HOW THE LEADERSHIP OF A CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT CURRICULUM EFFECTS

THE STANDARDIZED TEST SCORES AMONG 3rd GRADE STUDENTS

by

Bonnie Diana Sypolt

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this non-experimental causal-comparative study sought to determine if character development curriculum directly impacted student success, specifically in the area of academics through standardized test scores. Many articles presented an explanation regarding the need for character development curriculum, but very little research has been done regarding the positive academic impact on standardized test scores. By utilizing a quantitative design, standardized test scores for 168 students in third grade were collected from one school district and analyzed to determine a difference between scores in Language Arts and Math through the statistical MANOVA test. The standardized test scores for the elementary students were compared between two schools in the same school district, where one school implemented the character development curriculum through the Leader in Me Program and the other school lacked implementation. Quantitative data in the form of standardized test scores were collected and analyzed in order to determine if the implementation of a character education curriculum had an impact on standardized scores, specifically the through a state system of school assessment. Results showed a significant statistical difference in the 3rd grade English Language Arts test scores and Mathematics scores on a State System of School Assessment between students who have been exposed to a character development curriculum versus students who have not. Elementary students exposed to The Leader in Me program do not overperform when compared to students at the same grade level, with similar demographics, and within the same school district. Recommendations for future research include looking at more grade levels, multiple years of implementation, and the overall implementation of The Leader in Me Program.

Keywords: character development, character education, moral education, academic performance, character development, academic outcomes, soft skills

Copyright Page

Dedication

What a long journey this has been. I first want to thank my God for bringing me through this process. I also send a heartfelt thank-you to my husband Matthew. Without your support from the very beginning, this would not be possible. There were many evenings you watched our children while I worked away at Panera Bread. You never complained and always expected me to finish the race. To my two little boys, thanks for sacrificing your mommy many nights and weekends while I worked. This process has taken many years, and I lost one of my biggest cheerleaders, my stepfather Paul. His steadfast support and encouragement, "Paging Dr. Sypolt," was the encouragement I needed when I felt like quitting. I am saddened to know he will not see me finish this journey, but I know he is watching from heaven. To my mother, thank you for making this a priority and encouraging me at every step. Even after I had a baby, you managed to help me keep my house in order, babysit, and continue to expect an end product. After each rejection, you were there praying me through and telling me God has a purpose and his faithfulness will endure. To my grandparents in heaven, your encouragement from a young age to value education and work hard was the groundwork for this process to even begin. You planted a seed in me to become a lifelong learner that I can never uproot. To my sisters Katie and Rachel and special aunts Lynda, Rita, Patty, Darleen, and Cindy, thanks for accepting this journey with me and providing another layer of love during the process. To my mother-in-law Mary Lou, Diane, teachers and coworkers, your support and kind words during this process were very much appreciated. I feel as though I had my own fan base to make this possible. To my dear friends, thank you for being willing to look over my paper and provide input in a time crunch. Through this process, I discovered how blessed and supported I am during the many rejections as God always made a way.

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Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Character development curriculum has the ability to affect many aspects of student's lives. At all levels of education, student well-being and personal relationships are researched as influenced by character development curriculum. School programming can either be targeted directly or indirectly as a means of impacting overall school culture, academics, or both. The problem of this study focused on the effects of character development curriculum on student academic success.

Background

Character development curriculums are helping prepare students to be leaders for tomorrow (Agboola & Tsai, 2012). Many behaviorists, counselors, educators, and economists agree a character development curriculum can impact many aspects of a school with positive outcomes. One of the main aspects of a character development curriculum is helping students regulate their thoughts and actions in ways that encourage achievement for personal attainment (Seider, Novick, & Gomez, 2013). Character development curriculum has also been described using other terms such as moral education, soft skills, moral reasoning, life skills education, and service learning (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004).

A character development curriculum has the ability to completely alter the school culture and expectations within a school that also impacts student outcomes, both socially and academically. Schools across the country are looking at ways to include a character development curriculum within their core curriculum given the desired social results (Davidson, Khmelkov, & Baker, 2011; Snyder, Vuchinich, Acock, Washburn, & Flay, 2012). Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory parallels with the social implications character development curriculum

exemplifies. Yet, there is a high level of inquiry around the change academic student

performance experiences with the establishment of a character development curriculum.

Many studies have been conducted regarding the overall increase in student well-being

after the intervention of character development with research focused throughout elementary,

middle, and high schools. The outcome of a character development curriculum can help students

flourish academically and socially, especially students from urban backgrounds, when character

strengths are increased (Oppenheimer, Fialkov, Ecker, & Portnoy, 2014; Seligman, Ernst,

Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009). The overall outcome a character development curriculum

develops, according to many character development curriculums, is student perseverance and

performance character, academic integrity, moral character reasoning, school connectedness, and

ethical development (Seider, et al., 2013). Students are also intrinsically looking at experiences

for promoting a caring community and creating positive relationships with others (Johansson,

Brownlee, Cobb-Moore, Boulton-Lewis, Walker, Ailwood, 2011). The approach a school takes

to create and continue a character development curriculum is the factor in how successful a

character program begins, its long-term systemic use, and overall perception by educators,

students, and parents alike. The motivation in creating concrete strategies is the biggest factor

socially and academically regarding student overall success (Seider, 2012; Seider et al., 2013).

Given the overall positive effects of a character development curriculum, administrators

in schools with character development curriculums have decided to implement such programs

through researching various options and determining the overall expected outcome after intended

use. The positive correlation character development implementation has on school cultures and

student outcomes has impacted school districts and administrators from both a fiscal and

curriculum viewpoint in determining whether to execute a character development curriculum (Snyder, et al., 2009; Zakin, 2012).

Historical Summary

According to Watz (2011), character education in America has included both implicit and explicit instruction, with historical foundations stemming from European influences. Both American and European character development viewpoints stem around similar moral components. Williams (2000) states that character development involves three aspects; focusing on realizing, desiring, and doing good for others. The character development term has evolved over time, with educators seeking to name the term character development. Character development was coined during a time when scholars had no description for their impact in forming the character of the younger generation by affecting their experiences. Personal knowledge, behavior, and awareness are seen as three aspects centered asround the development of character education (Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, & Smith, 2006).

The term soft skills has been frequently related to character development curriculum in the past decade with a focus on students setting goals, increasing student motiviation, and focusing on positive character traits to use not only at school but in the future workforce (Heckman & Kautz, 2012). The soft skills individuals possess are also thought to have a link with overall success. The term of soft skill being a 'skill' implies that it is something that can be explicitly taught to an individual. The integration of soft skills is now commonly a term for personality traits related to character development (Heckman & Kautz, 2012; Shields, 2011).

Effective school programs not only include core direct instruction and language-based curriculum programs, but also need an element of a school climate approach either school-wide or district-wide (Brooks & Kahn, 1993). The intensity of a character development curriculum

has changed based on political trends. Educational theorists such as Kohlberg, Dewey, and Piaget helped build momentum for a character development curriculum based on the Progressive movement (Howard, Berkowitz, Schaeffer, 2004). In the 1800s, character development was seen as a reinforcement of home values and was included in the public-school curriculum. All children, including those of immigrants, were seen as needing to know good characteristics. Education in American started as a Puritan viewpoint that evolved into a belief system seemly Protestant. The Bible was used to teacher moral principles, along with history, reading, and writing. Benjamin Franklin was a founding father who stressed the need for public schools that included curriculum taught with morals embedded in history (Watz, 2011).

In the nineteenth century, Horace Mann was a prominent politician who was instrumental in shaping the viewpoint and need for character development. He focused on educational reform and the necessity for explicit moral instruction inside school curriculum. His viewpoints stemmed around the idea students learn by example, specifically in the realm of moral development. His influence encouraged more educators to take a direct role in regards to teaching character development in a hostile free manner with realistic examples for learning (Watz, 2011). Subsequently at the same time, more Catholics immigrated to America. Parochial schools were formed to increase the seamless integration between student character development at school and home, with families seeking a solid partnership (McCormack, 2013).

Two educational approaches were evident before the turn of the century in 1890, with the first being an emphasis on students doing well and seeing and building fundamental habits. Students were expected to receive these habits both in school and outside of school through venues such as church or Boy Scouts. The other approach was process orientated and saw ethical decisions based on cultural contexts (Lickona, 1991). The viewpoint during the turn of

the century was the need for schools to step away from being the principal educator of character development (Sojourner, 2012).

The progressive movement over the next half-century continued the need for the development of each individual for the betterment of society. John Dewey created the Progressive movement that focused on a child-centered approach, which included the need for students to be able to problem solve and have access to multiple curriculums. This philosophy encouraged students to interact within their education environments and focus on desirable values (White, 2015). With the focus on values, public schools identified with the definition of character education, including character traits society views as desirable. At the same time, religious schools viewed the child-centered approach as a means to help foster individual moral and spiritual growth (Blain & Revell, 2002).

An increase in character development, however, began in the 1980s and 1990s after a decline in the quality of public education between 1940 and 1970 with ethical dilemmas regarding what to include in character development curriculum (Lickona, 1991). Until the 1950s, character development was widely taught in public schools as part of the standard curriculum but was phased out due to the concern of the relationship between character development and religious teachings (Howard et al., 2004). School began to integrate character development curriculum in the quest to increase moral reasoning (Sojourner, 2012).

When looking at current trends in the culture across schools in America, not all schools include a direct and explicit character development curriculum or instruction that includes soft skills. The last two decades in education have revealed a need for moral development, pushing the desire for school districts to seek a relationship between students and teachers within schools (Oppenheimer et al., 2014). The need has primarily been focused on increasing overall student

success with a character development curriculum. Numerous studies have been conducted

noting the positive relationship between a character development curriculum and student success

socially (Bierman, Coie, Dodge, Greenberg, Lochman, McMahon, & Pinderhughes, 2010;

Heckman & Kautz, 2012). Sanderse (2013) noted that character development curriculum

provided an opportunity for positive relationships to form along with the ability for teachers to

role model moral and character values to their students (Lee, Chang, Choi, Kim, & Zeidler,

2012). Oppenheimer et al. (2014) observed urban adolescents over a period and noted an

increase in student behavior. Students began to look at the future and set goals for future

endeavors after the implementation of explicit lessons on character strengths. What was missing

as a future research effect in this particular study was the relationship between academic

achievements among the urban adolescents (Gillham, Adams-Deutsch, Werner, Reivich,

Coulter-Heindl, Linkins, & Seligman, 2011).

In addition, whole-school change and an increase in school climate through social and

emotional learning was investigated in Hawaii; the study looked at the overall environment at the

elementary level. Given the ability to implement change and address unsafe school conditions,

the character development curriculum implemented at the schools in this study noticed a positive

correlation. Schools, families, the surrounding community, and most importantly students, were

all seen as benefiting from increasing social learning skills and character development. The

finding presented encourages schools to consider the use of a character development curriculum

for similar results (Snyder et al., 2012).

Skaggs and Bodenhorn (2006) presented the most comprehensive review of the effect on

academics with the utilization of a character development curriculum and how a program that

focuses around soft skills can impact student academics. This study was the first of its kind

comparing greater improvement in perceived character driven behavior with related academic connectedness. A noticeable improvement in character-related behaviors was observed with the initiation of a character development program in five school districts over a five -year period that included both rural, urban, and suburban populations. Given the responses from a school-wide survey, behaviors resulting in suspension and student dropout rates decreased, but student academic achievement revealed a lack of positive relationship (Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006). Schools were expecting to see a relationship between the implementation of a character development curriculum with overall student gains, but little direct influence was noted. The idea of an improvement in overall student success was evident, but the goal of implementing a character development curriculum beyond improved student behavior and a positive school climate was impractical. Since this study, much research has been done in the area of character development, what it entails, and how it changes school culture (Seider et al., 2013) in the past half century; especially with research by Walker, Roberts, and Kristjánsson (2015) setting the pathway of a new era of character development beyond just theory but practice (Arthur, 2010; Lewis, Robinson, & Hayes, 2011).

Social Impact

Character development helps prepare students for the challenges of life, through building a sense of empowerment through resiliency (Elias, 2014). Determining the present school culture and 'rewiring' the culture systemically can display remarkable benefits for the staff and students alike (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). With an increase in negative behavior among school populations, many schools are beginning to see the increased need for a character development curriculum (Agboola & Tsai, 2012). Davidson (2014) explained the human costs and possible economic costs associated with not educating students to respond morally and

ethically. The younger a child is exposed to character building skills, the more likely they are to experience positive outcomes socially and emotionally (Ji & Flay, 2013).

