1999, Jones, Ryan, and Boblin (cited in Williams, 2000, ¶ 4) characterized character education as “knowing the good, loving the good, and doing the good.” The National Commission on Character Education has defined character education as “any deliberate approach by which school personnel, often in conjunction with parents and community members, help children and youth become caring, principled, and responsible” (Williams, 2000, ¶ 5).

It is not difficult to see why there is so little consensus--and so much dissension--regarding character education. Below are some of the common aspects of different character education programs.

Societal Values

One of the underlying assumptions of character education programs is that there are indeed virtues that need to be transmitted to young people in order for them to become worthwhile participants in our society. Various writers and various programs

emphasize different virtues. At the same time, there is likely to be discrepancy as to what these virtues mean in “real world” circumstances.

I will begin with William Bennett, perhaps the “father of the modern moral education movement.” In 1995, in testimony before the House of Representatives, Bennett stated, “ ...there are values that all American citizens share and that we should want all American students to know and embody: honesty, fairness, self-discipline, fidelity, love of country, and beliefs in the principles of liberty, equality, and the freedom to practice one’s faith” (§ 10).

In 1996, Thomas Lickona, in the influential article “Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education,” proposed, “We need strength of mind, heart and will--qualities such as good judgment, honesty, empathy, caring, persistence, self-discipline and moral courage--to be capable of work and love ... ” (§ 3). In 1998, Kevin Ryan, in “Values, Views, or Virtues?” identified these virtues as worthy of transmission: “Virtues--habits such as diligence, sincerity, personal accountability, courage, and perseverance-- ... enable us to do our work better and enjoy it more as a consequence” (§ 14). In September 2000, Mary Williams, in “Models of Character Education,” stated, “ ... much common ground has been found concerning the basic values that underpin our democracy (values like justice, respect, fairness, cooperation, respect, and responsibility)” (§ 15).

In addition, each company’s character education program identifies its own list of character traits which it is attempting to instill in students. I will discuss the concept of prejudicial language and the lack of objectifiable terms in a succeeding section.

School as a Moral Community

All proponents of character education agree that everyone in the school must, first of all, be made aware of the character education program, and, secondly, serve as role models. “The school must be a caring community,” states Lickona (1996, ¶ 14). From the principal to the custodian, each individual is called on to act in an ethical fashion. Each person must be willing to bring up moral issues. Students must not be afraid to investigate values and mores. “The daily life of classrooms ... must be imbued with core values such as concern and respect for others, responsibility, kindness and fairness” (Lickona, 1996, ¶ 14). Teachers must overcome the hesitation to serve as moral exemplars and remain neutral in ethical debates.

In 1997, Lickona outlined the classroom components of character education for which a teacher is responsible:

- “1. The teacher as caregiver, moral model, and moral mentor.
2. Creating a caring classroom community.
3. Moral discipline.
4. Creating a democratic classroom environment.
5. Teaching values through the curriculum.
6. Cooperative learning.
7. The conscience of craft--the capacity to feel satisfaction at a job well done and to be ashamed of slovenly work.
8. Ethical reflection.
9. Teaching conflict resolution.” (¶ 14ff.)

Certainly, these are all worthy ideals, and it would be difficult to find a classroom teacher to admit she was not already working in pursuit of these goals. To give Lickona credit, he does go on under each of these components and explain to greater or lesser detail what he means by these phrases.

Unfortunately, these writers do not address what to do when school personnel (or others) “fall short.” Presumably, teachers do not make mistakes or erroneous judgments in the moral arena. Indeed, one core value which I failed to see listed in any description was “forgiveness.” (Another was “modesty.”)

Example and Experience

Despite the many differences between the various character education programs, their curricula always come down to two explicit activities: listening to and/or reading stories that exemplify positive character traits, and then doing something with what they have learned. “[A] story [is] a favored form of education for many who promote character education” (Heft, 1995, ¶ 34). Lessons constructed around individuals in history or literature who have demonstrated great personal integrity and the characteristics being inculcated in respect to the program are read and discussed with the class. Students then respond with some personal, expressive writing; engage in an activity, such as role-playing; or take an assignment home.

Having youth “do something” tangible is an integral component of contemporary character education programs. Values clarification and Kohlberg’s moral principles program were criticized as being “cerebral” (Ryan, 1986, ¶ 17). Students merely thought about their values, but were not exhorted to act upon them. Heft (1995) writes,

“character education is inescapably craftsmanlike ... many who support character education recommend strongly various forms of service” (§ 32). Community service, especially with the disadvantaged or handicapped, enables students to interact with others in a drastically different setting than their (the students’) own. Hopefully, the student and the recipient(s) of the service will benefit from the project. Ideally, students will “open their hearts” and continue to participate. At the same time, there can never be too many volunteers for service organizations.

Problems with Character Education

No parent would ever say, “I don’t want my child to learn good values.” Such an individual would be a pariah, castigated by the community. Indeed, Social Services would step in to take away the children of any parent who made such an antithetical statement. Nor would any teacher ever make a similar statement about his students. On the other hand, educators and researchers have identified a number of problems with the implementation of character education programs.

Do We Need Character Education?

In “Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education” (1996), Thomas Lickona outlined ten “troubling youth trends” which point to the need for character education in our schools. It is worthwhile to include his list for review at this point:

- “1. Rising youth violence.
2. Increasing dishonesty (lying, cheating, and stealing).
3. Greater disrespect for parents, teachers, and other legitimate authority figures.

4. Increasing peer cruelty.
5. A rise in bigotry and hate crime.
6. The deterioration of language.
7. A decline in the work ethic.
8. Increasing self-centredness, accompanied by declining personal and civic responsibility.
9. A surge of self-destructive behaviours such as premature sexual activity, substance abuse and suicide.
10. Growing ethical illiteracy, including ignorance of moral knowledge as basic as the Golden Rule and the tendency to engage in behaviours injurious to self or others without thinking it wrong.” (§ 6)

Each generation appears to worry that the succeeding generation represents a moral nadir, an unethical cohort that will reduce our nation to a world-wide laughing-stock. According to this line of thought, by the time we are senior citizens, today’s youth will have obliterated our social structures, will have unleashed rampant licentiousness and destructiveness, and will never have assimilated or internalized any values we hold dear. However, no proponent of character education examines the positive values youth may hold before the implementation of a program. Some character education companies may conduct surveys to attain baseline data before the implementation of a program--but none of them ever state, “Our youth are indeed moral and already exhibit values our nation cherishes.”

The assumption, unspoken in all of the literature, is that if schools do not participate in values transmission, there won’t be enough character education going on.

Although proponents never come out and say it in so many words, the belief is parents, clergy, peers, and other institutions are not doing enough to instill core values. If they were, we wouldn't have to worry about these programs. This assumption may open character education to the charge of "false dilemma," for it seems to state that without program implementation, our country is on the slippery slope to social anarchy (Kozloff & Rice, 2001, 148).

Whose Values Are To Be Transmitted?

Most character education proponents recognize that we live in a pluralistic society. Many different racial, ethnic, and religious groups inhabit our cities, even those with smaller populations. No longer is it the case that everyone knows everyone else by name--even on the school campus. Because of this wide variation in background, the question arises: which set of values do we decide to focus on, and what do these values mean?

Character education proponents advocate constructing community consensus as to what values the school should focus on. This consensus could be formulated through town meetings, panel discussions, questionnaires, take-home surveys, etc. Problems arise with the percentage of response (or the lack thereof) and the possibility that not all "stakeholders" are being adequately represented.

If a school district brings in a "pre-packaged" character education program, rather than devising one on their own, it is "importing" a set of values which the originating company has identified as being important and worthy of transmission. These values may or may not be what the community would like to have transmitted to its youth.

Religiosity

In 1995, James Heft raised an important question, one which he never fully answers in his own article: Is it possible to separate the teaching of morality from the teaching of religion? (§ 6)

Educators are wary of violating the “firewall” between church and state. They do not wish be perceived as advocating one moral philosophy over another. They cringe at the thought of fundamentalists and liberals raising a hue-and-cry over morals education. For some groups, any virtue is a “revealed truth.” In other words, there is nothing inherently worthwhile in human nature; anything good we believe or act out is a gift from a deity that must be acknowledged for these virtues to have any meaning. By ignoring or sidestepping these issues, some community members may feel schools are doing a disservice, rather than a service. At the same time, other may feel virtues are better communicated by parents and religious professionals than educators.

Lack of Research

By its very nature, character education is loaded with prejudicial language. What professional educator would ever step forward and admit that he or she is not concerned with the transmission of these values? At the same time, what these terms actually mean in practice is never opened to analysis. “It appears to be morally good,” but “...appealing as it may sound, this argument gives no data on what ... their curricula actually yield” (Kozloff & Rice, 2001, 147).

