LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF MORAL/ CHARACTER EDUCATION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
In Pursuit of Mechanisms

Marilyn Watson
Developmental Studies Center (retired)

At risk high school students who had participated in an elementary school character education project, the Child Development Project (CDP), were interviewed about their self concept, memories of elementary school, current school experiences, and future goals. The classroom experiences and personal and moral growth of these students during second and third grade with one teacher using the CDP program had been previously documented. Evidence that these positive effects continued into their high school years was found for most students, even those who displayed a substantial number of challenging behaviors while in elementary school. The students explicitly attributed much of their current success, moral and personal values, and positive outlook to their elementary school experience. Trust that their teacher cared for them unconditionally was found to be the most important common characteristic of students who displayed long term positive effects. The results are discussed in terms of attachment and care theories.

INTRODUCTION

During the 1996 and 1997 academic years my colleagues Peter Shwartz, Cindy Littman, and I conducted an ongoing documentation of an inner-city second-third grade classroom in which the teacher was implementing the Child Development Project. Based on this documentation, I, in collaboration with the teacher, Laura Ecken, created a case study of the class that is presented in the book, *Learning to Trust* (Watson & Ecken, 2003). *Learning to Trust* describes in detail the ups and downs of Laura's sometimes heroic efforts to create a caring classroom community and develop her students' skills, understandings, and desire to be good learners and good people.

The Child Development Project (CDP) is a comprehensive intervention program that seeks to foster students' social, emotional, eth-

• **Marilyn Watson,** 8535 Quail Canyon Rd, Vacaville, California 95688, Phone: 530-795-0995. E-mail: watsonms@hughes.net

Journal of Research in Character Education, 4(1&2), 2006, pp. 1–18 ISSN 1543-1223

ical, and intellectual development through helping elementary schools become caring communities of learners. The program's basic components, theoretical rationale, and outcomes have been extensively described elsewhere (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997; Lewis, Watson, & Schaps, 1999; Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000; Watson, Battistich, & Solomon, 1997).

Briefly, CDP seeks to help elementary schools create caring communities within and across classrooms. It incorporates family involvement and school-wide programs that emphasize service to others, interpersonal understanding and prosocial as well as academic values. The classroom program involves collaborative learning activities that emphasize interpersonal understanding and prosocial values, a values rich reading and literature program, and an approach to classroom management and discipline that focuses on building caring and trusting relationships with and among students. The classroom program emphasizes internal academic and prosocial motivation, uses a developmental, problem solving approach to student misbehavior, focuses on meeting students' needs, and involves the students themselves in establishing and upholding the norms and values of the classroom.

When CDP was well implemented, students displayed a broad range of positive effects—for example, greater commitment to democratic values, conflict resolution skills, concern for others, trust in and respect for teachers, altruistic and positive interpersonal behavior, intrinsic prosocial and academic motivation, and liking for school (Solomon, Watson, Delucchi, Schaps, & Battistich, 1988; Solomon et al., 2000).[1]

The teacher, Laura Ecken, entered teaching as a second career. She had been teaching for 4 years when she was introduced to CDP as part of her school's involvement with the project. Laura's teacher preparation equipped her with the classroom management tools of assertive discipline and a compartmentalized direct instruction approach to academic teaching. CDP's components, its strong focus on building relationships and community, its constructivist approach to teaching in the academic as well as the moral domains, its focus on internal rather than extrinsic motivation, and its teaching, problem solving approach to discipline were inconsistent with Laura's initial education as a teacher.

However, CDP was very much in synch with Laura as a person. She had a caring heart, a joyful approach to teaching and life, and a deep, religiously based belief in the goodness and value of every child. Her's was one of the strong voices in favor of the school becoming involved with CDP. The project was a natural fit for Laura as a person and she immediately embraced it, first its goals and gradually all its components. I think it is fair to say that the CDP program helped Laura become the kind of teacher she wanted to be. Below, in Laura's words, is an account of Laura's initial involvement with CDP and ways that the project changed her teaching.

> When I started out that first year to try to build community, I listed it in my plan book for forty-five minutes a day, from 1:00 to 1:45. It sounds embarrassing now, but I really thought it was something that you could write in your plan book for a certain time.
>
> It just dawned on me gradually that this way of working with kids is a philosophy that permeates your whole way of teaching and living, even your way of dealing with your family.
>
> I guess before that I'd never really thought about what I was trying to accomplish in the classroom. I had a curriculum and I went in and taught it. I know it sounds really ignorant. But it had never occurred to me that I was trying to build a love of learning and a strong respect for other human beings. Once I thought about those goals I could see I wasn't working toward them. I had never realized that they were my goals. I had never thought, "Why are you here? What are you trying to accomplish?"
>
> The year I first started doing relationship-building activities in the classroom, I really got to know the kids. I had never gotten to know them so well and so quickly

> before, and they got to know me. At the same time, things were very hectic that first month in my classroom. Instead of just putting names on the board when kids were doing something wrong, I constantly had to be talking to people about what they were doing. But suddenly it became obvious to me that there was no more humiliation in my classroom, no more manipulation of the students by threats, no more punishments at the end of the day.
>
> I also began to realize that this way would take longer and that I had to allow children time to learn to operate in ways that were new for them, too. Many of them were used to being *told* what to do, rather than being encouraged to make decisions and think for themselves.
>
> I grew as the children did. I began to trust myself more and the learning the kids were doing. I began to take more account of what they were interested in, to have them ask their own questions, and to connect more of the curriculum to their lives. (Dalton & Watson, 1997, pp. 149-150. Italics in the original.)

All the students in Laura Ecken's class were at risk because of poverty and many had additional demographic risk factors such as parental substance abuse, incarceration, or other forms of family instability. Additionally, at the time they entered the classroom, about half of the students engaged in a variety of challenging behaviors that Hamre and Pianta (2005) have labeled "functional risk factors," for example, low investment in learning activities, teasing and fighting with classmates, stealing, and defiance of their teacher. However, during the 1996 and 1997 academic years, while they experienced their teacher's implementation of the CDP program, all the students showed considerable social, emotional, ethical, and academic growth. The children and their gradual transformation are described in detail in *Learning to Trust.* Across the 2 years that are documented in the book, their functional risk factors disappeared or diminished substantially. But, how long would this growth be sustained? Would it be sufficient to overcome the ongoing demographic risk factors in the children's lives?

