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IDENTIFYING SCHOOLS AS CARING COMMUNITIES: TEACHER PERCEPTIONS ABOUT CHARACTER EDUCATION

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TEACHER PERCEPTIONS ABOUT CHARACTER EDUCATION

Jasmine Johnson

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the
School of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership
William Carey University

May 2021

Approved by Committee:

Melony Hanson, Ph.D., Chair

Jalynn Roberts, Ph.D.

Edna Thomas, Ph.D.

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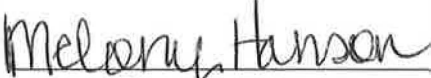
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ABSTRACT

Jasmine Johnson

Identifying Schools as Caring Communities: Teacher Perception About Character Education

This study quantified teacher perceptions and their observations of school community interactive attachments. Observed attachments through teacher perceptions classified school communities as caring. Elementary school teachers in the southern United States districts volunteered, in order to determine the significance of school-based taught or learned character education principles in comparison with caring attachments. Data were collected using the Caring Community Profile – II questionnaire, which measures the participants' attitudes by the extent to which they agree or disagree with a statement. The results clarified the significance of character education programs that identify school communities as caring.

Additionally, the findings answered the study's research questions and hypotheses. The major findings determined that not only can teacher observations label their school environments but teachers in general connect school stakeholders, and teacher influence has a significant impact on positive community character education growth. Ultimately, the study concludes the significance of character education programs or the lack thereof and the potential ethical impact character education curriculums can have in society.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the source, strength, and sustainer of my life, Jesus. Thank you for never leaving me nor forsaking me. Thank you for the lessons in longsuffering, humility, and endurance. Thank you for sending constant and timely encouraging words through my mom, Jacqueline McFarland; and sisters, Courtney and Linelle; my husband, Steven; and children Anaya, Ariana, and Amare. Thank you for hearing and answering the intercessory prayers that led to the accomplishment of this work, and I only continue to pray for the opportunity to influence the need of every character to reflect yours.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1	CEP	Character Education Program	4
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3	PSD1	Private School District 1	42
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The curriculum, delivery method, and teaching practices vary from school to school (Oliva, 2009). There are various reasons distinctions exist among school communities, namely methodology and pedagogy, but the primary cause is culture. A school's culture is instrumental in improving the quality of student academic outcomes and student behavior (Amtu et al., 2021). Additionally, culture relates to school faculty working together to establish beliefs and values that promote inclusiveness among the daily faculty/staff, student, and parent stakeholders (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). However, it is crucial for a school to have a distinct inclusive culture because no matter individuals' cultural background or values, there are opportunities for sustainable outcomes when exposing students to systematized learning.

Every school community, regardless of the culture, has, at the very least, accepted the required three core academic curriculum subjects: reading, writing, and mathematics. The three content areas are a systematized learning core because such skills provide every student with the opportunity to examine, interpret, and communicate with literate and competent capabilities. Within the U.S. school system, teachers have been trained to primarily focus on creating and sustaining an effective academic culture instead of a four-core focus that would include the importance of learning constructive character principles. Recently, community trends and societal events such as police brutality, racial bias, and political unrest incidents, have created cause to examine, not intellectual choices, but moral ones. Such events have created reason to observe the relationship between character education, moral curriculum, and respectable friendship attachments that exist among individuals within their school community environment.

Kim et al. (2018) suggested that there are several indicators that would imply dissension exists among teachers/staff, students, and parents within their school community. He further believes that disrespect, dishonesty, body language and flawed character were the leading factors to deter positive attachment outcomes and academic progress. Therefore, a relationship exists between learned principled character traits and a cohesive school community. Essentially, schools have solely focused on a three-core academic culture and not an interrelated four-core culture: positive character traits, reading, writing, and mathematics. School community cultures have failed to require that every student learn principled character traits equal to the learning practices of academic content subjects, hindering optimal systematized school community success measured by intellectual skills and moral community attachments.

Statement of the Problem and Significance

Mader (2019) reported that 50,000 preschoolers, ages 3 and 4, are expelled yearly among U.S. school communities nationwide. Interestingly, while the article described stressed parents, it was the teachers that were overwhelmed by the high rate of suspensions and expulsions. Teachers perceived they added to the excessive percentage by the absence of parent and student relational attachments. Teachers believed that non-supportive parents, negative student behaviors (i.e., lack of respect), in conjunction with deficient classroom management training, led to the common-place meltdowns students would exhibit. These factors would cause teachers to respond inadequately, which further decreased levels of student respect and parent support, hence contributing to a continuous dysfunctional cycle in school communities. Consequently, the article further found that teachers perceived suspension and expulsion was not impacting student behavior positively, and if suspension and expulsion rates did not improve, student behavior could lead to future extensive significances. The article concluded that students suspended and/or

expelled in preschool were more likely to drop out of school and later be incarcerated (Mader, 2019).

Currently, the United States has the largest prison population in the world, of which the southern states rank the highest (Wagner & Sawyer, 2018). Wagner and Sawyer (2018) reported Louisiana as the “world’s prison capital.” The third highest ranking incarcerated state was Mississippi, and the state of Georgia was fourth.

Georgia is a southeastern U.S. state with 827 juvenile detention centers and 34 state Department Correctional communities. Collectively, the prisons house 52,000 felony offenders. In 2020, research indicated 70% of Georgian inmates were illiterate and/or unable to read above a fourth grade reading level. The inmates were presumed at some point to have been a member of an inner-city Georgia district school community (GSC; Stevens, 2020). The Department of Education reported Georgia’s public school system consisted of 1.6 million students, 114,800 teachers, and 2,200 schools as well as a private school system composed of 156,536 students and 907 “top” schools (GaDOE, 2020). Yet, regardless of the district, both school sectors had students that contributed to the Georgia juvenile detention and prison communities, further providing evidence of a continuous dysfunctional cycle (Mader, 2019). The cycle of rising school suspensions/expulsions leading to high incarceration rates is posing a serious state and local community problem. Wagner and Sawyer (2018) further suggested that mounting concerns stem from the state’s perspective that juvenile detention centers and prisons are responsible for responding to the causes that maintain the cycle. Additionally, once student behavior results in incarceration, correctional officers and not teachers should be held accountable for student reading deficiencies and the lack of learned character traits that have been allowed to instigate and preserve a modern cultural community cycle.

Contrary to state beliefs, modern school communities do not rely on correctional officers but on three distinctive stakeholder factions to impact daily academic and student behavior. Those factions are students, teachers, and parents. Each of these groups has significant roles in a school community; however, teachers have the most significant attachments among the three groups (Mader, 2019). Teacher relational attachments in a school community include, but are not limited to, teacher to student relationships, teacher to parent relationships, teacher to faculty/staff relationships, teacher to administration relationships, and teacher to school board member relationships. These overlapping relationship connections influence a school's entire community and substantiate teacher influences and perceptions. Furthermore, due to apparent continual deficiencies in Georgia's schools, growing teacher perceptions reveal concerns for declining student behavior impacting all stakeholder community attachments (GaDOE, 2020).

Concern by Georgia teachers over declining student behavior in school environments across the state was addressed by a character education program (CEP) initiative. In 1995, legislation was passed by the Georgia General Assembly requiring GSCs to implement character education curriculum in each of its school's communities (Saylor, 2021). Saylor (2021) stated the law stipulated character education programs were to focus on students developing character traits that included, but were not limited to, self-respect, respect for others, and respect for their environment. In all, the character education program to be implemented among GSCs required the teaching and learning of 26 character traits. Regrettably, by school year 2000, as Saylor reported, perceptual concerns had developed, and the majority of the public school officials ignored the state mandate. Also, those officials that disregarded the mandate opposed those public school districts and administrators who attempted to comply. Overall, problems ranged from GSC staff and faculty disregarding the state mandate, believing a program would make a

difference, different perspectives for program implementation, needed teacher professional development (PD) training sessions for best character trait practices, and character education program funding (Saylor, 2021).

Boateng et al. (2007) found that while CEPs have been studied and found effective, the program's implementation process and associated factors, mentioned previously, can generate its own set of problems. Although, the successful application of a CEP may disclose student behavior significances, GSC teachers further questioned the effectiveness a character program could have among the three daily stakeholder factions (Saylor, 2021) as limited CEPs exist for schools, and scarce research exists for character improvement for the collective school community.

Lickona (1993) suggested that character growth is essential, not just for the character developing student, but for all persons that share the environment in which character traits are being taught. He believed if all involved persons possessed character traits of respect, it would encourage character traits of caring. Subsequently, respectful caring behaviors could establish more intimate relationships called caring attachments. The development of caring attachments between stakeholder factions in GSCs could strengthen existing areas of positive character behaviors or identify where character improvements are needed across the entire school community. Declining student behavior problems adversely effecting GSCs need to be addressed. Opposing viewpoints regarding character education programs further prevented any actual progression. The failure of the vast majority of Georgia state school communities following the state's character education mandate, grounded in the absence of wholistic community impact, is concerning and significant.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify and examine teachers' perceptions and observations about student, faculty/staff, and parent behaviors, determining the scope of caring attachments within a GSC. Identifying and examining teacher perceptions have helped the collective Georgia School District Communities by providing methods specifying areas of strength and areas for improvement in character education program principles, community wide. Once areas of strength and/or areas for improvement were measured by character program principles, it was determined that a GSC met the standards to be labeled a Caring School Community (CSC). Additionally, the study examined the quantifiable significance of CEPs in GSCs to those GSCs that were not using an implemented structured CEPs.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The research questions and hypotheses of the study were as follows:

Research Question 1: Is there a difference in teachers' perceptions of student respect in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and those not using a character education program?

H₀: There is no statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about student respect in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

H_A: There is a statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about student respect in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

Research Question 2: Is there a difference in teachers' perceptions of student friendships and belonging in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and those not using a character education program?

H₀₂: There is no statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about student friendships and belonging in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

H_{A2}: There is a statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about student friendships and belonging in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

Research Question 3: Is there a difference in teachers' perceptions of students' shaping of their environment in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and those not using a character education program?

H₀₃: There is no statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about students shaping their environment in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

H_{A3}: There is a statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about students shaping their environment in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

Research Question 4: Is there a difference in teachers' perceptions of support and care by and for faculty/staff in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and those not using a character education program?

H₀₄: There is no statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about support and care by and for faculty in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

H_{A4}: There is a statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about support and care by and for faculty in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

Research Question 5: Is there a difference in teachers' perceptions of support by and for parents in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and those not using a character education program?

H₀₅: There is no statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about support by and for parents in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

H_{A5}: There is a statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about support by and for parents in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

Behaviorism is the theoretical educational framework that supported this study. David (2015) described behaviorism as a worldview that functions on a principle of response to a stimulus. Behaviorists believe that all behavior, including behavior influencing character and character behavior, can be explained without considering the abstract internal state of mind, instead by the external stimuli. Knight (2006) asserts that there are three ideological roots of behaviorism: philosophical realism, positivism, and materialism. These three roots build the framework for character development. Once a platform for character development has been

established, emphasizing an individual's nature, knowledge of one's behavior, and consciousness can be shaped. Intentional influences on consciousness, improving upon knowledge for one's conduct is what renders growth in behavior.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined:

1. *Behavior*: The actions or reactions of persons or things in response to external or internal stimuli (Schell, B., & Martin, C., 2006).
2. *Behaviorism*: A school of psychology that studies observable and quantifiable aspects of behavior and excludes the study of subjective phenomena, such as emotions or motives (Houghton Mifflin Co. (1997).
3. *Caring Community*: A school committed to character strives to become caring, civil, and just. A community that helps student members form respectful relationships that lead to caring attachments (Lickona, 1993).
4. *Character*: The aggregate of features and traits that form the individual nature of a person or thing; moral or ethical quality (Webster New World, 2006).
5. *Character Education*: Character education is more than how you act, think, and feel, but also, significantly, about why you do so (Duckworth & Meindl, 2018).
6. *Curriculum*: A course of study in a school (Webster New World, 2006).
7. *Effective*: Success in producing a desired result (Webster New World, 2006).
8. *Instruction*: Teaching education (Webster New World, 2006).
9. *Materialism*: The doctrine that physical matter is the only reality and that everything, including thought, feeling, mind, and will, can be explained in terms of matter and physical phenomena (American College Dictionary, 1997).

10. *Operant conditioning*: A learning process in which the likelihood of a specific behavior increases or decreases in response to reinforcement or punishment that occurs when the behavior is exhibited, so that the subject comes to associate the behavior with the pleasure from the reinforcement or the displeasure from the punishment (American College Dictionary, 1997).
11. *Philosophical realism*: A reaction against the abstractness and other-worldliness of idealism. The universe is composed of matter in motion, so it is the physical world in which people live that makes up reality (Knight, 2006, p. 50-51).
12. *Positivism*: Doctrine contending perceptions are the only admissible basis of human knowledge and precise thought (Nardi, 2013, pg. 240).

Assumptions

It was assumed the participants had a genuine interest in contributing to the research and did not have any alternate motive. It was assumed the participants provided honest perceptions of observed behavior. It was also assumed that the study's survey instrument was accurately completed. A final assumption for this study was that survey averages were correctly analyzed.

Delimitations

1. *School Location*: the investigator only considered participants teaching in Georgia school communities.
2. *School Districts*: there are a range of school districts in Georgia, the investigator only considered two school districts in close proximity to each other; three school communities of one school district had a character education program while three school communities from another school district did not.

3. *Participants*: there were a vast number of stakeholders that create a school community' however, for the intent of this study the investigator only considered elementary teacher participants.

