Character Education Integration in Secondary School English Curriculum

By

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A research project submitted in conformity with the requirements for the

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Abstract

Character education is not a new phenomenon. Although much of the discussion surrounding character education focuses on elementary level students and schools, character education has had a surge in popularity in recent years. This study seeks to investigate the ways in which secondary school English teachers integrate character education into the English curriculum. Data were gathered through two semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with two secondary school English teachers who express a level of expertise in the integration of character education into the English curriculum. Findings point to the lack of a single definition of character education; teaching character through modelling; teaching character through literature and current events; encouraging student reflection; and the importance of supportive communities. The results of this research serve to provide transferrable techniques for secondary school teachers who aspire to fuse character education into their everyday practice.

Keywords: English, character education, curriculum, integration, secondary school
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Introduction to the Research Study

My personal philosophy involves the idea that one needs to, and does, make connections from one thing to another, and develop meaning from those connections. In an academic sense, one makes connections from one subject area to another, and can see ideas and how they are interwoven with each other. From these connections, one can. These connections will not be the same for every person, but they need to exist and need to be encouraged and investigated. The connections made by individuals cannot be predicted, as they are personal and unique, but they must be encouraged nonetheless. It is these connections and their inherent meanings that make ideas important and allow individuals to grow as a part of a larger community.

Making connections extends to connections between people. Society as a whole is, at its simplest form, the connections and interactions of people. By fostering communities within the classroom, we are teaching students how to make connections as well as the ways in which connections should be made. A strong community was integral to my own success in my secondary school education, and I believe that positive communities can make a huge impact on students’ performance.

A strong community alone does not, however, magically cause a student to care about their studies and their own life path. Although developing a positive space for a student to grow is an important step in fostering the holistic education of an individual, it is ultimately the students themselves who must succeed on their own. A student’s own set of positive character traits is what makes a student successful. By developing positive character traits, students are
able create connections and meaning in their own lives and to the larger communities in which they are members.

For me, positive character traits are values that individuals can possess that enable them to care about themselves, others, and their community in order to work towards the good of everyone. Character traits such as perseverance, curiosity, and respect are integral to a student’s success in the classroom and beyond. Although students can display their knowledge of science, history, or *Jane Eyre*, it is their interpersonal skills and traits that drive students to do what they do and act the way they act. Students develop not only academic abilities in school, but also character traits that help them navigate the relationships they have with the people around them, and understand who they are as individuals.

**Purpose of the Study**

I truly believe in the holistic education of students. That is, I believe that students are people first, and we as educators have a duty to understand and nurture the growth of the student in more than just an academic way. As teachers, we are not merely transmitting subject matter to students, but in fact taking part in the moulding of the next generation of society. I want my students to be great people. I want them to develop the skills that will help them succeed in life, while exposing them to as much of life and the world as is possible from my position in the classroom and in the school.

Students arrive in the classroom with a personality. Especially at the secondary level, students have their own set of character traits, behaviours, and values. Much of the discussion about character education focuses on elementary level students and schools. I do not dispute the importance of establishing positive behaviours, attitudes, and character traits beginning at a
young age, although as a teacher candidate who wishes to teach English at the secondary school level, I wish to incorporate character education into my own teaching.

The question I address in my research is, “In what ways do secondary school teachers integrate character education in the English curriculum?” I believe that character education is important enough to be taught in secondary schools. Due to the limited amount of class time with students, the inclusion of character education into the curriculum can be perceived as “yet another thing” to add to teachers’ already overflowing plates. Integration of character education, however, should not be seen as additional material to be covered. Effective integration of character education into the curriculum means that curriculum expectations are met while simultaneously teaching positive character traits and ethical values to students. Integration of character education into the curriculum also allows for students to make the connections that are so crucial to success. Whether I like it or not, as a teacher I will be influencing students’ character to some extent. Because I want to instil in students a set of character traits in order for them to succeed as positive members of their communities, I wish to discover techniques and strategies that I, and other secondary school English teachers, can put to use in our own teaching careers.

