GETTING TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER: CONCEPTUALIZING CHARACTER EDUCATION AND USING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE TO PROMOTE VALUES IN SCHOOLS

BY

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THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2016

Urbana, Illinois

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ABSTRACT

This is a study of how character education was conceptualized and enacted by two participating classroom teachers, especially through the use of children's literature to promote values. Data were collected through observations and interviews and analyzed using an inductive, qualitative, case study approach that included descriptive analysis. The research questions included the following: 1) How do two selected teachers define and conceptualize character education? 2) What values do they highlight in character education instruction and how do they define them? 3) How do they implement character education in their teaching instruction, including how children's literature is selected and used as part of this pedagogical implementation? and 4) How do they see character education affecting their students? Findings indicated four key components of Lois' character education instruction: relationships and community, mindful decision-making, the value of talk, and relevance. Findings also indicated five key components of Kathryn's character education instruction: relationships and community, taking a questioning approach, the value of talk, relevance, and feelings. Though not a comparative study, connections were seen across both teachers. Implications include the importance of trusting relationships and community, the value of talk and discussions, a willingness of teachers to take a critical thinking approach, teachers being reflective and mindful, and taking an in-depth look at whose values are being talked about and whose are being ignored within character education.

To my mom, Bubba (Christine Stout): I absolutely love that you're my mom, and it is an honor and a privilege to be your daughter! Thank you for your unwavering support, goofy humor, and fierce, unconditional, and sacrificial love you've so willingly given me from the first day of my life. I wouldn't be who I am or where I am today without you and how much you love me. I am a better person because of you, and I love you very much!

To Dr. Tyner: Thank you for being one of the best examples of the type of educator I hope to be. Thank you for always believing in me and for seeing something in me as an educator that I'm still learning to see in myself.

To an awesome 3rd grader, Emerson Rose: Coming to your classroom, reading books with you, and talking with you has reminded me why I wanted and decided to get my master's degree in the first place. Thank you for teaching me about creativity, patience, grit, and perseverance. You remind me to laugh, do the best I can, and be the best I can be as an educator for you and all my future students.

And to all kids everywhere: May you know you are valued. May you know your lives matter. May you believe in yourselves. May you receive the education you deserve, and may you always know that your lives are worth fighting for!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Character education is somewhat controversial within the field of education (Linkins,

Niemiec, Gillham, & Mayerson, 2015). Linkins et al. wrote,

> For as long as there have been schools, there has been discussion about the role of
>
> schools in promoting positive character development. Educators and philosophers have
>
> long argued that schools need to educate the heart as well as the mind (Aristotle,
>
> Nicomachean Ethics; Dewey, 1909; Pestalozzi, 1818). While few would deny that
>
> schools should play some role in fostering positive character, identifying which traits
>
> should be endorsed has sometimes proven controversial. (p. 64)

These authors argued that schools do play a role in fostering the character of their students, but

selecting the values to focus on is not as clear-cut and straightforward. Helterbran (2009) laid out

a number of claims made about character education, some of which included that character

education should be the responsibilities of families and that research indicates a positive

correlation between teaching character education and increased academic success. In addition to

all of this, in my experience talking to other educators and to parents, some believe that schools

should focus solely on students' academic learning.

Others in the field claim there is a deep need to nurture students' growth beyond just their

intellectual or academic needs (e.g., Character.org, 2014; Freeman, 2014). Based on the research

of others and their claims of the importance of character education, Freeman (2014) specifically

looked at the role of bullying behaviors in children and how character education could help

support bullying prevention within schools. Other purposes laid out in the research and theory on

character education include Covell and Howe's (2001) belief that "growing numbers of children

[being] inadequately socialised at home, [therefore] moral education and values teaching have increasingly become the responsibility of the school" (p. 29). Bryan (2005) noted the escalation of violence and crime among young people. She argued, "The wake-up call of increased violence and crime among children has probably settled the debate over whether or not character education needs to be implemented into the public school curriculum. IT DOES!!!" (p. 3). Bryan felt that schools need to be involved in students' character development because violence is a pervasive and increasing problem within society. Additionally, Lake (2011) argued, "Rising divorce rates, increasing violence in schools, acts of violence around the world, and other similar events have brought the concept of 'character' and what it means to be of good character to the forefront" (p. 679). She also believed that discussions of character need to happen because of the rise of divorce and violence, not only within American society but also around the world. These latter purposes are negatively framed and feed into possible stereotypes held about specifically underserved students but are included here to offer a view into the wide range of arguments made for the inclusion of character education. That said, neither author offers any evidence to support a causal link between violence and crime and a lack of character and/or character education.

Rather than adopting these negatively loaded statements, my views on the need for and value of character education are more in line with the arguments made on Character.org (2014), which, "is a nonprofit organization that strives to ensure every young person is educated, inspired, and empowered to be ethical and engaged citizens through the character transformation of schools" (p. 24). On their website, they give a mission of "providing leadership and advocacy for character in schools, families, communities and workplaces throughout the world" and a vision of "young people everywhere who are educated, inspired and empowered to be ethical and

engaged citizens" (Character.org, n.d.a, unpaged). Established in 1993, they also acknowledge

the long history of character education (Sojourner, 2012). They also partner "with schools,

districts and organizations to develop a culture where young people thrive both academically and

ethically. We provide the tools, methods and strategies that educators, parents, community

members and workplaces need to create caring and productive environments" (Character.org,

n.d.a, unpaged). Here, there is a noted desire to increase the academic success of all students as

part of their overall goal:

> Character education provides effective solutions to ethical and academic issues that are of
>
> growing concern. Educators have successfully used character education to transform their
>
> schools, improve school culture, increase achievement for all learners, develop global
>
> citizens, restore civility, prevent anti-social and unhealthy behaviors, and improve job
>
> satisfaction and retention among teachers. (p. i)

To me, character education is about more than just trying to meet the needs of students that

appear to not be met at home or to decrease violence among youth. As mentioned above, I

believe character education can help increase morale and positivity within school climates, not

only among school staff but among students as well. I also believe that character education is

important in helping children develop into the types of people and citizens who positively

contribute to their immediate society, as well as the larger globe around them. It should be noted

that character education encompasses multiple veins of thought, including values from both

secular and religious perspectives. Important to note here also is that consideration of who

children are as human beings with experiences and values of their own, instilled in them by their

families and communities, is essential when implementing character education. I do not believe

that children come to schools as blank slates waiting to be instilled with values. I believe they come with values based on their varied backgrounds and cultural communities.

Whatever the argument, many school districts and schools have character education programs designed to teach various character values that are considered admirable, such as respect and integrity, with the goal of helping students to become good and decent people who are able to contribute positively to society (Character.org, 2014[1]). Character values are also culturally defined. The purposes of these programs are many and varied (some of which could be based more on fears than realities or slightly biased toward particular groups of people, cultures, etc.). Therefore, it is important to understand not only why character education is important but also how to implement it within schools to have a positive effect on all students' growth and development and within the teaching pedagogies of educators who may have little experience teaching about moral dilemmas and dealing with the differences of opinions in discussions of character. There may be numerous reasons justifying why schools include character education in their curricula (some more or less equitable and/or effective in their approach), so ultimately, how schools do character education is going to be a primary determinant for the overall impact and effect of it on students. Edgington (2002) noted, "A typical comment across the country [of the United States] is, We [sic] think we *need* to do it, but we're not sure of *how* to do it" (p. 113). Seeing as this is a question of many people, I propose three core components, which help lay the foundation of and create a framework for how character education programs can be done in schools in ways that are impactful, useful, effective, and worthy of teachers' and students' time. These three components include 1) the use of children's literature, 2) readers' responses—individually and through discussion, and 3) teachers' roles within the classroom community.

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[1] While other social, civil, and religious organizations within society have similar goals and affect the character development of children, the focus of my paper is specifically on the choices of two teachers' practices as part of children's character education experiences in schooling.

Drawing from the research, these three components were often mentioned, discussed, and/or highlighted, albeit not always all together, but I am making explicit connections between these three aspects and arguing that all three are essential to character education programs that foster authentic character within students for the long-term and not just for the present moment.

The Use of Children's Literature

Before beginning a discussion about readers' responses and teachers' roles in discussions, one must first understand the importance of using literature as a tool for engaging students' in discussions of character. Literature is a vehicle of instruction that provides a foundation for exploring the universality and diversity of people. Bishop (2000), while not focusing specifically on children's literature in character education, did make a case for the importance of literature, even in the midst of an ever-changing technological society. From the start, Bishop claimed, "Literature enables us to interpret and shape our experience as humans. It transcends time and place and cultures and helps us to re-view the past, interpret the present, and envision the future" (p. 73). For Bishop, no matter what new advances come into the world, literature is one thing that will always remain constant and potentially relevant to our lives. This is an important consideration when thinking about the best ways to provide character education instruction. In a world and a society that is constantly changing, it is important that educators consider using a tool to help talk about character that is going to provide some universality and be relevant to all their students' lives, regardless of background, culture, race, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, etc. Without a strong vehicle to foster character within students in personal, multifaceted, and universal ways and to help inform teachers' instruction, bringing about discussions of character will be challenging.

Not only is literature important because it transcends time and human differences, but it also helps us gain insight into other people's lives and to see the world differently than we might otherwise (Bishop, 2000; Harris, 1999). Literature allows us to venture into corners of the world and cultures that are different from our own, and even though these cultures and corners may be thousands of miles away or at a different point in history, we still have opportunities to explore them beyond our limited understanding of the world (Rosenblatt, 1995; see edited books by Harris, 1993, 1997 as well). Through learning about different cultures, we can see there are differences, but we can also learn about what unites us as humans. Bishop (2000) wrote, "Literature can help us discover that across time and place and cultures people share certain fundamental human traits and desires and problems. At the same time, literature affirms the great diversity that co-exists with shared human commonalities" (p. 76). This should be exactly the type of perspective we want to bring to discussions of character and what it means to be "good." Many schools use various programs that teach specific character traits/values, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but with literature, there are expanded opportunities to look at these values in ways that allow there to be diverse opinions about these values, while still grounded in the sameness and universality of humanity.

Literature also helps what students learn to move beyond just head knowledge. Literature is about more than just information; rather, it is about experiences (Mills, Stephens, O'Keefe, & Waugh, 2004; Rosenblatt, 1995). Rosenblatt noted, "Through literature [students] acquire not so much additional *information* as additional *experience*. New understanding is conveyed to them dynamically and personally. Literature provides a *living through*, not simply *knowledge about*" (p. 38). This is crucial to understand because literature is more than just an accumulation of reading skills and strategies (Mills et al., 2004). It can also help students gain a deeper

understanding of themselves and of the people around them, and through this they can gain a newfound appreciation and sense of the world, which can help "students…to envision a future world that is more just and equitable" (Mills et al., 2004, p. 49). If I want character education to impact my students beyond a thirty-minute lesson on a particular character value, then let me give them opportunities to explore, through literature, what they can do to make the world a better place, simply by being who they are and employing the character values they already possess.

There are many important roles literature can serve as a springboard for responses and discussions of character, one of the most fundamental being that literature specifically highlights various values, which we might declare positive and admirable. Bishop (2000) claimed:

> Because literature has functioned in part as a witness to human foibles and triumphs through history, it is one foundation to which people can turn for perspectives on the kinds of decisions they ought to make, and ultimately the kind of lives they wish to lead…Whether written or oral, literature is one of the ways social groups encode their values, their mores, their behavioral expectations, their belief systems, their history.
> (p. 74)

What Bishop wrote about how literature transcends time is related to how values can be enmeshed in the pages of books. Literature is filled with the history of the past, which can help show us our greatest accomplishments, as well as our biggest mistakes. When having discussions about character with our students, I need to look to the past and use it as a potential framework to explore and discuss how the character values humans possess affect their actions and how humans shape the world around them.

One core component of character education should be the use of literature that helps students think about who they want to be and how they want to live their lives. In an earlier article by Bishop (1990a), she emphasized the importance of what students read:

> I believe that *what* those students read makes a difference…we ought to help young people to choose literature that can engage them in the kind of thinking and feeling and imagining that will help them grow into decent, contributing members of this society. Building literary experiences on books that deal with individual freedom, love, friendship, loyalty, courage, and hope, can be a powerful beginning. (p. 8)

Using literature that has themes of compassion, selflessness, humility, and related human values woven throughout its pages, whether overtly or subtlety, can serve as a solid starting point for bringing about responses and discussions of character in schools and classrooms. Literature serves as only one part of the foundation for strong character education curricula in schools, however. The ways students respond to it, individually and through discussions, is something educators must give credence to when thinking about how to frame and integrate character education into schools.

Readers' Responses

The second component of effective character education I propose is readers' responses. An important aspect of any discussion of literature is one's response to it. Readers can have individual and very personal responses to literature and can also talk about what they are reading with other people, which gives them opportunities to build upon and elaborate on what they are thinking and feeling. Often times in schools, when students are beginning to read, they tend to read for the purpose of finding the facts or specific meanings within texts (McCormick, 1991, p. 136). This often persists throughout many students' school careers. Rosenblatt (1995) wrote:

In many cases there is an unbridged gulf between anything the student might actually feel

about the book and what the teacher, from the point of view of accepted critical attitudes

and his adult sense of life, thinks the pupil should notice. This often leads the student to

consider literature something remote from his own present concerns and needs. (p. 59)

Instead of students reading and responding in authentic ways, they are responding to texts in

ways they feel their teachers want them to respond. Using literature in the school curricula,

including character education, is crucial and has the potential to help students learn and grow in

extraordinary ways, but if teachers do not allow space for initial student responses that are

untainted by teachers' points of views, then educators are undermining the strength of literature

and students' responses to it.

Fortunately, there is a way students' responses to literature can be more authentic, and

this can be done through Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory, which supports the idea that the

meaning readers make from reading texts does not lie solely within the text or within the readers.

"Meaning emerges as the reader carries on a give-and-take with the signs on the page…the two-

way, reciprocal relation explains why meaning is not 'in' the text or 'in' the reader. Both reader

and text are essential to the transactional process of making meaning" (Rosenblatt, 1995, pp. 26-

27). Rosenblatt's theory is important in talking about response to literature because it supports

the idea that discovering hidden facts within the text is not a true representation of making

meaning of a text, and readers' own minds and experiences are not going to fully make meaning

of a text. There needs to be both, and emphasizing the importance of both the reader and the text

can help teachers provide opportunities for authentic responses to the text, in which students are

able to learn and draw from the text what they read and understand instead of solely what the

teacher wants them to learn. If one of the ways character education is to be taught is through the

use of children's literature and the responses that ensue from reading it, then gaining an understanding Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory is an important part of this process.

Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory alludes to the importance of creating a student-centered learning environment in the classroom, rather than a teacher-centered environment. As C. S. Pierce says about schools, they must shift from "institutions for teaching" into "institutions for learning" (as cited in Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 125). This shift starts with the mindset of the teacher. When speaking of character education, students should be given opportunities to explore character values they see in texts, instead of the teacher always imposing or pointing out which values they should see and reflect upon throughout and after their reading. This shift helps lead character education away from didacticism toward authentic transactions with texts.

Drawing upon Rosenblatt, Mills et al. (2004) discussed a K-5 magnet school rooted in practicing reading through Rosenblatt's transactional theory. The researchers discussed the importance of conversation in making meaning in the reading process and how this can, ultimately, help students become contributing members of a democratic society. As Mills et al. made a point to say, in a classroom, all the children may read the same text and comprehend it similarly, but their reactions and the meaning they create from it will be more personal because they each bring their own experiences and influences to their reading of the text. Mills et al. continued to note that by acknowledging and celebrating multiple interpretations of the text, students have the freedom to think and refine what and how they read and how they create meaning from texts.

Allowing for multiple interpretations is a necessary part if students are going to read texts authentically. However, Rosenblatt also believed that there still needs to be guidance in helping children interpret texts and draw meaning from these same texts. While educators should

encourage students to bring their life experiences to their reading of texts, it is also important that they have guidance in their interpretations so they do not ignore what is written in the text or "[introduce] irrelevant or exaggerated responses" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 268). This is an important consideration in thinking about character education because while there is diversity in how educators think about character and character values, there are is still the potential for some responses to the literature that opens up discussions of character and values to be more appropriate than others.

Teachers, however, must be very careful to balance this guidance and their own interpretations so as not to impose their ideas on their students—intentionally or otherwise. If not, teachers can very easily (mis)use literature to foster character through didacticism. Rosenblatt (1995) clearly highlighted that values are present in the texts we read through the choices characters make and discussed how readers are forced to look at their own values based off of those in the texts and consider how they support or reject those values in and for their own lives. Through reading these texts in personal ways, students are able to explore and clarify their values and think about the choices they make without didacticism from the teacher (Rosenblatt, 1995). When thinking about responses to character values in literature, anything that is truly worth learning and has the potential to profoundly impact one's life and one's growth are those things that were not forced or imposed upon a person. Therefore, teachers can guide their students and find ways to foster their character development, but ultimately, if they want their students to take ownership and emulate various positive character values, even when nobody is watching them, they need to give their students opportunities to explore, through literature, what those character values mean to them without forcing them to think about these values in a

uniform way. These opportunities can be given through making space for students'

individual/personal responses to texts and through communal discussions in classrooms.

Rosenblatt not only believed in the importance of individuals' responses to literature, but

she also emphasized the value in creating a community of readers. She argued that readers can

gain insight and inform and enhance their responses to texts based off what they learn from other

people's transactions with the text (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994). Students need to better understand

who they are and how their lives have shaped them. This offers them extended insights into texts

that others might not have, and they also can learn from their peers based off of their life

experiences. Knowing they each have something unique to bring and offer to the text potentially

adds to the depth and the richness of the discussions that happens surrounding literature.

A core aspect of having discussions and building a community of readers who can freely

exchange ideas is the necessity of dialogue between and among all members of a classroom.

Möller (2008) discusses how one of the tools we use to make meaning from literature is through

the use of dialogue because by engaging in verbal dialogue with other people we are able to give

shape to our thoughts and clarify our own processes for making meaning. Dialogue is a

fundamental ingredient in giving our students opportunities to respond to literature and clarify

their own beliefs and ideas about what it means to be someone of good character. Students

should not be limited to only hearing the thoughts and views of their teachers. They should be

exposed to the thoughts and opinions of everyone in their classroom's community of readers. "If

readers limit the voices to which they will listen, they limit the intensity of their response to

literature, to themselves, to their fellow humans, and to their world" (p. 167). Therefore, it is

imperative that in discussions of literature, especially those related to character education,

teachers are "not dictating the response, but providing space for a deeper understanding to be

evoked through the social dialogue in the group" (p. 177). Character education should be grounded in this type of social dialogue, and it is through creating a community of readers, dialogue, and opportunities for personal transactions with the text that teachers help students to feel what they have to say and who they are as people is "worthy of consideration" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 164).

Teachers' Roles Within the Classroom Community

Without students' feeling like they are valued members of the classroom community and that what they have to say matters, the types of responses teachers hope to evoke within their students and the discussions they hope to have within their classrooms about literature and character are compromised because students feel the sole authority in the classroom is the teacher. This leads to the third component of strong character education programs: teachers' roles within the classroom community. One of the main roles teachers have in the classroom is to teach the curriculum to their students. O'Sullivan (2004) discussed what role schools should take in promoting character education within their curricula. She most emphasized the "inevitability for character education in schools" (p. 641). Her argument was "that the literature students read will instill character traits in them unconsciously, even if these are never discussed or addressed directly in the classroom…[Therefore], schools would be wise to intentionally shape this development toward good by consciously using the existing curriculum for character education" (p. 641). This can be done explicitly in the ways teachers select the children's literature they wish to use to bring about discussions of character and foster character in their students.

There are many reasons teachers select books to read to their students, especially books related to character education. O'Sullivan (2004) listed four criteria for choosing books for character education: "1) Well-written books containing moral dilemmas; 2) Books with enough

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depth to allow moving beyond literal comprehension; 3) Books with admirable but believable characters about the same age as students; and 4) Books across a wide range of cultures and with both boys and girls as lead characters" (p. 641). Helterbran (2009) also created a list of criteria for how to select books that are grounded in character education, which includes 1) children from a variety of diverse backgrounds, cultures, religious beliefs, races, ethnicities, etc. as the main characters; 2) the characters in the book and the children in the classroom are of similar ages; 3) the text is relatable, realistic, and gives opportunities for children to make connections with the story; and 4) the story presents moral dilemmas, admirable character values, and where doing the right thing is encouraged. Many of the criteria listed by these two authors overlap. Both authors believe that children's literature can be used to help foster character in students, and in carefully thinking about the books used to do this, teachers are able to make these connections to moral dilemmas and character values more explicit in their teaching instruction.

Selecting books carefully also urges teachers to find and use books that provide windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990b) for their students. Bishop wrote:

> Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books. (p. ix)

Through offering books where students see themselves, other people, and can use literature to experience the world around them, teachers are validating their students' lives and experiences and encouraging them to learn about and appreciate those lives that may be different from their own. If literature is going to be used as a vehicle for character education instruction, then it is important that the values being discussed are reflective of all students' lives and not only the dominant select few within the classroom.

Though there is a need for teachers to be conscientious about the books they select to support discussion of values with their students and to foster character in their students, this does not eliminate the need for reading for one's own personal enjoyment, even if there is not an explicit discussion or awareness of character values or moral dilemmas. Instead, teachers being intentional about the ways they use the curriculum is to make students and themselves more self-aware of the texts they are choosing and why they are choosing them over others. The criteria of these authors are not necessarily comprehensive and exhaustive lists of selecting books for character education nor should they be used without any other knowledge and information that could inform teachers' instruction. These criteria simply help give teachers a framework for how to look at and use children's literature in authentic ways that account for the universality and diversity of humanity. No matter how teachers choose texts to share with their students and to help spur discussion, their goal should be to use books in non-didactic ways that help foster critical thinking of morals and values in multifaceted, inclusive ways without "[dictating] a specific discussion focus" (Möller, 2012, p. 25), moralizing, and/or projecting their own beliefs onto their students. This does not mean, however, that teachers cannot share their own beliefs as part of the dialogue happening within the classroom. Rather, it means teachers need to find ways to share their own beliefs without those dominating their students and/or forcing them to believe

what the teacher believes. Both teachers and their students can encourage each other to look at an idea or an issue from multiple perspectives, but this does not necessarily mean all views are equally as good, which gives teachers the opportunity to intervene in discussions and address biases, prejudices, etc. that may arise from certain viewpoints being held. While finding this balance poses a challenge at times, there are ways teachers can frame discussions of character to help them achieve this goal.

Linkins et al. (2015) discussed how character education can be framed through a prescriptive or a descriptive lens. They argued that character is not something to be put into a person (prescriptive) but is something already there to be cultivated and grown (descriptive). Linkins et al. specifically drew on the Values in Action (VIA) Classification, which emphasizes a strengths-based approach to character education. "Within the context of this richer, more nuanced definition of positive character, the goal of character education is to help students *reveal and effectively engage their unique constellations of character strengths*" (p. 65). By framing character education in this way, there is no one correct set of character values that need to be taught to students because the character values being emphasized already reside in students' strengths. While this may be a more complex way to think about and frame character education, it will, ultimately, be more beneficial to students. By helping students to identify their strengths of character and having discussions about their strengths, character values will be more internalized and understood among students, and they can make the world a better place, simply by using their strengths and being who they are. There may be times, however, when teachers and their students do not necessarily agree with each other or there are disagreements among students about what should be valued. I believe this is not only alright, but to be anticipated and

embraced because through multiple perspectives, albeit challenging at times, teachers and students can learn to develop respect for those who do not necessarily share their beliefs.

Edgington (2002) suggested ways character education can be framed within the classroom community. He discussed four approaches or frameworks that can be used to integrate character education discussions into the classroom through the use of children's literature. Each of these approaches—values inculcation, values clarification, values analysis, and moral reasoning—has a purpose and the potential to help teachers frame discussions of character through children's literature. Values inculcation is how most schools frame character education instruction with it being more driven by teacher-centered instruction, and it being based on an already chosen set of values (Edgington, 2002). The other three frameworks move away from this in that learning is more driven by students, their beliefs, their values, their analyses, and their reasoning. Discussion is more open-ended and teachers act as guides in helping students think about and refine what they believe about their values and how their values compare to society's values. Edgington claimed that the goal is not for the teacher to decide whether students are correct or incorrect in their beliefs but, rather, to help them reason, clarify, and/or analyze their beliefs.

Within these frameworks, it is possible for teachers to set the stage for rich discussions of literature that give way to an appreciation of diverse opinions, perceptive thinking about character values, and opportunities to help cultivate character in students and having them cultivate it within themselves too. If teachers want students to learn about character in a way that is "authentic, meaningful, and relevant" (Edgington, 2002, p. 116) to their lives, discussions must be more than just having teachers ask questions about potential values hidden in children's

literature; rather, discussions should be a platform to think about character deeply and how it can be applied to our lives, both in school and beyond.

These approaches and frameworks to character education may seem elaborate to some teachers. However, teachers can frame discussions about character in simpler ways too—namely through the questions they ask their students. Sipe (2008) wrote about the importance of teacher questions in literary discussions as a tool to help to direct and guide the conversation. Through his work and research with teachers and their students, he discovered five main types of questions teachers asked during their read-alouds with students: invitations, encouragements, probes, predicting questions, and factual questions (Sipe, 2008). All question types, with the exception of factual questions, were used to help prompt students to continue talking, elaborating, reflecting, predicting, interpreting, and clarifying their thinking (Sipe, 2008). If teachers want to engage students in discussions of character that allow them to explore their thinking and understanding of what they are reading and learning, then teachers should be cognizant of the types of questions they are asking. There needs to be fewer factual questions— those questions to which the teacher already knows the answer (Sipe, 2008)—and more questions like the other four Sipe discussed.

If teachers can ask questions that are more open-ended in nature, then the questions they ask have the potential to help students draw their own understandings and conclusions from texts, instead of trying to uncover what the teacher is thinking (Sipe, 2008). If discussions of what it means to have character and to emulate character values are going to truly make an impact in students' lives, then teachers need to make sure they are asking and framing questions that remind and reassure students that there is more than one way to do the right thing. There is no one correct answer to what it means to have good, admirable character and how teachers

frame discussions of character can help reaffirm this. In addition to this, it is not simply the questions teachers ask or the frameworks they use that are important in engaging students in discussion, but it is also the roles teachers take in discussions that make an impact too.

Often times it seems that teachers get so wrapped up in their role as educators that they forget one fundamental and significant aspect of their being—their own humanness. Rosenblatt (1995) claimed, "The essential thing, [the teacher] knows, is to be a complete human being in his relations with his students—bringing to bear in his work with them all the sensitivities that he would bring to bear in his relations with people outside the classroom" (p. 198). There is so much teachers want to their students or have to teach because of curriculum and standards. However, teachers should be aware they are simply people teaching younger people, and this should be the starting point from which their teaching instruction and discussions stem. If teachers are human beings first and then teachers second, this also helps them to be both a teacher and a reader (Galda & Beach, 2001). How can teachers expect authentic responses from their students and an active process of meaning-making, if they often times forget they, too, are readers and have their own responses and interpretations of texts? If teachers forget that they, too, are people and readers, then so much of the richness in discussions of character is diminished because it appears as if the lives of teachers are not relatable to students' lives and that only the opinions and views of the teacher are valued and important.

Building from this foundation of humanness, teachers can take multiple roles in discussions with their students. In his book, *Storytime*, Sipe (2008) began by defining scaffolding, and while his definition of scaffolding is multilayered, the two aspects I think are most important to note are 1) teachers can play multiple different roles in discussion and 2) making meaning out of the text is a shared process between the teacher and the students. These

roles include reading the text, managing students, encouraging students, asking students to clarify their thinking, probing students for extended responses, wondering and speculating about the text as fellow participants, and extending and refining students thoughts, namely through the use of teachable moments (Sipe, 2008). Many of these roles in discussions are similar to the types of questions teachers ask their students. In none of these roles, though, does Sipe suggest that teachers should be the sole voice in discussions of texts. Instead, these roles are designed to help teachers take a step back and get their students to step up and be active participants in their thinking and learning, and it is through these roles that both teachers and students can share in the process of making meaning of texts.

Möller (2012) discussed her research and experience with a group of students in their discussions of texts in literature circles, in which she was also a member of the group. She concluded, "We must find meaningful ways to prompt reflection when aspects of the discussions require immediate attention, while simultaneously taking care not to overshadow students' dialogue" (p. 34). In an earlier piece written about the same group of students, she wrote, "In our literary transactions, the students had the freedom to explore their agendas but could also rely on me…Teachers can help focus on students' inquiries and support multilayered reflection on society and self without taking over discussion" (Möller, 2002, p. 476). Möller brought an important awareness of the roles of teachers in discussions. Her point was not that teachers are to be eliminated from discussions; rather, they take strategic roles in discussions. They give space for their students to think and inquire, yet they are still there if their students need their support. They are there to act as a fellow reader, thinker, and participant in the discussion without overpowering or undercutting their students' responses. Both Sipe (2008) and Möller offered keen insight into the various roles teachers can assume in class discussions of texts. These roles

are important to consider when thinking about how to make the discussions surrounding

character and values impactful and rooted in students' thinking instead of only the teachers'

thinking.