Summary

Young (2014) believed that today's school communities are not considering the necessity of teaching positive character program traits equal to the teaching of academic curricula. Based on this significant disparity, GSC have noticed its statewide society is declining morally, sustaining a dysfunctional cultural cycle. Teacher perceptions have determined declining student behavior may have been influenced by the absence of teaching students programed character traits. Yet, more than learned character traits, detached relationships existed between the everyday stakeholders: students, faculty/staff, and parents. Once potential solutions to mandated CEP initiatives were introduced to GSCs, meant to offset declining student behaviors, teacher perception concerns escalated (Saylor, 2021). Although research has indicated that while CEPs have impacted student behaviors positively, few CEPs support character growth and the formation and sustained respect care attachments for the entire community. The failure to respond adequately to both the declining student behavior in Georgia's state schools and a CEP that considers collective community stakeholder character traits support to the significance of this study.

The purpose of this study was to identify and examine teacher perceptions and observations about student, faculty/staff, and parent behaviors, determining the scope of caring attachments within a GSC community. Identifying and examining teacher perceptions have helped the collective Georgia School District Communities by specifying areas of strength and

improvement in character education program principles. Lastly, the study determined measurable significance of CEPs in GSC to those GSC that were not using CEPs.

To provide focus, the study's delimitations relate to specific teacher classifications, teacher locations, and school community localities. Moreover, Chapter I, provided clarifying study related terms, four assumptions based on participants, the study's survey tool and calculated averages. And although the conceptual theoretical framework further explained conjectural causes to identify and examine modern school communities, the research questions and hypotheses provided support for the study.

Chapter II addresses the relevant literature that established the definitions and qualities of character education, the identification of caring school communities relevant to character education program principles, and teacher perceptions of character education. The review of literature also expounded on related behaviorist and cognitive theorists and their theories.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter II will define character education and identify caring school communities based on character principles, evaluate how culture affects student behavior, address the attitudes that teachers have towards character education programs, and establish a conclusive theoretical framework. Furthermore, theorists and their respective theories that will be discussed in this chapter include B.F. Skinner, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget.

Character Education

McGrath (2018) proposed two objectives for character education: differentiation between personal growth programs and character education programs, causing the reader to conclude his own definition. According to McGrath (2018), seven features define what he calls a Character Education Prototype: (a) it is school-based; (b) it is structured; (c) it addresses specific positive attributes; (d) addresses identity; (e) it addresses moral growth; (f) it addresses holistic growth, and (g) it addresses the development of practical wisdom. Like McGrath, Berkowitz et al. stated that the steps to character education development are to identify a school location, indicate the intentions of specific psychological attributes, and emphasize such features that augment honorable societal performances.

Researchers believe that attributes displayed in society and students' learning environments help formulate a definition for character education (Berkowitz et al., 2012). Character education is described as "the intentional attempt in schools to foster the development of students' psychological characteristics that motivate and enable them to act in ethical, democratic, and socially effective and productive ways" (Berkowitz et al., 2012, p. 78). Yan (2018) acknowledged that Berkowitz et al. (2012) provided a detailed description of character

education; however, he suggested success for student character development rests with classifying character education and not merely defining it. He suggested that the psychological characteristics of Berkowitz et al.'s model can be developed into four subcategories to increase the optimal classification and the education's function. The model (Berkowitz et al., 2012) includes the student's (a) civic, (b) performance, (c) moral, and (d) intellectual character.

Yan (2018) and McGrath (2018) were credited for defining character education along with the morals and student performance characteristics that support it. However, the study of performance characteristics did not originate with either one of them: Lickona and Davidson (2003) had previously determined their importance. Both had conducted extensive research in identifying character improvement traits in education. Their work involved theories, research, and observations inside a span of school communities where their conclusions and findings were documented.

In reflecting on McGrath's theories, Lickona (2018) came to similar conclusions. He accepted that a prototype allows practitioners and researchers to define character education with specific features. These agreed upon features also established a framework. However, Lickona rejected any framework that included a location. He believed that a set location communicated character education as limits. He believed character education is defined by moral and performance outcomes, not where students are physically when they are learning such lessons. Ultimately, his main focus was to refute character education confined to school buildings. He assessed McGrath's framework features and provided an alternate perspective for each one (Lickona, 2018). Lickona was not the only advocate for unstructured character programs but the teaching of character development outside of a school building.

In 2019, Katie Ferrara conducted a study on student behavior and the effectiveness of character education in school buildings. Ferrara accepted a definition of character education from a well-known character program, Character Education Partnership, as seeing the excellence in students as they are doing and being better. However, she believed the definition was too broad. She believed that character education definitions ought to have a process inclusive of distinct ethical traits like respect, not for the excellence and betterment for students, but for the entire school community (Ferrara, 2019). The study concluded character education is effective, decreasing bullying and violence, positively increasing behaviors beyond student stakeholders, reaching other stakeholders throughout the entire school community. Ferrara was not suggesting Lickona did not want schools to engage in character education or have programs, he just believed schools should embrace teachers, other stakeholders, and the community; and do more than focus on the cognitive elements to build character.

Duckworth and Meindl (2018), like Lickona (2018), also provided a differing perspective in response to McGrath's (2018) article. Duckworth and Meindl noted the framework for defining character education must include a student's purpose, and ultimately, "character education is not just about how you act (identity), think (morals), and feel (attributes), but also why you do so (purpose)" (p. 38). Essentially, Schwartz et. al. (2018) defined character education as:

The intentional effort to develop in students, young people, core ethical and performance values that are widely affirmed across all cultures. To be effective, character education must include all stakeholders in a school community and must permeate school climate, culture, teaching, and learning. (p. 1)

Most of the literature supports the why, where, and how of character education. Researchers (Duckworth & Meindl, 2018; Lickona, 2018; McGrath, 2018; Yan, 2018) conducted extensive research on character education. Through their research, character education investigators provided a detailed description of character education. Their descriptions were easily understood, practical, and modern. Additionally, approaches to the question “What is character education?” considered various acceptable and reliable explanations, all based on improving, further developing, or teaching positive behavior. However, a problem or difference that existed amongst the investigators is framework. Implementing a reliable character educational program will need to match a suitable character education framework.

Character Education Programs

White (2016) believed that character education could lead to progressive change in schools, students, and the community. However, as other researchers have mentioned, a specific successful character education program is not detailed; only the frameworks are presented. Starr (2009) noted that there is limited research related to character education implementation in schools because many schools lack the resources to implement the program successfully. She further suggested that such schools seeking character education curricula will utilize already established programs that have been proven successful in school districts.

Your Environment Character Education Program

The Your Environment Character Education Program was developed by a company in the State of Pennsylvania. In an effort to improve academic achievement and student behavior, several schools in the Pittsburgh area adopted the character education program (Starr, 2009). Ackerman (2007) noted the Your Environment Character Education Program has three goals: (a)

improvement in student behavior, (b) improvement in academic achievement, and (c) improvement in the learning environment.

The Your Environment Character Education Program has several components: the classroom, varying attributes, parent partnership, and community resources, with each measurable component. Starr's (2009) research further indicated that five Pittsburgh elementary schools piloted the program and also witnessed the same success as a school district in Dayton, Ohio.

Schools that reported using Your Environment, suggested the program included all of the resources teachers needed to be effective. Program resources included Teacher Guidebooks, actual life incidents to emphasize the different traits, discussion topics, quotes, activities, and accompanying assignments. Teachers were to spend at least fifteen minutes each day having students review the trait word. The specific words selected for students from the program were obedience, willingness, humility, loyalty, responsibility, courtesy, respect, kindness, and patience. The words were rotated on a weekly basis. In addition to the weekly rotated words and school associated activities, the lessons were sent home for parents to reinforce with the student. Starr (2009) reported the program conducted for training for parents to expand upon weekly words from their parent activity book to discuss with their students during the evening hours. Your Environment has also been commended for its widespread community character education efforts. These efforts extended into companies that have media outlets, administrative offices, and banks.

The community efforts in collaboration with home and inside the classroom with teachers are not left to chance. Facilitating the program has measurable evaluations. Prior to implementing the Your Environment Program, a student, teacher, and parent survey is suggested.

The student surveys were created to determine if any character gains are made in students, while surveys submitted by parents track perceptions on the learning environment (Starr, 2009).

The Leader in Me Character Program

In 2011, Katie Pinkelman studied The Leader in Me (LiM). The concept behind The Leader in Me program was derived from Stephen Covey's (1989) book, *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. However, unlike the habits described in the *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, the LiM promotes character development and leadership skills in K-12 students. The seven core habits promoted through the program are as follows (Franklin Covey Education, 2018):

1. Habit 1 Be Proactive: you are in charge of your actions,
2. Habit 2 Begin with the End in Mind: you have to have a plan,
3. Habit 3 Put First Things First: you complete work first, then you can play,
4. Habit 4 Think Win-Win: everyone can be a winner,
5. Habit 5 Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood: you listen before you talk,
6. Habit 6 Synergize: you work together,
7. Habit 7 Sharpen the Saw: you seek to be balance (Wright, 1999).

In the LiM character education program, the framework for the core seven habits is structured from five core paradigms. The framework provides a distinctive approach to changing and sustaining school culture. The paradigms include (a) everyone can be a leader; (b) everyone has genius; (c) change starts with me; (d) educators empower students to lead their learning, and (e) develop the whole person. The LiM character education program is a comprehensive school improvement model that is evidence-based.

McDonnell (1997) implies that character and intelligence are necessary for authentic education. In essence, authentic education must involve effective character education programs in schools because successful results have indicated the program needs (Pinkelman, 2011). Conversely, a drawback that arises after selecting a proven, successful character education program is in ensuring that teachers apply the program with associated resources in their classrooms.

LiM started in classrooms with North Carolina district teachers. The program is now noted for having a global impact. Wright (1999) proposed the character program to transform the whole school by empowering students. He suggested students who aim to be leaders in the school environment create a common culture that is holistic. Still, the literature indicates to a large degree, students are most responsible for program success, and it is unclear specifically the role of parents and how teachers are to implement the program daily.

The 11 Principles of Effective Character Programs

Lickona is an honorable protagonist for character education. In addition to his published works, he has built a sustainable framework for character development, thus creating a character education program. In 1993, Lickona and Catherine Lewis and Eric Schaps founded the company Character.org, which became Character Education Partnership (CEP) in 1995. After establishing the Character Education Partnership (CEP), the researcher conducted a study comparing successful schools. The research findings revealed eleven principles that all successful schools have in common, and from this, they created the 11 Principles of Effective Character education program. The 11 Principles of Effective Character education program is different from other character education programs in that it is reviewed and updated bi-annually by practitioners and researchers. To maintain the best research-based practices for character

development in communities worldwide, the content must stay current (McDonnell, 1997). The 11 Principles of Effective Character education program are meant to be administered in K-12 schools. The eleven principles for an effective character education program include the following (Lickona et al., 1993):

1. Principle 1: Promotes core values,
2. Principle 2: Defines “character” to include thinking, feeling, and doing,
3. Principle 3: Uses a comprehensive approach,
4. Principle 4: Creates a caring community,
5. Principle 5: Provides students with opportunities for moral action,
6. Principle 6: Offers a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum,
7. Principle 7: Fosters students’ self-motivation,
8. Principle 8: Unites staff through collaborative learning,
9. Principle 9: Fosters shared leadership,
10. Principle 10: Engages families and community members as partners,
11. Principle 11: Assesses the culture and climate of the school.

In the guidebook that accompanies the character education program, each of the principles are described. Lickona (2018) believed there are no constraints or script to developing positive character traits in students. The character education program defines each principle with two to four indicators that describe what principles ought to look like, for example, benchmark practices and character evaluator consultations are offered with the program. With CEP researchers' support, the program framework consists of an instrumentation tool to validate measurable progression that is updated often. Schaps believed teachers should have guidance if need be and the growth community wide should be measurable. A community should know

where it is deficient and areas where it has grown. The program includes a scoring guide to measure current classroom or district status and the status of the program administered over time (Lickona et al., 1993). The guidebook and scoring guide help educators to evaluate their current education practices, set short-term and long-term goals, and develop or strengthen an improvement plan for the entire school community. Schwartz et al. (2018) recommended teachers to evaluate to the extent to which their school or district is implementing each principle to increase the success of the character education.

McDonnell (1997) noted that improving character without knowledge is ineffective, but knowledge without character is precarious and a threat to communities. In the late 1990s, Jefferson Junior High School, an inner-city school in Washington, D.C., had severe issues with discipline, student pregnancies, and drugs. Principal Vera White at the time instituted the 11 Principles of Character education program. The research reported that within 5 years, Jefferson Junior High School had almost no student pregnancies, behavioral issues were practically nonexistent, and student academic achievement was the highest in the city, with a waiting list of more than 300 students (McDonnell, 1997).

The School as a Caring Community

McDonnell's (1997) research indicated a positive impact on student academics and student behavior when a character education program was introduced and sustained in a school community. Lenz et al. (2018) believed that social-emotional learning (SEL) plays a significant role in character education, which links to creating a healthy and safe school environment for staff and teachers, defining the school municipal as a caring community. The caring school community is the comprehensive effort of educators transforming schools through a strong vision that centers students and their family needs and strengths (Gil, 2019). Gil (2019) believed

that students, teachers, staff, and families support each other in the caring school community setting through partnership and shared problem solving. The problem discovered was many schools lacked a caring community.

