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The Disparate Americans:
A Qualitative Analysis of Appalachians, Character, and Character Education in Appalachia

Thesis submitted to the
Graduate College of Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English

by

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May 2009

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Abstract

This thesis evaluates and critiques a federal research grant on character education initiatives in Appalachia. In order to do so, 1) This thesis addresses the evolution of the term “character” from Classical times to contemporary applications, while building toward the definitions, validity and current practices in character education and how it relates to Appalachians, 2) This thesis presents the challenges and upsides of developing character education curricula in Appalachia and how outside perceptions and stereotypes impact the people within, and 3) This thesis examines and interacts with original qualitative and quantitative data from the research grant.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank you, Dr. Corrigan, for giving me the opportunity to continue my education post B.A. by offering me a position on your staff following my student teaching portfolio presentation on character analysis in film. If not for you, I may have already lost a few thousand dollars in my retirement portfolio during the recent economic downturn. But, thanks to my continuing education, I have no retirement savings to lose!

I would also like to sincerely thank Drs. Green and Kirkwood for mentoring me these last few years. Dr. Green, your knowledge of Appalachian material from previous classes and direction on this project was an immense help in finding the right sources that would ultimately shape the outcome of the entire thesis itself. And Dr. Kirkwood, I truly appreciate the preparation and background you provided me in rhetorical theory and history, and your convincing, logical argument in Foundational Texts I to switch from the literature strand to the rhetoric strand. Without your guidance and training, this thesis would not carry half its weight. ☺

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CHAPTER ONE

"Presenting the Thesis"

To a good number of Americans, Appalachia is not too far removed from popular culture references like the foolhardy *Beverly Hillbillies* and historic accounts of clannish rivalries like the Hatfields and McCoys. To many, these character types are what some expect to find down any hollow or splattered along any hillside—wallowing in poverty and ignorance—where the youth are trapped by outdated communal norms. This is the picture of Appalachia painted over the years by personal accounts and overreaching stereotypes, but also, it is a picture based in reality.

This thesis will examine these perceptions from the perspective of character education development in West Virginia through a U.S. Department of Education grant and attempt to articulate ways in which perceptions (and other hindrances) create challenges in developing character education curricula in Appalachian schools. It will also address specific qualitative and some quantitative data from the research grant itself. A conclusion will be drawn as to how effective character education is in Appalachia because of—and perhaps in spite of—the perceptions of Appalachia from outside and within.

To fully realize the scope of character education in Appalachia, I decided to divide this thesis into three main body

chapters (and an introductory chapter). Each chapter plays its part in both building knowledge of character education and Appalachia, but also demonstrates how the two are inexplicably tied into one another in this research grant. As the history and theories of both areas play out in the subsequent chapters, a clearer view of each is attained. Therefore, this thesis not only presents and comments on understood practices, but it informs them as well.

Below is a breakdown of all four chapters and how they contribute to a greater understanding of character education, Appalachia, and the Appalachians themselves who are the participants of this character education grant in West Virginia.

Chapter Breakdowns

In order to accomplish the intended goals of this thesis, I have divided the body of the text into four chapters including this one. Chapter one, as you can see, outlines the intention of this thesis. I also spend a brief moment discussing formatting.

Chapter two will answer the question: “What is character and character education?” I decided that a brief outline of the two was necessary for those who may not have the specific backgrounds in rhetorical theory or educational theory that is required for understanding. This chapter will explore theories and definitions of character ranging from Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian all the way to up to John Locke, and Lawrence

Kohlberg (and many others in between). I will present and comment on these theories and definitions and consider how they interact with one another. Chapter two will subsequently address the theories behind modern character education curricula in the United States based on the works of Lev Vygotsky, Emile Durkheim, Marvin Berkowitz, and others. Chapter two will comment on how, or even whether, character education should be implemented in today's fast-changing, diverse society.

Chapter three is set up as an overview of the Appalachian region in terms of human perspective. These perspectives help inform the challenges of implementing character education in the Appalachian region. In order to do so a solid background of contemporary Appalachia must be addressed first. Within this context, a treatment of Appalachian perceptions from the outside and from within help distinguish Appalachia from other areas where character education curricula exists. This analysis will expose some challenges and upsides to developing character in Appalachia in an attempt to construct better character education models in the future. Chapter three will also address the ways in which these perceptions will impact character education.

Chapter three's major intention is to relate character education to cultural self-value and circumstance. The chapter intends to demonstrate how Appalachians view themselves within

the context of a larger American society, which in turn, impacts the results and validity of character education.

Chapter four begins where chapter three's discussion leaves off by scrutinizing a current character education research grant funded by the U.S. Department of Education. This grant, centered in West Virginia, uses qualitative and quantitative data to determine the validity of character education through eight participating schools in rural Appalachian areas. Chapter four will review some of the findings from this research and comment on what the study has found and whether character education is doing all it can to succeed.

Lastly, chapter four concludes the discussion on character and character education in Appalachia by addressing the findings and problems posed in the previous chapters and commenting on the early data returns.

Chapter four's relevance in this thesis is to show how character education, with careful attention paid to the lessons in chapter three, is succeeding in West Virginia. Chapter four also cites data from the grant that defends some the assertions made in chapter three in regards to Appalachian perceptions.

Formatting Decisions

In order to 1) comply with the thesis guidelines set forth by Marshall, and 2) make this thesis as reader friendly as possible, I decided to use the serif typeface Courier New, font

12. It is a slightly larger font than Times New Roman, yet still conforms to the “10-12 letters per horizontal inch” set forth by Marshall’s “Theses and Dissertations” web document.[1] In fact, Times New Roman, font 12 is too small (13 letters per inch).

As you can see at the bottom of this page, I decided to use footnoting instead of in-text citations to help the reading flow smoothly. The format I used is the Chicago style because of its simplicity and practicality; it also prevents me from needlessly listing all the mundane details in the body.[2] The format also allows the reader to easily find a source from the Works Cited pages at the end of each chapter. No matter the type of source, each footnote begins the same way its Works Cited parent begins with other relevant information such as specific page numbers (where applicable).

My Reasons for Writing and Researching

When I graduated with my B.A. in English Education in 2007, I assumed I was immediately destined for the public schools, but that future was deferred by the aforementioned federal research grant through Marshall University. As I finished my undergraduate requirements, the chance to continue my education while working as a research assistant presented itself. At first, like most people, I had never heard of character

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[1] “Print Formats.”

[2] University of Chicago Press staff, ed. The Chicago Manual of Style. 594-595.

education, but I could not turn down an opportunity at paid graduate study. So when Dr. Michael Corrigan asked me if I would consider a position on his staff (in light of my student-teaching portfolio presentation on character study in film) I took the chance.

As I began my work in the fall of 2007, I quickly became aware of the overall scope of our research. I learned that our research covered three states: North Carolina, Ohio, and West Virginia. Each state featured two distinct groups of schools within. There were *control* and *experimental* schools. In the control schools, character education was overtly shut out of the curriculum by those who oversaw the grant. These schools were told not to include any character education models and to continue on with business as usual. The experimental schools did implement character education curricula. The grant's primary objective was to test the validity of character education by comparing survey data and other data collections between the two groups.

My job, however, ranged from synthesizing data, arranging collection visits, collecting data, and keeping contact with the principals in our grant's schools. The latter two missions were the ones that helped inspire this thesis. Through keeping contact with the principals in schools and visiting all of them (in Ohio and West Virginia), I grew an understandable curiosity

of what our data were showing. Furthermore, the notion that public schools in my state were being studied was a great interest of mine. After all, at one time I seriously considered a job in the public schools; however, I knew that further academic research would present me with an opportunity to see my future from a unique perspective.

Therefore, in the spring of 2008 I decided that I would write a thesis revolving (in some way) around our research here at Marshall. I knew I wanted my thesis to focus on West Virginia, but considering the near infinite possibilities I had in front of me, the choice took a great deal of careful rumination. It was not until well into my research that I found the track on which to run my findings. I discovered that a key word in the subject of our grant held the most promise: character.

I began asking myself, “What is character anyway?” “Who defines it?” and “Do different groups of people define it differently?” I found that “character” has a long, distinguished past. Not only that, but character is the core value that most societies seemingly flaunt. Therefore, character must have a place in Appalachia. What I did not know was whether character was a major concern in regards to Appalachian perception. As it turns out, character is everything in terms of perception *and* reality.