Ultimately, the type of classroom community the teacher creates is going to be the

foundation for how everything else is done in the classroom, the ways teachers engage their

students in discussion, how intentional they are about using the curriculum, and how much of a

positive impact character education is going to have on the growth and development of their

students. Some of Sipe's (2008) most significant claims include how children will be more prone

to take risks when they feel their teachers have created an environment of acceptance and

encouragement. He argued that teachers could scaffold by modeling what it looked like to be

respectful of other people's opinions and to give everyone an opportunity to contribute to the

conversation. Teachers can scaffold by asking questions that do not always have predetermined

answers but, instead, are open-ended, which are meant to help prompt further discussion and

push students "to examine aspects of the story that may not have otherwise been explored" (p.

211). Another relevant point by Sipe is this:

> If children believe that what they bring with them is valued by the teacher, they can feel
>
> free to apply whatever they know to the making of literary meaning, and can develop
>
> sophisticated ways of talking about what they read. In the social milieu of a readaloud,
>
> they also learn how meaning can be constructed in collaboration with others, peers as
>
> well as the teacher: that they can contribute to the creation of knowledge, not as passive
>
> recipients of knowledge from the teacher. (p. 223)

It is important that teachers help students feel safe and valued so they can take ownership of their

learning and apply it to their lives. Looking at each of these ideas about the roles teachers take

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within the classroom community is critical in a discussion about the role children's literature can play in character education. By teachers assuming various roles within discussions, framing discussions in strategic ways, creating an encouraging classroom community, and scaffolding and questioning in a variety of ways, they can help their students gain a deeper and better understanding of what they are reading. In addition to this, teachers can also help open up opportunities for critical and diverse thinking in meaning-making of literature and/or other texts, which is significant if we want character education to be worthwhile, authentic, and long-lasting instead of shallow, irrelevant, and short-term.

Conclusion

Character education is often included in schools' curricula and for many different purposes. Unfortunately, not all ways of doing character education are of equal positive impact and value. Through analyzing the use of children's literature, readers' response, and the roles of teachers within the classroom community, I sought to make explicit connections between these three components of what I believe can serve as a strong and grounded framework for how teachers do character education in schools. I want to conclude my discussion of this framework for character education by using the words of Bishop (1990b):

> Those of us who are children's literature enthusiasts tend to be somewhat idealistic, believing that some book, some story, some poem can speak to each individual child, and that if we have the time and resources, we can find that book and help to change that child's life, if only for a brief time, and only for a tiny bit. On the other hand, we are realistic enough to know that literature, no matter how powerful, has its limits. It won't take the homeless off our streets; it won't feed the starving of the world…It could, however, help us to understand each other better by helping to change our attitudes

towards difference. When there are enough books available that can act as both mirrors

and windows for all our children, they will see that we can celebrate both our differences

and our similarities, because together they are what make us all human. (p. xi)

Children's literature has the power to change lives and deeply impact the ways in which we think

about the world around us because, as Harris (1990) wrote, "Written words sometimes have a

great power, and we should never underestimate their effects on children" (p.538). This is why I

believe it is a cornerstone for character education curricula in our schools. I also, know, however,

that literature by itself does not necessarily prompt children to enjoy what they are reading or

glean insights into the complexity of character values and the multifaceted nature of what it

means to be someone of good character. Through their responses to literature and the roles

teachers take within their classroom communities, these other two cornerstones have the

potential to enhance the children's literature being used and read to help foster character in our

students. These three components of effective character education can deeply impact the extent

to which students think critically about what they are learning and whether character education

has the potential to impact them when they walk outside of the four walls of their school

building.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON CHARACTER EDUCATION

Character education is an often-discussed topic within the field of education in the United States (Beachum, McCray, Yawn, & Obiakor, 2013; Chang & Muñoz, 2006; Davis; 2003; Edgington, 2002; Leming, 2000; Milson & Mehlig, 2002; Was, Woltz, & Drew, 2006) and has been a topic of discussion for centuries (Bryan, 2005; Freeman, 2014; Helterbran, 2009; Milson & Mehlig, 2002; Young, Hadaway, & Ward, 2013). Over the years, its importance and emphasis within the teaching instruction and pedagogy of schools has moved in and out of favor because of emphasis placed on academic learning (Bryan, 2005). In the 21st century, however, some of this focus on academics has been transferred over to character education (Bryan, 2005), which is now even a mandate for many schools (Character.org, 2014; Edgington, 2002; Nickell & Field, 2001; O'Sullivan, 2004; Was et al., 2006). According to Character.org (n.d.b), 18 states mandate character education, 18 states encourage it, 7 states support it without legislation, and 8 states (including the District of Columbia) do not have legislation specifically regarding character education. Debating whether character education is important, however, is not the focus of the research presented in this chapter. Since it is required in many school districts, my focus is on what it is, how we do it, and the attitudes and outcomes that result from character education instruction. These are the questions that need to be considered in order to support effective character education in schools. Educators need to discover ways to help develop and nurture students' character in deep and meaningful ways.

While character education is clearly being emphasized in schools, an ever-increasing focus is being placed on standardized, high-stakes testing to meet national standards. A study by the Center for American Progress sought to discover just how much time K-12 students spend

taking tests (Lazarín, 2014). This research showed that while less than 2% of time is spent on the actual taking of tests, it is the testing culture that poses the biggest problems for schools. Lazarín concluded that some of the tests given are redundant, do not measure what they intend, or are simply unnecessary. In addition, Lazarín noted that something harder to measure is the amount of test preparation that goes into helping students prepare for taking tests, which places additional emphasis and time on testing students. Another recent study of K-12 students by the Council of the Great City Schools (Hart, Casserly, Uzzell, Palacios, Corcoram, & Spurgeon, 2015) reaffirmed the earlier research of the Center for American Progress. Hart et al. concluded that while the average amount of time students actually take tests was less than 3% of the school year, this number varied by state, district, and grade level of the students, and many of the tests given were redundant in nature. "This is not a large portion of a school system's total instructional time. However, in practice…the total can eat into teachers' and students' time, particularly if one takes into account the time necessary to administer tests and prepare for them" (Hart et al., 2015, pp. 83-84). This testing culture in schools is an important consideration when thinking about integration of character education into the teaching pedagogy of schools and individual classrooms because it helps give educators a framework from which to begin thinking about the best, most effective ways to include character education in their instruction, even in the midst of time pressures and other responsibilities they have.

With the current focus of the American education system predominantly on the Common Core State Standards and standardized testing, many schools and teachers are being pushed to focus primarily on the academic success and growth of their students. While academic growth is necessary and important, students are more than a percentage or test score. They are whole persons, with their intellect being one part of who they are and what they need to contribute to

society. Along with academics, schools and teachers have a role in addressing the character development of students. This aspect is emphasized, for example, in school-sanctioned character education and/or anti-bullying programs. I am interested in how character education is defined, structured, and implemented within teachers' classrooms. Teachers can aid in the growth of their students not only academically but socially and emotionally as well. Therefore, I want to discover how teachers choose to engage their students in character education to aid in their students' character development—whether through the implementation of character education programs or through other instructional and interpersonal choices they make in their classrooms. Questions that guided my literature review include: What is character education? What values are emphasized within it? How do teachers engage students in character education in the classroom, with an emphasis on their use of literature as a vehicle for character education instruction? How self-efficacious are teachers towards character education? How do they see character education affect their students, and overall, why is it important?

When I initially started searching for research related to this topic, I focused the majority of my search on education databases (e.g., Academic OneFile, Education Full Text, ERIC) through the University of Illinois library. Most of the sources I used, with the exception of three, are peer-reviewed articles from academic journals (e.g., *The Journal of Educational Research*, *International Journal of Social Education*, *The Social Studies*, *Journal of Moral Education*, etc.), and all of my sources, with the exception of one article (which was published in 1997), were published between the years of 2000 and 2015. I limited my search to this date range and excluded most articles that fell outside of this range because I wanted the most recent and pertinent information and research related to the current climate of education in the United States. With the exception of a few sources, I also excluded articles that were not peer-reviewed

because I wanted my research to be of high and reliable quality. Any potential biases in my search strategy may include that none of my resources argue against character education and many of my sources come from education types of journals.

This review of the research is divided into four main sections with a discussion section to follow. These four sections aim to define character education and lay out some of the values emphasized in it, discuss teachers' roles within it, discuss how teachers engage their students in it, and discuss the overall importance and effect of character education. The discussion section will provide an overall synthesis of the research and discuss any gaps left in the research.

What is Character Education?

Define Character Education

Before looking at research about character education within schools, we must first define what it is and what is encompassed within it. The organizers of Character.org (2014) defined character education as "the intentional effort to develop in young people core ethical and performance values that are widely affirmed across all cultures" (p. i). They continued by noting, "Character education includes a broad range of concepts such as positive school culture, moral education, just communities, caring school communities, social-emotional learning, positive youth development, civic education, and service learning" (p. i)**.** This is an all-encompassing definition that includes a variety of aspects related to students' growth and development beyond their intellect and academic understanding. Since this definition includes much that is beyond the boundaries of school (and that are more community based) it is more all-encompassing that what I will focus on in my discussion of character education in schools below.

Young et al. (2013) defined character education as "consciously nurturing students' core ethical virtues, such as wisdom, temperance, and justice; such values are often considered basic

skills needed for productive, successful living" (p. 380). Davis (2003) claimed character

education is "any attempt a school makes to improve a student's character, that is, to make more

likely than otherwise that the student will do what she should—not simply today but for many

years to come" (p. 34). In his definition of how a student decides what s/he should do is not

clearly or explicitly defined. Nevertheless, both of these definitions suggest that character

education is not supposed to affect students solely for the present time or in one particular

setting. Character education is essential for having a long-term impact on students' lives in all

areas of their living within society.

There are two additional definitions that are important to note, specifically because they

address character education as more than a personal and individual benefit to students. Almerico

(2014) wrote:

Character education describes curriculum developed to teach children about essential

traits needed to build good character. It is a deliberate effort to develop noble character

and cultivate core values that are worthy for the individual and society as a whole…It

deals with teaching students to develop the ability to decide how to behave in an

appropriate manner in various social situations with the purpose of developing

individuals who are capable of understanding moral values and who choose to do the

right thing. (p. 2)

In all four of the definitions shared so far, values have been connected to character education.

Lickona (1997), however, disagreed with the notion of teaching values:

Character education is the deliberate effort to teach virtue. Virtues are objectively good

human qualities. They are good for the individual (they help a person lead a fulfilling

life), and they are good for the whole of human community (they enable us to live

together harmoniously and productively). Virtues, unlike "values," don't change. Justice,

honesty, and patience always have been virtues and always will be virtues. Virtues

represent objective moral standards that transcend time, culture, and individual choice.

(p. 65)

While I can see the distinction Lickona was trying to make between values and virtues, I

disagree with this distinction. I would like to believe that core virtues do not change, but

unfortunately, I do not see a society in which justice, honesty, and patience are always practiced

and/or appreciated. In my definition of character education, I will use the term values because it

is not as nuanced, is more clear-cut, and, in my experience, is a more widely used term when

talking about character in education. Needless to say, Lickona (1997) made an interesting

distinction because while values may be considered more of a personal choice, virtues could be

said to span across time, cultures, religions, and the like. Regardless of this distinction, Lickona,

just like Almerico, believed that character education is something more than just for oneself. It is

designed to help nurture values (or virtues) in students to be able to help them on a more global

scale, too.

Understanding definitions of character education is a fundamental step in any discussion

about character education. By highlighting these five definitions, educators and researchers are

given multiple perspectives on a multi-dimensional area within education. As a whole these five

definitions highlight some overarching characteristics of character education, especially its

intentionality, its universality (which accounts for diversity), and the need for it to be nurtured

rather than inculcated. The three main themes across these definitions help identify strengths

within character education. Unfortunately, while these are strengths, these three themes also pose

a challenge: How does one discern which values are universal, and how do educators teach them

in an intentional way that is not simply instilling values into students, as if values are not already within them?

Building on and extending the definitions of other researchers, I would like to provide my definition of character education and lay out my framework for discussion of character education in schools. Drawing on many of the components of the five definitions above (Almerico, 2014; Character.org, 2014; Davis, 2003; Lickona, 1997; Young et al., 2013), my claim is that character education is the deliberate and purposeful effort to nurture and cultivate values that span across diverse cultures and backgrounds, which will have a long-term impact on who children and adolescents are as individuals, how they contribute to community and society, and how they choose to do the right thing no matter what situations may arise. It should be noted that how "the right thing" is defined is an amorphous and complex issue because I do not believe it is uniform across all cultures, all people, or in all situations. Rather, the right thing is a consciously chosen thing that is decided upon once all the options are thoughtfully weighed in any given situation.

Common Values Emphasized Within Character Education

Now that I have given a working definition of character education, it is important to discuss some of the traits highlighted within character education programs in schools. By recognizing some of these traits, we can gain more insight into the types of qualities and values schools want to grow in their students. Whether character education programs have a set amount of traits per year they are trying to meet and foster, many of these programs include any combination of the following: honesty, integrity, respect, self-discipline, loyalty, dedication, citizenship, courage, perseverance, self-motivation, wisdom/knowledge, humanity, justice, temperance, transcendence, responsibility, caring, humility, hope, generosity, kindness, tolerance, trust, fairness, freedom, equality, and numerous others (Almerico, 2014; Davis, 2003;

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Rivers, 2004; Was et al., 2006; Young et al., 2013). These appear to be the traits/values/virtues/qualities that most people find to be the most admirable to try to nurture within students in schools, and because of this, we can infer that few people would argue against these character values. These values appear to be sensitive to the diverse backgrounds and cultures that comprise many of the children that go to American schools.

Summary

By investigating the definition of character education and values integrated into many character education programs, we are better able to understand what it is and to then begin to ask harder questions about how it can fit into students' schooling experiences and education. Character education is multi-layered and has multiple elements included within it. The character values promoted within a thoughtful, diversity-rich approach to character education result in something worthy of teaching students—using a nurturing, rather than dogmatic, approach. In such a case, the goals would be to help students become better individuals, who can add positively to society and who do not just think about doing the right thing but want to and choose to do the right thing (Almerico, 2014). One of the challenges, and simultaneously also one of the gaps in the research, is how these particular values are selected to be highlighted as compared to other values and whether these are teacher-selected values or if students also had a voice in choosing these values (Lake, 2011). Another gap in the research is studying the diverse range of backgrounds of students and the role those play in character education. These are important questions to consider because if character education is going to be an integral part of education, then we need to ask ourselves what we expect our students to take away from their character education learning experiences.

Teachers in Character Education

A fundamental component in the implementation of character education programs in schools is the teacher (Helterbran, 2009; Lickona, 1997). Without teachers' commitment and support, many character education programs would be fruitless endeavors. Teachers introduce, reaffirm and reiterate the goals of these programs. Therefore, recognizing the roles of teachers within character education programs and their impact on the overall of character education in schools is essential.

Teachers' Roles Within Character Education

Helterbran (2009) discussed the role of the teacher in character education. She explained that character education, at its core, is something learned through the words and actions of other people, and teachers are the role models for their students to help show them how to do this and how to be a person of good and strong character. Helterbran drew from the research of Milson and Mehlig (2002), who studied the roles of teachers in character education:

> They [teachers] are called upon to serve as positive role models, to seize opportunities to reflect on moral issues within the context of the curriculum, to create a moral classroom climate, and to provide students with opportunities outside of the classroom to practice good character through service programs, clubs, and peer tutoring. (p. 47)

Without teachers dedicated to creating the type of environment where character is valued and where students can learn what it means to be a person of good character, then character education would not thrive. Teachers are with their students on a day-to-day basis, and it is their relationship with their students and the community of (and beyond) their classroom that is going to be the key to whether character education flourishes or is stifled.

Lickona (1997) explored the roles of teachers in character education in even greater depth. In his research, Lickona listed nine roles of teachers within a comprehensive approach to character education. He was trying to gain insight into what teachers could do when everyone in the school, in addition to parents and the community, were striving to affect the character of the students in schools. Two important points stand out in Lickona's study. The first is the ways teachers were supposed to help their students not only think about character education but also care about it and, therefore, to do something with what they are learning related to what it means to be someone with good character. The second is how the teacher served "as caregiver, moral model, and moral mentor." (p. 66). Lickona explained further that "the quality of a teacher's relationships with students is the foundation of everything else a teacher may wish to do in character education" (p. 66).

Both Helterbran (2009) and Lickona (1997) offered important insights into the roles of teachers within character education, with the greatest emphasis on teachers' relationships with their students. What would make this work stronger would be empirical evidence of how teachers, who take on these roles, affect their students' character development and whether this truly does make a positive impact in their learning of character values. Although, the authors offered no empirical data to back up their claims, one can still envision the potential of what could happen when teachers place themselves in these roles within their individual classrooms. Without strong, firm, and trusting relationships with their teachers, many students are not going to particularly care about what their teachers have to say. If teachers can build strong relationships with their students, there is a better chance for the ways the teachers act as moral beings and the examples they set for their students to have a greater impact on their students' choices and lives. This increased impact could encourage students to go beyond just knowing

what character education is and parroting the values emphasized to the point of owning the learning and embedding it into their daily lives (Lickona, 1997).

Teachers' Attitudes Toward and Self-Efficacy for Character Education

Teachers may assume various roles in order for character education to be effective in their schools and classrooms, but two essential characteristics that underlie their roles are their attitudes towards character education and their self-efficacy regarding character education instruction. Based on a survey given to 263 pre-service teachers, Beachum et al. (2013) discovered that the majority of their participants supported character education and felt it should be included in a curriculum/methods course as part of their coursework. This is an important consideration because it shows the value these pre-service teachers placed on character education. Because character education is becoming ubiquitous in schools, it is important that educators are addressing the needs of both current and future teachers who will have a role in teaching character education to their students. While Beachum et al.'s study included only pre-service teachers, additional insights could be gained by asking practicing teachers their thoughts and views on character education, their attitudes towards it, and what they would keep the same or change about it.

This point brings me to two important studies: one by Milson and Mehlig (2002) and the other by Ledford (2011). Both of these studies sought to understand and examine the self-efficacy of practicing teachers for character education. Although their research asked different questions, both studies examined the personal teaching efficacy and general teaching efficacy of teachers, which were two constructs proposed by Albert Bandura (Ledford, 2011; Milson & Mehlig, 2002). Ledford wrote,

Personal teaching efficacy (PTE) is the belief a teacher holds about his or her own

teaching effectiveness" and continued by noting that "general teaching efficacy [GTE] is

a teacher's perception that instruction/teaching can produce learning. The teacher's belief

is about the general nature of teaching as an effective means of producing learning

regardless of outside circumstances. (pp. 258-259)

Milson and Mehlig (2002) discovered through a survey of 254 certified elementary

school teachers that overall their self-efficacy was high for both PTE and GTE. It can be inferred

that many teachers believe in their personal ability to affect change in their students, but they

also believe that teachers can do so generally too. Ledford (2011), on the other hand, looked at

the PTE and GTE of teachers across elementary, middle, and high school levels. She discovered

that teachers with even a minimal amount of university training in character education had higher

levels of PTE and GTE, and elementary school teachers had the highest levels of self-efficacy

with middle school and high school teachers following, respectively. Ledford's research

reaffirmed that many elementary school teachers have high levels of self-efficacy when it comes

to character education instruction and is consistent with the research by Milson and Mehlig

(2002). It also shows that teacher preparation programs need to help middle and high school

teachers gather the resources and the confidence they need to teach character education.

The results from both of these studies are important because, ultimately, teachers are the

ones who are implementing character education at the classroom level, so understanding what

impacts their confidence levels when teaching it is essential. It would have been more helpful

had these studies included interviews with teachers. This could have provided deeper and more

comprehensive information, such as the teachers' fidelity in teaching character education and the

reasons for their emphasis of specific values over others. The biggest limitation of these studies,

which Ledford (2011) acknowledged, is that the implications are more geared toward teacher educators and universities, as opposed to practicing teachers, in helping to prepare pre-service teachers for what to expect when teaching character education.

Summary

Ultimately, it would be challenging to discuss character education without looking at how teachers fit into it because they are the ones helping to cultivate character values in their students on a daily basis and each time they interact with their students. By taking a more in-depth look at teachers in character education, it is clear that there are multiple roles they can take, but everything must start from a foundation of trust, as will be discussed in more depth below and expanded upon in my data chapters. Many teachers also appear to be advocates of character education and believe they are able to teach it, which is vital if they are going to effectively engage their students in character education instruction.

Student Engagement in Character Education

The teacher's role in character education is an important point to consider, but ultimately, character education is for the student. Therefore, it is important to consider the best ways to engage students in these programs. While there may be multiple ways to engage students in character education instruction, I am specifically focusing on one way that is key to my personal interest and research focus, which is how children's literature can be used to help teach the values being promoted within character education programs. Much research (Almerico, 2014; Bryan, 2005; Edgington, 2002; Freeman, 2014; Helterbran, 2009; Leming, 2000; Lintner; 2011; Young, 2013) also concludes that children's literature is an important tool to use in fostering character in our students.

There are numerous reasons teachers may choose to integrate children's literature into their teaching instruction. Edgington (2002) thought the best reason literature can be used to help children learn about character values is because of its relevance to their lives and argued that it can be used across any and all grade levels. In his research, the question is not whether there is enough quality literature that can be used to help teach character; rather, the question is how to use the literature to help frame character education instruction. To try to answer this question, he proposed four different approaches to character education, ranging from more teacher-centered discussions to more student-centered discussions. It would be beneficial to do research on each approach with a group of students and see if any of the approaches are more valuable in discussions of character. Regardless of the approach, however, literature can be used to help students think and learn about character values. Edgington emphasized that "when literature is coupled with practical modes of values instruction, it provides a more powerful mode of character education than a simplistic 'trait-of-the-week' strategy" (p. 115). Edgington maintained that in order for character education instruction to be effective, teachers must be dedicated to engaging students in ways that will captivate their attention and push them to want to learn and discover more about character values and how these values relate to their lives.

Young et al. (2013) also agreed that literature could be used to engage students in character education instruction, specifically through the use of international children's literature. These researchers discussed how different books can be used to teach various virtues and argued that the power in using international literature is in the content of what students read and the discussions that can result from it: "Children…see characters whose lives are both very different and similar to their own. They recognize how the same virtues and character traits affect and inform their reasoning, decisions, and problem solving—and determine who they are (p. 385).

The relevance of literature presented by Young et al. is similar to what Edgington (2002) discussed about the importance of using children's literature to help nurture character values within students. Young et al. (2013) pointed out that teachers might categorize a book as emphasizing one virtue differently than their students understood or lived that virtue, but noted that this diversity is an important part of the process. They stressed that teachers should be open to hearing what their students have to say about character virtues because this helps reiterate that diversity in thinking and learning about character is encouraged.

Helterbran (2009) emphasized the use of literature in similar ways to Young et al. (2013). Although, Helterbran (2009) did not specifically emphasize the use of international children's literature, she maintained that by using literature, children are able to gain more of a global awareness of humanity. "Children must see the *sameness* in humankind, but understand that differences do exist and that they add richness and texture to the human experience" (p. 71). Based on this belief of children's literature, Helterbran listed criteria, as I discussed earlier in my thesis, for the types of books that should be used within character education instruction (i.e., culture, gender, ethnicity, race, religion, age of main character, and criteria related to character realism, storyline, character traits, and the potential for emotional attachment). By using books that meet these criteria, teachers can design focused questions that help children think deeply about the content of books and how various character values influence the characters' decisions in these books (Helterbran, 2009). Similar to Young et al. (2013), Helterbran (2009) reminded educators that not all children are going to interpret character values in exactly the same ways because different cultures and groups of people interpret values differently based on who they are and where they come from in the world. Reading about this idea across the research helps reaffirm the significance and strength in allowing children to embrace their diversity and to think

critically about the values they are learning. If educators do not make room for students to do this, then they are undermining one of the purposes of character education instruction and some of the values they hope to help nurture in their students.

Lintner (2011) and Bryan (2005) took a different approach to using literature to help promote character education among students. They both look at specific types of literature to help in teaching character education. Lintner looked at how children's literature can be used to teach character education in elementary social studies classrooms, and he focused on literature that highlights children with exceptionalities (i.e., disabilities). The goal was to help students value children who are potentially different from themselves and to encourage an acceptance of those differences (Lintner, 2011). In choosing texts, Lintner asked questions of those texts to make sure they were sensitive in their portrayal and discussion of children with disabilities. Ultimately, using literature that is inclusive and that highlights children with exceptionalities can help promote rich discussions in the classroom among teachers and their students about what it means to be someone of good, strong character. Bryan (2005), on the other hand, focused on the use of fairy tales to help promote a myriad of character values. Her argument was that fairy tales have been around for many years, and "often leave children better off ethically than they were before they heard or read them" (p. 4). There is a clear distinction between good and evil and what is right and wrong, and there is a clear display of the values and virtues that the main characters in fairy tales possess. Trousdale (1989) also researched children's responses to fairy tales. She claimed:

> Using fairy tales to teach particular moral lessons is not a wise practice either inside or
> outside the classroom. Expecting children to derive particular morals from the tales will
> prove likely to be an exercise in frustration and confusion, for both children and adults.

Opportunity to reflect on the story and to come to some insight or conclusion is certainly

beneficial, but it can be better done in a forum which allows open-ended discussion. In

such a setting, children's attempts to bring a tale into personal significance may occur

with out fear of rejection or criticism. (p. 45)

While Trousdale believed that fairy tales could help enrich the lives of children, she argued for

the importance of making sure children have the space to make meaning from the fairy tales they

read rather than adults imposing a moral or a lesson from the reading onto children. Across the

studies, it would have been beneficial to see how children learn about character values from

multiple different genres of literature versus just one specific facet (e.g., fairy tales or literature

about children with disabilities) of literature. Unfortunately, neither Lintner, Bryan, nor

Trousdale had empirical research showing this type of comparison.

Freeman (2014) studied how character education and children's literature could help

teach preschool-aged children about bullying behaviors. The results of her twelve-week study

showed that her participating preschool-aged children gained a greater understanding of bullying

behaviors and of character through the process of reading children's literature (or having it read

to them) and doing activities to go along with these books. Her research showed that literature

has the potential to help teach very young children about good character and positive and

negative behaviors.

Not only are there several studies documenting the power of children's literature to help

build and nurture awareness of character values, but two specific character education programs I

found in the research included children's literature as part of the curricula. Leming (2000)

evaluated a literature-based character education program out of the Heartwood Institute and

discussed how this program affected students' knowledge of character and prompts them to take

action. Almerico (2014) believed so much in the power of children's literature in character education that she took the steps to start designing her own K-6 literature-based character education program. She chose eleven character traits she wanted to emphasize and created high-quality text sets of published children's literature to go with each character trait. One of her goals was for character education to be an organic learning process alongside academic learning, which is one of the biggest motivators in using children's literature within character education. Unfortunately, the results of the research in both of these studies is limited because while Leming (2000) evaluated a literature-based program, the focus of his study is less on the literature portion of the program and more about the overall effects of the program on students. In addition to this, the character education program being designed by Almerico (2014) was still in development at the time of publication, so it is hard to know what effects the literature used within this program will have on children.

Summary

In my reading, a key quote stands out: "Children learn character traits from others—both good and bad—whether that is intended or not. To avoid leaving character education to chance, it behooves schools to actively plan for it by encouraging children's development as moral, decent persons and citizens of the world" (Helterbran, 2009, p. 73). If children can learn character, consciously or not, and I believe they can, then it is imperative that teachers are intentional in finding ways to engage their students in discussions about character. Children's literature is an excellent way to do this. Much of the research discussed above is strong in its argument for using children's literature because it pushes teachers to be conscientious about the books they choose to discuss with their students and it pushes teachers to think about the difference between attempting to instill/inculcate values in their students and actually nurturing

values in ways that get their students to critically think about what they are learning about character. Much of the research I looked at, however, is mostly focused on children in the elementary grades, and it would be advantageous to read research on character education and literature that includes children across all grade levels. Another limitation is the lack of empirical research on the overall effects of using children's literature within character education programs on students.

Literature is relevant and helps open students' eyes to the similarities and differences of the people of the world. It can also help spur deep discussions with students about what having good character means and what that looks like in their own lives and in the lives of the people around them. If educators want to engage students in these types of discussions, literature is an excellent place to start, especially because it is already an important cornerstone of many English-language arts curricula (Almerico, 2014; Bryan, 2005; Lintner, 2011; O'Sullivan, 2004).

