

ROLES HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS PLAY IN ESTABLISHING A SUCCESSFUL CHARACTER EDUCATION INITIATIVE

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Principal leadership is crucial to the success of a high school character education initiative. The purpose of this qualitative grounded theory research was to identify the roles that high school principals play in developing, implementing, and sustaining a high functioning character education program. Data were collected through interviews and evaluation of school documents. The data were analyzed through 3 separate coding procedures: (a) open coding, (b) axial coding, and (c) selective coding. In the analysis of data, it was found that the data could be organized into 6 categories which were labeled as: (a) cultural engineer, (b) plate peddler, (c) collaborative leader, (d) reflective leader, (e) moral leader, and (f) champion. High school principals are key to a successful character education initiative in their schools and this study has outlined the roles that they must utilize to ensure the youth in their schools are best prepared when they graduate. Principals have the power to develop a character education initiative that will have lasting effects on their students, schools, and communities.

Turning on the evening news a person can see the turmoil that is taking place across the world. In the United States, violence and crime affects many directly and indirectly from infants to the elderly and the need for reform is necessary. Many educators, politicians, and scholars believe that the people committing these criminal acts have not been taught basic values of right and wrong while they were being raised at home or taught at school (Hayes, Lewis, & Robinson, 2011). Throughout history “education has had two great goals:

teach people to be smart and help them to be good” (Lickona, 1993, p. 7). Character education, teaching students to be good, is one way in which society has and will continue to combat these negative behaviors (Schwartz, 2008). Studies have shown that effectively led character education initiatives have helped in “establishing classroom and school communities that increase student bonding to school, attendance increases and dropout rates decrease” and communities are strengthened (Schwartz, 2008, p. 2).

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Many school administrators see the need for a character education initiative, but often are unsure how to implement and sustain one. Berkowitz (2011) stated:

At some point a light bulb has to go on as principals recognize that the development of character of their students is a prime purpose of schooling, and that they as the school leaders, have to be at the helm of that journey. (p. 103)

Principals are key in ensuring a school character education initiative is successful and they often are not well prepared for leading an effective character education initiative (Berkowitz, 2011). Many character education programs that are “implemented and/or prescribed [by principals are] based on intuition, marketing, or chance” (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007, p. 30). Secondary schools and leaders of these schools are left to develop initiatives based on little research and less effective practices (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007). These character education programs are weak due to school leaders not knowing the roles they should play in implementing character education programs (DeRoche, 2000).

The key to better implementation of a character education initiative is through the training of the principal to help them understand, implement, and exercise the best practices for a character education initiative. In order for principals to develop, implement, and sustain a character education initiative, they must know the best practices and roles that they are to utilize to ensure that the initiative is successfully maintained. This study focused on what high school principals, in high functioning character education programs, do to ensure that the character education initiative is successful during the three phases of the initiative—development, implementation, and sustainment.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research was the basis of the research design for this study. Qualitative

methodology uses interviews, observations, and documentation review “to get at the inner experiences of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 12). The research utilized the grounded theory approach—to discover a theory that is grounded in information from participants who have experienced the process (Creswell, 2007). The nature of a grounded theory approach was best suited for this study which allowed for a theory to be developed from rich data collected. The focus of the study was to explore how principals have implemented successful character education initiatives. High schools involved were those that have been recognized as National Schools of Character (NSOC) from the Character Education Partnership (CEP), a leading advocate organization for character education. This study used data collected through the following sources:

- NSOC school websites;
- NSOC student and parent handbooks;
- NSOC school applications to CEP;
- Past CEP surveys;
- articles about school in CEP’s annual newsletter, *Schools of Character*;
- news articles of NSOC school;
- CEP interviews of NSOC schools posted on YouTube; and
- any other literature relating to the topic being studied.

Also, 14 NSOC high school principals were interviewed by phone or through Skype to explore their perceptions of leadership behaviors, beliefs, roles, and exceptional practices in leading a recognized character education initiative. Table 1 outlines the participants, each of whom gave their consent to release their name, and information relating to their schools.

The interviews and data gathered from these sources gave the researcher a saturated data file which was evaluated to develop a theory. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967),

TABLE 1
Participant Information

<i>Administrator</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Years in Education</i>	<i>Year Awarded NSOC</i>	<i>School Size</i>	<i>School Type</i>	<i>Country Region</i>
Carol Grossi	F	20–25	2004	1,000–1,500	public	NE
David Booz	M	25–30	2000	1,500–1,550	public	S
Dr. Deanne Fisher	F	15–20	2013	150–200	public-alternative	MW
Elissa Heal	F	10–15	2010	450–500	public	MW
Dr. Harold Slemmer	M	20–25	1998	2,750–2,800	public	W
Jeffery Beedy	M	10–15	2002	300–350	private	NE
John Klemme	M		2002	75–80	public-alternative	NE
Lauren Kelly	F	5–10	2004	2,550–2,600	public	W
Kevin Pobst	F	15–20	2008	2,600–2,650	public	MW
Dr. Robert Burkhardt	M	20–25	2012	50–100	private-alternative	W
Sally Shultz	F	10–15	2002	100–150	public-alternative	MW
Stephanie Valleroy	F	30–35	2012	150–200	public-SPED	MW
Thomas Callanan	M	15–20	2013	750–800	public	NE
Timothy Matheney	M	20–25	2011	2,800–2,850	public	NE

