Mega Champs Field Trip: A Lesson in Character Development

Kim Akinyanju
Korrie Allen
Edward Lorek

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholars.fhsu.edu/alj
Part of the Educational Leadership Commons, Higher Education Commons, and the Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons

Recommended Citation
Akinyanju, Kim; Allen, Korrie; and Lorek, Edward (2011) "Mega Champs Field Trip: A Lesson in Character Development," Academic Leadership: The Online Journal: Vol. 9 : Iss. 1 , Article 58.
Available at: https://scholars.fhsu.edu/alj/vol9/iss1/58

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Academic Leadership: The Online Journal by an authorized editor of FHSU Scholars Repository.
Academic Leadership Journal

Introduction

Educational leaders are responsible for the academic success of all students. As greater numbers of students exhibit disruptive behaviors, educational leaders are challenged with the task of maintaining high academic standards while simultaneously managing problem behaviors that interrupt the learning environment. Many schools have implemented character development programs aimed to decrease student disruptive behavior by increasing student prosocial skills. Character can be defined as “the emotional, intellectual and moral qualities of a person or group as well as the demonstration of these qualities in prosocial behavior” (United States Department of Education, 2008, p.1). Character education is “an inclusive term encompassing all aspects of how schools, related social institutions and parents can support the positive character development of children and adults” (United States Department of Education, 2008, p.1). The central goal of character education is to promote the development of prosocial behaviors among students and effective character education has been demonstrated to reduce student as absenteeism, disciplinary referrals, suspensions, and substance use (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004).

Connection between Character and Sports

Many educational leaders, parents and coaches share the belief that participation in sports builds character (Chandler & Goldberg, 1990). Chandler and Goldberg explained, that “while participation in sports may not be the only avenue through which character values can be taught, it may provide unique opportunities for learning that are unavailable in other settings” (Chandler & Goldberg, 1990, p.1). Sport psychologists support the notion that life skills can be taught in conjunction with athletic skills. These skills promote positive youth development and improve the ability to effectively handle life challenges (Danish & Nellen, 1997; Holt, Tink, Mandigo, & Fox, 2008). Moral development, including character traits such as courage, gameness, composure and integrity, has been linked to participation in sports (Goffman, 1967; Chandler & Goldberg, 1990). In addition, teamwork and commitment are also important components of good sportsmanship (Sugarman, 2004).

Sport-Based Field Trip

A distinct way in which educational leaders can promote character in education is through field trips. Field trips present an opportunity to integrate classroom material into life experiences by providing examples of when and where such material can be utilized and how it can benefit students. While field trips engage and entertain students, they can also make educational experiences more memorable and significant (Scarce 1997). When compiling the thoughts of his students after field trips, Scarce (1997) learned that they believe field trips helped make the classroom material more retainable and seem more realistic. Additionally, in an overview of the science field trip research, Bitgood (1989) found several studies showing an increase in cognitive knowledge and a positive impact on affect. Specifically, students who participated in field trips demonstrated a more positive attitude toward the subject matter following the experience (Bitgood, 1989). Although the research is not specific to
character education or social emotional learning, the research demonstrates that field trips are associated with increases in knowledge and positive affect.

**Sport-Based Field Trip**

The school environment is an excellent setting in which to encourage learning and practice of positive character traits (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). Character education has been traditionally taught during regular education humanities or social studies classes (Committee for Children, 2010) and research on school-based character education programs has revealed that there are over 150 different character education programs currently available (Altman, 1996; McMahon & Washburn, 2003). Sports are most often addressed during physical education classes. The present study sought to extend the opportunity for students to learn positive character and discuss and participate in sports by designing a sport-based field trip.

A sport-based field trip can provide students with an increased opportunity to learn positive character traits and participate in a sport or physical activity. Physical activity programs “involve action, interaction, and a range of emotional state, and thus offer unique personal and social development opportunities” (Hellison, 2003:243). It is often through physical education or after school sports that students are provided the greatest opportunity to interact with other students and either display positive character traits or negative behavior.