Importance of Character Education

Delving deeper into answering the questions about how to address character education in our schools is an important undertaking. However, it is still important to discuss its overall importance, especially if it is something that is going to be part of many students' learning experiences in American schools. Lickona (1997) briefly discussed why character education is important enough for it to be included in schools. One of the points he made is that character education is important because there are many Americans who feel that the United States is in a rapid spiral downward when it comes to our ethics and morals. Many of these same people believe that is important for "the whole human community" to come together to help foster character values in children, which will hopefully affect culture as a whole too (p. 64). Schools are part of this human community, and because of this, "they can begin by making character

development their highest educational priority—the goal that underlies everything else they do" (p. 64). Regardless of whether communities or individuals agree that the U.S. is in moral decline, if schools make developing the character of their students a priority, there is no saying how this might potentially positively affect the futures of individual students and society as a whole in terms of their reflective attitude about character values.

Character.org (2014) also discussed key reasons for the importance of including active character education in schools. The site acknowledged growing concern in the United States about "ethical and academic issues" and made the case that one way to help address these concerns is through character education in schools (p. i.). As cited earlier in my thesis, a key quote from Character.org emphasizes the centrality of character education: "Educators have successfully used character education to transform their schools, improve school culture, increase achievement for all learners, develop global citizens, restore civility, prevent anti-social and unhealthy behaviors, and improve job satisfaction and retention among teachers" (p. i). There is the potential for character education to have effects beyond just developing strong and good character in our young people. "Schools with high-quality character education are places where students, teachers, and parents want to be. They are places where young people do their best work because they feel safe, appreciated, supported, and challenged by their peers and the adults around them" (p. i). Doing character education is important for many reasons, but if doing it can help make schools inviting places to be to learn and live, then just like Lickona (1997) suggested, character education can help lay the foundation for everything else schools seek to do for and within the school community.

Earlier I briefly mentioned a literature-based character education program that Leming (2000) evaluated as part of a study he did with 1st through 4th grade students to gain a deeper

understanding of students' knowledge of ethical behaviors and their desire to take action and of how the character education program affected their character development. Findings from this study indicate that, overall, this character education program had a positive impact on the program group (i.e., those students who received instruction from it) as evidenced by pre- and post-questionnaires administered to the students and teachers completion of a behavior rating scale based on their students' behavior. Even five years after this study took place, Leming discovered that many of the teachers who participated in his study were still dedicated to integrating some type of character education instruction into their teaching pedagogy and their relationships with their students. Based on these findings, it can be suggested that some type of character education instruction has the possibility of helping to increase both teacher and student awareness of character values and moral actions within a school setting. This program may not completely and automatically help grow students' character, but it does have the potential to help bring to the forefront conversations of various character values, what they are, and how they are lived out. I believe Leming could have used a better methodology in his research and in trying to answer his research questions. For example, I think much more insight could have been gleaned from this study about the effects of character education that is taught as separate lessons versus those that are embedded into the larger curriculum. In addition, in this study:

> The Heartwood curriculum consists of three kits. Each kit contains 14 illustrated children's literature trade books—two for each of the seven character attributes. The books of the curriculum feature stories from other cultures as well as some of the cultural groups in the United States with a heavy reliance on folktales, folklore and fairy tales. Only four of the 42 books in the curriculum feature white American characters. (p. 415)

While I appreciate that a diverse range of books were included in the curriculum, analyzing each book for authenticity would be important to assure a quality diverse collection. In addition, I would increase the number of trade books used for each character attribute. I would also give some flexibility in which books are used for which character traits, depending on how students respond and think about the books being read and discussed in the class.

Character education programs have proven to be important and beneficial and to make an impact, even if only in small and subtle ways. Nickell and Field (2001) helped show this through a study they did on evaluating the character education program called Kids With Character (KWC) with teachers and children in a 1st and a 4th grade class. The findings they presented indicated that this character education program had a positive impact on both teachers and students. Teachers felt that character education had the potential to make a difference in their students' character development if it was taught consistently for many years and if they, as teachers, modeled the various character values they were trying to foster in their students. Nickell and Field concluded the responses from the students involved indicated that they gained a greater, albeit still shallow, understanding, which suggests that there may be better ways to engage students in discussions about character and values (e.g., through children's literature).

Chang and Muñoz (2006) also studied a program called Project CARE, which was implemented in 3rd through 5th grade in a single district in 8 treatment schools and 8 control schools. They discovered that the schools that implemented this character education program had higher levels of a caring classroom community than those schools that did not implement this program. For both teachers and students, this program had the most effect on participants when they felt supported and when teachers trusted their students (Chang & Muñoz, 2006), which reaffirmed the idea that character education must begin with a foundation of trust among all

people within a school community. Chang and Muñoz reiterated that character education seemed to be the most effective within a school community when it was done comprehensively and on a school-wide level because there was support from all involved in the focal academic community.

Summary

Character education is important for many reasons, namely the impact it can have not just on students' character development but also within the entire school community. Studies of the above character education programs help reaffirm this idea and help show that while character education may not be an instant solution (Bryan, 2005) to the moral and ethical problems of American society, it does have the possibility to bring an awareness of character values to our students and get them thinking about how character fits into their lives. What we need to continue to do is uncover and research the best and most effective ways to engage students in character education so that its impact and importance is not overlooked in the effort to meet the academic needs of students as character education, as argued on Charater.org (2014), may, in fact, be able to enhance academic learning in our schools and classrooms.

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Discussion

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In this chapter I have shown that there are many different aspects to character education and to the goal of nurturing character values in our students. In Rivers (2004) discussion of essential characteristics of character education, he concluded by writing, "We are constantly confronted with false dichotomies…between words and deeds, facts and fictions, subject and object, ideal and real, and self and community abound" (pp. 259-260). My goal in discussing the research regarding character education has not been to create a false dichotomy between character education and academic learning; rather, my goal is to affirm that it does not need to be one or the other. I am not proposing that we swing all the way over to the side of character

education with no accountability for academic learning, but I do believe we need to give credence to character education, its importance, and its potential to deeply impact the lives of those involved in it. Through these discussions of multiple aspects of character education, hopefully, I have been able to illuminate not just that character education is important but also the importance of how we do it and the potential effects that can come from it.

As I have laid out above, character education is multifaceted and complex, and there are many definitions to describe it and many values featured within it. Teachers have many roles they can take when bringing about discussions of character in their individual classrooms, but no matter what they do, it must start from the relationships they build with their students, which come from a place of trust and understanding. Next, I looked at how children's literature can be used to engage students in character education and how this is an especially important vehicle for talking about character. Finally, I examined the overall importance of character education instruction in school communities, indicating that character education should have a place within the education experiences of students because it has the potential to positively impact their character development and who they are as individuals.

Much of the research I read indicated that character education does have an impact, but it is hard to distinguish the degree of that impact in schools. One important consideration Was et al. (2006) brought up was that much research regarding character education is short-term and most of these studies are qualitative research on limited populations, which is necessary and important, but if the field wants to gain a greater understanding of the degree of impact of character education on students' character and behaviors, it needs to do more longitudinal studies that explore change over time and maintenance with quantitative data. Much of the research I read related to character education either involved studying students, teachers, and/or schools or

it examined literature that could be used within character education programs based on specific criteria the author(s) had.

More research that could be done and prioritized regarding character education could be the effect a didactic approach to character (i.e., instilling and inculcating values) has on students versus an authentic and open-ended approach (i.e., nurturing and critically thinking about values). I read research with both approaches to character, and it would be beneficial to gain greater insight into how each of these approaches affects students' views and learning about character. A final area of research that could be done involves the role of discussions of literature in classrooms related to character. Many of the studies and much of the research I read had teacher-led discussions of character rather than student-led discussions, and I wonder if this has an impact on how students learn about character and the depth to which they understand various aspects of character and character values. Both of these areas of research could be studied quantitatively, using specific instruments to assess student character growth, or the research could be conducted qualitatively, using instruments like classroom observations, interviews with teachers to ask about their views of character growth within their students, and/or interviews with students to ask about their views of character growth within themselves. These implications for future research are what prompted me to design and carry out my own research study on character education, which resulted in my master's thesis. I will share the design of this thesis study in chapter three and move then into sharing my findings in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Based on my review of the research above, character education is an important

component of many schools' curricula. While schools and teachers assume a responsibility in

fostering students' character development, it is crucial that how they infuse character education

into classrooms is studied more closely because, as the research indicates, not all character

education programs have the same effect on students' character growth. Because character

education can be taught in various ways, I designed my thesis research study to examine

reflection on and enactment of such instruction in two actual classrooms. I conducted a

qualitative, descriptive study focused on two teachers' approaches to character education.

Through my twin case study approach, I sought to document the implementation of character

education in two classrooms, one 1st grade and one 3rd grade, in a local public school.

I selected a basic case study approach in order to collect data that would allow me to

provide a full picture of each teacher's choices in the implementation of character education. My

research was an observational field study (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). "Field studies are

defined by the *site* of the research, usually the natural habitat or customary environment of the

participants" (p. 32). I also chose a case study approach because I was "interested in insight,

discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing" (Merriam, 1998, pp. 28-29). Going

into this study, I did not have a clear or full hypothesis about character education or how I think

it could or should be done most effectively, but I did have some ideas about the importance of

relationships and community, as well as of the impact of children's literature as a vehicle of

instruction. My purpose was to gain more insight into these teachers' approaches to character

education, including how they built on and extended school district character education

mandates. The ideas I did have about what makes for quality character education as well as my background in children's literature and awareness of its benefits in schools played into my purposeful selection of these two teachers, which I will delineate more fully in sections on my participants and on my researcher background.

Drawing from Robert Stake's work, Merriam (1998) explained that case study knowledge is "more concrete" and "more contextual" (p. 31). Both of these aspects of case studies were important to me because I wanted tangible examples to draw from to inform my learning, and I wanted to take a close look at specific a specific situation in a specific context. Case study research is also beneficial because it "offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables" (p. 41). While my focus was on children's literature in character education instruction, I wanted to observe how multiple variables within a classroom and in a teachers' instruction affected character education instruction.

"Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand its readers' experiences…[and] it "can be construed as tentative hypotheses that help structure future research" (Merriam, 1998, p. 41). I wanted to look at two specific classrooms from a holistic perspective and draw from deep and extensive data. "Case study analysis is appropriate for intensive, in-depth examination of one or a few aspects of a given phenomenon" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 33). Additionally, as an educator, I want to be able to take what I learned, ask questions about it, and hopefully prompt other people to ask questions of my research in ways that directly impact classroom instructional practices in a local setting. While some "readers may think that case studies are accounts of the whole" (Merriam, 1998, p. 42), I understand case studies do not allow for larger generalizations because they are contextualized and provide a

holistic picture of a particular situation or event. My case study was also a bounded case in which "cases are selected for study because they are of particular interest given the study's purpose" (Patton, 1990, p. 53). My case was not on the two classrooms or the teacher's instruction overall. Rather my focus was on these two teachers and their teaching of character education. This was done in-depth and contextually but was focused solely on their character education instruction and not all of their instruction in the classroom.

I used purposeful sampling because "information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (Patton, 1990, p. 169). For this study, I chose two teachers on which to focus. Spending significant time in the classrooms of these two teachers allowed me to gain an in-depth picture of what character education instruction looked like in each classroom and for each teacher. I wanted to better understand how each teacher defined character education and how she engaged her students with it. My goal was not to compare the two teachers, but to offer the opportunity for my research to speak to the fact that there is no single set way to be an effective teacher of character education as well as to offer two grade level examples. There was no attempt in my data presentation or analysis to compare these two participants as educators or their approaches to character education instruction. Since there are a number of ways to engage students in character education, I specifically chose to focus on two teachers who I knew through personal experience to be strong, engaged teachers who were effective in helping students learn and who were successful in creating working classroom communities with and for their students. Both teachers were recognized by school colleagues and leaders, as well as by local university professors, as being effective teachers of academic subjects for children and for having strong classroom communities. Importantly, however, this study is not examining overall teaching effectiveness.

Rather, it is focused on the two participants' interpretations and teaching of character education. In addition, I selected teachers who valued the extensive use of children's literature in instruction because of my own interest (built through personal experience and through my reading of the research on character education) in understanding the value of children's literature in the implementation of character education instruction. In the character education research, the use of children's literature (more or less successfully) is one of the most common approaches to initiating discussion of character values. This is an area of significant interest to me as a researcher as well.

The research questions in this study include the following: 1) How do two selected teachers define and conceptualize character education? 2) What values do they highlight in character education instruction and how do they define them? 3) How do they implement character education in their teaching instruction, including how children's literature is selected and used as part of this pedagogical implementation? and 4) How do they see character education affecting their students? It is important to note that I did not enter this study assuming any particular set of character values should be the set that is dictated and that I did not have a set agenda on how I expected character education to be taught.

Setting

This study was conducted in two classrooms in Oceanvale Elementary School, a public elementary school located in a small Midwestern, urban school district. This school served diverse and traditionally underserved students, of whom over 90% live in poverty[2], through both academic and social-emotional learning. The year of my study, this school had an average class size of 20-25 students. The number of students enrolled was between 300 and 350. This school

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[2] The descriptive percentages were drawn from the school's state report card. All percentages are close approximations to protect the confidentiality of the school. Therefore, the specific school demographic report card is not cited as a reference.

served approximately 25% English Language Learners. Compared to the district as a whole, the student mobility rate was high, which often meant that because students were moving in and out of classrooms, classroom communities were always changing. Oceanvale was the only school within this district that was situated within a historically Black community in town. The racial demographic make-up of its students was approximately 60% African American, 20% Asian, 10% White, with Hispanic and multiracial students making up no more than 10% of the student population. The demographic make-up of its educators was predominately White females. Oceanvale was one of approximately ten community schools within this school district.

My impression of this school and the district in which it was situated was positive. Based on my time spent at Oceanvale, I had seen school-wide initiatives set in place to help with both academic and social-emotional learning. The class sizes in this school district at the time of my data collection were about 20 students per teacher, which allowed for a good level of individualized attention towards students and their needs. Based on my experiences working as a volunteer and through my own activities in the school related to my work as a graduate student at a local university, I observed an adequate number of student support staff so students seemed to be receiving appropriate support services to meet their academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs. Additionally, there were efforts to partner with families and the communities in the education of the children that attend the schools within this school district.

I selected Oceanvale Elementary as part of my research study because I was already known to this school through my work volunteering in and completing aspects of my graduate school coursework at this school before I began my study. I also knew this was a school dedicated to the social-emotional growth of its students and had character education initiatives

already set in place. Additionally, I knew a few of the teachers and was able to recruit two who were known for their successful instruction who agreed to participate in my research study.

Participants

For this study, I wanted to invite up to three classroom teachers to participate in my research. In the initial recruitment phase of my study, to cast the widest possible net for potential participants, I asked the principal of the school to send out an email describing my study to all faculty. She asked that those who were interested contact me. Two teachers expressed interest in my research. After an individual meeting with each, during which I offered detailed on my research approach and the specifics of my design, each agreed to be part of this study. My academic advisor and I decided that two participants were sufficient for my study goals. One participant teacher taught first grade, and the other was a third-grade teacher. Both teachers were dedicated to teaching character education and to fostering their students' character development within their individual classrooms. The focus of this study was on the teachers' choices and instructional decisions. Therefore, data collection only involved these two teachers. No data was collected on students.

Lois Carpenter

Lois had been teaching 3rd grade at Oceanvale Elementary School for five years, since she graduated from college. No longer a novice teacher, Lois was well-respected within the school and within the district as a whole. Lois was also a fellow graduate student colleague of mine at the local university. In addition to classes we had taken together, I also worked with one of her students on reading comprehension during the 2015-2016 school year. Since I already had a relationship established with this teacher and knew of her commitment to character education

and trying to meet the social-emotional needs of her students, I was thrilled when Lois responded that she would be interested in being a participant in my research study.

Lois was a teacher who hardly ever sits down behind her desk. She was either walking around the room, helping individual students, or she was sitting at a table, working with a small group of students. She did not expect complete silence in the room, but she also was able to maintain the noise level and keep students focused and on-task. During read-alouds and in class discussions, Lois was eager to have her students participate and often used long pauses to give her students space to think and respond to each other, the text, and/or her. Lois was friendly and approachable, and her students willingly and eagerly asked her questions about stuff related (or unrelated) to the topic at hand.

Lois also valued reading texts and engaging in activities that reflected the diversity of her students. A primary way she integrated the cultural backgrounds of her students into her read-alouds is through the use of picture book biographies "about inspiring people from various cultures…including Dr. King and many other civil rights leaders from our country and others." She explained, "I try to be very diverse in my selections—a mix of men/women, people from different careers/backgrounds, and [those] who are inspiring for different reasons to showcase the contributions and stories of all different kinds of people." Some of the children's literature she used—biographies or otherwise—include the following:

- *Wilma Unlimited: How Wilma Rudolph Became the World's Fastest Woman* by Kathleen Krull
- *Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* by Doreen Rappaport
- *Whoever You Are* by Mem Fox
- *Don't Laugh at Me* by Steve Seskin and Allen Shamblin

- *Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon* by Patty Lovell

- 3 books—*Zero*, *One*, and *Two*—by Kathryn Otoshi

Aside from literature and family involvement, Lois also shared some of the activities she implemented with her students to help showcase their cultural and diverse backgrounds, a few of which include having conversations, show and tell, and "letting kids [bring] things in from their culture [to] teach their classmates about something." Through talking with her students and giving them opportunities to talk and share with each other about their lives and what they value, she opened up spaces for them to learn about each other and for her to learn about them, no matter what cultural background they may come from, reaffirming the importance of a diverse community in her classroom. Additionally, Lois also involved herself in school and community events to learn more about the lives of her students.

One aspect of Oceanvale Elementary School that drew me to this school initially was the fact that it is an example of a school that has a history of a good relationship between the school and the local community of school families. The school served predominately students of color from the local neighborhood, and like most schools in the local community, employed predominantly white female teachers. Lois' classroom reflected this as well, since she was a white teacher in a classroom that, at the time of my study, had 19 students. Of these 19 students, 10 were African American and/or multiracial, 3 were White, 2 were Chinese, 1 was Ethiopian, 2 were from countries of Arab cultures, and 1 was Brazilian. Six students were English Language Learners, and about 90% of the class came from a low socio-economic background and received free and reduced school lunch. A person walking into Lois' classroom would notice students actively participating in their learning. They might be involved in a read-aloud, a class discussion, partner activities, or centers. Lois would be walking around the room, helping

students, or she would be at the kidney bean table, working with a small group of students. Her students would be focused on their work, and while they would acknowledge the guest in their classroom and be respectful, they would not completely stop what they are doing or become distracted by an additional presence in the room. Her students would be speaking kindly and respectfully towards one another, helping each other with their work as needed.

Lois' classroom was a print-rich environment. Student work hung from the walls and ceiling and self-stick notes adorned the sides of the SMARTBoard as evidence of thinking during a past read-aloud and class discussion. Anchor charts (charts usually created by Lois and the students in whole group discussions hung on the walls for student reference of basic concepts) with strong reader strategies and whole-body listening were visible and referenced often by Lois in her teaching. A classroom library and student book bins were eagerly accessed by students who demonstrated excitement at opportunities to read. Books of past read-alouds were always on display to remind students about their shared reading experiences. A wall with all the character traits of the months, with the current month was highlighted prominently.

Kathryn Wallace

Kathryn was a 1st grade teacher who has been teaching for seven years, the last four of which had been at Oceanvale Elementary School. Kathryn was known for her commitment to student learning and the community she strove to create in her classroom. Kathryn was also a fellow graduate school colleague. Since I already had a relationship established with this teacher and knew of her commitment to character education and trying to meet the social-emotional needs of her students, I was also very pleased when Kathryn agreed to become a participant in my research study.

Kathryn was a teacher who strongly focused on meeting the individual needs of all of her students, which is why she was often working with students individually or in small groups. She loved to talk to and with her students, so she often had discussions with her students. Kathryn was also passionate about children's literature, so in addition to the classroom library she had for her students, she had a bookshelf that is specifically for the books she read aloud to her students. Kathryn was firm and set boundaries, but her students knew she cared and only wanted the best for them. Kathryn also loved to tell jokes and have fun in her classroom, so there is often a lot of laughter that could be heard coming from her classroom.

Kathryn also read literature selections and engaged in activities with her students that reflected the diverse, cultural backgrounds of her students and helped create a classroom community that reflected the values of all her learners. Some of the literature selections included the following:

- *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi

- *Honey, I Love* by Eloise Greenfield

- *The Family Book* by Todd Parr

- *Big Red Lollipop* by Rukhsana Khan

- *Please, Puppy, Please* by Spike Lee and Tonya Lewis Lee

- *Please, Baby, Please* by Spike Lee and Tonya Lewis Lee

- *Black Cat* by Christopher Myers

- *The New Small Person* by Lauren Child

- Children's literature about Wangari Maathai (see "References" for specific titles)

- *Wilma Unlimited: How Wilma Rudolph Became the World's Fastest Woman* by Kathleen Krull

- *Melba and Her Big Trombone* by Katheryn Russell-Brown

- *Jazz Age Josephine: Dancer, singer--who's that, who? Why, that's MISS Josephine Baker, to you!* by Jonah Winter

Kathryn also completed activities with her students, one of which is a photography project, which she explained to me:

> The kids take digital cameras home and take pictures of their lives and we focus…and use those during our narrative writing unit at the beginning of the year. I teach narrative writing in the fall so the kids start taking those cameras home like the second week of school and they get to share all about their lives in anything they've taken pictures of.

This activity gave her students an opportunity to share anything they wanted about their lives, their cultures, their backgrounds, etc. This was an activity where her students could choose to share, through conversations and/or photographs, some of the character values that were important to them and their families.

Like Lois, Kathryn was a white teacher successfully working with her racially and linguistically diverse classroom. In Kathryn's classroom at the time of my study, there were 17 students. Of these 17 students, 1 was White, 8 were African American, 3 were African, 1 was Malayan, 1 was Korean, 1 was Vietnamese, and 2 were multiracial. Of these 17 students, there were 6 English Learners. Most, if not all, of her students came from low socio-economic backgrounds and received free and reduced school lunch. If a visitor were to walk into her classroom, that person would see students who were engaged in their learning, especially reading. Often times, there were students sitting spread out around the room with their noses in books, whispering the words to themselves or each other. One might see students participating in math or reading centers, while Kathryn was working with a small group of children at a table in

the middle of the room. A visitor would see technology being used by both Kathryn and her students across the day in ways that enriched and enhanced student learning. Kathryn's students were taught to and then trusted to self-monitor. They understood and were able to get themselves back on-task when they lost focus. Her students were respectful to each other and to guests who came into their classroom. They were eager to share with guests what they were working on and were eager to work with each other on the activities at hand.

Kathryn's classroom was also a print-rich environment. Anchor charts covered the walls, with newly created anchor charts standing by ready to be hung. Student work was showcased in the classroom and on the walls up and down the primary hall. A "Sometimes I Feel…" chart hung on the wall, often referenced by Kathryn and her students during class discussions. An extensive classroom and read-aloud library was filled with books that students eagerly chose and read to themselves or with a partner. There was always a past read-aloud book displayed for students to look at and reread themselves.

Data Collection

During my data collection, students were involved in regular instructional activities. My purpose was to document how character education was implemented and embedded into regular instruction and was not to change the teachers' instruction or encourage them try a new approach to teaching character values. Data were collected through interviews and classroom observations. I was an observant-participant (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) in that I was known to the students as a researcher, but I did not actively engage in the life of the classroom while I was observing. I came into the classrooms, sat down, and kept my engagement with the students in each classroom to a minimum.

Interviews

The first step involved conducting an initial interview with each of the participating teachers. This interview was designed to gain a greater understanding about their views and understandings of character education and how they implemented character education into their teaching instruction. Each interview was audiorecorded in addition to the field notes I took. The interview protocol is included as Appendix B. Each initial interview was held in the teacher's classroom and lasted approximately 45 minutes for each teachers.

After each classroom observation, I conducted a short debrief interview with each teacher. The debrief interview protocol is included as Appendix C. Debriefing was designed to extend the data set and clarify my observations through questions based on what was observed in the character education lessons, thereby gaining insight into why teachers made certain instructional decisions, why they chose to use the children's literature they did, why they took a particular role in class discussions, etc. These debriefing sessions were organized in much the same structure as the initial interview with both field notes and audiorecordings. I conducted four debrief interviews with Lois and three debrief interviews with Kathryn.

Classroom Observations

I also observed each teacher teach multiple separate character education lessons, ranging from 30-40 minutes in length each. Due to scheduling, I observed Lois teach four lessons and Kathryn teach three lessons. The goal of these observations was to gain a deeper understanding of their character education instruction in practice and the roles of these teachers and their students in these discussions of character and character traits. The observation guidelines/protocol is included as Appendix D. Observational field notes were written down during each observed lesson. In the field notes, I looked at how the teachers set up and framed

the character education lessons, the materials they used, the children's literature used to introduce/extend the lessons, and how the book titles they chose were used. I also noted how the teachers incorporated student work into the lesson, what artifacts they referred to on the walls that were used as part of their instruction, and how they used these artifacts to extend thinking and discussion about character education and character values. The field notes were predominately used to collect my thoughts after each data collection and to help me determine the next steps in my research study. They also helped reorient me to the temporal space of my data. They helped me when I went back through to ask questions of my data and think more deeply about the research I conducted. In addition to field notes, each of these observations was audiorecorded, with the focus being on the teachers' comments and responses and not on their students' comments and responses. Alongside each lesson, related artifacts that the teachers used for the lesson were collected, which included copies of character education lesson plans, handouts, and any other artifacts used within the lesson.

Instrumentation. Guidelines/protocols were created for this study. Each component within the data procedure—the teacher consent form (Appendix E), the initial interview with these teachers, the observations conducted in their classrooms, and the times of debriefing after each of the observed lessons—have a set of guidelines/protocols to be used in recording the collected data. I also had both teachers send home a parent informational letter (Appendix F), explaining my presence in the classroom and how my research was solely on the teacher and not their children.

Research Questions and Data Collection

In this section I will detail how each type of data I collected served to elucidate my research questions. The table below (See Table 1.) offers a visual organization of how I used specific segments of my data to respond to my research questions.

Table 1

Research questions cross-reference with types of data collected

Research questions	Types of data collected
1) How do two selected teachers define and conceptualize character education?	• Interviews: Through interviewing both teachers, they were able to explain to me how they defined character education. They were able to expound upon what character education means to them and why it was so important that they included it in their teaching instruction.
2) What values do they highlight in character education instruction and how do they define them?	• Interviews: Through interviewing both teachers, they were able to share some of the values they highlighted within character education instruction, either those mandated by the school district or those they each found personally relevant. They also were able to explain and give examples of what some of the values meant to them and how they defined them, either in their own lives or in what they expected of their students. • Observations: Through observing both teachers, I was able to see which character values they highlighted within their teaching instruction, through the read-alouds, and in classroom discussions. • Field notes: In my field notes, I took note of the non-verbal aspects of the classroom, such as what was on the walls in the classroom. This was specifically related to character education (e.g., labeled and defined character values that are highlighted by the school district as the character traits of the months).
3) How do they implement character education in their teaching instruction, including how children's literature is selected and used as part of this pedagogical implementation?	• Interviews: Through interviewing both teachers, they were able to share some strategies, activities, and read-alouds they used to engage their students in character education instruction. They both explained in-depth how they selected and used children's literature as a way to implement character education instruction. • Observations: Through observing both teachers, I was able to notice how they used children's literature in their teaching instruction to talk about character values. I also observed other strategies they used and was able to compare what I

Table 1 (*continued*)

Research questions	Types of data collected
3) How do they implement character education in their teaching instruction, including how children's literature is selected and used as part of this pedagogical implementation? (*continued*)	saw to what teachers told me in my interviews with them. • Field notes: In my field notes, I took note of the non-verbal aspects of the classroom, such as what was on the walls in the classroom. I wrote down which charts were referred to in the lessons, the titles of books that were used, and activities that were done. I also took note of nonverbal communication and how this seemed to play a role in the implementation of character education instruction.
4) How do they see character education affecting their students?	• Interviews: Through interviewing both teachers, they were able to explain to me how they saw character education affecting their students—academically, behaviorally, and socially-emotionally.

Researcher (Researcher's Stance)

I am a young female in my early twenties. I am also biracial, being both African American and European-American. I have a Bachelor of Science in elementary education and am a licensed teacher in two states, in addition to completing my Master of Arts degree in Curriculum and Instruction (with this thesis serving as my culminating project for that degree). I have worked with children from Kindergarten through 6th grade. I have also taught a children's literature course to junior undergraduate elementary education initial licensure students. Children's literature is something I have learned and read a lot about in my courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. I am extensively interested in discovering new ways to integrate children's literature into the classroom, especially as I prepare to become a classroom teacher for the first time this coming fall.