In a follow-up study of the effects of CDP, Battistich, Schaps, and Wilson (2004) found that middle school students who were exposed to the program in elementary school did sustain a positive advantage over comparison students. For example, they were more engaged in and committed to school, more prosocial, and less likely to engage in problem behaviors than comparison students. That study specifically focused on students from schools serving high numbers of students who were demographically at risk, and provides indirect evidence that program effects on high risk students can be sustained after they leave the program. However, the study examined outcomes for students classified as a group as "at risk" because of demographic characteristics. In every school serving large numbers of "at risk" students, there are many students who do not appear to be functionally at risk—students who generally work well and cooperatively with their teachers and peers—as well as many who exhibit the kinds of challenging behaviors that put them functionally at risk. Battistitch, Schaps, and Wilson did not separately examine outcomes for subgroups of students, and thus the study does not provide direct evidence that positive long term effects hold for students who demonstrated enough serious behavior problems to be termed functionally at risk as well as for those who, while demographically at risk, were functioning well socially and academically.

Further, they hypothesize that "school bonding" or "connectedness" acquired in elementary school carried over to middle school leading to positive outcomes. Battistich and Hong (in press) support this hypothesis using second-order linear growth models that show students' level of bonding to their elementary school predicts level of bonding in middle school, which in turn predicts positive middle school outcomes. But how does early bonding achieve positive effects?

The present study was designed to provide an in depth look at the students from Laura Ecken's elementary class when they were in high school with hopes of learning whether the

positive effects from elementary school were sustained for all students, those who were originally functionally as well as demographically at risk as well as those who, while demographically at risk were generally cooperative and compliant. Further, it was hoped that individual interviews with the students would yield more insight into the specific mechanisms involved in sustaining positive effects.

High School Follow-up Study

In this exploratory clinical study, four major questions are addressed: (1) Can positive long term effects be found for students whose initial elementary behavior was challenging as well as for those whose behavior was generally cooperative? (2) What potential mechanisms might have brought about long term positive effects? (3) How do the students themselves remember their elementary school experience? And (4) Do the students themselves see a direct connection between their current selves and their experiences while in elementary school?

Subjects

Fourteen of the 21 students who were in Laura Ecken's combination second-third grade class during the 1997-98 academic year were still in the original school district 7 years later. Of the students who were no longer in the district, 1 had dropped out of school and 6 appear to have moved to other districts. Of the 14 remaining students, 1 refused to be interviewed, 2 did not respond to request letters, and 2 failed to keep their interview appointments. Individual semistructured interviews of approximately 1 hour were conducted with the remaining 9 students. Five of these students were African American males, 2 were African American females, and 2 were European American females. Five were students who initially presented many challenges at the start of elementary school, and 4 were generally cooperative and socially and academically successful throughout their time in elementary school. See Table 1 for brief descriptions of the characteristics of the five students that led to their classification as challenging or functionally "at risk" at the beginning of second grade.

Along with the students who were cooperative and well engaged in learning all of the five "challenging" students had made substantial gains academically, socially, and ethically while in Laura's classroom. Five of the nine students had been in the class for second, third, and at least part of fourth grade, three students had been in the class just for second and third grade, and one student had been in the class for part of third and all of fourth grade. At the time of the interview, six of the students were at the end of their sophomore year in high school and three were at the end of their freshmen year. All were on grade level except for Louise, who had been held back a year.

Procedure

Following a brief guided imaging exercise designed to help the students envision Ms. Ecken's elementary classroom and prime their

TABLE 1
Functional Risk Characteristics of Students Classified as Initially Challenging

Martin—Defiant, angry, physically and verbally aggressive, occasionally cruel, disruptive in class, quick to take offense.
Tyrone—Poor concentration and self-control, easily upset, disruptive in class, inclined to steal, otherwise friendly and kind, good math skills but found reading and writing difficult.
Tralin—Angry, physically and verbally aggressive, defiant, resisted academic engagement, and found reading and writing difficult.
Louise—Angry, jealous, secretly aggressive or cruel, quick to take offense, poor social skills, had few friends.
Derek—Angry, defiant, poor concentration, verbally aggressive, disruptive in class, struggled academically.

memories, the students were asked to tell the interviewer whatever they remembered about being in the class. Following the guided imaging and free recall, each student was asked a set of specific questions about their experiences in the classroom and any ways they think the classroom and teacher have influenced them. For example, "What did you like best about being in Mrs. Ecken's class? "What are some things you learned in Mrs. Ecken's class?" "Are there ways that being in Mrs. Ecken's class effects how you are today as a student or as a person?" Following the questions about their elementary experience, the students were asked about their current school experiences and their self-concept. For example, "Do you like school?" "Do you like your teachers?" Have you gotten in trouble at school?" "If someone were to describe you to a person who didn't know you, what would you hope they would say about you?" The final set of questions focused on the students' future goals and plans. For example, "How far do you expect to go in school?" "What are you planning to do when you finish school?" "Why would you like to do that?" The interviewer asked follow-up questions until she felt comfortable that each student had said all he or she had to say. (See the Appendix for a description of the guided imaging process and a list of interview questions.)

RESULTS

Can Positive Long Term Effects be Found for Students Whose Initial Elementary Behavior was Challenging as well as for Those Whose Behavior was Generally Cooperative?

Both students whose elementary school behavior was initially challenging and those who were generally cooperative showed clear evidence of being positively affected by their elementary teacher's efforts to foster their social, ethical, and intellectual development. Of the nine students who were interviewed, seven appeared to be doing well academically in high school, had a positive attitude toward school and their teachers, a view of themselves as ethical and successful, and positive expectations for their future. Two students, Louise and Derek, both of whom were classified as challenging in elementary school, appeared to be in serious trouble academically: one had been held back a year and was currently failing all but one subject and the other was doing poorly academically, and had a record of poor school attendance and occasional suspensions. Three of the currently successful students had been "challenging" students in elementary school, and four had been positive, and cooperative.