The 'conscience of craft' is termed as a way of helping students develop a moral conscious to handle social concerns and respond appropriately. Providing an opportunity for students to practice their social skills in a safe environment before expecting mastery builds competence in students socially. Providing real-world activities and simulations allows students at different developmental levels to have access to competence in thinking and behavior (Davidson, 2014).

Thinking and behavior skills gained from character development help students socially handle self-management skills, understand self-awareness, make decisions, handle 'themselves and relationships' effectively, practice relationship building skills, and all together grow socially and emotionally. When students are provided with opportunities for social and emotional learning, negative outcomes and events are decreased with an increase in overall positive student outcomes, social competence, and academic achievement (Ji & Flay, 2013; Neophytou, 2013). Outcomes of a character development curriculum work together and are not seen in isolation. Beyond social skills, overall school absenteeism is one other factors affected by the impact of a social-emotional and character development program (Snyder et al., 2012).

The students from the most concerning environments are at the greatest risks for developing vital character skills if they are lacking exposure to these traits in their formal education. Character development programs are known to impact factors of resiliency and handling risk appropriately in low-income, urban schools. Many of the research studies regarding the outcome of character development programs tend to focus around urban students

and the overall impact on including the community a character development curriculum has the potential for influencing (Bavarian et al., 2008).

When looking at different character development programs, one of the most crucial elements that first must be reflected upon is not only the current culture of the school, but the cultural acceptance of the program by all students within the school. In order to fully implement a character development curriculum, school leaders need to understand the values and beliefs of the students and the staff. Teachers and students both contribute wholly to the school culture (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015).

Theory

The theoretical framework that guided this research study was based on the work of psychologist Albert Bandura. The Social Learning Theory by Bandura provides a basis for understanding how observation, imitation, and modeling affect overall student academic performance (Bandura, 1977, Grusec, 1992). Bandura's Social Learning Theory postulated that learning is a cognitive process where modeling provides students with the ability to self-regulate their behaviors through continuous reinforcement (Sivo, Karl, Fox, Taub, & Robinson, 2017). Research demonstrates that when children are exposed to specific changes in modeling behavior and thinking (Grusec, 1992), the outcome can affect academic performance.

Bandura's theory explains how motivation that a character development curriculum provides affects the learning outcomes of students (Skaggs and Bodenhorn, 2006). Long (2011) further explained this affect by asserting that Bandura's Social Learning Theory provides students with the ability to self-regulate their behaviors through continuous reinforcement that can enhance student achievement tremendously (Sivo, et al. 2017). Ultimately, feedback academically through student cognitive activities academically helps enhance intrinsic self-

motivation. Findings demonstrate the idea that modeling self-efficacy skills, along with personal experiences increase in individual's student academic success (Zimmerman, 1998). Sivo, et al. (2017) further agrees with Zimmerman (1998) in regards to school climate, created by self-efficacy development, being as importance as school curriculum when encouraging the success of students.

Student data is one practice interrelated with both student academic and social functions that allows for personalization in meeting student needs and to make informed decisions in schools (Rutledge, Cohen-Vogel, Osborne-Lampkin, & Roberts, 2015). In order for character development curriculum to be productive for students, assessment is necessary, as dictated through educational best practices (Beaumount, O'Doherty, & Shannon, 2011). Student assessment could be in the form of state standardized testing. Modeling character development curriculum repeatedly, focused around leadership, improves overall academic performance, thus leading to improved assessments. Further research shows additionally modeling for students in disadvantaged school districts influenced standardized test scores when exposed to continuous modeling provided by their school (Snyder & Flay, 2010).

Problem Statement

Throughout the United States, many schools have incorporated character development programs, however; research is limited in regards to how character development affects early adolescence individuals through promoting personal achievement and purpose for success (Malin, Liauw, & Damon, 2017). If a school district financially invests in a character development program, the implementation of the program should demonstrate a positive impact, academically, and improve school culture for students during regular school hours (Snyder 2015).

Jones, Barnes, Bailey, and Doolittle (2017) mirror the perceptions presented by Snyder (2015) in stating that social-emotional learning (SEL) is a critical variable in academic achievement for students.   SEL skills should be explicitly taught during elementary school years. A study conducted by Grier (2012) observed an afterschool program centered around an educational enrichment and character development curriculum for at risk students between third and sixth grade students. There was an increase in Lexile levels for only students enrolled in the after-school program. Snyder et al., (2012) had a similar mission in exposing how a character development curriculum influenced overall school culture through school personnel perceptions. While students did improve academically with the Positive Action curriculum during the second year of implementation, the results were based solely on perception from individuals working with the students. Jones and Doolittle (2017) further highlight challenges in character education programs after evaluating 11 different SEL programs with a need for a SEL program to embrace an entire school environment. School wide training to effectively teach SEL skills and available data regarding the academic effect in SEL programs is a continuing concern.

Research is limited in regards to how character development affects early adolescence individuals through promoting personal achievement (Malin, Liauw, & Damon, 2017). A character development curriculum that focuses on promotion and growing intellectual virtues in relationship to traditional character education has been underexplored (Baehr, 2017). Research shows that character development is a pathway for individual positive development and personal betterment (Seider, Jayawickreme, & Lerner, 2017). With a momentum for promoting character development, evidence shows that students who have higher expectations and positive beliefs in themselves experience increased academic success (Corno & Anderman, 2016).

The studies, beforehand, demonstrated the need for continued research regarding the

impact of character development curriculum on academic student performance, specifically on standardized test scores for students (Elias, White, & Stepney, 2014). In order to measure the impact of a character development curriculum on academic performance, a school-wide character development program with lessons as part of the regular school day, explicit SEL skills taught to school staff, and positive results on student assessment outcome is crucial. This gap is evident in the need for high-quality leadership to successfully implement a character development curriculum in an effort to improve student academics (Steinberg, & Li, 2014). While there has been some research on the effects of character development on student achievement and positive behavior (McCormick, Cappella, O'Connor, & McClowry, 2015; Finn, et al.; Elias, et al, 2014; Corcoran, Reilly, & Ross, 2014), a gap still existed in the literature with regards the effects of character development on normative achievement; therefore, the problem of this study was to determine the effects of a character development curriculum using standardized test scores from 3rd grade students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this causal-comparative study was to add to the research on character education and determine if there was a difference in standardized test scores between third grade students who have been exposed to a character development curriculum or have not. The independent variable was defined as a character development curriculum that embodies a different paradigm focused on intrinsic motivation and using a common language ubiquitously throughout an elementary school. There were two levels of independent variables. Only one school received a character development curriculum; a second school did not receive a curriculum. Standardized test scores for the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) in the subject areas of Language Arts and Mathematics were the dependent variables. The

population of the study involved all third-grade students at both elementary schools, with approximately 150 students total.

Significance of the Study

Finn et al. (2014) expresses character development curriculum as way to improve overall emotional and academic gains, specifically performance on standardized tests. This study was significant because it moved beyond the element of simply improved social skills and school culture but examined school wide leadership and implementation of a character development curriculum, along with the impact academically when comparing two schools within the same school district (Mattix Foster, & Daly, 2016). Research by Hollingshead (2009) and Wilkens (2015) both acknowledge the impact leadership has on the implementation of a character development curriculum.

This study was aimed at understanding the impact fidelity and leadership have on the overall outcome of student standardized test scores from participation in character development curriculum throughout the entire school year. Consistently, research indicated soft skills matter for predicting overall student success, as presented in the study by Kautz, Heckman, Diris, Weel, and Borghas (2014). The study conducted by McKown, Russo-Ponsaran, Allen, Johnson, and Warren-Khot (2015) has a strong case in displaying academic gains on standardized test scores, however the character development curriculum was taught across many grade levels using different forms of summative assessments. Wang and Degol (2016) surmised test scores improve with the implementation of a character development curriculum, however the results were perceived only through surveys and questioning (Snyder, 2012). While personal input is certainly important, the study by Seider et al. (2013) stated there was a limitation based on self-assessment of those involved with the actual character development curriculum. If students

standardized test scores do create an impact, this study specified additional information regarding the justification for a school district to financially consider implementing a character development curriculum. The overall need for soft skill formation during school age years is presented, but the overall outcome of soft skill integration, both academically and fiscally at the local educational agency level, was lacking.

Research Questions

The following research question was investigated:

RQ1: Is there a difference in the effect on standardized test scores in English Language Arts and Mathematics between students who have been exposed to a character development curriculum versus students who have not.

Definitions

1. *Soft Skills* - personality traits, goals, motivations, and preferences that are valued in the labor market, in school, and in many other domains (Heckman & Kautz, 2012).

2. *Character Education* – The process of defining what is the ethically correct action and having the integrity, or character to do the right thing (Howard et al, 2004).

3. *Character* – a set of psychological characteristics that motivate and enable individuals to function as competent moral agents (Seider et al., 2013).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter begins with an overview of character development curriculum and its implications. Different curriculums have been created in the past quarter century that use skill-based approaches to help students' emotional and social needs in an effort to increase academic competence. The chapter also explores the main components of character development and the theoretical framework for Leader in Me curriculum.

Introduction

Character development curriculum can be referred to as overall social and emotional learning. Character development curriculum can also be known as moral education or values education. A character development curriculum is also is known throughout school systems by the term of social and emotional learning, which is using social and emotional skills to increase social skills and overall academic achievement. (Bracket, et al., 2012). Howard et al. (2004) and includes components of exemplary values and the development of academic and social skills (Kamaruddin, 2012). Schmacker (2014) took the definition of a character development curriculum farther to include the term performance character. Performance character is considered an associated character traits that helps individuals successful either at school, work, or other extra-curricular activities. Regardless of the program a school determines to be appropriate, the premise of a character development curriculum centers around the need of the classroom educator to focus on helping students understand, label, and express their emotions. Since how students respond to outside stimuli impacts many of the day to day operations that occur in the classroom, helping provide students with the necessary skills and teaching them to understand and manage their emotions is thought to have positive outcomes holistically for

overall student success, which is often tied to their academic success (Bracket et al., 2012; Berkowitz & Bier, 2004).

Walker et al. (2015) stated there are currently 213 school-based programs of social emotional learning available, according to the review by Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger (2011) who evaluated character development programs available. Character development programs are found across multiple school environments and student populations. One program in evaluation is the Leader in Me Program, which was created by the Franklin Covey Foundation. According to the report *Leader in Me Evaluation Report* by Biggar, Dick, and Bourque (2015), seven habits are focused on impacting school culture positively while focusing on school culture, academics, and skills students need to be successful in the 21st century. The program utilizes the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People in order to create a change in school culture by focusing on leadership skills with program implementation (Ohlson, & Dow, 2011).

The Leader in Me Program has been utilized for students of all demographics, with urban students making a large majority of the positive outcomes when evaluating overall program success (Biggar et al., 2015). Teaching to student strengths, along with focusing on academic achievement, can help improve overall student well-being, especially for students in urban school settings who are the most at risk (Oppenheimer, 2014). Teachers have the unique ability with this character development curriculum to not only be a role model for students, especially those students in an urban setting, but also show appropriate action through imitation along with educating students, thus helping students emulate those traits in their own life (Sanderse, 2013). Yet, a similar study (Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2005) reviewed over four years looked at the positive effect of a character development curriculum in five school districts and noted an insignificant

impact on student achievement primarily based around the lack of relationship between the goals of the character development curriculum and student achievement. Schools that spent more time aligning the character development and student achievement goals had an increased impact on academic success, along with a lower rate of disciplinary consequences such as school suspensions.

Davidson (2014) summarized the required aspects of a character development curriculum after working with the IEE (Institute for Excellence and Ethics) as incorporating skills that (1) help development moral performance (2) respond to concerns regarding ethical conscience and conscious of craft (3) focus on educating for competence and consciousness, (4) guarantee that character development instruction occurs (5) analyze character performance assessment and grade averages. These particular aspects are keystones in defining the fundamental elements a character development curriculum should comprise within its approach. Hossein, Ali Nowrozi, and Ahmadpoor (2016) noted similar aspects of character development curriculum to include the traditional design of including moral acts, service learning opportunities, civic education, SEL, and a caring approach (Power, Nuzzi, Narvaez, Lapsley, & Hunt, 2007).