My experiences with character education stem from my time student teaching in a 3rd grade classroom. While there was no specific character education curriculum implemented within the school or the classroom, it was something I tried to incorporate into my teaching

instruction. Since then, through my graduate coursework, I have learned more about the effects of social-emotional and character education learning on children's growth and development. Additionally, through my personal teaching experiences and through what I have read, children's literature is often a tool used to implement character education instruction, so I wanted to learn more about how teachers include children's literature in their teaching instruction to discuss character values and nurture students' character development and growth.

When I think about my experiences as an educator, the key and most prevalent memories that come to mind are those times spent building relationships and community with students. I believe that a fundamental aspect of character education is the trust and kindness built between teachers and students and between the students themselves. I wholly believe in the importance of enriching students' minds and helping to cultivate their intellect, but throughout my time in college and graduate school and through my teaching experiences, the importance of reaching students' hearts has become increasingly and vitally important to me. I do not believe character education and academic learning are in a dichotomous relationship but, instead, have a positive reciprocal relationship with one another. It is important to me that I do my best to foster character values within my students because throughout their time in my classroom and as they venture into adulthood, they are more than the sum of academic achievement. Therefore, learning about ways to define character education and effectively integrate it into my instructional pedagogy was fundamental to me and served as a strong impetus for this research study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was done on a number of levels. First, I lived through my data in real-time when I initially collected each piece of data for both teachers. Patton (1990) says, "In the course

of gathering data, ideas about possible analysis will occur. Those ideas constitute the beginning of analysis; they are part of the record of field notes" (p. 377). During each interview and observation, I wrote field notes as a way to analyze and express what I was hearing and seeing in real-time. After each interview and observation, I audio-recorded analytic memos as a way to process what I saw and heard. I would speak into my voice recorder and reflect on what I had just seen and heard. Based on what I saw, I would remind myself of questions I wanted to ask the teachers. These analytic memos served as a tool to help me delve deeper into the data I collected, by asking questions of what I saw and heard and prompting me to think more in-depth about my topic.

After all the data were collected, the audiorecorded data was transcribed. The field notes taken were typed into a word processer and combined with the audiorecorded/transcribed data. After all the data was transcribed and typed, I read through all of my data once. After my initial read-through of the data, I read through it all again, and themes were marked and pulled from the data. This allowed me to see and analyze what common patterns occurred with each individual teacher as well to discover patterns and themes basic to both teachers. My themes came from the data by means of inductive analysis, which "means that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (Patton, 1990, p. 390). Throughout this entire process, I talked with my advisor about what I saw and heard. I asked questions of her, or she asked questions of me, which prompted me to think about my data from different focal points, observe both teachers' instruction from a different perspective, and/or help me frame the questions I asked these teachers during my interviews with both.

Challenges Faced

Throughout this study, there were a few challenges I faced as a researcher. The first challenge was that of time. I wanted to make sure I was not interrupting teachers' normal instructional time. Also finding the time to debrief the teachers after each observation proved to be challenging because of conflicting schedules or their other responsibilities as educators.

Another challenge I faced was how to decide on the boundaries of my case and to discuss the data I had. It was challenging deciding how to keep my data selection limited enough to be workable and focused on character education but not so limited that I left out the feel for the classroom and the role it plays in character education instruction. Additionally, reading through the data and choosing which pieces were the best pieces to use and highlight when discussing each of the themes in my data.

A third challenge I faced is that I am a novice researcher. I do not have a lot of experience with doing research. Throughout my study, I had to figure out how to do research along the way, often talking with and asking questions of my advisor for help.

Significance of this Approach

Designing this study as a case study and taking this approach to the research is significant because it provides two different but detailed perspectives on character education. Each of these teachers is different as a person and as an educator, but they are both respected among their colleagues and they both engage their students in high-quality teaching instruction. Their approaches to character education had similarities, but there were also distinct differences in their content approach to character education and their overall teaching style. Each teacher's teaching style fits who they were as educators and worked for them and their students. Lois was more laid-back with her students, giving them space to think and reflect on character values, but

was still respected by her students and able to manage her classroom well. Kathryn, on the other hand, was more firm with her students, immediately highlighting her sense of classroom management, but still encouraged them to think for themselves, work independently, and discuss character values. She was also respected by her students. Being able to show two different yet effective approaches to character education emphasizes and reaffirms there is no one right kind of teacher to implement character education, and there is no one right way to engage students in discussions and learning of character values.

Conclusion

In the next two sections, I will discuss the data on each of these teachers. I will first talk about Lois, her views and definitions on character education, and what I saw driving her character education instruction. I will look at the themes within my data and use the data to discuss how Lois engaged her students in character education instruction. In the chapter following Lois, I will repeat this process and discuss Kathryn and the data I collected on her.

CHAPTER 4

LOIS CARPENTER

For Lois, character education is more than a boxed curriculum to implement a few days out of the school week. Two significant issues that arose in her character education instruction during my observations were relationships and relevance. Community and the relationships she builds with and among her students serve as the foundation of character education for Lois. She also seeks to make her character education instruction relevant to the lives of her students, both inside and outside of the classroom. One fundamental way she does this is through the use of talk in her classroom. Through valuing and promoting talk, she is able to foster strong and trusting relationships between her and her students and also make character education relevant to their lives now and hopefully into adulthood.

Because character education goes beyond naming character traits and expecting students to emulate them, Lois is very mindful in the decisions she makes. Drawing from the relationships she has built with her students, she reflects on what they need rather than assuming a one-size-fits-all approach (e.g., thinking about their home lives during the holiday season and how that will affect their attitudes and ideas about what it means to be generous) will be successful in her classroom community. She is structured in her planning and implementation of character education, but also takes opportunities to capitalize on teachable moments when they arise. Character education grounds Lois' academic instruction, but she is also intentional about including character education instruction in her classroom that fits the needs of both her and her students.

In this chapter I will draw on data collected to paint a picture of Lois and her instruction in character education, starting with her definition and description of character education and

extending with examples from my interviews with Lois and observations of her teaching. I will then discuss what I believe drives Lois in her teaching of character education based on the data I collected. Through this I will introduce and analyze four key themes: relationships and community, mindful decision-making, the value of talk, and relevance. I will conclude with an overall picture of Lois, summarizing what character education means to Lois and how her understanding weaves throughout her instruction.

What Does Character Education to Mean to Lois?

Character education is fundamental to everything Lois does within her classroom. When I asked her in our initial interview about the importance of character trait development within her pedagogy, she replied that it was

> Hugely important. I would call it the foundation of everything else that I do. And that's why sometimes it seems tedious by…the third week of school we still are just talking,…not just talking, but doing things around…these things all the time still in the third week of school. It seems repetitive, but it pays off later on when you're able to have set up that foundation. And then, obviously, it breaks down, and you have to repair it when that happens, but I would call it the foundation of everything else that I do.

For Lois, character education serves as a springboard for everything else she wants and needs to do in the classroom, which is why she takes the time to reinforce the importance of character in her classroom and with her students.

Not only does character education serve as a springboard for social-emotional education and growth in her classroom, but it also serves a springboard for academic learning. In further discussing in our initial interview what she understood character education to be, she continued:

It's basically what we do so that we can do the rest of our job, which is teach them…I've

always told my kids…what's more important to me at the end of the year. "Yes, I need

you to walk away being able to read and write and do math and all of those things, but if

you know how to be kind and treat another person, that's (pause) that's going to be the

most important thing to me any day of the week." So…yeah,…it really doesn't matter to

me what kinds of academic skills kids walk into me with. It's never mattered to me

because they're going to come in at all different levels. I can take that any day of the

week, if they're kindhearted and…they know how to be, to treat other people.

(pause)…that for me is enough to start with and then we can work on the rest from there.

Lois teaches all her students and is focused on academic learning. She accepts her students on

whatever academic level they start, in that they do need to be "on grade level." She begins

rigorous and focused instruction for each where he/she is academically. However, Lois also

believes that the relationships she develops through her emphasis on what character means to all

of them helps her to do the rest of her job seamlessly and effectively. She also believes that while

academic learning is important, that cannot happen without her kids knowing how to be kind and

respectful of each other. Lois grounds herself in the importance of not only cultivating strong,

brilliant minds but kind and caring hearts as well.

Character education also serves a much larger purpose for Lois, evidenced by how she

defined it. Responding to a question about what she understands character education to be, she

replied,

Basically without character education we wouldn't have any education at all is how I feel

about it….because before we can teach our students academics, before we can teach them

all of the things they need to know…, they need to know how to have good character.

And they need to be able to have all of these foundational things, social-behavioral things within themselves, that allows them…to learn.

Character education is clearly the foundation of Lois's teaching instruction.

Lois is also deeply aware of her need to reach her students across racial difference, as she wrote to me:

To be honest, my background (schooling, family, etc.) up until Oceanvale was not very diverse at all. But from the moment I stepped foot into Oceanvale, I realized that there were (are) people much different than me out in the world - very interesting, kind, smart, and special, inspiring people. It was something I honestly appreciated.

Through her work at Oceanvale School, she has drawn on "ongoing opportunities to get to know people who are different from [her]" and found a sense of comfortableness "in this setting." To bridge what might be considered a racial divide, she explained to me how important it is for her "first and foremost, I talk to and get to know my students." She expanded:

I listen to them, ask them questions, have fun with them, tell them about myself, and try my best to understand them. I realize I come from a different cultural background, but I try to show everyone the same level of respect and kindness that I would want for myself.

Lois appreciates the opportunity she has had to work in the same school for multiple years because, as she said, "I feel like I got to know/understand/appreciate cultures different from my own but that came only through experience in addition to being what I consider a kind and open-minded person." Lois maintains an attitude of thankfulness for how her time at Oceanvale has shaped who she is as a person and as an educator and for the relationships she has built with her students and their families. She explained to me:

I'm so grateful for the chances I have had to work with, teach, and get to know people from all walks of life. It has made me who I am as a teacher and as a person. I not only get to know my students, but I get to know their families. I involve myself in school and community events and just talk to people. I'm friendly and show interest in their lives. I show that even though I am a certain way, I don't think that's the only way people should be. Over time, I feel that the Oceanvale School families (staff, parents, everyone) are able to see me as someone who, although not necessarily part of the same culture/race as them, loves and cares for their children and will work hard to ensure their success in the classroom and in life. I feel it is clear that I want to be here, working in this school with my students, and I wouldn't have it any other way anywhere else.

Responding to her students' humanness and sharing some of her own, Lois is able to learn about and appreciate the differences between her and her students. Learning about and responding to the diversity in her classroom is part of character education for her. Knowing what she believes about character education, this allows us to better understand why character education is such a significant stronghold in her classroom. With this understanding in place, next I will discuss what drives Lois in her teaching instruction of character education.

What Drives Lois in Her Teaching Instruction?

Through talking with Lois and observing her teach, it became clear to me that her vision of character education is about more than simply about teaching a generic understanding of "good character" or and trying to inundate her students with values that will help them to be "good people." Rather, for Lois, character education is fundamental to the life of her classroom, driving her teaching decisions and intersecting fluidly with the relationships she builds with and between her students. Based on my data, I identified four themes that help explain Lois'

instructional choices in teaching and the importance of character education to her: relationships and community, mindful decision-making, the value of talk, and relevance.

In the following sections I will discuss first how character education informs and is informed by the relationships she builds with her students and the sense of community she helps cultivate within her classroom among her students. Next, I will demonstrate through data excerpts her mindful decision-making and how the decisions she makes informs what she does with her students but also helps her to be reflective and grow as an educator. Third, the important (and ubiquitous) nature of talk as a vehicle for instruction will be addressed. Finally, I will expand on the idea of relevance. Lois strives to make sure that her students understand why they are engaging in these discussions and activities involving character values. She wants them to see the relevance of it to their lives outside of the classroom and take ownership of what they are learning about various character traits.

Relationships and Community

Character education for Lois is more than just about teaching character values because at the core of character education is the relationships Lois builds with her students and the relationships students build with each other. The roots that help ground Lois' instructional decisions regarding character education stem from the community she strives to build in her classroom and with her students all year long. In this section, I will discuss the importance of relationship and community building to Lois. Additionally, the relationships she builds and the community she cultivates stems from and adds to what she knows about her students.

Lois told me that her favorite thing about character education is "really getting to know my kids…on that [personal] level." Knowing how she defines character education, it is easy to understand why getting to know her students beyond academic learning is so important to Lois.

Not only does getting to know about the lives of her students in and out of school help her form trusting relationships with them, but it also allows her to learn and understand more about them. Lois explained an activity she did with her students one day and how this was an eye-opening moment for her in getting to know one of her students:

> I did the "I feel respected when"…and then we've also done "I don't feel respected when." And like there were three or four [who] when…the object was passed around that like stopped me in my tracks…I didn't realize that that was happening to them because they've never expressed it to me. Like one kid said, "I feel disrespected when people make fun of how many brothers or sisters I have," and I was like I didn't even know that the kids had ever given him a hard time about that. Like [it] had never, never crossed my mind. He had never said, cause, obviously, it's probably not a big enough deal to him where he feels like he's gonna come, he needs to tell an adult cause like somebody's bullying me…but kids have teased him about him enough where he's like "I really don't like this."…."You guys need to knock it off!"…There [were] a couple others that were said in that moment…I was like, "Wow!" (Pause) It's just usually you think you could predict that they'd say, and I was not predicting accurately to what they were saying….So, it's always interesting cause I think I know them well, and then they surprise me.

Lois does activities and has discussions with her students that allow space and time for community and relationship building in her classroom. She does not allow herself to become complacent in what she knows and learns about her students. Instead she pushes herself to learn all she can about her students to build those trusting relationships. It is from this knowledge and trust that authentic and purposeful character education instruction can begin.

Lois also believes in the importance of saying "positive things to your students more often than…you say negative things to your students….Whenever you can." Part of how she builds relationships and community in her classrooms is grounded in the language she uses. It is important to Lois that she is being positive and saying positive things towards her students because she believes this has an effect on how they respond (and behave) in school. This is not to say that she does not have to discipline her students, but she also knows that "sometimes it's just a matter of saying how one person is doing something really well, and then I never even have to say it to anybody else because they noticed what that person was doing…and they did it." She knows that her students not only learn from how she models positive behaviors, but she knows that her students learn from each other. So, she chooses to be intentional in "making sure that they know all the time that you're proud of them and that they're doing well and that they're good at this and showing them and telling them what they're good at, too." Through the language she uses and how she says it, she is able to build strong relationships with her students that help to show them she cares about who they are as individual human beings and that she has a belief in their abilities.

Lois uses this positive, affirming language not only with her students but with their families as well. Building community extends to the relationships she builds with her students' parents and guardians as well because she wants to try to include her students' families in all areas of their education, including that of character education. Lois noted:

> I make phone calls regularly…. as of now, it's just more me communicating to them about how their child fulfills these things or sharing examples of when their child does those things or stands out in those areas or doesn't…. But, it's never purely negative, even when I have to call with something negative.

Even when she does have to call to talk about a consequence she gave a student, she still tries to frame it positively. She explained to me how one day one of her students "had a consequence for something and I said they handled it…really well and…I was somehow able to spin that as positive because of the way the child handled it and the attitude they had. So, I try and put that in there just wherever I can." Lois seeks to make sure she is building positive relationships with her students 'families, which means not always or only calling when there is something negative to say. She tries to be positive in her interactions with families because she knows that her students' families are crucial to their education, academic or otherwise.

Lois also takes what she knows about her students to make mindful decisions about her character education instruction[3]. Knowing her students and using what she knows to help inform her instruction helps to build a positive rapport within her classroom community. In one of the lessons I observed, Lois used a skit as the activity of choice to have her students showcase what they learned from their discussion and her read-aloud. She chose to do a skit based on what she learned and knew about her students, which is that they are "extremely social beings, and…for the most part….they like the…attention being on them." She mentioned that giving "them a positive way to have the attention be on them was something that I…thought would be [pause] helpful for my class." In another observation I did of Lois, she conducted a read-aloud and lesson on non-tangible giving. She said "it really was the conversation that I had with my kids that made me think of this lesson to begin with." This example was so significant that I have included a lengthy excerpt in the table below. Importantly, Lois draws on what she learns and knows about her students to make instructional choices, but it also further serves to strengthen the

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[3] I will expound on this in the next section on the theme of "Mindful Decision-Making," but introduce here as it relates to her relationship building.

relationships and community she continuously builds with her students. (See Table 2 for more data examples.)

Relationships and community with her students and their families serve as a strong foundation for how she builds unity and bolsters character education in her classroom. Lois loves getting to know her students and believes it is what makes character education worth doing. The language she uses and the frequency of positive verbal interactions with and about her students are important to how she builds relationships with her students and how she cultivates community in a way that allows her students to be teachers to one another. In one exchange in the fourth lesson I observed her teach, Lois said: "Roxie, you had a really good answer the last time I asked this question about why we read things more than one time….And I thought, 'Wow, that's a really smart way to explain it.' Ultimately, Lois believes that getting to know who they are as people (and not just students) is fundamental as is giving them a chance to get to know how she is as a person (and not just their teacher). During the second observed lesson, she told her students: "And that's actually my favorite part of Christmas. I actually like to go…shopping for other people more than I like receiving gifts myself, because I like to think about what the people in my life would like to get as a gift. And I like thinking about it, and I like picking it out, and I like wrapping it, and I like watching them open it." In the next section, I will discuss how Lois' mindful decision-making informs her character education instruction.

Table 2
Data excerpts to highlight Lois's focus on building of relationships and community.

Date and description	Data excerpt
December 7, 2015: Lesson #2 Debrief	In response to my question about why Lois chose a particular purpose for her students while they read the book *Ordinary Mary's Extraordinary Deed*: Well, it really was the conversation that I had with the [small group of] kids that made me think of this lesson to begin with. Umm, but also at this time, like I always kinda feel like I focus on that during the month

Table 2 (*continued*)

Date and description	Data excerpt
December 7, 2015: Lesson #2 Debrief (*continued*)	of December, as I'm out spending all my money on people. I like to think (chuckles) about "what could I do for people besides this?" Umm, so I wanted to get the kids thinking about that because they don't have a lot of money themselves. And maybe their families don't have a lot of money, and so thinking about ways that, you could have very little and still be giving towards other people…and so that conversation we were sitting around the table, and I asked them to say their favorite thing about Christmas. Now, all [the kids in this small group] did celebrate Christmas. I was sure of that. And they all, and like the first per-, I think the first person did a good job of setting the stage. Cause they said like giving to others or s-. They said something really like…that, and so then all the other kids were like, "Well, now I can't [say] presents cause they said, 'God or Jesus.'" Or, ya know, other people were saying these like very…thoughtful things. And, so everybody around the table said something like that. And it made me want to share it with the whole class, and then do kind of a whole class lesson on it. So, this is my way of celebrating Christmas in the classroom, kind of. You know what I mean? Without celebrating Christmas. Celebrating the season of giving. Because I, again, it's like, comes back to knowing the kids because a lot of them really want credit for everything that they. They want credit for the things that they do, and they go out of their way to do these kind things. And, and I also make a big point out of when I see them doing something that I didn't ask them to do, and then that they didn't try to get credit for. I make a big deal out of it, like I just happened to watch them or see…them doing something that was a good deed without them even knowing it was a good deed or them trying to get. Cause a lot them will like do somethin-, "Oh, I let so-and-so borrow this. I let so-and-so did this. I helped. They dropped their stuff, and I picked it up for them. Like just letting you know that I did this good deed." And, so, trying to get them to understand that it's not necessarily about always how it makes us feel, even though it should make you feel good to be giving, but it's about the other person. It's about doing that because it's right and because it's a good thing to do and not always needing somebody to realize who did that for them or even, yeah. Just basically not taking credit for things.

Mindful Decision-Making

As most educators know, teachers are constantly making numerous decisions throughout any given school day. Some of these decisions are calculated and thoughtfully planned before teachers even begin instruction, while others are made in the moment based off of what teachers

see happening in the classroom and what they think their students need. Part of the decision-making is grounded in teachers' reflections of their own teaching and how they see their students interacting with the content they want them to think about, learn, and own. One cornerstone in Lois' character education instruction emanates from the decisions she makes within her teaching instruction. The three biggest areas in which she makes decisions include those that are planned/structured, teachable/in-the-moment, and reflective/ attitude. Each of these areas of decision-making emerges from a mentality of mindfulness and thoughtfulness. In the following sections, I will discuss each of these three areas in more depth and show how they function as important components of how Lois makes mindful decisions to inform her character education instruction.

Planned/structured. Lois takes the time to plan out her character education instruction. She also does her best to structure her lessons, read-alouds, activities, and other aspects to make the best use of her limited time in trying to reach both the hearts and the minds of her students. Lois is intentional in why she chooses the literature selections she does to read to her students. She never just selects books to read on a whim and hope for best results. Whether the books she chooses are her "favorites, my go-tos, that I go to, that I read every single year" or books that "are recommended by other people," Lois does her best to be thoughtful in her literature selections.

In my lesson debriefs with Lois, I always asked why she chose the books she read to her students, and she always had a reason for choosing them. For example, she chose to read *Miss Penny and Mr. Grubbs* (Ernst, 1991)

> because cooperation is our character trait of the month, and I chose that book because I
> wanted my students to plan…a skit where they had to show cooperation, and so the book

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was chosen because it set up the activity nicely. So, it gave an example of non-cooperation…because at first I was going to pick a book that showed cooperation, but I liked that the *Miss Penny and Mr. Grubbs* story showed [pause] not that so that they could fix it.

Lois chose to read *Ordinary Mary's Extraordinary Deed* (Pearson, 2002) because she wanted her students "to see examples of giving that doesn't involve tangible items," and she wanted to show them that "sometimes giving can come in other forms." She "also liked how it showed how the good deeds spread from one person to the next and that everybody carried it on." She chose to read *The Giving Tree* (Silverstein, 1964) "because…it connected to Friday's lesson" when she read *Ordinary Mary's Extraordinary Deed* (Pearson, 2002). She wanted to extend this idea of what it means to give beyond just spending money for other people and have students take ownership of their learning by actually doing some of the good deeds they discussed as a class. Finally, Lois chose to read *Enemy Pie* (Munson, 2000) because she "really like[s] the message of the story,….[and] it's a story the kids really follow cause it's one of those that I think surprises them at the end."

No matter the reasons are for why Lois chooses the books she does, she always has a clear reason and is articulate in expressing those reasons. In a conversation I had with Lois she told me,

Well, I feel like…the books that I choose are because they're relatable. And they're all, all the books that I pick have good storylines, but a lot of times…all of the time, it's…people that they can relate to. Characters…it's written in kid-friendly language. It's written in an engaging storyline so that they can relate to it. So, they can follow the story, and they can

feel like they can imagine themselves as one of the characters is, is what the goal I always

have in mind [is] to imagine yourself as one of the characters.

Without specific knowledge of Bishop's (1990b) concept of books offering readers mirrors and

windows, as I have discussed earlier in my thesis, Lois exemplifies this concept in her desire to

make the books she reads relevant to the lives of her students[4], which is why she is so purposeful

in her selection of books. On the other hand, sometimes she chooses a book to read because it

"relates to an issue we've been having." So, she takes what she knows about her students,

responds to their needs, and chooses her book selections accordingly.

Lois is not only specific in why she chooses her read aloud selections, but she is also

clear in setting a purpose for her students and why they are reading a particular book. Each of the

four times I observed Lois teach her students, she set a purpose for reading and made sure her

students understood why they were all reading and discussing these books. (See Table 3.) Lois

told me that whether they are reading for fun, academics, and/or character education that

"usually I like to set the stage ahead of time [pause] and like get them to clue in…on a certain

reading strategy or a certain thing to pay attention to…I would say that 9 times out of 10 I say

something ahead of time about the purpose." Lois wants to help support her students'

comprehension and get the most out of her read-alouds, which is why she believes setting a clear

purpose for reading is so crucial to her students' learning. She also thinks setting a clear purpose

for her students is

valuable because…when kids read books or are read to or read it themselves, they clue

into so many things. They clue into so many different details—the details of the

pictures…the details of the words…I like watching kids read books because they do more

than, than I think adults…would naturally ever do when they read a book. Cause…you

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[4] This will be discussed further in the later "Relevance" section.

literally watch their eyes explore the entire page. So…to allow them to do that but then to bring it back to a common goal…of…what we're talking about, what we're related to I think is important so that they don't get too far sidetracked by those extra thoughts.

For Lois, everything that goes into selecting and reading a book is important, which is why she is so mindful in making decisions to read various literature selections.

While children's literature is a key component of her character education instruction, Lois also is mindful of other practices and activities she does through her teaching instruction. In my first conversation with Lois about character education, she told me,

Well, I do what's required of me. I do my class meetings…we talk every morning about something. It might not be…an extravagant…thing where we sit and talk about our feelings every time necessarily, but…every single morning we start with something. So, there's something, some sort of message that I'm telling them or that they're telling me or something that we start with that is beyond, before we get straight to the academics. So…that's where I start. And, then…we do have our class meetings. They end up being more than once a week that's required….but I don't necessarily have it like a set day, "This is when we do our class meetings."…It's usually when they're most necessary…or it's always…when they're necessary. If there's ever a time where I see it's absolutely necessary because kids are picking with each other at recess or there's some particular thing going on, we have a class meeting and we address it. Umm, and then other than that, when there's not an issue that we need to address, we sit down at least twice a week…in a circle and talk about something.

In addition to doing read-alouds and class meetings, they also do Second-Step lessons, which are district-mandated, and Lois said, "There's like little cards where the lessons are pretty laid out

and structured for you…but you can, of course, take it wherever you want to go and, and get more in-depth with it with the kids." While I never saw Lois do any Second-Step lessons, she did tell me that she does not really like to do them because they do not leave any room for her teaching style and her own creativity while teaching. They also do not fit the needs of her students, but even in the midst of this, Lois tries to build off of the Second-Step lessons to make them more purposeful and authentic.

Aside from doing what is required of her, Lois is mindful in selecting and planning additional activities with her students. She tries to "do activities that aren't necessarily a class meeting but just something that promotes community or…friendship amongst the kids," which further reaffirms her fundamental belief about the importance of relationships and a strong community within her classroom. (For more specific examples, see Table 3.) Within these activities, she puts a lot of thought into how these activities will be structured. For the skit she had her students do after reading *Miss Penny and Mr. Grubbs* (Ernst, 1991), she said she "did strategically group the kids" and that she "planned that out ahead of time" because she wanted to try to "evenly disperse the leader[s]" within the groups. While reading *The Giving Tree* (Silverstein, 1964), she used post-its as a tool to help her students comprehend and dig deeper into the read-aloud. She also said to me that post-its are a way for her and her students

> To keep track of our thoughts, a way for me to keep track of their thoughts and then when the kids go back….it just is, it's evidence for me that the kids picked up on what I needed them to pick up on, and then when they go back and pick up that book and read it later— 'cause they will [do that]. I always set those books out, and those are always like the first ones that the kids pick up during…independent reading and stuff like that. Then they'll see and they'll be reminded of the purpose. They know why we wrote that down.

This type of text evidence can help remind her students about these different discussions about character they had as a class and give them some extra time to think and reflect on these conversations later.

Lois is planned and structured in her book selections, in her purposes for reading, and other activities in her classroom, which is why she takes the time to really think about what she wants to do with her students and why. Of course, there are times when this is not always possible. In the next section, I will discuss how Lois uses teachable moments and makes in-the-moment decisions to enhance her character education instruction.

Table 3
Data excerpts highlighting Lois's planned/structured approach to character education

Date and description	Data excerpt
October 27, 2015: Initial Interview	Other times we will do activities that aren't necessarily a class meeting but just something that promotes community or…friendship amongst the kids like…with bucket filling the thing we did most recently was I had everybody go write a piece, their name on a piece of paper and then they crumpled up the piece of paper and we threw them all in the middle. And then they all had to pick up a piece of paper and take it and go write a message to the student…whose…paper they picked up and write something positive about them. And…I usually read them before I let them give them to them because I've had classes in the past that…I didn't really have a way of holding them accountable for what they write. And I've [had] classes in the past that weren't as kind and friendly as this one, so I read them all. But I really didn't need to with this class cause this class is pretty trustworthy. So, we've done things like that. That's just an example. We've also done like, friendship jars, where they all have a little jar on their desk and they go around and, and say nice things or we just do compliments at the class meeting. We'll pass something around, and they can compliment other kids in the circle.
December 4, 2015: Lesson #2	But there's things that we can give people besides gifts, besides things that we buy. Okay? And, so that's why I want to read you this story today, and I want us to think about some ways that, during this month and during all the time, but this month especially because it's all about giving, some ways that we can give. That doesn't, that don't cost a lot of money. Cause I know I don't have a lot of money, and I doubt that you guys have a lot of money cause you're just kids. So, we want to think about ways that we can give to people that are beyond just spending money on them. So, see if you can think of any ideas. See if this story

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Table 3 (*continued*)

Date and description	Data excerpt
December 4, 2015: Lesson #2 (*continued*)	about the little girl that I read in this book, the girl I read about, gives you any ideas for how…you might be giving this season. And I'll say this one more time, even if you don't celebrate Christmas is it okay to be giving?.... Right. Okay, so it doesn't really matter what you celebrate at home because it's still a good time of the year for that…. There's lots of different holidays that people celebrate, and even if you don't celebrate one, it's still a good time of the year for that, right? So, this story is called *Ordinary Mary's Extraordinary Deed*, and it's one of my favorites.