data gathered through a variety of sources “for generating theory is highly beneficial, because it yields more information on categories than any one mode of knowing” (p. 66). The data gathered allowed the researcher “to move beyond the description and to generate or discover a theory, an abstract analytical schema of a process, action, or interaction” (Creswell, 2007, p. 63).

The data were collected, organized, and analyzed using QSR-NVivo a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software. The benefit of NVivo over manual methods “is the ability to organize data and its analysis efficiently” (Bringer, Johnston, & Brackenridge, 2004, p. 250). The interviews and data gathered from these sources gave the researcher a saturated data file which was evaluated to develop a theory. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), data gathered through a variety of sources “for generating a theory is highly beneficial, because it yields more information on categories than any one mode of knowing” (p. 66). NVivo allowed the researcher to utilize computers for recording, sorting, matching and linking data which harnessed the efficiency of the data analysis process (Bazeley, 2007). Fur-

ther, the “use of computers is not intended to replace the ways the researcher learns from the data, but to increase the effectiveness of such learning” (Bazeley, 2007, p. 47). The software was used by the researcher to enhance the analysis of data to develop the best conclusions (Hutchison, Johnston, & Breckon, 2009).

The interview is the heart of the study and vital that it is planned and done correctly. For qualitative studies researchers “ask open-ended research questions, wanting to listen to participants [they] are studying and shaping the questions after [they] ‘explore,’ and [they] refrain from assuming the role of expert researcher with the ‘best’ questions” (Creswell, 2007, p. 43). Participants were asked open-ended questions, which allowed participants to “contribute as much detailed information as they desire and it allows the researcher to ask probing questions as a means of follow-up” (Turner, 2010, p. 756). The interview included questions about demographics, attitude, leadership styles, personal values, time management, etc. These questions sought data regarding the change process and the leadership roles and qualities that were used to instigate the change. According to Schein (1992), “at the early stages of organiza-

tional creation, a unique leadership function to supply the energy is needed to get the organization off the ground” (pp. 60–61). The questions were seeking to find where this energy is channeled by the leader in initiating change and the implementation of a new character education initiative in a school. Also, at this time of implementation and development, the leader was acting as change agent during which there is a “genuine change in the leader’s behavior through embedding new definitions in organizational processes and routines” (Schein, 1992, p. 65).

The interview was the main source of information for the study, however, other sources of data were gathered and compared to one another to ensure the results were credible. Corbin and Strauss (2008) stated that “the term ‘credibility’ indicates that findings are trustworthy and believable in that they reflect the participants’, researchers’, and readers’ experiences with a phenomenon but at the same time the explanation is only one of many possible ‘plausible’ interpretations possible from data” (p. 302). Other methods, to establish trustworthiness of the data, included:

- **Data triangulation.** This involves using different sources of information in order to increase the validity of the study (Denzin, 1978). The researcher used more than one source to gather data in this study—interviews, NSOC applications, news articles, CEP surveys, and journal articles. These different areas provided corroborating evidence to support and strengthen the conclusions of the study.
- **Environmental triangulation.** This involved the use of different locations, settings, and other key factors related to the environment in which the study took place (Lichtman, 2006). Principals of various high schools across the country were interviewed. Further, principals of regular, private, and charter high schools participated in the study.

- **Peer review.** The study was reviewed by a committee composed of research experts from the University of Montana to externally check the research process (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994).
- **Member checking.** Following the completion of the first draft of the study the researcher solicited participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994).
- **External audit.** Throughout the study the researcher had an external consultant to examine the study, both the process and the product of the account, assessing their accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Erlandson et al., 1993).
- **Interview transcriptions.** Transcribed interviews gave the researcher ideas and understanding that are otherwise missed. Coding full transcripts brought the researcher to a deeper level of understanding to generate many research questions (Charmaz, 2008).

Through these methods the data and results were trustworthy to establish a solid theory of the activities and roles principals play in an effective character education initiative. Further, these results will assist in helping other principals throughout the country in understanding the successful practices in developing, leading, and sustaining a character education initiative.

The data were analyzed using the process suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998, Corbin & Strauss, 2008) by open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. These processes involve “interacting with data (analysis) using techniques such as asking questions about the data, making comparisons between data, and so on, and in doing so, deriving concepts to stand for those data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 66). During these steps the researcher reduced “data

from many cases into concepts and sets of relational statements that can be used to explain, in a general sense, what is going on” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 145). In these steps the data were decontextualized, analyzed, and recontextualized (Morse & Field, 1995).