In response to the question asking how they would hope to be described, all but one of the students mentioned a moral or prosocial disposition. Martin—an initially "challenging" elementary student who was in the class for second through forth grade:

> That I'm a good, funny person… That's about it…. That I really never got in too much trouble. I always did what I was told. And I was also a funny person. I always have a smile on my face. Always … me and Terry we're always laughing and joking all the time. And I like to play sports. That's about it.

Tralin—an initially "challenging" elementary student who was in the class for second through fourth grade—said she would like to be described as follows:

> She's sweet, caring. She has a head on her shoulders. Like she knows what she wants in life and … that's basically it.

Tyrone—an initially "challenging" elementary student who was in the class for second through part of forth grade:

> I really don't get caught up on what people think about me but if someone was just to describe me I would want them to let them know about my personality. I'm a pretty outgoing person. I like to have fun. I don't like to stay in the house all day. I like to get out and do some exciting things. And I'm a

> pretty nice guy. I'm polite and … I like sports. I do get along with everybody. I don't think I have any enemies. I hope not. I don't try to make enemies.

John—a cooperative elementary student who was in the class for second through forth grade said he would like to be described as follows:

> I respect people. I don't really disrespect nobody … I'm respectful to adults and to other people…. Most of the times stays out of trouble. Not a trouble maker ... I usually get along with people.

Cindy—a cooperative elementary student who was in the class for second through fourth grade:

> good, cool to be around, funny, nice, caring, respectful, honest.

Tara—a cooperative elementary student who was in the class for second and third grade:

> a good listener. I'm somebody you can come talk to if you got a problem. I won't go back and tell people. Um ... I'm confident about my future, about what I can do and I'm very realistic about stuff that I do. I won't try to like instigate or nothing like that and make people not like each other. Basically I would hope they'd say that I was a leader instead of a follower.

Paul—a cooperative elementary student who was in the class for second and third grade:

> I'm a good person. I don't just start stuff with people. I kind of tend to myself, but I'm real social. I'm a people person. I don't get into it with a whole lot of people. I got a lot of friends. I'm not real hard to not (sic) get along with.

Louise—an initially "challenging" elementary student who is currently in serious academic trouble at school. She was in the class for second and third grade and requested to move to a different class for forth grade:

> That I'm a funny person and … I make people laugh. And that I don't put people down and I don't judge people. And that's it.… I always make my friends laugh when they're feeling sad and I can easily do it.

Derek—an initially "challenging" elementary student who is currently in serious academic trouble in school. He was in the class for part of third and all of fourth grade:

> he's an intelligent boy. He can do his work but he won't do it. He knows how to do the work but won't. He chooses not to do it.

While some of the students' responses are more sophisticated that others, all of the academically successful students describe themselves in prosocial or moral terms. They are "nice," "good," "get along well with others," "respectful," "caring," "honest." Even Louise, who has been held back 1 year and is currently failing all but one of her classes describes herself as not putting people down and able to "make my friends laugh when they're feeling sad." Only Derek remains entirely self-focused and seemingly bent on maintaining a reputation as capable by not trying.

Most of the currently successful students have realistic goals for their lives. While Martin still clings to his elementary school dream of being a professional football player, he has a back up plan of opening his own barbershop business. Paul and John are also planning to go into business: Paul hopes to open his own carpentry shop and John is thinking about a business involving engineering, design, or computers. Four of the currently successful students, Tralin, Tyrone, Cindy and Tara, all look at their potential future professions as ways to help others.

Tralin: To become a nurse … they actually take their time out caring for another person, making sure that person has the right medicine, the right therapy to help them to improve their sickness and get back on their feet…. I would love to do that…. I could say I did my good deed.

Tyrone: I'm going to college. I want to major in criminal justice. I want to go to law school after college. I want to be an attorney, but if

I can, (I want to) boost up there to a judge or a circuit judge in a town or something like that. Even though they don't make as much money but they get the respect.… (I like) working with people.… I like to sit down and connect with them and see why … like maybe we won't even need to go through the law suit, maybe we can settle or something.

Cindy: A teacher. I picture myself probably just like Mrs. Ecken. Because I just feel like it was a big building block for me so I feel like I should be more important in their lives too.

Tara: I want my main job to be something that's successful that I could make a lot of money in like maybe a lawyer or a doctor or something.

(Why a doctor?)

Tara: (I like) helping people. I like being able to help somebody that needs help. I like seeing people's faces when I help them. Like I like to know that I did something good for the day. Maybe save somebody's life for the day.

(Why a lawyer?)

Tara: I think I should really be a lawyer because I'm able to get my point across real easy and I'm able to help people that's in a bad situation. I give good advice and I can like persuade people easily.

What are the Likely Mechanisms Contributing to Long Term Positive Effects?

Trust

While all of the students remembered Laura and the class fondly, in the memories of the two currently unsuccessful students Laura is seen as **contingently** caring, as not fully trust worthy. For example, Derek misremembered Laura's discipline approach as a combination of time-outs and contingent rewards for good behavior. Louise, who was in the class for second and third grade and chose to go to another class for fourth grade, believed that if the class hadn't behaved well Laura would have turned mean, something no currently successful student believed.

Derek: When you do something wrong, she ahh put you like in time-out, I guess, I think. She would put you in time out and you would have to sit in there for some minutes. Or, if you do something right she give you some snacks. I remember we had snacks in the classroom. She'd give you a snack or whatever if you do something right.

Louise: Our kids were pretty nice. Cause they knew … they knew that if we messed up she wouldn't be the way she is. She would be strict. Go mean on us.

All the currently successful students indicated somewhere during the interview, some multiple times, that they had developed a deep trust in Laura. For example:

Martin: She was real nice. Sometimes she would get upset at something she would just sit down and explain to us. Like when me and Terry got into an argument she would just say now you all are best friends you don't need to get into an argument We used to get into arguments all the time…. If she was here…. I wish she was teaching here.

