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Documenting the Relationship of Students' Trust in Teachers to Cognition, Character, and Climate

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This study highlights the efforts of a U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools Partnerships in Character Education Program grant awarded to an Appalachian region state education agency to study the effect of the integration of character education models into rural schools. More specifically, this study focuses on data collected regarding the role of students' trust in teachers to the instructional and developmental process. The participants from this study were recruited from four rural schools (2 middle schools and 2 high schools). The student participants recruited at the middle/high school level consist of 151 males (42%) and 199 females (55%) for a combined N =3 66 (14 nonreports). Post hoc correlation analysis identifies numerous positive significant relationships between students' self-reported levels of trust in teacher and students' perceptions of one's own character, educational attitudes and school climate.

According to Bowlby's attachment theory (1982), the early bonds formed by children with their caregivers have a tremendous impact that continues throughout life. For several decades, theorists have expanded Bowlby's attachment theory assumptions to encompass a broader notion of attachment networks beyond child-mother and inclusive of child-teacher relationships (Howes, 1999; Pianta, 1999; van Ijzendoorn, Sagi, & Lambermon, 1992; Watson, 2003). The quality of our children's relationships with teachers emerges as an important predictor of children's future social relations with peers (Howes & Tonyan, 2000), their behavior problems (Howes & Aikins, 2002), and school satisfaction and achievement (Baker, 1999; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001). Quality student-teacher relationships have the potential to develop the "affectional" ties that encourage trust, autonomy, and initiative factor which leads to enhanced resilience in youth development (Werner, 1995). And when the school bell rings, students are more likely to seek guidance from

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their teachers and accept their attempts to influence them if they trust them (Wooten & McCroskey, 1996). Since many character education and prosocial education initiatives are aimed at helping educators develop the whole child socially, ethically, and academically, this study is intended to contribute to a scientific knowledge base for character education and further document the empirical relationship between trust in teachers and students' cognition (toward education), their self-perceived character, and the school climate.

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools Partnerships in Character Education Program (PCEP) has funded approximately fifty experimental (or quasi-experimental) efforts that are investigating the effects of character education in relation to youth development on academic achievement and numerous social and behavioral variables. According to Berkowitz and Bier (2004), however, "Whereas character education is not new, scientific study of its effectiveness has been only sporadically implemented ... [and] therefore not informed by a scientific knowledge base" (p. 72).

> Thus the importance of approaching recent government-funded exploration of character education with sound methods, as well as reliable and more importantly [when possible], valid measures, is essential to discovering the true role that character education can play in the educational process. (Corrigan, Grove, Vincent, Chapman, & Walls, 2007, p. 106)

Given that the PCEP grant projects have collected some of the most recent and comprehensive data sets in regard to a wide array of variables associated with character education, it would seem that with such rich data sets available for use in research or post hoc analysis, character education researchers could capitalize on this opportunity to further develop the much needed scientifically documented knowledge base. Therefore, this study focuses on a post hoc analysis of data collected through one of the PCEP grants and addresses specifically the role of students' trust in teachers to learning and the developmental process.

Definition and Characteristics of Trust in Teachers

Trust is "the confidence an individual has that another will act in ways that promote the fulfillment of desired [common] goals" (Rempel, Ross, & Holmes, 2001, p. 57). Erikson (1963) hypothesized that individuals develop trust gradually by moving through eight sequential stages based on their psychosocial experiences. Trust is a dyad-dependent, mutually beneficial element to the student-teacher relationship (Corrigan & Chapman, 2008). Students' trust in teachers, also called trustworthiness, is considered to be one of three dimensions of teacher credibility (Teven & Hanson, 2004; Thweatt & McCroskey, 1998).

Building trust is a slow and difficult process, but losing trust (if it exists) can happen quickly (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). "Children who do not trust, but are instead preoccupied with the child-teacher relationship, are unable to use the teacher as a resource for learning and spend their time in school resisting, attempting to control, or avoiding the teacher" (Howes & Ritchie, 2002, pp. 5-6). According to Jaasma and Koper (1999) trust is positively correlated with frequency of informal contact between teachers and students, student satisfaction, socializing during informal contact, and students' positive evaluation of the teacher. Ellis and Shockley-Zalabak (2003) found that trust in the teacher has an indirect effect on motivation and cognitive learning.