Character education proponents acknowledge the difficulty of operationalizing the terms they are attempting to pass on to students. Terms such as “honesty,” “caring,” “responsibility,” and “self-reliance” all mean different things to different people. Who is to say what these things mean, and how can one determine whether or not a character education program was successful in inculcating these qualities in a child? No student lives in a moral vacuum outside of the school setting, yet how does a researcher screen out all the potential intervening variables?

Ronald Thomas (1991) acknowledges these problems: “By its very nature, assessing character education is uniquely challenging for educational research” (¶ 12). He identifies the following problems:

1. Inability to isolate school character education programs as the one reason among all contextual factors for observed conduct changes.
2. The Hawthorne effect.
3. The Pygmalion effect.
4. The importance of distinguishing between “impact” and “coverage” in interpreting results of evaluations with affective outcomes.
5. The fact that immediate effects may be merely temporary responses to external factors and not necessarily indications that values have become ingrained in students’ characters.
6. Lack of unanimity about the nature of common core of values.
7. Reductionist nature of some assessment strategies.

8. Status-quo orientation inherent in programs designed to develop students committed to what they believe with little understanding of why they believe it (§ 12, 13).

Without truly addressing methods by which to overcome these problems, Thomas goes on to say “meaningful data will not emerge immediately” (§ 15). (So how much time is necessary?) In addition, “character education should use a variety of techniques, including rich, full descriptions of situations and interactions in addition to number counts and tallies of particular actions” to aid assessment (§ 16). Distressingly, “No one research technique can fully assess the multidimensional nature of character education” (§ 17).

Thomas cites Roger Straughan, who essentially states character education cannot be quantifiably verified:

There can ... be no simple and direct correlation between holding a particular value and performing a particular piece of behavior, because values are just not like that ... If “values education” is really to be concerned with values rather than with some obscure, operational construct, we must avoid legislating the meaning of values in such a way as to over-simplify and distort the very nature of the moral enterprise which we are trying to convey to children. (§ 19)

Thomas adds: “Assessment ... should be crafted as a highly idiosyncratic approach and reflect the realization that because educational contexts vary so greatly, so must evaluation strategies ... We must recognize that we will never know, nor can we fully understand, the implications of all the implicit and explicit character education constantly going on in classrooms” (§ 24-26). It sounds as if Thomas is excusing character education programs from verifiable assessment, as if they were educational components which cannot be accountable or held up to quantitative measure.

James Leming, in 1997's "Whither Goes Character Education?", closely examined ten different then-prevalent character education programs in terms of their curriculum objectives, pedagogical perspectives, and research perspectives. In addition to the problems identified above by Thomas, Leming also added this challenge: "To date, character education research has not been subjected to the critical scrutiny that is the characteristic of publication of peer-reviewed research articles" (§ 34). He notes that most research data is published in company brochures (with the exception of the Child Development Project).

It is to be hoped that character education programs will indeed be held accountable to objectifiable standards. Both quantitative and qualitative instruments need to be applied to the programs. Company claims of effectiveness need to be investigated by impartial researchers. Comparative studies of different programs could determine "best practices" in character education. In addition, to reiterate the concern I raised in the introduction, it would be worthwhile to conduct a study to make sure that character education programs don't foster the very behaviors they seek to eliminate.

Character Education in New Hanover County

In 1998, the New Hanover County Board of Education adopted a character education resolution (Appendix A). School personnel are expected to model eight identified character traits. The exact operational meaning of these character traits is not explained, nor is any particular method of transmitting these to students.

Some of the schools in New Hanover County have adopted character education programs. Successes in these programs are occasionally highlighted in The Word

Weekly, an in-county communications organ. A typical example is reproduced as Appendix B.

In the 1998-99 school year, New Hanover County secondary schools were introduced to the “Senior Project” concept. The Senior Project endeavors to have students make connections between their academic curricula and “real-world experiences.” Students select a topic about which they have a personal interest, about which they would like to investigate. The topic can’t be an area about which the student already has a great deal of knowledge; there is a requirement for a “learning stretch.” The student must locate a “mentor” in the community, someone other than the senior English teacher (the individual who is typically in charge of the project). The mentor helps facilitate the student’s research.

The Senior Project consists of four main components: a) a research paper, b) a portfolio in which the student collects all paperwork relevant to the assignment, c) a project, a demonstrable “product” (such as a piece of art, documented community service, participation in coursework outside school, etc.), and d) a presentation to a panel of judges. Successful completion of the Senior Project is a graduation requirement of all seniors beginning with the class of 2003.

The Senior Project is not explicitly related to the character education resolution. However, it is clear that school personnel desire high school seniors to utilize not only academic knowledge but also interpersonal relationship skills in the completion of the Senior Project. Since contact with mentors and experts in the field under investigation are a required component of the Senior Project, seniors are expected to extend themselves beyond their “comfort zone,” beyond the confines of the school campus. An unspoken

yet implicit aspect of the Senior Project is the expectation that seniors will meet successful community members who exemplify strong ethical values and behaviors.

In my capacity as a teacher in New Hanover County, I have served as a panel judge for several students going through the Senior Project program. For her project, one young lady volunteered at a children's day-care center. Another young lady collected hygiene products from members of her church and then donated them to a Wilmington shelter for the homeless. These seniors are certainly displaying positive character traits, the sort of values proponents of character education would like to see developed in all of our nation's youth.

However the requirements of the Senior Project do not dictate that a student's project must be in the service sector. I am aware of other students who learned to sail a boat--who refinished a car--who handcrafted a guitar. It is a fallacy to assume that implementation of the Senior Project will develop ethical characteristics in senior students. I know that the second young lady whom I mentioned in the preceding paragraph was already a devout church-goer who volunteered her time in other service areas. The Senior Project did not create in her a new sense of empathy, but rather offered her an academic opportunity to utilize the sensibilities she already possessed.

This is not to say the Senior Project does not have educational validity, nor the potential for heightening a sense of citizenship and community. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some students regard the Senior Project as the turning point in their academic career, an experience by which they learned just how much they were going to need to utilize all the skills they had been taught during eleven years of public education. On the other hand, due to the limitless expanse of topics a senior might investigate, it is

conceivable that a student might find an area that does not “expand his horizons.” It is also unfortunately true that not all seniors successfully complete the Senior Project.

In 2000, John T. Hoggard High School became affiliated with Project Wisdom, a character education program based in Houston, Texas. The program’s stated purpose is to strive “to teach young people how to live ethical, principle-based lives” (Project Wisdom, n.d., Series 1 Handbook). The program advises schools to:

- a. review a list of thirty-one positive character traits and assess their applicability to the school and community;
- b. administer a “School Problems Inventory” prior to implementation of the program;
- c. implement the program throughout the school year;
- d. administer a “School’s Personnel Perceptions” survey to assess opinions of the program;
- e. survey parents and community members using a “Parent Opinionnaire” and “Community Involvement Inventory” (Project Wisdom, n.d., Series 1 Handbook).

The most visible component of Project Wisdom are “The Words of Wisdom.” These are scripts, supplied by Project Wisdom, which are broadcast on the daily morning video announcements. These scripts are centered on a famous historical individual, a literary character, an historical event, or a particular theme. A quote exemplifying a virtue is presented and explained. The quote is related to a student’s life experience. At the end of the “Words of Wisdom,” students are exhorted to “Make it a great day--or not. The choice is yours.” (The latter portion of the statement seems to hearken back to

values clarification days.) (A typical “Words of Wisdom” script has been reproduced as Appendix C.)

The Project Wisdom “Words of Wisdom” are aired during the daily morning video announcements. The morning announcements are produced by the Video Production class of Hoggard High School. The announcements are aired during the last ten minutes of first period. The announcements contain information about school news, club meetings, scholarship information, etc., and end with the “Words of Wisdom” segment. At the end of the “Words of Wisdom” segment, the “daily quotation” is displayed for several seconds. The Video Production class has elicited the assistance of school personnel and the student body to serve as announcers for the “Words of Wisdom.” The Video Production class has also brought in community members, such as local television and radio personalities, to announce the “Words of Wisdom.”

Project Wisdom also supplies the school with weekly journal topics that invite students to reflect on their personal ethical values and how these values have made an impact on their lives. A typical journal page is included as Appendix D. Project Wisdom also sponsors an annual essay writing contest.

Teachers are aware of Project Wisdom, but there has been no formal training in character education as such, nor has there been any explicit mention of the role teachers are to play as moral role models (other than the previously mentioned county character education resolution).