A Caring School District and their Communities

In 2017 Chesterfield County Public Schools communities aimed to address declining student academic performance and increasing student disciplinary incidents. The action plan addressed issues including administering districtwide strategies centered on student wellness (character education), trauma-informed teaching, and SEL (Lenz et al., 2018). Lenz et al. (2018) suggested that creating a caring school community was the first and most crucial step, as the "responsibilities of schools have evolved to include the health and wellness of both students and their families" (p. 11). Chesterfield County Public Schools adopted the Caring School Community program (CSC). The CSC program is an evidence-based nationally recognized program (Lenz et al., 2018). The program specializes in developing SEL skills in students, building classroom capabilities, and building the overall school community (Lenz et al., 2018). Gil (2019) suggested that creating and sustaining a caring school community for all children is an atmosphere worth educating the twenty-first century learner. The CSC program included the following strategies:

1. Class meetings where students discuss common concerns;
2. Implementing activities where younger students are paired with older students to practice SEL skills;
3. Home-based activities with SEL topics;
4. Engaging in activities that promote positive school climate (Lenz et al., 2018).

11 Principles of Effective Character Caring Community

Schools that aim to create caring communities influence student behavioral referrals, classroom environments, recognition of students as individuals, and support of egalitarian practices leading to community success (Range et al., 2013). Research conducted by Lenz et al. (2018) supported Range et al. (2013). The study found that classrooms that worked together with their school community experienced a significant drop in student disciplinary referrals, rendering favorable results (Lenz et al., 2018). Moreover, Lenz et al. supported that the school staff must work collaboratively to create a safe and supportive learning environment and a caring community. Lickona (1993) also supported caring communities for the schools to be successful.

The fourth principle in the 11 Principles of Effective Character education program is “the school creates a caring community”:

A school committed to character strives to become a civil, caring, and just society. It does this by creating a community that helps all its members form respectful relationships that lead to caring attachments. By modeling and scaffolding excellence in academics and behavior, members of this caring community develop responsibility for one another. (Lickona, 1993, p. 16)

Lickona (2018) believed that character education programs in systems are the foundation for creating caring communities around schools. Specific character traits such as respect will govern the caring school community environment, ultimately affecting the daily classroom environment and the overall school setting (Lickona, 1993).

According to the 11 Principles of Effective Character education program, four components measure whether a school has a caring community. The four components also identify where a school excels or needs improvement in sustaining a caring school community.

The four components are as follows: (a) making it a high priority for foster caring attachments between student and staff; (b) making it a high priority for caring attachments between students; (c) making it a high priority for caring attachments between staff, parents, and other stakeholders, and (d) taking measures to prevent cruelty and violence, and when it does occur, help to respond efficiently (Lickona, 1993, p. 17).

The research indicated that efforts to create or sustain caring school communities rely on fostering caring attachments between staff, students, parents, and teachers. While each of these stakeholders significantly impacts implementing a character education program with a principle like the caring community, it is the teacher who possesses the most influence on the strategies and program successes (Range et al. 2013).

Characteristics of the Caring Community

Lickona et al. (2003) suggested that while there is no specific framework for effective character education programs, there are basic principles every school community should plan to incorporate: “The school itself must embody good character. It must progress toward becoming a microcosm of the civil, caring, and just society we seek to create as a nation” (p. 2). However, creating and sustaining a caring nation must first begin with creating and sustaining the nation’s school communities. Lickona and support team believed that any school community could be labelled a caring community with its recommended basic principled attachments, regardless of a structured character education program. Those five basic principled caring attachment characteristics include:

1. Students are respectful and forming caring attachments with other students,
2. Students forming friendship and belonging attachments with other students,
3. Students have positive influences towards shaping their environment,

4. Teachers (faculty/staff) are respectable and forming caring attachments towards all students and other faculty and staff,
5. Teachers have respectable caring attachments with parents (Lickona, 2018).

These five displayed stakeholder attachment characteristics between students, teachers (faculty/staff), and parents are vital as they are the main stakeholders to interact daily. Lickona et al. (2003) suggested the attachments between the three core stakeholders are significant to the moral success of an entire school. It was further suggested that these main attachments be monitored and often assessed to identify a focal point(s) to improve or strengthen the overall attachments between students, teachers, and parents (Lickona, 2018). The frequent assessing of caring attachments are foundational to the success or decline of a school community because it promotes importance and desires to belong to something meaningful (Lickona et al., 1995). A desire to learn and have caring attachments fortifies the need for character education principles imbued throughout a school community.

Teachers and Character Education

Dean et al. (2013) suggested that teachers can use their knowledge and skills in a classroom to help students unpack instructions, objectives, and information. Teachers need only be willing to teach. Davis (2006) conducted in-depth research on how educators feel about teaching and implementing character education programs that are a part of the curricula. However, his research is exclusive to the American public school system; he terms it as "our nation's schools" (p. 5). Davis found that everyone acknowledges that instruction in morals is needed for students. He further asserts that countless teachers want to teach morals.

Additionally, teachers want to teach morals from a biblical perspective, but they are discouraged by the U.S. Supreme Court decisions. *Private School Law in America* (2017)

addresses the U.S. Supreme Court decision of *Engel v. Vitale* (1962). The case ruled state officials composing and reciting a prayer in public schools as unconstitutional. Davis (2006) stated that teachers had associated character education with religious training due to this case, therefore leaving such instruction up to guardians and other religious institutions that shape student lives.

Although there is a separation of church and state in U.S. schools, Davis (2006) suggested that the twentieth-century educator has begun to experiment with various non-religious methods to impact positively student lives. Although teachers cannot teach students to be religious, they can teach them morals, values, and character using other methods (Davis, 2006).

Davis (2006) affirmed that teachers want to instruct positive core virtues in our nation's schools, and there is only one final approach to the solution. The final approach is character education, as it focuses on developing particular qualities in the individual student. His research indicated that educators were not prioritizing the importance of character education programs until recently, but the mindset has changed drastically. The evidence of such change reflects in educators and the American government, proven by former president George W. Bush. During his presidency, Bush requested triple funding, 24 billion dollars, to fund character education programs in state schools across the country (Davis, 2006).

Additionally, character education programs are also sought after among teachers and school districts outside of the United States. In 2016, three Turkish researchers conducted a descriptive analysis study, ultimately publishing the work, "Primary School Teachers' Perceptions About Character Education." Demirel et al. (2016) suggests that globally education is regarded as a tool to instruct students to have respectable character. The declining level of

respect in society today is what motivated their study. Lickona (1993) found that training teachers to teach respect is more complicated than teaching reading or math because teachers are not trained in ethics themselves.

Consequently, teachers know the importance of teaching character attributes but feel uncomfortable teaching them (Demirel et al., 2016). Demirel et al. (2016) used descriptive research to evaluate teachers' comfort zones instructing students in character education. The study group consisted of 80 classroom teachers with between 10 and 20 years of professional teaching experience. The tools to collect the data were a 25-minute, open-ended question survey; they interviewed four teachers. Demirel et al. found that teachers believed that character education was primarily the responsibility of parents. However, as teachers answered questions about students and their homelife related to socioeconomic status, community involvement, marital status of parents, parent involvement, and culture, to name a few; teachers began to change their perspectives impacting their perceptions (Demirel et al., 2016).

Gosset (2006) emphasized the perception that positive and ideal behaviors come from character education. Battistich (2005) focused on how individuals perceive character education as a tool to raise students from childhood to adulthood with positive morals. Demure et al. (2016) conducted research that changed teacher perceptions about teaching character education in their classrooms. While teachers need ethics training, they feel it necessary to have character education as a part of the school curriculum. Kagan (2011) stated that character education ought to be a universal notion accomplished through classroom instruction. Teachers want to have character education programs in their schools; however, teachers need and want instructional training to undertake the successful implementation of character education curriculum (Davis, 2006; Demirel et al., 2016; Kagan, 2011).

Teachers and Character Curriculum

Oliva (2009) provided key principles for teaching character education curriculum. She believed that curriculum principles were guidelines for teachers as they interact with students daily. While PD is needed for teachers to implement curriculum successfully, Oliva advocated that sound judgment can be used (Curren, 2017). More, Kagan (2011) stated that teachers foster good judgment and possess a distinct approach to positive character virtues through curricular methodologies. Character curricula allow teachers to explore relevant issues with students, teach virtues of mutual respect for diverse people, and sharpen the students' critical thinking skills (Curren, 2017).

Teachers and Character Instruction

Teachers need to feel comfortable teaching and implementing character education, curriculum, and instruction (Kagan, 2017). The curriculum is the "what," including the program, plan content, and learning experience. Instruction relates to the "how," entailing the methods, teaching acts, implementation, and presentation (Oliva, 2009). Many teachers lack confidence in the instructional component (Kagan, 2017).

Curren (2017) suggested that research on educators' feelings about teaching character education in their classrooms is vast and redundant. Teachers know the benefit and necessity of teaching morals. They only request character education PD for such a critical need (Davis, 2006). Kagan (2017) concurred that PD for teachers in character curriculum and instruction is needed since the structure is a large part of character education (Kagan, 2017). Although Davis (2017) stated that teachers need PD to implement character education, he was uncertain of how teachers can teach morals while supporting the various student cultural backgrounds. Hunter

(2017) suggested that character education can be problematic when considering embedded family culture.

Culture and Character Education

Lopez and Coronado (2013) are professors who have completed extensive research on character education. While they advocate for character education programs to have a place in every school, they believe that character curriculum-instruction should not encroach on any individual student culture. Lopez and Coronado found that character education and a student's cultural background "cross boundaries in different ways, for different reasons, and on different levels" (p. 28). Christopher et al. (2003) supported the notion of cross boundaries and character education and asked readers to consider various principles related to distinct cultures.

In 2003, Christopher et al. (2003) published, *Culture and Character Education: Problems of Interpretation in a Multicultural Society*. In this article, the authors examined several specific virtues: caring, responsibility, and respect. The selected virtues are three of six character principles highlighted in the character education program, *Character Counts!* (Josephson, 2021). The three virtues accentuate the cultural complexities involved when encouraging character education in a multicultural society (Christopher et al., 2003). The in-depth research defined the virtues and understood the context of southern, eastern, and western culture perspectives. Christopher et al. believe teachers should consider cultural interpretation to character principles as students are asked to participate in character education programs no matter the cultural background.

In addition to the cultural interpretation of character education principles, Kaplan (1995) noted that student diversity impacts virtue cultural relevance. There is a link between cultural virtue relevance and a viable tool to measure cross-cultural character education evidence

(Snyder, 2014). According to Sivo et al. (2017), cross-culture virtue relevance is measured by scaled score tools embedded in character education programs quantifying character development. Sivo et al. concluded that schools that do not categorize students based on culture scored high in character-relevant correlations. Furthermore, Christopher et al. (2003) suggested for teachers not to assume students of different cultures would understand or value character education in the same way that students from other cultures would.

Hằng (2019) accepted the view that diverse cultures understand and value character virtues differently. In the early 21st century, Vietnam underwent a comprehensive, educational transformation in its school system. The transformation placed character education at the foundation of the Vietnamese school system. The study took 2 years, included 321 teachers and 1,633 third and fourth-grade students. Participants were selected at random, with most of them chosen from the final years of primary education, with students proficient in reading and writing (Hằng, 2019). Hằng argued that critical thinking (CT) should be the focus of character education, and in so doing, CT skills would strengthen values among students. Further, Hằng suggested that a newly designed character education program would improve CT among students and transform sociocultural values as a society. The transition to character education at the base of the Vietnam school system enhanced primary student CT skills while effectively impacting moral competencies (Hằng, 2019).

The implementation of character education in Vietnam schools enriched CT skills among primary school students and drastically changed educator and researcher perspectives of Confucian heritage cultures (CHC) in Eastern countries (Hằng, 2019). Vygotsky (1978) suggested that educational philosophy differences exist between CHC Eastern and Western countries. In education, CHC emphasizes stability and harmony in human values; knowledge is

universal and theoretical. Simultaneously, Western academic cultures accept scientific claims that truth is relative, empirical knowledge and theoretical knowledge are changeable (Hàng, 2019).

Cross-cultural virtue relevant investigations are critical when implementing character education programs in the classrooms (Sivo et al., 2017). Cultural virtues have been preserved and passed on within cultures worldwide (Lopez et al., 2013). The inheriting or passing of culture includes values, social beliefs, and morals, which support the need for character education programs globally for diverse students.

Theoretical Basis for Character Development

Hirsch (1988) believed to be culturally literate meant to possess necessary fundamental information. However, as time and trends shifted so did his ideologies. The term “cultural” became complex and confusing, and “cultural literacy” transitioned into “core knowledge” (Hirsch, 1988). For centuries, societies’ knowledge and theoretical worldviews remained constant (Knight, 2006). Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, society-enhanced, scientific knowledge advanced, and humanity rejected universal certainties and absolute reality (Knight, 2006). Gribov (2001) suggested that all education gained through scientific awareness methods such as valid knowledge, contemporary theory, and modern philosophical views support character education in district wide school systems.

Pragmatism Validating Knowledge

Pragmatism is a theoretical thought contributed by American philosophers during the nineteenth century (Knight, 2006). Knight (2006) defined pragmatism as looking at things backward, the last things (e.g., fruits, consequences, facts) first and the first things (e.g., principles, categories, supposed necessities) last. Pamental (2007) contended that pragmatism,

although originating as an American philosophy, has been accepted as a worldview and is relevant to the philosophy of education. The impact of pragmatism in education stems from the rejection of absolute truth and the acceptance of valid knowledge tested by realistic experiences (Knight, 2006).

