

IMPLEMENTING CHARACTER EDUCATION
IN THE SECONDARY ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM

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Abstract

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On a daily basis, students are faced with moral and ethical choices. Based on the level of their development of character, students handle situations and dilemmas very differently from each other. Some choose to ignore adverse circumstances like bullying of others, while some might contribute to it, and yet other students may make the decision to step in and stop whatever confrontation may be at hand. Why do these students make the decisions they do? In implementing a form of character education in the classroom by integrating it into the curriculum, I sought to observe whether students were more aware or even had a changed attitude about daily situations around them.

In analyzing my data of surveys, questions, interviews and group discussions I found students were initially opposed to the idea of learning about character education, however, when imbedded in the curriculum they responded positively to the lessons administered. Many students throughout the study were more aware of their perspective and actions as well as the perspective and actions of others when a situation of character developed. However, more time was needed to implement this study to see if there was a lasting effect on students as they matured and grew.

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Introduction

Tom and Jason are sophomores walking to their 3rd period class. Jason is talking to Tom about their plans for Friday night, when they hear a commotion in the hallway. They quickly realize an upperclassman is pushing around another boy from their class. Tom's immediate response is to intervene but he is not sure how to go about it. Jason does not even seem to notice the bullying as he continues to talk about their upcoming activities and keeps his pace heading on down the hall. Tom, pauses for a moment but instead of stepping in, pushes through the onlookers and heads to class with Jason.

What makes Tom decide not to intervene? He contemplates it and wonders how to stop the infraction but instead does nothing. Then one wonders why Jason seems oblivious to the action going on in the hallway? He shows no concern or interest in the scene taking place. The other students in the hall are watching but not helping their peer and some are even laughing. Do these students appear to be lacking certain types of qualities? Since the earliest of time, philosophers, educators, and the church have argued for the importance of moral development, how to define it, and the best ways to implement it. It has been threaded throughout our history in some shape or form, which brings us to 1994 when The United States Congress begins The Partnership for Character Education Program. Then, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 fosters this progress to make a place and a particular standard for character education in our national education system. "Indeed, one of the six goals of the Department of Education is to 'promote strong character and citizenship among our nation's youth'" (US Department of Education, 2005). In this study, I am interested in seeing the affects of character education introduced to students on a daily basis.

The need to define character education, especially when used in the school

system, is vital. The brochure, *Character Education...Our Shared Responsibility*, written by the United States Department of Education gives us an idea of the term: “Character education is a learning process that enables students and adults in a school community to understand, care about and act on core ethical values such as respect, justice, civic virtue and citizenship, and responsibility for self and others”. Even with the United States Department of Education and the No Child Left Behind Act placing importance on our role as educators to implement some form of character education within our curriculum, many schools and teachers often overlook it.

This makes me wonder why it is not an integral part of our lessons taught to students. With my introductory scenario in mind, would instructing students in character education increase their morality and would there be a different outcome to my story? Specifically could character education be integrated into daily lessons, especially in social studies and English/language arts? If enough time is given to this curriculum, I believe we would see a revitalization of morality throughout the majority of the class. The success of the program will not only support positive character development but also academic achievement.

The following literature review defines what character is and what does character education look like at the secondary level. With the definitions in mind, the importance in the moral guidance of our students is addressed and the role schools must take to further positive character development. The literature makes it clear character education must not stand on its own but must be incorporated into the curriculum.

Literature Review

Definitions

The traits, which make up good character, are what are often debated among society. People felt the development of character traits were related to religious ideals and in keeping with the separation of church and state, the government took it out of the curriculum during the 1970s. However, with a new understanding in the importance of character education, researchers began defining character and how it should look in the educational system.

The general definition of character as defined by the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary is: “[2a] one of the attributes or features that make up and distinguish an individual” (2009). There are assorted views on what positive traits are important to focus and educate students on in the classroom. It is subjective in nature to decide and even define these terms but most conclude the basic core values are trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, caring, justice, and citizenship (Berkowitz & Fekula, 1999; O'Sullivan, 2004; Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006). Anderson and Leal also feel loyalty and hard work should be included when thinking about these traits (2000; 1999).

A sampling of core values is often woven into the definition of character education to give an idea of what should be included in the educational system's focus. Skaggs & Bodenhorn state, “Character Education is described as 'any deliberate approach by which school personnel, often in conjunction with parents and community members, ... help children and youth become caring, principled, and responsible’” (2006, p. 3). Expanding on that description, Berkowitz & Fekula elaborate on the specific qualities that should foster from the education of character. “We define character development as the growth of those aspects of the individual that represent his or her ethical worth, including behavior, cognition, affect, values, personality, identity, and skills that are not

moral themselves but support moral functioning” (1999, p. 2).

Character Education is the foundation in which to build a strong individual. It helps create the “habits of thought and deed that help people live and work together as families, friends, neighbors, communities and nations” (United States Department of Education, 2005, para. 4). Like the definitions are similar across texts, the reason character education is important is also similar throughout the texts.

The Importance in Character Education

Hunter explains a nation must have people within it, whom exude excellent character, without it a nation cannot survive. Parents, community members, and schools see this need, with fear as a motivation due to the social decline, and strive to implement some form of character education because of it. Our country was built by men and women who bore strong character and people believe it must continue for the sake of our government. “Commentators abound who catalog the wide range of public problems in the contemporary world 'as arising out of a defect of character formation” (Hunter, 2001, p. 4). Hunter continues that as society changes, the children within the society adjust, good or bad. With the moral decline, character education must begin to challenge our children of today.