This thesis will hopefully diagram my discoveries in answering these questions and concerns. It is my hope that my true reasons for writing and researching—to better understand my region and our research—will illuminate themselves in the subsequent chapters.

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CHAPTER TWO

"What is Character and Character Education?"

"Character involves making and acting on ethical judgments in a social context, and [this] is the aim of character education."[3]

Over the centuries of recorded intellectual thought, the concept of character has cycled through many applications of tone and nature. From classical philosophers such as Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian, to more recent theorists such as Horace Mann and Wayne Booth all the way up to modern thinkers such as Lawrence Kohlberg and Marvin Berkowitz, character has strongly influenced the nature of argument, civility, and education. All the aforementioned theories left a lasting impact on their respective fields of literature, rhetoric, and pedagogy. Their influences stretch to the highest levels of government, where character education is being recognized as an integral part of school curriculum. These practitioners (and others like them) articulate the meaning of character and why it is an important facet of society.

What Exactly IS Character?

Aristotle's theories are often the first ones mentioned in discussions of character. He taught that character, or ethos ("the study of human character; persuasive potential of the

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[3] Howard, Berkowitz, and Schaeffer. "Politics of Character Education." 190.

speaker's character")[4], is one of three chief means through which a speaker appeals to an audience in order to achieve a desirable end. For Aristotle the ability of a speaker to *prove* to his listeners that his sentiments are valuable hinges on whether that audience believes the speaker is virtuous in character.

He professed that proof is achieved by showing applicable examples (called *inductions*) or by appealing to an audience's preset knowledge of a subject by using *enthymemes*.[5] Inductions are the use of applicable examples, and enthymemes are the use of sometimes-illogical comparisons (though not necessarily illogical). There is, however, some disagreement in the academic community as to the exact meaning of enthymeme, which I will delve into shortly. But, proof through induction, according to Aristotle, is "based on a number of similar cases"[6] where the argument used has already been proven elsewhere. While induction is evidence based on what has been demonstrated or proven in the past (such as gravity), an enthymeme in Bizzell's and Herzberg's[7] translation of Aristotle is based on mere assumption that may not be proven (cats have whiskers and cats are animals, therefore all animals must have whiskers).

Even though an enthymeme can be illogical (as stated

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[4] Herrick. The History and Theory of Rhetoric. 279.
[5] Aristotle. "Rhetoric." 182
[6] Aristotle. "Rhetoric." 182
[7] Aristotle. "Rhetoric." 182

above), its most useful form comes in a *seemingly* logical statement. Some argue that an enthymeme is logical by using "propositional forms of argumentation."[8] In other words, enthymemes are arguments that can build on understood premises. For example, some say, "A car is the safest place to be in an electric storm" because a car is elevated on rubber tires. Whether it is the safest place or not, there is logic behind this reasoning and some evidence to back it up (rubber is a very poor conductor of electricity). Even so, that does not mean that lightening will strike the ground first, which would negate the benefit of tires. Induction, as Aristotle defines it, or inductive reasoning, requires prior facts that prove the argument, whereas an enthymeme, or deductive reasoning, does not necessarily require evidence (though it may still be true).

It is important to explain the definition and uses of enthymemes—from an Aristotlian perspective—in order to understand their importance in character theory. The user's perceived virtue based on inductions and enthymemes will determine whether an audience chooses to listen. In a passage from *Rhetoric*, Aristotle further explains his notion of persuasion through character: "Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to

[8] Corrigan. "Should Taglines Argue?" 7.

make us think him credible."[9] He seemingly suggests that the speaker need only *convince* an audience he is reliable and not necessarily be of high morality himself. However, Aristotle goes on to say that "persuasion . . . should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what people think of this character before he begins to speak."[10] In other words, Aristotle believed that good character is exhibited through action and not reputation, because a speaker's only evidence is his speech; it is essential that the speaker convey a sense of propriety in the present moment with his words if his listeners are to take him and his proof seriously.

Aristotle further argued that of all the ways in which someone may convince an audience, "[A person's] character may be called the *most* effective means of persuasion [one] possesses."[11] Aristotle, therefore, put a high premium on character, considering it essential to communication.

Aristotle draws the conclusion that action is character and action is what proves character; therefore, character is vital. As was said above, a speaker needs to prove he has character in the instant he speaks if his words are to hold merit. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle substantiates this point:

> It makes no difference whether a good man has

[9] Aristotle. "Rhetoric." 182
[10] Aristotle. "Rhetoric." 182
[11] Aristotle. "Rhetoric." 182

> defrauded a bad man or a bad man a good one . . . the law looks only to the distinctive character of the injury, and treats the parties as equal, if one is in the wrong and the other is being wronged, and if one inflicted injury and the other has received it.[12]

This again relates to character in the moment, and not reputation. In Aristotle's philosophy, a reputation is not as powerful as the facts in the current situation.

It is plausible to find fault in Aristotle's logic (I will explore this shortly), for one's character is reasonably subject to proof and sincerity, and reputations are arguably as important in modern Western culture as any other dimension of humanity. One need only recite the story of the boy who cried wolf to understand what consequence may come of not being considered trustworthy. But Aristotle's definition and defense of his definition nonetheless makes moral character a quality obtainable by all, whether a person is reputable or not. Character, then, is a learned trait. Character also is not always contingent on past events (not static); it is often who we are. Most importantly, character is who we can become through experiences and training.

In Book III of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle uses an analogy between a man who is immoral and a man who is sick to

[12] Aristotle . "Nicomachean Ethics: Book V."

prove that character is a learned trait. Both men have "voluntarily" chosen not to follow direction (the immoral man does not listen to good advice and the sick man does not listen to his doctor), but if they do follow the guidelines laid before them by knowledgeable persons, they have the potential to become the opposite of their current states:

> But if without being ignorant a man does the things which will make him unjust, he will be unjust voluntarily. Yet it does not follow that if he wishes he will cease to be unjust and will be just. For neither does the man who is ill become well on those terms. We may suppose a case in which he is ill voluntarily, through living incontinently and disobeying his doctors. In that case it was then open to him not to be ill . . ..[13]

In other words, Aristotle believed that if a man listened to the counsel of those who knew better, he would have a chance to be healthier morally and/or physically. Aristotle does not list the specific places where a man would learn these traits, but that is not the matter. The point is a man *can* learn how to be a just person.

Some philosophers did take issue with Aristotle's assertions that character is only "who we are now" and "who we will become in the future." About 200 years after Aristotle, the

[13] Aristotle . "Nicomachean Ethics: Book III." Web Document.F

Roman Cicero all but refuted Aristotle's sentiments that character could be harnessed and used as one of three principal means of persuasion. Cicero believed that character was not exemplified through a single speech (or an isolated incident of communication), but as Herrick suggests, "In keeping with Roman thinking on the subject, character was a natural trait of an individual that gradually revealed itself [throughout life]."[14] In other words, character is not necessarily who you are in the present, but who you have proven to be.

Cicero's standard of character as a lifelong evolution, though, does not mean that character cannot be redeemed. As May suggests, "Aristotle's conception of personal character portrayed through the medium of a speech was, for the Roman orator [like Cicero], neither acceptable nor adequate."[15] After all, Cicero's "dignitas," meaning dignity, was an essential element of character. Therefore a man who articulates his current state but also lives with dignity through his life should be considered a man of high moral character. Although Aristotle and Cicero disagree on when character is shown, they both consider morality important. Cicero says in *De Orator* that it would take a "loftier art" than good persuasion to convince

[14] Herrick. The History and Theory of Rhetoric. 102
[15] May. Trials of Character: The Eloquence of Ciceronian Ethos. 9

someone of a point through deception.[16]

Both Aristotle and Cicero's philosophies are prominent forbearers to later views of character that often marry the two. Following Cicero, the Roman philosopher Quintilian's idea of character still reaches audiences in the 21st century. It is not so much his definition of the term character but his implication of the moral man that keeps his theories alive. In what is a commonly reprinted definition, Quintilian describes rhetoric as "the art of a good man speaking well." For Quintilian, a person who wishes to be the most effective communicator must be a moral person in life in order to be moral in speech, and moral speech is the most effective form of communication. Quintilian also believed that "Oratory that does not move its hearers toward the good is not 'rhetoric.'"[17] In other words, a man cannot persuade without morality.