Gribov (2001) believed pragmatism validates knowledge, specifically in character education. Knight (2006) supported Gribov's ideology and further noted that students, from a pragmatist's worldview, value above all practical experience. Such students are experienced individuals who are adept at using their knowledge to solve problems. Knight (2006) believed pragmatic students are those who "experience school as a part of living rather than school preparing them for life" (p. 71). Sund et al. (2014) considered theorist John Dewey to have the most pragmatic analytical approach to student life experiences, morals, and character education in this modern time.

Pragmatic Theorists

John Dewey

Knight (2006) believed education is most influenced by American philosopher John Dewey's pragmatic thoughts. Dewey was the youngest of the original pragmatists and added a constant philosophical influence on pragmatism when he published *Experience and Nature* in 1925 (Shook & Ghirdelli, 2006). Ultimately, Dewey's work supported moral character growth in humanity, and he believed growth is linked to knowledge and education. Dewey promoted that student learning was acquired through scientific-like methods, and school programs should be filled by the intellectual and moral attitudes grounded in the practice of experimental inquiry (Gribov, 2001). Dewey viewed student learning as action and inspired teachers to support

students in developing practical life skills and morals, imperative to student education (Shook & Ghiraldelli, 2006).

William James

James was an American forefather in the philosophical movement of pragmatism in the nineteenth century. Novakowski (2017) believed James to be the “grandfather of American psychology,” urging colleagues to help give education a “second wind” (p. 96). James’s most significant contribution is *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*. Hall (2019) believed James lived up to his potential of teaching students about comparing external behaviors and internal states. According to James, external behaviors are a reflection of students good habits. James suggested that all students ought to develop positive habits as early as possible and that practicing positive habits can help disseminate intrinsic value defining character education as a “structure by means of acquiring habits of conduct and tendencies to behavior” (Novakowski, 2017, p. 101).

Charles Peirce

Peirce was a mathematician, scientist, and American philosopher. While he worked as a scientist and held a chemistry degree, he was also known as “the father of pragmatism.” Peirce acknowledged Dewey’s and James’s contribution and influence on his theories (Atkin, 2015). Consequently, Albert (2018) suggested that Peirce’s work in ethics education and student behavior was critical to the “second wind” education needed at the time (Novakowski, 2017). In 1906, Peirce redefined his normative science of ethics theory to pragmatics, where he believed normative sciences, interrelated to practical sciences, precisely human behavior (Albert, 2018). Fundamentally, Peirce’s aesthetic, educational theories about student behavior aligned with

Dewey and James, supporting constant ethical growth and moral character development (Liszka, 2013).

Cognitive Development in Modern Philosophy of Education

Jean Piaget was a psychologist from Switzerland known for his work in modern philosophy for education. Piaget placed substantial significance in educating students, thus formulating viewpoints on the cognitive development theory. Jardine (2014) conceptualized Piaget's cognitive development theory as human reason because his philosophy denotes the nature of knowledge, how it is acquired, constructed, and used. McLeod (2018) concurred with Jardine and further defined cognitive development as a means to build a mental model of a student's societal presence. Additionally, McLeod believed Piaget rejected the notion of fixed intelligence but regarded cognitive development as a progressive practice caused by biological maturation.

Piaget's four stages of cognitive development are as follows: (1) sensorimotor to age two, (2) preoperational stage to age seven, (3) concrete operational stage to age eleven, and (4) formal operational stage from adolescence to adulthood. The four stages proved Piaget's organization of learned abilities, patterns, sequence, and continuity. Interestingly, the theory in an organization causes Piaget to reject the pragmatic model and growth in practical experience (Jardine, 2014). Nonetheless, Jardine (2014) clearly expressed Piaget's advocacy for character development, stating such capable learning takes place in the third stage, where "nebulous knowledge is not simply of things in the world but of his or her own operations on the world" (Jardine, 2014, p. 58).

Behaviorism in Contemporary Theory of Education

Behaviorism has been an influential force since the twentieth century. Knight (2006) proposed that behaviorism favors cognitive development based on an ideological root and nature laws. The other roots for behaviorism are positivism and materialism. Behaviorism (David, 2015) is a worldview that functions on a principle of response by stimulus. Behaviorists believe that all behavior, including conduct influencing character, can be explained by external stimuli (Knight, 2006).

The most prominent behaviorist has been B. F. Skinner (Knight, 2006). Skinner addressed behavior modification and teaching machines in published works such as *Walden Two* (1948) and *Science and Human Behavior* (1953). Behavior modification and teaching machines are significant because they examine student behavior while learning (Picciano, 2017). Skinner claimed that student behavior growth is necessary for schools and the behavioral engineering process (Knight, 2006). Furthermore, the process of behavioral engineering acknowledges Piaget's cognitive development theory, admitting "the important role and focusing on what happens between the occurrence of environmental stimulus and student response" (Picciano, 2017, p. 167).

Summary

This chapter consists of a review of the literature related to teacher perceptions of character education related to student behavior. Specifically, it details the impact of cultural influences in character education, eventually recognizing that no matter what the student ethnicities, beliefs, traditions, or backgrounds are, character education in the school system yields operative positive character growth influencing the entire school community. The

literature review also provides a foundation for the proposed study, detailed pragmatism, child development, and behaviorism as the basis of the theoretical framework.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study was an evaluation of teacher perceptions and their school community, student, faculty/staff, and parent stakeholders displaying character program principled behaviors. The study analyzed teacher perceptions from GSC that had implemented CEPs and GSC that did not use CEPs to determine the depth of interrelated stakeholder caring attachments. A quantitative method was used to evaluate teacher surveys (Appendix C), providing relevant information regarding significances in mean scores.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to identify and examine teacher perceptions and observations about student, faculty/staff, and parent behaviors, determining the scope of caring attachments within a GSC. Identifying and examining teacher perceptions have helped the collective Georgia School District Communities by providing methods specifying areas of strength and areas for improvement in character education program principles, community wide. Once areas of strength and/or areas for improvement were measured by character program principles, it was determined whether a GSC met the standards to be labeled a Caring School Community (CSC). This chapter describes the research study methodology. It further describes information concerning the setting, participants, instrumentation, data collections, procedures, and data analysis.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The research questions and hypotheses of the study were as follows:

Research Question 1: Is there a difference in teacher perceptions of student respect in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and those not using a character education program?

H₀₁: There is no statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about student respect in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

H_{A1}: There is a statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about student respect in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

Research Question 2: Is there a difference in teacher perceptions of student friendships and belonging in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and those not using a character education program?

H₀₂: There is no statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about student friendships and belonging in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

H_{A2}: There is a statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about student friendships and belonging in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

Research Question 3: Is there a difference in teacher perceptions of students shaping of their environment in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and those not using a character education program?

H₀₃: There is no statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about students shaping their environment in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

H_{A3}: There is a statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about students shaping their environment in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

Research Question 4: Is there a difference in teacher perceptions of support and care by and for faculty/staff in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and those not using a character education program?

H₀₄: There is no statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about support and care by and for faculty in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

H_{A4}: There is a statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about support and care by and for faculty in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

Research Question 5: Is there a difference in teachers' perceptions of support by and for parents in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and those not using a character education program?

H₀₅: There is no statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about support by and for parents in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

H_{A5}: There is a statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about support by and for parents in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

Research Design

A comparative, quantitative methods design was used to identify and examine teacher perceptions and observations about particular stakeholder behaviors demonstrated in GSCs. The study research questions inquired about the relationship between a CEP and five distinct subscale program principles. The independent variable represented any CEP a school community could select to implement. The use of a particular CEP independent variable was not necessary for this study, as the investigator aimed to explore impartial outcomes. The independent variable, however, was compared to subscales from the 11 Principles of Effective Character program. There were five dependent variables investigated. Those five subscale variables were as follows: (a) teacher's perception of the student's perceived display of respect, (b) the teacher's perception of the student's perceived display of friendship and belonging, (c) the teacher's perception of the student's shaping environment, (d) and the teacher's perception of support and care by and for faculty/staff and (e) the perceptions of support and care by and for parents in the school's community. Table 1 shows relationships between the variables, research questions, and survey items.

Table 1*Variables, Research Questions, and Items on a Survey*

Variable Name	Research Question	Item on Survey
Dependent Variable: 1 Display of Respect	Research Question 1: Is there a difference in teacher perceptions of student respect in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and those not using a character education program?	See Questions 1, 4, 7, 9, 12, 15, 17, 20, 23
Dependent Variable: 2 Display of Friendship & Belonging	Research Question 2: Is there a difference in teacher perceptions of student friendships and belonging in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and those not using a character education program?	See Questions 2, 3, 5, 10, 13, 16, 18, 21, 24
Dependent Variable: 3 Display of Student's Shaping Environment	Research Question 3: Is there a difference in teacher perceptions of student's shaping of their environment in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and those not using a character education program?	See Questions 6, 8, 11, 14, 19, 22, 25
Dependent Variable: 4 Display of Support by/ for faculty/staff	Research Question 4: Is there a difference in teacher perceptions of support and care by and for faculty/staff in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and those not using a character education program?	See Questions 26, 29, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40
Dependent Variable: 5 Display of Support by/ for parents	Research Question 5: Is there a difference in teacher perceptions of support by and for parents in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and those not using a character education program?	See Questions 27, 28, 30, 33, 37, 41, 42

In addition to research questions, hypotheses, and the study variables to support the quantitative method as the most fitting design for this study, the investigator used a survey (Appendix C). The survey provided numeric perceptions of student, faculty/staff, and parent behaviors as well as descriptions of trends that resulted between the GSCs using CEPs and GSC that were not using CEPs (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, advantages for using this survey design permitted the investigator to select a specified data collection form and to conduct the study within a designated timeframe.

Setting

The sites of this study were two small private school districts located in Georgia. The first private school district (PSD1) volunteered three school communities that used CEPs. In school year 2020-2021, PSD1 contained four Early Childhood Education Centers (grades 0-PK4), 34 elementary schools (grades K-8), and three high schools (grades 9-12). The PSD1 serviced approximately 2,185 students and employed 216 certified teachers (grades K-12). The second private school district (PSD2) volunteered three school communities that did not use CEPs. In the same school year as PSD1, PSD2 contained six early childhood education centers (grades 0-PK4), 16 elementary schools (grades K-8), and one high school (grades 9-12). Private school district 2 serviced approximately 667 students and employed 92 certified teachers (grades K-12).

Participants and Sampling

Elementary teachers (grades K-8) across six school communities between PSD1 and PSD2 were asked to participate in this study. The investigator used a convenience non-probability sample to provide the ability to generalize to Georgia's teachers' perceptions about stakeholders displayed student, faculty/staff, and parent behaviors (Creswell, 2014). There were 58 teachers from PSD1 to submit surveys and 41 from PSD2 to submit surveys, for a total of 99

teachers to voluntarily participate. All of the surveys were usable. Out of the sample, most teachers (81%) were females and (19%) males. Participant ages ranged from 22 to 60 years and older, of which 27% were between 22 to 39 years, 55% between 40 to 59 years, and 17% were 60 years and older. Across race categories, most were Caucasian (51%), followed by African American (37%), Hispanic/Latino (7%), Asian (3%), mixed (1%), and “wished not to say” (1%). Also, half of the participants had earned a master’s degrees, followed by 42% with a bachelor’s degrees, 4% had educational specialist degrees, 2% had a Ph.D. or Ed.D., and 1% had earned an associate degree. The largest number of participants had 26 or more years of teaching experience (26%), while the fewest had 6 to 10 years of experience (12%; see Table 2).

Permission and Participant Protection

The participant and protection consent process began with approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at William Carey University (See Appendix A). Once IRB documentation was received, each of the superintendents from different districts were contacted by telephone. At the conclusion of each telephone conversation the investigator provided a follow up email reviewing the telephone conference. The email also included the attached IRB Approval Letter and the VP for Education Permission Letter (See Appendix B for letters to superintendent) consenting to conduct the study at schools in their governing school district.

This study was conducted during a global pandemic. Due to updated 2020-2021 contactless procedures and school closers, both superintendents were adamant the investigator could not contact participating teachers but would select schools on the investigator’s behalf. Consequently, the superintendents contacted and obtained the participating school and teacher participants. All communications about this study were disseminated electronically through their offices or from the VP office with approval.

In an email, each teacher participant received encouraging words, gratitude for participation, a deadline to complete the survey, and the survey link. The platform to submit responses was Google Survey, and each link was coded for identification purposes since all submissions were anonymous. Survey links were coded Teacher Perceptions 1, Teacher Perceptions 2, and Teacher Perceptions 3 marked for the three separate school communities that had implemented CEPs and Teacher Perceptions A, Teacher Perceptions B, and Teacher Perceptions C which were marked for the remaining three private schools in the second district that did not use CEPs.

Data Protection

Since the investigator created electronic survey links programmed anonymously, personal or school related information about districts, schools, and teachers could not be collected for any participant. Moreover, submitted survey responses were confidential and restricted to the investigator and William Carey University committee members, as requested. In further complying with the committee and IRB approval (Appendix A) all data were protected. The data collected from the survey were stored in a password-protected Excel database. The data were stored for 5 years and marked through Google program settings to automatically and permanently delete from electronic programs after that time.

Instrumentation

The study used one instrument to collect the research data. Lickona and Davidson developed the School As A Caring Community Profile - II (SCCP-II) questionnaire survey in 2003 (See Appendix C). This survey measures program principals from the 11 Principles of the Effective CEP. The entire CEP was not examined, only its fourth principle, “Creating Caring Communities” (Lickona, 1993). The survey was validated by more than 65 evaluators, 15 state

coordinators, an advisory council, a board of directors, and a staff team. In 2017, the company resources, including the survey, were revised. The Educational Advisory Council conducted the revisions (Lickona, 1993; Schwartz et al., 2018). Additionally, permission is given to duplicate without the consent of the authors (See Appendix C).