The cognitive and social development of youth which encourages academic success occurs in an interactive context (Pianta & Walsh, 1996). Trust is normally based on a pattern of everyday interactions, as opposed to a single interaction, and it is considered an important factor in determining the extent that students are open to being taught by a teacher (Wooten & McCroskey, 1996). Curzon-Hobson (2002) proposes that trust is an integral

part of higher learning and argues that teachers' own daily actions and reactions are vitally important in creating a sense of trust with students by communicating effectively that the students' contributions will be welcomed and rewarded by the teacher. Wooten and McCroskey (1996) state that students are more likely to trust teachers who exhibit responsiveness (i.e., sensitivity to communication and recognizing the needs of others).

Subsequently, negative teacher characteristics and actions also are related to students' trust in teachers. Students are less likely to trust teachers that use verbally aggressive messages (e.g., character attacks, competence attacks, and physical appearance attacks) (Myers, 2001). Thweatt and McCroskey (1998) found that teacher trustworthiness is rated by students as being significantly lower for teachers with misbehaviors than for teachers without misbehaviors. Categories of misbehavior include incompetence, indolence, and offensiveness.

For quite some time it has been generally accepted that next to parents and home, teachers and schools are the most influential forces in the lives of youth (Purkey, 1970). "Students need positive role models to provide guidance and assistance in acquiring the personality traits that will prepare and enable them to function positively and effectively in society now, and in the future" (Hawkes, 1991, p. 475). As the 8th Principle of the Character Education Partnership's *Eleven Principles* states, "First and foremost, staff members assume this responsibility by modeling the core values in their own behavior and taking advantage of other opportunities to influence the students with whom they interact" (www.character.org). Therefore, to be a more effective teacher that students look to as a mentor and/or role model, research suggests that one could benefit greatly by building a quality student-teacher relationship that is reliant upon trust. As the old saying goes, "They don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care."

Rationale

Since 1995, the U.S. Department of Education has awarded 97 grants to assist in designing, implementing and sustaining high-quality opportunities for students to learn and understand the importance of strong character in their lives (Kidron & Osher, 2009). PCEP projects funded by the Department of Education are intended to help states work with school districts to develop curriculum materials, provide teacher training, involve parents in character education and integrate character education into the curriculum. The initial projects were tasked with designing activities to incorporate six elements of character,—caring, civic virtue and citizenship, justice and fairness, respect, responsibility, and *trustworthiness*. Given trustworthiness was one of the six elements, and research suggests that building trust in the classroom and schools has beneficial effects on instructional and developmental outcomes, further addressing the quantitative relationship of student/teacher trust to educational outcomes is warranted.

When students trust teachers, they are placing confidence in their teachers and ideally learning the importance of trustworthiness. Through one's actions in the classroom and less formal interactions outside of the classroom, teachers can either facilitate or undermine the confidence that students place in them. In order for educators to more positively influence the development of children it is important to establish trust as an authority figure. Prosocial education frameworks based on efforts such as character education, that ask educators to focus on developing safe and caring learning climates essential to building trust, have the potential to benefit schools and students greatly. As Berkowitz and Bier (2004) suggest, however, there is still more scientifically supported research needed to justify and validate the field of character education.

Therefore, to continue building upon a scientific knowledge base that is essential to supporting the goals of character education the following research questions are proposed:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What is the relationship between a student's trust in teachers and one's self-perceived character, performance character, moral character, concern for others, misconduct at school, and altruism?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): What is the relationship between a student's trust in teachers and one's sense of school community and victimization at school?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): What is the relationship between a student's trust in teachers and one's academic self esteem, trust in principals, motivation to learn, and perceived teacher efficacy?