Tralin: She encouraged me. (When I made mistakes, she'd say,) "It's okay. Everybody has trouble with something but if you keep trying, ... you'll get it eventually." And it stuck with me even now.

Cindy: She seemed like she cared. She just acted like…she seemed like she wanted to know about your lives and she seemed like she cared about you.

Tara: ... she was like a teacher and a friend. We could talk to her about anything we wanted to.

Paul Some teachers just pass their image over you. Ms. Eckens wouldn't do it. She'd get to know you. She didn't judge. She didn't judge you by who you hang with or how you looked. She was just a good teacher.

Trust is the hallmark of a positive, supportive teacher-child relationship, and the quality

of the teacher-child relationship in the early elementary grades has been found to be a significant predictor of later academic success and behavioral adjustment in school (Entwisle & Hayduk, 1988; Hamre & Pianta, 2001). From the perspective of attachment theory a trusting child-caregiver relationship is the foundation of a positive world view and a cooperative, prosocial approach to social relationships.

Change in Attitude

While in elementary school, four of the five initially "challenging" students engaged in bullying or teasing and were more than occasionally defiant. In their words, they had an "attitude." The two who are currently successful specifically said that their elementary experience changed their "attitude." Below are their answers to questions about how the class affected them or what they learned from the class.

Martin: Attitude. I used to have a bad attitude until I got Mrs. Ecken. She changed that…. She's the one who really got me into sports…. Doing good in school. Staying out of trouble in school … I guess focus on my work more. Try to make it somewhere in life.

Tralin: I learned to have self control. I like had an attitude problem. I could just have an attitude for anything. I don't know why, I just had an attitude. I learned to control my attitude and you know, to think before I act.

The third initially "challenging" student who is currently successful lacked the ability to control his emotions when he was in second and third grade, but he did not have a mean or angry attitude.

Neither of the challenging students who are currently unsuccessful in school made any mention of a general change in their social disposition and both continue to have a confrontational stance or "attitude" at least toward authority as demonstrated by their poor academic performance, Louise's smoking and multiple body piercings and Derek's multiple suspensions from and total dislike for school. Louise, however, does believe that the class continues to have a positive impact on who she is as a person, but Derek maintains that he did not learn anything in the class that he still carries with him.

Do the Students see a Direct Connection Between Their Current Selves and Their Experiences During Elementary School?

All of the currently successful students perceive that they were personally changed by their experiences in the class. To the questions "Are there ways that being in Mrs. Ecken's class affects how you are now, as a person or as a student?" and "What are some things you learned in Mrs. Ecken's class?", they described acquiring a variety of specific social and emotional competencies, ethical values, and academic competencies and attitudes that in and of themselves were likely contributors to their continued success after leaving elementary school.

While CDP's main focus is on fostering students' social and moral development, it also incorporates a strong focus on reading for understanding and intrinsic academic as well as moral motivation. The project stressed the importance of meeting students' needs, one of which is the need to be academically competent. In many ways, Laura's classroom provided the strong positive emotional and instructional climate that Hamre and Pianta (2005) found to be important for the academic success and behavioral adjustment of students who were functionally at risk. Laura worked hard to support her students' academic growth—for example, on a daily basis she exposed her students to good literature, provided focused reading instruction, and engaged them in instructional conversations while constantly encouraging all her students, but especially those who were struggling, with the message that they will succeed with sustained effort. Thus it was heartening to see how many of the students attributed their cur-

rent academic success, especially with regard to reading, to Laura's instruction.

For example, in addition to saying that the class helped them get rid of their "attitude," a crucial social and ethical learning, Martin and Tralin describe the class as contributing to their academic skills, attitudes, and motivations. For example:

Martin: I make goals all the time. Do this. Do good in school. Make good grades so I can graduate. So I can be the first one of my mother's kids to graduate.… She really helped me learn how to read too. I didn't know how to read that much either. I'm a good reader now.

Tralin: I definitely learned how to read. And I love reading now. I learned to have self control.… I learned my multiplication. I remember those 9s and 6 and 7. Umm … umm also, when we did books, I know how we can relate to the person in the book, the main character, or how the book affects us in life. You know how during that part or period of time and how it is today. Like we would compare it with the book in our life today and umm … I learned how to succeed. Like she would tell us to just go on even though you don't think you can make it, just keep going. I've learned a lot from her. But I think the biggest would be reading and how to control myself.

With the exception of Derek, all the students are clearly aware of learning related to social, ethical, and academic competencies that influence them in their present lives. For example, Tyrone, who struggled in elementary school with self-control and academic tasks, attributes to Laura's class his caring and respectful attitude and his creative, positive approach to school.

Tyrone: As a person that class has probably taught me to be caring, polite, respectful, outgoing.… (I)t's rare to catch me down or mad at someone. If I'm mad it won't be for long, trust me, I'm usually a happy person. I think, even remembering just the meeting area and everything just brought a smile to my face. (A)s a student it taught me … mostly to have fun with what you're doing, not to stress out…. And I usually don't let school get to me and stress out about it. Just to have fun with what you're doing and I usually try to think of something creative.… I think that's why I come back to school, because of that class, it shows me how fun school could be.

Similarly, John, who was an able and basically cooperative student in elementary school, attributes to Laura's classroom his ability to work with others and his strong motivation to do his best.

John: Today I can work with almost anybody. I think it helped me in my life by working with other people in groups.... A hard worker. Wanting…Wanting to do more in the classroom. I like … I just want … the ability to do above what I think I can do.

Even Louise, who is currently failing academically and seems to be in a confrontational stance with her school, is aware of important social/ethical learning.

she taught me not to judge people. Like if you see somebody and they're different from you.… Don't judge them because there are people saying that they're weird. Just walk up to them, start talking to them, maybe they're just like you. That's why I don't judge people and that's cause of her. I believe that's a good thing.