Soft skills are another definition used to highlight the components of character development skills. Heckman and Kautz (2012) pushed for the need for schools to continue focusing on academic achievement. To be successful not only as a student, but as a well-rounded adult who can contribute positively to society, schools should include a component that focuses around goals, personal motivations and personality traits (Heckman & Kautz, 2012). Skaggs and Bodenhorn (2006) presented that certain character traits, such as respecting other human beings in a fair and truthful manner, are crucial components of a good character development curriculum. Sanderse (2013) further detailed the character traits teachers must

specifically embody as hardworking individuals who act honestly, attain successful careers, have a sense of humor, and are well regarded. Berkowitz and Bier (2006) analyzed many different character development curriculums and determined the idea of whether or not to include a character development curriculum in a school is not the question; the main program and methods of effectiveness is the central question schools face when determining how best to help students. Davidson (2014) also noticed the need for character development fits in with the views of many current educational policies, such as Common Core, where ethics and excellent and moral and performance character are part of 21st century skills in helping develop the whole child.

Theoretical Framework

The Leader in Me Program, created by Steven Covey, incorporates the theoretical approach of Albert Bandura and his Social Cognitive Theory. Grusec (1992) summarized Bandura's theory as a theory focused on learned observation, imitation, and modeling of human behaviors for the onlooker to internalize their own perceptions. Observing others through social interactions is the framework for which Steven Covey created his Leader in Me Program. According to Fonzi and Ritchie (2011) who completed a review of the Leader in Me, the program is based on three underlying fundamental beliefs. The first belief is individuals can lead their own lives and observe key skills through other individuals for opportunities to lead. Similar to Bandura's belief, the observation of others as leaders is critical in creating habits from others and using a lens of choice when looking at leadership (Fonzi & Richie, 2011).

Students have the option of determining how to use the leadership skills they observe from others or through direct instruction. Students are provided with the tools to help them become leaders and reach their full potential. Through the process of self-reflection, students have the ability to determine if they are meeting their own personal goals and using their own

strengths to become leaders (Fonzi & Richie, 2011). Skaggs and Bodenhorn (2006) related how the particular underlying belief of having the opportunity to lead through the observation of others is part of higher level of reasoning of social cognitive processes observed in guided mastery learning. Bandura (1988) described this theory as highly related to goals, challenging oneself through goals, and the ability to improve personal performance through self-motivation.

Fonzi and Ritchie (2011) describe the second belief of The Leader in Me program; habits presented in the program are available for all students, regardless of student race, ethnicity, gender, class, or disability, and students should embrace and practice these skills to help cultivate problem solving, increased leadership, and accountability. Bandura's social cognitive theory encompasses helping all people accomplish and obtain their goals for the future through personal self-motivation and goal regulation through personal decision making and taking ownership of those decisions (Bandura, 1988). Sanderse (2013) summarized the theory of Bandura as a personal choice of a student to embrace the habits through observation. Similar to the second belief presented by Fonzi and Ritchie (2011), school culture has the ability be completely transformed when habits presented by the Leader in Me Program are utilized school-wide to help students personally meet their full potential but also help positively change school culture through integration of the habits presented in the program.

The third belief of the Leader in Me program is leadership in the program helps individuals see their own self-worth and potential to become inspired. When a student experiences the ability to look at themselves from the inside out, they are encouraged to see their own self-value in a clearer manner through the encouragement of others (Fonzi & Richie, 2011). Bandura (1988) described this in his theory involving both the environment, behavior, and personal factors as mutually affecting one another, or a Triadic Reciprocal Causation, where one

component affects the other two. A variable can be affected with guided mastery through modeling, ultimately affected all three aspects. Fonzi and Richie (2011) emphasized this aspect of Bandura's theory by believing those who have a direct impact on students, such as teachers or other school members, must model the skills that enable students to reach their full leadership potential.

Moving past the Social Cognitive Theory presented by Bandura (1988), character development curriculums such as Leader in Me were developed over time to meet the growing school reform in helping students reach their true potential. A whole-school transformation philosophy regarding personal character development expanded throughout the past century in the United States. Looking at the history of character development curriculum since the 1830s, education in America often had an additional component beyond the academic curriculum focused on helping to increase the values of the home and develop moral identity (Hardy & Carlo, 2011; Smith, 2013). Around the 1950s, character development was slowly phased out of public schools with a concern it was too similar to religious teaching for students. There was a resurgence of character development curriculum in public education programs in the 1980s and 1990s (Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006). Until the passing of No Child Left Behind in 2001, character development programs were loosely evaluated. In 2003, the overall effectiveness of character development programs were tested when the U.S. Department of Education saw the need to insure character development programs were implemented. These aspects included significant detail and ability to replicate, prior research, testing under different conditions completed before implementation, and an overall reliable and measurable data gained during the research phase of the program (Howard et al., 2004).

Two well-known figures in American educational history, Thomas Jefferson and Horace Mann, stressed the need to create productive members of society with universal education that instills values such as respect, loyalty, and self-discipline (Seider et al., 2013). The ability of a student to learn soft skills was noted as one indicator of life success beyond looking at strictly cognitive capacities. While student achievement tests results are known to be one outcome factor of student success, personality psychologists research in the past century has also focused around the outcome of providing soft skills training to students and the resulting lifetime effects (Heckman & Kautz, 2012).

While these traits, often known as soft skills or psychological traits by psychologists, can be challenging to measure, the traits themselves are seen as contributing towards meaningful life outcomes. While intelligence is often measured through standardized achievement tests or IQ ratings, psychological traits that incorporate soft skills can be more challenging to validate as far as what traits have an immediate effect on overall student intelligence (Heckman & Kautz, 2012).

Related Literature

As Davidson (2014) stated character development curriculum is the crafting of consciousness. According to et al., (2004), character development curriculum is the process of defining what is the ethically correct action and having the integrity, or character, to do the right thing. Hersh (2015) describes the process of curriculum integration that expands from birth in coordination between interactions with neighbors, religious organization, school, and families. The use of character development curriculum within a school climate highlights the impact on resiliency for school students (Martinez, 2015) and helps to improve the overall quality of the school climate (Snyder, 2012). The effect of character development curriculum on students

based on demographics has been largely examined for urban or African-American students (Gallien & Jackson, 2006; Seider, 2013). Two clearly prominent features of many of the character development assessments included were positive transitions from elementary to middle school (Lane, 2015) and a decrease in school absenteeism and discipline (Snyder et al., 2009).

Character Development Curriculum Implications

Multiple studies display that character development curriculum can provide numerous positive results. The following characteristics were critical components in helping to facilitate a quality character development curriculum as exhibited by Skaggs and Bodenhorn (2006) and Howard et al. (2004): (a) student safety and overall behavior, (b) involvement with school activities, (c) overall satisfaction with the school, (d) quality student support that provides focused and sustained action, and (e) the responsiveness and professionalism of staff. Teacher, parent, and student feedback has also been critical to note when looking at overall school health and the relationship to the character development curriculum.

When looking at the overall school quality and climate effects in regards to a character development curriculum, many policies in the past have been mandated for schools to incorporate; the programs presented, however, are often guidelines do not adequately provide the needed personnel and resources for the character development curriculum to be effective. Safe and Drug-Free Schools Act and the Communities Act are two such programs policymakers enacted in the past two decades that lacked proper aspects to create overall school reform. For overall school community to experience impact, the program must be implemented with fidelity and embrace an entire whole-school change (Snyder et al., 2012).

A study conducted by Snyder et al. (2012) in Hawaii noticed the overall implication for school health improved when there was a focus on safe, quality schools with a program that

extended school wide and into the community. One other critical factor presented to improve

with a character behavior program was school absenteeism and overall disciplinary outcomes.

Jones, Greenberg, and Crowley (2015) noticed the more students exposed to pro-social skills, the

more likely they would avoid negative influences and be successful later on in life.

Another study by Snyder et al. (2009) highlighted how the implementation of a character

development curriculum lowered school absentee rates among students and lowered suspension

rates in a one year trial with different social-emotional and character development skills. The

study by Snyder et al. (2009) occurred between 2002-2003 and 2005-2006 across 20 different

elementary schools and including teachers self-reporting their findings and perceptions regarding

the pre and post concerning the improvement of overall school quality with the implementation

of a character development curriculum. The lowering of absentee rates and suspension rates are

more positive aspects that help to improve overall school climate through the integration of a

character development curriculum. Bavarian et. al. (2013) similarly noticed a decrease from

school personal in school absenteeism with the integration of character development program for

students in grades K-6 with school wide implementation and character development curriculum

in effect for over a year.

The implications of The Leader in Me Program by the Covey Foundation were examined

by Ross and Laurenzano (2012) and shown to have major implications on the stakeholders

involved with a character development program. The study evaluated two different elementary

schools different in location and demographics based on five evaluation questions regarding

thoughts and overall perception with the application of The Leader in Me Program. Through the

evaluation of both schools, a sense of purpose and community, with an establishment of culture,

were noted as the main aspects a school created with school wide implementation. The program

provided a common language to handle daily issues and communication that occurred during the course of the school day. Baile and Collinwood (2008) described the change in the school to embrace a common vocabulary through planned organization and collaborative decision regarding increasing resiliency among students. Beyond acquired school organization of communication and decision-making, personal motivation and confidence increased when students had an opportunity to express responsibility and self-realization upon the practice of goal setting (Baile & Collinwood, 2008). The overall school climate was seen as improved as students accepted responsibility for their own actions (Ross & Laurenzano, 2012, Baile & Collinwood, 2008).

Language associated with character development curriculums are known to help provide an increase in students feeling secure and noticing a sense of order in how behavioral aspects are handled. As students had the opportunities for leadership roles, Ross and Laurenzano (2012) noted a decrease in bullying and an increase of students taking the time to listen to one another. Due to the fact the students were better equipped to handle conflict, there was an overall decrease in disciplinary actions, fights, arguments, and overall school suspensions. Parents were also included in the program through leadership exercise and opportunities to practice the seven habits at home. The school provided literature and information to parents as a means of helping reinforce the common language for students outside of the classroom doors (Ross & Laurenzano, 2012).

Implication on Urban Students

The idea of a character development curriculum in today's society is seen as critical and necessary, especially for students in an urban population. Power (2014) noted children deserve the opportunity to be exposed to a character development curriculum that resonates with student

dignity and provides an opportunity for students to embrace leadership responsibly while seeking a sense of purpose. Students in urban settings often benefitted the most when they were introduced to a character development curriculum, including the benefit of exposing the students to learning how to express and regulate their thoughts and actions in a positive manner. With greater outside stress factors being present for urban students, any type of character development helps to provide a foundation in regards to instilling core character values (Elias & Haynes, 2008; Seider et al., 2013).

Martinez (2105) also believed when students felt embraced and cared for in their school setting, sessions that provided school-based character development created a greater outcome for students in handing outside factors by building personal resiliency. Oppenheimer et al. (2014) stated given the amount of time students are in school, focusing on student strengths can help create healthy, happy students who are capable of leading successful and fulfilling lives.

Since students spend between 35-40 hours weekly in school, the opportunity to use positive psychological interventions focused on positive well-being and improving student academics are possible in an urban environment with the assistance of a character development curriculum (Huebner & Hills, 2011). Helping students find a role model who could positively contribute to students' budding personalities is critical. Teachers have the unique ability to role model and become someone students look up to with a character development curriculum. A character development curriculum that focuses on personal motivation is a shift for school personnel that requires not just teaching performance traits in isolation but providing opportunities for students to notice their successes (Pappano, 2013).

Subsequently, Sanderse (2013) found 44% of adolescents failed to mention a role model in a school lacking a character development curriculum, revealing students have a hard time

recognizing who influences them the most. Urban students can be the most at-risk for failure; looking for strengths-based approaches is one way to improve overall school well-being and academic achievement for urban students when comparing their achievement to that of suburban students raised in a higher socioeconomic status (Hart & Risley, 2004). According to Koebler (2011) minority students are the most at-risk for not finishing high school, with only 57% graduating.

Power (2014) also noted urban students are less likely to have access to character development curriculums and opportunities to practice ethical skills when family income depicts the ability for students to have access to high quality schools, athletic instruction, and other opportunities for programs that support positive development. Reardon (2013) agreed with Power's belief that children who are not exposed to the enriching experiences upper class children experience are at a deficit of attaining the same goals, which only increase the achievement gap within schools. Character development is seen as one of those services urban students need in nurturing social responsibility and helping students build resiliency. Students need direct explicit instruction to know how to handle circumstances that present themselves, similar to the idea of Horace Mann encouraging apprenticeships in moral responsibility (Power, 2014).