Skaggs and Bodenhorn state the schools who willingly embrace a character education program do see a level of change. These schools show a marked increase in “positive perceived behavior and fewer suspensions at the elementary and middle school levels” (2006, p. 2). The argument is whether it is the program put in place which changed attitudes or some other force. There is no clear documentation to prove one way or another.

The value of character education coupled with an already established curriculum works not only as a means of getting two for one but it also is beneficial for expanding the student's way of thinking. Leal (1999) explains when you combine the two components student's develop critical thinking. Critical thinking is vital to a student's educational development. Students who learn how to be critical thinkers can expand on knowledge they obtain. Rather than gorge and regurgitate material, students are able to understand and build upon the information. Often the character traits are studied and then related to material already covered, like a literature assignment. If taught well, the students can identify more closely to the story. This creates an excitement within individual students thus expanding to the rest of the classroom discussion. The classroom environment is a perfect place to encourage the development of character.

The Role of Schools

Historically schools have taken on the responsibility to implement a character education program. It was as important as academics. The notion that undergirded this was the belief that the shape of our nation hinged on the character of its people. It was a universal understanding on the gravity the education of character, within the schooling system, had on the success of our country (Hunter, 2001; O' Sullivan, 2004).

Currently, our legal system has stepped in and mandated that character education be implemented in our educational system. Edgington states, "Character education is the fastest growing reform movement in the United States" (2002, p. 1). At the national and many of the state levels, formal approval is given to the schools to find a program that works and then, execute it. After 1994, with the Partnership for Character Education Program in place, many schools began to jump on the character education bandwagon

trying out and implementing different character building programs. Ninety-seven grants were given out to school districts to find that perfect program. The United States Congress and the Department of Education continue with this effort through support systems. The No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 made it one of their goals to motivate moral development with the belief it is the national educational system's "shared responsibility" (Edgington, 2002; O'Sullivan, 2004; United States Department of Education, 2005).

The Department of Education contends that schools had a role to specifically engage character education into their improvement plans. These are key points that many scholars believe to be fundamental for any character building program:

- Take a leadership role to bring the staff, parents and students together to identify and define the elements of character they want to emphasize;
- Provide training for staff on how to integrate character education into the life and culture of the school;
- Form a vital partnership with parents and the community so that students hear a consistent message about character traits essential for success in school and life; and
- Provide opportunities for school leaders, teachers, parents and community partners to model exemplary character traits and social behaviors (United States Department of Education, 2004, para. 7).

If school districts could apply these points, The Department of Education believes positive character development will follow.

Many of the key points above raise the notion that community involvement is vital when implementing character education. Society as a whole agrees with this but also encourages character education in the schools. First of all, schools have the resources. The students are present most of their young adult days, ready to learn. Piaget, Kohlberg, and Vygotsky all agree children are still capable of learning “moral codes” (O'Sullivan, 2004). They are reading literature, both in English and in History, which provide core values in it. Students will pick up on these without the influences of their teachers, however, why not capitalize on the chance to further a learning experience. A learning experience that will make a person better rounded. (Berkowitz & Fekula, 2004; Hunter, 2001; Martinson, 2003)

Anderson (2000) explains how vital the learning environment is in the classroom for students. “The classroom can reinforce, model, and practice positive character traits” everyday, all day long (p. 1). The teacher must be giving to their profession for the sake of the students' success. This is in the form of time and commitment as well as responsibility to guide and influence positive traits. In a survey of over 280 teachers, more than three- fourths felt character education should be a part of the curriculum making character education a natural place in the classroom.

The classroom, the school, the community and the nation, however, fight against themselves when trying to establish moral development. It is a double-edged sword. Hunter explains the conundrum schools have themselves in because of the effort to keep things politically correct. In doing so, teachers are in a state of paralysis. They are fearful of offending when discussing even the most benign character traits. The cultures in the classroom can be much diversified and so they take “great pains not to offend

anyone by imposing beliefs and commitments that might make people uncomfortable” (2001, p. 7).

Three tactics are put in place to counter this problem. The first is the Psychological Strategy where the school must always educate from a neutral ground, never from a religious point. Second, the Neoclassical Strategy keeps the basic shared virtues which stem from the beginnings of Western Civilization. Third, the Communitarian Strategy takes the stance of similar real world experiences through a “democratic life and social consensus” (Hunter, 2001, p. 9). The three tactics allow the education of character to be taught from a point of view people can not say is biased. Rather than taking from one belief system character education is taken from three different teachings of character. These three strategies used together can help counter the fear of discriminating while educating the students on the virtues society has deemed vital to the development of character.

Integrating Character Education into the Curriculum

The implication that our society as a whole needs some form of moral development can be debated. However, the race to find the right educational tool to implement character education is evident with the plethora of organizations and companies sprouting up (Hunter, 2001; Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006). This ever increasing character building industry is searching for the perfect character education program. Many claim to have what it takes to produce results within the educational system. These results are debatable because often “the designs are not experimental, which limits causal inference that can be made regarding the effects of CE” (Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006, p. 27).

The vast variety of character education programs on the market today can be overwhelming. Many promise results, making claims through testimonials and surveys. Some programs are accredited by the United States Department of Education and other nationally recognized organizations and departments. There are websites upon websites advertising and marketing particular character traits like bullying, honesty, or discipline to whole programs offering a combined assortment of traits. The United States Department of Education decided to support the local and state educational systems by offering grants to schools who wanted to “design, implement, and sustain high-quality opportunities for students to learn and understand the importance of strong character in their lives” (2005, para. 11).