A Positive Role Model

Several of the students' comments imply that Laura has become an ongoing role model, deeply affecting their personalities, goals, and view of life. For example, Cindy pictures herself a teacher "probably just like Mrs. Ecken," and two students, Tralin and Tara, describe consciously using their image of Laura to guide their current behavior.

Tralin: (S)ometimes I'm in class now and I'm like, "Well I can't do it." And then I actually have a flash back to elementary where I was like "I can't do it." and Ms. Ecken' s like,

"Yes you can, you can do it." So that helps me push even more.

Tara: (I)f I'm about to do something bad I think about like "What would Ms. Ecken say?"... It's like I get myself away from everybody else so I wouldn't let myself get messed up by everybody else. I learned that from her.

How do the Students Remember Their Elementary Experience?

While the students remember little of the specific activities, books, or topics of study, all except Derek had some fond memories of specific activities—for example, making chicken soup, having parties with root beer floats, making posters of their learning, having class meetings. All the students had clear memories of the emotional feel of the classroom and of Laura as caring and helpful, even Derek and Louise.

Derek: Mrs. Ecken was nice. Mrs. Ecken she's nice. When I had a headache one day she touched my hand and squeezed it and my headache went away.… She was friendly too. And umm if you need any help, she would help you. That's all I remember.

Louise: I remember that she was always fun and it didn't seem like we had a real class because we was always playing games or doing something fun.… (I)t didn't seem like we was in class and it was like everyday we'd want to come back to her class because we was having so much fun. And then at the end of the day we wouldn't want to go.

The currently successful students remember Laura as the best teacher they ever had. They have overall positive feelings toward their elementary classmates as well, although few remember more than a few classmates specifically.

Tyrone: That class was, no hands down, the best class of my years, I mean since I been in school … we moved up together. Really, none of us moved away. I remember everybody staying in the class and we did things together. Everybody knew everybody and everybody was a friend to everybody.

Paul: She was down to earth and you could talk to her. She explained things real good where we would understand. She was a good all around teacher.… She's incomparable. I couldn't compare no other teacher to Mrs. Ecken. She'll always be my favorite teacher.

Tara: … everybody knew everybody so ... nobody didn't have like their own group. Everybody was like in one big group because everybody knew each other … she knew each student individually. Like she'll sit and talk to everybody individually and she'll know what they was good at and what they was not good at … she was like a teacher and a friend.

DISCUSSION

This small clinical study looked at the development of just nine students, but it provides a clear answer to at least one important question, "Can a moral/character education program in elementary school have long term positive effects on 'challenging' as well as cooperative students?" Three of the five "challenging" and all four of the cooperative elementary students were found to be not only academically successful in high school, but also to describe themselves in positive moral terms—four having career goals involving caring for or helping others.

A somewhat surprising finding is the degree to which the students were aware of their elementary school teacher's moral and social goals and the degree to which they were aware of their teacher's effect on their social, emotional, and moral development. For example, Tyrone, John, Cindy, and Tara comment on learning how to cooperate and care about other people, and even Louise is aware of learning "not to judge people." A comment from Tralin makes this point most clearly.

> (In my current classes), you did what you did, you got in trouble, next day come back, act like nothing happened. You know, just start all over again. And Mrs. Ecken, if we

> got in trouble … she'll give us a chance to think about it and how could we change the situation differently. What could we have done to make it better or, you know, things like that.

In *Learning to Trust* (Watson & Ecken, 2003) I argued that establishing trust within the classroom is the first and most important condition for effective moral as well as academic instruction. That book documents Laura's efforts at trust building across 2 years and the gradual emergence of her students' growing trust and social, emotional, moral, and academic development. The present interview data provide further support for the role of trust, not only for the students' progress while in Laura's classroom but also for their continued success 6 years later when the students were in high school. All of the high school students who are currently successful describe their relationship with Laura in terms of interpersonal trust. They describe Laura as like a friend, a mother, as understanding and caring about students, as someone who could be relied on to help and explain and not get upset. Again, a comment from Tralin describes this trust most clearly.

> I loved Mrs. Ecken's class cus we was open and honest.… You had that honesty there. She was like a mother… some kids was like struggling in homes and stuff … she was like our mother when we came to school.… And that's what's so special about her.

On the other hand, the two unsuccessful students, although remembering Laura fondly, remember her with mistrust. Louise says that Laura would have "go(ne) mean" if the students had not been well behaved and Louis remembers Laura as punishing students with time outs and providing snacks only if "you do something right."

The students' responses to the interview questions provide support for an attachment theory explanation of their long term success or failure. When viewed through the lens of attachment theory (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Lyons-Ruth, 1996; Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 1999; Main & Solomon, 1990; Pianta, 1999; Sroufe, 1983, 1996; Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986; Stayton, Hogan, & Ainsworth, 1971), four of the five "challenging" students, Martin, Tralin, Louise, and Derek, displayed in elementary school behaviors consistent with a history of avoidant or disorganized attachment. They were defiant and disruptive in the classroom, quick to take offense, and engaged in teasing and bullying. The fifth, Tyrone, more often the victim in elementary school, displayed behaviors consistent with a history of insecure-ambivalent attachment. He had little ability to regulate his emotions, was quick to take offense, easily dissolve into tears, frequently took things that did not belong to him, and displayed insecurity about the quality of his work. He was, however, friendly and not aggressive toward his classmates. In order to develop healthy personalities, attachment theory would argue that all five students would need to develop a sufficiently trusting relationship with a significant adult, and through that relationship shift their views of others, themselves, and relationships.

Two of the four "challenging" students who displayed substantial anger and aggression during elementary school, Martin and Tralin, describe themselves as doing just that. Both describe a trusting relationship with Laura, explicitly saying that she helped them get rid of their "attitude" and build positive self concepts. Martin explains that he now always has a smile on his face, and that she helped him set goals, focus on his work and do well in school. Tralin declares, "I learned that I can trust myself," and describes herself as "sweet" and "caring" with "a head on her shoulders." It appears that for these two students Laura became an attachment figure powerful enough to support the rebuilding of their personalities and the changing of their world views. Tyrone, the student whose elementary school behavior was challenging because he had little ability to regulate his emotions, also describes having established a deep trusting relationship with Laura that apparently helped him not only

learn to control his emotions, but also to have self confidence and perseverance.