Open coding analyzed the concepts emerging from the data and relationships among the concepts were revealed. Open coding according to Corbin and Strauss (2008) involves “breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data. At the same time, one is qualifying those concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions” (p. 195). In this first phase the researcher is comparing data and continually asking questions about what is and is not understood and making comparisons (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During this phase, the researcher must make “sense” out of what was just uncovered and compile the data into sections or groups of information, also known as themes or codes (Creswell, 2007). These themes or codes are consistent phrases, expressions, or ideas that were common among research participants (Kvale, 2007).

Data were decontextualized and microanalyzed in relation to the categories through axial coding procedures. In the previous process of open coding the data were fractured and categories were identified and their properties and dimensions were examined (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In the step of axial coding, according to Corbin and Strauss (2008), the data were crosscut and concepts were related to each other” (p. 195). The data were pieced together in new ways after open coding to allow connections between categories. Further, it is the act of “relating categories to subcategories along the lines of their properties and dimensions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 124). By continually asking questions and making comparisons, axial coding takes place with the process of relating subcategories to a category (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Using the paradigm model outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) the data were recontextualized to link the “subcategories to the [core] category in a set of relationships” (p. 99).

Selective coding, the final stage of the coding process, was applied to the data and focused on a macroanalysis that was provided in an explanatory narrative. Selective coding is the “process of linking categories around a core category and refining and trimming the resulting theoretical construction” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 263). The linking of categories occurred during this selective coding process and the data that have been microanalyzed were macroanalyzed. The data that were discovered in the open and axial coding stages were integrated and refined. The selective coding process of a storyline was used to identify the central category and the integration of concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

DATA ANALYSIS

Following the collection of data from external sources and interviews, the data were evaluated to “develop a theory that explains the process, action, or interaction” of principals in recognized character education initiatives (Creswell, 2007, p. 64). Analyzing data “consists of examining the database to address the research questions” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 131). The analysis of data proceeded in stages to ensure that common themes emerged. NVivo assisted in organizing and analyzing data from school websites, school NSOC applications, and interviews. The built-in tools in NVivo allowed for “recording decisions, conceptual and theoretical thinking, and links between memos, documents, nodes, and models assists in the development of a dynamic audit trail to meet the criterion of transparency” (Bringer et al., 2004, p. 250).

The analysis of data yielded one core category—Principal Leadership in a Character Education Initiative. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), “the core category represents the central phenomenon around which all the other categories are integrated” (p. 116). The subcategories relate back to the core category and in this study six subcategories or roles were discovered: (a) cultural engineer,

(b) plate peddler, (c) collaborative leader, (d) reflective leader, (e) moral leader, and (f) champion. These six categories become the basis of the study.

These six themes, or roles, were drawn from a synthesis of comments, from interviews, and the other data pieces. As the information was gathered and then analyzed, it became apparent that specific themes started to emerge. The principals who were interviewed shared similar insights and responsibilities that they exercised at various times in the implementation of a character education initiative. In the coding process, first, similar and related “effective practices” of NSOC schools were grouped together. Second, the effective practices were then grouped based on similarities and organized as “responsibilities” that principals exercised during the implementation of a character education initiative. Third, the core “roles” were found and organized based on the relationships of the responsibilities. The names for each of the core roles are based on current leadership research and the research outlined in this article. Table 2 outlines the six core roles, responsibilities associated with each role, and the effective practices of each responsibility.

Described below are the six main roles principals play in effective character education programs that emerged from the data. Along with the description of each role are accounts from interviewed NSOC principals.

Cultural Engineer

An engineer is a person “who operates or supervises an operation through the planning, designing, construction, and management of the operation; they plan and direct skillfully and give guidance (Neufeldt & Guralnik, 1991, p. 450). As the cultural engineer of a school the principal oversees the planning, designing, and development of the culture of the school through various means to effectively establish a strong character education program. As a cultural engineer the principal had a vision of where the character education

initiative needed to go and what the end result was to look like. A community member of one school stated, “It takes the vision of a strong administration and board, the dedication of our talented teachers and the support of the parent community working together to help each student open their eyes to the world around them.” Carol Grossi of Cranford High School in New Jersey (NSOC in 2004) stated, in regards to a shared vision, “It has to be a vision and they—teachers, students, parents—all feel very comfortable with coming to me with all these ideas and what they want to do because we believe it.” During the development process, Dr. Raymond Pasi, of Yorktown High School in Virginia (NSOC in 2004), stated that

The first thing is to determine what kind of behavior and atmosphere we want in a school and then to deliberately and explicitly promote that. At every turn, we have to promote what we want in our institutions so that when it is not there, it is obvious to everyone.