There are many schools using programs like Educating for Character, Community of Caring, Character Education Institute, and Character Counts(!). These organizations offer programs where the education of character is a unit all in itself. This form of curriculum, meant to stand on its own, often falls flat. They also offer educational units that can be coupled with an established curriculum. This is the form that is most widely agreed upon as being successful. The consensus among scholars is that character education must be integrated into the curriculum. Students need to relate to abstract ideas and have those ideas put into a picture. Somehow they need to be made to use their senses when thinking about character traits. Introducing hands on learning environments with real life situations give better opportunities for students to learn positive character traits (Anderson, 2000).

According to Berkowitz and Fekula?, there are five components in a well developed character education plan: teaching about character, displaying character,

demanding character, practicing character, and reflecting on character. Two ways of teaching about character would be through “creative academics” or incorporating character education in the everyday curriculum. As mentioned above, another way is by directly teaching on a particular character trait by itself which both the Maxims Research Project and the United States Air Force Academy rely on and believe is an effective means of educating despite what the majority believe (Berkowitz & Fekula, 1999, p. 3).

O'Sullivan states the most obvious way to integrate character education is through the literature the students are already reading. “It awakens the moral imagination” (2004, para. 7). Like O'Sullivan, Martinson believes learning about moral development needs to come from the imagination. They argue that students need to recognize an ethical dilemma in order to understand character. Having students memorize “The Star Spangled Banner” to develop patriotism or work on the philosophies of Kant is ridiculous. “Stimulating the moral and ethical dilemmas” needs to be at a place where students can relate and understand to make connections (2003, p. 2).

Characters in stories portray core values like truth, integrity, honesty, and loyalty which students can see and live through. Looking at the stories and the dilemmas the characters face, these characters use one or more of these values and then overcome the issue. Students see a positive outcome and the importance of a particular virtue (Sanchez & Stewart, 2006). Edgington agrees with Sanchez & Stewart and believes young adult literature is often based on material that students can relate to the issues the characters are experiencing. Many genres keep with this tradition making it an easy tool for educators to utilize, however, teachers struggle with developing effective lesson plans to transmit these values. When educators' couple character education with literature as a means,

however, the lessons become more effective (Edgington 2002).

The development of critical thinking is always on the agenda for teachers. Integrating character education with literature allows one more way for educators to encourage deeper levels of thinking when looking at the way the character's character develops and changes with each experience and situation. Ellenwood explains the literature must be "vivid and vexing" (2006, p. 17). Students need to care about the character and see the development of the character using value-based judgments and ultimately reaching a decision. With Socratic dialogue, fishbowl debates, and reflection journal writing, teachers can challenge students' opinions to think critically. It is important not to coerce a student to change positions on a matter. There needs to be critical thinking taking place when studying character not just asking for thoughts or feelings. Besides introducing core values through literature, it can show how those values invoke judgment going beyond simple decision making skills. Last, literature couples the core values and the judgments being made through the individual character, and the way that person can change an outcome or a course of events. Literature makes character education more concrete rather than conceptual (Ellenwood, 2006; Leal, 1999).

Research clarifies the need to integrate character education with the curriculum with some debate about the usefulness character education has on its own. Studies also show threading moral values through the use of literature creates a relationship for the students with the characters and a deeper understanding of the desired traits being taught. Finally, a definition explaining character and what the education of character looks like lays the ground work to build a working curriculum related to moral development.

Research Question

From this review of the literature, I recognize the important role the development of moral education needs to play in the classrooms, schools, and communities nationwide. Through collaborative efforts, schools need to successfully implement a character education program weaving it into the life and culture of the student's everyday learning experiences. With this, I am left with the following research questions: In what ways will character education affect student's thinking about moral dilemmas they see in literature and real life? Do students relate better to character education when it is connected with literature or visual texts?

Methodology

Method and Rationale

This action research project is qualitative in design looking at the whole system of beliefs within character education. This method uses information gained from the subjects to understand how moral developing education may or may not influence student's behavior. The qualitative case study approach works best for this project because like qualitative studies, case studies focus on events that occur in the real world or as in the case of this project, a real working classroom. A qualitative case study concentrates on understanding a specified social setting, working personally with the community or among the subjects, gaining a nuanced and complex view of them and their situation. Thus, this approach is useful because my focus is on a particular group of students where I am student teaching.

Sample

Data for this sample will come from one specific class. The group is an 11th/12th grade Advanced Placement English class. These students are at a high school in the

Seattle, Washington area and I will work with this class on a daily basis for a period of three weeks. The high school is in a rural suburban area with a student population of 1,550. 87% are white students and 15.4% of the total student body population qualify for free or reduced meals.

My role in the project as researcher and educator in the class will take place over a period of four weeks. The time spent with these students begins on a part-time basis and evolves into a full-time experience. Character development is something that has always been important in my life. This can contribute as a bias for me as the conductor of research.

These students will be useful to my project because of their presence in an English/Language Arts classroom. They are already studying visual texts so I can easily introduce character education and incorporate it into this unit. By observing these students and the collected data from them, I will be able to notice whether there are differences present in their actions, attitudes, and/or thoughts.

Instrumentation

In this study, three classifications of data will be examined. The data will be collected through observations, interviews, and examinations of assignments and surveys given to students. By using observational data, artifacts, and inquiry data, I can establish a triangulation proving validity in the study. This data will lead to “meaningful, accurate, and appropriate conclusions” when analyzing the information obtained at the end of the project (Hendricks, 2009 p. 79).

The observations will be of the students as they communicate their thoughts and ideas pertaining to the topic of character education. This will be during group

discussions where the students are talk about character within the visual texts we are viewing. Observing the topics the students bring up for discussion and whether or not those changes over time will be of importance. Watching for changed opinions and awareness about character issues will assist in understanding how the intervention is affecting students.