Teachable/in-the-moment. Even though Lois plans and structures her character education instruction, she still has a flexible demeanor that responds to the needs of her students, which allows her to have opportunities to use teachable moments and make in-the-moment decisions. Lois believes these decisions form the most important aspect of character education. She said, "You can sit down and make a list as much as you want, but you could never possibly cover all of the areas that your students are going to need character education in." She realizes that as much as she wants to plan and be structured in her approach to character education, she also needs to allow space to be flexible and use moments that arise to discuss character to her advantage. (See Table 4.)

Table 4
Data excerpts highlighting Lois's teachable/in-the-moment approach to character education

Date and description	Data excerpt
October 27, 2015: Initial Interview	In response to a question about what Lois thinks the most important aspect of character education is and why: Probably the in the moment ones I think…because you can sit down and make a list as much as you want, but you could never possibly cover all of the areas that your students are going to need character education in. You can't, I mean the curriculum is great, but it's not gonna to be able to...sit there and plan out something that's going to address every issue that you'll ever encounter. So, the teachable moments are more important for those, those types of things that are unscripted…and you have different types of problems with different groups every year….So, it often depends on the class and the dynamics of the students, of what the need is. And, so, those teachable moments are gonna to help you

Table 4 (*continued*)

Date and description	Data excerpt
October 27, 2015: Initial Interview (*continued*)	address the need rather than just, because those, those umbrella concepts and things that you need to teach them are great, but…I think it's more effective in the moment. When it's addressed in the moment. And when there's a real experience tied to why we need to learn this.
	It's not like I write it [strategies] in my lesson plans. It's really more in the moment….another strategy I use probably excessively is using the kids as examples for that. And, so, I, I feel like I say all day everyday (pause) look at so-and-so, this is what they're doing. This is why it stands out to me…using them as examples for each other. That's something that I do…a lot of, and I see a lot of success. That's…a big deal to kids is being the one that the other kids can follow is being a positive role model for them. So, that's one that…might be the most successful one is always showing them because they might not think they have leadership capabilities, or they might not think that they have this or that. So, I try and catch those moments whenever I see them and make sure that they realize that that's what they did.

Knowing that these teachable moments arise in everyday teaching situations, Lois uses these as tools to engage her students in character education instruction. She explained to me the importance of these moments:

And then, of course…whenever there's a moment, whenever there's a teachable moment. Like not time for a class…meeting necessarily but…something I'm seeing positive or negative…It doesn't just have to be a behavior that I've seen or something that happened that was…mean or disrespectful or something like that. We do stop, of course, during those moments, but even when I see somebody going out of their way to do something especially kind that I didn't even ask them to do or think of, we'll stop, and I'll make sure to draw attention to that. And we'll kinda praise that person but then also maybe there's other kids that didn't even think to do something like that that might try…that in the future or do that in the future.

She uses both positive and negative teachable moments to help foster character development within her students because she understands that both are important.

Lois values acting on teachable moments, but she is also mindful in making in-the-moment instructional choices regarding character education about when to act immediately and when to wait and address something later. In-the-moment decision-making is deciding to take the opportunity to address something immediately (acting right away on the teachable moment) or choosing to address it at a later time (noting the teachable moment and storing the knowledge from it to be used and addressed at a later time). For Lois, "if it's a serious issue, we'll stop right then and there." She does this because she believes that

> Sometimes that's more valuable to completely stop what you're doing and make them realize that what you're saying, that this is important enough to set our learning to the side and talk about. And, so, if it's a serious enough issue that it…can't wait, then right then and there. Like, I mean, stop what you're doing, put it away, come here and so that we can talk.

There are other times, however, when she might notice certain student behaviors that are not "necessarily disrupting the learning all the time but need to be addressed, I would wait and then make that the focus of my next class meeting." These moments, though, are not moments that can be planned in advance, so Lois has to be observant and aware of what is going on in her classroom and the dynamics between and among her students.

Lois is also mindful in the discussions she has with her students. She is mindful of the students raising their hands and tries to be cognizant of which students to call on and when. She also uses the discussions they have in class a springboard for other discussions she wants to have with her students in the future. Lois must be aware of what is going on in her classroom in order

to make these types of decisions. She is constantly thinking about what is most important for discussing right now and what can wait to talk about until a later time. Being able to do this and make these informed but spur of the moment decisions is part of makes Lois so mindful in her decision-making processes. In the next section, I will discuss how Lois' attitude and reflective stance aid in her character education instruction.

Reflective/attitude. One significant practice that allows Lois to be mindful in her decision-making is that she takes time to reflect on her practice and chooses to have a positive attitude about her teaching and her students. Lois seeks to be the best teacher she can be for her students, which is why she tries to carry herself with a positive attitude and maintains a reflective posture within her teaching. One of the core ways she does this is through how she tries to be a leader within Oceanvale Elementary School. She talked to me about how she defines leadership and gave me an example of what leadership looks like to her:

One way I feel like I show leadership is by not always buying…into the negativity because it's very easy to get wrapped up in that but rather like especially with the new staff and the new hires and I'm mentor to the teacher next door, trying to make sure that…I'm not…just another one of the voices that those people are hearing, saying negative things about students, negative things about staff members, negative things about the school district or the school because that's an easy trap to fall into....But… trying to show leadership in that showing those types of people that it's very easy to stay out of the drama if you choose to remove yourself from all of that kind of stuff and be a positive contribution to the school environment. You could do that very easily without letting the negative impact your day-to-day life. So, I, I am great friends with most of the people work, all the people that I work with, get along great with everybody, but I also

choose, make a conscious decision to be that way [Pause.]—whereas, I feel like you can go, you can go either way."

It is important to Lois that she comes to work every day with a positive attitude, which is why she actively removes herself from negative situations. In my observations, this was crucial to the way she interacted with her students. Through her conscious choices she can serve as a model to her students about what it means to choose to refuse to negativity and to choose joy instead.

Lois make efforts to reflect continually on her teaching practices. On way she targeted herself to improve, upon self-reflection, was in the area of including her students' parents and families in their children's character education instruction. She told me,

> That's a good one, one I could probably improve on a lot…because really, other than when I communicate with them about all of how their child is doing in these different areas like at conferences or like I…make phone calls regularly. But, other than that, I don't think I involve them very much, which they definitely could be. (Pause) They could maybe come in, and (pause) I don't know. I don't know what that would look like, but they could come in and talk about cooperation or come in and share an example of those things in their lives or something. I like the idea of involving them more.

While Lois did not have a definitive answer about how she could improve on in including parents and families in the character education of their children, she began the process of reflection. Lois is self-efficacious towards character education and feels she can successfully engage her students in it, but she is also willing to grow. She told me, "I would say I'm definitely confident in my ability to teach it [character education]. (Pause) However, I…also have room for improvement for sure." She further explained, "I would say I can be more, more consistent about it [teaching planned character education lessons] and more purposeful about it." She also

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understands the other areas she has less confidence in like selecting the most relevant and relatable books to read to her students.

Lois, like most teachers, does not like being unsuccessful in her teaching and would say it is her least favorite part of character education. However, even when she is unsuccessful, she uses these moments as opportunities for growth. She explained to me in a conversation about her and her students had an agreed-upon team meeting during lunch one day to discuss issues they had been having as a class during recess. Lois said,

We talked about it and figured it out, and I was like feeling really good about it…that we had sorted out our issues and then I go to pick them up the next day at recess and like same stuff, same problems, exactly to a T. So, that was kind of disappointing [both Lois and Morgan chuckle]. Like that was a waste of our time but, but maybe not. [Pause] There are…other things that…have been successful, but it does kind of stink when you've put in the time and you're like "That went well. I like how that went." And, then, same problem. [Morgan chuckles] Same problem, new day. So, …that part is not fun.

Lois understands there will be these moments in teaching that are not super fun, like being unsuccessful in something she does with trying to help build character in her students, but she chooses to reflect on these moments and carry herself with a positive attitude anyway.

Lois is also a nuanced thinker. She often has subtle undertones within her thinking processes that offer insight into how tuned in and responsive she is to the needs of her students. She spoke frequently in our interviews about her then-current class. For example:

I've had issues with…bullying in the past…with past classes. This class needs more help on how to get along with each other, but it's not really a bullying issue. It's just how to not

argue when we sit down and do something together or how to not get annoyed with other

people or whatever it may be.

She did not just automatically assume that her students were bullying each other but took the

time to really think about the underlying issue with why her students might be having some

communication problems or times when they are frustrated with each other. This nuanced

thinking is grounded in her willingness to get to know her students and design her instruction

around them.

In all of my conversations with Lois, she maintained a reflective stance. (See Table 5 for

additional data examples to highlight this stance.) There were times she was able to clearly

articulate what she was thinking about and reflecting upon, but there were also times where she

did not have an answer to give me but would use my questions as prompts to further reflect upon

her character education instruction. For example, once when I asked her about how she creates

space to encourage her students to create their own meaning rather than just accepting one

correct answer. Immediately she explained, "I could totally be better about what you're talking

about right now. 'Cause like I said there's so many different options of where the kids could have

thought that that story ended." However, as we kept talking, she tried to give some ideas about

how she could improve on this, but ultimately she was not completely confident in ways she

could have improved or done it differently, which caused her to continue reflecting on what we

were talking about, even after we were done with this particular lesson debrief.

Decision-making is essential to Lois' character education instruction, which is why she is

so mindful in the decisions she makes. Whether these are planned decisions, in-the-moment

decisions, or reflective moments, Lois seeks to better herself as an educator and enhance her

students' learning by taking the time to be thoughtful and cognizant of the decisions she is

making. In the next section, I will discuss how the value of talk impacts Lois' character

education instruction.

Table 5

Data excerpts highlighting Lois's reflective/attitude approach to character education

Date and description	Data excerpt
October 27, 2015: Initial Interview	I learned…because my first year I…had a really challenging class. But…I was a new teacher, and I felt like I had to just push these academics all the time and that was my focus…cause I had to get through these standards and I had to get through this stuff. And, so, I didn't necessarily take the time to build the classroom community and environment that is needed. And, so…I learned that the hard way my first year. But seeing that, seeing that in the future, and it's not that I've never had a hard class since, I have, but I also have seen a huge difference when you're putting in the time…routinely, all the time, not just, not just the teachable moments but routinely putting in the time to work on those kinds of those things and be consistent about it…I have seen it impact them. I've seen it impact them in a positive way, and I hear the language from them all the time. The language, the way that they know all these words and what they mean is pretty cool cause they've been getting these since they were in first grade at least. It's been here for a few years, those character traits. And they can use those, those words like they, they really know that language…they know how to describe what they mean. They know how to describe what it looks like and how they do it…and so it's really evident in just their learning and how they can apply those things to different situations.
	What is the first thing you do when planning instruction involving teaching? (Pause)…think about my students. (Pause) Think about (pause) my particular students and the ones that…stand out to me as probably needing the most instruction in that area. And sometimes using them like as examples but now in how that sounds. That sounds bad. But like (pause) when you ask like questions like "oh, how could you handle this?" or "what would it look like to…do this in this situation?". Having them be the role models or having them be the…ones to answer the question according to what you would do….I don't know how to elaborate on that but just thinking about the students and the situation and what they're going to need and what they need most help with cause there's some things that aren't an issue this year that have been issues in the past that I haven't had to spend a lot of time on.
February 12, 2016: Lesson #4 Debrief	In response to my question to Lois about whose values are being emphasized and whose are being ignored within character education:
	Ooo, that's a big question. (Pause) Whose values are those, and whose

Table 5 (*continued)*)

Date and description	Data excerpt
February 12, 2016: Lesson #4 Debrief (*continued*)	values are being ignored? (Pause) Well, I, I suppose they're my values…cause like I'm not getting them from a handbook somewhere…well, I guess when I talk about the character traits, those come from the district. Those are our kind of building blocks of character that we emphasize throughout the whole district. But I would say they're mine, even more so. Because probably the ones that I most value, without even realizing that I value them, those are probably the ones that I reinforce and emphasize the most without even, I mean it's not even a conscious thing. (Pause) But…as far as the values that are being ignored (pause), that's a great question…because I don't know whose values I'm ignoring. (Pause) Because there might be some that I'm not addressing cause of…my narrowed view of this is what's important to me....I mean I've had conversations with my kids before about like for example, we'll look at the, we'll look at…the Oceanvale School expectations: be respectful, be responsible, be ready. And I've had discussions with them before like which of those do you think is the, like at the heart of, like which one do you think is the most important? And obviously in my values, I think they should pick be respectful because be respectful can encompass….All of the others. But sometimes they don't say that. Sometimes they say being ready, and then they have an explanation for it. So, I think it's important to keep that conversation open with the kids, as far as like, why is this important? Is this important to you? (Unclear) talk about how do you show this at school? How do you show it at home? Umm, (pause) but maybe I need to open it up to families and do some sort of a survey or do…something at conferences…[or] maybe just a discussion where the kids go home and interview or ask their parents like what…are our values?...how do we believe people should be? (Pause) Like…that was a food for thought....I like that question, and it's a really good one to think about. Cause I could definitely…be more aware of their voices in that rather than just being the only one that dictates what we learn about. (Pause) I like that….I like that a lot.

The Value of Talk

One of the most fundamental tools Lois uses to build relationships and community within her classroom is through the use of talk. She values talk as a way to engage her students in strong character education instruction. Through informal conversations Lois has with her students, she is able to build trusting relationships with them where her care for them is grounded in authenticity. She gives time for her students to talk to each other, both informally and formally.

Lois also has class discussions in which she strives to have every member of the classroom be an active participant in the discussion. Whether through active speaking or listening, each student, in addition to Lois, has the opportunity to contribute to conversations based on his/her background knowledge and individual experiences.

Time to talk to her students. As I discussed earlier, Lois values the opportunity to get to know her students and build relationships with them. One of the primary ways she does this is through talking to and with them. This is done informally and outside of the realm of teaching a lesson as well as through instructional engagement. When I asked her how she thought she could use children's literature to help teach and reinforce character trait development in her students, she replied, "That's my favorite way to do it, actually, through read-alouds. Beyond just talking. Talking with the kids might be my most favorite one." She noted that talking to her students affords her opportunities for her to get to know her students and for her students to get to know her, which she "loves." Opportunities for talk enhance and strengthen the teacher-student relationships in her classroom.

One of the reasons Lois values talk so deeply is because it is her favorite part of character education. She explained,

Getting to talk to my kids about something that's less formal…You could put that in quotes, quotation marks "…less formal" than like the typical academics. So, I feel like those are the moments where I really get to know my kids. Umm, and I really get to hear kind of who they are as people beyond (pause) their schoolwork and beyond, like, their learning. So, I'm kind of learning, learning things, learning things about them beyond that. So, then those things are useful towards, in other areas of supporting them.

She loves those moments where she gets the opportunity to learn about her students and talk to them about things they have nothing to do with academic learning. These informal conversations show her students that she cares about them as persons and not just test scores, but it is also based on those informal conversations that she can draw on what she learned to help inform her instructional decisions. (See Table 6.)

One common example of how Lois uses talks to her students in a more formal and structured way is through how she begins lessons. She introduces her lessons by hooking her students with a short anecdote to activate background knowledge, or she informs her students why they have a story to read that day by setting a purpose for reading (as I mentioned and discussed earlier). One instance I can recall Lois doing this is during my fourth observation of Lois when she read the book *Enemy Pie* (Munson, 2000). Because I am focusing in my study only on the teacher, and did not gather permission to include student voices, I have included only Lois' statements below. The ellipses include spaces where the students were commenting and asking questions as well. Before Lois set the purpose for reading, she began by telling her class:

> I have a story that I'm gonna read to you today, and I'm sure you're going to be excited about it because most of you who have seen it sitting up here since Friday like "Can I read that? Can I read that? When are you gonna read that to us?" Right? You guys have been asking me about it, so that must mean either you've read it before…. And you're excited to read it again, or you just really were curious about what enemy pie was. One of the two. Raise your hand if you've read this story before. Excellent. You can put your hands down…. So, the first time you read this book maybe….you read it on Storyline Online. Maybe your second grade teacher read it to you, and you probably read for fun.

And I'm still reading it to you for fun because reading stories [are] fun. But this time I

have a very specific purpose.

She continued talking to her students by saying,

So, this time we're gonna read for fun, but I also have another purpose why I want us to

read, okay? There is, there is a lesson to be learned from just about every book that we

ever read. And the reason that I chose to read this book to you today is because it has a

really important lesson in it. The author, Derek Munson, (pause) has a really important

message that he wants to share with you by writing this story. And I just, I happen to love

the way he wrote it cause he wrote it in a really fun way, but he didn't just write this book

for fun. He didn't just write this book to entertain, right? We know that's a, a purpose why

sometimes authors write. But I think he had something he wanted to teach us from this

story, and if you already know what happens at the end could you (pause) keep your lips

sealed till the end. Cause there's some people that haven't read it yet, and we don't want

spoil (pause) it for them.

Lois used informal observations of her students' excitement about the book to grab her students'

attention and hook them into the text. By doing this, she was able to set the foundation for a

more formal lesson she taught to her students related to character education, which also helped

the lesson to be relatable and relevant because the lesson began from a place of Lois noticing her

students' excitement about reading and responding to it.

For Lois, talking to and with her students is essential to getting to know them. She

believes that she cannot really get to know her students without talking to them, and if she is

talking to them, she might as well get to know them. Anytime I talked to Lois about her students,

she was also very authentic and joyful, which shows me just how much she values talking to

them and learning about who they are as individuals. So much of how she plans for character

education stems from the talks she has with her students. In the next section, I will discuss how

Lois valuing the time for her students to talk to each other is crucial to the success of character

education in her classroom.

Table 6
Data excerpts highlighting the value of time for Lois to talk to her students

Date and description	Data excerpt
December 4, 2015: Lesson #2	[To her class] Okay, so I have a story to read with you today. (Pause) And I chose this story because…[a] couple days ago, I had some students in here for "Lunch Bunch," and we were…going around and sharing and talking about what we like about this holiday season. Whether or not we all celebrate Christmas or not, we were talking about this, this particular season of the year is very special and we like it a lot, and we talked about why. (Pause) And what made me so impressed by the kids that I was talking to that day was because…when we went around the circle and everybody got to say one word that was their favorite thing about Christmastime or the holiday season or whatever holiday they celebrate, I was expecting for them to say, "Presents. Gifts. You get things." Right? That's what I was waiting for them to say….And that was why I was so impressed with what they were saying because you guys are kids, and I really expected for them to say that they like getting presents. But that's not what anybody said. Instead…they shared completely different things, and they told me that they liked…Christmas because of family, right? They talked about some religious reasons for why they like Christmas. They talked about…because they get to give to other people. Sarah talked about love and caring about people, and it just impressed me because they realized and they knew that…Christmastime…is not all about buying things and getting gifts, right? It's also about being able to give things to other people, right? And make other people feel good….But there's things that we can give people besides gifts, besides things that we buy. Okay? And, so that's why I want to read you this story today, and I want us to think about some ways that, during this month and during all the time, but this month especially because it's all about giving, some ways that we can give. (Pause) That doesn't…cost a lot of money.

Time for her students to talk to each other. While Lois' students have opportunities to

talk to each other and build friendships in ways that are informal, my focus in this section is

going to be on the times when her students have structured time to talk to each other during class

activities and lessons. Two of the most significant ways Lois uses formal and more structured opportunities for her students to talk to each other is through the use of mediation and turn-and-talks during classroom discussions. When I asked Lois about different strategies and activities she uses to engage her students in character education instruction, she told me about this strategy she uses:

> So strategies I use, examples are like having the kids talk to each other. (Pause) Directly to each other. (Pause) About problems or about non-problems, about just whatever…like when kids have a conflict and they come up to me and they complain about each other, rather than them just telling me whatever they're feeling and then walking away and then I call up the other kid and talk to the other kid about it. I call the other kid up when they're standing right there, and rather than just telling me, talking directly to me, I have them turn to the other child and explain to the other child what they did that wasn't, that they didn't like or didn't appreciate. And then I let the other child say their peace, and I sit there and, essentially, mediate a conversation between the two of them and keep it from…becoming an argument…a mediating-type situation."

Something important about this and having Lois choose to be a mediator in certain situations between students is that Lois is challenging her students to solve and work out their own problems, but she is also there to act as a safe support for her students in case they need it. This shows her trust in their abilities to resolve their own problems, but they also know that they can rely on Lois for support if they need help. Giving students opportunities to talk directly to each other when conflict arises gives opportunity for working on character development in real-life, authentic ways.

Aside from this, one of the most fundamental ways I saw Lois value talk between her students is through having students turn and talk to each other before and after classroom read-alouds. (For more specific examples, see Table 7.) Through my observations of Lois' teaching, I noticed that before jumping into classroom discussions[5], she often had students do turn and talks with each other tied back to their original purpose for reading. This afforded students opportunities to talk through what they read, process with each other, and gather their thoughts before returning back to whole group discussion. Additionally, because each student had the chance to talk, all students in her class had opportunities to say what they needed and wanted to say and to have their voices heard. While the turn-and-talks were often no more than two or three minutes, this was one of the most powerful tools Lois used in her character education instruction because conversations could begin and then continue as a whole group based off of what students were talking about with just one or two of their peers.

Lois values talk between her students because she understands that she is not the sole voice of knowledge in her classroom. She believes that students can learn from each other and that they each have something worth saying. Therefore, in the next section, I will discuss why discussions regarding literature enhance the growth and understanding of various character traits among her students.

Table 7
Data excerpts highlighting the value of time for Lois's students to talk to each other

Date and description	Data excerpt
November 9, 2015: Lesson #1	I want you to take a second and think. (Pause) What did this story have to do with cooperation? (Pause) Or, (pause) what did it not have to do with cooperation? (Pause) What did have to do with cooperation, or what did it not have to do with cooperation? (Pause) Turn to the person sitting next to you. (Pause) Make sure every person has a partner…. I want you to take two minutes. Theo (pause) make sure you have something to tell Zeek. What you think this story had to do (pause) or

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[5] I will expound upon this later in the section titled "Classroom Discussions."

Table 7 (*continued*)

Date and description	Data excerpt
November 9, 2015: Lesson #1 (*continued*)	didn't have to do (pause) with…cooperation. (Pause) Explain it.
December 7, 2015: Lesson #3	With your partner or partners, you have one minute to tell them about some of the good deeds from this story that we read on Friday. (Pause) Hold on. Wait, wait, wait. You don't have to remember the characters names cause that's a lot to remember. Just tell them about some of the good deeds that you remember. I see somebody that isn't included. Can you invite that person over? (Pause) Oh, you're just turning this way while you're listening? Okay. Okay, begin.
February 1, 2016: Lesson #4	I want you to explain to your partner, when I say go. I want you to explain to your partner what is the lesson that the author or you could say the author or you could say what was the lesson that….the boy, not the enemy, not Jeremy but the other boy. What…lesson did his father want him to learn? You, you don't have to raise your hand cause you're gonna tell…your partner. Explain to them what do you think was the lesson of the story. (Pause) Go ahead. Why do you think the author wrote this book? Go ahead.
February 12, 2016: Lesson #4 Debrief	Like if I stopped at every page, I could have three to four comments per page. Like my kids have a lot to talk about. But that's why I did, did I do a think-pair-share at the end?.... I did, right? So, my kids have a really hard time, like they get upset if they don't get to say what they want to say. And so I try and use things like that at the end of a lesson to be able to, to be like, "save your thoughts." And if they're important enough or if you remember them enough, you'll…remember them enough to say them at the [end] of the story. And then I kind of try-ta target the conversations a little bit more around whatever the social goal is that I was aiming towards when I chose the book and chose the lesson.

Classroom discussions. Classroom discussions are important to Lois because it helps reaffirm to her students that their voices and experiences matter and that they are worth hearing about. What they know and have learned from the meaning they have created from reading and listening to Lois reads is important and relevant. The discussions Lois has in her classroom helps build a cohesive and safe community within her students. One of the most fundamental ways Lois brings about discussions in her classroom is through the use of children's literature. Lois

believes "literature gives the kids an actual example…and it gives me, as their teacher, an example to talk about. And…it's personal because it's somebody they can relate to, but it's not them." She values literature because

> The story gives you an opportunity to talk about those things and those situations vicariously through a, a fictional character in a story, a fictional or a…real person in the story…but somebody else that's not us, that's not in the classroom.…That's why I most like literature…for teaching the character traits is because it gives us a story.

Lois talked about how her students remember various read-alouds she has done, even those done in the beginning of the school year, and they draw from these shared reading experiences to make connections and have new discussions about other read-alouds Lois does with her students. Ultimately, Lois knows and believes "books are the…language of kids. And it makes more sense to them sometimes than just talking at them about it." She is able to use books as a springboard for discussion about various character traits and ties them to experiences rather than just lecturing them about character and why it is important.

Lois also uses discussions as a way to prompt reflection. During the end of her first lesson, Lois brought her students back together to discuss how they felt they worked together in their groups. She went around to students and asked how they felt their group cooperated. She gave them this time to reflect because she wanted them to give them space to begin to take ownership of their learning instead of Lois doing all of the learning and reflecting for them. Through this simple practice, Lois was able to bring about a discussion of character in a real-life and relevant way, even if she did not explicitly say this to her students. It was during this same lesson that Lois told me some of her own reflections about what had occurred in her classroom:

And obviously it wasn't perfect because there were…for sure some issues that went on

between the groups and not all students contributing equally, but those will also be

discussion points that we will make sure to address when we…come back together as a

class to present our skits. Talk about what went well and what didn't go well.

This was a time when Lois made an informed and mindful decision to not discuss with her

students some of the issues that had arisen during that activity but to save those talking points for

a discussion they were going to have later on in the week.

Lois is also very mindful about the roles she thinks she has, as the teacher, in book and

classroom discussions. In responding to my question about what she thinks her role is in

discussions, she replied,

Well, the facilitator, so providing the source of discussion. But also keeping the

discussion focused…and also helping them reach, so like the tangents that they go off on

are important [be]cause…they like to make connections and they like to make

predictions. But keeping it back on the purpose because I always have…a purpose for

why I chose that book, why we read that book. Sometimes we just read books in general

for fun when those, all those types of comments are relevant, but when…I do set a

purpose, I try and keep them back to that particular purpose so that they can understand

why we read that book. That it's tied back to "oh, there's a reason why"…so the

facilitator…job is also to encourage participation from all of the kids and not let certain

kids just monopolize the whole thing…and then…if they don't necessarily come to the

point of it on their own, helping them to reach a conclusion about why this was

important. And extending their thinking, so if they do have a thought, if they do have an

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idea, how can I take that to the next step towards a reading skill or a reading strategy that

they're kind of exhibiting but not…to a great extent.

Through my observations of Lois' teaching and through what Lois says about herself, she really

does do her best not to overpower the discussions. She is intentional about making sure her voice

is not the only voice that is heard. She tries to give her students think time and guide them in

their own thinking. This is crucial in Lois' discussions of character because if she told her

students what they should have learned about character within a story it would have undermined

her students' thinking and diminishes the role they play in their own learning. By giving them

space to take part in discussions and act as a guide and facilitator helps them to care about what

their learning, which will help them want to emulate these character values they are learning and

reflecting upon.

Talk is essential to everything Lois does in her classroom because it is through talk that

relationships are formed and strengthened, community is built, discussions are had, voices are

heard, and ownership of learning is possible. (For more examples, see Table 8.) Through talking

to her students, students talking to each other, and the teacher and students talking to each other,

they are able to have rich shared classroom experiences centered on children's literature and

character values. It is through valuing talk that character education is made relevant to the lives

of Lois' students. In the next section, I will discuss the role relevance plays in Lois' classroom

and how relevance serves to reaffirm the importance of character education, both inside and

outside of the classroom.