**Background of the Researcher**

I am a Toronto-born and –raised 26-year-old white male. I currently am a teacher candidate in the Master of Teaching program at the University of Toronto. I grew up in the east end of Toronto, and completed all of my K-12 education in the Toronto Board of Education in the Ontario public school system. From grade 7 until grade 12, I was enrolled in the Extended French program, which meant that a large number of my classes were taught in French. Although
I successfully completed this program, I found that in my case institutionalised language learning was not very effective. Throughout my public school career, I was very committed to extra-curricular activities, with the most attention paid to music. From as long as I can remember I took part in choirs, until I started playing trombone in grade 6, and I was not permitted to pursue both vocal and instrumental music studies. I really enjoyed playing and learning within a band, and doing so with a fairly constant group of peers. Throughout my secondary school career I felt as if I were part of many different groups that all successfully intertwined to create a unified community and sense of connection to both the people and the building itself.

After graduating from secondary school in 2005, I began attending the University of Toronto as a full-time undergraduate student with a major in English. After the initial excitement of starting anew, I soon found myself disconnected and unenthusiastic about my studies and about school-life completely. In the summer of 2006 I began working as a porter in the Emergency Department at in a downtown Toronto hospital. Although I had no experience in health care, not a real desire to pursue it as a career, my new job was exciting and fulfilling in ways that I did not expect it to be. I expected to feel this way about my university career, but instead I found my working life more enjoyable than my academic studies. I enjoyed the subject matter of my courses more than I enjoyed medicine, but I had more of a desire to perform well at work than I did at school.

Looking back at this time of my life it is now obvious to me that what I found so appealing in my high school and work careers was something that I thought came naturally: community and communication. In both high school and at the hospital I was part of such a diverse set of connections and interactions everyday. This was missing in my experiences at the University of Toronto. In 2007 the university placed me on academic probation for what would
have been my third year (2007-2008), and I worked full time at St. Joseph’s Health Centre for most of that period. I returned as a part-time student to University of Toronto in the fall of 2008. I decided that I needed to make an effort at connecting with school-life. I made a point of speaking with my professors, engaging with my classmates, and trying to carve out a place for myself with in the university’s community. I no longer had the assumption that communication and community would simply appear to foster and support my academic and social growth. I realised that I needed to be an active participant.

I was not fond of studies in history until fairly recently. I had a sour experience in history classes in my public school days. This was also intensified by the fact that my history courses were taught in French, a language that I was, and still am, learning. My interest in history was kindled by the music history and culture courses that I took at University of Toronto. I knew that I wanted to continue to keep music as a part of my education, but I was unable to take instrumental music courses at the post-secondary level without a considerably larger commitment to performance than I was willing to make. Music history and culture courses however were available to all undergraduate students. My interest in music led me to music history, which in turn led me to studies in history. It is this sort of trajectory that has led me to believe that cross-disciplinary studies are one of the most important aspects of an education.

I love studying English. It incorporates so many different subjects under one umbrella term. English studies explore the communication of ideas. History, philosophy, literature, drama, and poetry are all different facets of studies in English. They are all interwoven in the subject’s focus on communication of ideas, and this communication as an art form. English taught me the skills that allowed me to make meaningful connections in my academic and professional careers,
as well as in my life, and to understand who I am both as an individual and as a member of multiple communities.

Upon reflection of the experiences that brought me to where I am today, I believe that what allowed me to persevere through difficult times and to achieve my own version of success was my own set of character traits. I believe that the time that I spent as a member of multiple communities precipitated the development of my own positive character traits, but that it was through the application of these character traits that I was able to succeed. For this reason, I wish to research the ways in which I can implement the integration of character education into my own teaching practice, so that I can provide students with some of the tools that will help them achieve their own versions of success.