Positive Aspects of Character Development Curriculums

Character development curriculums are consistently chosen among schools for the positive variety of aspects they bring to schools to enhance school culture, academics, or both. Elias (2014) described schools that utilized character development curriculum as helping to make positive contributions to American society. When looking at the type of America we want, while values may be different in some regards, schools have the opportunity to contribute to moral

reasoning and understanding in a democratic society. The overall skills taught in character development curriculum can focus around subject areas already discussed in today's schools, such as citizenship.

Ji and Flay (2013) noted SEL not only has the ability to help students stay in school but also has the ability to help students avoid violence and substance abuse by promoting positive social competence through the implementation of emotional skill development. When a student is able to self-regulate his or her feelings and decisions, those particular skills emphasized in school carried with students throughout their lives. Students within the urban school setting have the most to gain in regards to strengthening the likelihood of student success. When observing the link between character development and overall student well-being in an urban school setting, Oppenheimer et al. (2014) used student surveys to illustrate that one year of implementation does provide a growth in welfare among urban, African American adolescents.

Subsequently similar to the program presented in the study by Brackett et al. (2012) utilized RULER (Recognizing emotions in self and others Understanding the causes and consequences of emotions, Labeling Emotions Accurately, Expressing Emotions Appropriately, Regulating Emotions Effectively), or better known as the Feeling Words Curriculum created by Yale University. Other schools across the country focused on the overall development of student character to help deliver students with the character development skills and academic experiences for success (Seider et al., 2013). The schools in the KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) differentiated the implementation of how character development skills were presented to their students through a variety of approaches. While some implementation was completed through the use of whole group, others were implemented during a set time focused around character development. The outcome measures exposed low-income youth who participated

character development throughout the course of the school year indicated a stronger commitment to academic integrity and overall academic work. Lower-achieving students within the schools noted an increase in their own reflection regarding their perception towards school with the important of acting with integrity increasing when character development skills were present (LaSalle, 2015; Seider et al., 2013).

One other program utilized in the measure of study by Ji and Flay (2013), SECD or Social-Emotional and Character Development Program called Positive Action, presented how character development directly impacted students overall. This program was used to determine overall improvement of student social and emotional skills in urban elementary school between grades 3 and 5. The program only focused on student overall well-being in determining the outcome of strengthening student skills and behaviors. The cohort of students at these grade levels saw an increase in prosocial behavior, honesty, self-development, self-control, respect at school, and respect at home with implementation of the Positive Action Program as outlined in student self-reflection measures (Ji & Flay 2013).

When assessing the Leader in Me Program, Westgate Research (2014), on behalf of the Covey Foundation, found many positive aspects of the program. Reduced discipline problems and the use of a common language for school-wide communication were the two highest aspects of school wide implementation of the Leader in Me Program, as reported by participating administrators. Improved student responsibility, leadership skills, school culture, and academic test scores were the other positive components listed by administrators. Additional areas cited for improvement were student engagement and motivation, parent involvement, self-confidence and self-esteem, improved interactions between students, better teachers, and an impact on both school and family life (Westgate, 2014).

Effect on Academic Performance and The Leader in Me Program

Numerous studies focused on determining if academic performance was a direct effect of the implementation of a character development curriculum within a school. Brackett et al. (2012) exposed an increase in student overall academic achievement when the school utilized the RULER Feeling Words Curriculum during a 30-week curriculum designed for fifth and sixth grade students. The concept of the program at the elementary level relied on the overall school facilitation of helping students both express and regulate their emotions. The outcome of the study relied solely on school administration output and overall perception, versus solid academic growth in both Language Arts and Math. This particular skills-based program helped to increase overall student competency in both academics and the handling of social concerns at the end of the 30-week trial measured through report card grades (Brackett et al., 2012).

According to the information presented through Biggar et al. (2015), student academic achievement as one aspect directly impacted by The Leader in Me Program. Students were able to intrinsically create their own goals academically, which allowed for success through multiple measures. The study incorporated 13 schools utilizing the Leader in Me Program for students at the elementary level and middle school levels; students were evaluated on two academic measures for comparison of academic growth including DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) and iLeap scores (Biggar et al., 2015).

Younger children were noted as having a strong increase on overall DIBELS scores and in iLeap Math scores with the use of the Leader in Me Program. Students were evaluated in subgroups across the elementary schools based on gender, ethnic group, and free or reduced meal plan status. Overall, the one subgroup that experienced the most positive gains was students who were African America with low grades living in poverty. Students were found to perform at

benchmark level on DIBELS, which evaluated overall student reading fluency based on grade level expectations (Biggar et al., 2015).

Westgate Research (2014), on behalf of the Covey Foundation, concluded that according to principal perceptions, academic performance increased on state testing failing grades in student classes decreased. With a random sample of 260 principals currently using the program were interviewed over the phone, principals noted an overall attendance improved and students focused more on instruction in class, thus creating higher academic success. Of the 260 principals interviewed, 99% of the principals specified the results of the program being very positive for their schools (Westgate Research, 2014).

Biggar et al. (2015) conducted a study over the course of six months with fifth graders to determine if overall academic achievement increased and office referrals decreased with the Leader in Me Program. Observations concluded students using the program had a 14% higher chance of reaching academic success with the Leader in Me Program. During the course of the year, a slight decrease was noted but subsequent years of implementation were needed to determine long term effects of the program.

Ross and Laurenzano (2012) observed the Leader in Me Program implementation in regards to academic achievement but noticed a less significant correlation with the Leader in Me Program and overall student academic success. School personnel, including administration agreed the program improved school climate within their school but overall improvement in state assessments was not as visible after implementation. Two elementary schools in the study conducted by Ross and Laurenzano (2012) within the same school district observed students performed better in Language Arts and Mathematics on state assessments but did no better than other schools within their school district. However, in the particular review, the state

standardized results were only observed after the first year of implementation and not after subsequent years.

Corcoran et al. (2012) noted similar observation at Johns Hopkins School of Education in their review of achievement outcomes of the Leader in Me Program. Scores were examined between third and fifth grade within two elementary schools. State standardized scores were compared for three years between the school results and state scores in the areas of both Language Arts and Mathematics. The study indicated schools maintained their performance across the baselines for their school district on state standardized test but did perform better according to the state average in both Language Arts and Mathematics (Corcoran, et al., 2012).

Effect on Student Transitions

Transitions in life are some of the most difficult times in a student's educational career. Lane, Oakes, Carter, and Messenger (2015) stressed the risks students take when transitioning from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school. The last few years of elementary school going into middle school are seen as some of the hardest transition years for students to handle both academically and behaviorally for both females and males (Kalberg, Lane, & Lambert, 2012). With a focus on peer pressure, acceptance, and rejection, this time period is critical in focusing on a smooth transition behaviorally for students moving between elementary to middle school (Bloom, 2010, Lane et al., 2015).

Davidson (2014) observed when students transitioned from elementary school to middle school or even high school into the real world, students who have been exposed to character development training, regardless of the specific program, were able to proceed into a new setting having had opportunities to practice character skills that would benefit them for a lifetime. Davidson (2014) stated any real-world simulations that allow students to practice essential

character-developing skills allowed for the overall process of mastery in positive behavior to occur. Providing scripts, curriculum, and lessons that have students focus on thinking about behavior is a strong catalyst for future success in college and in a career (Theriot, & Dupper, 2010). Jones et al. (2015) noticed a relationship in pro-social skills being a predictor of non-cognitive developments included student attention, the ability to regulate emotions, an increase in social skills, and self-regulation. Jones et al. (2015) believed social –emotional and cognitive skills are critical for success with student's attention, self-control, and interactions with other individuals. Skills that help develop social skills go beyond school years help improve outcomes students will face when becoming young adults and being exposed to different circumstances such as education, employment, criminal activity, substance abuse, and mental health (Jones et al., 2015).

Implementation and Program Components

School districts in general can often be hesitant when deciding on the implementation of a character development curriculum, based on the inability to predict the overall outcome results of a program requiring not only financial resources but significant time in implementing the program with fidelity (Brackett et al., 2012). In the review by Walker et al. (2015), teachers stated they were supportive of a character development curriculum that would help students not only behave appropriately but also in increase student academic success on schoolwork (Arthur, 2010, Biesta, 2010).

Bavarian et al. (2013) also presented a benefit for high-risk students to do well academically when exposed to a social-emotional or character development plan for youth living in urban, low-income areas. Overall, student academic motivation was seen as increasing through the use of student surveys at the elementary and middle school levels. When students

were exposed to direct explicit instruction focused around behavioral curriculum in grades K-6, archival data from the school, limited to school data based on report cards, and other diagnostic forms revealed academic outcomes increased for students aged 6 to 11. Gallien and Jackson (2006) cited the need for character development curriculum to be culturally responsive in how character development is presented, especially for students coming from an urban setting. The narratives and standards must reflect the neighborhood the school is serving.

The overall curriculum of a program is critical in determining how responsive the program will be upon school-wide implementation. According to the Covey Foundation, The Leader in Me Program follows seven habits as the basis of the curricular program to include the following: (a) be proactive; (b) begin with the end in mind; (c) put first things first; (d) think win-win; (e) seek first to understand, then be understood; (f) synergize; and (g) sharpen the saw. The program does not use a scripted curriculum but instead focuses on the seven habits with common vocabulary integrated throughout the school (Ross & Laurenzano, 2012).

Leader in Me Program

The Leader in Me Program attributes its success to seven habits noted throughout the program (Ross & Laurenzano, 2012). Classrooms that incorporate the program focus on the habits through a variety of methods. Teachers can be heard discussing or talking about the habits in the school hallways; posters, banners, signs, and reminders highlight the habits throughout the classrooms and in the school. Teachers have the ability to determine exactly how to teach the habits through discussions and modeling. A common vocabulary is used among the students within the school, and students take on leadership roles within their classroom and throughout the school. Daily aspects of a typical school day are executed to reinforce the seven habits and focus on goal setting (Ross & Laurenzano, 2012).

The first habit is being proactive and includes the premise of moving from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset helps students take initiative for their own personal goals and choices (Franklin Covey, 2015). The study conducted by Bonawitz et al. (2010) revealed that students are more likely to explore the world around them when they are exposed to certain standards focused around responsibility and mindfulness of behavior.

The second habit is to begin with the end in mind, which helps students look at their overall goals and beliefs through a personal mission statement (Franklin Covey, 2015). Wolters (2004) presented the idea of beginning with the end in mind and focusing on goals helps shape student achievement and their motivation for obtaining personal goals; student environment is an essential component that impacts student goal setting. Adolescence is seen as the critical time to focus on this particular goal. A study conducted by Rolland (2012) involving over 31,000 students determined goal setting was correlated with increased levels of self-efficacy, student competence, and self-assurance. Hill and Tyson (2009) observed a study conducted by Nancy Hill of Harvard University, who evaluated 50,000 students over a 26-year time span and focused on student goal setting. The outcome focused on improving academic achievement through goal setting, and that helping students focus on future goals while inspiring the significance of education propelled success in schools, when looking at parental and teacher support for helping student obtain their personal goals.

The third habit of the Leader in Me curriculum focuses on putting things first such as where students are taught to establish and carry out main priorities (Franklin Covey, 2015). The notion revolves around the idea of self-discipline; Duckworth and Seligman (2005) stressed self-discipline improved academic achievement and overall attendance. The idea of helping students

with self-discipline carried into many facets of life in regards to the third habit (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007).

Thinking win-win is the habit that encourages students to emphasize with others during conflict and seek interactions that are accepting of both parties. Compromising and understanding how to handle conflict resolution allows students to understand healthy ways to handle conflict and look at another individual's viewpoint to create a resolution (Franklin Covey, 2015).

The fifth habit is seek first to understand, then to be understood. Listening to others and understanding their viewpoints is the premise of this fifth habit. According to Thompson and Lientz (2004), the best way to build a foundation for critical thinking is to enhance the skill of listening to others. Students often do not have exposure in working on the habit of listening. Providing opportunities for students to practice effective listening has a positive correlation with helping students improve academic achievement (Franklin Covey, 2015).