METHOD

Participants

The individual participants from this study were recruited from four schools selected through a matched random sampling technique used for the quasi-experimental purposes of the grant. Please note that consent rates obtained during the first year of the grant (project development phase) by the participating schools range from 75 to 98% participation. The student participants at the middle and high school level consist of 151 males (42%) and 199 females (55%) for a combined $N = 350$. The high school students at the time of this survey (beginning of phase two-intervention stage) had recently begun 10th grade, and the middle school students were starting 7th grade. In the participating middle and high schools 53% of the students receive free or reduced lunch and 14% are designated as having special needs.

Procedures

The surveys for this assessment were administered in either the cafeteria or auditorium by outside evaluators, and no school staff or teachers were present at the time. Student identification numbers were used on the surveys and answer sheets to provide a greater level of confidentiality. Participants were asked to respond truthfully to the survey questions by reflecting on previous experiences relating to the past year in their neighborhood, community, and school. The surveys were administered in accordance with guidelines for research with human participants (American Psychological Association and the institutions involved). As part of an agreement with the sample's Appalachian-based state's Department of Education, additional data were provided for indicators of academic achievement, special needs, and other academic related statistics for use in analyses.

Measures

The surveys used multiple demographic questions and self-report Likert-type or semantic differential scales described in the following paragraphs to begin a more thorough assessment of stakeholder perceptions and the proximal and distal outcomes possibly related to the grant's character education intervention. The scales on this survey were selected after several pilot runs administered during Phase 1 of the study. See Tables 1, 2, and 3 for the characteristics of all scales.

Measurements of Character

Concern for Others Scale *(CFOS).* This 9-item Likert-type scale (1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree) was developed by the Developmental Studies Center to measure the level of concern that students have for others. Previous research utilizing this scale reports past internal reliabilities ranging from .78 to .81 (Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004; Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995; Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000). No formal studies supporting the construct validity of this scale have been

TABLE 1
Characteristics of Scales Measuring Character

Scale	*# of Items*	*Item Scale*	*Range*	*Alpha Reliabilities*[a]	*Validities*[b]
1. Concern for Others Scale	9	1-5	9-45	Previous: .78-.81 Present: .85	content
2. Moral Character	12	1-5	12-60	Previous: .80 Present: .77	content
3. Performance Character	12	1-5	12-60	Previous: .80 Present: .80	content
4, Self-Perceived Character Elements Scale	19	1-5	19-95	Previous: n/a Present: .90	content
5. Misconduct at Scale	4	1-5	4-20	Previous: .74-.79 Present: .75	content
6. Altruism Scale	9	1-5	9-45	Previous: .80-.85 Present: .81	content

Notes: [a]Alpha reliabilities refer to internal consistency of the scale (coefficient alpha). [b]Validities provide the types of validities (content, construct, predictive-criterion-related, concurrent-criterion-related) that have been reported.

TABLE 2
Characteristics of Scales Measuring School Climate

Scale	*# of Items*	*Item Scale*	*Range*	*Alpha Reliabilities*[a]	*Validities*[b]
1. Sense of School Community (SSAI)	9	1-5	9-45	Previous: .80-.82 Present: .82	content construct
2. Sense of School Community (SSUP)	9	1-5	9-45	Previous: .80-.82 Present: .89	content construct
3. Victimization at School	6	1-5	6-30	Previous: .75-.79 Present: .81	content

Notes: [a]Alpha reliabilities refer to internal consistency of the scale (coefficient alpha). [b]Validities provide the types of validities (content, construct, predictive-criterion-related, concurrent-criterion-related) that have been reported.

TABLE 3
Characteristics of Dimension Six Scales Measuring Educational Attitudes

Scale	*# of Items*	*Item Scale*	*Range*	*Alpha Reliabilities*[a]	*Validities*[b]
1. Student Motivation	5	1-5	5-25	Previous: .94 Present: .84	content construct
2. Academic Self-Esteem	4	1-5	4-20	Previous: .82-.84 Present: .73	content
3. Trust in Teachers	4	1-5	4-20	Previous: .75-.84 Present: .83	content
4. Trust in Principals	4	1-5	4-20	Previous: .75-.84 Previous: .75-.84	content
5. Student Perceived Teacher Efficacy	24	1-5	24-120	Previous: Present: .88	content

Notes: [a]Alpha Reliabilities refer to internal consistency of the scale (Coefficient Alpha). [b]Validities provide the types of validities (content, construct, predictive-criterion-related, concurrent-criterion-related) that have been reported.

identified. A sample item is "People should look after themselves and not try to solve other people's problems."