Since field trips provide students with the opportunity to reinforce material that they learn in the classroom and sports have been recognized as an effective avenue through which one can learn and practice pro-social skills, it was presumed that a sport-based field trip would be a unique and effective way students could learn character education. The purpose of this study was to determine if a sport-based field trip increased student knowledge and attitudes of teamwork, commitment, leadership and perseverance. It was hypothesized that there would be a significant difference in character trait knowledge and attitudes from pre to post assessment.

**Methods**

**Participants**

The participating southeastern Virginia school district consists of 25 public schools enrolling more than 15,000 students. Seventh and eighth grade students from one middle school were recruited to participate in the study. The sample was comprised of 148 students which included 24% white, 73% African-American, 2% Hispanic, and 1% other groups and 52% were eligible for free or reduced cost meals. See Table 1 for demographic information.

**Procedure**

Study procedures were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Eastern Virginia Medical School. Students attended a two-hour field trip at the Virginia Sports Hall of Fame.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. *Demographic characteristics of middle school students.*
Those students with parental consent who assented to participate in the study completed a pre-survey immediately before the field trip and a post survey at the conclusion of the field trip.

During the field trip students explored two 30 minute and four 15 minute interactive stations. One of the 30 minute interactive stations took place in the museum’s media room where students viewed a short film on character/sportsmanship and short vignettes on local and national heroes, then subsequently discussed characteristics inherent in successful athletes who demonstrate good character. The other 30 minute interactive station was a class that taught students about the importance of character traits such as teamwork, problem solving, commitment and perseverance. While participating in this station, students were required to work in teams in order to complete assignments and discuss how to solve problems that may arise while playing sports and in other parts of life. Assignments also required that they focused on listening and trusting each other. The four 15 minute stations included; (1) using a Nascar simulator; (2) riding a bike and treadmill; (3) playing soccer and football in the Sports Plex; and (4) playing basketball.

**Intervention**

The “Mega Champs” field trips were hosted by the Virginia Sports Hall of Fame and Museum (VSHFM) located in downtown Portsmouth, VA. The mission of the VSHFM is to serve as an educational resource for youth, instilling a value system for life, centered on the values of leadership, integrity, teamwork, discipline and character. The field trips are designed to provide experiential learning activities that complement character topics and concepts presented in their home school.

Following the tenets of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), when designing the field trip developers took into account important character traits as well as student interests. A behavior change approach (Bandura, 1977) that recognizes four prerequisites for adoption of behavior was used to develop the field trip (Mittman, Tonesk & Jacobsen, 1992). The individual or institutional representative must (1) want to adopt the behavior, (2) know what actions to take, (3) have tools or support to perform the behavior, and (4) have the ability and confidence (self-efficacy) to perform the behavior. These prerequisites were addressed by: (a) collaborating with students to ensure that the interactive activities would be engaging; (b) teaching students imperative character traits (i.e. integrity and commitment) that are often needed in order to achieve goals and are exercised by successful athletes; (c) providing students with examples of scenarios in which specific character traits would be beneficial; and (d)
conducting interactive exercises to allow for practice of character traits and increase in self-efficacy.

Instrument

The Field Trip Character Trait Questionnaire was developed from a content analysis of the information presented during the field trips. Items were developed by the researchers to assess knowledge of the information taught (e.g., definition and importance of teamwork) and the ability to apply the information to sample situations. The questionnaire was divided into three sections (for the post-assessment it was broken into four sections). The first section of the questionnaire included demographic questions for constructing a unique student code for matching pre-assessment and post-assessment data. The second section included eight character trait knowledge questions in which students were presented with a situation and asked to choose the character trait that best fit the example. Responses to the eight questions were coded as correct and incorrect. The third section asked students to evaluate the importance of four character traits: teamwork, commitment, leadership, and perseverance using a Likert-type response format, with responses ranging from 0 (Not at all important) to 2 (Very Important). The fourth section of the questionnaire, specific only to the post-assessment, asked students to indicate: (1) whether they enjoyed the field trip; (2) their favorite activity/area of the field trip; and (3) what they would like to learn more about.