The sixth habit it so synergize, or help students learn how to work with others in a group setting (Franklin Covey, 2015). This habit is described as helping students cooperate with one another and realize every opinion matters. According to Laal and Laal (2012), higher academic results occur when students learn to cooperate as teams versus working together individually.

The seventh and final habit is sharpening the saw, or having students take a moment and encourage other students to enhance their own self-worth seen by focusing on overall well-being including exercise, eating habits, mental health, and personal goals (Franklin Covey, 2015). Friedman-Krauss and Barnett (2013) related this habit as helping students experience self-regulation and be less inclined to partake in negative situations. Students were less likely to be involved in something of a criminal nature when they learned to sharpen the saw and focus on

their personal self-first. In a study by Payton et al. (2008), students' abilities to engage and their social and emotional development were an important intervention in focusing on the whole student.

Effect on School Culture and Leadership

Curriculum is one component of a character development curriculum but overall acceptance of the program chosen is critical for maximum attainment of success (Kristjánsson, 2013). Utilizing a character development curriculum within a school involves a partnership of all stakeholders who are willing to embrace opportunities to incorporate school-wide initiatives (Mattix et al., 2016). While most parents and school staff support the need for a character development curriculum, economists in general tout the positive effect of academic success when schools help improve quality character development curriculums. Investing in school culture from an economic standpoint is viewed as a positive predictor of how students benefit society as a whole as they age (Brackett et al., 2012). While academic achievement is noted as improving, many lawmakers and legislators are seeing the gains following less then intended targets in the areas of student academic growth. The United States as a whole is known for focusing more on academic achievement with a disproportionate lack of emphasis on overall student well-being (Oppenheimer, 2014; Rogers-Sirin & Sirin, 2009).

The Leader in Me Program addresses whole-school improvement with a focus on improving the learning environment within schools by addressing school culture and behavior (Steinberg & Li, 2014). With over 2,000 schools currently using the Leader in Me Program by the Covey foundation, Steinberg and Li (2014) noted the program was similar to other interventions currently in schools, such as RTI (Response to Intervention) or PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports), but with a focus on leadership throughout the entire

program. Steinberg and Li (2014) believe any character development curriculum should embody school leadership skills that help students take on not only leadership roles, but have the ability to self-reflect through student-led conferences, opportunities for public speaking, collaborating with their peers, and the ability to self assess personal progress.

Looking past academics, character development curriculum provides the ability for leadership to occur at a variety of levels. One of the first forms of leadership would be instructional leadership through use of pedagogical improvements focused around character development. Shared leadership also occurs at the building level when teachers and students have buy-in with overall program execution and success. Teachers have the unique opportunity to contribute to a positive school community with shared decision that positively impacts school culture (Sanderse, 2013). When observing adolescences involved in a character development curriculum, Rolland (2012) found that social-emotional support provided by a student's teacher impact his or her overall performance academically. Sanderse (2013) also noted that with a character development curriculum, teachers have the unique ability to model and help cultivate a student's character; the teacher buy-in is critical in helping students raise their own personal achievement goals. The ability for teachers to role model moral and character development aligns with Bandura's social learning theory follows the premise learning is process students observe from others. Teachers role modeling positive traits that students should embody are compared to the Aristotelian approach that students flourish when opportunities to grow character are attainable (Saderse, 2013).

Students also are impacted as leaders when they are provided with opportunities to focus on their own goals and to practice leadership opportunities while at school. Administratively, principals can support leadership and help increase the activities and partnerships necessary for

sustained school improvement (Hollingshead, 2009; Klenk, 2015). The goal of education should not only be academic intelligence but personal character (Oppenheimer et al., 2014). Hollingshead (2009) reported one of the biggest ways character development improved leadership within a school was through allowing school leaders to not only build capacity in each other, but also initiate change for improving future school sustainability.

In the Leader in Me Program, school wide leadership through the perspective of administration was observed by Steinberg and Li (2014) on behalf of the Covey Foundation, to report on what impacted student success besides academic achievement. While academic achievement is seen as being important, overall student achievement in a variety of areas was one program aspect of Leader in Me. The survey conducted by Steinberg and Li (2014) found principals noted the biggest changes in student leadership skills, school culture, and student academic achievement as the top positive effects of the Leader in Me Program. Principals also noted how important social and emotional skills are when looking at the long-term success of students, with 99% of principals in the study of 669 participants believing academic success is not as important as life skills (Steinberg & Li, 2014).

Ross and Laurenzano (2012) observed similar feelings of the Leader in Me and noted sustainability and implementation dependent on buy-in from all school staff, including administration, teachers, and counselors. The Leader in Me Program revealed a positive effect on school culture and leadership when a committed Lighthouse Team supported and continually monitored the fidelity of implementation. The program was seen as being sustainable in providing leadership opportunities and creating personal intrinsic motivations for continuation of the program.

Components of School-wide Implementation

The implementation of a character development curriculum needs certain critical factors for school wide implementation when looking at facilitating the adoption of a curriculum development program (Hollingshead, 2009). Planning the components of school-wide implementation is one of the most critical aspects school administration and leadership faces when deciding on a character development curriculum, not only to students but also more specifically to the school staff. Walker et al. (2015) stated teacher preparation is the start of quality education for students. When looking at a character development curriculum, the change process involving something new and challenging for staff depends on the intensity of the implementation. Any strategy required by a character development curriculum creates varying degrees of support for management and ultimate success (Aitken & Aitken, 2008, Biesta, 2010). Students also need the opportunity to practice in-context opportunities that allow for case-based learning applications. Thiel et al. (2013) noticed the positive effect demonstrating positive character traits had in helping students work on reasoning skills in emotional situations. This was one aspect of a character development curriculum Thiel et al. (2013) stated was essential in creating a positive influence in education students both morally and ethically in character development curriculum

School-wide implementation of the Leader in Me Program resulted in a leadership day for the school held during the spring that involves the entire school. The school celebrated the year and students were provided opportunities to showcase their leadership skills in the form of performances and public speaking in front of the school. Teachers actively participated in the leadership day by designing opportunities for their classrooms as a whole to present their talents and skills, which is seen as the driving force behind a successful leadership day (Ross & Laurenzano, 2012).

Implementing a Successful Character Development Curriculum

Hollingshead (2009) concluded in order for a school to meet the purpose of the character development curriculum, the school staff was critical in the implementation. When including both new and veteran teachers alike as implementers to facilitate change within a school, Hollingshead (2009) noticed four categories to define support from being a resistor, cooperator, ideal implementer, and over achiever. First, some educators will be resistant to the change. School leaders were needed in instances where resistance occurred in order to motivate a more positive implementation. Educators can also be defined as cooperators, or willing to work with others in regards to implementing the program but needed some support and assistance from fellow colleagues (Williams, 2009).

The ideal implementer is seen as an educator who collaborates with all and incorporates the highest level of implementation school wide. Finally, the overachiever educator goes above and beyond typical implementation plans by creating additional attributes or interventions to the character development curriculum (Hollingshead, 2009). When looking the four types of school personnel support, school administration and leadership should acknowledge staff members most likely fall among these four levels. Implementing a successful program for positive change requires addressing interventions to consider concerns and planning for ways to create and sustain enthusiasm for positive support from all involved (Williams, 2009).

Sanderse (2013) completed a study of teachers' impact on student behavior and their unique approach in role modeling behavior. The study noted teacher preparation programs did not explicitly train teachers the moral aspects of teaching and how-to role model certain traits to students. The ability of a teacher to have the skills necessary to role model certain behaviors were dependent on the teachers' own personalities and backgrounds. It is important for school

administration to take the information Sanderse presented into account when looking at the four types of implementation personalities teachers fall into when executing a plan and moving forward to provide explicit training for the modeling of character development.

The second item administration should consider when implementing a character development plan is the actual program itself. Skaggs and Bodenhorn (2006) stated there were critical elements that must be reviewed before deciding to implement a certain character development program. There are multiple programs available for purchase that can create positive results for students. However, when determining which program to use, administration must make sure the program was evaluated by outside evaluators and scrutinized by an academic review process. Character development programs are seen as needing apparent goals, a strong mission in regards to expectations with the oversight, high quality training and resources, and a review process (Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006). When looking at the Leader in Me Program through the Covey Foundation, a study presented by Biggar et al. (2015) observed overall teacher buy-in with the program and any changes in staffing, both at the administrative level and at the teacher level, could affect the overall impact of school-wide implementation.

Outcomes of a Character Development Curriculum

When looking at the outcomes for expectations, questions must be asked when reviewing the implementation of a character development curriculum in school, including questions about the relationship between the program itself and the perceptions of all involved and if positive student achievement occurred. The stated goals of the character development curriculum should align with the expectations the administration and school have to school-wide academic achievement, behavior indicators, and behavioral perceptions (Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006).

Character development curriculums influence a variety of factors. Walker et al. (2015) surmised the review conducted by Berkowitz and Bier (2006) of 109 character development curriculums, that curriculum can create positive change for schools if they are based around proper design and implementation and are successfully part of the overall school culture. When this type of change occurred within a school, behavior indicators, such as school suspensions or school dropouts, typically decreased school-wide (Brady, 2008; Walker et al., 2015). Behavioral indicators were also one area that can be improved through a character development curriculum (Grier, 2012). Skaggs and Bodenhorn (2006) stated consequently, the implementation of a character development curriculum helped impact the school climate from the behavior of the students to the creation of a positive learning environment free from distractions. As noted, parents and students alike perceived these positive outcomes as ones worth the implementation of a program (Baker, Grant, & Morlock; 2008, Grier, 2012; Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006).

The research expressed on the topic of character development often discussed the ability for student academic achievement to improve with the use of a character program. How academic achievement was defined as improving depended on the research study at hand. Currently, character development curriculum is seen as helping improve student graduation rates (Koebler, 2011) and improving academic work (Seider et al., 2013). Academic work could be referred to as overall student assessment and reflection of their personal progress in all academic areas. Correspondingly, academic work increasing with a character development curriculum was defined through student grades on their report cards in the study conducted by Bavarian et al. (2013). Biggar et al. (2015) even noted the growth of student success with student reading fluency defined by DIBELS scores as well as progress on iLeap Math scores.

Looking strictly at the Leader in Me Program, Steinberg and Li (2014) concluded principals who incorporated the Leader in Me Program choose the program specifically to teach students high quality skills centered about social emotional learning, while ultimately improving the culture of the school and student academic success. While looking at the main challenges principals faced, the Leader in Me Program was regarded as highly satisfied based on the opinions of administrators who decided to utilize the program with academic achievement having a positive effect with overall program implementation in their school. The overall investment into the program was higher for the Leader in Me Program than for other programs ranked by principals who implemented other programs such as PBIS and RTI. In conclusion, the study conducted by Steinberg and Li (2014) noted The Leader in Me as a character development curriculum model that successfully establishes school leadership and helps transform overall school culture. While the program itself was not created specifically to improve student academics, the main components of the program consequently have a domino effect that translates into students improving academically with program implementation.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

At the present moment, character development curriculums discuss how school culture, along with many other positive components, improve with the application of a program. The effect on school culture and leadership was noted through a variety of different resources as being one of the first factors positively influenced with the utilization of a character development curriculum, regardless of the particular program chosen. The implications of a character development curriculum are seen as being positive towards many features indicating student success, especially impacting urban students in a positive manner. A chance in school culture was also displayed as a very important component occurring with school-wide implementation.

The consequence on academic performance was perceived through a variety of different resources, including teacher and student perceptions, student academic report card grades, and standardized assessment data. Student academic success was seen as improving with a character development curriculum in some studies, but overall effect on school culture continues to be the focus of research regarding character development curriculums.

One gap that existed in the literature regarding character development is how student academic success, especially with standardized test scores in both Language Arts and Mathematics improves with the use of a character development curriculum. There is little research in the area of how character development curriculums improve standardized test scores, particularly at the intermediate elementary level. Character development curriculums, including the Leader in Me, have yet to express how their program impact students academically on standardized test scores in comparison to another school with similar demographics who does not utilize a particular program. While research for the Leader in Me Program through the Covey Foundation does show academic improvement, a gap existed whether or not student standardized test scores in both Language Arts and Mathematics increases with program implementation across schools within the same school district.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This chapter begins with the rationale for the design and identification of the variables. The research question and null hypotheses are stated, followed by a discussion of the participants and setting, instrument, and data analysis.