The 11th/12th grade Advanced Preparation English class will be based on a general observation. I will focus on all the students in the class and watch for a change or their lack of, taking note on both. Observing all the students in a general manner will assist in answering both my primary and secondary questions.

As the teacher in the classroom, in which the research is taking place, I will be both the observer and a participant. I need to orchestrate the discussions and ask questions of the students to invoke critical thinking. Note-taking will become an important tool in assisting in my observation.

I will also use formative assessments, specifically their assignments relating to character education and the integration of film study as well as other means of attempting to develop character. This may be in the form of their journals, written assignments, and self-assessments. I plan on creating a standardized form of assessment to make sure it is as objective as possible. Using a number of different artifacts will allow me to assess their progress or attempt to make changes if there is no change in development.

I also plan on keeping a journal throughout the study for reflection purposes. The other source will be my lesson plans. This will demonstrate the type of character education implemented in the class. Between the lesson plan and the journal, I will be able to coordinate between the two to assist in evaluating the effectiveness of the project.

The last and possibly the most important form of data in this study are interviews. To find out the students' "knowledge, values, beliefs, past experiences, feelings, opinions, attitudes, and perceptions" is vital to understanding where the students are coming from and where they end up in their development of character (Hendricks, 2009, p. 97). The students will be asked through surveys and interviews which will give insight on how they feel about the implementation of character education. If they feel it is worthwhile will help in planning different approaches to teaching next time. Also, finding out if they notice a difference in themselves and/or their peers will give us an idea if this process was successful. These are just a few of the questions which would need to be asked. Through inquiry, I can get the answers needed to fill in the blanks to the project. This is where the details are fleshed out and I can see whether the method is successful. The students might also have ideas to further develop character education in the classroom. Both positive and negative criticism will be important to the research.

The interviewing process will be one on one, face to face, structured, and will be with selected students from the class rather than every student. The interview will be semi-structured so I can get my specific questions answered as well as get open feedback from the students. The students chosen to be interviewed will be randomly chosen through volunteers. I will interview at the completion of the project to see changes, if any. The interviews will be codified to protect the subjects.

The survey given to the students will be administered before the project, however, all the students in the study will take the survey. There will be cross-over with questions from the interview and questions on the survey but again, the survey is able to reach all the students in the study so the repeat is necessary. Some of the questions will be based

on an attitude scale since they can relate to their own character, as well as the character they witness of others. The surveys also allow for honest answers since they are anonymous. Some students may feel self-conscious answering questions about their character so the anonymity is important (see Table 3).

Analysis/Validity

By using interviews, surveys, student's written work, teacher's lesson plans and self-kept journal as well as observing students creates a number of different types of data collected which I will be able to triangulate, thus adding strength to my conclusions. Evaluating the implementation of character education using multiple data sources is critical to understanding the success or failure of the study. As the researcher, the development of character is always an important part of who I am. To account for my bias, I plan on having a peer evaluate my report to check for partiality.

Throughout the study, data that is collected will be analyzed to check for issues that may interfere with validity. This is an ongoing process during the project. Reviewing notes from the days' observations and making sense of them right away to get a clear understanding of what is taking place in the classroom will assist in precise analysis of information.

Since this study is qualitative, a deeper analysis is needed to understand the data collected. The interviews will be transcribed and the student and teacher-generated artifacts will be gathered together. Observations will also need to be transcribed and analyzed. All the data, transcribed interviews and observations, written assignments, as well as surveys will then be coded for thematic analysis.

The data for verbal and visual differences in student's attitudes and behavior will

be processed. Student's work is looked at to analyze if a deeper understanding of what good character qualities are and if it impacted the students in a lasting way. Lesson plans will be analyzed to see how character education was implemented, for instance, whether it was through visual texts, a simple character education program or other forms of educating. Then, analyzing which ways were the most successful, and which were less successful ways. Connecting film with character education and looking at what visual texts were introduced and what outcome they had with the students. The interviews and surveys will be analyzed for a deeper understanding as to what student's got out of the character education instruction and why. The feedback will help me understand why the implementation of the education of morality was successful or not. For instance, during an interview or when asked specific questions, key comments like, "I never thought about xyz before but now I find myself thinking about it throughout the day" or "I find myself looking at situational ethics a lot differently now and am just aware of my personal ethics when different situations arise" would bring awareness about changed views on character.

Data

The survey as well as the questions based on responsibility and respect was collected from the 15 students identified as A through O. The interview answers were drawn from three students identified as 1, 2, and 3.

Student Survey

All surveys were given to each student in the class and collected immediately. Each pillar of character was addressed in the survey with questions under each particular pillar. The questionnaire was true and false and students were asked to circle the best fit answer. The survey was derived from Copyright Elkind+Sweet Communications / Live

Wire Media. Reprinted by permission. Copied from www.GoodCharacter.com. The survey questions and the results are below in table 1.

Table One: Character Survey – A True and False Questionnaire

Are you a trustworthy person?		
True	False	Questions
15	0	I keep my promises; I am a person of my word.
14	1	I am reliable; I follow through on commitments.
12	3	I am honest.
13	2	I keep secrets; I never betray a confidence or a trust.
11	4	I have integrity; I don't cave in to temptation.
15	0	I am loyal when loyalty is appropriate.
Are you a respectful person?		
True	False	Questions
13	2	I treat other people the way I want to be treated.
13	2	I am considerate of other people.
12	3	I treat people with civility, courtesy, and dignity.
12	3	I accept personal differences.
12	3	I work to solve problems without violence.
12	3	I never intentionally ridicule, embarrass, or hurt others.
Are you a responsible person?		
True	False	Questions
13	2	I do what needs to be done.
12	3	I am reliable and dependable.