Table 8

Data excerpts highlighting the value of time for classroom discussions

Date and description	Data excerpt
November 9, 2015: Lesson #1	Thanks. (Pause) Henley, how did your group, umm, do you feel everyone in your group really did a nice job of getting along? (Pause) Was everybody focused?....Not being too silly? (Pause) I, I noticed that

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Table 8 (*continued*)

Date and description	Data excerpt
November 9, 2015: Lesson #1 (*continued*)	too. I just wanted to make sure you thought the same thing. Sarah, how do you feel about yours?....Who am I missing Theo right now?...yeah, I noticed that that group every time I looked over at them nobody was like dancin' around on the ground. They weren't gettin' real loud, right?....there was another group. Oh, Megan, you guys had a really great plan. Do you feel everybody in your group was cooperative?....Julia and Derek and Penelope do you feel that your group did a nice job of cooperating?....And so you guys had to cooperate in order to make a decision?....And so you guys kinda put your ideas together? Judah?....so if you're group maybe didn't, maybe you have one person in your group or maybe two people or maybe just all together you felt like you could have been a little more focused on your job or maybe you could have…done a better job of making sure that everybody was listening to one another. Or maybe that…nobody was being…overly silly things like that. (Pause) That was mostly what I saw from the groups that didn't receive cooperation points was that some, some of the group members and that's what is so important about teamwork. Right, Emerson Rose? Theo? What's so important about teamwork is it takes every single person (pause) not just part of the group, not just one person, not just even two people. In this case, it took the entire group, all three team members to make it work. Right? (Pause) If even one person doesn't cooperate, it's not gonna work out the same way, is it? Roxie?....Yeah. (Pause)…you're play might not turn out as good, right? Or somebody could end up with hurt feelings? Or somebody could end up upset, right? That happens sometimes when that somebody's not cooperating.
November 13, 2015: Lesson #1 Debrief	Characters in stories give you a good setting for talking about problematic situations outside of the kids themselves. So…sometimes you do want to talk about issues that are going on within the classroom. But sometimes you want to talk about them as outside people, so that the kids don't feel (pause) targeted or they don't feel, umm, (pause) it's good for them to be able to talk about it, as if it's happening (pause) externally…because it kind of removes it from being emotional I think for them….it's relatable, but it's removed enough so that it's not (pause) troublesome there….And so when you're seeing characters in stories that are either exemplifying a certain character trait or not, it's just a good discussion…point to go with from there and for them to be able to learn through the actions of those characters, whether it be to do what they do or to do what they are not doing.

Relevance

For learning to be effective and lasting, it must be relevant to our lives. For children, the learning that happens within their classrooms needs to be relevant to their lives outside of the school building. For character education instruction to be worthwhile, Lois believes that how she engages her students must be relevant to their lives. She seeks to engage her students in character education instruction that will not only impact them for the length of one day or one school year but will also impact them many years down the road and into adulthood. Lois also emphasizes the all-important question of why it is important to be someone of strong character. Lois believes that in order for character education to be relevant to her students' lives that they must care about what they are learning and take ownership of it because it is only through ownership of one's learning that this learning gets put into practice and made a part of one's life.

Short-term vs. long-term. Lois believes that worthwhile and effective character education is done when it affects students on a long-term basis and not solely on a short-term basis. She knows that her students will someday be adults. Therefore, she believes that what she does in her character education instruction and how she does it is crucial to the impact it will have on her students. In a conversation, she expressed to me,

> Ultimately, someday these are going to be adults that are going to be in society, and we want them to be able to have compassion for other people and have integrity and do the right thing and persevere when things are hard in life. So, we're teaching, giving them, these foundational skills. Giving them names for these things. That then at some point in their lives will help them to be more successful in their careers, in…college and as they get older but most importantly when they get to be an adult that hopefully those things if we build them well enough along the way, they'll be able to do that."

She understands that her students may not remember specific activities or lessons they did centered on character values, but she believes that by helping them name character traits and by making it relevant to their lives in that way, hopefully, her students can connect these values to their lives outside of school, their current family and community values, and into their futures.

Part of making character education lasting is not always giving students examples of characters in stories who are always doing the right thing. She strives to give students opportunities to problem-solve through literature by giving students a non-example of various character traits they discuss. After my first observation of a read-aloud she did with her class, Lois told me,

> By allowing them to read a story where the characters don't cooperate, they can be problem solvers, and they can take a role in…solving that problem and thinking about how it could be done differently, which is what I would want them to take and apply to their lives. When they encounter problems and maybe other kids aren't cooperating or maybe they're not cooperating, how could they problem solve in order to fix it and to make it better? So, that's kinda why I feel like a non-example worked in this situation…because it's easy for them to pick out (pause), when you read a book…how the characters are doing something right. They're, they're really good at reciting to you what cooperation looks like, but it's not always as easy as it seems. So, for them to see a situation where cooperation wasn't easy for people and being able to talk about how they could've made it better.

She wanted what she read to be applicable to the lives of her students, but she also felt the best way to do this was to give them the opportunity to reflect on what was read and think about what they might have done the same or differently than the characters in the story.

Part of making character education lasting is not always giving incentives for doing the right thing. Lois does not have any qualms about extrinsic motivators. However, she also tries to make sure her students have an understanding that they will not always receive extrinsic motivators like "Cooperation Cash" for emulating strong and positive character values. Lois explained to me,

'Cause we also like to cooperate, even if we're not earning rewards….We just like to intrinsically know that that's the right thing to do….Rather than always being [rewarded] for things. (Pause) Which is great too. (Both Morgan and Lois chuckle)….I mean don't get me wrong, but adults don't really get [rewarded] for cooperating with other people.

She wants her students to begin to uphold the character values they talk about and discuss because she knows that, as adults, there are very few extrinsic motivators for doing the right thing. As adults, most of us want to do the right thing because it is something within us prompting us to do so. Therefore, Lois tries to reiterate this to her students, even in the midst of taking part in school-wide incentive programs to emulate the character traits of the months.

One of the key aspects of making character education relevant and lasting is to discuss why we talk about character values and try to nurture them in the first place. (For an additional example, see Table 9.) In the next section, I will discuss how Lois discusses the "why" behind character education and the impact this has on her character education instruction.

Table 9

Data excerpts highlighting short-term vs. long-term relevance in character education instruction

Date and description	Data excerpt
December 7, 2015: Lesson #3 Debrief	Obviously what I need from them here at school is for them to be good characters at school…if I were to say what I need from them in the classroom, that's what I need from them in the classroom. But as far as what I want is I want much more than that. So, if I were only interested in getting them to have good character in the classroom, everything that we did would be focused around how do you treat your, your classmates with this? And how do you do this during group work? And how do you

Table 9 (*continued*)

Date and description	Data excerpt
December 7, 2015: Lesson #3 Debrief (*continued*)	do this with your assignments? And how do you do this on the playground? Like everything that we did would relate to school. But I think by embedding these conversations in more real life scenarios…they can take and extend that to their own lives. And they can think about how to do these things in their own lives beyond the school environment…(pause) and you know, the hope is obviously that by doing these kinds of things once or two times or three times, you create an interest in it. You create a habit the more times you do them together in school or the more that you talk about these ideas and encourage these ideas, the more they'll do them on their own, which would hopefully carry over into the future as well. (Pause)…and by, by having discussions…I guess it just makes the kids care more about what they're learning. It gives them ownership of it. If I were just reading them the stories and telling them what they should learn from it (pause), I don't think they would be taking as much ownership of the content and of the message of the story, as when they talk it through themselves. And as when they explain it to other people, so we do that a lot too is to explain to somebody else. Do a think-pair-share, things like that to explain to somebody else what you thought about a certain…part.

The *why* behind character education. People need to understand why they are asked to do something. Often times, when we are asked to do something without a purpose, it makes us apathetic and lethargic toward the task or activity. Children are the same way. Without attempting to answer the all-important question of "why," they might be confused about how character education is relevant to their lives or resist learning about and participating in discussions and activities regarding character values. This is one of the reasons teachable moments are so impactful and important to Lois. She said,

And, so, those teachable moments are gonna to help you address the need rather than just, because those, those umbrella concepts and things that you need to teach them are great, but…I think it's more effective in the moment. When it's addressed in the moment. And when there's a real experience tied to why we need to learn this.

She understands that she can plan and target specific character values, but it's those things that happen in the moment that are going to be the most relevant and applicable to her students' lives.

One practice Lois does is talk about cooperation with her students before they do any type of group work. As Lois was setting the stage for her students to plan a skit activity based read aloud I had just observed and explaining the activity with her students, she had this discussion with her students:

> Do you have to be a girl to play Miss Penny?....No. (Pause) Right. That's not even the important part. (Pause) Okay? (Pause) The important part is that you can show, and are you going to need to be able to have cooperation in order to work with your group to show us about cooperation?....Are you gonna have to listen to one another?....Are you gonna have to respect other people's ideas?....Are you going to have to get along?....Are you all gonna have to work together?

Lois understands that her students may need a refresher on cooperation in order for the activity to go smoothly. She also understands that laying this foundation of being cooperative as a group is relevant to her students: relevant in the moment because of the activity they were doing and relevant in future situations, because they are doing to need to know how to cooperate and collaborate with each other in group situations.

Lois also answers the "why" behind character education by giving examples of people emulating values in her adult life. She tries to make the connection between what they are learning as kids to similar situations that happen in adulthood. In one discussion she had with her students, she told them a story about a time when she experienced unprompted kindness from a stranger:

It kinda reminded me, too, of the time I told you about the when I was at Starbucks, and

the person in front of me pa[id] for me. Because did I ever get to, did they do it because

they wanted me to do something for them?....I didn't even get to see their face. I didn't

even get to see, say thank you cause they were in the car in front of me. So, they didn't

need credit for it, right?....They just did it to be kind.

Through giving examples such as the one above, Lois is able to answer the question of why she

is teaching this and why they are talking about this through the literature they read, the activities

they participate in, or the situations that arise. (For more specific examples, see Table 10.)

Ultimately, the core practice that Lois does is making sure she weaves discussions of

character in everything she does. She said,

I think the most important thing is that this isn't the only time that we talk about it

[character]. And that every time things come up, (pause) every time something comes

up (pause), it's [a] character lesson. Whether it's just for that…one or two kids that are

having a situation or whether it's for the whole class or whether…it's for a group of kids

or whatever it may be…these lessons are to set the stage for a certain thing that I'm

trying to, to teach or to…teach them. However, that wouldn't be the only time that we

talk about it.

She believes that character education is not done in pockets of isolated lessons. It has to be

connected to real-life situations, both inside and outside of the classroom. It has to be a vein that

runs through everything they do in the classroom. In the next section, I will discuss the

importance of student ownership in effective character education.

Table 10

Data excerpts highlighting the "why" behind character education instruction

Date and description	Data excerpt
November 13, 2015: Lesson #1 Debrief	Even though that's the character trait that's emphasized that month, it's not like it's the only time that we talk about it…. Cause cooperation, I would say we do a mini-lesson. I would call it a mini-lesson on cooperation every single time the kids go to work together. Cause we talk about…what it will look like when the group members are cooperating, what it'll look like when both group members are contributing to the group and how you're gonna respect each other and all those things. So, I would call that a mini-lesson every time we, we do group work.
December 7, 2015: Lesson #2 Debrief	And, so, trying to get them to understand that it's not necessarily about always how it makes us feel, even though it should make you feel good to be giving, but it's about the other person. It's about doing that because it's right and because it's a good thing to do and not always needing somebody to realize who did that for them…Just basically not taking credit for things. And I had told them…this story of…how I went to Starbucks….And the person in front of me paid. And so…the next time I went to Starbucks, I did that for the person behind me, and I was like, I said, "…that person will never know my face. They'll never be able to say thank you to me. They'll never even know it was me, if they see me or meet me again. They'll never know it was me. But it's just about knowing that some stranger, somebody that you don't know out there is doing those kinds of things." So, I think that example really made sense to them, and…made them realize like, "Okay, it's not always about the credit that we get.
December 7, 2015: Lesson #3 Debrief	In response to my question about how Lois thinks she helps foster genuine character in her student and not fabricated or fake character:

I think the most important thing is that this isn't the only time that we talk about it [character]. And that every time things come up, (pause) every time something comes up (pause), it's character lesson. Whether it's just for that…one or two kids that are having a situation or whether it's for the whole class or whether…it's for a group of kids or whatever it may be…these lessons are to set the stage for a certain thing that I'm trying to, to teach or to…teach them. However, that wouldn't be the only time that we talk about it. So, it's not like I teach you this extravagant lesson about how to give and do these good deeds, and, but is it gonna look like this all the time? No, probably not, cause in reality sometimes you do good deeds for other people, and they go unappreciated or unnoticed or whatever. But that's not the point. The point is that we do them because it's the right thing to do….and so it's just as important to do these lessons and teach them about the idea, as it is to embed it into |

Table 10 (*continued*)

Date and description	Data excerpt
December 7, 2015: Lesson #3 Debrief (*continued*)	everything that you do and into situations that arise. And, so…when it comes to various things…we make a point of doing things for other people. And, so, I don't know. It's really hard to even articulate because it's just built into everything all the time. So…if a situation arises and two students had a conflict or one student felt this way or…like there was a student who, her mom told me at conferences that her daughter didn't feel like she had any friends. And, so, I had a conversation [with] two or three of my girls that I felt were not as clicky as other girls, and I asked them…if they could go out of there way to whatever. And they all did it willingly, like happily. Like just little things like that I think are (pause) bringing it back to…that bigger purpose. Does that make sense? Or…we had a…teacher that worked here pass away a couple weeks ago, and…we had like a big class discussion about it. And it was very emotional. And afterwards we talked about things that we could do to help the family, and so a lot of the kids…made cards for the family. Like sympathy cards. But then I had a couple kids that specifically wrote letters to…the woman's daughter….So, it's more sometimes just when things, when the need arises for a good deed….to do it then. And the kids always ask me about like cause…the teachers do this little stocking thing that they pass around, as like a, kinda like a Secret Santa, but you get it, and then you pass it on to somebody else. And the kids always ask me about it, and so I stopped an explained to them why we do it. And…just kinda telling them the reason behind (pause) what we do for people. (Pause) Ya know? Then leading by example I think is probably the other of the best ways to do that. So, what makes these…lessons more authentic than just in the moment is that it's not the one and only one time we talk about it. And I teach character not only through stories. I teach them through stories to give the kids something to relate to and to kinda like set the stage for it, but then those types of things are proven over and over again in, in the way that the classroom runs. So, kinda just in the environment…they know those…types of things are expected of them all the time.

Student ownership. In order for any learning to be truly relevant to students' lives, they need opportunities to be active participants in their learning so that they can take ownership of it. The same can be said of learning surrounding character education. One specific instance I observed Lois give students the opportunity to own their learning was the skit they participated in creating after the read-aloud of *Miss Penny and Mr. Grubbs* (Ernst, 1991). She told her students,

So, instead of telling me out loud why you think they didn't cooperate…or what you

think, this is what you're going to do. You have a job to do…. I want you to show Miss

Penny and Mr. Grubbs's story (pause), except for I want you to show it in a way that they

could have been more cooperative….With each other.

While Lois did not explicitly tell her students that this was an opportunity for them to own their

learning, by simply shifting the control over to her students and having them showcase ways to

be more cooperative, she extended the invitation of ownership to her students.

Another instance in which Lois extended the initiation of ownership to her students was

through their discussion of the books *Ordinary Mary's Extraordinary Deed* (Pearson, 2002) and

The Giving Tree (Silverstein, 1964). After reading about Ordinary Mary's story, she had students

come up with ideas about ways they could be doing extraordinary deeds at home, in school, and

within the community. She wanted her students to think of their own ideas and not just give them

her ideas of how they can be giving. Based on this class discussion and their discussion of *The*

Giving Tree (Silverstein, 1964), Lois came with an idea to create a tree called "The Giving

Tree." She explained to her students that this tree could be a way for them to showcase their

ideas for how they can be giving in school, at home, and within the community. Although the big

tree was her idea, the acts of giving that would hang on the tree would come from the students,

further giving them an opportunity to take ownership of their learning and being to understand

further the importance of character education and doing the right thing.

Lois reaffirmed my thought processes when I was listening to her explain "The Giving

Tree" idea to her students. In a conversation afterwards, she told me,

Hopefully all the ideas that we hang up there will be free ideas for giving…and by

making something like that they're kind of taking ownership of this idea that we've been

talking about and I'm not only saying, "go and pick one of these things that you're gonna

do." (Pause) But they can also educate others. So, sometimes that [is] important…as far

as teaching kids that, that it doesn't stop with you. So, spread that onto somebody else.

(Pause) Because like in Ordinary Mary's story, if it had stopped with Mrs. Bishop….

there wouldn't have been a story. So, if it stops with just them (pause), then there won't

be a story.

Lois wants her students to care about what they are talking about and discussing as a class. One

way to help students care about emulating character values and practicing these values is to give

them opportunities for ownership of their learning. (For more examples, see Table 11.) Lois

knows that her students' have stories worth telling and acts worth doing with their lives and the

character values they embody, which is why it is so crucial that she makes character education

relevant to their lives. She designs her teaching in ways that have a long-term impact, start to

answer the question of why we talk about and want "good character," and extend ownership of

learning to her students.

Table 11
Data excerpts highlighting student ownership in character education instruction

Date and description	Data excerpt
November 13, 2015: Lesson #1 Debrief	In response to my question about why Lois chose a skit as the activity for her students to do after her read-aloud: So they [have] a chance to do something for a purpose because when they perform it….for their peers, it will give them a purpose for their cooperation. They're not just planning something for nobody. They had an audience…and so then they can just kind of showcase their work and…their ideas and what they came up with. (Pause) And, again…they're very social…they like working together, and so I knew that part would be engaging for them. They like talking to one another and being silly and all those types of things as they work…which I allow to a certain extent of silliness. But…then to be able to come back and show that to their peers (pause), they really, they just like peer interaction. And, so, even if it's them standing up in front of other kids and performing something and then getting feedback or compliments or

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Table 11 (*continued*)

Date and description	Data excerpt
November 13, 2015: Lesson #1 Debrief (*continued*)	questions or things like that because we always do kind of a feedback session after they perform. (Pause) So.
	Morgan: Do you think that helps to set the stage for more student-centered learning versus teacher-centered instruction?
	Lois: Absolutely! Yes, thank you…I forgot to say that, but yes. It is more student-centered because during that, I mean during the read-aloud, I was the one leading that. But…after that, it was 100% them…in their groups…for the most part they didn't really need me or need my input…if I spread the leaders out well enough, which I think I did…they kinda could go with it on their own. Occasionally they needed my help in bringing it back, but they pretty much ran the show during that part.
December 4, 2015: Lesson 2	You guys have so many ideas, and it's really amazing…and that's why I have this paper for you to write down some of the ideas that we talked about and some of your own. And we're gonna do this…together next week sometime. And we're gonna think about and we're gonna actually do one of these things, as a class. We might pick an "at school" one, but we might also think about something that you could take and do at home or something that we could take and give back to the community. Another one that I, that I just thought of that I think I would work at home, at school, and to the community, and we've done this before is to write letters. Write thank-you letters. Or write cards. Make, make Christmas cards or make "I'm thankful for you" cards. Right? You could [do] that at home because you could do it for a parent. You could do it at school because you could do it for a teacher….Or you could do it for the community cause we've written thank you notes, thank you cards to the United Way. We've written thank you cards. We did a thank you for Kellie Jo Lamb. We've done lots of thank you's. So, that's something for the community.

Conclusion

Lois Carpenter is a teacher who strongly believes in the importance of character

education. She believes it serves as the foundation of everything she does to the extent that

without character education, she would struggle to teach academics to her students. Fundamental

to everything she does is this idea that academic learning and character education are not in a

dichotomous relationship. Character education helps to enhance academic learning because if

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kids know how to better treat each other and engage in positive behaviors, then it will be easier for them to be able to focus on and engage in rich academic experiences and learning.

Lois does what the district mandates for character education, but then she adds onto it and engages in character education in ways that work for both her and her students, which may change from year to year depending on the needs of her students. She believes in the importance of relationships and community because without either of those, character education cannot truly take place in authentic, safe, and trusting ways. She also seeks to be mindful in her decision-making. She plans solid character education instruction, but also makes informed in-the-moment decisions based on the needs of her students. Lois also maintains a reflective, positive attitude that serves a strong model of character for her colleagues and her students.

Lois values opportunities to promote talk in her classroom: talking to her students, students talking to each other, and students and teachers discussing together. Through talk, character education is made relevant to the students' lives—inside and outside of school and across childhood and (hopefully) into adulthood. Through talk, Lois can begin to answer the why behind the importance of character education and also give opportunities for her students to take an active role in their learning, which will hopefully prompt them to take ownership of their learning of various character values in other settings as well. Each of these components serves as a strong and effective foundation for character education instruction in Lois' classroom that helps make character education and the discussion of values go beyond a "one-size-fits-all" approach to character.

CHAPTER 5

KATHRYN WALLACE

The foundation of character education in Kathryn Wallace's first grade classroom is community. She believes strongly in the importance of character education, but she does not adhere to packaged programs, focusing instead on implementation that best fits the needs of her and her students. The relationships she builds with her students and the relationships her students build with each other are of the utmost importance and are the basis of character education in her classroom. One of the most significant ways she builds this community is through classroom discussions, which reaffirms the value of talk. Most of these discussions are centered on the books teacher and students read together in class.

Kathryn also wants to make sure that what she is teaching her students regarding character education is relevant to their lives, both inside and outside of school. This is one significant reason why they talk about feelings a lot. Their discussion of feelings gives opportunities for these young children to make connections to newly named character values in ways that are relevant to them. Kathryn also seeks to give examples of ways adults exhibit good and strong character and the challenges that arise with being caring, compassionate, kind, and other character values she is trying to foster. Her goal is to reaffirm that character education is not just relevant for the present, but also plays a significant role in adulthood. Lastly, Kathryn does not take the mandated character education curriculum at face value. She thinks about her students and asks constructive questions about the curriculum that enhance and add to it so the character education she implements in her classroom is grounded in what she knows about her students and seeks the best ways to foster character within her classroom community.

In this chapter I will first draw on data collected to paint a picture of Kathryn and her instruction in character education, starting with her definition and description of character education with and for her students and then extending with examples from my interviews with Kathryn and observations of her teaching. I will then discuss what I believe drives Kathryn in her teaching instruction of character education based on what data I collected. Through this I will introduce and analyze five meaningful themes drawn from the data: relationships and community, taking a questioning approach to character education, the value of talk, relevance, and feelings. I will conclude with an overall picture of Kathryn to reaffirm what character education means to her and how this weaves throughout her character education instruction.

What Does Character Education to Mean to Kathryn?

Character education to Kathryn is more than just trying to get kids to behave well and appropriately. It is grounded in a stance of doing and being, which stems from a place of being intrinsically motivated to do the right thing and emulate positive character values. Kathryn said,

> I'm so…anti-extrinsic motivation….It's how you feel inside. If you're doing your job the right way (pause)…Sure I get that kids need to have [fun] at school. But we have fun in here all day long. Like we did a…pumpkin unit study last week. And what did we do? We dug out pumpkins and had Mr. Edwards carve them for us. That was so much fun!....And we're learning at the same time.

Kathryn believes that we should behave appropriately and be kind to other people because it is comes from a core internal belief that doing so is the right thing to do, regardless of what one might receive in exchange. This does not mean that school needs to be an overly serious place that drains all the fun, excitement, and creativity out of learning because when teachers and learners are present with each other and being caring and respectful of one another, then doing

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these fun and exciting activities is possible. Based on my observations and our informal conversations, it was clear to me that Kathryn saw issues with unkind interactions and disrespect as interfering with academic learning and as making it much more challenging.

Kathryn also believes in the importance of educating herself on the diversity of her students' backgrounds. Kathryn wrote:

At the beginning of the year I hit families and communities REALLY hard with a lot of multicultural children's literature and family themes. I make sure that my classroom library is stocked full of books with characters of different races and ethnicities, and that I make a point to do read alouds with those books, too....I make sure it is a community of learners who respect each other from the very beginning. I don't leave any "race" out, I have books that show characters with positive character traits of all races, and characters that show negative, too (*Thank You Mr.* [*Falker*], for example, the other students were not being kind to the main character).

Kathryn informs herself through literature and her relationships with families and communities. Additionally, from what I know about Kathryn and her classroom, she has many units of study that draw directly on links between her students and their families and their classroom learning.

Another key component of Kathryn's focus on doing and being is feelings. Kathryn believes in trying to find ways to talk about character that these young children will understand. Additionally, part of the transition from emulating character values for extrinsic rewards to doing it for intrinsic reasons is grounded in how people feel. Kathryn defined character education as

Making sure we know how we're feeling (pause), how to tell on people's faces how they might be feeling, and what we can, how we can react to that. We talk a lot about feelings

in here….we talk about facial expressions a lot…..How people are feeling. How they feel

when they feel like that. And what we can do to react to that.

She believes that a significant part of character education is being responsive to the feelings of

other people. According to Kathryn, doing the right thing should make one feel good, but taking

the time to understand how somebody else might be feeling and responding to that accordingly

helps create a strong sense of community with the people around them. This is a belief Kathryn

put into practice each day.

Being, doing, and tuning into our own feelings and those of the people around us are at

the core of what character education means to Kathryn. Knowing more about what she believes

about character education, this allows us to better understand her approach to character education

and how she teaches it within her classroom community. With this clearer understanding of what

character education means to Kathryn and how she defines it, next I will discuss what drives

Kathryn in her teaching instruction of character education.

What Drives Kathryn in Her Instruction?

Through talking with Kathryn and observing her teach, it became clear to me that her

vision of character education is about more than simply trying to get her students to emulate

positive character values because that is what is expected of them but helping them to do so

because internally this is something they want to do regardless of what anybody else expects.

Because of this, for Kathryn, character education is "very important" within her classroom, and it

grounds her instructional decisions and how she seeks to build strong and trusting relationships

with and between her students. Based on my data, I identified five themes that help explain

Kathryn's instructional choices in teaching and the importance of character education to her:

relationships and community, taking a questioning approach to character education, the value of talk, relevance, and feelings.

In the following sections I will discuss first how character education informs and is informed by the relationships she builds with her students and the sense of community she helps cultivate within her classroom among her students, taking a specific look at the role safety plays in this. Next, I will demonstrate through data excerpts how Kathryn's questioning stance towards character education helps inform her instructional decisions surrounding character education. Third, the important (and ubiquitous) nature of talk as a vehicle for instruction will be addressed. Fourth, I will extend on the idea of relevance and how Kathryn strives to make sure her students understand the importance of character values for the long-term. Finally, I will look at the role feelings play in helping to bring about discussions of character and nurture character values within Kathryn's classroom community.

Relationships and Community

Fundamental to everything Kathryn does in the classroom are relationships and community. This includes both academic and character education instruction. Kathryn believes in the importance of building strong relationships with each other and her students doing the same with each other. In this section, I will discuss first the effect relationships and community have on Kathryn's character education instruction, including specific focus on the role safety and trust plays in fostering these aspects in her classroom and with her students and their families.

Kathryn appreciates opportunities where she gets to know her students. As she explained in one of our conversations, her favorite thing about character education instruction is

Getting to know my kids. Getting to know my kids….because they share a lot about how they're feeling in their lives when they are talking about…character traits. (Pause) And

why it makes them feel that way, and (pause), yeah, getting to know my kids. And

creating that sense of classroom community.

Kathryn aspires to get to know her students on a personal level and learn about their lives outside

of school. When they talk about their home lives, she listens and takes what she learns to create a

stronger sense of community in her classroom.

Not only is building community and relationships Kathryn's favorite thing about

character education, but she also believes it is the most important and vital thing to do in the

classroom because it is these relationships that are created that form the basis and the stronghold

for everything else. Kathryn explained,

If you start this from day 1, the rest of your year is gonna go so much smoother because, I

mean, take 30 minutes out of your day from assessing the first two weeks of school and

build that community. Build that character….Have daily meetings about not just one the

character trait of the month but just about how the kids are feeling. And just talking to

them and getting to know them on a personal level….That's like the most important

thing….like really creating that family.

Kathryn, from the first day at the beginning of the year, is intentional about taking the time to

continuously build community in her classroom because she believes that having conversations

with her students about their lives and getting to know each of them as a person and not just as

her student is fundamental to the success of her students.

Even Kathryn's students understand the importance of community. Kathryn said,

"Community and safety[6] that's how you're gonna get to the kids. That's how you're gonna get

things done….Like my kids are (pause), I mean they're six. So, ya know, sometimes things

happen. But they follow directions. They understand why they need to follow directions." Her

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[6] I talk explore this idea of the need for safety in more depth later on in my thesis.

students understand because Kathryn is constantly uncovering ways to help her students feel a sense of camaraderie in her classroom. Although her students are in the first grade, they understand what it means to have a sense of community within the classroom and can see how it affects them. Kathryn explained to me one day a conversation she had with one of her students:

> One of my boys said, "Yeah, we're a family." And I said, "Yeah, we are a family. So, this is what we're gonna do tomorrow"…and so, like even just like using the word "family", for 6-year olds like…they get it. Like they get that there's a school family and a home family.