Design

The research design is an ex-post facto causal-comparative study or "a type of quantitative investigation that seeks to discover possible causes and effects of a personal characteristic (academic success) by comparing individuals in whom it is present with individuals in whom it is absent or present to a lesser degree (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 634)." A causal-comparative study was chosen based on the need to test the significance between two or more groups, specifically the difference in student academic performance using a state standardized test within a school district. Gall, et al. (2007) describes a causal comparative research study as a means to discuss the cause-and-effect relationships created with the design of two groups, including one of the groups experiencing the independent variable. Due to the fact the independent variable is a character development curriculum, specifically the Leader in Me, the study includes no manipulation and meets the definition of an ex-post facto design. The results of the state system of school assessment in Language Arts and Mathematics for third grade students, that have already occurred, are the dependent variables. The comparison groups comprised of a school implementing the character development curriculum and one not using the curriculum were already established, making it not possible to include random assignment. Student results on the PSSA's in both Language Arts and Mathematics were compared for an effect to school implementation of a character development curriculum.

Research Question

The following research question was investigated:

RQ1: Is there a difference in the effect on standardized test scores in English Language Arts and Mathematics between students who have been exposed to a character development curriculum versus students who have not.

Null Hypothesis

The null hypothesis for this study are:

$H_0$1: There is no statistically significant difference in the 3rd grade English Language Arts test scores and Mathematics scores on a State System of School Assessment between students who have been exposed to a character development curriculum versus students who have not.

Participants and Setting

The participants for the study were drawn from a convenience sample of elementary students located in the Northeast section of the United States during the 2016-2017 school year. The school district is an urban school district that services around 8,000 students. The school district consistently has the lowest bottom percentile in all school districts within the state in regards to academic achievement. The school district is around ten square miles serving students in preschool through 12th grade. The city where the school district is located has an average median income of $26,920, with the largest aspects of the population being 30% Caucasian, 52% African American and 3.5% Asian.

According to Gall et al. (2007), a minimum sample size of 126 participants were required for a MANOVA for a medium effect size with a power of .7. This study involved 168 participants in order to exceed the minimum requirement. At D Elementary School, a Leader in

Me school, all third graders were chosen to participate, approximately 72 students. At S Elementary School, all third graders were chosen to participate, approximately 96 students. The ages of the participants ranged between age 8 and age 10. Both male and female students were included as participants.

Each school had approximately 75-95 students per each grade level in third grade and all third-grade students were included in the sample. State standardized test results included third grade results conveniently selected with at least 70 students in third grade for each elementary school. Students who have an IEP (Individualized Educational Program) were included as participants.

The two elementary schools were chosen based on their similar demographics in regards to grade level supports, school population, and student ethnicity. S Elementary School did not have a school wide improvement plan and D Elementary School implemented a character development curriculum called The Leader in Me. D Elementary School applied The Leader in Me Program upon completing the comprehensive grant application during the 2012-2013 school year through the Covey Foundation. The school administrators choose this particular program based on student success, both academically and behaviorally, that occurred in other schools with similar demographics in America. This program was also chosen because it embodies a different paradigm focused on intrinsic motivation and using a common language, or the seven habits. School leadership then traveled to a symposium presented by the Covey Foundation in New York City that influenced the application process to begin. School-wide commitment at the time of grant completion was required by the faculty, parents, and leadership team before submitting the grant proposal to the Covey Foundation for review. The grant was eventually approved and the school district has since supported the use of the program with steady

commitment and an increased need to keep the leadership team stable during the beginning years of implementation.

Both S and D Elementary Schools had between 400-500 pupils that attended preschool through grade 4. Additionally, both schools had school populations where 95% of the school population received free or reduced lunches. D School had a population primarily 63% African American and 30% Hispanic, while S School had a population primarily 40% African American and 54% Hispanic. When looking over all of the schools within the school district, S and D Schools had the closest demographics in regards to student population numbers and ethnicity.

Instrumentation

The yearly Pennsylvania System School Assessment is a "standards-based, criterion-references assessment which provides students, parents, educators, and citizens with an understanding of student and school performance related to the attainment of proficiency of the academic standards (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2016)." According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (2016), the PSSA assessment incorporates 7 components for universally designed assessments and the Principals of Universal Design (Center for Universal Design, 1997). The PSSA assessment develops tests to have inclusive populations, precisely defined constructs, assessable and non-biased items, amendable to accommodations, simple and clear instructions and procedures, and maximum reliability and comprehensibility, along with maximum legibility.

The PSSA assessment was created by a company in New Jersey, with Pennsylvania first using the assessment in 1992 when schools were required to implement the test every three years. Starting in 1999, all school districts were required to participate. The 2015 PSSA assessment was field tested in 2014 before full utilization with over 50 Pennsylvania educators,

both teacher and Pennsylvania Department of Education staff, to review items in both the

Language Arts and Mathematics tests to make sure the 7 components were properly adhered to

before full implementation the following school year (Pennsylvania Department of Education,

2016).

Student formative assessment data will be gathered through the use of the Pennsylvania

System of School Assessment (PSSA) that focuses on English Language Arts (ELA) and

Mathematics for grades 3 through 8, with assessment anchors specifying eligible content for each

grade level tested. Assessment Anchors are tools provided by the Pennsylvania Department of

Education that align curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices throughout the state.

Assessment anchors are also known as eligible content, with samples and resources regarding

eligible content provided on the Pennsylvania Department of Education website for educators

(Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2016). According to the Pennsylvania Department of

Education (2016), annual standardized assessments are one indicator of student performance. In

comparison, the Social Learning Theory helps drive the use of standardized data as students are

required to perform academically based on attention, memory, and motivation throughout all

aspects of standardized testing. The ability for students to retain information presented during

the course of the school year and then provide a snapshot of their performance through the use of

standardized testing data aligns with Bandura's theory (Grusec, 1992).

Reliability on the PSSA tests are defined as the degree in which scores by test takes are

consistent throughout repeated testing applications, specifically the how consistent the scores are

when procedures are replicated, regardless of how the overall consistency is reported (Data

Recognition Corporation, 2016,). The PSSA technical report was published in January 2015 for

the 2016-2017 assessment. The report discusses the interpretation of reliability coefficients,

conditional and unconditional standard errors of measurement, and agreement between raters as threats to reliability (Data Recognition Corporation, 2016, Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2016).

The Technical Report lists the PSSA test reliability in the low 0.90's in all areas of Mathematics and Language Arts, showing a high consistency across scores regarding test items. The PSSA's also utilize Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α) when determining reliability based on open-ended questions throughout the Mathematics and Language Arts sections in third grade (Data Recognition Corporation, 2016, Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2016). The Data Recognition Corporation (2016) paralleled the PSSA standardized test with other mass state assessments of the same length and content area and found that reliability was in the same range, high 0.80s to low 0.90s. In detail, the third grade Mathematics reliability is 0.94 with Standard Errors of Measurement (SEM) of 3.61 (Data Recognition Corporation, 2016, Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2016).

All students across the state in grades 3 through 8 were assessed yearly in regards to English Language Arts and Mathematics, in separate answer booklets for each subject area. All public-school students in the state of Pennsylvania are required to take the PSSA assessment, with exceptions granted to IEP (Individualized Education Plans) students who met the requirements to participate in the PSSA's. The testing window for the 2016-2017 PSSA in English Language Arts was April 3 through April 7 with makeup testing being between May 8 and May 12. The testing window for Mathematics was April 24 through April 28, with schools taking on average four school days for test completion, not including a makeup testing window between May 8 and May 12. Strict procedures for materials being returned and test security measures are clearly outlined in testing manuals before the testing window begins.

The instrument has been used in numerous studies (Lucas, 2013; Shapiro & Gebhardt, 2012; Barghaus, Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Henderson, Li, & McDermott, 2017). Lucas used this assessment as an indicator of student performance statewide in Math when exposing students to Math Curriculum Based Assessments. Shapiro & Gebhardt (2012) used the assessment as a way to indicate the effectiveness of educator efforts, noting a high reliability coefficient alpha for comparing curriculum-based measurement methods. Barghaus, et al. (2017) used the assessment to show internal consistency and validity when comparing academic performance at the primary grade level. Both of the exams in 2016-2017 included embedded field tests along with the operational tests for all third-grade students. The Mathematics assessment measure focused on four anchors that included numbers and operations, algebraic concepts, geometry, and data analysis and probability; the majority of the questions were multiple choice questions with open-ended task components (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2016).

The English Language Arts assessment measures included a writing component, focused on writing, language, and text-dependent analysis, and a reading component, focused on literature text, informational text, key ideas and details, craft and structure along with the integration of knowledge and ideas, and vocabulary acquisition and use. Questions in this section of the test involved standalone multiple-choice items, passage-based multiple-choice items, evidence-based selected response items, short-answer items, text-dependent analysis items, and writing prompts. In third grade, there was a total of 64 questions in English Language Arts and 76 questions for Mathematics on the 2016-2017 PSSA assessment, including 4 open-ended responses for each subject assessment and the rest a combination different multiple-choice questions (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2016).

The students were scored on the following four levels: Advanced, Proficient, Basic, and Below Basic. Cumulative scores are given individually for ELA and Math. The English Language Arts test for third grade was comprised of 64 questions with a total score averaging between 600 and 1586 points, with 600-905 scoring Below Basic, 905-1000 scoring Basic, 1000-1143 scoring Proficient, and 1143-1586 scoring Advanced. Mathematics for third grade included 76 questions with a total score averaging between 600 and 1594 points, with 600-923 scoring Below Basic, 923-1000 scoring Basic, 1000-1110 scoring Proficient, and 1110-1594 scoring Advanced. All student responses were scored one time and ten percent of the responses were scored a second time. Raters were chosen and trained by the DRC (Data Recognition Corporation) in applying scoring guidelines using anchor papers as models. All raters for open-ended responses received extensive trainings after being specifically recruited (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2016).

The testing window for the PSSA test is every spring around April. Mathematics has three test sessions and English Language Arts has four test sessions. Testing results are available the following July of the same school year. The research aims to evaluate archived PSSA data from the 2016-2017 school year. At that time, D Elementary School had four years of successful implementation of The Leader in Me Program.

Validity of the test, in regards to content included and evaluation, shows the PSSA test aligned with the knowledge and skills presented in the Pennsylvania Department of Education assessment anchors. All test items were first tested in the field test event with statistical analysis conducted regarding internal structure and validity evidence. To maintain validity, fairness reviews of items were utilized to avoid issues related to subpopulations or specific populations, and an outside third-party reviewer reviewed test content. In addition, the DRC selected item

writers who were highly qualified and trained in providing high-quality items (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2016).

Procedures

Permission was sought from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) with great care being taken to minimize participant risk. Data was gathered by contacting the school district involved in the research after first seeking approval from the school district's school board through an acquisition form. The form was completed and turned into the school district building, with specific requests for student data, from the 2016-2017 PSSA assessment. Student names were stripped of information and conveyed only through the student identification numbers between 1 to 75 for both schools. This process allowed for minimizing risks to students. Scores for the students were kept locked in a file cabinet by the researcher, following privacy guidelines.

Data Analysis

As stated previously, the research design for this study was a causal-comparative (ex-post facto) using a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to examine the differences in student performance based upon exposure to a character development curriculum. A MANOVA test was utilized since it is "a procedure used when the measured variables are correlated with each other and the dependent variable is a composite index of two or more variables (Gall et al., 2007, p. 645)."

The research aimed to evaluate archived PSSA data from the 2016-2017 school year. At that time, D Elementary School had four years of successful implementation of The Leader in Me Program. The analysis procedures involved use of the SPSS (Statistic Package for the Social

Sciences) to calculate descriptive statistics and compare the mean scores on PSSA data in both English Language Arts and Mathematics of two different groups comprising of one group that was impacted by a character development curriculum, specifically The Leader in Me, and the other group of students not impacted is the control school.

Statistical reporting included a test for outliers using a Box and Whisker plot for each group. Assumption testing used independent observations and checked for normality with the use of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, with a sample size greater than 50, along with a Shapiro-Wilk test for normality, and a Mahalanobis distances value. An overview of the results were provided through descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, and number per cell.

The alpha level was set at $p < .05$, with the null hypothesis being rejected if $p < .05$. The null hypotheses stated there is no statistically significant difference in third grade English Language Arts test scores and third grade Mathematics test scores on a state system of school assessment between students who have been exposed to a character development curriculum versus students who have not.