In December 2000, the Site Based Management Team of Hoggard High School sent out a “beliefs survey” to parents. This survey was distributed in order to help the members of the team construct a new “mission slogan” for the high school. Parents were

asked to rank eight different “belief statements,” including such statements as “Teachers, administrators, and parents share the responsibility for school performance,” “Basic learning for all is the main priority and primary focus of the school,” etc. The survey achieved a sizable return rate, with 931 responses. Out of the eight belief statements, this statement--“Character development is a key school responsibility”--ranked eighth out of eight. A copy of the results of the beliefs survey is included as Appendix E. Evidently, the parents of the students at Hoggard High School are not as concerned about the efforts of school personnel in terms of character education as they are in other educational areas.

In Spring 2001, New Hanover County Schools produced a brochure entitled “Character Education: The Ultimate Gateway” (included as Appendix F-1 and F-2). This brochure lists the eight positive character traits adopted in the 1998 resolution (Appendix A). It also includes a glasses-wearing bear, “Norm,” evidently a “character education mascot,” and adds the tagline, “Good Character is ‘the Norm’ for New Hanover County Schools.” The remainder of the brochure is filled with color photographs of students in classrooms and quotes from eminent individuals, including Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr. The brochure does not tell readers what these character traits mean in operational terms, nor does it tell how character education programs are being implemented in the county schools. It also does not explain what is meant by the phrase, “the Ultimate Gateway.”

Throughout 2002, the New Hanover County School Board was engaged in a lengthy debate as to whether or not to post nine “historical documents” in the county’s schools. These historical documents included, among others, the Declaration of Independence, the Magna Carta, the U. S. Constitution, and, what became the most

troublesome and troubling document, the Ten Commandments. Proponents stated that they had the legal right to post such documents. They would only display the documents with an explanation of how each document influenced U. S. history and judicial law. Opponents were aware that the American Civil Liberties Union was against the plan and threatened to bring legal action against the county should the documents be posted. Some area businessmen had agreed to pool their resources in order to financially assist the school board should legal proceedings be initiated, but the “anti-document” school board members worried that the funds would not be enough to cover the costs of a protracted battle (Jones, “The time,” 2002, 1A). In the end, in December, 2002, the board, in a very close four-three vote, decided against posting the historical documents (Jones, “Commandments,” 2002, 1A). Although the school board members never explicitly brought up character education in relation to the historical documents, community members clearly saw the potential display of the Ten Commandments, rightly or wrongly, as an opportunity to heighten the awareness of religious--and specifically Christian--values in the public schools.

METHODS

Research Design

I was interested in compiling secondary students' reactions to the implementation of the character education program at Hoggard High School. Because of the existence of so many intervening variables, I did not think it would be feasible to try to determine whether or not the character education program had actually changed students' behaviors or whether it had positively or negatively influenced the school climate. I did believe that it would be possible to determine whether or not students enjoyed listening to the "Words of Wisdom" announcements, whether they believed such announcements had any impact on the school climate, and whether they felt safe on school grounds. I was interested in finding out whether the responses to these questions would vary by grade level, gender, racial background, and religious affiliation. Secondarily, I thought it would be interesting to have the students indicate who or what they see as having an influence on their decision-making processes--individuals such as parents, peers, and pastors; and institutions and programs, such as the media and the "Words of Wisdom."

Therefore, I conducted an exploratory survey in order to learn, specifically:

1. Do the students perceive that Project Wisdom's "Words of Wisdom" enter into their own decision-making processes?
2. Who/what do students perceive influencing their decision-making processes?
3. Have the "Words of Wisdom" contributed to a positive school climate?

During my research and my literature review, I could not find an existent quantitative and/or qualitative character education survey or questionnaire. I developed my own instrument: "Survey of Character Education and Decision Making" (Appendices

G1 and G2). The instrument gathers both quantitative and qualitative data. The instrument has four sections. The first section requests demographic information: gender, age, grade, racial/ethnic background, and religious affiliation. The second section asks students to respond to fourteen statements using Likert-scale responses ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Don’t Know/No Answer.” Statements in this section include “I pay attention to the morning video announcements,” “I enjoy listening to the daily ‘Words of Wisdom,’” “Our school is a safe place,” and others. The third section asks students to identify to what degree eleven people/institutions influence their decision-making processes using Likert-scale responses ranging from “Very Strongly” to “No Opinion.” The people include “Parent(s)/Guardian(s),” “Friends,” “Teachers,” and others. The fourth part asks three open-ended questions. The questions included were:

[1]. Who do you think had the biggest influence on the way you behave now? Tell us about that person.

[2]. “School climate” is a term that describes the way a school “feels” to the people who attend the school. How would you describe your school’s climate?

[3]. In your opinion, what is the best way to convince students to act in a friendly and cooperative manner with each other?

The questionnaire was reviewed and approved by professors working in the Watson School of Education.

Data Collection

All students enrolled in North Carolina public schools take an English course each school year. Surveying students in English classes allows a researcher to examine a

representative cross-section of the school population, especially if questionnaires are administered in both regular level and advanced level classes.

Questionnaires were administered to students at Hoggard High School in English classes during a two week period in December 2002. Questionnaires were administered to students at all four high school grade levels. Questionnaires were administered to students at both the regular level and the advanced level. Table 1 summarizes the number of respondents at the different grade levels.

Questionnaire administration yielded 182 usable instruments. This represents ten per cent of the total school population (1881 total Hoggard students) (State Board, 2003, 1).

| LEVEL | TOTAL ADMINISTERED | TOTAL USABLE |
|--------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Freshmen-Regular | 22 | 19 |
| Freshmen-Advanced | 26 | 28 |
| Total | 48 | 45 |
| Sophomore-Regular | 23 | 23 |
| Sophomore-Advanced | 28 | 28 |
| Total | 51 | 51 |
| Junior-Regular | 20 | 18 |
| Junior-Advanced | 30 | 28 |
| Total | 50 | 46 |
| Senior-Regular | 22 | 19 |
| Senior-Advanced | 22 | 21 |
| Total | 44 | 40 |

Table 1. Number of Questionnaires Administered by Grade Level.

RESULTS

Profile and Statistics of Respondents

Questionnaire administration yielded 182 usable instruments. Respondents were evenly divided across the four high school grade levels (9th grade = 41 [22.5%]; 10th grade = 53 [29.1%]; 11th grade = 47 [25.8%]; 12th grade = 41 [22.5%]). Respondents were almost evenly divided between males and females (males = 95 [52.2%]; females = 87 [47.8%]). Respondents' ages were distributed across a normal curve to be expected in a public high school (14 years or younger = 27 [15%]; 15 years = 47 [26%]; 16 years = 49 [27%]; 17 years = 42 [23%]; 18 years or older = 17 [9%]). Responses to racial/ethnic background accurately reflect the make-up of Hoggard's student body, which is predominantly white/non-minority (questionnaire respondents: white = 147 [81%]; African-American = 21 [12%]; Hispanic-American = 5 [3%]; Asian-American = 5 [3%]; Native American = 2 [1%]). Responses to religious affiliation did not seem accurately reflect the expected responses from this particular population (other = 74 [41%]; none = 25 [14%]; no response = 4 [2%]). It may be that respondents did not understand the question, did not understand the question choices, or did not want to accurately state their religious affiliation. I will not attempt to analyze the responses on basis of responses from religious affiliation.

Quantitative Results

In the second part of the questionnaire, students were presented with fourteen statements that related to character education and school climate. Students were asked,

“The section of the questionnaire provides you with a series of statements about character education and your own beliefs. It asks you to rate your opinion for each statement.”

Students were asked to rate their response to each statement along a range from “Strongly Agree” to “Don’t Know/No Answer.”

Students were asked to respond to the statement “I pay attention to the morning video announcements.” Over half of the respondents in three of the four grade levels indicated that they either “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” with this statement (freshmen = 24 [58.5%]; sophomores = 36 [67.9%]; seniors = 108 [68.3%]). Only 20 juniors (42.6%) indicated that they either “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” with this statement. The percentage of African-American students who “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” with this statement, 81%, is higher than the percentage of whites, 58.5%.

When asked to respond to the statement “I enjoy listening to the daily ‘Words of Wisdom’,” more than half the respondents at each grade level answered with either “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” (freshmen = 26 [63.4%]; sophomores = 32 [60.4%]; juniors = 31 [65.9%]; seniors = 25 [60.9%]). The percentage of the African-American students who responded either “Strongly Agree” or “Agree,” 71.4%, is notably larger than the white students responding similarly, 21.7%.