9	6	I am accountable for my actions; I don't make excuses or blame others.
12	3	I fulfill my moral obligations.
14	1	I use good judgment and think through the consequences of my actions.
13	2	I exercise self-control.
Are you a fair person?		
True	False	Questions
13	2	I treat other people the way I want to be treated.
13	2	I treat people with equanimity and impartiality.
15	0	I am open-minded and reasonable.
12	3	I play by the rules.
13	2	I don't take advantage of people.
11	4	I consider the feelings of all people who will be affected by my actions and decisions.
Are you a caring person?		
True	False	Question
6	9	I am never mean, cruel, or insensitive.
14	1	I treat people with kindness and generosity.
9	6	I am charitable.
12	3	I give of myself for the benefit of others.
13	2	I am responsive to the concerns and needs of others.
Are you a good citizen?		
True	False	Questions

4	11	I take responsibility for what goes on in my community.
12	3	I do my part for the common good.
13	2	I participate in community service.
9	6	I help take care of the environment.
14	1	I obey the law.
Are you honest?		
True	False	Questions
14	1	I am truthful, sincere, and straightforward.
8	7	I don't lie, cheat, or steal.
12	3	I don't intentionally mislead others.
Are you a diligent person?		
True	False	Questions
13	2	I always do my best; I strive for excellence.
12	3	I am willing to risk failure for a worthy goal.
12	3	I am self-disciplined.
13	2	I make sure to learn from my mistakes and failures.
12	3	I try to see the big picture and think long term.
13	2	I set goals and stay focused.
11	4	I don't give up just because things seem difficult.
2	13	I don't procrastinate.
Are you a person of integrity?		
True	False	Questions
10	5	I always try to do what is right, even when it is costly or difficult.

12	3	I am true to my very best self.
12	3	I live up to the highest ethical standards.
Are you a person of courage?		
True	False	Questions
11	4	I stand up for what is right even if I stand alone.
15	0	I don't cave in to negative peer pressure.
7	8	Fear of failure does not prevent me from trying things.
11	4	I am not afraid to express myself just because some people might disapprove.
14	1	I work to solve problems without violence.
11	4	I never intentionally ridicule, embarrass, or hurt others.

Questions based on Responsibility and Trustworthiness

Students were asked to answer questions after each visual text viewed. The film, Nicholas Nickleby's main character trait exemplified responsibility and trustworthiness thus the focus of the questions. The answers to the questions are unedited and transcribed as written by the students. I have only posted one of the questions and the responses which are posted in table 2.

Table two: Questions based on Responsibility and Trustworthiness

Question	Student	Response
What responsibilities do you believe you personally have	A	a) To live a successful life. b) To not be a burden and to support my parents if need be. c) Can't think of one. d) Help prevent global warming and promote open mindedness.
	B	a) I am responsible for getting good grades and being who I am and standing up for and living by my morals. b) I am responsible for setting an example to my younger siblings. c) I am

for: a) yourself b) your family c) your community d) your world?		responsible for putting in input and participating in events and activities. d) I am responsible for keeping it clean.
	C	a) Succeed in school, get a job, maintain my own expenses. b) take care of them [parents], be there to support them and listen. c) contribute to society d) not pollute or kill anyone.
	D	a) I believe that I am completely responsible for myself and all my actions b) Everyone should contribute to the family c) I should be responsible for my actions in the community, but no one else's d) Recycling – cents for tents, blood drives, etc.
	E	a) My responsibility to myself pertains only to being the kind of person I would want to be around. Aspects of this include honesty and respect while still remaining easy going and never taking myself too seriously b) Responsibility to my family is limited. I only need to give them what they gave me c) As I am a part of my community I am only responsible for not harming it d) My responsibility to my world is the same as my responsibility to my community.
	F	a) I am responsible for myself in that I have to take care of myself and make sure I do all the things I have to such as schoolwork or chores b) I am very loyal to my family, in particular my little sisters who I'm very protective over c) I volunteer in my community as much as I have to but otherwise I'm not very active in it d) uh... I guess my responsibility would be to do the best I can. The world encompasses a lot. I recycle I guess.
	G	a) To get my work done and feed my fish so they stop dying b) uhhh. None. Mom's in work release and dad's a bipolar cripple. Gotta fix mom. c) multiple charity events – sharing smiles d) to keep it from falling apart. My life is in a bit of despair.
	H	a) Try my hardest at everything I do, be kind and respectful to others, do what makes me happy, and take care of myself b) take care of them and uplift them to keep us a strong unit c) take care of it and make a safe, positive, and fun community to live in d) im-

		prove it for future generations
I	a)	Stay focused and concentrate on my school career so that I can have a good and successful career. Also keeping myself out of trouble b) I care for my family and be there for them c) I am responsible for taking care of our environment and making sure I help my neighbor
J	a)	I feel that I have the responsibility to stay out of trouble with the law as well as with my parents, and to do well in school and obtain good grades b) I have to care for them and provide/add to a loving environment c) to keep my community safe, and positively add to the environment d) keep the world/earth clean, participate in elections, and stay informed.
K	a)	Set goals and to work hard to accomplish them, don't lie to myself b) show respect to my family and to do what they tell me to do c) do community service and help out when I can d) try to help the world not hinder it, to try to better the world, help others.
L	a)	Take care of myself and my own actions b) caring for my family, helping during times of need c) community service, helping those younger than me d) taking care of the environment
M	a)	Take care of my body and my school work b) I have to take care of my share of housework. If these are ignored, then I will definitely get in trouble because I am held accountable.
N	a)	Be successful and perfect b) protect and provide for them c) protect within reason d) IB-ID
O	a)	Don't put too much pressure on yourself and sometimes you just have to forget about things and enjoy yourself b) I'm responsible for being supportive of my family and putting their needs before mine c) I feel I have a responsibility (as does everyone) to be a good citizen and partake in community service d) I have the small responsibility to care for the environment and be an overall good citizen. Also I need to be more aware of current events.