> now today, I have no problem like getting in front of class, even if I make a mistake … I don't care if I mess up, I know I can do better next time.

The two remaining "challenging" students, Louise and Derek, had fond memories of Laura and did seem to have a trusting relationship with her while in elementary school, and, as documented in *Learning to Trust,* developed under her guidance positive social, moral, and academic values and competencies. Yet, looking back on the class, both describe their relationship with Laura as one of mistrust and neither succeeded in maintaining enough of these values and competencies to succeed in middle and high school. We cannot tell from the data why this is the case, but one possible explanation is that the level of trust they had was either too brief or too shallow. Derek, for example, was in the class with Laura for less than one academic year, whereas the three challenging students who maintained their trust were in the classroom for more than 2 academic years. While Louise was in the class for 2 academic years, the fact that she took the option to go to a different class for fourth grade is some indication that even in elementary school she did not have a fully trusting relationship with Laura. From the perspective of attachment theory, we would not expect students to shift their "working models" of themselves and others unless they had established an enduring and deep trusting relationship.

As Noddings (2002) argues, simply being in a caring environment may not be enough to support the capacity for sustained social, emotional, and moral growth. The failure of Derek and Louise to thrive after leaving elementary school suggests that the caring must be perceived by the one cared for as unconditional, and must last long enough for the child to do the active work of reconceptualizing the self and the world of social relationships. One possibility is that Louise never really believed that Laura's care was unconditional, as stated by her belief that Laura would "go mean" if the students misbehaved, and thus never trusted Laura enough to use their relationship to rebuild her self and world view. Derek may have come to deeply trust Laura but their time together may have been too brief. So instead of changing his world view he changed his view of Laura's classroom to fit his untrusting world view.

In contrast to the "challenging" students, all of the students who were generally cooperative when they entered Laura's classroom in second grade, Cindy, John, Tara, and Paul, continued to thrive in middle and high school. From the perspective of both care and attachment theory, this result is not surprising. These students entered the classroom with positive self images and a trusting attitude and were thus open to Laura's guidance and teaching. They arrived in the classroom with the ability to cooperate and use their teacher to learn new skills and build new understandings, both moral and academic. And that is what the students describe themselves as doing. While all the currently successful students mention having learned specific academic skills, particularly in reading and math, they are most explicit about their social and moral learning. Cindy says that she "learned to care about other people and to realize that they have feelings." John declares that he "can work with almost anybody," and learned to be "a hard worker." Tara says she "learned how to share, how to cooperate with other people, and how not to make differences in people."

To explain the post treatment positive effects for middle school students of the Child Development Project, Battistich and his colleagues (Battistich et al., 2004; Battistich & Hong, in press) offer "bonding to school" as the potential mechanism allowing for carry over effects. They found that students in CDP schools had more positive views of school while in elementary school than students in comparison schools, and hypothesize that these more positive views of school led them to enter middle school with a more positive attitude, and to find a supportive niche within

their more impersonal and less developmentally sensitive middle schools. There is some evidence in the interview data that the currently successful students experienced a general bonding to their elementary school. For example, Martin says that he "loved elementary school," and Tyrone, in remembering how much fun learning was in Laura's class, says "I think that's why I come back to school, because of that class, it shows me how fun school could be." All these students say that they currently like school but they mourn the loss of the close and caring relationship they had with Laura in elementary school. For example, Cindy comments that most of her teachers "don't make relationships with their students," and several students mentioned in one way or another that their teachers do not trust them or do not push them to do their best. In Tara's words,

> It's like nobody's really pushing us to do our best. If you don't understand … they'll think that you're not understanding on purpose.

Martin expressed this longing for school to be like it was in elementary school in a short poignant comment.

> I loved elementary school. I wish I could have just stayed in elementary school instead of moving up to middle school or high school. I don't like it. I only got two more years here and then I'm going to college. She (Ms. Ecken) used to always talk about us going to college.

Of course, the interview data from this study only provide a weak estimate of students' bonding to school in general. The focus of the current study was on one teacher, and all but one of the students had been in that teacher's class for 2 or more of their 6 elementary school years. However, these data do provide a good estimate of the power of bonding to a teacher, of the "power of one" as it is referred to in the literature on resiliency (Benard, 2004; Brown, D'Emidio-Caston, & Benard, 2001). Laura Ecken incorporated in her teaching all of the characteristics that have been found to support student resiliency, for example, a caring, encouraging manner; confidence in the students; a strong and enriching curriculum; and a democratic, nonpunitive, restorative approach to discipline (Benard, 2004; Weinstein, Soule, Collins, Cone, Mehlhorn, & Simontacchi, 1991). And seven of the students, all of them with two or more demographic risk characteristics and three of them with additional functional risk characteristics, displayed at ages 14 or 15 such key hallmarks of resiliency as social competence, resourcefulness, humor, a positive identity, and a sense of purpose.

Yet, the successful students are more than resilient; they view themselves through a moral lens and have a moral identity. The teacher in this study combined unconditional caring with strong, purposeful teaching in the social and moral, as well as the academic domains. The seven students who perceived that unconditional caring grew in their capacity to be good people as well as good students, and they appear to have carried their capacity for goodness with them into middle and high school.

As proposed by Noddings (2002), caring teacher-student relationships may be essential to any program's effectiveness. Hamre and Pianta (2005) have shown that first grade students who were classified as both demographically and functionally at risk in kindergarten, performed as well as their nonrisk peers if they happened to be placed in a caring, emotionally and academically supportive first grade. However, unlike the students in Laura's class, their sample was not highly at risk and they looked at effects for only 1 year. Mutually caring relationships take time to build, especially for young students whose behavior is highly challenging and who enter relationships from a mistrustful stance. As Flinders and Noddings (2001) have argued, and these data support, teachers may need to be with their students for more than 1 year to have a lasting positive effect. But these data leave no doubt that a car-

ing teacher can be a lasting positive presence in the lives of his or her students.