The ideal of doing what is right was an ideal that Quintilian held dearly, just like his predecessors Plato, Isocrates, and Cicero.[18] However, unlike his predecessors, Quintilian delved further into detail of how a man would become a good person and speak well by advocating early and often training and education in morality. Before I delve into the pedagogical aspect of Quintilian's writings, it is fair to point

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[16] Cicero. "De Orator." 330.
[17] The Rhetorical Tradition. 362.
[18] The Rhetorical Tradition. 361

out that not even Quintilian knew exactly what defined good character. In *Institutes of Oratory*, Quintilian admits that some morals are open to interpretation: “Some points are ascertained by conjecture, others are settled by definition . . ..”[19] However, Quintilian concludes his main discussion of morality by saying,

> Yet a good man, who has a knowledge of these virtues, not by sound and name only . . . but who has embraced them in his heart, and thinks in conformity with them . . . will express sincerely what he thinks. [20]

It is here that the next logical step toward the advocation of some form of character education arises in Quintilian.

Is Character Teachable?

Quintilian paid a great deal of attention to pedagogy and the growth of the individual in home and at school. His theories of when to begin teaching a child showed Quintilian’s belief in a good education (“the question *when a boy ought to be sent to the teacher* . . . is best decided by the answer, *when he shall be qualified*”).[21]

Quintilian’s beliefs regarding the teaching of character and morality were well noted. As Bizzell and Herzberg articulate, the foundation of good education is a parent-child

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[19] Quintilian. "Institutes of Oratory." 420.
[20] Quintilian. "Institutes of Oratory." 420.
[21] Quintilian. "Institutes of Oratory." 365.

type relationship between a teacher and his or her student. For Quintilian, an emersion in “a total environment for encouraging love of the good, as embodied in caring teachers” is what leads to the development of good people.[22]

Quintilian elaborates on the order of words in his definition of “a good man speaking well” by saying that the “[first] requisite in this definition, that an orator should be a *good man*, is naturally of more estimation and importance than [the second part].”[23] This belief, which Quintilian waited to express at the beginning of the final book in *Institutes of Oratory*, underscores his one lasting principle of persuasive human communication—a principle that Quintilian believed was teachable from the earliest ages until the end of a student’s life.

Cicero was also a strong advocate for education, though his belief that character was not an explicit dimension of rhetoric meant that the inclusion of moral character in formal rhetorical training took a backseat. However, Cicero did spend time explaining how a good rhetor will feel and clearly exhibit the emotions he wishes his audience to feel. Cicero says,

> It is impossible for the listener to feel indignation, hatred, or ill-will, to be terrified of anything, or reduced to tears of compassion, unless all those

[22] The Rhetorical Tradition. 360.
[23] Quintilian. "Institutes of Oratory." 413.

> emotions, which the advocate would inspire in the arbitrator, are visibly stamped . . . on himself. [24]

If this is true then the orator (communicator) who wishes to inspire good would have to exhibit good qualities himself (but not necessarily possess them). These qualities of good communication must be brought about through education, for "a rhetor must be, above all, a broadly educated person."[25] This means that manners and tools of effective communication are teachable, and they must be taught for effective communication to take place.

Aristotle foreshadowed the sentiments of his successors that education is the pathway to moral character. He indicates in Book II of *Nicomachean Ethics* that morality is contingent on feeling the right emotions, which will drive us to feel moral as opposed to a dishonorable. He uses feelings of pleasure and pain to articulate his view:

> Moral excellence is concerned with pleasures and pains; it is on account of the pleasure that we do bad things, and on account of the pain that we abstain from noble ones. Hence we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and to be pained by the

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[24] Cicero. "De Orator." 330.

[25] Herrick. The History and Theory of Rhetoric. 103.

> things that we ought; for this is the right education.[26]

It is an education that must start from birth, with the parents, and continue through schooling and life. Teaching character is not only viable, but it is the right thing to do in order to preserve society. And though Aristotle does not go as far as the assertion of societal preservation, he does say in the same passage that men who can properly align their feelings will be good men and those who cannot will be bad. Certainly a society filled with good has at least the chance to be good as a whole.

Wayne C. Booth, a renowned American educator and literary critic who promoted what he termed “listening rhetoric,” where students are taught to explicate each other and not just good literature.[27] Listening rhetoric asks students to figure out why there is a dispute in opinion between themselves and someone else by asking thoughtful questions and engaging in civil dialog. It is a child-centered teaching philosophy where individual assertions are heard and assessed. When a student learns to actively listen, he or she will more likely and thoughtfully consider the opposing view of another classmate or assigned reading and hence build stronger character that will follow them into the community. Through listening rhetoric,

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[26] Aristotle . “Nicomachean Ethics: Book II.”

[27] Booth. The Rhetoric of Rhetoric. 85-101.

students develop a sense of understanding of one another in a communal setting.

English philosopher John Locke had his own theories. He claimed that all children are empty canvases that can be filled with knowledge and character through the tutelage of caring teachers and parents. Locke's theories are best known as *tabula rasa*, Latin for "blank slate." Locke believed that humans are born without predetermined limitations, hence filling up their slates with experiences and teachings. In other words, Locke agrees with Aristotle and Quintilian in the sense that children are not born with innate gifts or tendencies to be moral selves but need nurturing and a firm inclination toward better character from the moment children learn to communicate, which is the beginning of life.[28]

This idea of educating the character of a child to be moral holds true for more current educational practitioners in the United States. Some of these educators point to the fact that character is a modeled/learned quality. Michael Corrigan points out the absurdity of the notion that character is an inborn trait or predetermined before the child enters into formal education by their parents' genes. He posses a scenario asking his readers to imagine what would happen if a parent would not use "some form of operant conditioning" in reaction to a child's

[28] Locke. Some Thoughts Concerning Education. 1-16.

behavior. The implied question is, “How would a child learn what is right or wrong without conditioning?”[29]

Corrigan’s proclamations call attention to the debate of whether children are either born with inset moral codes or whether children’s upbringings and education can mold their character. The answer, of course, is that education does impact a child’s character. However, it is *not* a classic nature verses nurture debate, but more so a debate over society’s will to overtly teach a common thread of morality and personal character in a culture as diverse as ours here in the United States.

The desire to teach character derives from a clear, uniform understanding of what character is but also an understanding of how to implement character in the everyday curriculum of our schools.

But before an understanding of character can be fully appreciated, one must reflect on modern education’s (perhaps) most influential contemporary theorist: Lawrence Kohlberg. Kohlberg developed what he labeled “The Six Moral Stages,” which he built from famed psychologist Jean Piaget’s “two-stage” model by advancing the stages into adolescence, “to examine the relation of stage growth to opportunities to take the role of others in the social environment.”[30] In other words, Kohlberg is interested in how a child’s character matures into adulthood.

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[29] Corrigan. "Integrating Effective Character Education Models." 10.

[30] Kohlberg. The Psychology of Moral Development. XIX.

This overall concept is important to the study of character and development of character education because of its insight into the evolutionary process of morality, which helps to inform educators on the best practices related to character education.

The first stage of Kohlberg's theory deals with "Heteronomous Morality," which is when a young child acts merely to fulfill his or her own desires as opposed to a moral obligation to others. Stage two is where children acknowledge that others have (sometimes) conflicting needs and that "right is relative." In stage three children become aware of "the need to be a good person [to others]." In stage four, morality evolves into the practice of fulfilling obligations and making conscious contributions to one's respective community or society as a whole. In stage five of moral development, a child moving forward into adulthood becomes a protector of societal laws and individual rights, which leads to stage six. In the final stage of moral development, a human will follow what one feels is ethical, even if it violates a law that contradicts his or her moral beliefs. As Kohlberg states, "The equality of human rights and respect for the dignity of human beings as individuals"[31] is paramount.

These stages develop at a "slow and gradual pace."[32]

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[31] Kohlberg. "Revisions in Theory." 83-85.

[32] Corrigan. "Integrating Effective Character Education Models . . ." 10.

Therefore it is reasonable to assume they must be nourished over a prolonged period of time. As children grow, it will become the shared responsibility of parents and teachers to make sure the desired stages are modeled.

