

## **TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD CHARACTER EDUCATION AND INCLUSION IN FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES EDUCATION CURRICULUM**

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*Character education is a hotly debated topic and is receiving much attention among educators and policy makers. The purpose of this study was to examine in-service family and consumer sciences education teachers' attitudes toward character education and the inclusion of character education in family and consumer sciences education curriculum. One hundred ninety-five surveys were completed and returned. The family and consumer sciences teachers responding to this survey indicated that they were including 22 of the 27 character traits of the Georgia character curriculum as important or major concepts in their teaching. For the most part, they reported the concepts were taught in the Nutrition and Wellness and Parenting curriculum. Overwhelmingly, teachers agreed that character education can be and should be integrated in the family and consumer sciences curriculum. The teachers responding to this survey indicated that they had extensive knowledge of the character traits and how to teach character traits.*

### **Introduction and Conceptual Framework**

There is a growing concern and much discussion about the need for schools to do more to foster character development in students (Jones, Ryan, & Bohlin, 1998) and to educate today's youth on character and values. Character education is helping students to know the good, love the good, and do the good (Ryan, 1993). Character education is a hotly debated topic and is receiving much attention among educators and policy makers. A study released by *U.S. News and World Report* found that "teaching children values and discipline ranked the highest among issues Americans considered most important to reforming our schools" (Jones, Ryan, & Bohlin, 1998, p. 11).

In order to effectively provide an innovative teaching and learning environment, teachers must be knowledgeable of the common character traits that are the core of character education (Anderson, 2000). Anderson (2000) listed (a) respect, (b) responsibility, (c) fairness, and (d) hard work as four core character traits. According to Nodding (1995), "The greatest structural obstacle, however, may simply be legitimizing the inclusion of themes of care in the curriculum" (p. 191). Those involved with planning and implementing education, such as politicians, state education departments, parents, and schools are searching for ways to effectively include and integrate character education (Anderson, 2000).

Throughout history there have been three social institutions that have shared in the responsibility of character and moral education (a) the home, (b) the church, and (c) the school (Lickona, 1991). Historically, character development was a central theme in teacher training programs in America (Jones, Ryan, & Bohlin, 1998). "Character education" is the prevalent term used today by policy makers and educators, but historically, there have been several terms used

to convey the concept of teaching morals and values in the educational system. These terms include (a) moral education, (b) moral reasoning, (c) values education, (d) values clarification, and (d) ethics (Jones, Ryan, & Bohlin, 1998).

The idea of teaching character and care has been prevalent in the early childhood curriculum for a length of time. But secondary schools, where violence and apathy are concerns, have done little in the past to develop the capacity to care among students (Nodding, 1993). According to Lickona (1993), "Character education is far more complex than teaching math or reading; it requires personal growth as well as skills development" (p. 336). After a period of decline, character education is experiencing a resurgence of interest in the public school system (Jones, Ryan, & Bohlin, 1998).

Over the past decade, most of the discussion has focused on efforts at the public school level to develop character traits in students. According to Jones, Ryan, and Bohlin (1998), "Little scholarly attention has been given to what is currently being done at the level of teacher preparation to equip future teachers with the skills and knowledge they need to work effectively as "character educators" (p. 11). Teachers across all subject areas often do not receive adequate preservice or inservice training on how to teach character issues. By receiving little or no training, teachers result in feeling uncomfortable or less competent in the values domain (Lickona, 1993).