The revised survey instrument measured student, staff, and parent perceptions. For this study purposes, the survey only considered teacher stakeholder perceptions in order to respond to modern needs that have happened in state schools in Georgia. As well, the instrument used measured observations to examine identified areas of strength and areas for improvement in character education program principles, community wide. Still, empirical behavioral observations, using by this study instrument, lead to interpreting the extent to which a school community could be identified as a caring community (Creswell, 2014). The questionnaire further inferenced comparisons between school communities that were defined as have caring attachments to the GSCs that used CEPs and also to the GSC that did not have a CEP. The survey used a total of 42 questions that used a 5-point Likert Scale. The rating descriptions were marked 1 = *almost never*, 2 = *sometimes*, 3 = *as often as not*, 4 = *frequently*, and 5 = *almost always* (See Appendix C). For validity and reliability, the teachers were asked to complete all of the questions: "the reliability and validation analysis alphas in U.S. samples, for this survey, range from .73 to .88 for teachers that complete all forty-two questions, providing for a stronger validity and reliabilities" (Lickona, 2003, p. 1).

Data Collection

The investigator called several public and private school districts in central Georgia. A virus outbreak, COVID-19, delayed the study as schools were closed for quarantine purposes. The first school districts to respond for participation were among the private school districts.

Once IRB approval was granted, the investigator was given permission to communicate directly with each district superintendents. The superintendents selected the schools based on distance from the investigator and willingness to participate. All communication related to the study was communicated through the district offices to the teacher participants electronically.

The SCCP-II survey instrument, permission letters, and the IRB approval letter were sent electronically to the district office for review. The superintendents reviewed all the documentation and allowed the study to move forward. The initial and following correspondence was necessary for contactless interactions to limit the spread of the global pandemic. The electronic attachment package provided for teacher distribution contained a clickable Google form, online survey link for teachers to access: (a) instructions for the research study; (b) the demographic survey information to complete; (c) the electronic SCCP-II survey questions with clickable responses, and (d) a thank you note for participating. The instructions indicated a designated 2-week time frame to access and submit responses with the option to close out of the survey at any point. The district offices sent two additional email reminders within the two-week timeframe to collect the survey replies.

Data Analysis

Data analysis and scores resulting from past use of the SCCP-II survey instrument validated reliability (see Appendix D; see Creswell, 2014). The reliability of the instrument was examined by running Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha provides a measure of how well items in a subscale are measuring the same thing. When evaluating Cronbach's alpha, a score of .7 is an indication of good reliability, however, scores of .6 are also acceptable (see Table 3). High internal consistency was found for subscales: Student Respect (Cronbach's alpha = .773), Student Friendships and Belonging (Cronbach's alpha = .879), and Student's Shaping of Their

Environment (Cronbach's alpha = .844). Internal consistency was somewhat lower for Support and Care by and for Faculty/Staff (Cronbach's alpha = .664) and Support and Care by and for Parents (Cronbach's alpha = .661). Cronbach alphas for Support and Care by and for Faculty/Staff and Care by and for Parents did not reach .700.

So as to solve Research Questions One, Two, Three, Four, and Five and to test the study hypotheses the data were imputed using the IBM-SPSS Statistics, Version 26. Descriptive and group statistical analyses were run to describe the characteristics of the samples as well as to examine and discuss the average participant responses on the individual subscales. Finally, the *t*-test was used as a statistical approach to examine group differences of beliefs of their schools as caring communities between teachers using CEPs and those not using CEPs. Independent sample *t*-tests were conducted using the participants responses for each of the five subscales and statistically significant differences were tested.

Procedures

In the Fall of 2020, the investigator was granted approval by IRB (see Appendix A) at William Carey University to conduct a study identifying and examining the relationship between teacher perceptions and CEPs the State of Georgia. The original intent of the investigator was to contact and visit all participating school communities to have all the teachers take the survey simultaneously during a selected staff or PLC meeting. However, 2020-2021 district social distancing measures, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, did not allow for it. Instead, all communication was directed through the private school district superintendent's office. In October 2020, participants received an electronic Google survey link with instructions, providing them the opportunity to access the link when available during the designated two-week timeframe starting in October and ending in November.

In the electronic package of materials, teachers were asked to read and review the provided literature related to “School as a Caring Community” based on the 11 Principles of Effective Character before completing the survey. Throughout the two-week timeframe participants received two reminder emails to complete and submit the survey by the designated date. The investigator received all anonymous SCCP-II survey responses directly to the electronic database. Survey submittals were received by marked identifying codes. The responses that were received from one of the school communities that had implemented CEPs were marked Teacher Perceptions 1, Teacher Perceptions 2, and Teacher Perceptions 3; and Teacher Perceptions A, Teacher Perceptions B, and Teacher Perceptions C were responses from one of the three private schools in the second district that did not use CEPs. When all the necessary data were collected it was scored with SPSS for statistical analysis (see results reported in Chapter IV). The Google survey database permanently deleted the data in fall of 2025.

Summary

In Chapter III, a comparative quantitative design method was used to guide the research questions and assess the study hypotheses. The quantitative model proved best, examining measurable relationships between the studies independent and dependent variables (Creswell, 2014). The study was conducted in two small private school districts coded PSD1 and PSD2 for distinction purposes. PSD1 volunteered three school communities in the district that used CEPs and PSD2 volunteered three school communities that did not use CEPs. A total of 99 teachers participated. Sampled participants were represented from both genders, ages 22 to 60 and older, various ethnical backgrounds, little to no experience to tenured, and degreed. Once IRB documents were approved and superintendent permission letters were received, the SCCP-II

survey was distributed. An electronic survey link and password protect database were used to collect and store the data. A statistical approach, by way of, independent sample t-tests were conducted using the participant responses for each of the five subscales. The study *t*-test results and statistically significant differences are examined in Chapter Four and further discussed in Chapter V.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The current study was aimed to examine elementary teacher perceptions of their schools as caring communities as described by 11 Principles of Effective Character Education Program (Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis, 2007). Furthermore, teacher perceptions of their schools as caring communities were measured with regard to the frequency at which they observed behaviors. Specifically, observed behaviors of students, faculty/staff, and parents across subscale categories related to student respect, student friendships and belonging, student's shaping of their environment, and the support and care by and for faculty/staff as well as by and for parents. Finally, the differences in teacher's perceptions were analyzed for each subcategory among teachers that used character education programs and those that did not use character education programs.

School communities that used a CEP and those that do not use a CEP are located in private school districts in the State of Georgia. Each school community was sent a survey that was distributed electronically. A total of 99 surveys were returned, resulting in a response rate of 48.7%. All of the surveys returned were usable. Every question was marked as required. Participants had the option to withdraw from the study at any time by simply exiting the survey. Once a participant submitted the survey, it could not be retracted.

Participants Demographic Information

The sample size consisted of $N = 99$ elementary teachers across six school communities within two private school districts. Out of the sample, most teachers (81%) were females and (19%) males. Participant ages ranged from 22 to 60 years and older, of which 27% were between 22 to 39 years, 55% between 40 to 59 years, and 17% were 60 years and older. Across race

categories, most were Caucasian (51%), followed by African American (37%), Hispanic/Latino (7%), Asian (3%), mixed (1%), and “wished not to say” (1%). Furthermore, half of the participants had earned a master’s degrees, followed by 42% with bachelor’s degrees, 4% had educational specialist degrees, 2% had a Ph.D. or Ed.D., and 1% had earned an associate degree. The largest number of participants had 26 or more years of teaching experience (26%), while the fewest had 6 to 10 years of experience (12%). Finally, 59% of teachers used a character education program, while 41% did not use a character education program. Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 2*Demographic of Participants*

Characteristics	<i>N</i>	%
Education program		
Character education	58	58.6
No character education	41	41.4
Gender		
Female	80	80.8
Male	19	19.2
Race		
Asian	3	3.0
Black or African-American	37	37.4
Caucasian	50	50.5
Hispanic or Latino	7	7.1
Mixed	1	1.0
Wish not to say	1	1.0
Age range (years)		
22-29	11	11.1
30-39	16	16.2
40-49	30	30.3
50-59	25	25.3
60 & Over	17	17.2
Highest degree earned		
Associate degree	1	1.0
Bachelor	42	42.4
Educational specialist	4	4.0
Masters	50	50.5
Ph.D. or Ed.D.	2	2.0
Teaching experience (years)		
0 – 5	14	14.2
6 – 10	12	12.1
11 – 15	16	16.2
16 – 20	14	14.1
21 – 25	17	17.2
26 or more	26	26.3

Note. *N* = 99

Analysis of Data

Cronbach's alpha was computed to assess the internal consistency of subscales that measured teacher perceptions of student characteristics. The analysis indicated reliability levels that ranged from .661 to .876 (see Table 3). Acceptable to very high internal consistency was found for subscales: Student Respect (Cronbach's alpha = .773), Student Friendships and Belonging (Cronbach's alpha = .876), and Student's Shaping of their Environment (Cronbach's alpha = .844). Internal consistency was somewhat lower for Support and Care by and for Faculty/Staff (Cronbach's alpha = .664) and Support and Care by and for Parents (Cronbach's alpha = .661). Although Support and Care by and for Faculty/Staff and Care by and for Parents did not reach the Cronbach alpha of .700, the decision was made to proceed with the analysis.

Table 3*Cronbach's alpha values for Subscales*

Subscales	Cronbach's alpha
Student respect	.773
Student friendships and belonging	.876
Student's shaping of their environment	.884
Support and care by and for faculty/staff	.664
Support and care by and for parents	.661

In this study separate independent sample *t*-tests were conducted to examine group differences in subscales of teacher perceptions of their school as a caring community based on the frequency of student, faculty/staff, and parent frequency of observed behaviors. Prior to analysis, the investigator examined the assumption of equal variance (Field, 2013). A Levene's test, which tests the assumption of equal variances between groups, indicated that the assumption was met for three of the subscales. However, the assumption was not met for the scales: Student Friendships and Belonging, $p = .003$ and Student's Shaping of their Environment, $p = .017$. Table 4 presents the means, standard deviations, and *t*-test results for the five subscales.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked: Is there a difference in teacher perceptions of student respect in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and those not using a character education program?

H_{A1}. There is a statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about student respect in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

H₀₁. There is no statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about student respect in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

Dependent Variable: Perceptions of Student Respect

Independent Variable: A character education program

There was not a statistically significant difference between teacher perceptions of student respect, $t(97) = 1.60$, $p = .112$, in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program; therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. The scores were averaged, and student behaviors related to respect in a caring school community were frequently observed among teachers who used a CEP ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 0.44$) and among those who did not use a CEP ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 0.60$).

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked: Is there a difference in teacher perceptions of student friendships and belonging in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and those not using a character education program?

H_{A2}. There is a statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about student friendships and belonging in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

H₀₂. There is no statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about student friendships and belonging in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

Dependent Variable: Perceptions of Student Friendship and Belonging

Independent Variable: A character education program

There was not a statistically significant difference between teacher perceptions of student friendships and belonging, $t(60.75) = 1.16, p = 0.249$. Therefore, the null hypothesis, that there is no statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about student friendships and belonging in a caring school community between teachers using a CEP and teachers not using a CEP, was not rejected. The scores were averaged, and behaviors of student friendships and belonging in a caring school community were frequently observed among teachers who used a CEP ($M = 4.29, SD = 0.47$) and those who did not use a CEP ($M = 4.14, SD = 0.77$).

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asks: Is there a difference in teacher perceptions of students shaping their environment in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and those not using a character education program?

H_{A3} . There is a statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about students shaping their environment in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

H_{03} . There is no statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about students shaping their environment in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

Dependent Variable: Perceptions of Students Shaping Their Environment

Independent Variable: A character education program

There was not a statistically significant difference between teacher perceptions of students shaping their environment, $t(64.97) = 1.44, p = 0.154$. Therefore, the null hypothesis, that there is no statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about students shaping their environment in a caring school community between teachers using a CEP and teachers not

using a CEP, was not rejected. The scores were averaged and, behaviors of students shaping their environment in a caring school community were observed frequently among teachers who used a CEP ($M = 3.93, SD = 0.59$) and those who did not use a CEP ($M = 3.70, SD = 0.87$).

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked: Is there a difference in teachers' perceptions of support and care by and for faculty/staff in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and those not using a character education program?

H_{A4}. There is a statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about support and care by and for faculty in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

H₀₄. There is no statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about support and care by and for faculty in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

Dependent Variable: Perceptions of Support and Care By and For Faculty

Independent Variable: A character education program

There was not a statistically significant difference between teacher perceptions of support and care by and for faculty/staff, $t(97) = 0.06, p = 0.956$. Therefore, the null hypothesis, that there is no statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about support and care by and for faculty/staff in a caring school community between teachers using a CEP and teachers not using a CEP, was not rejected. The scores were averaged and, behaviors of support and care by and for faculty/staff in a caring school community were observed almost always among teachers who used a CEP ($M = 4.65, SD = 0.31$) and those who did not use a CEP ($M = 4.64, SD = 0.33$).

Research Question 5

Research Question 5 asked: Is there a difference in teacher perceptions of support by and for parents in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and those not using a character education program?

H_{A5}. There is a statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about support by and for parents in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

H₀₅. There is no statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about support by and for parents in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program.