Because of the reason above, the six stages of moral development are an educational goldmine for policy makers in the field of character education. Kohlberg believed that proper moral education must come from the teacher (when the child is at school). Kohlberg even believed in "indoctrination" so long as everybody plays a part in curriculum and rule-development processes.[33] "Everybody" includes the parents and students. This, according to Kohlberg, helps ensure that students' rights are not violated. Because of Kohlberg's stance on moral development, and building on previous philosophies and theories of character, policy makers and educators continue to develop character education curricula.

What is Character Education?

Character education is an explicit goal of The *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001. According to the U.S. Department of Education: Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, character education is a major emphasis of this controversial but enduring legislation.[34] But what *is* character education according to the federal government? "Character education teaches the habits of

[33] Kohlberg. "Revisions in Theory." 83-85.
[34] "Character Education . . . Our Shared Responsibility."

thought and deed that help people live and work together as families, friends, neighbors, communities, and nations.” In other words, character education is the teaching and demonstration of the basic core values of a given community—large or small. This includes the local communities, the nation, and the world. Character education also includes self-responsibility and personal conduct “that serve as the foundation of our society.”[35]

Some of the sentiments and terminology used by the U.S. Department of Education are somewhat vague in their implications. What is ethical, moral, or virtuous, and who decides? The U.S. Department of Education does not outline specific objectives other than basic markers such as “respect,” “caring,” and “citizenship.”[36] What it does do is explain *who* can define these terms. It becomes not the federal government’s responsibility, but the local school administration’s responsibility to, 1) create a forum where every contributing member of a school’s community—parents, students, school staffers, etc.—join together to define their own parameters for good character education that they would like to emphasize, 2) train staffers in implementing these traits, 3) keep constant

[35] Character Education . . . Our Shared Responsibility."
[36] U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences.

communication with the community, and 4) allow all in these communities a chance to model the traits they see fit.

The first responsibility of creating a forum for sharing ideas with all participants in a child's life reaffirms the findings of psychologist Lev Vygotsky. He believed that a child's moral development could not be removed from the society in which he lives; therefore, including his or her entire social network.[37] Consequently, in light of Vygotsky's socio-cultural findings, Corrigan stresses that education systems need to include society in the development of a character education curriculum. This strategy will help to ensure its success.[38]

The first responsibility of character education, though, lies the with parents, and immediate family members who, according to Erik Erickson, play the most vital role in the child's character development because a child will unambiguously model the behavior of their familial influences in many stages of development.[39] Therefore, parents need to take a leading role in the development of the curriculum through forum discussions.

These forum discussions may go a long way in addressing the question most frequently asked of character education: Should character and morality be taught in the public schools? Obviously the mandatory and necessary inclusion of students'

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[37] Vygotsky Mind in Society. 85-90.
[38] Corrigan. "Integrating Effective Character Education Models . . ." 11.
[39] Erickson. Childhood and Society. 8-25.

families and neighbors will go a long way in making sure that these curricula address the types of character building that parents would like to instill in their children. Based on the U.S. Department of Education's guidelines, the school would ideally facilitate the values and behaviors that parents wish to emphasize, rather than the school deciding on its own what is important to character development. Consequently, the school plays an integral role in character education as it elaborates on the traits (some) parents hope to teach at home.

Durkheim addresses the importance of a school's participation in moral development in relation to other pockets of socialization in a child's life (including family). As his editor states in the introduction, Durkheim believed:

> The church [must be eliminated as the sole leader in moral development] because a sound morality must be founded in reason, no revelation. The family is out since the indulgent warmth of kinship ties is incompatible with the sterner demands of morality . . . So the task of moral education devolves upon the school.[40]

Durkheim's endorsement of school-taught morality did not mean that the other areas of a child's life were not important; he explained that school can teach a child how to meet expectations

[40] Wilson. Moral Education. Xv.

that are usually ungoverned or untapped by the certainty of church doctrine or the unconditional love of family. When a child is at school, he or she must be prepared to deal with tests of character that may go unaddressed in other places because school most closely mimics the societies in which these children live.

Once the forums are set with familial and communal emphasis in the character education curriculum, the program can be tailor-made to fit whatever specific local issues are most prevalent[41] (e.g. gang violence, drug use, academic performance).

The second responsibility of *NCLB* character education curriculum, training staffers, lies mostly with the direct understanding that good character (as defined in the forums) must be modeled and conspicuously present within all aspects of the classroom and school environment. This means character education takes place in the classroom, in the gym, the library, and the playground.

The third responsibility, to keep constant communication with participating members of society, will provide a check/balance between the school staff and the rest of the community to ensure the success of the character education curriculum.

The fourth responsibility will include all those involved

[41] "Character Education . . . Our Shared Responsibility."

in the task of improving the character of their children through cooperation with neighbors, family, friends, and school staffers. With everyone having a role to play in the education and development of the children's character, the likelihood of success will increase because all who participate will be empowered to take a role of responsibility.

Modern character education does have its challenges that must be addressed before adequate implementation can be achieved. One major concern is the treatment of diversity and its role in character education. If we let the local communities decide what should or should not be implemented, then we may very well exclude the views of the larger community. This issue is addressed by Howard, Berkowitz, and Shcaeffer in regards to "citizenship education" in a democratic society.[42] Howard and company suggests that the character and citizenship education "have a shared link"[43] and are not only constant throughout American history but essential to the survival of our collective way of life.

Citizenship education is the "transmitting"(a word used throughout) of values such as following the rules and laws, voting, and participating in our republican democracy in various capacities (such as volunteering to help the less fortunate). But how does character education, or citizenship education,

[42] Howard, Berkowitz, and Schaeffer. "Politics of Character Education." 196.
[43] Howard, Berkowitz, and Schaeffer. "Politics of Character Education." 200.

address those who violate the rules for the greater good? Howard mentions Rosa Parks as an example but fails to answer the question. Instead, he cites a source that claims that these virtues are lauded in most societies and not just ours. That is true, but still, how do we treat them? How do we teach children to know when it is right to break the rules? Or do we brush it off like Howard and company do? The answer is ultimately left up to the teacher and a child's character.

Howard, et al. not only touches on some potential controversy but also lays out a graph of ten "types" of character education ranging from physical health to life skills and moral reasoning/education.[44] The first two are seemingly unrelated to character, but the descriptors indicate otherwise. In health education, for example, the program is designed to "prevent unhealthy/antisocial behaviors." In other words, if we all cleansed properly then there may not be as much disease. This and other "types" are meant to show how extensive character education is in our society, even perhaps, without trying.

Character education is woven into nearly all aspects and subjects in the curriculum, but according to Berkowitz and Bier, it is nothing revolutionary or easy to gauge.[45] What Howard explained with his ten "types," Berkowitz reaffirms by suggesting that character education is too pervasive to measure

[44] Howard, Berkowitz, and Schaeffer. "Politics of Character Education." 197-98.
[45] Berkowitz and Bier. "Research-Based Character Education." 72-74.

its singular effectiveness. Berkowitz chooses to answer the question of whether character education works by asserting that, "*Quality* character education does work. In other words, [it] hinges upon certain characteristics."[46]

One of the determining factors in effective character education is proper implementation. The biggest contributing factor to proper implementation is "fidelity." If the teachers—who are the closest to the students—believe in it, then it has a higher chance of success.[47]

School pride is another factor to successful character education initiatives. The more a student feels a connection to his or her school, the more likely the program will work. This can be improved in various ways. One key way is through interaction and communication. Berkowitz and Bier suggest through their research that children who feel they can communicate more than mere school related concerns with their teachers feel safer and happier at school. [48] (These are the aspects Quintilian promoted as shown on page 19). It almost seems common sense that this would be the case. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning because open communication of this degree is not a requisite for teaching.

Berkowitz and Bier see quality character education as a

[46] Berkowitz and Bier. "Research-Based Character Education." 72-74.
[47] Berkowitz and Bier. "Research-Based Character Education." 75.
[48] Berkowitz and Bier. "Research-Based Character Education." 76.

total team effort, so to speak. Like the U.S. Department of Education outlines articulate, it takes the community, parents, teachers, administrators, and students working together to make character education effective.[49]

In Conclusion

These theories, philosophies, and research findings define character education in its present form in the United States, but character education is more than words on a cafeteria wall; it is the implementation of research and methodology that makes a school a successful model of good character education. As Corrigan emphasizes in his article on character education, successful schools must adhere to three principles: 1) They must devote more time during the day to actual classroom lessons, 2) They must encourage teachers to follow approaches proven through research and development, not artistic flair, to help deliver more effective lessons, and 3) School staffers must knowingly implement and model the character traits they wish to embody in their students.[50]

Character education, then, can be defined as a communal effort to teach children the proper modes of behavior and responsibility within the community through a process that involves cooperation and study of the basic components of human development and psyche. Character education is an all-

[49] Berkowitz and Bier. "Research-Based Character Education." 82.
[50] Corrigan. "Integrating Effective Character Education Models . . ." 9-10.

encompassing facet of education rooted in classical thinking, contemporary educational and child psychology, and science.