All the participants described the importance of making character education part of each aspect of the school. Many participants described this as “branding” the school where all aspects of the school are driven by adopted virtues and values of the school. They described that the culture must be branded with the character education initiative and the foundation of the school must be based on the vision of the initiative and that all aspects of the school are focused on the initiative. Kevin Pobst of Hinsdale Central High School in Illinois (NSOC in 2008) stated that “We have attempted to brand the school” and stressed the need to inculcate strong ethical values in these students, who will be the “future business leaders,” by building “a school of caring, compassion, and character.”

Dr. Deanne Fisher of Jefferson City Academic Center in Missouri (NSOC in 2013) noted that she and her character education team specifically worked on embedding character in everything that they do. She stated

TABLE 2
Character Education Roles and Practices of Principals

<i>Role</i>	<i>Responsibilities</i>	<i>Effective Practices</i>	
Cultural engineer	Visionary	• Has a vivid vision of what the school could/should become • Decisions and actions are guided by this vision	
	Clarifier	• Keeps initiative on track	
	Planner	• Conducts a needs assessment of the school • Develops action plan based on data • Intentional in the process • Creates a timeline for effective implementation	
	Organizer	• Conducts regular staff training	
	Designer	• Brands the school • Incorporates the character education initiative into every aspect of the school • Ensures that initiative is foundation of the school • Hires staff in support of character education	
Plate peddler	Activist	• Involved in every aspect of the initiative	
	Salesman	• Sells character education to get stakeholder buy-in • Works to get buy-in from all stakeholders • Uses data and exemplars schools to build support • Provides regular professional development to staff	
Collaborative leader	Guide	• Establishes and utilizes a character education committee to make decisions and drive the initiative	
	Stakeholder partner	• Implements character education activities and opportunities to empower students and staff • Solicits feedback from stakeholders	
Reflective leader	Evaluator	• Uses data to drive change • Researches best practices • Visits model schools	
	Stakeholder counselor	• Encourages staff to regularly reflect on their practices of implementing character education • Encourages students to regularly reflect on their behavior and attitudes based on the school's adopted virtues	
Moral leader	Model	• Exemplifies high values and morals	
	Mentor	• Encourages others to practice appropriate behavior at all times	
Champion	Sponsor	• Provides financial support • Provides guidance and direction • Communicates effectively • Celebrates successes	
	Advocate	• Fights to overcome any obstacles	

Character's not an in your face thing at the school. It's in every conversation we have whether it's with me, with a teacher, a secretary, the counselor. It's embedded in everything. You feel it when you walk in the building. You see it with the kids. You hear it. It's just that feeling you have whenever anyone comes. It's truly embedded in everything we do, it's really helped to develop your climate and culture, and make it a great place for everybody.

Thomas Callanan of Hanover Park High School in New Jersey (NSOC in 2013) had similar thoughts as he helped to lead the branding of the school:

We had the core values, but we've taken it to another level where they've become part of almost every conversation, morning announcements where we're talking about them and we did different announcements

and teachers have them on the board, they're in every classroom, they're posted. I've observed classes where teachers are referencing them, and the staff bought in.

Dr. Harold Slemmer of Mountain Point High School in Arizona (NSOC in 1998), related that the vision that he helped establish is still being shared and used long after his tenure of principal ended. He stated,

I think just the fact that mission statement, that vision statement—Purpose, Pride, Performance—20 years later is just as important to everybody as it was when we first stated it, in fact I drove by the school the other day, they put up a new marquee, right out in front of the school as you drive by it, and on the marquee are three huge letters Purpose, Pride and Performance.

The majority of the participants noted that it takes time to establish a vision that will become the foundation for the school and branded into all areas of the school. One participant, Dr. Robert Burkhardt principal of Eagle Rock School (NSOC in 2012), stated in support of a long-term shared vision, “So when instituting a program of some kind there’s this need for patient-over-time and a step-by-step approach that is buttressed by a long-term vision that is supported.”

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According to one school’s NSOC application, their approach “to stimulate development is comprehensive, intentional, and proactive.” Dr. Harold Slemmer stated that he helps his staff do character education “by design and not by chance, like we just happened to come across this.”

According to the participants of this study, the principal is integral in developing a healthy

culture through a character education initiative. The influence a principal has on a school culture has been recognized by numerous scholars (Berkowitz, 2011; Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Hoy & Miskel, 2008; Lickona, 1993; Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis, 1995; Schein, 1992). Schein (1992) described the four areas that a leader enacts as a cultural engineer—creating, building, maintaining, and changing.

Plate Peddler

A plate peddler sells character education as the plate from which education is served. Plate peddlers believe that character education is not an additional dish in the offerings at a school, but the plate itself. Dr. Harold Slemmer described his belief in a character education initiative and that educating the whole child makes up the entire plate—the education offered by a school:

It’s got to be the plate, and I think that’s our huge part of the success of any program that that people understand that it’s really the glue; it’s really the blood that keeps everything together. There’s always the teachers that feel like “you know, I got a lot on my plate already.” And I really tried to impact them with the idea that the whole idea of teaching character isn’t something that you put on your plate, it is the plate. So we really tried to help everybody understand that this unified effort here is going to benefit everyone in the long run. And it isn’t an “add-on,” it’s actually what we do. This is the main focus of what we do.