Student Interviews

The interviewees were three students who volunteered. Three other volunteers were designated an interview date, however, they failed to show for their interview. The answers to the interview questions were vital to fill in the blanks and gather more detailed answers to my questions. The responses to the interview questions are below in table 3.

Table three: Student Interview Questions and Responses

Questions	Student	Response
What was your impression of character education when first introduced?	I	My impression was that it was a ridiculous and far fetched idea. I thought it would only work in a perfect world. No, I had not heard of character education.
Had you ever heard of the education of character?	II	At first I thought it would be pointless but then I thought it could be interesting. I have never heard of Character Education.
	III	I thought it was a waste of time but I looked forward to watching the films. No I had never heard of character education.
Questions	Student	Response
Do you feel you have been taught these traits at home? Is so, how	I	I think I have been taught many of these traits at home, through my faith and simply my parents showing and telling me what I should o. It was effective in a day to day sense, though it wasn't

<p>ere they taught to you? Was it effective? Could your parents have done something different?</p>		<p>always strictly enforced in my house. If there had been stricter punishment for things such as lying, I feel the teaching would have been better.</p>
	II	<p>Yes, I was taught at home just not traditionally. I was taught to manipulate the different character pillars. My dad is a missionary who gets money for the church and my mom owns a Christian bookstore. I am glad what they taught me but not how. Because they don't practice what they preach. They deny teaching me to manipulate the character traits in order to get what you want. For instance, my parents told me to stand up for whatever I believe in but now that I am standing up to them... they are upset with me. The need to keep supporting what they taught.</p>
	III	<p>I learned from my parents and I think they did the best they could and it was effective.</p>
Questions	Student	Response
<p>The idea to incorporate character education in the</p>	I	<p>I think the way it is being taught is a good way to teach it.</p>

<p>curriculum already being taught is how I taught it to you. Can you think of a better way or a different way to teach character education or do you feel it was effective as is?</p>	II	I think it is a good idea but it should be more taught from leading by example and talk about it in class.
	III	I think it should be embedded in the curriculum, almost masked so kids don't know they what they are learning. I felt like you were directing character education at me specifically. Someone made the comment, All lies are bad, and I don't believe that. It made me feel uncomfortable. I feel it is beneficial to lie sometimes.
Questions	Student	Response
<p>Do you think character education works? Do the conversations we have in class cause you to reflect outside of class at anytime since we began this</p>	I	I think character education is a valuable tool, I don't know how the word "work" is being defined. If it is simply showing the students a different point of view, then yes I think it works. Yes, they cause me to think about my actions.
	II	I think it can make people aware but with a risk because people can think you are teaching them a specific way to be. My favorite motto is <i>Life isn't what you make it, It's what you make of it.</i> Make it work for yourself regardless of others.

journey?		
	III	I am not sure if character education works. I am more aware of the bad things like when people don't hold the door or don't say thank you where I didn't notice that before.
Questions	Student	Response
Did you admire anyone's behavior in the movies and does it make you think of your own behavior and want to change it?	I	Some of the respect the brothers have for their family and sisters I think is admirable, and those are traits I wish I had. (<u>Nicholas Nickleby</u> and <u>Pride and Prejudice</u>)
	II	I admired the Nicholas Nickleby character because he stood up to people. I already try to be like that. The film reinforces the way I want to be.
	III	I admired Nicholas Nickleby. It doesn't make me want to change my behavior or character.
Questions	Student	Response
Were these movie choice good	I	I believe they gave a great spot to move from in our discussions, with good characters for discussions.

examples of character whether positive or anti-character? Did they make you think and give you a jumping off point for discussion?	II	Yes, these movies were good examples of good and bad character. It was a blatant dichotomy and not subtle but expressed ideas well.
	III	Nicholas Nickleby was obvious in the films characters' character.
Questions	Student	Response
A few people mentioned they think these values will shape as you mature. Do you agree or disagree? Why? Do you feel this could speed up that process by having discussions	I	I agree, I believe that the brain continues maturing until we reach twenty-five(ish), and thus our opinions and what not would mature as well. I believe the process wouldn't be sped up but rather the horizons for eventual beliefs widened.
	II	I agree everyone changes as they get older. Yes, I do think it could speed up the process but more importantly not necessarily learning it from a classroom. I'm more apt to learn from my youth pastor. If they say, "Look you're being dumb" but they need to say it in a convincing way.

throughout the year about good character traits, what they look like, why people do what they do, ways to think about your decisions, etc.?	III	I agree the more experience you have the wiser you get. It depends on person. If intent is not there to change then maybe it is a good thing. It needs to be hidden in curriculum and made to be more of an unconscious lesson.
Questions	Student	Response
Do you value good character in your family? Friends? People? Some say that is the choice of the person to act under "good" character and if they choose to act less than what many think is "good" character,	I	I value good character in such people, however, I realize it is difficult to always follow through with your beliefs. I know I struggle with acting with the character I should want myself to have, that doesn't mean I don't try or wish to act that way.
	II	I value it in my family when it is directed towards me. I'm not sure if I care if they have good character towards others. It doesn't bother me if they steal from someone that deserves to be stolen from. I stand firm on situational ethics. I expect good character from my friends within reason. Most of my best friends work the same way as I do. I know how I work. I bend the rules sometimes or even