Character education is not yet compulsive in most school districts across the country. Some federal studies (which I will further delve into in chapters three and four) are currently working to test the validity and capabilities of character education within the public school system. Perhaps these studies will validate the theories, or perhaps they will shed more light on a subject that has already been carefully critiqued for over 2400 years.

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CHAPTER THREE

"The Challenges and Upsides of Developing Character in Appalachia"

"The best part of us is only an emanation of the collectivity."[51]

Character education has a distinctive relevancy in every school district that formally implements it into the curriculum. Appalachia's perspective on character is especially distinct because of pervasive (and sometimes negative) long-term associations from surrounding communities (and beyond) of Appalachia. Whether true or not, these perceptions from the outside shape Appalachia within. They, along with Appalachian's own perceptions of themselves, consequently present challenges to developing character education curriculum in Appalachia. However, some of these perceptions also help make character education initiatives more successful. This chapter will present the challenges and potential upsides of these perceptions.

Briefly Defining Geographic Appalachia

Over the years, the Appalachian region has changed in geographic size—and hence congressional representation—in order to more efficiently meet the needs of this broad strip of America. The federal government's own Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)—born under the Kennedy administration—draws the

[51] From Emile Durkheim's Moral Education. 71.

most widely accepted boundaries, which include 13 states and 420 counties stretching from southern New York to eastern Mississippi. It is a mostly mountainous region and is more sparsely populated than the rest of the nation with 42 percent of Appalachians living in rural areas (compared to only 20 percent for the entire country).[52]

These boundaries, and the commission that forged them, were created to develop the economies and communities within by providing monies and support from the federal government. Originally, the idea sprang from the same minds that set the "War on Poverty" in motion in the 1960s. The ARC's intention was to join Appalachia's political leaders on both state and national levels. There purpose was to grant resources from the federal government to those who require the most basic of human needs: housing, food, and education.[53]

Born from these undeniable facts of poverty and lagging education grew a perception still prevalent that Appalachians are back woodsy and backwards people. My experiences from travels out west and way south is that Appalachians sport worn out shoes (if any) and little education (if any). Some were surprised I still had all my teeth.

These are stereotypes the region bears. However, Appalachia

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[52] "The Appalachian Region."

[53] Obermiller. Appalachia: Social Context Past and Present. 4

also includes urban areas, which in popular perception are generally not considered part of Appalachia. Cities such as Pittsburgh, Birmingham, and Tupelo are within its boundaries while cities such as Cleveland, Nashville, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C. are all less than an hour's drive.[54] Nevertheless, it is just as difficult for Appalachia to escape its image as it has been for some areas to escape the hardships that compelled the creation of the ARC in the first place. The stereotypes and conceptions of Appalachia, whether true or not, are generally concentrated on the central and most mountainous sector, where West Virginia lies, the only state with its entire geopolitical map enveloped within ARC's boundries.

West Virginia is the specific region I intend to focus on through the rest of this thesis for two reasons: 1) West Virginia *is* the only state that is 100 percent regionally Appalachia and therefore serves as the most readily available microcosm of stereotypes and economic hardship, and 2) West Virginia is the focal point of the federal research grant from which I will draw statistical and qualitative information in chapter four.

Appalachian Perceptions from the Outside

Outside perceptions of Appalachia range from "hardworking,

[54] Obermiller. Appalachia: Social Context Past and Present. 4

brave, and determined" to "hillbilly, inbred, and ignorant" and variants in between. Some of these are based on observation and others on less concrete judgments. Whether good or bad, all are oversimplified categories that, even when not believed by Appalachians themselves, may have a limiting effect on the region.

Outside perceptions are not entirely wrong or necessarily biased, such as the notion that West Virginians are less educated. It is true that fewer West Virginians than the national average attend college. (In West Virginia, 39% of adults 25 or older have at least some college experience compared to 54% of the rest of the United States).[55] However, some of the perceptions derive from stereotyping, or over-generalizing. Stereotypes are often not too complex, originating in people from scant comments made in passing. Mainly, popular culture stereotypes of Appalachia emphasize poverty and inbreeding. It is not uncommon to hear the occasional poke, such as the Abercrombie & Fitch t-shirt exclaiming, "It's all relative in West Virginia,"[56] or a 2004 *Tonight Show with Jay Leno* joke in front of then Kentucky governor Ernie Fletcher decrying the commonwealth's suggested "new slogan": Kentucky: Reminding everyone that *Deliverance* was filmed in Georgia (I cite from memory).

[55] "Educational Attainment."

[56] "Abercrombie & Fitch Shirt Angers West Virginians."

The outside perceptions, surprisingly, may have arisen from the more affluent members of the Appalachian society itself through interviews conducted by early investigators in the nineteenth century.[57] Ironically, these stereotypes came to represent all Appalachians, not just the isolated ones.

Though these outside stereotypes may have come directly from self-reporting Appalachians and not from the seeing eyes of the outsiders themselves, outsiders have exaggerated some of these perceptions. Admittedly, though, some are based in grim reality. The notion that Appalachians—in solid majority—are poorer and less educated than most other Americans was and remains true in terms of government classifications,[58] though it is vastly more complicated than a simplistic categorical placement.

Over the years, federal and local governments have recognized the destitution and worked to improve conditions, but the perceptions persist on a level that can seem impossible to dissuade, especially since some of it is based (in part) on scientific study and federal data collection. Yet causes of perceptions partly remain the overblown comedic creations of people who may very well never set foot in the region, and their persistent ridicule has an impact on the region’s reputation—

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[57] Hsiung. Two Worlds in the Tennessee Mountains. 201-24

[58] "West Virginia: Selected Economic Characteristics: 2005-2007."

whether the jokes are true or not. Other stereotypical representations such as movies, music, and television dramas and comedies strongly reinforce misnomers. But beyond entertainment, there are serious conceptions about Appalachia that, fairly or not, define who and what it is.

But are these conceptions of Appalachia fair, and who has the authority to make these accusations? Foucault believed that a conscious knowledge of who is speaking is imperative when analyzing discourse within a society. Foucault asked, “Who, among the totality of speaking individuals, is accorded the right to use this sort of language? . . . From whom . . . does [the speaker] receive if not the assurance, at least the presumption that what he says is true?”[59] To Foucault, the power to make such statements comes from “a system of differentiation and relations.”[60] To be more specific, Foucault believed that a person or group of persons is ascribed authority based on the credibility and validity they are given by other facets of society. He uses the example of a doctor given the authority to treat sick patients. A doctor’s judgments are supported by professional review boards, which are supported by the government, which is supported by society. Those who have the power ascribed to them are the ones who can make the claims. Certainly, minorities throughout history have had to fight in

[59] Foucault. "The Archaeology of Knowledge." 1442.
[60] Foucault. "The Archaeology of Knowledge." 1442.

order to gain power in public discourse. Therefore it is easy to see how a minority culture like Appalachia (as a whole) can be stripped of the power to define themselves.

In Foucault's theory, power is transmitted through discourse, and there are multiple discourses at play at all times. The question then becomes: Which discourses have the power to shape perception? In America, political, cultural, and economic powers are seemingly granted by the mainstream. For the Appalachians to take hold of national discourses, they must communicate in accepted forms of mainstream discourse.

Discourse, being more than verbal communication, is also cultural communication: familial, religious, and communal practices. Not surprisingly, these are the very categories that foster the most ridicule, which means Appalachians lack authority to communicate in such national discourses (but only in terms of national power; they very much keep their authority at home, which I will delve into later).

Though Appalachian culture does not carry the authority of mainstream culture in American discourse that does not mean it lacks any significance or validity. It simply means that it is perhaps misunderstood because of a failure to communicate; however that is only part of the problem. Lisa Delpit examined the issue of miscommunication in her book *Other People's Children*. In speaking of minorities, she says many are hindered

by “rules of discourse” that are sometimes debilitatingly different in different subcultures.[61] This does not necessarily put the blame on anyone, but rather it clarifies a potential aspect of possible future study to find the most effective ways to overcome the limits of discourse.