Assessment of Student Moral and Performance Character Scale (MCHAR & PCHAR). Both of these 12-item Likert-type scales (1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree) were adapted from a part of the Khmelkov and Davidson (2006) CREE assessment survey that focused on performance and moral character development. Reliabilities for these scales have been reported in the .80 ranges. A sample item for the moral character scale is "I admit if I do something wrong." A sample item for the performance character scale is "I think about my school work and consider whether I need to work harder."

Self-Perceived Character Elements Scale (ECHAR). This Likert-type scale was developed for this study by combining the most widely published/used character traits/values/virtues/elements (e.g., honesty, respect) that are touted throughout character education and collapsing them down to 19 one-word items. For example, respondents can answer as to how much they understand and practice the term "Diligence" on a scale from 1 to 5; with 1 being "I do not know what this is" to 3 being "I know what this is, I think about it often, and practice it occasionally" to 5 being "I know what this is, I think about it often, and practice it constantly." These items will be studied through an educational psychology lens based on Bloom and colleagues (1956) Taxonomy of Cognitive Domain that considers the process of learning through the knowledge (cognitive), comprehension (affective meaning), and application (behavioral) levels. Please note that learning does not always follow a linear process where an individual first learns the word, then understand the meaning and then applies the behavior. It is quite possible for the behavior to happen first and the meaning and definition to follow. However, for this study we are using this taxonomy to measure increases in such prosocial character-based behaviors.

Misconduct at School (MS). This 4-item Likert-type scale (1 never to 5 ten plus times) was developed by the Developmental Studies Center to measure the level of misconduct that students practice in school. Research utilizing this scale reports internal reliabilities ranging from .74 to .79 (Battistich et al., 1995; Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004; Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000). No formal studies supporting the construct validity of this scale have been identified. A sample item is "Have you ever cheated on a test?"

*Altruism Scale (ALT*S). This 9-item Likert-type scale (1 never to 5 ten plus times) is a scale that was modified after Rushton, Chrisjohn, and Fekken (1981) by the Developmental Studies Center to measure the level of altruism that students practice in general. Research utilizing this scale reports internal reliabilities ranging from .80 to .85 (Battistich et al., 1995; Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004; Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000). No formal studies supporting the construct validity of this scale have been identified. A sample item is "Have you stood up for someone who was being picked on?"

Measurements of School Climate

Sense of School Community (SSAI & SSUP). Both of the 9-item Likert-type subscales (1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree) were developed by the Developmental Studies Center to measure a sense of school community. The SSAI focuses on the autonomy and influence experienced by the student participant, while SSUP focuses on school supportiveness. Research utilizing this scale reports internal reliabilities ranging from .80 to .82 (Battistich et al., 1995). Numerous studies utilizing this scale offer support for the construct validity of this scale (Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004; Battistich et al., 1995; Solomon, Battistich, Kim, & Watson, 1997; Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000). A sample item for SSAI is "Students help to decide what goes on at this school." A sample item for SSUP is "Students at this school are willing to go out of their way to help someone."

Victimization at School (VICS). This 6-item Likert-type scale (1 never to 5 ten plus times) was developed by the Developmental Studies Center to measure the level of victimization students experience at school. Research utilizing this scale reports internal reliabilities ranging from .75 to .79 (Battistich et al., 1995; Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004; Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000). No formal studies supporting the construct validity of this scale have been identified. A sample item is "Did someone threaten to hurt you but did not actually hurt you?"

