



Leading a National Call to Character

**Future Educators for Character Grant
Executive Summary, October 31, 2006**

Brief Project Overview

The *Future Educators for Character* grant program was created by CEP to identify innovative practices, influence teacher education programs, and make character education an integral part of the undergraduate and graduate training of teachers and educators for selected sites. The University of Illinois-Chicago (UIC), Whitworth College in Spokane, and a third university were originally selected for the two-year program. Each site received \$25,000 for the 03-04 academic year, with the understanding that CEP and its expert advisory panel would review progress before approving the final \$25,000 disbursement for the 04-05 academic year. The University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL) was substituted for the third university in the second year of the grant.

Each grant site had a different theoretical emphasis in their approach to character education. UIC used social domain theory as the guiding conceptual framework. This framework allowed them to differentially focus efforts upon teaching practices related to students' construction of morality, social conventional values, and zones of privacy and personal control. UMSL has approached character education from a social justice perspective and Whitworth used an integrated college-wide framework that integrates education of the mind and heart.

Synthesized Summary of Findings

Syllabi Review

In order to infuse character education throughout the teacher education programming, each site approached a form of syllabi review in their initial actions. UIC conducted an inventory of all course syllabi for the undergraduate elementary education program for content related to character education. In a similar vein, UMSL reviewed the current syllabi for their seven core educational courses. Each item linked to character education specifically or self-knowledge, building community, and becoming culturally competent in ways that might be linked to character education, was boldfaced and cut and pasted into a document so that they could get a clearer overview of the existing components. Whitworth also looked across syllabi for an understanding of what was intentional about character education.

Over the two year period, significant changes were made to syllabi across the three higher education sites. UIC was able to make important changes to the Child Development and Elementary Education course including a five-week character education unit with elements of character education linking to four other courses. In addition, UIC expanded character education emphasis to field course work/experiences. UMSL set up an organizational site for all core course instructors using their Blackboard software system. This allowed them to post resources and communications that emphasized opportunities for faculty that included articles, web sites, bibliographies, and film clips. Whitworth now has a total of 21 courses in their 4 programs that have participated in revision to include a more systematic approach to teaching character education.

Education of Faculty

Each site engaged in multiple ways to educate interested faculty in the study of character education as related to teacher education programming. First, the grant coordinators themselves expanded their knowledge by attending CEP's annual national Forum in 2004 and 2005, bringing a participating colleague with them. Whitworth began faculty education by choosing a number of recommended readings with various perspectives on character education, forming a book discussion group, and conducting "jigsaw" activities so that staff (and invited partner district teachers) could teach each other major concepts. They later held a "character education open house" for staff, displaying newly acquired materials and a bibliography of all materials with ordering information. In addition, Whitworth held a mini-character education conference on campus that included K-12 educators and faculty members. UIC faculty began with a study of social domain theory, reading Nucci's book *Education in the Moral Domain*. UMSL held a one day retreat that was facilitated by CEP's director of education and research, Dr. Merle Schwartz. This was in addition to the already mentioned web site. All sites found ways for faculty to talk together on this project.

As part of the grant offering, each site was told that they could access any of CEP's expert panel members (Dr. Marilyn Watson, Chair, Dr. Karen Bohlin, Dr. Joan Goodman, Dr. Mary Ellen Finch, and Dr. Nel Noddings) for consultation or presentation. It is interesting to note that all three sites enjoyed learning from Dr. Watson about developmental discipline. Two of the schools are going to require her book, *Learning to Trust*, as part of their teacher education program.

Evaluation

All sites did some form of baseline assessment as they began their grant which went beyond examination of syllabi content and included mixed methodology. UIC did a journal of project activities, observations of faculty implementation, student evaluations of moral development and education components of the child development course, and exit questionnaires of student knowledge and sense of efficacy regarding social and moral development and character formation. In fact, UIC used a methodology that allowed for a control group and a treatment group. They found statistically significant differences on student knowledge and efficacy for students who received not only course work with a character education focus, but intensive follow-through in character education during their second year of field work.

Whitworth used CEP's Quality Standards, with some adaptation, to assess the degree to which their education programs were following CEP's Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education. This provided them with a baseline from which to build. Whitworth's approach, to this point, has been qualitative as they assess the projects their students have completed within the character education framework. They also assessed the students' written reflections on the meaning of their experiences.

UMSL began the grant program late but used a pre and post test model to check student efficacy on how well students felt they were equipped to be educators of character. As UMSL had a late start for this project, getting up and running in the late fall of the second year, they do not have their data analyzed at this time.

Efforts

While the three sites had similarities in approaches, as described above, each program had unique elements which will be briefly described in this executive summary and elaborated in greater detail in a future publication (described under “next steps” below).

UMSL likened character education to multicultural consciousness, through selective literature. In this process, they had an urban focus on community acculturation, teacher ‘*other*’ by interrupting stereotypes, and looking at gender development issues. They developed a structure, using technology, for reaching out to all faculty members and including adjuncts in the process. They completed an item analysis of an existing student-teacher character education efficacy instrument and are modifying it to be useful for students not yet doing student-teaching.