However, communication is not “the result of a ‘conscious or intentional decision,’ but rather the product of a complex and almost indecipherable set of language practices within a culture.”[62] In other words, communication is far too complex to circumvent without knowing what leads to these “language practices.” This, perhaps, is one major challenge of implementing possible character education curricula if the curricula are promoted from the outside. But in order to improve communication, it is pertinent to examine a brief history of these outside perceptions to possibly discover their source, and in doing so, open the channels of discourse.

Thomas R. Ford’s 1962 book, *The Southern Appalachian Region,* is a good place to find early documentation of outside perceptions because it was the contemporary configuration of perception aligned with the newly formed ARC. (Many of his ideas persist.) Written near the time Appalachia was officially identified as impoverished by the federal government, Ford’s book is a formal documentation—citing scientific research—of

[61] Delpit. Other People's Children. 169.
[62] Herrick. The History and Theory of Rhetoric. 247.

perceptions and realities widely held by outsiders toward Appalachians. Ford's authority to make such claims was vast, for he communicated effectively in the national discourse as a knowledgeable person who could expertly frame the situation.

Ford's chapter titled, "The Passing of Provincialism," showed how Appalachia's way of life was changing in the post World War II era based on the integration of progressive technology (and all the symbolism it came with: power, prestige, knowledge) into a world of archaic villages and mores. And that is no exaggeration of Ford's tone. He calls Appalachia's introduction to paved roads and television antennas as "functional symbols" of the region giving way to the new century, but the question on Ford's mind was not whether the world had caught up to Appalachians, but if Appalachians had accepted the outside world, a question he called "moot," alluding toward his conscious perception: "no."[63]

Ford claimed that four threads wove the "mountain traits": 1) individualism and self-reliance, 2) traditionalism, 3) fatalism, and 4) fundamentalist religion, all four being the "antithesis of contemporary industrial society."[64] In other words, the culture was backwards compared to the rest of the country, which was taking full advantage of America's newfound

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[63] Ford. The Southern Appalachian Region 9

[64] Ford. The Southern Appalachian Region 11

lead in the world and its bustling post-war economy. His perception was that Appalachia did not want much to do with this progressive era, yet he did point to how the “highlanders” accepted help from the New Deal legislation (a counter to the self-reliance thread). This could have indicated to Ford that Appalachians are not as stubbornly independent as thought, but Ford turned it back onto the Appalachians, showing how they considered welfare a divine blessing and not a handout from the nation’s taxpayers. Citing an Appalachian woman, “It’s the good Lord taking care of me because I’ve worked hard all my life and prayed to Him.”[65]

Ford also found validation in his threads in other scholarly work. His traditionalism thread is observable in other essays pertaining to Appalachia. Wilma A. Dunaway pointed to the portrayal of women in popular literature. She claimed that the War on Poverty’s indirect creation of “new ethnographies” where women lived to serve the impulses of their men, contributed to Appalachian destitution. She stated:

> In the 1960s, doctors, sociologists, and social workers added the ring of scientism and professionalism . . . [legitimizing] the stereotypes of incestuous marriages and overly-fertile wives who

[65] Ford. The Southern Appalachian Region 13

> produced large families that caused the region's impoverishment.[66]

These findings did more than blame women for their own poverty; it was a slap in the face of the entire Appalachian cultural system where having families was one of the paramount necessities of living. Children could help around the house, and the religious ideas of sex for procreation certainly had an influence on the social construct of marriage. However, the argument by these "doctors" and "sociologists" does have some merit. When one considers the fact that almost all women stayed home while the men worked, the single income family could have prospered more had they procreated less. Yet a good number of Appalachians grew out of large families (my father had five brothers and sisters) that went on to lead economically fruitful lives.

The larger families often relied on each other for survival, sometimes with non-immediate family members living in the home. However, the American ideal of wanting a better future for the next generation was true in Appalachia as well. Ford observed that responses to questions relating to their children struck a hopeful chord in Appalachians of the mid-twentieth century. Most of them (particularly women) wanted to see their children prosper by taking part in the new industrial age, which

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[66] Dunaway. "Stereotypes of Appalachian Women in Literature Before 1990"

included the hope for better education. A majority accepted their children leaving the region if it meant they could live a better life elsewhere[67], which acknowledged hope for future generations.

Ford's perceptions, though dated, are the premises of similar modes of thought that persist today both outside and within Appalachia. The generation that Ford observed has mostly passed away, and that generation's children and grandchildren take up the mantle. It is, however, the grandchildren of Ford's Appalachia that is the focus of contemporary character education curricula. Over the 50-plus years in between, the younger Appalachians' self-perceptions have not greatly differed from those observed by Ford or Dunaway, and is contingent (in many ways) on outside perceptions such as these.

Appalachian Self-Perceptions

As George Towers discovered through his research in 2005 on West Virginia's younger generation, outside perceptions are big considerations when it comes to developing one's own since of community pride. Towers describes West Virginia as the center of Appalachia and a "stereotypical landscape of exclusion" because the people are isolated from the dominant culture, which molds Appalachia into a symbol of what is bad with America. This helps the larger groups (such as mainstream media) justify the more

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[67] Ford. The Southern Appalachian Region 17

embarrassing elements that exist within, because they can pinpoint it away from themselves.[68] This helps to explain why the more affluent Appalachians gave such negative portrayals of their neighbors to outsiders over a century ago. It helps the accuser feel better about himself and his home but at the expense of someone else's pride.

Towers explains, "Stereotypes influence people's spatial behavior. The primary cost of negative impressions is that they direct people away from places."[69] ("Places" meaning communities or regions.) He goes on to say that the youth of West Virginia are listening to perceptions that are turning them away from their home state (emotionally and geographically). The youth are internalizing these outside perceptions and making them their own. As a consequence, character education in Appalachia has the special challenge of overcoming a general lack of pride, which (as mentioned in chapter two) is one key to a successful implementation of character education.

This particular challenge is further reinforced by a poll conducted in part by Marshall University's WMUL-FM in 2003, where "83 percent of young adults in the state agree with the statement that 'resentment of the hillbilly stereotype is deeply

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[68] Towers. "West Virginia's Lost Youth." 75

[69] Towers. "West Virginia's Lost Youth." 76

rooted in the consciousness of West Virginians.’”[70] This resentment leads many to feel as if they must distance themselves from the region, which in turn hurts students’ psyche and school pride because the school is a representation of the community.

West Virginia’s youth build some of these perceptions on the influences of outside media. A 2008 Associated Press article pegged Huntington, West Virginia as the “unhealthiest” city in America, with 50 percent of the metropolitan area’s population categorized as obese.[71] The perception of overeating is a perception of laziness, similar to Ford’s assertion that West Virginians remain poor because they choose not to help themselves. One then wonders how much these perceptions hinder a community or school’s efforts to establish a positive and successful character model. Moreover, the health concerns behind these statistics—if wholly valid—have an effect on young learners. These facts, along with the perceptions they elevate, may create problems of self-worth that may need specific attention in any character education initiative.

Even with a host of negative perceptions, not all Appalachian self-perceptions are pessimistic. A good number see the true meaning of Appalachia as deeper than popular perception. They see it as close families, tight communities,

[70] Towers. "West Virginia's Lost Youth.” 77
[71] "Huntington Rated Unhealthiest City."

and a general sense of neighborly goodwill, which is perhaps more exceptional than in other areas of the country (a stereotype of modern American culture). Ken Slone, while nothing close to a comparison between Appalachia and the rest of America, offers a personal antidote of his Appalachian perceptions, which speaks to the notions of strong community. When discussing his experience educating Appalachian school children, he states:

> The fact that we are part of a *community* never becomes so apparent as when we stop to offer thanks. When we stop to think of the times we have said thank-you to those who were not related to us . . . [We're] a part of a community . . . [In the community] expressions of gratitude often come unexpectedly.[72]

This is the Appalachia that many in the region would like outsiders to see. Appalachia is to some, a community of shared values (such as spiritual beliefs, familial ties, and minimal government interference) and neighborly gestures such as friendly hellos that are—stereotypically—missing in those urban centers that cultivate the negative images of Appalachia. These values of independence, which Ford contended were hurting Appalachians, is one of the more respected virtues within. If true, these perceptions may actually lead to an easier

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[72] Slone. Mountain Teacher. 72-73

implementation of character education. After all, community engagement is key.