In 1997, the Georgia Legislature enacted a law supporting the development of a "character curriculum" to be developed by the State Board of Education. The character curriculum includes 27 character traits: character, courage, patriotism, citizenship, honesty, fairness, respect for others, kindness, cooperation, self-respect, self-control, courtesy, compassion, tolerance, diligence, generosity, punctuality, cleanliness, cheerfulness, school pride, respect for the environment, respect for the creator, patience, creativity, sportsmanship, loyalty, perseverance, and virtue. The character curriculum became part of the Georgia Quality Core Curriculum Standards required in elementary, middle schools, and high schools in the state. Throughout the state, teachers in every field are teaching character education with the decision related to amount of time and method of teaching left to the local school. Many of the 27 character traits outlined by the Georgia Department of Education may be included and integrated by family and consumer sciences teachers in different content areas. Teachers' attitudes toward the character education traits and inclusion in the curriculum is important to understanding the role of family and consumer sciences education in promoting character education.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study was to examine in-service family and consumer sciences education teachers' attitudes toward character education and the inclusion of character education in family and consumer sciences education curriculum. Three objectives addressed the purpose of the study. The first objective was to determine the extent to which the 27 character traits were included as objectives in family and consumer sciences curriculum. The second objective was to determine teachers' attitudes toward teaching character education as part of family and consumer sciences programs. The third objective was to identify the curriculum areas in family and consumer sciences where character education concepts were being included and integrated.

### **Methodology and Findings**

The study's participants consisted of family and consumer sciences teachers in Georgia. A character education survey instrument was distributed to 300 teachers attending the January

2001 Georgia Family and Consumer Sciences Teacher Winter In-Service meeting. One hundred ninety-five surveys were completed and returned resulting in a 65% response rate. The survey instrument consisted of a total of 36 items including 27 items on the inclusion of character education in family and consumer sciences education classes, six items on the attitude of teachers toward character education, and three demographic questions. The data were collected and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Mean, standard deviation, and frequencies are reported for the survey items.

The three demographic questions on the survey instrument inquired about the grade level taught, years of teaching experience, and the content areas in which the participant was teaching character traits. The responses for grade level taught and years of experience are indicated in Table 1. Seventy-five percent of participants taught in grades 10, 11, or 12. The number of years of teaching experience ranged from 1 to 39 years with a mean of 14.5 years.

Table 1  
*Demographic Characteristics of Georgia Family and Consumer Sciences Teachers*

Variable	N	%
Grade Level Taught	195	
6	53	27.2
7	50	25.6
8	49	25.1
9	144	73.8
10	147	75.4
11	147	75.4
12	148	75.9
Years of Experience	136	100
1 - 5	29	21.3
6 - 10	23	16.9
11 - 15	23	16.9
16 - 20	13	9.6
21 - 25	33	24.3
26 - 30	9	6.6
31 and over	6	4.4

Twenty-seven items asked participants to indicate the extent to which the character education concepts were included in their teaching of family and consumer sciences education. Each item listed the character traits and a phrase defining the trait as identified in Georgia Quality Core Curriculum Standards. For example, the item for courage read as follows, The character trait of courage: Willingness to face danger with determination. There were four response choices as follows:

- A. This is not a concept in my teaching. This concept is never taught as part of my FCS class.
- B. This is an incidental concept in my teaching. I teach this concept occasionally (monthly) in a FCS class.

- C. This is an important concept in my teaching. I teach this concept often, 2-4 times a month in a FCS class.
- D. This is a major concept in my teaching. I teach this concept often, weekly in a FCS class.

Response values were assigned A = 1, B = 2, C =3, and D = 4. Means on the 27 character trait items ranged from a low of 2.46 for the character traits courage and patriotism to a high 3.81 for the character trait of cooperation. The mean rating of 22 of the 27 traits were rated 3.0 or above indicating the concepts were *important* or *major* concepts in the teaching of the family and consumer sciences teachers responding to this survey. Ten of the items had a mean of 3.5 and above. The results are summarized in rank order in Table 2. *Respect for others* and *cooperation* were ranked one and two respectively as *major concepts* taught. This finding is consistent with the historical emphasis placed on cooperation in the family and consumer sciences education curriculum and student organization. It is interesting to note that of the 27 character traits surveyed, *courage* and *patriotism* received the lowest score. It is likely that since the terrorists' attacks of September 11, 2001, the extent to which courage and patriotism are discussed in the classroom is likely to have increased. This survey was completed before the attack and does not reflect the recent national resurgence of patriotism.