This seems evident in Cindy's desire to be a teacher "just like Mrs. Ecken," Tyrone's continuing belief that school "can be fun," Martin's continued dream of "going to college," Tara's inclination to "ask myself what would Mrs. Ecken say?" when faced with ethical dilemmas, and Tralin's still hearing Laura's voice saying, "you can do it" when she is tempted to give up. With time, unconditional caring and a willingness to teach for social and moral as well as academic growth, elementary teachers can have a lasting positive influence even with initially untrusting students whose behaviors are clearly challenging. In Tralin's words:

> Everything that she said, it sticks with me. I don't know, she just played a big role in my life. For her to be a teacher … you would think a student or a child would forget her as their teacher. But I'll never forget her, ever.

Limitations of the Study

While the students in this study describe themselves in positive moral and academic terms and see a causal connection between these positive characteristics and their experiences in Laura Ecken's class, there is no corroborating evidence. It is possible that the students may be wrong in their self assessments or in their belief that their experiences in Mrs. Ecken's class contributed importantly to their development of these positive characteristics. My impression, during the interviews, was that the students were amazingly candid, revealing problems as well as successes. For example, Tyrone mentioned that while math is his favorite subject he was only getting a C and Traline described "flipping off" one of her teachers. The students who described themselves as successful also engaged in the interview in a friendly and confident manner. However, I did not obtain the student's grades or other assessments from school personnel.

Further, the students knew that Mrs. Ecken would know what they said. While I assured them that if they said something they did not want Mrs. Ecken to know they said, that I would protect their identity, it is possible that they held back on negative things to protect themselves or to not hurt Mrs. Ecken. This limitation was unavoidable because the current information needed to be connected to the information about the children as they were in elementary school when Laura was their teacher. Knowing that their former teacher would know what they said may have biased the students in a positive direction, however, their comments were so strongly positive and often expressed with emotional force that it seems unlikely that this knowledge was a significant factor. Also, the students, who were in four different schools, made many of the same quite specific positive comments.

Finally, one might ask if the positive outcomes are due to CDP, the character education program Laura used, or simply the result of the relationship the students had with an exceptionally capable and caring teacher. The students' comments do make Laura sound like a perfect teacher who never made mistakes, lost her temper, or behaved punitively toward her students. In this way, the students' statements are too positive. *Learning to Trust* documents Laura's struggle to be the best teacher she could be, describing her missteps as well as her successes. For example, when 8-year-old Tralin called Tyrone's mother a "crackhead," Laura at first threatened to call Tralin's grandmother. A quick reflection led her to abandon that threat and instead focus Tralin on the harm she caused Tyrone and ways to undo Tyrone's pain. Laura would sometimes exert too little or too much control and sometimes loose her temper and become angry at her students. I remember one incident in which one of her students reminded Laura to take a deep breath and count to ten. But overall, she was able to provide the care, support, instruction, and encouragement her students needed and that is what they remembered, not her missteps. (For more

on this see Watson & Ecken, 2003, pp. 255-260.)

There is no absolutely clear way to disentangle the effects of Laura as a teacher and CDP as a program. It seems likely that the long term positive effects described by the students resulted from a caring teacher enacting a character education program that stressed the importance of caring. As mentioned earlier, Laura was a caring teacher before she started using the CDP program, but she did not focus on relationship building or on teaching her students to care.

With the CDP program and materials Laura engaged in many relationship building activities, used literature to highlight humane values, cooperative activities to teach students how to work with one another in fair and kind ways, buddies activities to provide her students with the experience of helping others, class meetings to build community feeling and give her students voice in shaping that community, and an approach to discipline that encouraged her to use misbehaviors as teachable moments rather than occasions for dispensing consequences. Research by the CDP staff indicates that for the program to be successful students need to experience their schools and classrooms as caring communities (Solomon et al., 2000). It seems likely that the CDP program and materials supported Laura in her efforts to create such a community and together program and teacher were able to have long term positive effects on the students' moral or character development.

APPENDIX

Interview Protocol

Guided Imaging

To begin, I'd like you to think back to elementary school and Mrs. Ecken's classroom. Closing you eyes might help. Try to see the classroom. (Pause) Picture yourself sitting at a table with three other classmates. Can you see their faces? Do you remember their names? Who are they? What are you all doing? (Pause) Now picture yourself sitting in a class meeting. What's being talked about? (Pause) Now picture Mrs. Ecken reading a book aloud. Can you remember a book or story she read to the class? (Pause) Now picture yourself doing partner research. What are you doing research on? Who is your partner? (Pause) Imagine someone in the class has done something wrong. What is it? What does Mrs. Ecken do? (Pause) Now imagine that you have done something wrong. What might that be? What might Mrs. Ecken do? (Pause) Imagine an end of the day class meeting and the class is discussing things that went well and rough spots. What might be being said? What might you have said? (Pause) Now let's back up and imagine a morning meeting. It's just ending. Pretend it's your turn to make the wish for the day. What might you wish?"

Free Recall

Okay, this was just a way to help you remember back to your years in Mrs. Ecken's class. Did it bring back memories? I hope so, because now l'd like you to share some of your memories with me. Let's begin by you just telling me whatever you remember about being in the class. (I probed for specifics if their memories very general. If they had difficulty remembering I asked if they remembered specific things that I know they did, for example, making a class book, doing a biography report, hearing a particular story.)

First Set of Specific Questions: Remembering Laura's Classroom

1. What did you like best about being in Mrs. Ecken's class? Why did you like that?
2. Can you remember some things Mrs. Ecken did that helped you be a better student? A better person?
3. What are some of the things you learned in Mrs. Ecken's class?

4. Were there some things you didn't like about being in Mrs. Ecken's class? Why were these things a problem? What should Mrs. Ecken have done differently?
5. Now that you are older and have had lots more school experience, is there some advice or something you would like to tell Mrs. Ecken to help her be a good teacher for other students?