Overview

This research project will contain five chapters in total. In chapter one I have introduced my topic, my research question, the reasoning behind my study, and background information on myself. Chapter 2, the literature review, consists of a review of the research and writing that has already been published on my topic. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used in my study of ways that secondary school teachers integrate character education into the English curriculum. Chapter 4 reports the data that I collected in my research. Chapter 5 describes the analysis of the data as they relate to my research question, and provides a discussion of what I have discovered in my research. It further addresses the implications of the research and identifies some areas for future research.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Character education is not a new phenomenon. In recent years character education, and specifically character education in secondary schools, has enjoyed a surge in popularity (Smith, 2006, p. 18); however, the idea of teaching students more than academic knowledge is not a contemporary one. Berkowitz and Fekula (1999) argue that “[e]ducation inevitably affects character; either intentionally or unintentionally” (p. 18). With this notion in mind, educators must be aware of the effects, deliberate or otherwise, of the lessons, attitudes, and actions that they bring into the classroom and subsequently into the lives of their students. While optimistically assuming that all teachers want their students to succeed in their own lives and become functioning members of society, teachers need to be aware of the best ways to teach students that will lead them to mature into valuable members of their community and achieve personally defined degrees of success.

I conducted my literature review with a focus on my research question, “In what ways do secondary school teachers integrate character education in English curriculum?” Many authors have published work broadly addressing the benefits and practices of character education, including literature that deals specifically with secondary school education. Most of the literature that I have reviewed is from the United States, in part due to the prominence of the Character Education Partnership (CEP) (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007, p. 30), which defines itself as a non-profit “umbrella organization for character education, serving as the leading resource for people and organizations that are integrating character education into their schools and communities” (CEP, 2013). Much of the available research, as well as the resources available through the CEP,
focus on character education programs as school-wide commitments. Throughout the literature I found six recurrent themes that I will address for the remainder of this chapter:

- Finding an appropriate definition for character education
- The need for safe and supportive communities
- Character education program efficacy
- The role of parents and school communities
- Difficulty with assessment of character education
- Integration of character education into curriculum

**Defining Character Education**

A review of the literature reveals that the term “character education” is used in two ways. Firstly, it is used an overarching term to encompass more educational techniques that focus on culturally or religiously specific values. It additionally is used as a general term describing education that promotes student development outside of the traditional academic sphere. Much of the literature concerning character education approaches it with a specific lens such as citizenship education, moral education, or virtue education. Although these versions of character education have different means to their ends, and although they do not share precisely the same set of which values or character traits are most esteemed, they all strive to promote the development of positive character traits and student development as successful, ethical human beings.

Berkowitz and Bier (2007) provide an excellent and in-depth description of character education:

Character education, as defined here, is intended to promote student development. The aspects of student development of relevance are those that
enable and motivate the individual to be a moral agent (i.e., to engage in systematic, intentional prosocial behavior). Such developmental outcomes include moral values (e.g., prosocial attitudes and motives), socio-moral reasoning competencies (e.g. perspective-taking, moral reasoning), knowledge of ethical issues and considerations, moral emotional competencies (e.g., empathy, sympathy), a prosocial self-system (e.g., moral identity, conscience), relevant behavioral competencies (e.g., ability to disagree respectfully, conflict resolution skills), and a set of characteristics that support the enactment of such prosocial motives and inclinations (e.g., perseverance, courage). In other words, the outcomes of effective character education are a complex set of psychological characteristics that motivate and enable one to function as a moral agent. (p. 30).

This approach to character education is presented through a psychological lens. A set of psychological characteristics influences the thoughts, behaviours, and actions of the individual.

A different approach to defining character education is summed up well by Bohlin, Farmer, and Ryan (2001) who state, “character education is not about simply acquiring a set of behaviors. It is about developing the habits of mind, heart, and action that enable a person to flourish” (p. 2). This idea of treating and teaching a student holistically and as a human being within society are overarching connections found amongst all forms of character education.

**Safe and Supportive Communities**

During my literature review of character education and its effectiveness, I found that a number of the sources stress the necessity for a positive school environment that fosters the development of a shared purpose and identity. For example, in discussion of her own experience integrating character education into her lessons, Gilness (2003) states:

The first truth I discovered in the classroom is that a teacher cannot begin to think about fostering character education without first creating a positive classroom climate replete with a strong sense of community and proper relations among members. (p. 243).
This sentiment is echoed by Lickona and Davidson (2005), who state that “[e]xcellence and ethics do not develop in a vacuum,” but instead they “develop within an ethical learning community” (p. 32). Gomez and Ang (2007) argue that schools “have the ability to provide positive people, positive places, and positive opportunities that promote positive development and act as protective factors” (p. 98) in the lives of students. This includes the role of positive adults in schools, such as teachers, who “recognize and respond to adolescents’ need for ongoing support in their development and their need for connectedness to others” (Gomez & Ang, 2007, p. 98) in order to foster a community within the school. In order for effective character education to take place, students must be able to develop prosocial and moral behaviour in their own school environment.