Table 2

*Rank Order of Means & Standard Deviations for Character Education Concepts Inclusion in Secondary Family & Consumer Sciences Education Programs*

Character Trait	<i>M*</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Respect for others: Concern for and motivation to act for the welfare of others.	3.84	.45
2. Cooperation: Recognition of mutual interdependence with others resulting in polite treatment and respect	3.81	.46
3. Courtesy: Recognition of mutual interdependence with others resulting in polite treatment and respect for them	3.74	.50
4. Punctuality: Being on time for attendance and tasks	3.72	.56
5. Self-Respect: Responsibility for one's actions and their consequences and being emotionally, physically or intellectually bound to something	3.72	.59
6. Self-Control: Exercising authority over one's emotions and actions	3.71	.59
7. Honesty: Truthfulness and Sincerity	3.70	.59
8. Cleanliness: Good habits of personal hygiene and grooming	3.68	.62
9. Kindness: Concern for suffering or distress of others and response to their feelings and needs	3.65	.64
10. Fairness: Freedom from favoritism, self-interest, or indulgence of one's likes and dislikes	3.62	.68
11. Compassion: Concern for suffering or distress of others and response to their feeling and needs	3.41	.72
12. Tolerance: The allowable deviation from a standard and indulgence for beliefs or practices differing from or conflicting with one's own	3.40	.74
13. Creativity: Exhibiting an entrepreneurial spirit inventiveness, originality, not bound by the norm	3.39	.76
14. Diligence: Attentiveness, persistence, perseverance	3.37	.76

15. Patience: Not being hasty or impetuous	3.36	.74
16. Perseverance: Persistence, adherence, to actions and their	3.34	.77
17. Cheerfulness: Courtesy and politeness in action of speech	3.32	.74
18. Virtue: Exercising authority over one's emotions and actions	3.23	.84
19. Generosity: Concern for suffering or distress of others and response to their feelings and needs	3.19	.84
20. School Pride: Playing a contributing role in maintaining and improving all aspects of a school's environment, programs and activities within the context of contributing to the betterment of the city, county and state	3.18	.87
21. Loyalty: Steadfastness or faithfulness to a person, institution, custom or idea to which one is tied by duty, pledge or a promise	3.12	.97
22. Citizenship: Democracy, respect for and acceptance of authority, equality, freedom of conscience and expression, justice, liberty	3.08	.90
23. Respect of the Environment: Care for and conservation of land, trees, clean air and pure water and of all living inhabitants	2.91	.91
24. Sportsmanship: Abiding by the rules of a contest and accepts victory or defeat graciously	2.90	.92
25. Respect for the Creator: Our most basic freedoms and rights are not granted to us from the government but they are intrinsically ours	2.61	1.1
26. Patriotism: Support for the U.S. Constitution and love for the U.S.A. with zealous guarding of their authority and interests	2.46	.98
27. Courage: Willingness to face danger with determination	2.46	.93

\* Note: 1 = Not a Concept, 2 = Incidental Concept, 3 = Important Concept, and 4 = Major Concept.

The family and consumer sciences content areas that were listed on the survey were taken from the National Standards for Family and Consumer Sciences Education's website. The two courses that received the highest ratings for character education already being included and integrated were Nutrition Wellness and Parenting both having a 58.5% score. The findings for this question are indicated in Table 3.

Table 3  
*Content Areas Where Character Education is Already Included & Integrated in Family and Consumer Sciences Courses, N = 195*

Content Area	Frequency	%
Career, Community, & Family Connections	109	55.9
Consumer & Family Resources	60	30.8
Consumer Services	31	15.9
Early Childhood, Education, and Service	75	38.5
Facilities Management & Maintenance	12	6.2
Family	94	48.2
Family & Community Services	62	31.8
Food Productions & Services	30	15.4
Food Science, Dietetics, & Nutrition	43	22.1
Hospitality, Tourism, & Recreation	19	9.7
Housing, Interiors, & Furnishings	63	32.3
Human Development	79	40.5

Interpersonal Relationships	86	44.1
Nutrition Wellness	114	58.5
Parenting	114	58.5
Textiles & Apparel	90	46.2