Using the language of family is important to Kathryn because, in the midst of many different backgrounds and personal experiences, she knows her students understand what it means to be a family with the people around you.

The community and family Kathryn strives to create are not only with her students but with their parents and families as well. Her students engage in "family message journals":

> So, every Friday they write letters….to their parents, and then…their parents write back. So, this is a time where the kids can write about what we…did that week, but they can also talk about our character traits if they choose to….because I think it's really important for them to share.

She wants her students' parents to feel involved in their children's learning, and she wants her students to feel excited about including their parents in experiences they have at school. In addition to these family message journals, they "talk about what they do outside of school." Kathryn engages her students in conversations beyond their academic learning. She also has "Good News Notes." These are, as she described them,

for specific things that kids do, not because they're ready, respectful, responsible, or safe.

But like specific things that they do that are really, really awesome. Like helping a friend

or working extremely hard…I try to give a couple of these out a week, especially

to…kids who I feel their parents need to know what they're doing because they're

awesome.

She tries to create as much positivity within the classroom community as possible, and this

means including her students' families and inviting them to be part of the classroom community

as well.

Through building these relationships with her students and their parents, Kathryn can

take what she knows about her students and make informed instructional decisions. When she is

planning instruction regarding character values, Kathryn told me the first thing she does is

Think about my kids. I think about their home lives. I think about…how they react to

certain things, and I think about…stories that they may bring up when talking about

them…I really try to think about my kids first…and I also think about real-life stories

that I can share with them about my life, so they know that I'm opening up so they can

also open up…so that would be…the first thing.

By thinking about her students, she is choosing to be responsive to their needs. She wants to

make sure what she is teaching is relevant to their lives[7]. (See Table 12 for additional data

examples.)

Table 12
Data excerpts highlighting relationships and community in character education instruction

Date and description	Data excerpt
November 3, 2015: Initial Interview	It [character education] 100% affects them. From the first day of school, it 100% affects them…and I think I have grown in character ed, and I've grown in how to create safety in my classroom over the last several

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[7] I will expound upon this concept of relevance in a later section entitled "Relevance" later in my thesis.

Table 12 (*continued*)

Date and description	Data excerpt
November 3, 2015: Initial Interview (*continued*)	years…I would say last year and this year have been academic-wise, behavior-wise, and just community-wise have been my best years because I, I'm learning every year. But my kids (pause) they get it. Like they understand that we're all people. I don't know. It's really hard to explain…I mean academic-wise, they work…because we talk about why it's important to work, how it makes people feel, how it makes you feel when you succeed in something, and how you can persevere if it's really hard. But why you're persevering cause you're going to be learning more, and it makes you feel good to learn more.
November 18, 2015: Lesson #1 Debrief	In response to my question about what Kathryn's next steps will be when she teaches her next character education lesson: It depends on what I feel like the kids need…like I don't read a book every day at that time, but every day we do come in. Well, we do a math timed test first, but then we come and sit in a circle. And I just say, "okay, how are we feeling today." And then they'll just be like, "This is how I feel, and this is why." Some people are feeling sad, and some people are feeling happy…and they're not allowed to say anybody's names. Like if somebody made them mad at recess….They're not allowed to say their names…but then we talk about what they could've done or whatever. I mean just giving them that time to (pause)…De-stress I guess. Usually makes the afternoon smoother.
December 6, 2015: Lesson #2 Debrief	Those strong connections with families is what is gonna make or break your year….I have seen so many positive things out of this classroom. 90% of my kids return their homework every week, which is not typical at all of a classroom. I had a 100%...attendance for conferences, which is not at all typical for this building. Not at all typical…my kids are excited to come to school….We do these literacy backpacks when they share their stories with their parents. We do these family message journals…where they write to their parents on Fridays about what they're doing at school, and then the parents write them back. There are all these different things that you can tie into literacy instruction…that you can…use to foster these relationships between home and school because these parents are working two to three jobs…and they don't have time to come and volunteer at school. But giving them a way to feel connected to the school and feel a positive connection…not just a negative connection, is really important…because a lot of times, when do teachers call parents? When they're in trouble.

Thinking about her students and knowing who they are as individuals is of the utmost

importance to Kathryn, and one key aspect of building relationships and community in her

classroom is safety. Often times when people think of the word safety, they may think about safety with our bodies and keeping our hands and feet to ourselves. While being safe with our bodies is an important and key component of safety, this is only one aspect of safety. Being safe with our words and our mouths is another key part of safety and is an area Kathryn seeks to reaffirm and highlight with her students. In her classroom community, she wants her students to feel safe. When I asked Kathryn about what she thought was the most important aspect of how she engages her students in character education instruction, she replied,

> That they feel safe with me. That they feel safe with me as a person. Like the first several weeks of school, I do so many things to build…community with my class, not just with them but with their parents. So, they know that their parents also trust me. The kids need to trust me. The kids need to trust each other. They need to know that they are going to be safe in here….And them trusting me and them trusting each [other] is…like the biggest piece. So we can talk about these hard issues. We can talk about perseverance. We can talk about responsibility. Things that everybody is working on, but we can trust each other and understand that everybody is working on them.

Kathryn believes that safety is the key to trust, and by creating an environment that is safe, her students can trust her, their parents can trust her, and the students can learn to trust each other too. She believes that without a mutual sense of trust with their community, trying to discuss and promote positive character values is going to be challenging.

This sense of safety extends to the discussions and conversations Kathryn has with her students in the classroom. Kathryn explained to me that her students "know that if I say, 'tell me more. Can you tell me more about that?' They know that it's a safe environment, and nobody's going to laugh at them. Or…make fun of them, or things like that." This is a key example of

safety moving beyond just physical safety. During discussions she wants verbal safety, too. She expects her students to use kind words and not make fun of each other. This expectation helps to create safety with leads to trust and further helps to strengthen unity and community.

Often the discussions students and Kathryn have surrounding character values stem from shared reading experiences. Kathryn reads a lot of children's literature to help introduce and expound upon various character values. In my second observation of Kathryn, she used the website Storyline Online (Screen Actors Guild, 2016) to read the book *Thank You, Mr. Falker* (Polacco, 1998) with her students. They had many different discussion threads, but there was an important one about the main character and safety. Because I am focusing in my study only on the teacher, and did not gather permission to include student voices, I have included only Kathryn's statements below. The ellipses include spaces where the students were commenting and asking questions as well.

> When she's with grandma, how does she feel?....So, I have a question. When she got home, what did she do?....Why do you think she told her grandma?....We always talk about this in here. It makes her feel what?....There's another word that we talk about in here. (Pause) She's gonna go talk to that person because that person makes her feel?....It makes her feel safe. Right? It makes her feel safe. So, she felt comfortable talking to grandma….So when…you're feeling something, do you think you should keep it all bottled inside? (Pause) Who…should you talk to about that?....Go to…somebody you feel safe. At school, Trisha probably doesn't feel safe because….people are laughing at her. So, do you think that's why she hasn't told anyone at school yet?....I have another question, do you think it was a smart idea for her to…share this with her

grandmother?....And do you think it's good to share your feelings with somebody that you

trust?....Does it make you feel better?

Kathryn used a section of this story to help highlight the importance of safety. She discussed

what was happening with the main character and used this shared reading experience to help

students make connections to safety in their own lives.

Through having conversations about safety and promoting safety within her classroom

community, her students learn what it means to be safe with both their mouths and their bodies.

Her students are also "really explicit when they are feeling unsafe…and they use the word

'unsafe' or 'I don't feel safe.' And…it always makes sense."

Building community and relationships is important to Kathryn, and she finds one of the

most fundamental ways to do this is through finding ways for her students to feel safe with her

and with each other. (See Table 13 for additional data examples.) Safety helps open up

opportunities for discussions of character values because feeling safe in trusting relationships

helps build a sense of community where kids want to be encouraging to one another share about

what they are learning. In the next section, I will discuss how Kathryn's questioning approach to

character education also serves as a tool for effective character education instruction.

Table 13

Data excerpts highlighting safety in character education instruction

Date and description	Data excerpt
November 3, 2015: Initial Interview	Kids need to feel safe at school. They need to feel safe…with their mouths, and they need to be safe with their hands, (pause) their bodies. And that means that you need to exhibit the character traits (pause) all of them, all the time. And…teachers need to be modeling that and explaining why it's important and reading books about it, so kids feel safe at school. And if they feel safe at school, they're going to do better with academics….I don't think it should have to be like, "oh, you need to teach the character traits because the kids here are crazy." If…teachers built that sense of community at the beginning of the year and…talked about these and how we feel and why we feel this way and how we can do our best at school, kids are gonna get it. And, I mean, my class is

Table 13 (*continued*)

Date and description	Data excerpt
November 3, 2015: Initial Interview (*continued*)	lovely, and they want to feel respected, and they want to feel like they can share. And we've talked about being safe with our bodies and being safe with our mouths. They know that they can share whatever they feel like they need to share because nobody's gonna laugh at them, and nobody's going to make fun of them. Well our school values are respectful, responsible, and ready, which I think are great, but I feel…kids also need to feel safe. So, I tack on safe, so we do all four of them. And safe is probably the one that we talk about the most….Because the kids need…to feel safe in the classroom so that I can talk to them about respect and…being responsible, and being ready. Because I don't want them to think that I'm just like nagging them about all of these things until I have that relationship with them. Until they know that I'm safe and that I care for them and that I'm doing this because I care for them and not just because it's one of the school's…mandated things to do. So, safe to me, umm, I feel safe in every area of my life when I don't have to worry about people saying things that are gonna hurt my feelings and people hurting me…and so I tell my students that. So, I actually talk about….Words, words really hurt, and I think…little kids think that feeling safe is people physically harming you….And…we really need to emphasize that that means feeling safe with your mouth and with your hands. And my kids, if you were to say, "what does feeling safe mean at school?" They…would say (pause), "Being safe at school means being safe with your mouth and being safe with your body."

Taking a Questioning Approach Towards Character Education

As a teacher who believes in the importance of character education in the lives of her students, Kathryn is not afraid to ask questions when trying to discover the best way to implement character education. While the district mandates certain things be done, Kathryn does not take these minimum requirements at face value. She asks constructive questions to try to figure out how to best fit the needs of her students. One of the prominent things done in her school district is to focus on one character trait per month. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this, Kathryn questioned this particular approach, sharing with me in one conversation:

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As a district, we have, they chose specific character traits. I don't know how they're used at every school, but I think everyone is supposed to focus on one a month…like we're focusing on cooperation this month (pause), which should be focused on all year long, so I don't understand why we're just doing one.

Kathryn was questioning why character values are discussed in isolation. My observations of her teaching confirmed her expressed belief that various character values should be talked about all the time, in that she included such discussions in each classroom observation. For example, during my second observation, a student mentioned compassion when Kathryn was leading a discussion about *Thank You, Mr. Falker* (Polacco, 1998): "Compassion….We actually haven't used that word yet. But what does compassion mean? And where did you see it in this book?". New character values should be introduced when the need arises, even if it is not one of the selected character values of the month. Kathryn believes that because the highlighted values are what she expects of her students all the time that they should be reaffirmed equally as much. For example, though empathy was not the focal value at the time, Kathryn stopped in one book discussion with her class to note:

Do you know what that's called when somebody feels sad (pause), and then you feel sad for them? Do you know what that's called? That's another character trait we have not talked about yet. Oakley, do you know what that's called? It starts with 'e'. (pause). It's called 'empathy.' Say that: 'Empathy.'

Kathryn also dedicates herself to doing more with character education in her classroom than may be initially required of her. Kathryn told me about their school-wide monthly assemblies:

I think the…Oceanvale School Players is fun, and I think that's good for the whole school to see that one thing….so every class sees the same thing, but that's just one 5-minute skit, and if teachers don't do anything else, it's not going to go any farther.

Kathryn appreciates the continuity throughout the school because it gives all teachers and students shared experiences and common language to use when discussing character values, but she also questions whether this is enough. Her belief is that as a teacher she may need to do more in her classroom in order to reaffirm what is being talked about on a school-wide level because she questions whether only doing the bare minimum is enough.

Kathryn asks questions, not as a way to diminish what is happening within the school district or as school-wide character education initiatives, but as a reflective tool to push herself to be the best teacher she can be for her students and to provide effective character education instruction that encourages them to grow and think more deeply about what is being discussed school-wide and how it connects with their lives outside of school. In the next section, I will discuss the value of talk in Kathryn's classroom and how it serves as a tool in effective character education instruction.

The Value of Talk

Talk is a fundamental aspect of Kathryn's classroom. Through talk community is built, relationships are formed, safety is reaffirmed, and character values are discussed. The value of talk is most prominently seen through classroom discussions. In my observations of Kathryn's teaching, classroom discussions were the primary tool used to discuss the read-alouds. Before she and her students even begin reading, however, Kathryn made sure to discuss the purpose of reading and allow students to engage actively in reflecting on the purpose, sometimes through turn-and-talks in which they had time to turn to the people next to them to extend on what she

shared about the purpose for reading for themselves. After they finished reading the book, Kathryn would make sure at least one part of the discussion would take time to reflect on and discuss the original purpose for reading.

Talk is also essential to the activities Kathryn does with her students after they have finished reading a book aloud. In my first observation of Kathryn, she read the book *One Big Pair of Underwear* (Gehl, 2014). Through reading this book, she wanted her students to reflect on what it means to be cooperative. She told her students this was their purpose: "Here's your job while I'm reading. Your job while I'm reading is to think about things that we have to work cooperatively with in our classroom." As I previously stated, Kathryn made sure to revisit the original purpose after the read-aloud was completed. During this particular read-aloud, the activities she did with her students also helped her students to delve deeper into the purpose for reading. She did some modeling with her students about appropriate and inappropriate ways to behave cooperatively because this was a recent problem in their classroom. After this activity, she also further extended their learning of cooperation by creating a list with them about ways they can be cooperative in their classroom. In all of this, talk was essential to helping her students think through what cooperation means and how they can emulate this character value themselves.

For Kathryn, an important part of classroom discussions is figuring out her role in these discussions. In my observations of her teaching, I noticed she tried not to dominate the conversation but sought to give her students the main role in discussion. In a conversation with Kathryn, I asked what she thought her role, as the teacher, was in classroom discussions. She replied,

To encourage their talking and not to prompt all of the questions. Not to have a set set of questions but to listen to what they're saying and…elaborate on what they're saying, what they think is important and where they're…going with the conversation…I think sometimes it is important to kind of curve the conversation to make sure we're on point….I think my role is to foster this safe place where the kids feel like they can share…and that I'm not going to…tell them they're right or they're wrong. But just to make sure that…people aren't making fun of them.

Kathryn seeks to make sure that she is acting as a facilitator in the discussions they have as a class. She wants to ask questions that prompt her students thinking. Kathryn often uses the phrase, "use your words" or "tell me more" to get students thinking about what they are saying. Kathryn's goal is not to simply give her students the answer, but to offer them space and time to figure out their thoughts for themselves and share them orally in their own words.

Part of taking a role in classroom discussions is scaffolding her students' thinking. For Kathryn, part of being a facilitator is knowing when to encourage her students to say more and being cognizant of what comments her students might say. When I asked about how she thinks her scaffolding helps her students in their discussion of books and their understanding of the stories they read, she replied,

My kids come from all walks of life, and I never know, even though it's day 50, 62…(pause) I don't know what [all of] my kids' background knowledge is and what they've been through, and so I don't know how they're feeling all the time. And I don't know what they understand, and so I just need to make sure that I'm hitting everything that could come out of their mouths (chuckles) before it maybe comes out of their mouth. Or…I don't know. That's a good question.

While Kathryn was still thinking and reflecting on my question, by the end of her answer she also knows that she scaffolds because she wants to make sure she can help her students as much as possible. She thinks about her students' lives, and even though she cannot possibly know and completely understand all of their unique and individual experiences, she still understands that it is these experiences that are going to influence their classroom discussions and what they learn and understand about character values.

The value of talk is not only evident in their formal classroom discussions centered around shared reading experiences but also during times when teachable moments arise. When possible, Kathryn tries to take advantage of the teachable moments that arise in her classroom, especially because the age group she teaches is so young, making things that happen sometimes hard to remember at a later time. Kathryn explained to me:

> I think with first graders…when things happen, I do try to stop it right away and just have a discussion…like the other day on the carpet…we were talking about something, and I said something about, "oh, I would love to speak French." And then one of my children from the Congo said, "you can't speak French, you're, you're not Black." And I said, "okay, let's talk about that right now." And so we just stopped, and we just talked about it…but those [other] situations, I wasn't able to stop and talk to the entire group about it cause it happened in small groups. So…that's why I pulled those two things over, so we could talk about it in a large group.

This was an opportunity for Kathryn to talk with her students about something that was said during class, but there are times when Kathryn understands she cannot stop right away. So, she will take those moments and save them for a later read-aloud or classroom discussion. Talk is a vital component in Kathryn's classroom and is something that is used to help her students delve

further into the meaning of character values and understanding how their feelings and behaviors

are connected to the values they are discussing, which helps make character education relevant to

their lives. (For more examples, see Table 14.) In the next section, I will discuss how the role

relevance plays in Kathryn's character education instruction.

Table 14

Data excerpts highlighting the value of talk in character education instruction

Date and description	Data excerpt
December 3, 2015: Lesson #2	Ezekiel, you know what? That was a really courageous. You were very, that was very brave of you. To say, "I don't know how to read hard books." (pause) (Student talks at the same time) But is that okay?....That's okay. Nobody laughs at him." "Okay, let's talk about that. So, if you think they're mean to her, she should be mean back to them?....Let's think about that for a second….What do you think about that, Quinnlan? If they're mean to her, do you think (pause) she should be mean back?....No….Well, we're still talking about what Reese just said cause this is important….If someone's being mean…what do you need to do?....You need to tell someone…you should not be mean back to them.
December 6, 2015: Lesson #2 Debrief	I don't know if this is another one of your questions, but the little boy in the front, we were talking about reading…he said something about, cause they were talking about laughing, the other kids laughing at…the main character. He said, "Well, I'm not a good reader, and people don't laugh at me." You, you don't hear that out of kids' mouths. That doesn't happen, unless they're like, "I hate reading cause I suck and blah, blah, blah!" That was a completely different situation. That little boy, I'm so surprised that he said that, but he was, he was being real…he's not a strong reader….he's my lowest reader, and he, he knows it, even though I haven't said it…but he knows that nobody's going to laugh at him in here…and that was a very real (pause), that was a very real…conversation. Like he, he understood what we were talking about, and he was like this shouldn't happen, even though I know that I'm not a good reader. People in here aren't going to laugh at [me], and I know that. (pause) And that's…part of him feeling safe in here with all these other kids. And she said something about…"If somebody's mean to you, you should be mean back." Clearly, that's not what we want to happen at school. So, I asked that question, and she still didn't get it. So, I was like we probably should probably stop and talk about this because everybody's hearing this…so that was something that we needed to talk about….Because she should not be mean back, even though you want to

Table 14 (*continued*)

Date and description	Data excerpt
December 6, 2015: Lesson #2 Debrief (*continued*)	be mean back…so that was just a situation. That was really interesting that she, that student brought that up, because she is someone who (pause) I feel if somebody was mean to her, she probably wouldn't be mean back. She would probably try and take care of the thing on her, issue own her own. But I also think a lot of these kids, ya know, very high poverty classroom. They have a lot of street smarts. They're probably taught to…fight on their own, and…if somebody's being mean to you, take care of it yourself…and we have to remember, remember probably what their outside lives, what they're dealing with in their outside lives and what they're dealing with in their school lives. And sometimes those are two completely different things. The way you act home…with your family or with whoever is probably not…definitely not the way you're gonna treat people at school…so I'm wondering if she was even thinking about her home life versus her school life.
December 15, 2015: Lesson #3 Debrief	They use the language, the vocabulary words in day-to-day activities. And, if they're like doing read-to-self or reading from the classroom library, I can hear them talking about the different character traits, even if that word isn't in the book. They can pick them up, even if it's not explicitly a book about perseverance.

Relevance

Any learning that is worthwhile is the learning that impacts us for the long-term and not just for the present moment. This is an idea that Kathryn believes when she is planning instruction involving character education. Two core ways Kathryn attempts to make character education instruction relevant to her students' lives, both right now and into adulthood, is through real-life stories/connections and through explicit modeling.

In one of my conversations with Kathryn, I asked about strategies she uses to engage her students in character education instruction. One of the strategies she replied with was:

Bringing as much real life. Real life stuff as possible. (Pause) Like one of my student's moms had a baby on Friday. She came to conferences Thursday night, and then she had the baby on Friday….I knew that she had a doctor's appointment on Friday…so when she…came to school this morning like I knew that she was gonna have, I knew that she

was gonna be really excited. So, I let her share that right away when we got in. Okay, what happened? How do you feel? How are you, ya know?

Most people love the opportunity to talk about themselves and what is happening in their lives, and most children are no different. Kathryn believes that giving space for her students to talk about their lives outside of school is fundamental to bringing about discussions of character because it is through our personal experiences that are character is formed and we are shaped as individuals. She knows her students have many experiences, and giving them space to discuss them also helps build community within the classroom.

Kathryn's students are not the only ones who bring in real-life examples. Kathryn does her best to bring in examples from her own life or make up examples about things that could happen in her adult life. Kathryn explained to me:

> We talk a lot about things that happen in the schools…and I talk a lot about, I feel like sometimes kids think that getting along as adults is easy, and it's not. So, I do bring in a lot of like (pause) usually most of it's fake, but…Mr. Edwards did this for me. And…(pause) I, I just make sure they know that as adults like we have to be kind to each other too.

Through my conversations and my observations of Kathryn's teaching, I often heard Mr. Edwards' name. Kathryn often talks about examples with this teacher because he is a teacher in the school building whom the students respect and trust and with whom they feel safe. Kathryn uses examples from adulthood to try to teach her students that what they are talking about now and the discussions they have about feelings[8], character values, and the like not only matters for the school year but is also something that continues into adulthood. She also tries to make a point of making sure her students know that the reason she has such high behavioral expectations

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[8] I will discuss this in more depth in the section entitled "Feelings" later in my thesis.

because emulating positive character values takes practice, and just like she is asking them to work on these values, adults have to do the same thing, too.

Modeling is another key aspect of Kathryn's teaching to make character education instruction relevant to the lives of her students. After my first observation of Kathryn teaching, we talked about why she chose to do an activity with modeling. She explained,

Little kids need…to model. You need to model everything for them, and…I don't know if you noticed or not, but when…the things we shouldn't do, I was a part of that interaction…so the computer thing, I was a part of the interaction, and with the marker thing, I was a part of the interaction. But then I stepped back, so they could do it the right way on their own…so I always need to make sure that I'm being a model for the things you shouldn't be doing…I'm not exactly sure why, but I just want (pause), I guess I just don't want everybody misbehaving at the same time if they don't need to be…but I needed to make sure to step back and kind of let them solve their own problems cause I knew that they could…We model everything in here. Like the first day of school, we model how to sit on the carpet. And we model how to sit in a chair…I mean we model everything in here because…you can't assume anything.

Just like Kathryn thinks about different responses her students might say when reading a book, she also knows that their life experiences affect their behavior in school as well. She tries not to assume because she does not necessarily know all of the experiences her students have. She wants them to see how they should be behaving and see explicitly what is expected of them. By modeling and having her students model appropriate behaviors for each other, character is being talked about and practiced, even if there are no specific labels given for associated character values. (For more examples, see Table 15.) In the next section, I will discuss how

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discussing feelings with her students serves as an important cornerstone in effective character

education instruction in Kathryn's classroom.

Table 15

Data excerpts highlighting relevance in character education instruction

Date and description	Data excerpt
November 16, 2015: Lesson #1	Now, I have a question. If you have a chocolate chip cookie and me and Milo are sitting together and there's just one chocolate chip cookie, (pause) do you think that we would hate to share that?....Yeah. Is it okay to not want to share?....But should you share?...Yeah. It's okay to not want to cause I probably wouldn't want to share, but you probably should. So, sometimes you have to do things that you don't want to do. (Pause) But should you share your underwear?....No, just cookies.
December 3, 2015: Lesson #2	Think about that for a second. Kids are laughing. Kids in her classroom…look at me, in her classroom are laughing at her….Oh my. Ezekiel tell me more. We never laugh at students. Tell me more….Why? Why? Why should you be nice? Finely, why are we nice in here?....It makes people feel good….More and more friends….Feel happy….And do you want to feel happy?....Usually.
December 15, 2015: Lesson #3 Debrief	It's just…explicit teaching [in that] you should, not, not [be] telling them what to do but giving them skills to problem solve on their own….(pause) Trying to connect it to their life that way. (Pause) "Ms. Wallace, my shoe is untied." "Okay, so what should you do?" "I should ask someone to help me tie it." "Okay, so go ahead and do that." "That's not something that you…need help with."

Feelings

For young children, talking about feelings is a tool that can be used to introduce and

discuss character values. Knowing how we feel and learning how other people feel is something

young children and understand, so even if they cannot name the character trait of compassion,

trustworthiness, integrity, or the like, discussing character values is still relevant to their lives

because emulating these values is connected to how they feel. This is an idea that Kathryn

strongly believes in and is fundamental to how she defines character, as I previously discussed.

Kathryn explained to me,

We talk a lot about how we like to feel, and…I mean, people like to feel good. And if you're not being nice, you're not gonna feel…make other people feel good…we talk about that a lot. But we talk about how we want to feel. How do you want to feel at school? How do you want to feel?...Do we like to feel sad? Do we like to feel upset? Do we like to feel like that? We don't like to feel like that, so to fix that or to make sure that we're doing that is to be kind to one another.

Kathryn and her students talk about feelings because how people feel is so deeply connected to how they treat other people and how other people treat them. Talking about feelings gives space to answer the "why" behind character education and why people should want to emulate positive character values.

In trying to answer the question of why, Kathryn disagrees with giving extrinsic rewards as a way to nurture character in her students. As she explained:

I don't give prizes in here. Like you're being kind. How does that make you feel? It makes me feel really great inside. Awesome! That's exactly how you're supposed to feel if you're being kind. I don't need to give you a dollar to (pause) make you be kind. It's about how you feel on the inside.

She wants her students to understand that being kind, caring, helpful, etc. should not stem from a desire to get something in return for emulating those values. She wants her students to learn that they should be engaging in positive behaviors because of how it makes them—and others—feel.

One key aspect of feelings that Kathryn believes in is not dismissing her students' negative feelings. She understands that, as human beings, we all have bad days and moments when we are simply not happy. She told me,

We talked about how we feel sometimes and how it's okay to feel like that. But we just

have to think about what we do when we feel like that. (Pause) Like if you're gonna be

angry, it's okay, it's okay to feel angry at school. That happens. It's okay to feel angry, but

what are we gonna do when we feel angry?....What's a good choice (chuckles) for you to

make when you feel angry at school? So, I always let them know that it's okay, it's

okay…to feel this way, but we just have to think about what we're gonna do when we,

when we feel that way. (Pause) So, it's okay for me to feel frustrated, but am…I gonna go

yell at everybody? No.

Even though she gives her students space to feel what they want to feel, she still has high

expectations for how they act towards one another. She wants to validate their feelings, but she

also wants them to begin learning that when we choose to feel a certain way, we also have to

choose how we are going to respond to those feelings.

Part of talking about feelings is not just naming our feelings or other people's feelings but

also being able to read facial expressions and know how someone might feel, even if they never

say explicitly how they feel. Kathryn understands the importance of nonverbal communication

and explained to me why he believes teaching about facial expressions are so important:

So with little kids,….we talk a lot about facial expressions….Little kids need to learn

how to read faces because you don't always want to be speaking at them all the time.

They need to learn how to read faces so that if…my kids know if like I have a certain

look on my face and I'm looking at them from across the room and instead of me being,

"Finley, knock it off!". They can look at my face, and they know that they're doing

something wrong. And they can get back on task…because it doesn't call them out. It

doesn't embarrass them in front of all the other kids and doesn't…interrupt…whatever

kids I'm working with…so we talk a lot about (pause) how do you think I'm feeling right

now, just by looking at my face? And when they come in in the mornings,

sometimes…I'll ask, "Are you okay?" And…I'll say, "Do you know why I asked that?"

And…they would be like, "Yeah, it's because I, I'm frowning or whatever"…so they don't

have to, and the whole thing with like "use your words" like (pause)…I can't always

know what they're thinking about. But I can usually tell how they're feeling by the

expressions on their faces. So, we talk about that in books too.