Whitworth, the smallest of the three schools, used a variety of methods to bring faculty together to talk about character education, materials, and syllabi sequencing. They approached a secondary assessment class from the perspective of academic honesty, how to prevent cheating, and establishing a classroom climate conducive to ethical conduct. They created criteria for “Whitworth Character Education Book Awards,” providing experiences for their students to select their character education award winner. This project-based experience was displayed throughout the school of education, providing opportunities for students to share their learning. Whitworth worked closely with partnering public schools throughout their grant program, as was evidenced in their mini-conference day. Whitworth is working on alignment of character traits with NCATE’s requests for development of certain teacher dispositions.

UIC folded content on social and emotional learning into coursework that was the result of a developing relationship with CASEL (Center for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning). CASEL is a national organization that happens to be located in the very same building as UIC’s department of education. UIC employed the use of Taskstream, a web-based program by which students work in teams to construct lessons based on actual social studies and language arts materials from the Chicago Public Schools. Some of the lessons required of students were of a moral nature and reflected the students’ learning of educating in the moral domain. Video clips of social and moral reasoning interviews with young children and religious children helped students understand the distinctions between children’s concepts of morality and their concepts of convention.

It should be noted that the sites co-presented on-going findings at both the CEP annual Forum and at the AACTE (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education) annual conference.

The Study within the Study

The “study within the study” refers to the qualitative methodology used by CEP’s principal investigator, the director of education and research, to study attitudinal changes among college faculty members. Participating faculty members at each site were interviewed before starting the grant program and at the end of the two year period. The purpose of the interviews was to discover how faculty members viewed character education and its relevance for their work. Transcripts are currently being transcribed for the last set of interviews and coding procedures will be applied to the data.

Next Steps

All sites have a commitment to continuing the work that was started, even if no further funding is found. The Dean of Education at UIC wants to extend the basic elements of their program to the cooperating teachers who work with UIC’s students in the public school classrooms during their field courses and student teaching. In addition, they are working on preparing faculty in-service workshops on Developmental Discipline. UIC will be seeking funding to continue work with their lab school, the National Teachers Academy, which is operated by the Chicago Public Schools in collaboration with UIC.

Whitworth plans to complete a more purposeful programmatic scope and sequence, defining student outcomes more specifically to be aligned with their conceptual framework. They want to add more questions about character implementation into the 1-year graduate follow-up interviews. They want to design research studies on effectiveness with their students and their students, including how to gauge the impact on K-12 students.

UMSL is opening a Center for Character and Citizenship Excellence which promises to be a great resource to continue their work in character education. They hope to continue documenting changes in syllabi and student efficacy and follow up with students to assess changes in knowledge, skills, and behavior.

Finally, CEP hopes to complete a college-level book for faculty that tells the stories of each grant site in a case-study format and provides a synthesis of learning that includes not only the *what* but the *how* to make change happen at the university level. CEP will seek to have this book published by a publisher that specializes in college-level education materials. Presentations and shorter publications will also be prepared and delivered, aiming towards the AERA (American Educational Research Association) and AACTE audience.

Conclusion Summary

The Character Education Partnership (CEP) awarded the Future Educators for Character grants to the University of Illinois- Chicago (UIC), coordinator Dr. Larry Nucci; Whitworth College, coordinator Dr. Sharon Mowrey; and the University of Missouri- St. Louis, coordinators Dr. Virginia Navarro and Dr. Marvin Berkowitz. Grant funds ranged

from \$25,000 for one year at UMSL to \$50,000 for a two-year period at UIC and Whitworth. The purpose of the grants was to identify innovative practices, influence teacher education programs, and make character education an integral part of the undergraduate and graduate training of teachers and educators for selected sites. The principle investigator and coordinator of the program was Dr. Merle Schwartz, director of education and research at CEP. The study was conducted during the 03-04 and 04-05 academic years.

The three sites used various methods to get a baseline on what they were or were not doing in the area of character education. Common to all three sites was a syllabi review across education courses, based on certain criteria that included common character education themes and related areas of self-knowledge, building community, social and emotional learning, and cultural competence. Initial interviews were conducted on participating faculty to establish their understanding of character education and initial attitudes towards including character education in their coursework. Follow-up interviews were conducted at the end of the study. Two of the three schools also had students complete efficacy questionnaires that measured the degree to which students felt comfortable with knowledge about character education and how to teach it in schools. Most important across all three sites was the establishment of a learning community among faculty, offering opportunities for the professors to engage in lively discussion based on readings, have excellent resources to turn to, and learn from expert presenters.

Each site reported qualitative and quantitative findings as a result of their experience. There was a significant increase for inclusion of character education across coursework in all three sites. UIC also found statistically significant differences on student knowledge and efficacy for students who received not only course work with a character education focus, but intensive follow-through in character education during their second year of field work. Whitworth witnessed understanding of character education principles through project-centered student experiences. UMSL established a web site for faculty to access resources and to standardize a character education strand across their seven core education courses.

All three sites will continue to expand the number of faculty involved in understanding and including character education in their work. UIC has their Dean committed to extending this work to include cooperating teachers where student-teachers are placed. Whitworth wants to connect their character education outcomes to the NCATE dispositions. UMSL will be folding this work into their newly created Center for Character and Citizenship Excellence.