Measurements of Educational Attitudes

Student Motivation Scale (SMS). Brophy (1987) defined student motivation to learn as "a student tendency to find academic activities meaningful and worthwhile and to try to derive the intended academic benefits from them" (p. 205). This study used the Richmond (1990) Student Motivation Scale (SMS) to measure the state of a student's motivation to learn, which is believed to be intrinsic. The scale consists of 5, five-step bipolar adjectives (5-point semantic differential scale) with reported previous alpha coefficients of .94 and considerable evidence of construct validity (Rubin, Palmgreen, & Sypher, 1994). Responses were given to "immediate feelings about school work." Examples of the bipolar adjectives are "motivated-unmotivated" and "interested-uninterested." For this study, SMS also was used to identify the possible relationship between one's level of engagement in the community and education-related views.

Academic Self-Esteem (ASSE). This 4-item Likert-type scale (1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree) was developed by the Developmental Studies Center to measure a student's level of academic self-esteem. Research utilizing this scale reports internal reliabilities ranging from .82 to .84 (Battistich et al., 1995; Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004; Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000). No formal studies supporting the construct validity of this scale have been identified. A sample item is "I am doing a good job in school."

Trust in Teachers (TTS) and Trust in Principals (TPS). The trust in teachers scale was originally a six item scale that measured the level of trust a student has in one's teachers. Due to requests from one of the participating school systems, two negatively worded items were cut from the scale. Also, with permission from the Developmental Studies Center the trust in teachers scale then was adapted to also measure trust in principals. Research utilizing the trust in teachers scale (as a six item measure) reports internal reliabilities ranging from .75 to .84 (Battistich et al., 1995; Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004; Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000). No formal studies supporting the construct validity of the trust in teachers scale have been identified. The trust in principals' scale is a new adaptation of the trust in teachers scale and will need further research to support construct validity. Both have been edited down to four item scales that measure the level of trust a student has for teachers or principals based upon a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree. Sample items for these two scales are "The teachers in my classes really care about me" and "The principal in my school really cares about me."

Student Perceived Teacher Efficacy Scale (TEFF). The TEFF is based on Milson's (2003) Character Education Efficacy Belief Instrument (CEEBI). TEFF consists of 24 statements on a 5-point Likert-type scale adapted to measure a student's perception of their teachers' ability to teach and develop character, rather than teacher's view of themselves. The original instrument has two scales: 12 items measuring personal teacher efficacy (PTE) and 12 items measuring general teacher efficacy (GTE). The CEEBI scales of PTE demonstrate alpha scores of .80 and GTE scales demonstrate alpha scores of .66. Bivariate correlations between the scales have been significant and strong at .69. For the first test of the new scale all of the 24 items were rewritten to fit the student perceived view. A sample

item is "My teachers know how to use strategies that might lead to positive changes in students' character."

Analyses

The first part of the analyses focuses on assessing the reliabilities of the scales utilized for this study. Given that this study proposes exploring three research questions instead of hypotheses that often assume or test a one-way causal effect, this study utilizes the correlation analysis (which is similar to other alternative analyses but does not require an *a priori* assumption or justification of dependence) to determine the strength, direction and interdependence of the variables. Therefore, the second part, through correlation analysis, examines the relationships between trust in teachers, student character, school climate, and cognition associated with educational attitudes.

RESULTS

Reliability (coefficient alpha) was computed for all of the scales discussed in the *Methods* section. Past and present reliabilities (as well as validity support) for each scale can be found in Tables 1, 2, and 3. Most scales showed adequate reliability (.73 to .91) for the baseline measurements.

Research question one (RQ1) examined the relationships between trust in teachers and one's self-perceived character, performance character, moral character, concern for others, misconduct at school, and altruism. Utilizing a Pearson correlation, moderate to strong significant relationships (r = .23 to .42) were identified between a student's level of trust in teachers and all the scales utilized to measure character except for altruism. Trust in teachers was found to account for: 5% of the variance in concern for others; 17% of the variance in moral character; 18% of the variance in performance character; 10% of the variance in the comprehension and practice of character elements; and 10% of variance in misconduct in school. Such findings suggest that for this sample of students trust in teachers had a statistically significant relationship to self-perceived character of students. See Table 4 for the complete listings of the Pearson correlations and p-values.