As Libby and Blum point out, “school connectedness” (which takes the form of “school bonding, school climate, teacher support and school engagement”) is a crucial element to student success.[73] Even though it is an admitted leap to conclude that Slone’s experiences would speak for all Appalachians (or even the participants in the character education study), early data returns from the study suggest that rural Appalachians mostly agree with Slone (see chapter four).[74]

Characteristics Appalachians see as positive are termed “social capital,” which is a concept Putnam uses in reference to West Virginians.[75] Basically, social capital stems from the capitalistic idea of making a profit in business. In a similar sense, social capital can be spent like economic capital in terms of creating stronger community ties that can build all institutes of community by drawing every member to a common goal. In theory, social capital seems like, and is, a very positive and helpful trait in regards to implementing character education. In many ways, social capital is what character education initiatives hope to build.

Jesse Stuart, like Slone, was an Appalachian educator who

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[73] Blum and Libbey. "School Connectedness.” 231.
[74] Vincent. Personal interview.
[75] Putnam. Bowling Alone.445-446.

firmly believed in a wholesome Appalachia and its social capital. In one of his memoirs, Stuart recalled the moral lessons learned as a child from his father, who Stuart proclaimed was his first teacher.[76] His father taught him to appreciate the beauty of the land and to respect those around him. Stuart's father "didn't have to travel over the country like other people searching for something beautiful." He found the beauty in the "lean[ing] cornstalks" and in his family.[77] This was wholly Appalachian to Stuart, and it can be fairly stated that these traits are wholly Appalachian to many who live in the region.

Stuart's recollection of his father is another positive aspect that character education hopes to promote. As was stated in chapter two, families must play major roles in the development of the curricula. Therefore, these Appalachian perceptions may be an upside to implementation in Appalachia.

Others are also proud of their distinct heritage, but some consider themselves no different than any other average American. In fact, this is the view most widely held by middle-class Appalachians.[78] They do not like to think of themselves as different. When they do think differently of Appalachia in relation to the rest of the country, the difference is usually

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[76] Stuart, Jesse. To Teach, To Love. 12.
[77] Stuart, Jesse. To Teach, To Love. 14-18.
[78] Barker, Bill. "A Study of West Virginia Values and Culture." 4-5.

something good, such as the wholesome values Slone and Stuart propagate compared to the ravenous, ‘every man for himself’ world outside Appalachia.

What These Perceptions Mean

Both the positive and negative images of Appalachia are “social invention[s] such as the cowboy or the Indian.”[79] However, these “inventions” create the obstacles and opportunities for communities.

Defining Appalachia and Appalachian character is as difficult as defining any society; it is full of complexities that are simply unfair to generalize. However, like any people, the things that surround Appalachians, whether immediate or not, mold Appalachians: family, friends, neighbors, teachers, physical environment, and the media. Appalachian culture ultimately hinges on what its members listen to, what those people say, and how Appalachians synthesize that information. It is also contingent, in part, on the physical environment in which Appalachians live. However, no element is the sole determinate of a person or a people. Appalachia is no different in that sense; it is only different in how it is perceived from the outside and within, and those perceptions mold the realities we see today and foster the challenges in building effective character education curricula. However, these perceptions are

[79] Obermiller. Appalachia: Social Context Past and Present. 4

not the only challenges to character education.

Other Contextual Factors

In an ABC News, *20/20* special that aired in February 2009, host Diane Sawyer visited a poor region (on the border of West Virginia) of eastern Kentucky to find "The Hidden America." There she reported on children living lives in conditions that rival some third world nations. Many of their parents were either addicted to drugs or sold drugs (or both). As stated, "Prescription drug abuse rates [in this region are] twice as high as in big cities,"[80] and the piles of trash towering around them are "a kind of defeatism left on the lawn."

These realities for some are the very reasons why all Appalachians are sometimes labeled poor and distressed, yet even *20/20* recognizes that the Appalachian people are not terribly different from their urban counterparts. As Professor Ron Eller at the University of Kentucky expressed:

> The difference between urban places and Appalachia is the availability of government resources to pick up that trash. Mountain people I don't think have given up. But when you organize, and you fight and you struggle and things don't change marketably for you,

[80] "A Hidden American: Children of the Mountains."

> then you step back and you find a way for your family to survive.[81]

This possibly leads to the theory of “learned helplessness,” which was put forward most prominently by psychologist Martin Seligman. He believed that people get caught in a cycle of depression or destitution because they believe they have no power over their situation. In a sense, they learn not to help themselves because it never works when they try.[82]

Though learned helplessness may be a contributing factor to some, it would be unfair to presume that enough West Virginians fall prey to it to consider it a major hurdle. Certainly some lose hope when they keep losing over and over again. But ultimately, we are talking about children who still have many chances to experience success. Therefore, learned helplessness may not be a major contributor to the challenges of implementation, but it is worth mentioning because of its common conception (as evidenced in the quote above).

All the contextual factors behind Appalachia’s challenges compared to the rest of the country make Appalachia a unique test case. The perceptions and realities outlined in this chapter demonstrate *some* of the challenges that may await the implementation of character education curricula in the West Virginia schools. It also profiles some the advantages that

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[81] "A Hidden American: Children of the Mountains."

[82] Seligman. Helplessness: On Development, Depression, and Death.

Appalachians may have with implementation. If curricula are to facilitate character and moral development, then the instillers of character education must be mindful of these conditions, for if they are not, they will fail to recognize the unique obstacles and advantages facing this particular region.

The main question, though, is this: How is character education related to cultural self-value and circumstance? The answer is that they may be very closely related. If character education hopes to improve on aspects that are differentiated between Appalachians and non-Appalachians, such as community/familial/religious values, health and educational attainment, then differing cultural values cannot be ignored during implementation.

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CHAPTER FOUR

"Assessing Character Education in Appalachia: A Preliminary Look at Early Data Returns, Suggestions for Modification, and Analysis"

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools has awarded dozens of grants to various institutions for studying the effectiveness of character education curricula in the public schools. These grants are intended to focus on how character education impacts academic performance and other measurables (such as the sense of community and sense of self).

As a graduate student at Marshall University, I spent my first two semesters as a research assistant to one of these federal grants pertaining to character education development in rural schools in West Virginia. I was fortunate enough to contribute to the collection and synthesis of data first hand, and to personally (yet informally) speak with each principal at all eight participating schools as the process developed. As a West Virginia native with close familial and personal ties to rural upbringings, I took this task personally, and I hope to treat the results and the people surveyed with the utmost respect and diligence.

This chapter will outline the results of some of the surveys conducted by the staff of research assistants and

professors at Marshall University (as well as others from the state level). Within the survey, four of the participating schools were control groups (without explicit character education) while the other four were the experimental schools (which built and are currently enacting character education curricula).[83] This chapter will delve into some of the qualitative aspects of the study as well as a few quantitative numbers to decide whether character education works in rural Appalachia and what needs to be addressed in order to improve the curriculum.

The Qualitative Aspect

Dr. Thelma Isaacs, an education professor at Marshall, has conducted personal and group interviews with representatives from all schools within the grant.

In her preparations for the interviews, Dr. Isaacs worked with others in the grant on developing an "Interview Protocol,"[84] from which she separately asks groups of students, parents, and faculty questions pertaining to character and character education. Subsequently, Dr. Isaacs conducts interviews with the principals at each school in order to grasp a better assessment of the character education curricula (or lack thereof). For this thesis, I am mainly concerned with the students and how they responded to questions such as: "What is character?" and "Do you

[83] Corrigan. "The Importance of Research in Character Education." 103.
[84] Isaacs. Personal interview.

feel safe in your community?" because I wanted address some of my assumptions regarding Appalachians.

Dr. Isaacs provided an interesting comparative analysis of West Virginia school children with children from more urban centers within the grant's sphere (urban Ohio). The students—ranging from elementary to high school—expressed similar answers to the questions above whether they were from Cleveland, Ohio or Wayne County, West Virginia. For example, Dr. Isaacs recalls the first question receiving a near immediate and predictable response among most students: "What is character?" she asks. The students answer in some variation: "Character is when someone drops their books and someone else stops to help them pick them up." It is demonstrative of the universal plight shared by all human beings: whether or not we should go out of our way to help someone in need.