Second Set of Specific Questions—Asking About Their Current School Experience

Now I'd like to switch to talking about your current life and school experience.

1. What classes are you talking?
2. Do you like school? What do (or don't) you like about it?
3. Do you have a favorite subject or class?
4. How are your grades?
5. Do you like your teachers?
6. Do you belong to any school clubs? Which ones?
7. Do you play sports? Which ones?
8. Do you have an after school job like baby-sitting, running errands, delivering papers, yard work etc.?
9. Have you read a book recently that you particularly liked? What was the book about? Was the book assigned in one of your classes? (If so, ask) Have you read a book this year that wasn't assigned?
10. Have you gotten into trouble at school? What did you do? What happened? How do you feel about it? Was that the only trouble you got into?
11. If someone were to describe you to another person who didn't know you, what would you hope the person would say about you?
12. Tell me a bit about your friends. What are your friends like? (Probe for information about friends' outside activities and academic standing.)
13. Do you still see any of your former classmates from when you were in Mrs. Ecken's class?

Third Set of Specific Questions—Asking About Their Plans and Hopes for the FUTURE

Now, let's leave the present and look to the future for this last set of questions.

1. How far do you expect to go in school? (Probe for high school, college, graduate/professional school?)
2. What are you planning to do when you finish school?
3. Why would you like to do that?
4. Now picture yourself 10 years from now. You're twenty-five. What do you hope your life will be like 10 years from now?
5. Now picture yourself twenty years from now. You're thirty-five. What do you hope your life will be like 20 years from now?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In addition to the editor, Steve Sherblom, I would like to thank Victor Battistich, Catherine Lewis, Cindy Litman, and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

NOTE

1. Since the research described in this paper, Developmental Studies drastically reshaped the classroom component of the CDP program. All references to CDP in this paper are to the version of the program implemented and assessed by DSC prior to the year 2000.

REFERENCES

Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment.* Hillside, NJ: Erlbaum.

Battistich, V., & Hong, S. (in press). Enduring effects of the Child Development Project: Second-order latent linear growth modeling of students' bonding to school, academic performance, and social adjustment during middle school. *Prevention Science*.

Battistich, V., Schaps, E., & Wilson, N. (2004). Effects of an elementary school intervention on students' "connectedness" to school and social adjustment during middle school. *The Journal of Primary Prevention*, *24*(3), 243-262.

Battistich, V., Solomon, D., Watson, M., & Schaps, E. (1997). Caring school communities. *Educational Psychologist, 32,* 137-151.

Benard, B. (2004). *Resiliency: What we have learned.* San Francisco: WestEd.

Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss* (Vol. 1). New York: Basic Books.

Brown, J. H., D'Emidio-Caston, M., & Benard, B. (2001). *Resilience education.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Dalton, J., & Watson, M. (1997). *Among friends.* Oakland, CA: Developmental Studies Center.

Entwisle, D. R., & Hayduk, L. A. (1988). Lasting effects of elementary school. *Sociology of Education, 61,* 147-159.

Flinders, D. J., & Noddings, N. (2001). *Multiyear teaching: The case for continuity.* Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa.

Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2001). Early teacher-child relationships and the trajectory of children's school outcomes through eighth grade. *Child Development, 72,* 625-638.

Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2005). Can instructional and emotional support in the first-grade classroom make a difference for children at risk or school failure? *Child Development, 76*, 949-967.

Lewis, C., Watson, M., & Schaps, E. (1999). Recapturing education's full mission: Educating for social, ethical, and intellectual development. In C. M. Reigeluth (Ed.), *Instructional-design theories and models: A new paradigm of instructional theory* (pp. 511-536). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Lyons-Ruth, K. (1996). Attachment relationships among children with aggressive behavior problems: The role of disorganized early attachment patterns. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 64*(1), 64-73.

Lyons-Ruth, K., & Jacobvitz, D. (1999). Attachment disorganization: Unresolved loss, relational violence, and lapses in behavioral and attentional strategies. In J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications* (pp. 520-554). New York: Guilford Press.

Main, M., & Solomon, J. (1990). Procedures for identifying infants as disorganized/disoriented during the Ainsworth Strange Situation. In M. T. Greenberg, D. Cicchetti, & E. M. Cummings (Eds.), *Attachment in the preschool years: Theory, research, and intervention* (pp. 121-160). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Noddings, N. (2002). *Educating moral people: A caring alternative to character education.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Pianta, R. C. (1999). *Enhancing relationships between children and teachers.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Solomon, D., Battistitch, V., Watson, M., Schaps, E., & Lewis, C. (2000). A six-district study of educational change: Direct and mediated effects of the Child Development Project. *Social Psychology of Education, 4,* 3-51.

Solomon, D., Watson, M., Delucchi, K., Schaps, E., & Battistich, V. (1988). Enhancing children's prosocial behavior in the classroom. *American journal of Community Psychology*, *24*(6), 527-554.

Sroufe, L. A. (1983). Infant-caregiver attachment and patterns of adaptation in preschool: The roots of maladaptation and competence. In M. Perlmutter (Ed.), *development and policy concerning children with special needs* (pp. 41-83). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum

Sroufe, L. A. (1996). *Emotional development: The organization of emotional life in the early years.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Sroufe, L. A., & Fleeson, J. (1986). Attachment and the Construction of Relationships. In W. Hartup & Z Rubin (Eds.), *Relationshikps and development* (pp. 51-71). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Stayton, D. J., Hogan, R., & Ainsworth, M. D., S. (1971). Infant obedience and maternal behavior: The origins of socialization reconsidered. *Child Development, 42,* 1057-1069.

Watson, M., Battistich, V., & Solomon, D. (1997). Enhancing students' social and ethical development in schools: An intervention program and its effects. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *27,* 571-586.

Watson, M., & Ecken, L. (2003). *Learning to trust*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Weinstein, R., Soule, C., Collins, F., Cone, J., Mehlhorn, M., & Siontacchi, K. (1991). Expectations and high school change: teacher-researcher collaboration to prevent school failure. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *19,* 333-363 (as cited in Benard, 2004).