Research question two (RQ2) examined the relationship between trust in teachers and one's sense of school community and victimization at school. Utilizing a Pearson correlation, moderate to strong significant relationships (r = .35 to .48) were identified between a student's level of trust in teachers

TABLE 4
Pearson Correlations Between Middle/High School Students Trust in Teachers and Self-Reported Character

	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*
1. TTS	–	.23**	.41**	.42**	.31**	–.31**	.07
2. CFOS	–	–	.32**	.30**	.28**	–.25**	.26**
3. MCHAR	–	–	–	.67**	.41**	–.48**	.27**
4. PCHAR	–	–	–	–	.51**	–.45**	.26**
5. ECHAR	–	–	–	–	–	–.15**	.31**
6. MIS	–	–	–	–	–	–	.11*
7. ALT	–	–	–	–	–	–	–

Note: Dashes were used to avoid repeating the correlation twice on the table or to indicate that the correlation of an item with itself was not reported. Scales were abbreviated with the following acronyms: 1. TTS = Trust in teachers, 2. CFOS = Concern for others, 3. MCHAR = Moral character, 4. PCHAR = Performance character, 5. ECHAR = Character elements, 6. MIS = Misconduct in school, 7. ALT = Altruism. Furthermore, anything that was at the .01 level was designated .05.
*p <.05, ** p <.001

and the scales utilized to measure sense of school community; except for victimization at school. Trust in teachers was found to account for: 23% of the variance in sense of school climate supportiveness; 3% of the variance in victimization in school; and 12% of variance in sense of school climate in autonomy and influence. Such findings suggest that for this sample of students trust in teachers had a statistically significant relationship to student perceptions of school climate. See Table 5 for the complete listings of the Pearson correlations and *p*-values.

Research question three (RQ3) examined the relationship between trust in teachers and students' academic self-esteem, trust in principals, motivation to learn, and perceived teacher efficacy. Utilizing a Pearson correlation, moderate to strong significant relationships ($r = .29$ to $.60$) were identified between a student's level of trust in teachers and the scales utilized to measure academic self esteem, trust in principals, motivation to learn, and perceived teacher efficacy. Trust in teachers was found to account for: 8% of the variance in student motivation to learn; 19% of the variance in academic self-esteem; 36% of the variance in trust in principals; and 31% of variance in student perceived teacher efficacy. Such findings suggest that for this sample of students trust in teachers had a statistically significant relationship to educational attitudes. See Table 6 for the complete listings of the Pearson correlations and *p*-values.

Basically, the analysis provides an estimate to the degree of association that exists between the variables and suggests that when a student's self-reported levels of trust in teachers increases, so can the perceptions of self-perceived character, school climate, and educational attitudes. Therefore, the results from the correlation analysis offer support for future research endeavors that seek to test the hypothesis that trust in teachers shares a moderate to strong positive significant relationship to numerous dimensions of education and the scales this study used to measure the dimensions.

DISCUSSION

Grade point averages are often inflated (Woodruff & Ziomek, 2003), dropout rates are hard to track, and in our research we have found behavioral incidents to be vastly underreported by many administrators at the school level not wanting the truth to be told. Furthermore, state-based standardized test scores often only provide a snapshot of that year's assigned classroom of students' mental acuity regarding content knowledge. Rarely are students held accountable for their scores nor do they ever track the progress or improvement made by individual students from year to year. When students know that a test will not be of much consequence to their grade cards (and that the burden of poor test performance truly

TABLE 5
Pearson Correlations Between Middle/High School Trust in Teachers and School Climate

	1	*2*	*3*	*4*
1. TTS	–	.48**	–.17	.35**
2. SSUP	–	–	–.17	.41**
3. VICS	–	–	–	–.10**
4. SSAI	–	–	–	–

Note: Dashes were used to avoid repeating the correlation twice on the table or to indicate that the correlation of an item with itself was not reported. Scales were abbreviated with the following acronyms: 1. TTS = Trust in teachers, 2. SSUP= Sense of school climate in supportiveness, 3. VICS = Victimization in school, 4. SSAI= Sense of school climate in autonomy and influence. ** $p < .001$