Both sets of urban non-Appalachian and rural Appalachian children have an inherent understanding of what character could be. They also, according to Dr. Isaacs' research, have similar feelings regarding their respective communities' safety. The urban Ohio students admit there are places you should not venture alone or in groups at certain hours (if at all), while the Appalachian students say the same about their smaller communities. However, the fascinating and most relevant difference Dr. Isaacs found between the Appalachians and the

non-Appalachians came in direct response to the question, “Do you feel safe?” The urban children directed their answers to elements of the local society, such as the drug dealers and gang activity; people from within the community who may live next door or down the street. To the contrary, Appalachian children are weary of someone from the *outside* coming into their community and causing problems.

This stark difference may go a long way in determining whether character education could succeed in Appalachia without significant guidance from within. Fortunately, a good character education curriculum requires community construction, which should aid the Appalachians in coming to grips with their skepticism of interlopers (at least at the onset). Dr. Isaacs theorizes that the reason urban children are okay with interlopers is because they see so many come and go on a regular basis, whereas rural Appalachians (or rural anybody for that matter) rarely see people moving into their neighborhoods because there is not much that draws outsiders in.

Based on these answers, a new dynamic is added to the list of challenges to building character education models in Appalachia. The issue of “setting” is at the heart of perception. Even though I may be taking a great leap of assumption to suggest that being rural or urban directly relates to character development, it is clear that each environment has

a unique impact on the perceptions its children carry of the outside world. Therefore, perhaps the most effective character education models should acknowledge the fact that a world outside the visible domain exists, and we must learn to appreciate it and know about it if we are to facilitate within our children a good citizenry in an interconnected 21st century. For so long as the suspicion of outsiders exist in Appalachia—which has been present since at least the days of the Thomas Ford book examined in chapter three—then rural Appalachians may always find themselves at a disadvantage compared to their urban counterparts.

It may also be of significance to specifically acknowledge who is answering these questions. The Appalachian school children that are taking part in this research grant were born in the Internet age. All of them are maturing in a period that has seen more exposure to the outside world than has ever been so readily available (popular radio, tv, movies, email, social networking sites, and instant messaging). Yet the outside world still worries them the most when it comes to safety, and safety is arguably one the most critical of all human needs. It could be the influence of their parents or teachers, or perhaps it is something deeper that would require the sort of sociological experiment too in-depth for this particular discussion. Nevertheless, so long as the rural Appalachians stay wary of

outsiders, they are surely bound to continue the misunderstandings that result in some the negative perceptions covered in the chapter three. However, I would be remiss in not conceding that Appalachians have been politically and economically exploited from the outside. One need only read the histories of the coalfields. Therefore, these traits may be justified. Nevertheless, they can be a hindrance.

However, these unfavorable perceptions, or what is being construed as unfavorable, have had little negative impact on the actual implementation of character education. Dr. Phil Vincent, a consultant responsible for professional development in the grant schools, has recorded numerous observations that show why character education is working in Appalachia.

According to Dr. Vincent,

> People who live in rural areas have less formal education . . . Yet they fund their schools at a higher rate than other groups, have less discipline problems in their schools, and have teachers who like their jobs more than in other locales despite making less money. This commitment may lead to a greater sense of connectedness to all stakeholders within the community.[85]

The word “connectedness” was touched on in chapter three as a

[85] Vincent. Personal interview.

key concept in the community element of character education. These Appalachians, whom Dr. Vincent describe, also feel more justified in providing their opinions of what is going on in their school because they tend to live close to and personally know those making the decisions (school board members and administrators).

Dr. Vincent also explained how more rural schools (which may apply to areas outside Appalachia as well) is often the "centerpiece of the community." In his observations, more rural schools are often the only place to meet to and hold community events. After all, if the entire community can fit in the football stadium or even the gymnasium, then why would they build a separate complex? This means schools "serve many purposes besides schooling." This, too, leads to a greater sense of belonging and mutual ownership, which only helps to make character education more fulfilling.

The Quantitative Aspect

The character survey itself has gone through some modifications in format over the life of the grant. The middle and high school survey consists of approximately 160 questions all read aloud by survey administrators such as my colleagues, our superiors, and myself. For this discussion, we will compare the results between the control and experimental groups within Appalachia to see if character education has made a significant

impact on behavior and grades. In order to address this inquiry, I will assess the results in light of three research questions. Each of these questions relates either in part or entirely to the six dimensions of character education: “1) Student character, 2) Community engagement, 3) School climate, 4) Professional development [helping the staff] 5) School leadership [principals and teaching taking the lead in school], and 6) Student educational attitudes.”[86]

The questions run,

1) “Are there significant differences between the control and experimental groups in relation to self-reported levels of character?”[87]
2) “Are there significant differences between the control and experimental groups in relation to self-perceived levels of community engagement?”
3) “What are the relationships shared between the proposed dimensions of character education and academic achievement?”

For question one regarding “self-reported levels of character,” the survey found an insignificant difference between the experimental and control schools at the middle and high school level, but did find that character education made a

[86] Corrigan. "The Importance of Research in Character Education." 108.
[87] Corrigan. "The Importance of Research in Character Education." 111.

positive impact on elementary students. For example, the “mean difference” at the middle and high school levels was 1.27 at the most and -.22 at the least, while the elementary were 3.54 at the most.[88]

If these numbers indicate anything, perhaps they suggest that elementary students are more susceptible to character education curricula in terms of rating character. It seems that the older students have already built their foundations of character, for the most part, and may not be adequate candidates for an initiation into character education curricula. Furthermore, it would be interesting to see how these elementary students answer these questions when they get older. Will the lessons taught in the experimental schools stick?

Answering the second question pertaining to “self-perceived levels of community engagement,” the data again found no significant difference in the middle and high school surveys. The elementary survey, which is significantly shorter than the other due to the limited attention span of younger students, only measured one of the five variables tested in the upper level. Therefore, no significant difference could be ascertained. Perhaps the same issue as before is prevalent. The older participants in the survey are more likely to have formed solid opinions about their lives and environments that—though

[88] Corrigan. "The Importance of Research in Character Education." 120.

still impressionable—may not change significantly with any new character education system.

However, when answering the third questions related to “the proposed dimensions of character education and academic achievement,” significant differences were found. At all levels, integration of character education and the fulfillment of all dimensions correlated with an improvement in academic achievement. What this could signify is that facilitating a conscious and pervasive character education curriculum at least improves the grades and test scores of participating students. The factors behind this difference are seemingly limitless. If students achieve more in the classroom as a direct result of character education, then character education does work—at least in part.

The Significance of the Findings

It is somewhat clear from the quantitative data that the best character education curricula are implemented at the earliest stages in school. The sooner a child is exposed to stimulus, the more likely it is to impact his or her life. Consequently, those who are exposed at a later time in life may still find benefit within a curriculum emphasizing character, but the impact will not extend as far.

Therefore, if we are to implement character education, it must be done at an early age, and it must also address specific

needs to each school beyond those expressed by the local communities.

It is clear from the qualitative analysis that Appalachians may need more education about who they are as well as multicultural education if they are to overcome the distress caused by the thought of intrusion. Appalachians do not have to give up their culture, but should rather be more open to sharing this culture with their American neighbors without fear of interjection.

A Final Analysis

Whether it is character education or the basic components of human life such as food and medicine, Appalachians have specific needs that must be addressed in one way or another. Emotionally speaking, we Appalachians are proud of home, yet we are embarrassed by the jokes made at our expense. Perhaps these jokes are partially to blame for the skepticism expressed by the young subjects in the Tower's article from chapter three or the participants in the character education survey in this chapter, or maybe it has something to do with the sociology of rural people, or maybe a combination of the two or something entirely different. No matter the reasons, the differences are clear, and if effective character education models and other forms of government support are going to benefit the Appalachians most,

or any Americans for that matter, the helpers must be aware, accepting of, and work with the differences.

Nevertheless, character education in Appalachia is working. Is it because of the Appalachian traits discussed in chapter three? Or is it because of a thorough and diligent implementation of the character education curriculum? The easy answer is likely the right answer: it is both . . . and a host of other factors that is currently leading to these results.

Above all, character education is an initiative that truly requires a unified effort of all individuals in a child's life. West Virginia—and Appalachia herself—just may be the model that other schools outside the region will follow.

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