One way Kathryn has discussions about facial expressions is by giving her students opportunities

to read the illustrations in the books they read. Through looking at and analyzing the faces of the

characters in books, they can gain insight into their emotions as characters and connect this with

their own lives. One example that stands out to me occurred when I observed Kathryn's read-

aloud of *Thank You, Mr. Falker* (Polacco, 1998):

Oh, let's just feel something. It says different, but look at her face. Look at her

face….Ezekiel, how do you know that she feels sad by looking at her face? What's she

doing with her face? Use your words….She's pulling her hair….Her face is red. (pause)

Ooo, yeah….Yeah, when you're nervous…sometimes your face gets red….Red or mad or

nervous. Uh, Oakley….Focusing really hard….Man, Oakley just took this picture and ran

with it cause that doesn't even say that in the book. And you just know that by looking at

the….Pictures.

When I observed Kathryn, I noticed that she asks questions about the characters in a story that

really help her students be perceptive and gain insight into who those characters are, so they

could then gain insight into oneself and how the world works. By looking at the illustrations in

this particular part of the story, the students who were talking (they represent the ellipses) were

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able to talk in-depth about what they were seeing, which helped them think about how they main character might have been feeling. Through this, they could start think about what they might do if they or one of their peers were in a similar situation.

Feelings are a way to make character education relevant in a tangible and immediate way because it is something that can be talked about and applied in any conversation or discussion. When Kathryn read the book *One Big Pair of Underwear* (Gehl, 2014) with her students, she asked her students questions about the book but then connected those questions back to real-life things happening in the classroom:

> Okay, so when the animals weren't sharing, (pause) how did they feel?....Okay…when you're at school (pause), and someone's not sharing with you, how do you feel?....So do you think you should just go on still just not sharing at all?....No. Ya know what, this morning (pause), this morning something happened. There were some people who weren't sharing very well, and then where was something that happened last week where a couple of people weren't sharing very well."

These questions and comments by Kathryn elicited extensive discussion with students. She extended with additional interactive opportunities, such as:

> Does somebody get left out?....How are they gonna feel?....He's mad. (Pause) Sometimes if you don't share do…do people get mad? I'll tell ya', something happened with the computer last week, and those girls were mad.

Both of these examples allowed students to talk about characters' feelings in the book and connected it back to real-life things happening in the classroom. Through talking about feelings, character education became immediately tangible and relevant. (For more examples, see Table

16.) Feelings arise in the classroom all the time and what was discussed can be immediately thought about and applied to classroom life by the engaged students.

Table 16

Data excerpts highlighting feelings in character education instruction

Date and description	Data excerpt
November 3, 2015: Initial Interview	We need like real life, in-class modeling, and if I see kids cooperating. Like yesterday (chuckles) my kids were, were telling me about…"oh, I dropped my book, and she helped me pick it up." And they were like, "that's cooperation." Awesome, that's cooperation. And…then they said, "but you can't give us cooperation cash, right?" And I said, "no, I can't give you cooperation…cash, but how did that make you feel?" It made me feel good because she was…helping me pick up my books. I'm like, "okay, good. So…it's making you feel good, so that's what we want. That's what we want."
November 18, 2015: Lesson #1 Debrief	And sometimes we can't help the way we feel, and they need to know that it's okay to feel a certain way. But it's how we act on it is what we need to do. Because sometimes, and like this year I don't, but sometimes we have kids who are really angry. They have a lot going on, and it's okay to be angry inside. But it's what you're doing with your anger (pause) to other people that we need to think about. It's okay to be sad. And we talk a lot about…how I can usually tell how they're feeling…so that's usually why I ask how they're feeling…but they need to know that it's okay to feel. To have feelings. And they need to share those feelings with people. (pause) Cause I get angry sometimes. It's okay to be angry. It's okay to choose to be angry. (pause) And I, (sighs) with little kids I worry (pause). Sometimes I worry that…they feel they have to be perfect all the time...and not be their true selves, and they need to know that it's okay to be their true selves for them to feel safe where they are.
December 6, 2015: Lesson #2 Debrief	In response to my question about how Kathryn thinks that talking about kids' feelings can help foster positive character: Well, with young kids, the vocabulary of the character traits that we use, I mean we use those character traits all the time, and we do those character traits all the time. But the vocabulary like empathy, they don't, they probably have never heard the word empathy before…they hear the word responsible a lot because…it's one of our expectations. But what about like compassion? That's not like an everyday vocabulary word that people use day-to-day, and they need to know that they exhibit these character traits. And they connect directly to how they're feeling and how they make other people feel…so making that connection between how we feel and what character traits we're actually exhibiting and the, that actually mean something is really important. Especially with young

Table 16 (*continued*)

Date and description	Data excerpt
December 6, 2015: Lesson #2 Debrief (*continued*)	kids who I don't think, I really don't think these kids have heard those words before.
December 9, 2015: Lesson #3	Okay. And what was he laughing at, Amelia?....How did that make her feel?....Do you think that was very nice of him?....And you know what else I was thinking? This was, this is her uncle, right? Is this her Uncle Fred?....Like I think it would be even worse having one of your family members laugh at you…so how is she feeling?....Look at her face….But how else does she look? Look at her face. Look at her eyes. They're really big….She does look surprised. "Really, he's laughing at me"….All right. (pause) I'm gonna reread this whole page. Okay? *And when it was finished, young Rosie was proud, but Fred slapped his knee and he chuckled out loud. He laughed till he wheezed and his eyes filled with tears, all to the horror of Rosie Revere, who stood there embarrassed*. Embarrassed. We've talked about that word before. Taylor, what does embarrassed mean?

Conclusion

Summary

Kathryn Wallace believes in the importance of authentic character education. She believes character education is not done in pockets of isolation. Rather, she believes talking about character is something that happens all the time and every day. The two biggest components that undergird Kathryn's character education instruction are relationships and community—with students and their families. On this basis, all other instruction—academic and social-emotional—can be built effectively. Kathryn also wants to create a classroom community that promotes safety, with both the body and words spoken, that leads to mutual trust. Kathryn also takes a questioning stance towards character education—questioning not as a way to be negative, but as a way to be most effective in her instruction and to help her students learn all they can.

Talk is also valued in Kathryn's classroom community, especially talk that happens within whole classroom discussions, either through class meetings or in response to the children's literature they read. Through talk, Kathryn and her students are able to explore feelings (their own and those of book characters) and to connect those feelings with various character traits that are discussed. This discussion allows for a more extended focus on feelings and character values and creates spaces for character education to be made relevant to students' lives outside of school. This increases the potential for it to have a lasting impact on students. By valuing and incorporating each of these elements into her classroom and/or teaching instruction, Kathryn is able to provide and implement effective character education instruction that fits the needs of all of her students and not just those who fit one particular curriculum.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I will discuss the significance of my findings across both teachers, some limitations of my research, and some implications for possible future research studies.

Considering the Meaning Across Participants

The previous chapters offer two detailed pictures of my two participants as strong teachers and engaged character education advocates. Each participating teacher approached this important topic in her own way and drew on her experience in unique ways. These descriptions offer clear evidence that there is not simply one way to "do" character education. The goal of my study, in no way designed or implemented as a comparative project, was to offer two snapshots of strong teachers' implementation of and thoughts on teaching character education. Nevertheless, the data and my analysis revealed some key components of meaningful teaching of character education that are basic to both of my participants' approaches. Highlighting these connected aspects of effective character education instruction can add significantly to discussion in the field, so I will note them here.

One foundational component that I found basic to both teachers was their emphasis on relationships and community. Both teachers believe in the importance of building relationships with their students and providing space and opportunities for their students to build relationships with each other. Both teachers strongly believe in the importance of knowing their students as individuals and using that knowledge to develop positive character values. Not only do they want to foster strong communities within their classroom, but each of my participants also worked to extend this community to include their students' families. Through building these trusting relationships with their classroom families, these two teachers were able to have discussions

centered on character values and what it means to emulate them in ways that did not create disconnects between students and their teachers and between students and their families. These open relationships helped to bridge any distance that might otherwise have developed between the teachers and families across the school-home connection.

Another component I found basic to both teachers was relevance. Both teachers sought to make character education instruction relevant to the lives of their students. They wanted their discussions, activities, literature selections, and read-alouds to impact students' character development for the long-term into adulthood and not just during their elementary school years. They sought to give their students authentic experiences with character education, where their students were taking an active role in their learning and creating their own meaning, rather than either teacher simply inundating their students with character values to be absorbed or adopted wholesale.

Using talk as a tool was also basic to both teachers. Talk is used as a vehicle of instruction and is valued by both teachers. They enjoy moments in which they had opportunities to talk to their students and to get to know them on a personal level. They both also made space for their students time to talk to each other, both informally and formally, for academic and structured learning purposes and to create a sense of shared learning in their classroom communities. Classroom discussions were a key time when these teachers talked about character values and encouraged their students to reflect. These discussions occurred as class meetings, optimizing teachable moments, and shared reading experiences, but no matter the form, these discussions held a prominent place in both classrooms. These discussions included time for teachers and students to talk to and with each other. They were a time when community was built

and strengthened, trust was continuously developed, and reflection on character values was emphasized.

Teacher reflection and questioning were also basic aspects of Kathryn's and Lois' approaches to character education. Neither teacher took the district-mandated character education curriculum and guidelines at face value. Each asked constructive questions of what they were being asked to do and reflected on how to do what was expected of them, while also finding additional ways to extend and enhance character education instruction to best meet the needs of all of their students. Each teacher demonstrated a willingness to grow in her character education instruction and stated a belief in the importance of weaving it into every aspect of the school day from the start of the school year. While these basic features are part of both Kathryn's and Lois' individual approaches to effective character education instruction, this does not mean these features can be generalized into a template for all effective character education approaches and/or programs. These teachers have found approaches that work for them and their students, based in large part on taking the time to know their students and to know the materials (including children's literature) that they can access to make character education effective in their classrooms. This alone is worth knowing.

Limitations

One key limitation of my study was the amount of time I had for classroom observations of each participating teacher. This was an exploratory study in some ways, as it was designed as a small study for my master's degree thesis. To keep the project manageable, I needed to limit its scope, which, in turn, limited what I saw each teacher use to engage students in character education instruction. While the children's literature exemplars I witnessed the teachers using as part of my study lacked racial and cultural diversity, my personal experiences in each classroom

prior to and after my study were that each teacher owned, valued, and used books that reflected the backgrounds of all of their students as well as a range of diverse groups that were not present in their classrooms, including books featuring racial and ethnic diversity, GLBT people/characters, people with disabilities, and others. Through these additional literature selections and other activities that encourage discussion and sharing of diverse cultures and students' home lives, both Kathryn and Lois help their students begin to see and understand that people from any culture can emulate and possess these character values they discuss and not simply characters portrayed in literature that reflect the dominant culture and society in which they live. However, because of the limited number of times I observed each teacher and based on the sample selection I saw, the data I collected do not reflect this directly.

Another limitation is related to the demographics of my participants. I only looked at the character education instruction of two young (but experienced), White, female teachers. While both were exemplary teachers of underrepresented students, in their cases predominantly African American students and students from a range of countries for whom English was a foreign language, it would be advantageous and important to study how teachers of color, both male and female, engage their students in character education instruction. The focus of my study was not on how ethnicity, race, or culture—of both the teacher and the students—influenced character education, so this would be something important to understand and study in more depth.

My study was limited to two case studies in one school. Researching the character education instruction of multiple teachers, across a number of grade levels, in more than one school would be an important addition to the knowledge base in this field. Did the things I saw in Lois' and Kathryn's classrooms apply solely to them and/or this school, or might the themes I drew from my data be relevant and seen in other classrooms? Additionally, I mainly looked at

the role and effects of children's literature in character education. It would be advantageous to study some other variables and see the effects of those within character education instruction. Additionally, unfortunately due to busy schedules of the key professionals who were most informed about the history of character education program adoption in this district and the formal goals of the program, I was unable to get more information about the mandated character education program (when it was established, why it was implemented, etc.) within this school district. Finally, both teachers I included were reflective practitioners, but their actions and words were necessarily translated through my lens as the researcher. It would be interesting to see what a teacher him or herself makes of his or her own character education instruction. Since I will be starting as a public school teacher myself this coming academic year, I could conduct an action research study on my own teaching as a novice teacher who brings extensive knowledge about character education. How will it play out in my classroom? How will I draw on my own experiences and my experiences with this research to develop my character education instruction with and for my future students? These are all interesting options for future research in this important area.

If I were to engage in another study on character education in classroom settings, I would draw on what I learned through this project. Since I learned a lot in this first foray into research, there are aspects of a redesigned study that would look different the next time. I would seek additional ways to learn more about the history of character education in the local school district. I would try to have more observations of the teachers included, as I believe this would give me potentially a data set that would allow for a wider and deeper representation of the teachers and their approaches. I would also include teachers with a wider variety of backgrounds to gain deeper insights into the effects of diversity and culture on character education instruction. I

might also do research in more than one school, across multiple grade levels, or across multiple classrooms at the same grade level. Each of these expanded study options could result in a wider and more in-depth study of character education within different school environments and/or across grade levels. Additionally, it is important to consider how students' character development is fostered outside of school. Through learning more about these considerations, it might be impactful to research more on how schools, families, and communities can partner together to further the character development of students. Finally, I might look at some other variables aside from character education to better understand the roles and effects of those variables on character education. All of these future options are exciting to contemplate, but considering them does not detract from the value of this short-term exploration of my two current participants' exemplary classroom teaching in this area.

Implications

Through my research and the analysis of my data, I have come to believe that at the core of effective character education instruction is trusting relationships between and among students and teachers that are cultivated all year long, which reaffirms Lickona's (1997) beliefs about teachers' relationships with students serving as a foundation of character education instruction. Without this foundation, I do not believe discussions of character values and the nurturing of these values would thrive. There needs to be a strong sense of community within the classroom where all students feel safe, accepted, and valued. Without teachers' willingness to get to know their students and to take that knowledge to inform their character education instruction, there is a risk of character education only having a short-term impact and not a long-term impact. As a teacher, everything I do in my classroom, character education included, needs to be grounded in

my willingness to build relationships with my students and learn about their cultures and lives both inside and outside of school.

I also believe that discussion—both talking and listening—is the key to effective character education instruction. Teachers cannot simply impose and/or inundate their students with values. In order to help students care about what is being discussed, in order for them to see the relevance of it to their own lives, in order for them to take ownership of what is being learned, talk needs to have a prominent role within character education instruction. Talk helps strengthen classroom community, and it also helps students reflect on what is being learned. This aligns with the research done by Möller (2008 and 2012) and Rosenblatt (1978/1994).

As a teacher, I need to take critical thinking approach to character education. I need to give my students the space to make their own meaning of character values (through read-alouds, activities, discussions, etc.), which reaffirms Rosenblatt's (1995) beliefs about readers' responses, rather than me simply imposing the meanings of various values upon them. My instruction needs to be relevant and relatable. Without either of these, there is nothing that prompts students to care about what is being talked about. There is very little reason to appreciate character values or have a desire to emulate positive character values unless I can help my students understand why it matters in the first place and how it connects to who they are and to their lives in and out of school.

As a teacher who values character education, I need to be reflective and mindful. I need to think about the literature selections I am choosing to use for shared reading experiences in my classroom community. Helterbran (2009) and O'Sullivan (2004) list some criteria for selecting books to read with students, and while I need not follow these exact criteria, I do need to be cognizant and purposeful in my literature selections and making sure they reflect and expand

upon the diversity and cultures within my classroom community. I need to take the time to reflect on my instructional practices and decide if what I am doing and how I am doing it is best meeting the needs of all of my students. I need to make sure that I am using what I know about my students and what is happening within the classroom to inform my pedagogy. I also need to not be afraid to ask constructive questions to try to do the best I can for my students to meet their needs. I do not want to be negative about mandated character education curricula, but I also do not need to take mandated character education curricula at face value. One key aspect reinforced through this research is that to be effected, character education must be in tune with the lives and needs of the specific students served and not be a generic list of traits to be memorized and absorbed.

I also believe that the field of education needs to take at an in-depth look at which and whose values are being talked about and which and whose are being ignored within character education instruction. This includes looking closely at how terms are defined and how the traits are enacted. Many times throughout my research, this was a question I asked myself and that was asked of me by my academic advisor and others. It is such a crucial question that needs to be researched and studied in more depth because while some character values may appear to be (and are often claimed to be) universally important, this may not actually be the case. Culture is such an important aspect of learning, and if children's literature is going to be used, I need to make sure I am selecting books that reflect a variety of cultures (see more from Harris 1993 and 1997) and provides windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990b). How can we include culture in discussions of character education? How can we include families in character education instruction to better understand what values they deem important for their children to

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learn about and emulate? How can we try to address the values that reflect the backgrounds and cultures of all of our students, while also taking care not to overwhelm our students or ourselves?

The field has a lot to learn from Lois and Kathryn. I know I have learned a lot from my work with them and look forward to continuing my research focus into my first public school teaching experience. In the end, this study of character education is also a story of relationships and the aspects of relationships that allow for meaningful human interactions. Authenticity, caring, safety, a desire to know students as people, and all the key themes that stood out in my data about Kathryn and Lois enabled them to build relationships with their students that led to them being able to engage their students in reflective character education. Seeing that in action was inspirational. I am left with the understanding that effective teaching of character education is part of effective teaching, as both participants noted directly. Without it, teaching of academic content and "values" is a rote transmission of information. With it, teaching and learning are part of a relationship that engages students and teachers in a human interaction. And developing students' abilities in human interaction is truly getting to the heart of the matter of (character) education.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval

10/07/2015

Karla Moller
Curriculum & Instruction
317 Education Building
1310 S. Sixth St.
M/C 708

RE: *Getting to the Heart of the Matter: Conceptualizing Character Education and Using Children's Literature to Promote Values in Schools*
IRB Protocol Number: 16224

EXPIRATION DATE: 10/06/2018

Dear Dr. Moller:

Thank you for submitting the completed IRB application form for your project entitled *Getting to the Heart of the Matter: Conceptualizing Character Education and Using Children's Literature to Promote Values in Schools.* Your project was assigned Institutional Review Board (IRB) Protocol Number 16224 and reviewed. It has been determined that the research activities described in this application meet the criteria for exemption at 45CFR46.101(b)(1).

This determination of exemption only applies to the research study as submitted. Please note that additional modifications to your project need to be submitted to the IRB for review and exemption determination or approval before the modifications are initiated.

We appreciate your conscientious adherence to the requirements of human subjects research. If you have any questions about the IRB process, or if you need assistance at any time, please feel free to contact me at the OPRS office, or visit our website at http://oprs.research.illinois.edu.

Sincerely,

Rose St. Clair

Rose St. Clair, BA
Assistant Human Subjects Research Specialist, Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

c: Morgan Williams

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APPENDIX B

Initial Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about the character education program in your school.
2. What do you understand character education to be?
   a. What specific character traits/values do you target?
   b. Why do you emphasize these traits/values?
   c. Give me an example of what that trait means to you, please.
3. How do you engage your students in character education through your teaching instruction?
   a. What do you think is the most important aspect? Why?
4. How do you think children's literature can be used to help teach and reinforce character trait development in your students?
   a. How do you select the books you use to highlight specific character traits?
   b. Give me an example of books you have used. Why those?
5. What is the first thing you do when planning instruction involving teaching/enhancing values?
   a. Tell me more about that.
6. Tell me how character education affects your students.
   a. How does it affect their behavior?
   b. How does it affect their interactions with other people?
   c. How does it affect their academic learning?
7. How do you decide when to start discussing character in your classroom/during your lessons?
8. How do you include parents in not only their children's academic learning but also character education?
   a. How do you connect character education to students' lives outside of school?
9. Tell me about the level of importance character trait development has in your classroom pedagogy.
10. Describe your self-efficacy towards teaching character education and encouraging positive growth in your students' character.
    a. Tell me about strategies you use to help foster positive changes and growth in your students' character.
    b. Tell me about support you have from colleagues for character education instruction.
11. What is your favorite thing about character education instruction? What is your least favorite?
    a. If you could change one thing about the way your character education program is set up, what would it be?
    b. What support would you need to make this happen in terms of time and resources?
    c. If you could encourage others to do one thing you do, what would it be?
    d. How could you share this idea with other teachers?

APPENDIX C

Debrief Protocol

1. Debrief Templates Protocol (Actual words depend on what teachers say during initial interviews and during instruction)
    a. When I looked back at ____, I noticed ___. Tell me about your choice to ___ here?
    b. I heard you emphasize ____. How did you know to ____?
    c. Here's how I understood ____. Tell me what your thought process was here.
    d. You used _____ book for ____ trait. How did you select that book? What factors played a role?
    e. In my last observation, you ____? What will be your next step when you teach your next character education lesson? Will you build on this concept during instruction at other points in your teaching day?

APPENDIX D

Observation Protocol

Prep at start of observation:
- *Ask teacher to wear microphone for audio-recording.*
- *Remind class that focus is on the teacher. No student talk will be used.*
- *Remember to take observational field notes using pseudonyms.*

Note the following in fieldnotes, along with any other pertinent information:
- How does the teacher set up the lesson focused on character education?
- What materials does she/he use?
- What book titles are used to introduce and/or extend the lesson? How are they used?
- How is student work incorporated into the lesson?
- What artifacts are on the walls that are used as part of instruction?
- How are artifacts incorporated into instruction?

Take specific field notes minute-by-minute noting what the teacher says and does as well as materials he/she uses as the lesson progresses. Include teacher remarks and mannerisms as well as how he/she responds to students during the lesson, keeping the focus on the teacher's words and actions—on her/his instructional choices—and on the flow of the lesson and not on what specific students say. Include remarks on overall student engagement as a product of the lesson, but do not include remarks or engagement of specific students. Note the time frames of the lesson by including times specifically when taking field notes. Note any reference by the teacher to displayed materials in the room as well as use of lesson materials.

APPENDIX E

Teacher Consent Form
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT URBANA − CHAMPAIGN

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

College of Education
311 Education Building, MC-708
1310 South Sixth Street
Champaign, Illinois 61820

Focal Teacher Consent Form to Participate in Research

_____, 2015

Dear _____,

My name is Morgan Williams. I am a master's degree student in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Illinois. I am investigating how character education is structured within this school district, how teachers conceptualize character education, and how these same teachers implement character education in their instruction. The results of this study will be used for my master's thesis and may be used for additional scholarly reports, journal articles, and academic presentations.

I am asking for your participation in this study in the 2015-2016 school year in the form of the following activities:
- An interview with you that I would like to audiotape (about 30-45 minutes) (October)
  - Some of the questions I will ask will include how you understand character education, what character values you emphasize, how you engage your students in character education instruction, what types of children's literature you used to help teach character education, and other related aspects.
- Three-five classroom observations of you teaching character education lessons in order to develop a detailed picture of how you implement this instruction. These observations will be audiotaped. (This will happen during regularly scheduled instruction. No modification of instructional time is needed. The focus will be only on you, not on your students. No student data will be collected.) (October-December)
  - I will be observing how you present the information to the students and how you respond to them, along with the material choices you made, especially in terms of books selected.
- A short debriefing session with you after each of your lessons or at a convenient time for you that I would like to audiotape (about 15-20 minutes)
  - I will be asking a few questions based off of what I see within your lessons and what I have more inquiries about. I will ask for your thoughts on what I observed so I better understand your instructional choices.
- Collection of related artifacts or materials, such as copies of your character education lesson plans, handouts, and other artifacts used

I am a certified teacher and graduate student who is passionate about and dedicated to the holistic growth of children. Oceanvale Elementary is an exemplary school that seeks to serve a diverse and high poverty population through both academic and social-emotional learning. Documenting and sharing purposeful character education, along with the meaningful integration of character education and children's literature could be of benefit to other teachers in this school and district, as well as to the teaching profession overall. In addition, for participating teachers, I am willing to volunteer in their classrooms for an amount of time at least equal to the time the study required of them, doing whatever the teachers find the most helpful in terms of activities such as making photocopies of instructional materials, reading aloud to students, helping students with work in the classroom, etc.). I will also purchase two children's books for each participating teacher's classroom.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. The choice to participate or not will not impact your involvement in any other current or future studies. If you change your mind at a later date, you are free to withdraw your permission at any time and for any reason without penalty. Your name and identity will be kept strictly confidential in all academic discussions, presentations, reports, and papers that result from this research. A pseudonym (fake name) will be used instead of your real name on all data, including all written work and oral recordings saved. All data obtained for this project will be stored on the researchers' secure, password protected computers.

Despite focused efforts to keep your personal information confidential, however, we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. As researchers, we will not share any identifiable personal information about you when this research is discussed or published. Since we will use a pseudonym for you and your school to mask your identity, no one reading the research or hearing data presentations will know you were a participant. However, laws and university rules might require us to allow specific organizations or individuals to inspect our research records for purposes of research quality assurance and oversight. For example, representatives of the university committee and office that reviews and approves research studies, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Office for Protection of Research Subjects, and other representatives of the state and university responsible for ethical, regulatory, or financial oversight of research as well as members of federal government regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections in the Department of Health and Human Services may have access to our records.

All audio-recordings and other digital information obtained for this project will be stored at a secure location and be accessible only to me while I am in the process of removing names from the material. Each original name will be replaced by a pseudonym. Once each original name has been be replaced by a pseudonym and all files have been saved with pseudonyms only, my academic advisor Dr. Karla Möller will also have access to this confidential data set while I am working on my master's thesis and for any papers and presentations we co-author that result from this data set. Any files she accesses will be kept on her password-protected notebook computer. Any print-out we use will be kept in a secure location while being used. Dr. Möller's role is to guide me as I finish my thesis. She will not keep the complete data set once my master's degree has been granted.

Once this project is complete, the original audio-recordings will be deleted and destroyed. Short segments of audio-recordings may be used in presentations and publications (with pseudonyms only). The researchers will keep these identifier-free (beyond the voices themselves which some may recognize) audio snippets indefinitely for use during academic presentations of the research.

In the space at the bottom of this letter, please indicate whether you do or do not want to participate in the project. Please use the self-addressed stamped envelope to return this consent form by _____, 2015, or as soon as possible thereafter. The second copy is yours to keep. If you have any questions about this project, feel free to contact me, Dr. Möller, and/or anyone in the Institutional Review Board Office by mail, email, or telephone.

Thank you for your consideration of this project.

Sincerely,

Morgan Williams, Master's Student   Karla J. Möller, Associate Professor
1310 South 6th St.; MC-708;   1310 South 6th St.; MC-708
University of Illinois; Champaign, IL, 61820   University of Illinois; Champaign, IL 61820
mtwllms2@illinois.edu   kjmoller@illinois.edu
708-663-4092   217-265-4039

* *
Please mark "YES" or "NO" for each statement below, then sign and date this letter.

☐ Yes or ☐ No: I have read and understand the above consent form and have been given a copy to keep for my own reference. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

☐ Yes or ☐ No: I give Ms. Williams permission to audiotape the initial interview and each subsequent debriefing session, following character education lessons.

☐ Yes or ☐ No: I give Ms. Williams permission to audiotape character education lessons observed in my classroom.

☐ Yes or ☐ No: I give permission for Ms. Williams and Dr. Möller to use short segments of audio-recordings in presentations and publications (with pseudonyms only).

Date: _____ Signature: _____

Questions: If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670, via email at irb@illinois.edu, or by mail at 528 East Greet St.; Suite 203; MC-419; Champaign, IL 61820.

APPENDIX F

Parent Informational Letter

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT URBANA − CHAMPAIGN

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

College of Education
311 Education Building, MC-708
1310 South Sixth Street
Champaign, Illinois 61820

Parent Informational Letter

_____, 2015

Dear Parents and/or Guardians,

My name is Morgan Williams. I am a master's degree student in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I will be observing in your child's classroom for research for my graduate work. I am investigating character education and how it is structured within this school district. I am interested in how teachers in this school define character education and how they implement it in their instruction. The results of this study will be used for my master's thesis and may be used for additional scholarly reports, journal articles, and academic presentations that I make on my own or with my academic advisor Dr. Karla Möller.

I will be observing between three and five character education lessons in your child's classroom from October-December 2015. The focus of my research is going to be on your child's teacher's instruction and materials she/he uses. No data on your child will be collected as part of my research. I will ask the teacher to wear a microphone for audio-recording, but if the microphone picks up any student comments, I will delete them before I use the audio-recording for data analysis.

I have been working in your child's school as part of my coursework, so know some of the students already.

I am excited to learn more about character education over the next few months!

Thank you so much for your understanding!

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me and/or Dr. Möller. Her contact information is kjmoller@illinois.edu and 217-265-4039.

Sincerely,

Morgan Williams, Graduate Student
1310 South 6th St.; MC-708;
University of Illinois; Champaign, IL, 61820
mtwllms2@illinois.edu
708-663-4092