Elissa Heal of Sentinel Career Center in Ohio (NSOC in 2010) described the plate in the interview:

I think that some people are not successful at it because they view it as something in addition to, not necessarily the plate that can be helping to guide the school. In order to be successful and sustained long-term—it has to be the plate and it has to be the focus, not only for your staff team, for your students, for your community.

Many of the participants discussed the importance of believing in character education to get buy-in from others for the initiative. All of the participants discussed that character education is not a separate program of the school, but the plate on which everything the school offers is served in order to educate the whole child. Carol Grossi was a strong proponent in believing in educating the whole child:

I believe that we must educate the whole person, we are not just feeding them information we have to also develop them as people, and I guess that Walt Whitman quote I have on my website “make good people and the rest follows” kind of sums it up, and that good citizenship comes hand in hand with strong academics. I think you can marry the two, you have to believe that every student, every child, every person has something to offer the world and it’s our job as educators to see that we make each individual realize that, whether it’s something that they know can help others. By helping others they help themselves.

Carol Grossi was very adamant in believing in educating the whole child through character education and continued by stating:

If you believe in it, you yourself believe in it, you can do it. You have to know you believe in it. I don’t care if they say “no let’s not do that, I want to do it this way ...” I guess in Missouri they use “show me”—show them how to do it. That’s what I believe and I have an administrative team, fortunately one that I picked most of them, and they believe in it!

All of the principals indicated that once there was a firm support and buy-in for the plate that the character education initiative grew quickly. Thomas Callanan described the process of building buy-in at his school:

I think that was an obstacle at the beginning and I think it’s become a lot better because the support system is there, and we have teachers that are helping other teachers, just a ton of helpful people here that are really helping each other out. I would say that that’s been our biggest success—that we’ve had the buy-in from the majority of

the staff and then again from the kids, and the community has been great.

Another principal, Dr. Harold Slemmer described his belief in a character education initiative and that educating the whole child makes up the entire plate—the education offered by a school:

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Later in the interview Dr. Slemmer talked about the plate again:

Well, there’s always the teachers that feel like “you know, I got a lot on my plate already.” And I really tried to impact them with the idea that the whole idea of teaching character isn’t something that you put on your plate, it is the plate. So we really tried to help everybody understand that this unified effort here is going to benefit everyone in the long run. And it isn’t an “add-on,” it’s actually what we do. This is the main focus of what we do.

All of the principals indicated that once there was a firm foothold of support and buy-in of the plate from stakeholders that the character education initiative grew quickly. Thomas Callanan described the process of building buy-in at his school:

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Participants reported that they felt that they acted like they were selling the character education initiative to establish support and buy-in from all stakeholders, which is supported by research done by Lickona and Davidson

(2005) and DeRoche (2000). Gorton, Alston, and Snowden (2007) described the need for principals to “promote the acquisition of skills necessary for successful academic achievement but also emphasizes using those skills to bring about social, educational, political, and economic change” (pp. 15–16). The promotion of these skills is in line with the selling of character education.

Collaborative Leader

Many of the principals expressed the need to be collaborative in leadership practices and empowering individuals. There were many examples of shared leadership practices to create support and develop an initiative that is comprehensive and infused into all the components of a school. Stephanie Valleroy of Northview High School in Missouri (NSOC in 2012) stated about her character development committee:

I have a character development committee, and I no longer run it [the initiative]. They run it, and they look at what the school practices are and what needs to shift and they oversee—we have five really strong service projects that we have going and lesson planning around those—they oversee all of that.

All of the principals indicated the importance of teacher leaders. Thomas Callanan stated, “We have a lot of teacher-leaders taking the front of it [the initiative] and then working with other teachers who were interested in ‘how can I do this?’” Dr. Deanne Fisher described the importance of this shared leadership:

Having those people involved in the process now and that’s part of their day-to-day, they spread the word. Having other teacher that are involved in a lot of the decision making that goes along with our character days is important as well.

The shared decision-making is not just with teachers, but also with the students according

to the majority of participants. Dr. Robert Burhardt of Eagle Rock School in Colorado (NSOC in 2012) stated, “We’re going to make the decisions along with the students and that’s the way it is.” He believes that giving students an opportunity for shared leadership and input is just a natural part of a character education initiative. Dr. Burhardt continued, “Leadership is another value, and it seems to me that in character education, leadership becomes real important because you need to put kids in leadership responsibilities ... situations so that they can exercise their values and develop their own characters.” Dr. Deanne Fisher described also the importance of sharing leadership with students and giving them a voice:

We put them in leadership roles that way. We have a leadership class. We have different committees and different things when we bring in community into our building and so you’ll have kids that will chair those committees. You know, giving students a voice is really big. They will be more honest with you than anybody else and they have really good ideas, if you just ask. They’re the ones in the trenches living it every day and they’ll tell you if something’s not working and they’ll probably be able to give you some ideas on how to improve it.