Results

A paired-samples t-test was used to determine whether a difference in character trait knowledge existed from pre-assessment to post-assessment. For analytical purposes, responses from each of the 8 knowledge questions (section 2) were combined to create a total score, with 0 representing the lowest achievable score and 8 representing the highest achievable score. There was a statistically significant difference in character trait knowledge from pre-assessment (M = 6.29, SD = 1.49) to post-assessment [M = 6.62, SD = 1.52; t (147) = -3.45, p = .001]. Table 2 shows the percentage of correct responses. Paired-sample t-tests showed no significant difference in student perceptions regarding the importance of teamwork, commitment, leadership, and perseverance from pre-assessment to post-assessment. The majority of students (96%) enjoyed the field trip.
Discussion

“Mega Champs” field trip is an alternative approach to encourage the use of positive character traits among middle school students. Reports linking participation in sports to character building is abundant. However research supporting the usage of field trips to enhance good character in students is sparse. While current research promotes that field trips can be an effective way to reinforce what is taught in the classroom, future research should further explore the effectiveness of using sport-based field trips as a way for students to experience character education. Such initiatives can create greater exposure to character education while allowing students increased opportunity to learn positive character traits. The present findings suggest that character education initiatives such as the “Mega Champs” field trip can increase student knowledge of positive character traits as the results indicate that there was a statistically significant difference in character trait knowledge from pre-assessment to post-assessment.

Limitations

Change in student attitude regarding the importance of each character trait was not significant from pre to post field trip. Though the findings do not support our original hypotheses they are consistent with other studies conducted on field trip experiences. Specifically, Knapp & Barrie (2001) found that students’ attitude toward science or the topic did not improve following the field trip. Knapp and Barrie attribute the limited change to the short assessment time span, and the fact that attitudes are complex and often difficult to measure. To address this problem the authors suggest collecting qualitative data.
through the form of interviews with individual students. This type of data could have better represented student attitudes and further assisted in determining the impact of the field trips on students in the present study. Also another potential limitation of the present study is that the sample size was small and, as such, the results cannot be generalized to a larger population; instead, these results are representative of the included southeastern Virginia middle school.

**Practical Implications for Educational Leaders**

All of these results must be tempered by the caveat that changes were measured immediately after the field trip when participants might be most inclined to agree with what they had been taught. It would be a useful next step for educational leaders who want to replicate this study design to examine the long-term stability of the field trip effects and to show how they affected decision-making in actual cases. In his study on the impact of environmental field trips on student learning in a middle school setting, Legutko (2005) found that it is imperative that teachers provide follow-up and culminating activities after the initial field trip to reinforce student learning. This type of follow-up or activity “should provide students with the opportunity to apply knowledge they gained during the field trip and tie together both content they covered in regular class and content learned during the field trip” (Legutko, 2005:7). Thus, it would prove useful for educational leaders to conduct follow-up sessions with students to determine if any positive results are long term and determine if any modifications need to be made to the intervention.

**Conclusion**

During the 1990s, many schools systems began implementing character education programs and instituted a variety of initiatives designed to improve student behavior and reduce violence. At the same time, student expulsions increased dramatically (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Few studies have been conducted on character education field trips designed to improve student knowledge of character traits and attitudes toward the importance of moral development. Even fewer studies consider the avenue of sports when choosing a character education program. The present study found positive effects of a sport-based field trip designed using a behavior change approach (Bandura, 1977) to provide students with the knowledge and practice of acting prosocially. Future research should be aimed at demonstrating the long term impact of this sport-based field trip on student knowledge, attitudes and behavior.

**REFERENCES**


and Values, 34(3), 169-76.


VN:R_U [1.9.11_1134]