

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Research Question:

What happens when I integrate character education into my everyday curriculum?

Sub-questions:

- Can I successfully integrate character education into my everyday curriculum?
- Will working in cooperative groups help my students learn to employ positive social skills towards one another?
- How will I teach character education topics to my students?
- How will my students interact with one another? Will my character education lessons impact their social-emotional learning?
- How will my teaching change as I learn to implement character education as an integral part of my everyday curriculum? How will my view of character education change as my students' behavior changes?
- Will my students learn to work together and respect each other as they learn about and discuss character education topics?

Rationale:

The first day I entered my first grade classroom, I was filled with eagerness and anticipation to teach. I was determined to be an influential and positive role-model to my students. After my first three weeks, I was miserable. I couldn't believe I had spent so many years working so hard to become a teacher, just to fail. My students were rude to each other and constantly tattled, argued, and broke up into mini-cliques. Each and every day, I was faced with social dilemmas. I could already predict the students who would someday become bullies and the students who would become their victims.

As I planned for my second year as a first grade teacher, I knew that I wanted to incorporate character education into my curriculum. My dilemma was that first grade is challenging enough without adding yet one more subject to teach. Therefore, I wanted to find out what happens when I integrate character education into my everyday curriculum?

Tools:

- *Teacher Observations and Reflections*
- *Parent Surveys*
- *Student Samples*

Data Analysis & Findings

Social Skills

I focused on teaching social skills as an introduction to manners and cooperation in the classroom. I did this through several activities:

- Listening exercises
- Star of the Week
- Secret Person Bag
- T-Chart for Social Skills

Creating Cooperative Groups

I created cooperative groups in the classroom and reinforced concepts such as cooperation, responsibility, and citizenship. Although students eventually learned how to work together in a positive, cooperative manner, some students were not always able to resolve conflicts without my involvement. Overall, several students displayed a democratic ability to work together to achieve a common goal. This attitude carried over during other activities such as field trips.

Integrating Character Education

Once I became more comfortable with organizing cooperative group activities, I began to plan my character education curriculum. Initially, I kept pushing my character education lesson back a day, then a week. After some time, I was able to find ways to truly integrate character education topics within my everyday Language Arts Curriculum. I learned to plan ahead and integrate specific character education literature, which I personally selected, into my lesson plans. I continued to read books and create lessons that revolved around diversity, tolerance, and citizenship. Students consistently demonstrated through their positive interactions and good deeds, that they had become part of a cooperative, values-based learning community.

Barriers/Limitations:

I did not teach my students conflict/resolution techniques, therefore I cannot gauge how this may have affected the students that continued to have difficulty working cooperatively and treating others with respect and consideration. Also, I did not record the number of conflicts/issues from month to month between students in my classroom. I plan to note the number and types of conflicts that arise in my classroom in the future.

Policy Implications

For the classroom:

- Teachers should begin by creating opportunities for students to socialize with one another.
- Teachers should allow for cooperative group time in order to allow students to learn to work together.
- Teachers should implement a character education curriculum that is integrated within the core curriculum and meets the needs of the students and the classroom environment.

For the district:

- Teachers should be provided with practical, easy to access resources for character education.
- Character education resources should include, but not be limited to types of literature, journal articles, and lessons taught by other teachers. This information should be available on internet sights with links.
- Teachers should be given the opportunity to attend character education workshops facilitated by fellow teachers during professional development days.
- Cookie-cutter character education programs should not be forced upon schools. These “pull-out” programs do not necessarily serve the individualistic needs of the classroom. These programs should offer time and resources to individual teachers. Instead, teachers should be provided with the training and resources to integrate character education into the everyday curriculum.