Dependent Variable: Perceptions of Support and Care by and for Parents

Independent Variable: A character education program

There was not a statistically significant difference between teacher perceptions of support by and for parents, $t(97) = 1.58, p = 0.117$. Therefore, the null hypothesis, that there is no statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about support by and for parents in a caring school community between teachers using a CEP and teachers not using a CEP, was not rejected. The scores were averaged and, behaviors of support by and for parents in a caring school community were observed frequently among teachers who used a CEP ($M = 4.48, SD = 0.44$) and those who did not use a CEP ($M = 4.33, SD = 0.47$).

Figure 1 illustrates the mean scores of teacher perceptions of observed behaviors (subscales) of a caring school community by character education and non-character education groups.

Figure 1

Teachers' Perceptions of Observed Behaviors

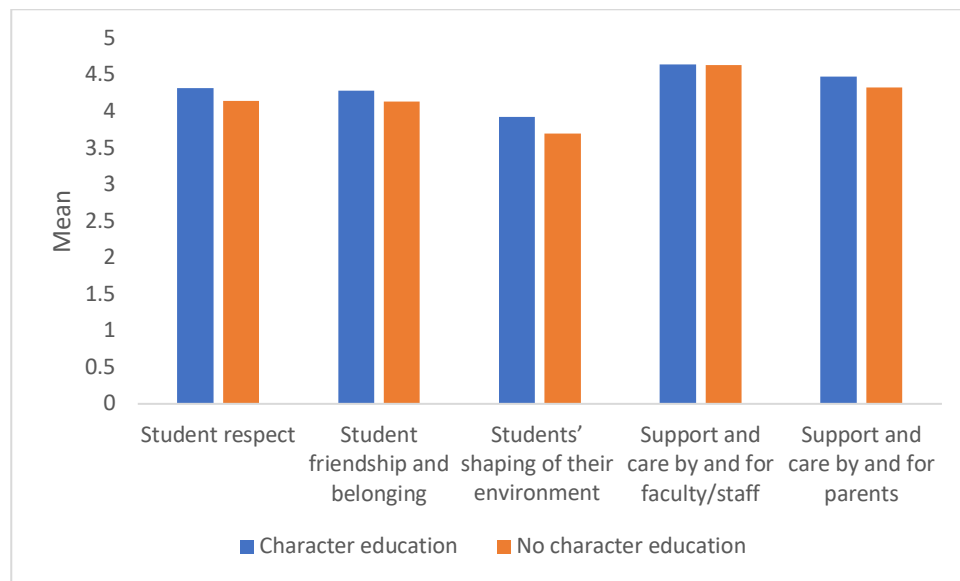


Figure 1. *Group means of teachers' perceptions of observed behaviors of a caring school community.*

Table 4*Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-test Result for Subscales*

Measure	Character education		No character education		<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Student respect	4.32	0.44	4.15	0.60	.112
Student friendship and belonging	4.29	0.47	4.14	0.77	.249
Students' shaping of their environment	3.93	0.59	3.70	0.87	.154
Support and care by and for faculty/staff	4.65	0.31	4.64	0.33	.956
Support and care by and for parents	4.48	0.44	4.33	0.47	.117

Note. Character education ($n = 58$) and No character education ($n = 41$). School as a caring community based on how frequently participants observe the following behaviors measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*Almost never*) to 5 (*Almost Always*).

Summary of Results

The quantitative findings of teacher perceptions of the school as a caring school community showed no significant differences in the school community between schools implementing a character education program and those that do not. These results, revealed support and care by and for faculty/staff and parents, affect student friendships, belonging, and the environment. Although no significant differences between groups were found, teachers who used a CEP generally reported slightly higher means for all subscales than those who did not use a CEP. Furthermore, on average, teacher perceptions were that they almost always observed support and care behaviors by and for faculty/staff in a caring school community. In addition, their perceptions for all the other subscales were that they frequently observed behaviors that aligned with their school as a caring community.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

The current study used quantitative analysis to examine differences in elementary school teacher perceptions of their school as a caring community. Specifically, these differences were examined between teachers using a character education program ($N = 58$) and teachers not using a character education program (CEP; $N = 41$). The predictor variable was the use of a CEP, while the independent variable was teacher perceptions of school as a caring community, measured by five observed behavior indicators (subscales): (a) student respect, (b) student friendship and belonging, (c) students shaping their environment, (d) support and care by/for faculty/staff, (e) support and care by/for parents. Participants responded to 42 items on the School as a Caring Community Profile-II (SCCP-II; Lickona, 2003) survey consisting of five subscales. Using five separate *t*-tests to examine differences across each of the five indicators, overall, the results suggested no statistically significant differences between the groups (using CEP vs. not using CEP) in their perceptions of observed behaviors that characterize their schools as a caring school community. These included observed behaviors of student respect, student friendships and belonging, students shaping of their environment, care by and for faculty/staff, and care by and for parents. Although the current study found no statistically significant differences, descriptive results provided a basis for further interpretation of the results. On average, across all five indicators, teachers using a CEP and those not using a CEP reported that they frequently to almost always observed positive behaviors among students, staff/faculty, and parents that were indicative of their schools as caring communities. As it relates to their observations of student behaviors, overall, teachers using CEP reported more frequent observations of student behaviors of a caring community. Similarly, as it relates to faculty, staff,

and parents, on average, teachers using CEP reported observing more behaviors of a caring community by and for faculty/staff and by and for parents. Additionally, across all five indicators and across CEP and no CEP groups, support and care by and for faculty/staff, and support and care by and for parents, had the highest overall ratings for a caring community.

Discussion of Findings

In this study the investigator examined elementary school teacher perceptions and their schools as caring communities regarding character education program principles. Concerns of moral decline in society and disparities among the schools of the nation have revealed a rise in disciplinary actions and rates of low academic achievement (Lenz et al., 2018). This onset has led to increased attention on the potential effectiveness of character education programs (CEP) to address these issues. Yet, research suggests that there are few schools with established and implemented character education programs (Character Education Partnership, 2022). Lickona (2018) believed that character education programs focus on the development of a student moral and environmental interactions which can affect performance outcomes. With an ongoing debate on what characterizes an effective character education program, Lickona et al. (2003) used research-based practices to define 11 principles of an effective character education program. Among these principles is Principle Four - *Schools as Caring Communities* - emphasizing the importance of schools reflecting the characteristics of a “civil, caring, and just society” (Lickona, 2018, p. 16) that is desired for the nation. Given this, the extent that schools were perceived as caring communities was of interest as it represents institutions’ comprehensive efforts to transform schools by way of a centralized focus on stakeholders’ (i.e., student, family, community) needs and through leveraging their strengths and shared support (Gil, 2019). Additionally, it provides a measure of the quality of social interactions and relationships among

the members of the school community. These efforts under lay the foundation for enhancing the effectiveness of CEPs (Lickona et al., 2007).

The shortage of caring school communities raises a need to explore evidence to substantiate efforts towards increasing the establishment of these types of schools that seek to protect the health and wellness of students and their families (Lenz et al., 2018). Given this, differences among elementary school teacher perceptions of their schools as caring communities were examined between schools with a character education program and those without a character education program. The study examined indicators (subscale categories) of schools as caring communities based on teacher observations of the following: (a) behaviors related to student respect, (b) student friendships and belonging, (c) students shaping of their environment, (d) support and care by and for faculty/staff, and (e) support and care by and for parents. The observation of behaviors aligned with behaviorist theoretical ideologies that focus on individual observable responses to environmental stimuli (Knight, 2006). The framework discusses behavioral modification through modeling. Essentially, student learning occurs based on teacher modeled behaviors. More than modeling behaviors, the modeling of intentional positive character behaviors can constructively influence other school community stakeholders who are observing. Thereby, observations of individual actions reflect their favorable or unfavorable responses to their environmental conditions (i.e., school environment). This chapter presents a summary of findings and a discussion of findings as it relates to the literature on character development, caring school communities, and character education programs. Also included is a discussion of implications for policy and practice. The chapter concludes with a presentation of the limitations, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

Student Respect

Behaviors that indicate student respect include the way in which students treat their peers, teachers, and staff with kindness and consideration, and show respect for other's personal property, school property, and are positive encouragers. When examining teacher perceptions of student respect in a caring school community, there was no significant difference found between those using a character education program and those not using a character education program. This result does not support the research alternative hypothesis that there is a statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about student respect in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program. This finding suggests that regardless of whether a school uses a character education program, it does not have an influence on the measure of respect that is observed among students. Specifically, in this case, teachers in schools that used character education programs and those that did not, equally had positive perceptions of observing students behaving respectfully. This finding could be supported by the idea that factors influence and shape behaviors of student respect beyond the boundaries of the school environment, such as within the community. Lickona (2018) rejected any character education model that confined the growth of student morals (i.e., student respect, the treatment of friends, etc.) to a school curriculum and district classroom teachers. He believed, as Duckworth and Meindl (2018), that students not only displayed positive ethical attributes towards others, but character growth occurred in other environments like home, church, and youth community centers. Therefore, the onset of this external factor could have presented an inaccuracy in observing true differences in perceptions of a caring school community based on teacher use or non-use of a CEP.

An additional possible explanation for the non-significant result in the finding is the development of intrinsic cultural virtues preserved and passed down systemically (Lopez et al., 2013) in private sectors. Lopez et al., (2013) argues that positive character development behavioral growth is necessary no matter the culture of students if it is continual. Systemic cultural virtues are taught consistently in private school districts. Shakeel and DeAngelis (2018) conducted a study based on a cross-sectional contrast asking revealing questions between public and private school cultures. The study found that private schools may have a systematic advantage over public schools as private schools have less restrictions related to school culture, making students more respectable. Additionally, the study revealed evidence that the modern religious schools have a higher likelihood of respecting property and schoolmate related incidents in their varying school communities. However, Shakeel and DeAngelis found no significant results between the private school district communities regardless of a CEP.

Although the difference is not statistically significant, the marginally higher frequency of teacher observations of student respect behaviors among those using a character education program provides some insight considering current findings in the literature. This finding could be supported, based on Caridade et al.'s (2020) views, that learning of ethical attributes that involve student respect and connected attachments in a structural environment should be intentional. The intentionality of CEP school communities indicated slightly higher observed frequencies in students that displayed respectful behaviors: (a) toward their teachers, (b) for other students, (c) with personal property, (d) in extracurricular activities, and (e) when receiving perceived disrespectful comments from any school community student, teacher, or parent stakeholder. Ackerman (2007) noticed the deliberate effects of implementing the Your Environment CEP, which had three distinct conclusions: (a) improved student behavior, (b)

improved academic achievement, and (c) an improved learning environment for the student stakeholder. The seven core LiM CEP provides a distinctive approach to changing and sustaining school culture. The school improvement model is evidence-based, implying a true education formula for positive character behavior (McDonnell, 1997). The 11 Principles of Effective Character CEP was created for K-12 school communities. Its guidebook includes a scoring guide for character behaviors validating measurable progression over time (Lickona et al., 1993). Literature provides evidence that when implemented purposely, the 11 Principles of Character CEP provides significant positive outcomes no matter the growth rate.

Student Friendships and Belonging

Observations of student friendships and belonging relate to behaviors in which students demonstrate inclusion and acceptance, cooperation, care, and attentiveness to the needs of their peers. The analysis of teacher perceptions of student friendships and belonging in a caring school community did not reveal any significant difference between those using a character and non-character education programs. Therefore, the research alternative hypothesis that there is a statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about student friendships and belonging in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program is not supported. However, the marginally higher difference on observed behaviors of student friendships and belonging by CEP school communities compared to those that did not use CEPs is reflective of John Dewey's (Gribov, 2001) moral curriculum instruction impact ideologies. The positive results confirm the importance of students receiving action learning on following school rules, having positive influences on the behavior of other students, resolving conflicts, and being involved in the process of helping the school community solve problems. The non-significant findings, yet

perceived frequent observations of behaviors of student friendships and belongings between teachers using a CEP and those not using a CEP, may be the result of the nature of the private school setting and student characteristics and motivation. According to Shakeel and DeAngelis (2018), students who typically attend private school are characterized as having fewer behavioral incidents, punctual class attendance, constructive contributions towards the safety of the school environment, and higher reading and mathematics standardized assessment scores in comparison to public school. Furthermore, Goodenow and Grady (2010) found a positive association between adolescent student academic motivation and their sense of belonging in their school. These findings could explain why, on average, participants reported that they frequently observed positive behaviors of student friendships and belongings.

Students Shaping of their Environment

Students shaping of their environment relates to student actions toward positively influencing the behaviors of their peers, resolving conflicts with care, and their efforts to improve their schools. An examination of differences in teacher perceptions of students shaping their environment in a caring school community resulted in no statistically significant difference found. This finding reveals that, generally, across schools using and not using a CEP, teachers similarly observed evidence of students exhibiting behaviors that positively influence the actions of their peers. Accordingly, this finding does not support the research alternative hypothesis that there is a statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about student's shaping their environment in a caring school community between teachers using a character education program and teachers not using a character education program. However, the results do fit with the third stage of Jean Piaget's four stages of cognitive development theory. The behaviors observed by teachers in this study were of elementary age students, and stage three of Piaget's

theory is based on the development of children up to age eleven. In stage three, Piaget advocates that during this stage, students are “capable learners where nebulous knowledge is not simply of things in the world but of his or her own operations on the world” (Jardine, 2005, p. 58). This supports observable behaviors of elementary students shaping their environment which are responses to their own subjective impacts related to and compared with their interactions in the school community environment. These observed behaviors align with the characteristic of a caring community in which the school reinforces a safe environment for students by establishing clear expectations for moral behavior and takes action to prevent and mitigate instances of cruelty and violence. As a result, the young student learns and adopts proper behaviors that have been modeled in the environment.