Students were asked to respond to the statement “I would sometime like to announce the daily ‘Words of Wisdom.’” More than half the respondents at each grade level answered with either “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” (freshmen = 29 [70.7%]; sophomores = 37 [69.8%]; juniors = 38 [80.8%]; seniors = 31 [75.7%]).

When asked to respond to the statement “My friends and I talk about the quotes from the daily ‘Words of Wisdom’,” students were almost uniformly negative. The

majority of students across the grade levels responded either “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” (freshmen = 38 [92.7%]; sophomores = 48 [90.6%]; juniors = 43 [91.5%]; seniors = 37 [90.3%]). Although the number of students responding “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” is small--8 African-American students, 4 white students--the percentage of African-American students (38.1%) answering this way is larger than white students (2.7%).

Students were similarly negative when asked to respond to the statement “My teachers make sure to discuss the daily ‘Words of Wisdom’ with my class.” The vast majority of students across the grade levels answered “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” (freshmen = 37 [90.3%]; sophomores = 50 [94.4%]; juniors = 43 [91.5%]; seniors = 37 [90.2%]).

Again, the students responded in a negative fashion when asked to respond to the statement “The daily ‘Words of Wisdom’ contribute to a positive school climate.” Once more, over half the respondents at each grade level answered either “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree.” However, the negative responses were not as overwhelming as the responses to the previous statement. Nearly a quarter of the seniors (10 [24.4%]) and over a quarter of the sophomores (15 [28.3%]) responded with “Strongly Agree” or “Agree.” Twelve of the African-American students (57.1%) and 28 white students (17.6%) responded “Strongly Agree” or “Agree.”

Some of the most interesting results were yielded by responses to the statement “The quotes in the daily ‘Words of Wisdom’ usually reflect my own beliefs.” Again, the majority of responses across the grade levels were negative, with most students marking “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” (freshmen = 19 [46.3%]; sophomores = 23 [43.4%];

juniors = 22 [46.8%]; seniors = 19 [46.4%]). However, this statement elicited the highest percentage of students responding “Don’t Know/No Answer” of the fourteen opinion statements (freshmen = 10 [24.4%]; sophomores = 13 [24.5%]; juniors = 8 [17%]; seniors = 7 [17.1%]). Five African-Americans (23.8%) indicated “Don’t Know/No Answer,” while 29 white students (19.7%) marked the same.

Students were asked to respond to the statement “Listening to the ‘Words of Wisdom’ contributes to a good school day for me.” Responses were, in the main, negative, with a majority of students responding “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree.” Three-quarters of the freshmen, sophomore, and senior students indicated “Disagree” or “Strongly Agree.” Eight junior students (17%) responded “Strongly Agree” or “Agree,” the highest percentage among the grade levels. Thirteen white students (8.9%) responded “Strongly Agree” or “Agree,” as opposed to 4 African-American students (19.1%). A relatively large number of white students (20 [13.6%]) indicated “Don’t Know/No Answer.”

When responding to the statement “I have heard quotes on the daily ‘Words of Wisdom’ that have influenced my own beliefs and/or behavior,” most students answered in the negative, with over half in each grade level marking “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree.” The highest percentage of students indicating “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” came from the junior class (16 students, 34%). Among African-American students, over half responded that they “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” with this statement (11 students, 52.4%), whereas only 19.1% of white students (28 students) answered similarly.

Interesting results emerged from the responses to the statement “Our school is a safe place.” Freshmen, sophomores, and seniors all responded positively, with over half

the students marking either “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” (65.8%, 69.8%, and 65.9%, respectively). Junior students, however, were not in agreement; only 21 students (44.7%) responded “Strongly Agree” or “Agree.” A majority of both African-American and white students answered “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” (African-Americans = 11 [52.4%]; whites = 94 [63.9%]).

Over half of the students in each grade level marked either “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” to the statement “Teachers are positive role models.” Sophomores had the highest percentage of these responses (75.5%), while seniors tallied the lowest (56.1%). In the racial/ethnic disaggregation, Asian-American students were the most positive in response to this statement (5 students, 100%); fourteen African-American students (66.6%) replied “Strongly Agree” or “Agree.” Ninety-two white students (62.6%) responded similarly. Almost a third of the African-American and white students either disagree with this statement or have no answer. It would be worthwhile to investigate why so many students answered this way and just how it is that they perceive their teachers. (If teachers are not positive role models in the eyes of the students, what are they?)

Yet more intriguing responses were elicited by the statement “Teachers act fairly toward each student.” Taking into account the “Don’t Know/No Answer” responses, the results were fairly split between “Strongly Agree/Agree” and “Disagree/Strongly Disagree” among the four grade levels. Twenty-seven juniors (57.4%) answered either “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree,” the highest percentage in the grade level responses. Fourteen African-American students (66.7%) marked either “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree.” White students were roughly split in their responses; 44.9% marked “Strongly

Agree” or “Agree,” and 48.3% marked “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree.” It would be worthwhile to investigate what the juniors and African-American students had seen or experienced to make them answer in such a fashion.

More areas for further investigation were revealed by the responses to the statement “Students act in a friendly manner toward each other.” Responses were roughly split between positive and negative responses at the freshmen and junior levels. The sophomores had the highest percentage of students replying either “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” (32 students, 60.4%), while seniors had the highest percentage of students replying “Agree” (26 students, 63.4%; although no seniors responded “Strongly Agree”). While the responses for the white students were roughly equal between positive and negative, sixteen African-American students (76.2%) answered either “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” to this statement.

In response to the statement “I behave the way teachers and school officials want me to behave,” students among the four grade levels were overwhelmingly positive, with the majority of students replying “Strongly Agree” or “Agree.” Sophomores had the highest percentage of positive responses (43 students, 81.1%), followed by seniors (32 students, 78.1%), freshmen (29 students, 70.8%), and juniors (33 students, 70.2%). African-American students and white students shared basically the same percentages of positive responses (“Strongly Agree,” “Agree”), 76.2% and 75.5%, respectively.

When the responses to the fourteen opinion statements were cross-tabulated with gender, male and female responses did not seem to vary to any noticeable degree. In most cases, responses varied only by a few percentage points. More males responded “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” to the statement “Students act in a friendly manner toward

each other” than females did (52.6% versus 40.2%). More females responded “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” to the statement “I behave the way teachers and school officials want me to behave” than males did (81.6% versus 69.4%).

The most intriguing differences showed up in the responses to the statement “I have heard quotes on the daily ‘Words of Wisdom’ that have influenced my own beliefs and/or behavior.” Twenty-five females (28.7%) responded “Strongly Agree” or “Agree,” while only 16 males (16.9%) answered similarly. It might be worth investigating what quotes the females might have heard that they perceived influenced their beliefs and/or behaviors, and how those influences were manifested in thought or action.

In the third part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked, “When you are making a significant decision, the opinions of people you know or institutions you are a part of might influence the decision you make. For each item below, evaluate how strongly the opinions of these individuals or institutions enter into the decisions you make.” Students were asked to respond along a range from “Very Strongly” to “No Opinion.”

Students gave the strongest positive responses to the statement “I make my decisions on my own.” Those responses marked “Very Strongly” and “Strongly” were in the majority for each of the four grade levels (freshmen = 34 [83%]; sophomores = 47 [88.7%]; juniors = 39 [83%]; seniors = 37 [90.3%]). Seventeen African-American students (80.9%) answered “Very Strongly” or “Strongly,” as did four Hispanic-American students (80%), all Asian-Americans (five students, 100%), all Native Indians (two students, 100%), and 127 white students (86.4%). Males and females were

essentially the same in the percentage of their replies as “Very Strongly” and “Strongly”: males, 85.2% (81 students); and females, 87.3% (76 students).

The next most influential individual/group was “Parent(s)/Guardian(s).” A majority of students at each grade level responded “Very Strongly” or “Strongly” to the influence of parent(s)/guardian(s) on decision-making processes (freshmen = 34 [82.9%; sophomores = 51 [96.3%]; juniors = 37 [78.8%]; seniors = 37 [90.2%]). Twenty African-American students (95.2%) answered “Very Strongly” or “Strongly,” and 129 white students (87.8%) answered similarly. A slightly higher percentage of females (90.8%) responded that parents “Very Strongly” or “Strongly” entered in the decision-making process than for males (84.2%).

By examining the percentage of responses for “Very Strongly” and “Strongly” across the grade levels it is possible to rank the individuals/institutions in a descending order of influence as follows: “friends,” “siblings,” “coach,” “teachers,” “youth leader,” “clergy,” “employer,” “media,” and “Words of Wisdom.” The “Words of Wisdom” received the highest percentage of responses in “Not at all” (freshmen = 25 [61%]; sophomores = 33 [62.3%]; juniors = 24 [51.1%]; seniors = 26 [63.4%]).