All the interviewed principals shared these same sentiments of empowering students. Carol Grossi described how her students became involved and empowered in helping others following Hurricane Katrina:

The kids researched and made phone calls and then researched and they called down to New Orleans, and learned that Biloxi had really got hit hard, but nobody’s paying attention to them. So we called the high school there and adopted Biloxi High School for 2 years. And the kids, what they did, they didn’t just collect money, they went and they held battle of the bands, they hosted volleyball games, they did all kinds of fund raising events that involved the community as well as everyone in the school district. So then they kept mailing money to them and we’d get letters back from the principal, and I would read these

over the PA, and this became an initiative that was ingrained in everything we did. I mean, we went on the local television stations, our teachers became pen pals with other teachers there. It became something ... we exchanged teaching ideas. This went on for 2 years. The second year we made a DVD and the DVD was done in Biloxi and in our high school. And the DVD was blended together and it showed individual students from, especially from Biloxi, how we impacted their lives. This became so powerful because everyone was involved. It was very powerful, so my belief is the only way you get a buy-in is when you know you truly make a difference.

According to the interviewed principals, empowering students is getting all the students involved and feeling like they are part of the character education initiative in one way or another. Elissa Heal described students getting involved and feeling empowered:

The students played a critical role and still do this today because they are the ones that are excited about character. They take pride in the way they carry themselves. For instance, when we go to an event, they are always dressed the same—same T-shirts, so that they have pride that we are unified and united, and the students often come up with character lessons themselves, and they also, throughout the year come up with teambuilding activities to do throughout the campus. Get students excited about what they're doing, and I think that it's our role to continue to encourage our students to spread the word as well.

Stephanie Valleroy also stated something similar that they are doing in their school, "Students are actively involved. Every single student is involved." Dr. Deanne Fisher described it well in empowering students, "The biggest thing is making sure you empower and give your students and staff a voice in it." Don Grimshaw of Seckman High School in Missouri (NSOC in 2010) summarizes the strength and necessity of empowering a student in a character education initiative, "When you empower teenagers, the results are limitless." The students "caught the spirit" of

the character education initiative because they felt empowered and part of it.

Several leadership scholars recognized the need for collaboration and shared leadership (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008; Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Leithwood, 1992; Lickona et al., 1995; Rost, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1992; Yukl, 2005). According to Hoy and Miskel (2008) shared leadership is a component of transformational leadership and focuses on "a collaborative, shared decision-making approach" (p. 15). The importance of shared decision-making has also been recognized as an important facet of leadership by Vroom and Jago (1988), Hoy and Miskel (2008), and Hoy and Tarter (2004). More than ever before, administrators are trying to empower teachers and students (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Empowerment of students and staff members has been recognized as essential for the success of leaders and their goals (Dee, Henkin, & Duemer, 2003; Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998; Leach, Wall, & Jackson, 2003; Schernmerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn, 1994).

Reflective Leader

All of the principals interviewed expressed the need to be reflective in practices to continually improve. The participants described the need to constantly be evaluating the character education initiative through data gathering, researching best practices, talking to other model schools, and constantly reviewing and reevaluating the vision, mission, and belief statements and how they relate the decision-making process. All of the principals indicated that data gathering and evaluation of the data was important to the implementation and sustaining of a character education initiative. Stephanie Valleroy described the process they used at her school to gather and use data to make individual and school improvement:

We do data teams, which are looking at specific student performance data, but we also look at student moral data. So each data team, they are in departments, based

on student disabilities and functioning level. They look at specific data and they formulate not only a performance goal, but a moral goal to address. They meet twice a month, to look at those specific student outcomes, along with the more formative state data, but you only get that once a year. We look at data, we look at the little tiny milestones, and we look at those big milestones.

Carol Grossi also stated that data are constantly reviewed to drive whole school improvement:

We annually assess our character education initiative in required progress reports from which we get feedback for improvements that we pursue. If we turn to our original goals before starting our journey—academic achievement, improved discipline and civic engagement—we see how our character education initiative has enhanced learning.

Many of the participants described, that along with regularly gathering and evaluating data, the evaluator must be constantly researching best practices and visiting model schools. Elissa Heal explained her ideas on research and working with other model schools:

I love to read and research, so I always want to share and new and innovative stories, quotes. I myself learned a lot from attending the National School of Character forums in Washington, D.C., and I learned a lot from other National Schools of Character, and things that ... the foundations that you need for a successful school. I am a life-long learner, always going to school and learning from other professionals in the field of administration.