Additionally, although the results were not statistically significant, descriptive findings revealed that teachers in school communities using CEPs reported slightly more frequent observations of students shaping of their environment. According to Berkowitz et al. (2020), school communities that implement a program addressing specific positive attributes, the growth of morals, identity, and the development of practical wisdom, emphasize the implications of future honorable societal outcomes. Given this, the slightly more frequent observation of these behaviors among CEP communities compared to school communities not using CEP can be substantiated upon considering that schools with CEPs are more likely to create an environment which explicitly and formally emphasizes student demonstrations of behaviors that are honorable and positively influence others in the school community (White, 2016).

Support and Care by and for Faculty/Staff

Furthermore, looking at differences in teacher perceptions of observed behaviors related to support and care by and for faculty/staff in a caring school community, no significant

difference was found between those using a character education and those not using character education program. This result does not support the alternative hypothesis that there is statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about support and care by and for faculty in a caring school community between teachers using a CEP and teachers not using a CEP. However, the consistent reporting of observed behaviors that align with schools a caring community across teachers who use a CEP and those who do not, implies that teacher behavior and observed teacher behavior may be comparable in any school community. Davis's (2006) *Our Nation's Schools* theory states that generally, teachers have apt dexterities and aspirations to create environments that will generate efficient outcomes. Such outcomes are inclusive of academics, character development growth, and interpersonal stakeholder relationships.

The influence of societal factors contributing to the non-significant findings of observed behaviors of faculty/staff of their school as a caring community across CEP and non-CEPs could also be understood in light of virtue cultural relevance. This means the significance of particular character principles within a culture. Snyder (2014) suggested that there is a link between virtue cultural relevance and current societal occurrences. Sivo et al. (2017) believed that virtue relevance intentionally happens particularly in the onset of cultural societal events. Within the past 2 years, there has been a substantial increase in economic and social injustices, sports and event related riots, police brutality, and politically motivated civil unrest, all systemic issues influencing a declining moral society (Routley, 2020). Moreover, research examines three specific teacher taught virtues to support positive exhibited student behaviors to contest the collective societal moral decline. Those specific three virtues are care, responsibility, and respect (Christopher et al., 2003). The non-significant finding suggests that regardless of a character education program, a singular moral societal event (i.e., an unprecedented violent mob assault on

the United States Capitol, January 06, 2021), can result in teacher increased awareness of the need to instill attributes, such as respect, among students in order to produce positive character development behavioral growth for the future.

Essentially, these findings support the conclusion that teachers from different school communities can commonly possess singular collective goals (Lickona, 1993). This could also be seen as being reflected in the descriptive findings that reveal that across all other indicators of a caring school community the most frequently observed behaviors were those among faculty and staff towards students, other faculty, and other staff. In other words, this supports the idea that in general, teachers and staff in a caring community demonstrate a high level of care, consideration, respect, and empathy in their interactions with other school community stakeholders (Schwartz et. al., 2018).

Support and Care by and for Parents

Overall, teachers reported frequency of observed behaviors as almost always indicating favorable perceptions of a caring community throughout. However, the results revealed no significant difference in teacher perceptions of support and care by and for parents in a caring school community between those using CEP and those not using a CEP. This finding does not support the research alternative hypothesis that there is a statistically significant difference in teacher perceptions about support by and for parents in a caring school community between teachers using a CEP and teachers not using a CEP. Nevertheless, these findings indicate that constructive adult interactions do not solely occur among colleagues, but also with the parents. Furthermore, according to SCCP-II (2013) one of the indicators of a caring school community is that the school makes it a high priority to foster caring attachments among adults within the school community. A school, prioritized in developing caring attachments among parents,

models respect and the qualities it wants to be embodied. In turn, this reinforces positive behaviors among parents who eventually influence the behaviors of the young learners.

Implications for Practice

Practical implications of this study exist. Today, student disciplinary incidents are still on the rise (Lenz et al., 2018), and research is indicating that school communities may be adversely ill-equipped to combat the increasing statistics. Davis (2006) implies that teachers do possess a collective goal to adopt the instruction of positive core virtues across the United States, but two major factors may challenge the success of implementation. Those two factors could be (a) funding of character education programs for each of the nation's communities and (b) sufficient professional development teacher trainings (Davis, 2006; Demirel et al., 2016; Oliva, 2009).

Lickona (1993) found that all school districts should strive to become caring communities. Communities that attain the caring community rating are pivotal to the larger moral society in which worldwide school systems contribute (Schwartz, et. al, 2018). This notion was supported in the current study that found that regardless of using a CEP, teachers perceived their schools as caring communities, reporting that they either frequently or almost always observed behaviors that aligned with those of a caring community. At the same time, the slightly higher observations of behaviors that align with schools as caring communities among CEP school communities provide some indication of the potential effectiveness of implementing CEPs in school communities. Ackerman (2007) noticed that a school community that used a CEP generally displayed three distinct results: (a) improvement in student behavior, (b) improvement in academic achievement, and (c) improvement in the learning environment. However, the reality is that the practicality of establishing a CEP is a challenge given that on average, nationally, schools are underfunded. A 2018 press release with a headline "Education

Underfunding Tops \$19 Billion” reported that elementary and high schools are considerably underfinanced. Yet, more than underfunded, schools in every single state in the United States are facing this economic issue (Crook, 2018). Therefore, issues of funding need to be addressed through educational policymaking that creates opportunities for access to necessary resources to support the implementation of activities that align with effective character education and foster a culture of a caring school community among stakeholders.

While the daily responsibilities of today’s teachers consist of student instruction, lesson planning, and grading, a K-12 teacher licensure is also contingent on yearly continuing education units and professional development sessions. The literature suggests that teachers agree that character education is important, and they want to teach morals and character development in their classrooms, notwithstanding of having access to a structured character education program (Kagan, 2017). Yet, the practical implication of providing effective student instruction is sourced in teacher professional development meetings or teacher training sessions. The study’s current findings imply that caring school communities can be developed regardless of the presence of a CEP. This notion is further revealed in the literature that supports that moral and character education trainings are needed for teachers whether they are instructing from a structured character education curriculum or not (Oliva, 2009). Given this, there should be a committed effort and plan established among institutional leaders and policy makers to develop opportunities for teachers in all schools (with CEP or no CEP) to benefit from training that supports character education ideals. This will in turn contribute to the development and sustainability of caring school communities.

Limitations

Due to situational factors (because of the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on school operations), the sampling of units was limited to elementary schools in private districts within the southeast Georgia region. Therefore, findings cannot be generalized beyond the current sample. However, relevant conclusions and insight for future research can be drawn from the findings that address the research purpose, which was to examine differences in perceptions about schools as caring communities among schools using CEP and those not using CEP. Furthermore, the data collection process was restricted to survey administration through phone calls and electronic communication, thereby, imposing on the potential response rate, which could have resulted in a larger sample. A larger sample size, therefore, could have provided greater power to detect significant differences.

The current investigation and interpretation of findings were guided by behaviorist theoretical viewpoints, which emphasize observable response or behaviors due to stimuli and the objective study of these observations (Knight, 2006). McGrath (2018) argued that the effectiveness of character education should not only be defined by an observation of student actions, beliefs, and emotions, but should also include an understanding of student reasoning of the behaviors that are observed. Additionally, in the current study, observations of character education were limited to teacher self-reports and their perceptions of student overt behaviors (i.e., respect, friendships, shaping of environment), thereby, presenting possible bias in responses. The inclusion of student reports of why (purpose) they perform the behaviors observed, could further strengthen or support for the findings obtained.

Conclusions

The current study used a quantitative approach to examine whether CEPs are making the practical difference that is suggested in the literature. The study, aimed to describe the relationship between the implementation of a classroom character education curriculum and the overarching school environment in which it dwells, is meeting the intended outcome of being labeled a caring school community. A caring school community was measured using five indicators: student respect, student friendships and belonging, students shaping of their environment, care by and for faculty/staff, and care by and for parents. In this study teachers observed behaviors of a caring school community between student and student, student and teacher, teachers and their colleagues and staff, and teachers with parent stakeholders. The findings, which revealed high frequencies of observing these behaviors, suggest the school communities sampled from the private school districts met the conditions of caring attachments – as outlined in Principle Four (A Caring Community) of the 11 Principles of Effective Character Education Program (Lickona, et. al., 2007). According to Principle Four, a caring community school has the following characteristics:

- (4.1) The school makes it a high priority to foster caring attachments between students and staff.
- (4.2) The school makes it a high priority to help students form caring attachments to each other.
- (4.3) The school makes it a high priority to foster caring attachments among adults within the school community.
- (4.4) The school takes steps to prevent peer cruelty and violence and deals with it effectively when it occurs. (Lickona, 2018, p. 16)

According to Watz (2011) character education programs are the most significant influence for school communities. Watz suggested that CEPs provide a quality and reform to the school community that enhances the physical and mental development for student stakeholders today. Although these attributes of a caring school community were observed by teachers across the schools, no significant differences were found when examining perceptions of a caring community between teachers using a CEP and those not using a CEP. However, the study's findings align with existing character education literature that emphasizes the possibility of moral growth regardless of a structured character education program in the school (Duckworth & Meindl, 2018; Lickona, 2018). Additionally, findings suggested that the school communities that used a CEP commonly reported marginally higher means for all subscales than those who did not use a CEP. It is believed that a structured character development program is essential in today's modern society. Character education programs can have a positive impact on student behavior and the overall culture of a school community. The literature suggests that CEPs were designed to teach students to consider their own actions and the impact their actions can make to the environment in which they influence.

Furthermore, findings in the current study supported the notion that all teachers are believed to have the ability and knowledge to help students retain varying life skills (Dean et al., 2013). Davis (2006) indicated that teachers want to instruct students to learn and preserve qualities such as care, integrity, tact, and respect. In today's worldwide educational systems, teachers globally are providing character education instruction without a structured program. There is a collective agreement that students should be taught to have respectable character regardless of access or availability of funding for a school-wide implemented character education program (Davis, 2006; Demirel et al., 2016). In essence, the study findings are supported in the

literature as teachers are providing character development instruction in schools where character education programs do not exist (Curren, 2017; Kagan, 2011).

The findings presented and conclusions drawn in the current study raise awareness of the potential for school communities that do not have a CEP to develop characteristics that meet the conditions of caring attachments. Although the research hypotheses were not supported, the results suggest that schools without a character education program have the capability to develop a school culture that embodies a caring school community. The findings also support the impact that character education can have on the development of a caring school community.

Furthermore, Peirce's (1907) normative science of ethics theories emphasize the value of interpreting descriptive means, irrespective of statistical significance, because the study results can provide interrelated or unrelated conclusions. Pierce believed that such results should encourage further inquiries of student behavior and ethical growth studies. Finally, the findings from the current study can be valuable to education institutional stakeholders and their communities in making decisions about the implementation of character education initiatives and in evaluating the effectiveness of character education programs.

Recommendations for Future Research

White (2016) believed labeling each community as a caring school community should be a school district's primary systemic goal. Creating caring attachments within and across school environments could have a global impact. The results and conclusions inferred from this study could have already begun the journey towards a shared objective, but further evidence is needed. In light of the current study findings, recommendations for future research are directed toward a full school community evaluation to determine the caring attachments between the school community stakeholders. This study only considered teacher perceptions; however, the SCCP-II

instrument is designed as such that the perceptions of behaviors by students and other adults such as parents and school board members can also be collected to gain a holistic understanding of the school as a caring community. Given this, and using the SCCPP-II, future research should survey the perceptions of schools as a caring community of all stakeholders. This would provide a comprehensive diagnosis of the state of the school as a caring community; it would eliminate the possibility of bias; and it would allow for common areas of concern to be identified.

Collecting data based on individual perceptions or self-reported data can introduce bias that can influence a study's results and conclusions. While a quantitative research design guided the current study, further research examining differences in perceptions of schools as caring communities between schools using CEP and those not using CEP, should adopt the use of a mixed-methods design. A quantitative approach can be used through administering the SCCP-II instrument to gain objective measurements of perceptions from each stakeholder group (i.e., teachers, parents, and students). Meanwhile, a qualitative approach can be used to gain subjective and in-depth data from stakeholders. Triangulation can then be used to analyze and substantiate the findings obtained using both research methods. Finally, findings from a mixed-methods design could provide insight that can add immeasurable value to teachers and school leaders in the educational field.

A third recommendation for future research studies concerns the selection of sampling units. Future research should use a stratified sampling technique to enhance the representation of both public and private schools, in addition to school communities that have implemented a CEP and those that have not implemented a CEP. This could also lend toward the use of a factorial design to further enhance the analysis of findings.

Lastly, based on the current study's findings, future studies should further examine the traits and characteristics of schools that do not have a character education program, but whose stakeholders (i.e., students, teachers, parents) portray evidence of behaviors that align with a caring school community. An in-depth examination and evaluation of the school culture through both quantitative and qualitative methods would provide additional insight that answers questions of "who," "why," and "how" caring communities are developed without the existence of a CEP.

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Review and Herald Publishing Association.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
 Jalynn Roberts, Ph.D.
 Chair

October 8, 2020

TO: Jasmine Johnson

RE: Identifying Schools As Caring Communities: Teacher Perceptions About Character Education (IRB #2020-046)

Jasmine,

This letter serves as official notification of the approval of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of William Carey University. It is the IRB's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study, and that the proposal appears to be in compliance with the Code of Federal Regulations on the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR Part 46). **It has been classified as expedited review research under the IRB guidelines.**

You are authorized to implement this study as of the date of final approval, which is October 8, 2020. This approval is valid until is October 7, 2021. If the project continues beyond this date, the IRB will request continuing review and update of the project.