Qualitative Responses

The instrument asked respondents three open-ended questions: [1]. Who do you think had the biggest influence on the way you behave now? Tell us about that person. [2]. “School climate” is a term that describes the way a school “feels” to the people who attend the school. How would you describe your school’s climate? [3]. In your opinion,

what is the best way to convince students to act in a friendly and cooperative manner with each other?

Looking at the responses holistically, but in particular to the responses to question [2], I found that they could be categorized along four broad headings: “Positive,” “Neutral,” “Negative,” and “No Response (Blank).” A positive response included such words or phrases as “I think it [the school climate] is over all [sic] really good” and “School is a good place to be.” A neutral response included such words and phrases as “Indifferent” and “School climate ‘feels’ okay.” A negative response included such words and phrases as “It’s boring” and “Hostile, bleak, and mass-produced.” Blank responses provided no answers. It was also possible to categorize responses by students’ grade levels and course levels. Table 2 summarizes the qualitative responses along these categories.

| | POSITIVE | NEUTRAL | NEGATIVE | NO RESPONSE | TOTALS |
|---------------|----------|---------|----------|-------------|--------|
| Freshmen-Reg. | 4 | 6 | 0 | 9 | |
| Freshmen-Adv. | 7 | 13 | 4 | 2 | |
| Totals | 11 | 19 | 4 | 11 | 45 |
| Soph-Reg. | 6 | 10 | 7 | 0 | |
| Soph-Adv. | 10 | 12 | 6 | 0 | |
| Totals | 16 | 22 | 13 | 0 | 51 |
| Juniors-Reg. | 3 | 4 | 4 | 7 | |
| Juniors-Adv. | 8 | 11 | 9 | 0 | |
| Totals | 11 | 15 | 13 | 7 | 46 |
| Seniors-Reg. | 4 | 9 | 6 | 0 | |
| Seniors-Adv. | 9 | 7 | 3 | 2 | |
| Totals | 13 | 7 | 3 | 2 | 40 |

Table 2. Summary of Qualitative Responses. (Reg. = regular class level; Adv. = advanced class level.)

In response to the first question, “Who do you think had the biggest influence on the way you behave now? Tell us about that person,” the majority of students wrote about one or both parents. A generally positive advanced level freshman female wrote, “I think that my parents had the biggest influence on the way I behave now. They are honest, caring, loving smart, nice, and they have good moral values. They are truly [sic] people. I love them very much, I am glad that I had them to influence me.” A generally positive advanced level sophomore female stated, “I believe it has been my parents. They have giving [sic] strong beliefs to go by everyday of my life. They are excellent role models. They have never told me to do something and then they do the complete opposite.” A generally neutral advanced level junior female wrote, “I think my mom has had the most influence on me, because she came out of a bad marriage and made us (her children) see the positive side about all things. Even though me and my dad don’t come along, my mom still tries to heal our relationship. She has been a good role model because she started making her dreams come true when she turned 40, and showed me that it’s never late.” A generally positive regular level senior male answered, “The person who had the biggest influence on me is my mom. She has always kept me in the right direction. She is probably one of the best role models their [sic] is.”

After parents, the greatest number of responses concerned the fact that the student makes his/her own choices without “outside influence.” A generally neutral advanced level freshman female responded, “I have no influences, I influence myself.” A generally negative advanced level junior male stated, “Myself. I have my beliefs, and I don’t compromise them by being influenced by others.” A generally positive advanced level senior female answered, “Myself, just for the simple fact I am one semester [sic]

away from college and two months from being a legal adult. It's import[ant] [sic] that I start making decisions for myself and reaping consequences, good or bad."

After parents and self, the greatest number of respondents discussed a sibling. A generally neutral advanced level freshman female wrote, "My sister, she is smart, and kind. She helps me w/ my home work [sic] and tells me when I'm wrong." A generally negative regular level freshman female stated, "My sister has had the biggest influence on me. My sister is older than me. She has been through a lot of stuff in her life." A generally positive advanced level sophomore females said, "My sister has had the biggest influence on the way I behave. She subscribes to the straight edge way of life (no drugs, no alcohol + no tobacco) and has helped me to see that that is the healthiest way of live."

Other respondents mentioned, in descending order, clergy or people/institutions involved with the church (i.e., God, Jesus, youth leader); peers, including boyfriends and girlfriends; and teachers. No one mentioned the "Words of Wisdom." Interestingly, out of the three open-ended questions, this one provoked the most openly hostile responses. A generally negative advanced level freshman female replied, "Not answering that, you rat bastards, you don't care..." A generally negative regular level senior male answered, "Who cares, I think this survey is a waste of valuable learning time."

Responses to the second question, regarding school climate, were roughly distributed across a bell curve, with the majority of students answering in a neutral manner. Reading the phrase "school climate," some students seemingly misunderstood and wrote about the school environment (the school's age, the school's lack of cleanliness), while other students jokingly referred to the air conditioning and the classroom temperature.

A generally positive advanced level freshman female wrote, “I think it is over all [sic] really good. Moving here this year church has helped me to make friends but school I feel really comfortable here. Beside being extremely cold in the mornings, the school makes me happy, not including the exams. I think the teachers ... are extremely supportive + kind.” A generally positive advanced level sophomore female said, “I think this school has a good ‘climate.’ I’m almost always around my friends so I feel comfortable all the time. I can say almost anything to them and they won’t make me feel stupid.” A generally positive advanced level junior male stated, “I think that Hoggard has a good climate because it is a fun school + everyone gets along together + we have great school spirit.” A generally positive advanced level senior female answered, “Positive, as a senior I have never felt disturbed or unsafe at all at Hoggard. The administration has done a wonderful job.” Another positive advanced level senior female echoed, “I think that we have a fairly good school climate. We have our problems, like any large school, but in general it feels like a place I[’m] used to, and very comfortable in.”

Some of the students who took a generally neutral tone gave very interesting and sometimes puzzling responses. For instance, one advanced level freshman male wrote, “Like a prison where you work all day but, It turns out to be something good.” An advanced level sophomore female said, “It’s too apathetic. People who go to this school always have the overall view of just coming because they have to. A small percentile exceed beyond the mandatory requirements of education, but most people rarely apply themselves enough.” An advanced level junior male who had something troubling on his mind gave this response: “I feel it is OK, but I’ve been thinking about something. The

other day a kid in my class was wearing a Confederate flag on his shirt. The sheriff [sic] and Mr. [assistant principal] came and told him he couldn't wear it anymore, it was offensive. I think he should be able to wear it. What about religious clothes, those may be offensive, or Nike clothes which are made in sweat shops. I find that offensive. So what are you going to do? Nothing." An advanced level senior male offered, "It's OK, at times I feel almost overly done, you can't go anywhere in this school without an administrator trying to do something, getting people in trouble or now even cameras are watching you." (The last response refers to the security cameras which school officials mounted around the campus in the late 1990s in order to minimize vandalism.)

The questionnaire gave some students an opportunity to vent their hostility and frustration at the public school system. An advanced level freshman female said, "It is school. School is the devil. It teaches conformity, not indivisality [sic]. It's useless for the 'real world,' inless [sic] of course one lives a life of nothingness, fake, getting nothing true from living, with school as an influence." An advanced level freshman male opined, "It's boring and a good place to sleep." One regular level sophomore female wrote, "My school climate makes me feel unwanted. No one likes me, and they always make fun. That is why I'm going to Ashley High School," and another stated, "The school climate ... hmm ... tough one. In my opinion it is cruel, cold, unloving, uncaring, annoying, horrible, and it is this that is driving me insane." An advanced level junior male responded, "Crappy. I don't like it very much. The school is dirty and depressing and the whole thug thing sucks." A regular level senior female gave this interesting comparison: "Our school climate is like a snake because people are always doing something to someone that is not even nessary [necessary] [sic] they always think that

they can slipp [sic] and slide away with anything. When the only one that they are hurting is themselves because that shows that they are not a good role model that makes them look like the fool.” A regular level senior male wrote, “It sucks[.] The people are so immature + stupid[.] I wish I wouldn’t have moved from my old school. The teachers are crooked too.” The student’s last statement makes one wonder what he saw or experienced in order to elicit such a cynical reply.