Six items asked teachers to indicate the degree to which they felt that character education is needed by a majority of students, the degree to which it can be integrated into the Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) curriculum, the degree that it should be integrated in the FCS curriculum, the level of knowledge that FCS teachers have of character traits, the level of knowledge that FCS teachers have of how to teach character traits, and the degree to which FCS teachers felt that character education should be a separate class taught by FCS teachers. For the first question in this category, the responses on the Likert type item ranged from *strongly needed* (1) to *not needed at all* (4). The responses on questions 2 through 6 on these six Likert type items ranged from *strongly agree* (1), to *strongly disagree* (5). Frequency and percent for each item are reported in Table 4.

The first statement asked teachers to indicate the degree to which they felt character education was needed by a majority of students. Eighty-six percent indicated that character education was *strongly needed*. Overwhelmingly, teachers agreed that character education *can be* (Strongly Agree & Agree = 98.9%) and *should be* (Strongly Agree & Agree = 87.1%) integrated in the family and consumer sciences curriculum. The teachers responding to this survey indicated that they had *extensive knowledge* of the character traits (Strongly Agree & Agree = 95.4%) and *how to teach* (Strongly Agree & Agree = 88.2) character traits. The last statement in this section asked teachers to indicate if they thought that all students should be required to take character education as a separate class taught by family and consumer sciences teachers. Thirty percent indicated that they were *undecided*.

Table 4  
*Family and Consumer Sciences Teacher Attitude Toward Character Education*

Variable	SN	MN	U	NN	SD
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	
1. To what degree do you feel that Character Education is <u>needed</u> by a majority of students?	162 (86.6)	19 (10.2)	6 (3.1)	0 (0)	
	SA	A	U	D	SD
2. Character Education <u>can be</u> integrated in the curriculum of Family & Consumer Sciences.	141 (75.8)	43 (23.1)	2 (1.0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
3. Character Education <u>should be</u> integrated in the curriculum of Family and Consumer Sciences.	126 (64.9)	43 (22.2)	18 (9.3)	2 (1.0)	4 (2.1)
4. FCS Teachers have an <u>extensive knowledge</u> of the character traits.	135 (69.2)	51 (26.2)	5 (2.6)	1 (.5)	2 (1.0)
5. FCS Teachers have an <u>extensive knowledge</u> of how <u>to teach</u> the character traits.	111 (56.9)	61 (31.3)	15 (7.7)	6 (3.1)	2 (1.0)
6. All students should be required to take Character Education as a <u>separate class</u> taught by FCS teachers.	52 (27.1)	37 (19.3)	59 (30.7)	27 (14.1)	17 (8.9)

\* Note: 1= Strongly Needed (SN), 2= Moderately Needed (MN), 3 = Undecided (U), 4 = Not needed (NN)

\*\* Note: 1= Strongly Agree (SA), 2 = Agree (A), 3 = Undecided (U), 4 = Disagree (D), 5 = Strongly Disagree (SD)

### **Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions**

This study was conducted to provide a descriptive analysis of family and consumer sciences teachers' attitudes toward character education and the inclusion of character education in family and consumer sciences curriculum. There is much debate among politicians, administrators, parents, and teachers on how character education should be implemented and taught. Anderson (2000), stated that "Character education should not be taught as a separate curriculum, but must be entwined in all curriculums" (p. 140). The family and consumer sciences teachers responding to this survey indicated that they were including 22 of the 27 character traits of the Georgia character curriculum as *important* or *major* concepts in their teaching. For the most part, they reported the concepts were taught in the Nutrition and Wellness and Parenting curriculum. Overwhelmingly, teachers agreed that character education *can be* and *should be* integrated in the family and consumer sciences curriculum. The teachers responding to this survey indicated that they had *extensive knowledge* of the character traits and *how to teach* character traits. Teachers are encouraged to notify state and local school administrators and parents of the contribution of family and consumer sciences to the development of character traits of youth in Georgia. Further research is needed to determine specific content and teaching strategies used to integrate character traits in the family and consumer sciences curriculum.

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