<p>does that make you uncomfortable?</p>		<p>break them. I have good character traits but just don't apply them. It is kind of grotesque. We are the people who keep everyone else inline. Like assassins keep society on track.</p>
	<p>III</p>	<p>Yes, I value good character in my family and friends. I notice when friends are showing good character so I do. I love the idea of Random Acts of Kindness. It bothers me when my friends don't act under the same standards I deem are good.</p>
<p>Questions</p>	<p>Student</p>	<p>Response</p>
<p>Here is where I would like you to comment, question, ridicule, or whatever it may be, in which, you would like to say – Speak your mind!</p>	<p>I</p>	<p>Hmmmm... I don't have any questions or anything...</p>
	<p>II</p>	<p>It has been a good thing. It turned out better than what I thought. The class needs to mature. I think if you used more situational dilemmas, it would have been more effective. People needed to hear out what I had to say. I believe the perfect utopian society but gave up on thinking people can be good. I do expect others to act with highly good character. I am hypocritical. My standards are high for everyone else but I act way below because the ends justify the means. If you need to sacrifice your morals to get</p>

		what you want so be it. The ends justify the means.
	III	I think this would be good at the elementary level maybe 1 st or 2 nd grade. I think this environment is ineffective.

Group Discussion Notes

After viewing each visual text, the class answered questions relating to the character trait emulated in the film. The class was required to participate in a Super Jigsaw Collaborative Activity. Each student was systematically grouped from most willing to participate in discussion to the least willing. The groups were allocated a specific question from the previous day to delve deeper and think more critically on. Each student was required to participate in their mini-group discussion. They were given approximately 15-20 minutes for this process. Each group was then instructed to present to the rest of their class their specified question and what they talked about in their mini-group. The group presenting asked for questions and discussion. The facilitator made sure the leading group and class stayed on task. The three rules for discussion were to be respectful of others and their opinions, do not interrupt, and everyone must participate.

- The questions presented were often contested as being too situational. I had to explain many times, those are the situations which cause us to reflect on our character.

- Once the question was presented, it always took awhile for the class to engage in a discussion. Usually, I had to reword the question, present a scenario, and coax commentary.
- It usually took one student to say something controversial that would spark the rest of the discussions. (Usually it was the same student who always provoked the rest of the students engaged with his comment).
- Because of the comments from this particular student it was often a huge task for the facilitator to keep the students to follow the discussion rules.
- The varying understanding each student had of what character education was and what was meant by it was wide. Students ranged from either completely missing the point to one student in particular who understood it, I think even better than me.
- The students who either missed the point of character education or didn't buy-in often chose to not participate which created constant encouragement from me to get engaged in the discussions and contribute.
- These discussions at the end were intensely debated and often the bell rang indicating the end of the period and students still remained to finish hearing a student out or to comment.

Data Analysis

Character Survey

The first section of data listed several questions based on each pillar of character. Overall, the first observation I made was the percentage ranking of each pillar. It started with a higher percentage and fell to lower percentages. I wondered if initially when

answering the questions students held back and then relaxed as the survey continued.

Here are the results for the survey based on how students ranked themselves. According to the survey these are the scores (see table 1): Trustworthy – 88%, Fair – 85%, Respectful – 82%, Responsible – 80%, Courage – 76%, Integrity – 75%, Honesty – 75%, Diligent – 73%, Caring – 71%, and Citizen – 69%.

Not surprisingly, students scored the least in the category of citizenship.

Although, in this day and age, with all the advertising, information, and push to recycle, I would think students would take more of an active citizenship role. When asked whether or not they take responsibility for what goes on in their community, only 26% said yes. Same goes for the question; I help take care of the environment. 60% said they felt they did take care of their environment. Both questions are similar so their scores being both low are not surprising.

As I said above, the highest score of 88% was in trustworthiness. I really feel if that category was towards the end of the survey, then maybe the outcome would be different. The two questions that created the lower score were: I have integrity; I don't cave in to temptation (73%) and I am honest (80%). In many of our discussions, the question of honesty came up and students over and over said they do not feel lying is bad and that lying serves a purpose. So when the students score an average of 80% which is low but not that low compared to our conversations, I tend to wonder again about the order of the questions.

When students were asked whether they consider the feelings of all people who will be affected by their actions and decisions; 73% said no they do not. Many students voiced that this will be something they will acquire with age or maturity. They do not

always think of others but when something is done to them, then they find it to be unfair, uncaring, disrespectful, etc.

Three of the scores which really surprised me from the category of caring, honesty, and integrity told a lot about the students' attitude because often these three responses to the questions were constantly being rationalized. The first statement, "I always try to do what is right, even when it is costly or difficult" scored 66%. The second statement, "I don't lie, cheat, or steal" scored 53% while the last statement, "I am never mean, cruel, or insensitive" scored 40%. These three statements were said to be situational. It depended on what was going on because sometimes it is necessary to carry out one or all of these anti-character traits to accomplish or gain an outcome.

Responses to three statements were right on target as far as I was concerned. The statement, "I am accountable for my actions; I don't make excuses or blame others", "Fear of failure does not prevent me from trying things", and "I don't procrastinate" all were ones I felt would be marked with an overwhelming false. I see even the best students' fall short of these character issues.