The third question asked respondents to offer their own suggestions as to specific ways to encourage students to act in a friendly and cooperative manner with each other. The majority of students who responded to this question offered a variation of the statement that “Teenagers are going to do what they want to do, and there is no way to influence them to do something differently” (i.e., as one senior wrote, “Students act the way they want to. I don’t think anybody can change that.”). Few students could offer a specific, concrete plan for influencing student-student or student-school personnel relationships. Two students did specifically mention the ‘Words of Wisdom’ and suggested that they continue to be aired.

One generally positive advanced level freshman female wrote, “Words of Wisdom is really neat but I don’t think we really listen to it when announcements come on, it’s usually just a chance for some to talk,” while another said, “In my opinion, the best way to convince students to act in a friendly way and cooperative mannar [sic] with each other is to create a good setting for them. I think if it is a good setting, it will result in a good manor [sic].” One generally positive regular level sophomore female responded, “If you show each student the same respect and give them space to make decisions w/ each other then maybe more people can get along,” while another added,

“By setting the example first. Also by showing the consequences when doing something bad or good.” A generally neutral advanced level junior female suggested, “To learn about each other’s differences and judge the people by the inside and not the outside.” A generally positive advanced level senior male advised, “Encouragement and an example by teachers and other faculty and staff.”

Some very cynical and hardened answers were made in response to this last question. An otherwise positive advanced level sophomore female stated, “There really isn’t anything you can do. Some people just don’t like each other for one reason or another and there’s nothing school officials can do about it.” A generally negative advanced level junior male responded, “You can’t [convince students to act differently]. That’s just how society is[.] Everything is a competition and for some people to make another person feel bad makes them think that they’re better.” A generally negative advanced level senior female wrote, “I don’t think there is a way for students to act friendly towards each other. Students have their minds set on doing what they want and if it requires hurting others, they will still do it.” And perhaps most chillingly, a generally negative advanced level senior male wrote, “For one, I have yet to see a proof showing that kindness has any positive effect on anything, but have seen many suggesting the opposite.”

Limitations

This exploratory survey does have several limitations which make it difficult to generalize too broadly. a) The results of this survey may be skewed due to the small sample size (ten per cent of the total student population). b) Since the survey was

administered relatively close to the 2002 Christmas holiday break, it is possible that students did not apply themselves to it as seriously as they might have had it been administered at another time of year. c) Families of students who attend Hoggard High School, on average, have a higher socio-economic status than most of the families whose students attend other high schools in New Hanover County. Had this survey been administered at another New Hanover County high school, the results may have been different. d) This survey was only administered to students; the perceptions of faculty members and administrators should also be gathered. e) The instrument was not constructed to ask respondents to code their class level (regular level or advanced level). This made it impossible to cross-tabulate responses to opinion statements with class levels. Examining differences among responses between class levels might yield noteworthy insights. f) This survey was only an initial exploratory survey; a longitudinal study might reveal changes in attitudes and perceptions over time.

DISCUSSION

The data make it evident that students do not perceive Project Wisdom's "Words of Wisdom" making a noticeable impact in the school climate or their decision-making processes. Several factors are at work which may inhibit the effectiveness of the school's character education program.

A) Placement. The "Words of Wisdom" are broadcast as a segment within the Hoggard morning announcements. The morning announcements are videotaped by the video production class and then broadcast over a school cable network. Each classroom has a television set connected to the school network, which enables reception. The announcements contain school deadlines, club meeting schedules, sports scores, and other student-related information. The "Words of Wisdom" make up the last segment of the morning announcements.

The morning announcements are broadcast at the end of first period. Since Hoggard High School is on block-schedule, there are four periods in a day. The morning announcements are usually broadcast between 10:05 and 10:10 AM. By this point in the school day, the first period teacher has concluded his/her lesson plan and assigned homework. The Hoggard administration has made it clear that first period teachers are expected to allow students to watch the morning announcements (in other words, not to teach through that time instead of turning on the television) and to try to focus student attention on the announcements.

This practice yielded the results in which over half of the students in three of the four grade levels indicated that they either "Very Strongly" or "Strongly" agreed with the statement that they paid attention to the morning video announcements (the junior class

being the exception). The majority of the students are complying with the teacher's directives to "pay attention" to the announcements--in other words, to be quiet, not talk, don't distract other students who may be listening. However, the fact that the students are watching the television does not guarantee that they are attentive to the message. During this time, it is possible that students may be engaged in a number of activities which do not interrupt the morning announcements and yet which do not promote active listening. Students might pass notes to each other; they might pack their bookbags; they might work on homework, etc. It is also likely that in some classes, despite teacher admonitions, students talk right through the morning announcements.

Students are aware that it is a school expectation that they listen to the morning video announcements, and this likely influenced their responses to the statement, "I pay attention to the morning video announcements." Most students, in the interest of minimizing adverse consequences, undoubtedly comply with the teacher's directive to watch the announcements without distracting other classmates. On the other hand, the instrument's second opinion statement, "I enjoy listening to the daily 'Words of Wisdom'," includes a personal, emotional component--the "enjoyment" of a segment within the morning announcements. This "product placement" likely influenced the overall negative response to the statement "I enjoy listening to the daily 'Words of Wisdom'" across the four grade levels.

By the time the morning video announcements end, there may only be a minute or two remaining before the bell to end first period. Often, the bell rings just as the announcements are ending or sometimes even before the end of the broadcast. If classtime remains at the end of the morning announcements, most teachers do not try to

refocus the class in order to teach further. Many students may have already mentally “left the class,” even before the end of the announcements. When the students arrive in their second period classes, their teachers are ready to get started with the day’s lesson plans. The second period teachers do not review the contents of the morning announcements or the “Words of Wisdom.” It is likely that these circumstances are responsible for the generally negative responses to the statements, “My friends and I talk about the quotes from the daily ‘Words of Wisdom’” and “My teachers make sure to discuss the daily ‘Words of Wisdom’ with my class.” These conclusions are borne out by the freshman student who wrote, “Words of Wisdom is really neat but I don’t think we really listen to it when announcements come on, it’s usually just a chance for some to talk.”

Within the boundaries of the school campus, students are focused, first, on their own thoughts, emotions and reactions; second, on those of their friends; and, third, on those of their teachers. It is likely that, if the student has not heard news or information in the opening section of the morning announcements which directly relates to him/her, the student is already focused on another thought or activity by the time the “Words of Wisdom” segment airs. This likely explains the large number of “Don’t Know” responses to the statement, “The quotes in the daily ‘Words of Wisdom’ usually reflect my own beliefs.” It is probable that the majority of students have not consciously paid attention to a large enough number of “Words of Wisdom” segments to know whether or not they agree with the beliefs embodied in the character education program or not.

B) Student Involvement. As noted earlier, character education programs seem to be most successful when they involve a) an example and b) student experience. The

Project Wisdom character education program provides the examples in the form of the “Words of Wisdom” announcements, but lacks the vital student experience component. Students are essentially passive receivers. They can choose to listen to the segments or ignore them. While there are benefits to assimilating the lessons promulgated through the “Words of Wisdom,” these benefits are intangible and often only show up “somewhere down the line.” At the same time, there is no penalty or adverse consequence for ignoring the “Words of Wisdom.”

The end of each “Words of Wisdom” segment does exhort the student to “Make it a great day--or not. The choice is yours.” However, this verbal admonition falls short of the “experience” envisioned by character education proponents, especially since it has been demonstrated that most students are not paying attention to the “Words of Wisdom” segment. The Project Wisdom company does provide the school with possible weekly journal topics (Appendix D). At the time of this writing, no Hoggard High School teacher was utilizing the journal topics in the classroom. It is also true that New Hanover County has mandated the successful completion of senior project as a necessary component for high school graduation; however, as has been described, the connection between senior project and character education is tenuous at best.

A drawback to the “Words of Wisdom” program is the fact that teachers do not know in advance what the segment will contain. If teachers were made aware of the scripts in advance, they might be able to somehow work the content into their daily lesson plans. Since Hoggard now has a central computer server which enables all teachers to receive e-mail messages, it might be possible to develop a system by which teachers learn in advance the contents of upcoming messages.

Teachers would have to be willing to modify their existing lesson plans to incorporate discussions of character development matters in their classes. Some teachers may not be comfortable with this (at least without some additional training or guidance). Some teachers may not be willing to give up classtime devoted to subject content in order to include ethical discussions. Since the introduction of block scheduling, some teachers feel time pressure to include all elements of their standard course of study, especially in courses which lead to a standardized test. Some teachers have stated that certain elements of their courses which they used to include in traditional year-long scheduling have fallen by the wayside. They may resent the inclusion of yet more material that minimizes content instruction. In an educational system that is increasingly focused on student achievement--especially with the passage of President George W. Bush's "No Child Left Behind" policy--anything that detracts from core content is likely to be given short shrift.