TABLE 6
Pearson Correlations Between Middle/High School Students
Trust in Teachers and Educational Attitudes

	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
1. TTS	–	.29**	.44**	.60**	.56**
2. SMS	–	–	.24**	.25**	.34**
3. ASSE	–	–	–	.38**	.24**
4. TPS	–	–	–	–	.25**
5. TEFF	–	–	–	–	–

Note: Dashes were used to avoid repeating the correlation twice on the table or to indicate that the correlation of an item with itself was not reported. Scales were abbreviated with the following acronyms: 1. TTS = Trust in teachers, 2. SMS = Student motivation, 3. ASSE= Academic self-esteem, 4. TPS=Trust in principles, 5. TEFF= Student perceived teacher efficacy. **$p < .001$

lies on the teacher's shoulders), one of the few hopes a teacher can have is that the students are motivated to take the test because they care about the teacher's future or reputation. This is where building trust and quality student-teacher relationships comes into play in the classroom.

Good heuristic theory is typically based on the simplest of ideas. The findings of this research provide further insight as to what simple aspects might need to improve in order to achieve instructional success. If we know that motivation is the key to learning and thus better student performance, and if research shows motivation can be improved through trust in teachers, then for some increasing academic performance, school climate and educational attitudes might be as easy as focusing on such perceived attitudes as trust in teachers. Just as Allen, Witt, and Wheeless (2006), through a meta-analysis, identified a causal model showing that high levels of teacher immediacy function as a means of increasing the motivation of a student to learn, and that such motivation increases the cognitive mastery of material, the findings of this study begin to identify possible variables of influence related to systemic change through a character education lens. Academic achievement is partially reliant upon building a stronger level of trust with one's students.

Analyses addressing Research Question 1 reveal significant positive relationships between trust in teachers and measurements of concern for others and student character. This suggests that the higher the trust in teachers the greater a student's self perception of character and concern for fellow students. Tests of Research Question 2 show us that a greater trust in teachers is related to more positive perceptions of school climate. Tests of Research Question 3 shows us that this trust also holds a positive relationship with educational attitudes including motivation to learn, academic self esteem, trust in principals, and views of a teachers' ability to build character in students; all of these are essential for building the motivation to succeed in education.

Trust, however, is easily undermined and slow to build up (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). We also know that "a teacher high in trustworthiness offers rational explanations for grading, treats students fairly, gives immediate feedback, and never embarrasses students or is verbally abusive toward students" (Teven & Hanson, 2004, p. 40). Therefore, though it might require more effort of a teacher to approach one's classroom with relationship building in mind, such efforts can go a long way in improving all that we do in our educational environments.

The data also highlight at least one possible limitation that should be addressed. Tables 1

through 3 illustrate that some of the scales utilized within this study (and also within character education in general) have not gone through a formal construct validation effort. This we feel is paramount to truly supporting findings at the end of the study to the greater education community. Therefore, major efforts to perform construct and criterion related validation studies on scales related to character education would be beneficial to future research endeavors and building a scientific knowledge base.

Summary

Given that the current assessment of our nation's schools has an abundance of room for improvement, the possibility exists that at some point in the near future No Child Left Behind will either be scrapped or overhauled to include a more thorough assessment of variables that go beyond academic achievement or discipline challenges. "Researchers are beginning to go beyond identifying the subject-matter classes students need to succeed after high school and home in on the cognitive and non-cognitive skills that also contribute to success" (Sparks, 2010, p. 1). Ideally a new assessment might take a multidimensional approach and assessment of education that encompasses evaluating attitudes, climate, and other data that might provide a clearer picture of the true state of our schools and readiness of students. If such a day arrives, then educators will once again be able to get back to the goal that many set out to accomplish in their career; inspiring children. Inspiration often comes through being encouraged by individuals we respect and trust. Therefore, this study provides evidence that one should not wait until the powers that be say we should focus on creating caring and safe school climates. If we can build trust with our students, many good things will come to those who do not wait. Trust us.

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