The pooled means and standard deviations for the groups were reported for all students (n=168). The population was robust with 168 total students measured, for a medium effect size with a power of .7. The minimum number of student data required was 126 in determining the level of significance, but this study utilized 168 students (Gall et al., 2007).

A Median Absolute Distance (MAD) method was used to investigate means for both Mathematics and English Language Arts. An assumption of homogeneity of univariate normality was tested with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Then, multicollinearity was checked with Pearson's correlation to test associations between variables. Scatterplots were then used to

test for linearity and multivariate normality. Mahalonobis distance was used to find multivariate

outliers, followed by a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This quantitative study analyzed how the leadership of a character development curriculum effected the standardized test scores among third grade students. Third grade students enrolled in two different elementary schools in the same school district were studied. One of the elementary schools utilized a character development curriculum (The Leader in Me) and the other did not. D Elementary school has been implementing The Leader in Me character development curriculum since 2013 while S Elementary School has no character development program in place. Standardized test scores for 72 third graders at D Elementary School and 96 third graders at S Elementary School were analyzed for the 2016-2017 school year. When looking at current character development curriculum trends schools may implement, this research is timely in that it addresses how the character development curriculum Leader in Me effected standardized test scores for urban students in third grade. By exploring the effect of student success when looking at standardized test scores, educational leaders can better evaluate the advantages character development curriculums provide at the elementary level.

Research Question

The following research question was investigated:

RQ1: Is there a difference in the effect on standardized test scores in English Language Arts and Mathematics between students who have been exposed to a character development curriculum versus students who have not.

Null Hypothesis

$H_0 1$: There is no statistically significant difference in the 3rd grade English Language Arts test scores and Mathematics scores on a State System of School Assessment between

students who have been exposed to a character development curriculum versus students who have not.

Descriptive Statistics

A total population of 168 students participated in the 2016-2017 standardized test scores for the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) in the subject areas of Language Arts and Mathematics at both D Elementary School and S Elementary School. Of these students, 76 completed Language Arts and Mathematics PSSA testing at D Elementary School and 97 students at S Elementary School. When comparing the standardized test scores from both D Elementary School and S Elementary School, the mean was reported as the measure of central tendency, along with standard deviation as the measure of variability, as presented in Table 4.1. D Elementary School, the elementary school utilizing The Leader in Me, had lower means in both Mathematics and Language Arts.

Table 4.1.

One-Way MANOVA: Descriptive Statistics

	School	*Mean*	*SD*	*n*
Math Score	D School	864.4722	52.87508	72
	S School	900.1875	94.33750	96
	Total	884.8988	81.02781	168
ELA Score	D School	900.6389	73.91741	72
	S School	946.5937	86.48901	96
	Total	926.8988	84.25259	168

Results

Null Hypothesis

The null hypothesis stated there is no statistically significant difference in the 3rd grade English Language Arts test scores and Mathematics scores on a State System of School Assessment between students who have been exposed to a character development curriculum versus students who have not. The results of this causal comparative study include initial data screening, tests of hypothesis including assumption testing and statistical analysis.

Initial Data Screening

Instead of using a Box and Whisker plot as a method to investigate means, a Median Absolute Distance (MAD) method was used. According to Leys, Ley, Klein, Bernard and Licata (2013), the median is similar to the mean when looking at central tendency but is not as sensitive when univariate outliers are present. To find the limits of the MAD method, MAD is similar to standard deviation in a Box and Whisker Plot. The MAD method is comparable to finding the upper and lower limits in the Box and Whisker Plot. The MAD method used a level of decision of 3.0, or very conservative. Additionally, given the number of student standardized test scores between both elementary schools, the number of participants was robust enough to avoid removing the four outlier test scores between the schools.

Assumption Tests

Individual independent and dependent groups showed three out of the four did not pass the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for univariate normality. Results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated that the assumption of normality was not met for three out of the four independent/dependent variable groups, as noted in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2.

Tests of Normality

	School	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	School	Statistic	*df*	Sig.	Statistic	*df*	Sig.
Math Score	School1	.151	81	.000	.905	81	.000
	School2	.133	100	.000	.938	100	.000
ELA Score	School1	.086	77	.200[*]	.983	77	.381
	School2	.098	98	.022	.951	98	.001

Multicollinearity was checked with Pearson's correlation to test associations between variables. Table 4.3 shows Pearson's correlations between variables. Pearson's correlation was lower than .80 and was not significant at $p < 0.05$. Thus, the assumption of multicollinearity was met.

Table 4.3.

Correlations

		Math Score	ELA Score
Math Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.102
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.183
	N	181	173
ELA Score	Pearson Correlation	.102	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.183	
	N	173	175

Linearity and multivariate normality was examined with the use of scatter plots as shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2. Figure 1 and Figure 2 indicate the assumption of linearity was not tenable. By not meeting the assumption of linearity, there will be a loss in power.

Figure 1 and Figure 2 also display the inability to find multivariate outliers. In order to decisively find multivariate outliers, the Mahalanobis distance was examined. The data's Mahalanobis distance value (13.16 max) was compared against the critical value outlines in a chi-square critical value chart concluding $X^2(2, N = 168) = 13.8155, p = .001$.
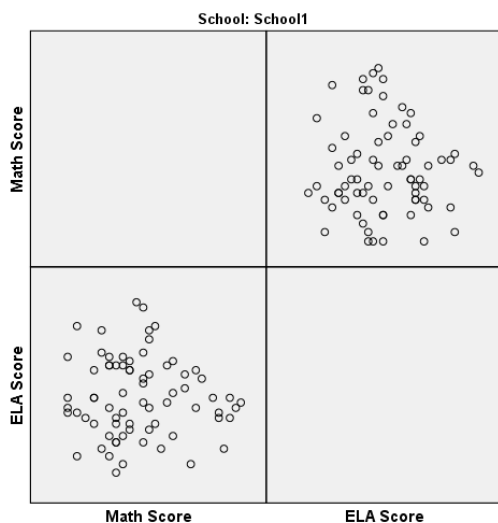

Figure 1. Scatterplot analysis of School 1 (D Elementary School) pertaining to English Language Arts and Mathematic standardized test scores.
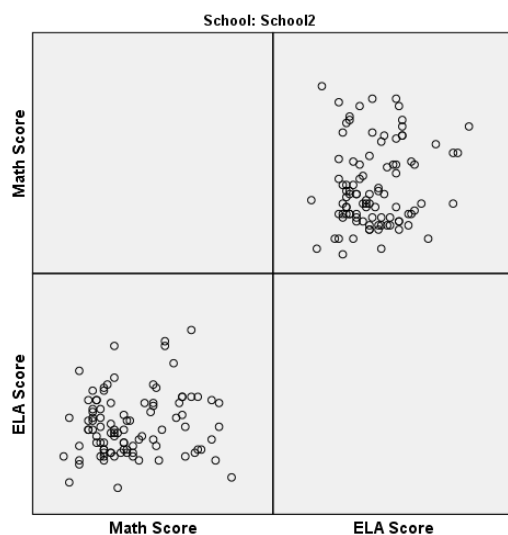
Figure 2. Scatterplot analysis of School 2 (S Elementary School) pertaining to English Language Arts and Mathematic standardized test scores.

A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was chosen based on the assumptions stated previously. The hypothesis was tested using MANOVA to determine the difference in English Language Arts test scores and Mathematics scores standardized test scores between students who have been exposed to a character development curriculum versus students who have not. *Box's* M test was used to test homogeneity of covariances. The results of Box's M (13.95) was not significant ($p > .001$), indicating the assumptions of homogeneity of covariances was not violated, therefore also showing that homogeneity of variances for each independent variable was not violated allowing Wilk's Lambda to be used for MANOVA.

A MANOVA revealed a significant multivariate main effect for school, Wilk's lambda = .909, $F(2, 171) = 8.487$, p = .000, partial $\eta^2 = .091$. Due to this, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was ran on each dependent variable. The one-way ANOVA showed there was a statistical significance in Mathematics, $F(2, 171) = 4.618$, $p < .05$; partial $\eta^2 = .026$. The one-way ANOVA showed that English Language Art scores was statistically significant, $F(2, 171) = 13.350$, $p < .05$; partial $\eta^2 = .072$ (Table 4.4, Table 4.5).

Table 4.4.

Multivate Test

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis *df*	Error *df*	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.996	18808.591[b]	2.000	170.000	.000	.996
	Wilks' Lambda	.004	18808.591[b]	2.000	170.000	.000	.996
	Hotelling's Trace	221.278	18808.591[b]	2.000	170.000	.000	.996
	Roy's Largest Root	221.278	18808.591[b]	2.000	170.000	.000	.996
School	Pillai's Trace	.091	8.487[b]	2.000	170.000	.000	.091
	Wilks' Lambda	.909	8.487[b]	2.000	170.000	.000	.091
	Hotelling's Trace	.100	8.487[b]	2.000	170.000	.000	.091
	Roy's Largest Root	.100	8.487[b]	2.000	170.000	.000	.091

Table 4.5.

Test Between Subject Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	Math Score	34792.639[a]	1	34792.639	4.618	.033	.026
	ELA Score	87201.465[b]	1	87201.465	13.350	.000	.072
Intercept	Math Score	134730119.229	1	134730119.229	17882.845	.000	.991
	ELA Score	145332126.228	1	145332126.228	22250.136	.000	.992
School	Math Score	34792.639	1	34792.639	4.618	.033	.026
	ELA Score	87201.465	1	87201.465	13.350	.000	.072
Error	Math Score	1288321.280	171	7534.043			
	ELA Score	1116927.737	171	6531.741			
Total	Math Score	138602164.000	173				
	ELA Score	149588224.000	173				
Corrected Total	Math Score	1323113.919	172				
	ELA Score	1204129.202	172				

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

This study examined how the leadership of a character development curriculum effected the standardized test scores among third grade students within the same school district. Archival data from the 2016-2017 was collected and examined using a descriptive analysis approach focused on how students did between both schools, where one school implemented the Leader in Me Program as a character development curriculum for three school years. As this study focused upon a comparison of two different schools within the same school district, these implications consequently relate to how the use of a character development curriculum, such as The Leader in Me, may provide academic benefits for elementary students. Chapter Five concludes this study by discussing the results, implications, the limitations, and the recommendations for future references.

Discussion

The purpose of this non-experimental causal-comparative study sought to determine if character development curriculum directly impacted student success, specifically in the area of academics through standardized test scores. The population of students from which the data was drawn were third grade students from the same school district, where one school received exposure to a character education program and the other did not. Student standardized test scores in both Language Arts and Mathematics for the 2016-2017 school year (N=168) were taken from both D and S Elementary Schools.

Many articles presented an explanation regarding the need for character development curriculum, but very little research has been done regarding the positive academic impact on standardized test scores. In light of the results discussed in chapter four and taking account the

literature presented in other studies, the results in this study contradict previous research (Bracket et al., 2012; Berkowitz & Bier, 2004).   Other studies looked at the overall perceptions of student academic success, this study looked at the gap that still exists in the literature with regards to the effects of character development on normative achievement.

While monitoring student academic achievement with the use of a character development program like The Leader in Me is important in warranting the overall resources required for implementation (Snyder, 2015). Resources include both leadership investment school wide along with the financial investment for program adoption. The typical cost for the implementation of the Leader in Me Program is between $45,000 and $60,000 for the first three years (Lighthouse Research and Development, Inc., 2015).

One specific research question guided this study:

Research Question

The main research question sought to discover if there is a difference in the effect on standardized test scores in English Language Arts and Mathematics between students who have been exposed to a character development curriculum versus students who have not. Standardized test score data was collected from 168 students from the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) between two different elementary schools in the same school district. A MANOVA was utilized to examine the differences between independent groups on more than one continuous dependent variable (Gall et al., 2007, p. 645).

The literature suggests that character development programs effect student success starting first with Bierman, Coie, Dodge, Greenberg, Lochman, McMahon, & Pinderhughes, (2010) showing research that well-implemented character development curriculum have significant positive effect on lowering aggression and increasing social competence and overall

academics at the elementary level. Heckman & Kautz (2012) showed that soft skills have the ability to predict success in life and are an important component of student curriculum.

When looking at academic achievement, Ji & Flay (2013), found that a character development curriculum influences student academic outcome, specifically low-income students living in urban communities. Brackett, et al. (2012) conducted research that showed student academic achievement increased through report cards grades with the implementation of a character development curriculum. Likewise, research shows character development curriculum for students in disadvantaged school districts influenced standardized test scores when exposed to continuous modeling provided by their school (Durlak, et al., 2011; Snyder & Flay, 2010; Snyder, et al., 2012).