C) Lack of Parental Involvement. The data indicate that students perceive parents/guardians as the single most important influence in their decision-making processes. It seems to be important to somehow bring parents into the school's character education program.

Although Hoggard has been using the Project Wisdom program for nearly three years, most parents are not aware of it. Parents who volunteer in the school have likely seen the "Words of Wisdom" segment incorporated in the morning video announcements, but they may not be aware of the segment's intent. As related in chapter one, although the school administered a "beliefs survey" in 2001, it did not send out Project Wisdom's "School Problems Inventory," "School's Personnel Perceptions" survey, "Parent

Opinionnaire,” or “Community Involvement Inventory.” If the school utilized these resources, or if it simply included a mention of the Project Wisdom character education program in the PTSA newsletter, it could perhaps increase parental awareness of the program and garner parental involvement.

With input from parents, administrators, and teachers, it might be possible to develop a delivery system that would allow parents to know what is going to be included in the “Words of Wisdom” on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. Parents could be encouraged to engage their children in ethical discussions centered on these positive character traits. While it is doubtful that all--or even a majority of--parents would include such activities in their daily lives, if even a handful participated, it might make a beneficial difference in the lives of their children “down the line.”

D) School Climate. The current survey was only minimally concerned with school climate. The instrument did not do a good job defining “school climate” for the student respondent. The majority of students indicated that they did not perceive that the “Words of Wisdom” contributed to a positive school climate. The data collected, however, open up many questions which bear further research.

It would be worthwhile to learn why almost a third of the African-American and white students either disagreed or had no answer to the statement “Teachers are positive role models.” It would also be interesting to learn why the responses to the statement “Teachers act fairly toward each student” are essentially split. The school should also learn why over half the African-American respondents answered negatively to the statement “Students act in a friendly manner toward each other.” Qualitative responses regarding school climate, such as this one, “I would describe my school’s climate as

stressful. Many students have a lot of tension between each other and the administrators are very strict,” urge more investigation.

CONCLUSIONS

Administrative Implications

Hoggard's character education program cannot be described as an "unqualified success." It does not seem to consciously impact students' decision-making processes, nor do students see it as contributing positively to the school climate. It is possible that, on some unconscious level, the messages from the "Words of Wisdom" are "sinking in" and making an impact on the students' beliefs and behaviors, but it would entail a much more involved study to evaluate this notion.

I do not believe, however, that any of this indicates a need to end the character education program. First of all, the costs associated with the program are minimal. Hoggard High School has now purchased the two series of "Words of Wisdom" scripts for several hundred dollars each. The school now possesses three years' worth of scripts. Utilizing the scripts carefully, it is probably possible to get four years' worth of scripts out of the books, ensuring that there is little or no repetition of "Words of Wisdom" messages from the time a student enters Hoggard as a freshman to the time he graduates as a senior.

I believe that it is commendable and even obligatory for a public school to let its students know "what it stands for." It is much more worthwhile for the school to be forthright and let students know what values it extols, rather than letting them assimilate the implicit messages carried through student-faculty interactions and classroom lessons. It is true that "actions speak louder than words," and students who are treated unfairly by

a teacher or administrator--or who perceive that they have been treated this way--will be biased against the school system. However, the messages of a character education program help refocus, at least in a minimal fashion, everyone's attention on the mission at hand: helping youth learn and grow to achieve the best that is possible for each one of them.

With some "tinkering" it would be possible to make the character education program more effective. Utilization of the school's e-mail program could enable teachers to receive "Words of Wisdom" scripts ahead of their broadcast dates. Teachers could then incorporate the "Words of Wisdom" quotations, lessons, and personalities in classroom lesson plans. Letting parents know about the "Words of Wisdom" could add a strong, valuable ally in the effort to inculcate positive community values into students.

Researcher Implications

This initial exploratory survey opens up many more avenues for further research. First of all, it would be worthwhile to find out how other area high schools are implementing character education programs and the perceptions of those programs on the part of students, faculty members, and administrators. Have other area high schools found programs which are more effective than Project Wisdom? Have other schools implemented the Project Wisdom program in such a way that their students are more receptive?

The current survey only surveyed ten per cent of the student population. While I do not believe a larger sample would vary drastically from the current results, I can't categorically assert that. It might be possible to survey the entire student body and

tabulate the results. It would also be worthwhile to assess students' responses by class level (regular, advanced, Advanced Placement) to see if variations exist.

The current survey is only a one-time "snapshot" of student perceptions of the character education program. A longitudinal study measuring a student cohort's perceptions over a period of time might yield insights as to whether or not the cohort's perceptions change at all and the reasons for the change.

As stated earlier, it is impossible to separate a moral dimension from the business of the classroom. Implicitly or explicitly, classroom activities carry a moral dimension. Schools that clearly delineate and promote a character education program can have a more beneficial impact on students' lives than schools in which those messages are conveyed "hit or miss." Just how much time and effort each school devotes to character education is an important decision which merits serious consideration on the part of school leaders.

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Appendix A

File: 7186

CHARACTER EDUCATION

The New Hanover County Board of Education believes it is vital that the public schools support and sustain the efforts of families and the community to teach all young people certain fundamental, commonly agreed upon character traits. Support for character development strengthens the New Hanover County Schools' efforts to maintain a safe, friendly and orderly environment where conditions for learning are optimum.

The Board of Education further believes that the curriculum, instructional methods, student activities, and the school climate should be integrated to model and reinforce the following eight character traits. These eight character traits were identified and defined by the North Carolina General Assembly in 1996; to wit:

1. Courage
2. Good Judgement
3. Integrity
4. Kindness
5. Perseverance
6. Respect
7. Responsibility
8. Self-discipline

The administration, instructional and classified staff, and volunteers at every school shall work together to model, reinforce, and uphold these traits. The principals shall, in their yearly school improvement plans, provide examples of how these eight character traits can be presented and incorporated into the instructional day as well as after school activities.

Members of the Board of Education, Central Office administration, and all school system employees shall strive to model and teach the eight traits of character herein defined.

Approved: 06/16/98

New Hanover County Public Schools, Wilmington, NC



A PUBLICATION OF THE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS OFFICE

The Word Weekly

February 26, 2001

Character Education
Highlight of the Week
by
The Pre-K Center at Howe



Families are an Integral Part of Character Education . . .

Families are an integral part of the program at the Pre-K Center at Howe. Parents and guardians are responsible for volunteering in the classroom a minimum of one hour per month. This reinforces parents' commitment to educating their children. Parents learn how important they are in this educational process. Parents and guardians work with the teachers in the classroom and on field trips. This method assures educational continuity between school and home.

In addition, parents attend workshops that focus on developing parenting skills, such as communication, self-esteem, discipline, school success, child abuse prevention, and kindergarten preparation. These workshops are interactive and allow opportunities for group discussion and support.

The children are taught character education in the classroom through cooperation and interaction on a variety of levels. Whole group meetings promote the concept of "school family." Meals are served family style, allowing for the development of social skills. Using "your words," instead of aggressive actions to settle conflicts is a schoolwide policy. In addition, programs for the children such as personal safety, conflict management, and expressing

Board Briefs . . .

The New Hanover County Board of Education met on Tuesday, February 20. The following items were presented and discussed:

- ☞ A non-partisan Board was discussed among Board members.
- ☞ The Instructional Media Selection Policy 7210 was presented for first reading. This will be on the next agenda for approval.
- ☞ The design for the new administration building was presented. This will be on the March 6 agenda for approval.
- ☞ Lumina Builders, Inc. was awarded the replacement of the gym floor for Princess Street gym at NHHS in the amount of \$187,640.
- ☞ The kitchen air conditioning for Virgo was awarded to Insight Builders, Inc. in the amount of \$81,060.
- ☞ The Novell student license agreement for NHCS was renewed for \$56,373.45
- ☞ Data Networks contracted support services was increased in the amount of \$10,000.

Appendix C

INFLUENCING OTHERS

Good morning, name of school! This is name of narrator with a few words of wisdom.

Every single day, in more ways than we may ever understand, we influence one another. The things we do and say affect those around us — for better or for worse.

And every day, we make choices about how we will treat others. Will we be a positive influence by being kind, courteous, and honest, or will we be a negative influence by being rude, hurtful, and untrustworthy?

African-American educator and reformer Booker T. Washington once said:

***There is no escape — man drags man down,
or man lifts man up.***

Today, ask yourself this: Am I going to drag down those around me, or am I going to lift them up by being the very best I can be?

With something to think about, this is name of narrator. Make it a great day . . . or not. The choice is yours.