Questions Based on Responsibility and Trustworthiness

The answers the students gave for the responsibility and trustworthy questions were typical canned answers. The question to ask after that question would have been a critical thinking question where they synthesize their response to a real world scenario creating a dilemma for the student to work through. When incorporating the curriculum, which we did with the film, Nicholas Nickleby, students were able to apply some of their responses to scenarios Mr. Nickleby found himself in. Students also deliberated together in groups to further think about responsibility and trustworthiness presenting situational

ethics. Several students verbally changed their answers to part b of the question, What is your responsibility to your family? When talking about if their parents fell ill or they were left to care for a younger sibling would their responsibilities to themselves change?

Student Interviews

The interviews were interesting in the difference of opinions and ideas which came from each interviewee. All three students initially believed the education of character and even incorporating it in the curriculum to be a “ridiculous”, “pointless”, and a “waste of time” (student I) (student II) (student III). However, after sometime they felt it was effective but they had a number of warnings. First, it definitely had to be imbedded in the curriculum and not so blatantly taught because they felt there would be resistance at the secondary level. Secondly, the task could not be to try to change students’ minds or opinions but to open their horizons to different ways of looking at issues.

My first interview with interviewee I had a very clear understanding of what we were doing with integrating character education in with the established curriculum. He felt it would help students see a broader perspective of different levels of character and better ways to understand their perspective of their personal character development. Interviewee one stated, “I believe the process [of the development of character] wouldn’t be sped up but rather the horizons for eventual beliefs widened” (T3I). He also felt it did encourage, “...me to think about my actions” (T3I). So because this student was very clear on what character development was and what it was not, the student fully grasped, accepted, and partook of the lessons.

The interviewee who brought a very different idea about what character should

look like and that the pillars of character all had a purpose caused the most controversy in the class. He had strong convictions and felt he was “taught at home just not traditionally. [He] was taught to manipulate the different character pillars” (T3II). This interviewee liked the idea of character education being taught in the school but for different reasons. He hoped the process would open the minds of his fellow students so they could understand his point of view.

Interviewee III was pretty adverse to the whole process and almost took offense to it; however, this student was also the one who was often distracted with her neighbor, was repeatedly absent or tardy, and confused at what we were doing in class. Even at the end, she misunderstood the point of character education where the other students all seemed to have discerned the intent of it. A comment she made in answering whether or not she thought the education of character was effective was, “I am not sure if character education works. I am more aware of the bad things like when people don’t hold the door or don’t say thank you where I didn’t notice that before” (T3III). She has not totally decided if it is effective or not and even though she states she now notices the negative aspects of peoples’ character, the fact that her awareness has changed, is an enlightened response.

Group Discussion

The jigsaw collaborative assignment was where the students really came alive with animated, detailed, and critically thought out responses to the questions posted after each film viewed. The discussions which followed each groups’ presentations allowed for commentary on what good character is, how it affects people, and how different scenarios can effect someone’s decision. The bottom line question was always: are there

ever absolutes to following the pillars of character or is there a time to lie, cheat, steal, etc? Even the most quiet of students got involved in these discussions.

Implications

The initial thought for this research project was to be able to begin the process at the onset of my student teaching experience; however, with the lesson plans already in place by my Coordinating Teacher, I was limited on freedom to manipulate those plans as well as having a huge time constraint placed on me. My C.T. felt the Advanced Placement English/Language Arts class would be the best opportunity to conduct my research project because they would be just finishing up their A.P. exam and she did not have anything planned for the class after that point. The great pressure which is placed on the A.P. students prior to the exam and with just a few weeks of school left, they were ready to check out of the academia world.

With this in mind, I chose to use visual texts instead of literature. The students were excited about this choice and were more motivated to participate actively and engage in the process. Students took film notes on the different points of character exhibited by the characters in each film to use for discussion points or to assist in answering their questions. This also kept the students on task and thinking about the character of the characters rather than becoming absorbed in the film. Overall, the films were well chosen and portrayed the different pillars of character well. The students were mixed as to whether they liked the blatant examples or the more subtle examples best. All felt they were good jumping off points for the discussions.

I would do the action research project differently if I had to do it over again. First of all, more time was needed to delve deeper into each pillar of character and allow time

for it to be spread out and not so clustered so students would feel they were not being bombarded with “good” character, almost like it was being forced upon them. This would also allow for it to be taught more subtly. Ideally, character would not be the only thing focused on throughout the unit lessons. The process would be threaded throughout each text rather than that being the sole focus but again because of the time constraint it needed to be the only theme looked at in the lesson. This is where students almost became adverse to the lessons especially after three weeks of films and discussions of character.

My qualitative study’s two questions to be answered were: (1) Does character education affect student’s daily thinking about personal moral dilemma as or situations (2) Do students relate better to character education when it is connected with literature or visual texts? Students have a changed awareness throughout the project of the different character traits or there lack of, however, with the time constraints, I do not feel I had enough evidence to show truly whether or not there were any lasting impressions left with students and how they thought about their personal character traits they had or desired to have or change. I do feel intertwining the education of character into the curriculum is vital and creating a subtle learning environment for that topic is important based on the student interviews and group discussions.

Conclusion

Moral development has been an important part of history and continued as an important part of our nation's foundation. In the last two decades, there has been a revival in implementing character education in the school system. This has been instigated by the United States Congress and furthered by the No Child Left Behind Act.

With the encouragement to introduce and feather out core ethical values within our students, educators are looking to find an effective system to execute that plan.

Hopefully, with the ongoing push to incorporate character development in the schools, more and more educators will begin to integrate the education of the different pillars of character into the already established curriculum. Even short term changes in attitude and behavior are better than nothing and as one student believed, “the horizons for eventual beliefs [would be] widened” through the education of character in the classroom (T3I). If that did happen, then character education taught in the classroom would be effective.

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