Thomas Callanan echoed similar sentiments with his advice to principals seeking to implement a character education initiative:

I think if they just look around, if they go with CEP, and then look at some of the schools. I think the best way to do it to call some of these other places or visit some of these other schools, see what they're about, see what they're doing.

Dr. Deanne Fisher believes that reflection is important to the overall sustainability of a character education initiative and stated:

There's always ways to do better and you could do something just a little different. I survey my teachers every year to find out what different things have come up that we need to address, and we work on that and they see that we work on that.

The principals indicate that reflection is an important part of improving oneself and as a group as a character education initiative is implemented and sustained.

Several leadership scholars have recognized the need for leaders to be constantly reflecting, monitoring, and evaluating their leadership practices, school programs, and school practices (De Pree, 1989; Elmore, 2000; Hattie, 1992; Kaagan & Markle, 1993; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Taggart & Wilson, 2005). Participants reported that they constantly reflected on data and best practices to drive school improvement. Further, participants reported on encouraging staff and students to be reflective of their practices and behavior on a routinely basis. Marzano et al. (2005) stated that effective leadership involves monitoring and evaluating and "refers to the extent to which the leader monitors the effectiveness of school practices in terms of their impact on student achievement" (p. 55).

Moral Leader

All of the principals interviewed, all of the NSOC applications, and many of the news articles evaluated focused on the need for the principal and staff members to be examples and model appropriate behavior and values. Participants described that the most important role that is played throughout the character education initiative is a moral leader. In order to develop a strong character education initiative there must be a leader at the forefront that is practicing the values and virtues that are desired by students and teachers. All of the interviewed principals indicated that modeling

the behavior they are expecting from the students and staff is a prerequisite to a successful character education initiative. Dr. Robert Burkhardt stated, in regards to the virtues adopted by the school, "If I was not living them, if I was not talking about them, if I was not celebrating them, if I was not reinforcing them, why should I ask you to?" Stephanie Valleroy also stated in regards to modeling, "It's really just about a modeling of behaviors that you would expect others to do." In one NSOC application the principal was compared to an athletic coach:

Just as a great coach will train with his team and demonstrate the sportsmanship he demands from his athletes, a great educator must model the behavior he/she wishes to encourage in her students. Before any pre-planned character education lesson can take place, educators must first show students that they possess true character themselves. Through authentic demonstration of ethical behavior, we teach students the most valuable lesson: character can and should be demonstrated by all people without regard to status or rank within a community. By holding ourselves to the same standards as our students, we teach them to "do as we do" not to "do as we say."

One NSOC application quoted a staff member describing the principal, "That's what makes him so endearing as a person. He is absolutely respectful, responsible, and honest."

In one news clip about a NSOC, it was stated that principals and teachers must "model the core values to the students and as a team, respect and support one another to give a foundation to the further success of the program in the school." In a NSOC application a paraprofessional stated, about modeling good character:

Every aspect of good character is carried out daily in the school community by very supportive staff through curriculum, peer interactions, and motivation through modeling. The staff teaches by example, holding one another to the highest standard of good character, creating an environment

conducive for learning and maturing into good citizens. Leading by example, the staff models trustworthiness by consistently reinforcing loyalty and honesty with one another in and out of the classroom to instill the importance of keeping your word and living up to promises made as well as keeping confidences between staff and students.

According to all who were interviewed and NSOC applications, part of being a moral leader is encouraging others to live by high values and morals

Moral leadership is a component of transformational leadership, according to Burns (1978):

Such leadership [transforming leadership] occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. Transforming leadership ultimately becomes *moral* in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both. (p. 20)

Leaders have to be good examples of an ethical leader who makes decisions based on the needs of others. According to Berkowitz (2011):

An important task of the effective leader is to walk the talk, i.e., to be a role model. We must be the character we want to see in others and for principals, we must be the character educator that we want to see in our staff. She must be the kind of person (have the character) that she wants her staff and students (and all other stakeholders) to be. (p. 109)

In any school or institution, in order for change to occur, the one leading the change must be modeling the behavior that is desired (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; House, 1977). According to Covey (1990) "Real leadership power comes from an honorable character and from the exercise of certain tools and principles" (p. 101).

Champion

All of the principals interviewed discussed their role as champion of the character education initiative. This role was comprised of acting as a support to staff and a fighter for the initiative. Elissa Heal stated, “I guess my role is maybe to continue to help push, encourage and be the cheerleader.” The encouragement and support comes in many different ways as described in the following quotes taken from NSOC applications:

The principal endorses the program, providing release time and grant money for team leaders, providing in-service training, and communicating the importance of the program.

- The principal is a strong supporter of character education and a champion of our core values. Because of his leadership, character education has flourished.
- Our principal models and champions character education. As the building leader, she empowers staff to create a positive moral culture and develop a caring school community that promotes our core values.
- It begins with the enthusiasm and support of the principal then filters throughout the family that the High School has become.
- Character education became our districtwide focus: she [the principal] energized the district staff, supported effective professional development, and involved the parents and community. Within a year, the Character Counts values became our living qualities.
- Administration truly supports the program by providing necessary funding, leadership, and moral support.