© 1995
Project Wisdom

Appendix E

JTH SCHOOL BELIEFS SURVEY 12-01- RESULTS OF PARENTS

RANKING OF 8 BELIEF STATEMENTS 1 THRU 8 WITH 1 BEING MOST IMPORTANT

1 QUESTIONNAIRE GIVEN TO ALL STUDENTS WHO ATTENDED DEC. HOMEROOM (APPROX 2300 STUDENTS)-REQUESTING PARENT SURVEY COMPLETION

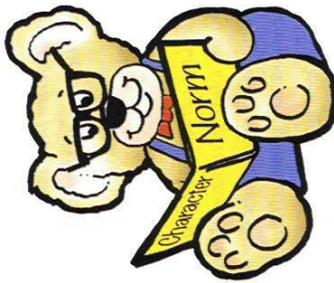
TOTAL RESPONDENTS: 973
 INCORRECT OR ILLEGIBLE RESPONSES 42 (4.3%)

TOTAL RESPONSES CALCULATED: 931

| <i>BELIEF</i> | <i>RESULTS</i> | <i>RANK</i> | <i>AVE. RATING</i> |
|---|----------------|-------------|--------------------|
| TEACHERS/ADMIN & PARENTS SHARE RESP. FOR SCHOOL PERFORMANCE | | 3 | 3.70 |
| BASIC LEARNING FOR ALL –MAIN PRIORITY AND PRIMARY FOCUS | | 1 | 2.69 |
| EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES/PROGRAMS IMPORTANT FOR STUDENT DEVELOPMENT | | 7 | 5.03 |
| PROVIDE VARIETY OF ASSESSMENT OPP. TO DEMONSTRATE LEARNING | | 6 | 5.02 |
| PROVIDE CURRICULUM/INSTRUCTION FOR VARIED STUDENT NEEDS | | 4 | 4.21 |
| SAFE, COMFORTABLE, DIVERSE ENVIRONMENT | | 2 | 3.07 |
| COMMITTED TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PROCESS | | 5 | 4.93 |
| CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT-KEY SCHOOL RESPONSIBILITY | | 8 | 6.89 |

NOTE:

- SURVEY QUESTIONS DERIVED FROM S.A.C.S. FORMAT.
- SURVEY MAY CONTAIN STATISTICAL ABNORMALITIES SUCH AS DUPLICATE PARENT SUBMITTALS.



Good Character
is "the Norm" for
New Hanover County Schools.

COURAGE

GOOD JUDGMENT

INTEGRITY

KINDNESS

PERSEVERANCE

RESPECT

RESPONSIBILITY

SELF DISCIPLINE

Character Traits adopted by
New Hanover County School Board
June 16, 1998

Schools of Character

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Edwin A. Alderman
Heyward C. Bellamy

John J. Blair

William H. Blount

Bradley Creek

Carolina Beach

John Codrington

College Park

Hubert Eaton

Rachel Freeman

Forest Hills

Gregory

Howe Pre-K Center

Dorothy B. Johnson

Ogden

Walter L. Parsley

Pine Valley

J.C. Roe

Sunset Park

Mary C. Williams

Winter Park

Wrightsboro

Wrightsville Beach

MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Myrtle Grove

Charles P. Murray

MCS Noble

Roland-Grise

Emma B. Trask

D.C. Virgo

Williston

HIGH SCHOOLS

Eugene Ashley

John T. Hoggard

Lakeside

Emsley A. Laney

New Hanover

Dr. D. John Morris, Jr., Superintendent

Administration Building

1802 S. 15th Street

Wilmington, NC 28401

910-763-5431

<http://www.nhcs.k12.nc.us>



Character Education Counts!

*"Let us put our minds together
and see what kind of life we can make
for our children."*

Sitting Bull

*"It is time for schools to teach
the 4th and 5th R's:
Respect and Responsibility."*

Thomas Lickona
Author of Educating for Character

*"... in our fast-paced global society
of instant changes, I feel it is more
vital than ever for students to have
a solid foundation of under-standing
about themselves and others."*

Linda Harrelson
NC Character Educator of the Year



*"Intelligence plus character -
That is the true goal of education."*

Martin Luther King, Jr.

*"A child is a person who is going to
carry on what you have started.
He is going to sit where you are sitting
and, when you are gone, attend to those
things which you think are important."*

Abraham Lincoln

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of

New Hanover County

Schools is to provide a high

QUALITY education that

prepares ALL students to be

productive and contributing

citizens of a global society.



Appendix G-1



SURVEY OF CHARACTER EDUCATION AND DECISION MAKING HOGGARD HIGH SCHOOL

Purpose: We are interested in determining the factors that enter into high school students' decision-making processes. Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary; also, if you choose to participate, you may choose not to respond to any individual items that you deem inappropriate. Since you have not given your name, the information you provide on this questionnaire is completely confidential. No school officials will see individual responses. We simply ask that you answer each question honestly.

DIRECTIONS: 1. Use a No. 2 pencil. 2. Fill in bubble completely. 3. Erase completely to change. 4. Do not fold.

Part I. Demographic Information. The questions in this section ask you for general information. Fill in the appropriate bubble completely.

1. What is your gender? Male Female
2. What is your age?
 14 or younger 15 16 17 18 or older
3. What grade are you in?
 9 10 11 12
4. What is your racial/ethnic background?
 African-Am. Hispanic-Am. Asian-Am. Native Am. White
5. What is your religious background?
 Protestant Catholic Greek Orth. Jewish Islamic Other None

Part II. Your Opinion. This section of the questionnaire provides you with a series of statements about character education and your own beliefs. It asks you to rate your opinion for each statement. Fill in the appropriate bubble completely.

6. I pay attention to the morning video announcements.
7. I enjoy listening to the daily "Words of Wisdom."
8. I would sometime like to announce the daily "Words of Wisdom."
9. My friends and I talk about the quotes from the daily "Words of Wisdom."
10. My teachers make sure to discuss the daily "Words of Wisdom" with my class.
11. The daily "Words of Wisdom" contribute to a positive school climate.
12. The quotes in the daily "Words of Wisdom" usually reflect my own beliefs.
13. Listening to the "Words of Wisdom" contributes to a good school day for me.
14. I have heard quotes on the daily "Words of Wisdom" that have influenced my own beliefs and/or behavior.
15. Our school is a safe place.
16. Teachers are positive role models.
17. Teachers act fairly toward each student.
18. Students act in a friendly manner toward each other.
19. I behave the way teachers and school officials want me to behave.

| | | | | | |
|--|----------------------|--|--|--|--|
| | Don't Know/No Answer | | | | |
| | Strongly Disagree | | | | |
| | Disagree | | | | |
| | Agree | | | | |
| | Strongly Agree | | | | |

Appendix G-2

Part III. Your Decisions. When you are making a significant decision, the opinions of people you know or institutions you are a part of might influence the decision you make. For each item below, evaluate how strongly the opinions of these individuals or institutions enter into the decisions you make.

- 20. Parent(s)/Guardian(s)
- 21. Brother(s)/Sister(s)
- 22. Friends
- 23. Media (TV, movies, music)

- 24. Clergyman
- 25. Teachers
- 26. Employers
- 27. Coach

- 28. Youth leader (Scoutmaster, 4-H leader, etc.)
- 29. "Words of Wisdom"
- 30. I make my decisions on my own.

| | No Opinion | Not at All | Not Very Strongly | Strongly | Very Strongly |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 20. Parent(s)/Guardian(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 21. Brother(s)/Sister(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 22. Friends | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 23. Media (TV, movies, music) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 24. Clergyman | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 25. Teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 26. Employers | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 27. Coach | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 28. Youth leader (Scoutmaster, 4-H leader, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 29. "Words of Wisdom" | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 30. I make my decisions on my own. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Part IV. Your Views. In the space provided below, please respond to the following questions.

31. Who do you think had the biggest influence on the way you behave now? Tell us about that person.

32. "School climate" is a term that describes the way a school "feels" to the people who attend the school. How would you describe your school's climate?

33. In your opinion, what is the best way to convince students to act in a friendly and cooperative manner with each other?

**This completes the survey.
We sincerely thank you for your participation.**

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Scott H. Urban was born on May 27, 1961, in Aurora, Colorado. He graduated from Kent State University in Ohio in 1983 with a B.A. in Telecommunications and worked in the field of radio broadcasting for several years. In 1989 he earned a B.A. in English and teacher certification from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington and began teaching in Columbus County. Since 1998 he has served as English Department Chairperson at John T. Hoggard High School in Wilmington, North Carolina. In 2000 he entered the graduate program at University of North Carolina at Wilmington in pursuit of a Masters in School Administration. He is married and has two daughters.