You are required to notify the IRB immediately if any of the following occur:

- 1. any proposed changes that may affect the status of your project;**
- 2. any unanticipated or serious adverse events involving risk to the participants.**

When the above-referenced research project is completed OR if it is discontinued, the WCU IRB must be notified in writing. The IRB Final Report Form will be used for this purpose.

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jalynn Roberts".

Jalynn G. Roberts, Ph.D.
 Chair, WCU Institutional Review Board

"EXPECT GREAT THINGS FROM GOD: ATTEMPT GREAT THINGS FOR GOD."

APPENDIX B
PERMISSION AND PARTICIPANT PROTECTION LETTER
FOR VP OF EDUCATION

November 2020
VP for Education

Dear _____,

My name is Jasmine Johnson, and I am a current student at William Carey University in the Doctoral program for Educational Leadership. I have been working diligently on completing a research study. The title of my study is IDENTIFYING SCHOOLS AS CARING COMMUNITIES: TEACHER PERCEPTIONS ABOUT CHARACTER EDUCATION. My study will focus on teacher perceptions as it relates to schools as caring communities. While character education has been studied, researched, and in few cases implemented the research is scarce as it relates to teacher perceptions with students imbuing character traits for the betterment of the wholistic school community. I believe schools still do not know the major impact of such a program and how academic progress can be achieved when a program is properly implemented. Utilizing a convenience sample method, the study hopes to discover and distinguish the impact of character education programs. The research hopes to uncover that teachers who participate in character education programs will positively impact students and their school community.

In order to continue such positive efforts in my research I need your support. In the coming weeks I would like to schedule a call with you. The interview will determine participation. Please note that all of the information provided will be used anonymously, no one's name, identity, school name, information, etc. will be used ever. Once the research is completed the information provided physically or electronically will be shredded, destroyed, and/or permanently deleted.

Thank you in advance for your participation. If you have questions about the study, you can contact me at 804.869.3513.

Yours truly,
Jasmine Johnson, Ed. S

Permissions and Participant Protection Letter for VP of Education

November 11, 2020



Dear Mrs. Gaiter,

My name is Jasmine Johnson and I am a current student at William Carey University in the Doctoral program for Educational Leadership. I have been working diligently on completing a research study. The title of my study is "IDENTIFYING SCHOOLS AS CARING COMMUNITIES: TEACHER PERCEPTIONS ABOUT CHARACTER EDUCATION."

My study will focus on teacher perceptions as it relates to schools as caring communities. While character education has been studied, researched, and in few cases implemented the research is scarce as it relates to teacher perceptions with students imbuing character traits for the betterment of the wholistic school community. I believe schools still do not know the major impact of such a program and how academic progress can be achieved when a program is properly implemented. Utilizing a convenience sample method, the study hopes to discover and distinguish the impact of character education programs. The research hopes to uncover that teachers who participate in character education programs will positively impact students and their school community.

In order to continue such positive efforts in my research I need your support. In the coming weeks I would like to schedule a call with you. The interview will determine participation. Please note that all of the information provided will be used anonymously, no one's name, identity, school name, information, etc. will be used ever. Once the research is completed the information provided physically or electronically will be shredded, destroyed, and/or permanently deleted.

Thank you in advance for your participation. If you have questions about the study, you can contact me at 804.869.3513.

Yours truly,

Jasmine Johnson, Ed.S

I have approved the collection of the foregoing research within the [redacted] district of schools.

Kim M. Gaiter

Kim M. Gaiter, Ed.S, M.Ed
Superintendent | Vice President for Education

11/11/2020

Date

Permissions and Participant Protection Letter for VP of Education

November 13, 2020



Dear Mr. Kossick,

My name is Jasmine Johnson and I am a current student at William Carey University in the Doctoral program for Educational Leadership. I have been working diligently on completing a research study. The title of my study is IDENTIFYING SCHOOLS AS CARING COMMUNITIES: TEACHER PERCEPTIONS ABOUT CHARACTER EDUCATION. My study will focus on teacher perceptions as it relates to schools as caring communities. While character education has been studied, researched, and in few cases implemented the research is scarce as it relates to teacher perceptions with students imbuing character traits for the betterment of the wholistic school community. I believe schools still do not know the major impact of such a program and how academic progress can be achieved when a program is properly implemented. Utilizing a convenience sample method, the study hopes to discover and distinguish the impact of character education programs. The research hopes to uncover that teachers who participate in character education programs will positively impact students and their school community.

In order to continue such positive efforts in my research I need your support. In the coming weeks I would like to schedule a call with you. The interview will determine participation. Please note that all of the information provided will be used anonymously, no one's name, identity, school name, information, etc. will be used ever. Once the research is completed the information provided physically or electronically will be shredded, destroyed, and/or permanently deleted.

Thank you in advance for your participation. If you have questions about the study, you can contact me at 804.869.3513.

Yours truly,
Jasmine Johnson, Ed.S

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin Kossick".

APPENDIX C
DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

Demographic Information: Teacher Perceptions & Caring School Communities

Gender	(Click one):
Male	
Female	

Race	(Click all that apply):
American Indian or Alaskan Native	
Asian	
Black or African-American	
Hispanic or Latino	
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	
Caucasian	

Age	(Click one):
Under 22	
22-29	
30-39	
40-49	
50-59	
60 and over	

Highest degree you have earned	(Click one):
Bachelor	
Masters	
Educational Specialist	
Ph.D. or Ed.D	
Other	

Prior Years of Teaching Experience	(Click one):
0-2	
3-5	
6-10	
11-15	
16-20	
21-25	
26 or more	

What grade do you currently teach?	(Click One):
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	

SCHOOL AS A CARING COMMUNITY PROFILE-II
A Survey of Students, Staff, and Parents

Circle one: (1) Student – Please write the number of the grade you are in: _____
 (2) Administrator (3) Teacher (4) Professional Support Staff
 (5) Other Staff (6) Parent (7) Other _____

Please circle the appropriate number that describes how frequently you observe the following behaviors in your school.

Almost always = 5
 Frequently = 4
 As often as not = 3
 Sometimes = 2
 Almost never = 1

1. Students treat classmates with respect.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Students exclude those who are different (e.g., belong to a different race, religion, or culture).	1	2	3	4	5
3. Students try to comfort peers who have experienced sadness.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Students respect the personal property of others.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Students help each other, even if they are not friends.	1	2	3	4	5
6. When students do something hurtful, they try to make up for it (for example, they apologize or they do something nice).	1	2	3	4	5
7. Students show respect for school property (such as desks, walls, bathrooms, busses, buildings, and grounds).	1	2	3	4	5
8. Students try to get other students to follow school rules.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Students behave respectfully toward all school staff (including secretaries, custodians, aides, and bus drivers).	1	2	3	4	5
10. Students work well together.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Students help to improve the school.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Students are disrespectful toward their teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Students help new students feel accepted.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Students try to have a positive influence on the behavior of other students.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Students pick on other students.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Students are willing to forgive each other.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Students show poor sportsmanship.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Students are patient with each other.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Students resolve conflicts without fighting, insults, or threats.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Students are disrespectful toward their schoolmates.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Students listen to each other in class discussions.	1	2	3	4	5

Almost always = 5
Frequently = 4
As often as not = 3
Sometimes = 2
Almost never = 1

22. When students see another student being picked on, they try to stop it.	1	2	3	4	5
23. Students refrain from put-downs (negative, hurtful comments).	1	2	3	4	5
24. Students share what they have with others.	1	2	3	4	5
25. Students are involved in helping to solve school problems.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Students can talk to their teachers about problems that are bothering them.	1	2	3	4	5
27. Parents show that they care about their child's education and school behavior.	1	2	3	4	5
28. Students are disrespectful toward their parents in the school environment.	1	2	3	4	5
29. Teachers go out of their way to help students who need extra help.	1	2	3	4	5
30. Teachers treat parents with respect.	1	2	3	4	5
31. In this school you can count on adults to try to make sure that students are safe.	1	2	3	4	5
32. Teachers are unfair in their treatment of students.	1	2	3	4	5
33. In this school parents treat other parents with respect.	1	2	3	4	5
34. Parents show respect for teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
35. In their interactions with students, teachers act in ways that demonstrate the character qualities the school is trying to teach.	1	2	3	4	5
36. In their interactions with students, <i>all school staff</i> (the principal, other administrators, counselors, coaches, aides, custodians, and others) act in ways that demonstrate the character qualities the school is trying to teach.	1	2	3	4	5
37. In their interactions with children, parents display the character qualities the school is trying to teach.	1	2	3	4	5
38. Faculty and staff treat each other with respect (are caring, supportive, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
39. Faculty and staff are involved in helping to make school decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
40. This school shows appreciation for the efforts of faculty and staff.	1	2	3	4	5
41. This school treats parents with respect.	1	2	3	4	5
42. Parents are actively involved in this school.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX D

SCCP-II DATA ANALYSIS VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

**SCHOOL AS A CARING COMMUNITY PROFILE—II
(SCCP-II)
A Survey of Students, Staff, and Parents
Scale Descriptions**

This questionnaire is designed to assess stakeholder perceptions of the school as a caring community and contains 42 items in a 5-point Likert format. The entire 42-item survey may be completed by both students and adults. However, validation analysis indicates stronger validity and reliability when students complete the first 34 items only and adults complete all 42 items. Confirmatory factor analysis supports the hypothesized break-down into 5 scales as shown below. Reliability alphas in U.S. samples range from .73 to .86 for youth and from .73 to .88 for adults. The three student scales were also administered to a national sample of 5th and 8th grade students in Taiwan and demonstrated reliabilities from .72 to .79.

Sub-scale IA: Perceptions of Student Respect (9 Items)

- 1 Students treat classmates with respect.
- 4 Students respect the personal property of others.
- 7 Students show respect for school property.
- 9[10] Students behave respectfully toward all school staff
- 12[13] Students are disrespectful toward their teachers. (Reverse)
- 15[16] Students pick on other students. (Reverse)
- 17[18] Students show poor sportsmanship. (Reverse)
- 20[21] Students are disrespectful toward their schoolmates. (Reverse)
- 23[24] Students refrain from put-downs (negative, hurtful comments).

Whole sample alpha=.8388; youth sample alpha=.7533; adult sample alpha=.8844.

Sub-scale IB: Perceptions of Student Friendship and Belonging (9 items)

- 2 Students exclude those who are different. (Reverse)
- 3 Students try to comfort peers who have experienced sadness.
- 5 Students help each other, even if they are not friends.
- 10[11] Students work well together.
- 13[14] Students help new students feel accepted.
- 16[17] Students are willing to forgive each other.
- 18[19] Students are patient with each other.
- 21[22] Students listen to each other in class discussions.
- 24[25] Students share what they have with others.

Whole sample alpha=.8541; youth sample alpha=.8144; adult sample alpha=.8754.

Sub-scale IC: Perceptions of Students' Shaping of Their Environment (7 items)

- 6 When students do something hurtful, they try to make up for it.
- 8[9] Students try to get other students to follow school rules.
- 11[12] Students help to improve the school.
- 14[15] Students try to have a positive influence on the behavior of other students.
- 19[20] Students resolve conflicts without fighting, insults, or threats.
- 22[23] When students see another student being picked on, they try to stop it.
- 25[26] Students are involved in helping to solve school problems.

Whole sample alpha=.8742; youth sample alpha=.8590; adult sample alpha=.8801.

Overall Scale I Alpha=.9424

Sub-scale IIA: Perceptions of Support and Care By and For Faculty/Staff (10 items)

- 26[27] Students can talk to their teachers about problems that are bothering them.
 29[31] Teachers go out of their way to help students who need extra help.
 31[33] In this school you can count on adults to try to make sure students are safe.
 32[37] Teachers are unfair in their treatment of students. (Reverse)
 34[41] Parents show respect for teachers.
 35[36] In their interactions with students, teachers act in ways that demonstrate the character qualities the school is trying to teach.
 36[29] In their interactions with students, all school staff (the principal, other administrators, counselors, coaches, secretaries, aides, custodians, bus drivers, etc.) act in ways that demonstrate the character qualities the school is trying to teach.
 38[35] Faculty and staff treat each other with respect (are caring, supportive, etc.).
 39[39] Faculty and staff are involved in helping to make school decisions.
 40[43] This school shows appreciation for the efforts of faculty and staff.

Whole sample alpha=.8026;
 youth sample alpha=.7990 (standardized alpha=.8359);
 adult sample alpha=.7313.

Sub-scale IIB: Perceptions of Support and Care By and For Parents (7 items)

- 27[28] Parents show that they care about their child's education and school behavior.
 28[30] Students are disrespectful toward their parents in the school environment. (Reverse)
 30[32] Teachers treat parents with respect.
 33[40] In this school, parents treat other parents with respect.
 37[42] In their interactions with children, parents display the character qualities the school is trying to teach.
 41[34] This school treats parents with respect.
 42[38?] Parents are actively involved in this school.

Whole sample alpha=.7049 (standardized alpha=.7334);
 youth sample alpha=.6988 (standardized alpha=.7300);
 adult sample alpha=.7091 (standardized alpha=.7259).

The SCCP-II was developed by T. Lickona and M. Davidson at the Center for the 4th and 5th Rs, SUNY Cortland, P.O. Box 2000, Cortland, NY 13045; (607) 753-2455. **It may be duplicated without permission of the authors** (last revised January, 2003).