Many of the participants indicated their role as a champion was to lead the initiative when there were obstacles or problems. During this time the principals indicated that it took grit, hard work, and ingenuity to overcome the

obstacles. Dr. Robert Burkhardt stated that it took a lot of grit to make the initiative work:

The question is: “is there the will power, is there the vision, is there the creativity, the imagination, and the grit to make it happen?” I’m a tough cookie in that sense. I had to see myself and I think any head of school or principal should, that I was the number one proponent of the values.

Thomas Callanan stated about his support for his staff in championing the initiative:

I think supporting the teachers in some of the ideas that they’ve come up with, either by saying “yes” or financially if they needed something on a budgetary piece, that we needed to budget for, letting them go on certain fieldtrips that we find to be worthwhile—related to character ed or service learning—and I think that helps that we’re not telling them “this is where we want to go,” and then saying “well, you can’t do that” or “you can’t do this.” So I think the support piece ... knowing that we’re going to be there to help them through this process is a big deal.

One CEP NSOC interview of a high school staff member described:

The path to become a great school of character is a difficult journey. It takes a lot of work to create a NSOC for principals, teachers, and all staff members. Some will fight a character education initiative and leaders must press forward and work hard to ensure that the CE program is successful to overcome these negative thoughts and attitudes.

Another staff member, that was highly involved in implementing a high school’s character education initiative stated, “A miracle? Hardly. However, we learned that a district vision, buttressed with hard work and collective zeal, could bring about amazing results!” Timothy Matheney of South Brunswick High School in New Jersey (NSOC in 2011) talked about the hard work and action in championing a character education initiative:

We encourage other schools to be action oriented. Sometimes high schools spend so much time planning and “admiring the problem” that they fail to take even initial action. School cultures are not built by a single program, but rather they are constructed and reinforced over time by a thousand smaller actions by staff and students.

Dr. Deanne Fisher talked about how the fight can be won by winning the smaller battles of helping others understand the impact of character education:

Probably the biggest obstacle we have had is not everyone understands the impact of character education and how it can affect academics and attendance and behavior. How all those things can be improved and so I think getting that across to other administrator, other board office people—I think that’s been our biggest challenge and so we never give up the fight on that.

Participants reported that they must champion a school initiative in order for it to succeed, which is supported by Cottrell (2002), Blase and Kirby (2000), Kelehear (2003), Kaagan and Markle (1993), and Cotton (2003). Championing the character education initiative can be difficult at some times and is most required when things get difficult.

Conclusion

There are many roles that principals play in their jobs and in implementing different initiatives. In developing, implementing, and sustaining a character education initiative the principal plays six main roles: (a) cultural engineer, (b) plate peddler, (c) collaborative leader, (d) reflective leader, (e) moral leader, and (f) champion. This study went further into depth to describe their different responsibilities and properties. The roles overlap and some are used at different times depending on the need of the school and where they are at in the process. The study also explains the exceptional practices and when these roles are exercised in establishing a character education initiative.

It is hoped that readers of this study will look closely at the results and strive to apply these roles and practices to their own schools. Specific recommendations drawn from the results of this study include:

- As a plate peddler, establish a character education initiative that has buy-in from students, teachers, parents, and community members.
- As a reflective leader, build a character education initiative that is well thought out, deliberate, based on research, guided by a specific mission and goals, and with the support of strong, effective teachers.
- As a cultural engineer, implement a character education that is branded into school and becomes the foundation of the school environment and is found in each aspect of the school— culture, language, mission, curriculum, discipline, instruction, discipline practices, extra-curricular activities, assemblies, et cetera.
- As a reflective leader, continually gather and evaluate data to drive changes in the character education initiative. Also, research best practices of what other schools are doing to make their character education initiative effective.
- As a moral leader, continually model the adopted virtues and values of the school and be an example in and out of school.
- As a cultural engineer, develop a specific timeline for implementation, development, and sustainment of a character education initiative. Principals should take their time in implementing a character education initiative to ensure necessary support is built and that the initiative is infused throughout the school.
- As a collaborative leader, find ways to empower students and staff by giving them opportunities for input, feedback, and leadership.

- As a champion of the character education initiative, ensure that obstacles are overcome and successes are regularly celebrated.

Principals play varied, chief roles in the success of an effective character education initiative and they must be the force behind each phase of the initiative. The principal must be a major supporter and driver of the initiative in order to build the support and establish the character education initiative on a firm foundation. High school principals are key to a successful character education initiative in their schools and this study has outlined the roles and practices that they must utilize to ensure the youth in their schools are prepared when they graduate. It takes strong leadership to oversee and establish an effective character education initiative that will develop the youth into productive upstanding citizens. Principals have the power to develop a character education initiative that will have lasting effects on their students, schools, communities, and the world.

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