Snyder and Flay (2010) report evidence that student achievement, attendance, and disciplinary outcomes are positively influenced with a character development curriculum at the elementary level. Results by Snyder, et al. (2012) evidenced elementary students from low-income areas do improve academically with a character development program, specifically on standardized test scores in both Mathematics and Language Arts. Durlak et al. (2011) found character development programs not only promoting student social and personal development, but also having the ability to enhance student academic performance with an integrated curriculum during the school day.

Research performed by Wilkens (2015) stated that a Leader in Me School did not significantly differ in state standardized achievement at the elementary level when compared to non-Leader in Me schools. There was no statistically significant difference in English Language Arts between 30 different non-Leader in Me and Leader in Me Schools. Wilkens (2015) suggested uncontrolled human variables versus controlled human variables as a reasoning a

Leader in Me School did not outperform a non-Leader in Me School. In comparison to this study, S Elementary School (non-Leader in Me School) outperformed students in Mathematics and English Language Arts without the implementation of the Leader in Me program.

The findings support research conducted by Ho and Yu (2014) concerning the ceiling effect on high-stakes testing and exploring descriptive statistics. This research explains that the ceiling effect is one way to describe data where the independent variable is no longer affecting the dependent variable. Regardless of the ability of test questions to accurately measure knowledge, the test taker reaches the highest limit of intelligence regardless of ability. Wang and Zhang (2009) support the findings by Ho and Yu (2014) in the idea of performance asymptotes in relationship to the ceiling effect, which describes when performance scores have no room for improvement based on factors that cannot be altered.

The researcher rejected the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant difference in the 3rd grade English Language Arts test scores and Mathematics scores on a State System of School Assessment between students who have been exposed to a character development curriculum versus students who have not. The one-way ANOVA test revealed a significant difference between standardized Mathematics test scores, $F(2, 171) = 4.618$, $p < .05$; partial $\eta^2 = .026$ at D Elementary School and S Elementary School.

While D Elementary School implemented the character development program; The Leader in Me, when compared to S Elementary School that has a similar demographic of students, there was a significant difference in overall Language Arts standardized test scores, $F(2, 171) = 13.350$, $p < .05$; partial $\eta^2 = .072$. This study does not support the findings by Fonzi and Ritchie (2011) that a change academic achievement can transform with the implementation of The Leader in Me.

When analyzing why students at D Elementary School did not improve academically, self-efficacy could be one component that affected the overall motivational component lacking in implementation of The Leader in Me Program, according to Doménech-Betoret, Abellán-Rosselló, & Goméz-Artiga (2017). Comprehensively to change school culture in an effort to help students positively, self-efficacy is a key component of Bandura's Social Learning Theory. The overall belief in staff regarding having the ability to create a positive change both in their classroom and schoolwide is a critical variable in determining the effectiveness of program implementation. Usher and Pajares (2008) even cite self-efficacy a key indicator when predicting students' academic achievement, specifically in the construct of both predicating and explaining achievement academically. The overall relationships between self-efficacy and students' expectations in doing well both academically throughout the school-year and on the state standardized test is determining by student belief of being able to perform the task, along with teacher belief in execution of the program (Doménech-Betoret, et al., 2017). Research by Ersanla (2015) concurred the more self-efficacy is present in students, the greater likelihood of academic success.

Implications

This study implied character development curriculum, specifically The Leader in Me Program does not improve standardized test scores in Mathematics and English Language Arts. While the findings by Ji and Flay (2013) reported increased academic achievement data in the form of standardized test scores with a character development program, the evidence found in this present study indicate increased test scores do not necessarily occur with the implementation of The Leader in Me program. Specifically, students exposed to The Leader in Me program do

not overperform when compared to students at the same grade level, with similar demographics, and within the same school district.

While student test scores are often seen as validation of hard work and valid implementation of a character development curriculum, efforts do not always produce academic gains (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). This research added to the existing body of literature by showing implementation of character development program has negative associations with academic performance (Valiente, Swanson, & Eisenberg, 2012) and falls short in improving academic performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Research corroborated with findings by Wilkens (2015) and added to the research indicating character development curriculums, with attention to The Leader in Me, lack the ability to improve academic performance. Wilkens focused on comparing if student achievement is guaranteed with the implementation of The Leader in Me Program, with no evidence emotional intelligence programs demonstrate higher achievement. With the design of this study to compare two schools within the same school district, this study provided a different perspective in analyzing students with parallel demographics but opposite exposure to The Leader in Me Program.

Limitations

There has been a limited amount of direct research on how a character development curriculum impacts student assessment data on standardized test scores for students who receive the character development curriculum during school hours. Likewise, there is no research currently that examines two schools within the same school district. Findings in this particular

study are limited to the population examined between both elementary schools and cannot be generalized to all students.

The first limitation of an internal threat was whether the Leader in Me Program was fully implemented during the school day. Adding to that limitation, the overall collective efficacy from school personnel in regards to the shared belief in The Leader in Me Program, along with the organization and execution of the curriculum might have been associated with student achievement (Donohoo, Hattie, Eells, 2018). Research by Donohoo, et. al. (2018) and Hollingshead (2009) both acknowledge the teacher's beliefs, along with the implementation of a program, strongly impact student achievement, even more than student socioeconomic status. Since the test was given under the same recommendations and standards across a state in the northeastern area of the United States, a second limitation is the internal threats of test anxiety, testing environment and student willingness to test, assuming this would have already been addressed through test preparation throughout both schools and by educators before the testing window began.

The last limitation is an overall combination of different factors that can affect student's achievement in general. Issues with the data not being normally distributed and the assumption of equal variances not being tenable calls into question the findings. Curwin, Mendler, and Mendler (2018) state there is a strong correlation between student success in school and their overall socioeconomic status. Similarly, Hattie (2012) lists overall student motivation, concentration, persistence, engagement, socioeconomic status, prior achievement, home environment, and parental involvement as main factors in school performance. Academic success can also be seen as "uncool" to students in low socioeconomic schools (Curwin, et. al., 2018). One component of this limitation was the concern the demographics of both schools were

not comparable in regards to looking at student assessment data. This particular limitation was resolved by choosing two schools within the same school district with similar demographics.

<div align="center">**Recommendations for Future Research**</div>

With much of the research on the topic of the character development curriculums focused on the shift in overall school culture and with research highlighting the need for character development curriculum, this study provided a different approach by looking at the positive academic impact on standardized test scores. Corcoran, et al. (2012) aligned with the viewpoint that The Leader in Me curriculum provides academic gains for students at the elementary levels. This study presented results different from the findings of previous studies suggesting academic gains increase with the implementation of a character development curriculum (Oppenheimer, Fialkov, Ecker, & Portnoy, 2014; Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009). The results were dissimilar and confirmed the findings of Wilkens (2015) that there is no statistically significant difference between a Leader in Me school and another school with similar demographics at the same grade level.

One contributing factor could be the implementation of The Leader in Me curriculum making an impact in the general success of the curriculum in relationship to increasing standardized test scores. The overall instructional methods and curriculum of the school in empowering The Leader in Me Program is another component to review when determining success.

Appropriately, recommendation for future research is suggested in an effort to include more grade levels in comparing standardized test scores. Based on the findings of this research, this researcher believes more grade levels would allow for a more in-depth comparison between schools. The Leader in Me Program is available for students in grade K-12. By looking at

multiple grades throughout elementary, middle, and high school, the program could be evaluated across multiple scales of grades.

Likewise, another opportunity for future research would be looking at student achievement over multiple school years versus only one school year. The growth of student success on academic across multiple years with implementation of The Leader in Me Program may provide a deeper analysis of the effect towards student's growth in respect to the length of implementation. Comparing schools at different levels of implementation would provide a viewpoint of how continued program indoctrination effects schools throughout multiple years.

Not considered in this study was implementation of The Leader in Me Program in comparison to other schools that utilize this particular character development curriculum. The validity of school implementation is a contributing factor when determining the overall ability of The Leader in Me Program in relationship to school buy-in from personnel. Furthermore, another recommendation is reviewing the overall perception of school personnel in relationship to academic access with the use of The Leader in Me Program. Furthering research to include schools at different levels of The Leader in Me Program leadership implementation when looking at standardized test scores could also be a way at analyzing success in this particular program.

The implementation of leadership principles to include professional learning, student learning, and family learning are components of implementation validity that could be reviewed. In addition, the overall leadership culture created, including both the leadership environment, shared leadership, and leadership events are a critical component of The Leader in Me Program that could be examined in terms of execution. Finally, the alignment of academic standards to include aligning The Leader in Me to school goals, student-led academics, and empowering

instruction are the last component that future research could review in terms of implementation

in regards to instructional methods.

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APPENDIX A

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 13, 2018

Bonnie Sypolt
IRB Application 3201: How Leadership of a Character Development Curriculum Affects the
Standardized Test Scores Among 3rd Grade Students

Dear Bonnie Sypolt,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance
with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration
(FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means
you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB
application.

Your study does not classify as human subjects research because it will not involve the collection
of identifiable, private information.

Please note that this decision only applies to your current research application, and any changes
to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued non-human
subjects research status. You may report these changes by submitting a new application to the
IRB and referencing the above IRB Application number.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in identifying whether
possible changes to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at
irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

LIBERTY
UNIVERSITY.
Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

APPENDIX B

Superintendent's Guidelines for Partnership Request-Activity or Program

PURPOSE:

The purpose of the *Partnership Request* is to ensure the activity/program compliments other district initiatives and addresses essential questions prior to the activity/program. The *Partnership Request* must have both Administration and Board approval before commencement of the activity/program.

PROCEDURE FOR APPROVAL:

Step 1: The applicant/s will submit a completed *Partnership Request*-Activity or Program to the appropriate administrator (e.g., building principal, curriculum coordinator, business administrator, etc.)

Step 2: The administrator or designee reviews and ensures the *Request* is complete, confirms receipt with applicant/s, and forwards it to the Chief Academic Officer for approval. The Chief Academic Officer or designee will return incomplete Requests, which may delay the approval process.

Step 3. The designated administrator consults with appropriate department regarding any related steps required to implement the activity or program, i.e. with the Business Office regarding use of facilities, purchases; with Human Resources regarding background checks for volunteers; etc.

Step 4. The Chief Academic Officer determines if the Academic, Instruction, and Student Services Committee Request must review the Request and follows the District's procedures for review and approval.

Step 5. The Chief Academic Officer determines if the activity or program compels a formal contract, agreement, or memorandum of understanding

Step 6. The administrator ensures all necessary steps for activity or program approval are completed and comply with District policy.

Form: 2-6-17

Clearing.

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BUDGET-Attach a preliminary budget detailing costs according to Item 3e above.

SIGNATURES:

I/We certify that the information contained in this Partnership Request is accurate and true.

_____   _____
Partnership Applicant/s   **Date**

_____   _____
Principal/Department Supervisor   **Date**

_____   _____
Chief Academic Officer   **Date**

Board of School Directors notified/approved on (date):_____

Form: 2-6-17

APPENDIX C

March 1, 2018

Dear Dr.

As a graduate student in the School of Education] at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is How the Leadership of a Character Development Curriculum Effects the Standardized Test Scores Among Third Grade Students. The purpose of my research is to add to the research on character education and determine if there is a difference in standardized test scores between third grade students who have been exposed to a character development curriculum or have not.

I am writing to request your permission to access and utilize student Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) data/records for third grade students
                for the 2016-2017 school-year.

The data will be used to determine the effects of a character development curriculum
                using standardized test scores from third grade students between

For education research,   District's permission will need to be on approved letterhead with the appropriate signature(s): Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by email to bsypolt@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Sypolt

APPENDIX D

April 12, 2018

Dear Sir or Madam:

Please find this letter as approval for Mrs. Bonnie Sypolt to conduct doctoral dissertation research   this school year. Her point of contact for all aspects of her research will be myself,

   I will be providing Mrs. Sypolt with the requested 2017 PSSA Grade 3 ELA and mathematics data for both elementary schools, as it will be stripped of any and all student identifiers prior to her receipt.

We look forward to working with Mrs. Sypolt to assist her in obtaining her doctoral degree.

Yours in education,

"Empowering Academic Achievers and Lifelong Learners"