On the topic of school communities, Smith (2006) states that “[a]n effective way of addressing student needs is through the development of a school environment that is focused on caring and community,” (p. 18) which involves administrators and teachers treating “students as developing human beings rather than as commodities.” This holistic approach to student development, in which educators understand and nurture the growth of students as people first, within the school setting and the greater context of society is a thread that runs through each of the sources. Student development takes place within the school community, and acts as a microcosm for the student’s place within larger communities subsequent to their secondary school education.

Developing a safe and supportive community in the school begins with a safe and supportive space of the classroom. A large part of fostering these communities involves helping students develop a voice in classroom (Lickona & Davidson, 2005, p. 43). When students feel safe and supported, they are able to become self-advocates and speak to their own needs and
desires as well as contribute to the communities of which they are members. Recurrent in the literature’s discussion of safe and supportive communities is the notion that the school must become a caring community for its students. Lewis, Robinson, and Hayes (2011) argue that “[a]uthentic character education should emphasize a culture of caring, an important building block to character” (p. 230). A suggestion made by the authors is for the same teacher or teachers to remain consistent throughout a student’s career in order to assist in developing this culture of caring (Lewis et al., 2011, p. 230).

**Efficacy of Character Education Programs**

There is no shortage of prefabricated character education programs. Berkowitz and Bier (2007) conducted a study of 33 different character education programs implemented at schools in the United States in order to discover what the common implementation strategies were for effective programs. The difficulty they had with their study was not in finding out if the character education programs worked well, but rather how they worked well. Berkowitz and Bier (2007) state that “most typically character education is ‘home grown’” and thus the pre-existing programs that they did review were not necessarily the best examples of effective character education (p. 41).

Lewis, Robinson, and Hayes (2011) argue that effective character education includes buy-in from involved stakeholders including teachers, students, families, counsellors, and administrators. Lewis et al. (2007) and CEP (2013) among others call for stakeholder input regarding the development of a set of values and standards upon which the individual school’s particular character education program will be based. In this way, stakeholders will feel an
ownership of the program in a way that is not evident in prefabricated programs such as “Character Word of the Month” (Lewis et al., 2007, p. 229).

Another issue with prefabricated character education programs is that these programs are not specifically designed for the particular community in which they are implemented, and thus may not resonate with the students, teachers, or any other stakeholders in the school community (Lewis et al., 2007). Smith (2006) states that “[a]ll character education programs, whether pre-packaged or locally developed, must focus on meeting a wide range of student needs. Along with academic needs, the moral, physical, psychological, and social needs of students must be comprehensively addressed” (p. 18). Lewis et al. (2011) also state that the goals and objectives of the school’s specific character education program need to reflect and fit the multicultural needs of that specific school (p. 230). By simply implementing a prefabricated character education program without adjusting it to the specific needs of the school community it proposes to serve, the program is almost certainly destined to fail.

The Role of Parents and School Communities

Although students spend a large portion of their waking hours in the classroom, the time spent with individual teachers is not as great as the amount of time students experience with their parents/guardians and with other members of their community. This is especially true at the secondary school level, where a subject specific teacher might see a student as little as 75 minutes every other school day.

Along with the necessity for student voice within the classroom and the school communities, Lickona and Davidson (2005) argue for parental and community member voices within the school (p. 47). This call for familial and community involvement echoes the sentiment
of Lewis et al. (2011) who state that not only teachers, but parents, school personnel, and people from the community at large can serve as role models for students (p. 230). Lewis et al. (2011) continue to argue that role models “are the basis for a good character education program” and that these members of the community can be brought in to model positive character traits such as equity, fairness, respect, and caring (p. 230).

As mentioned in the previous section, it is recommended families and community members are also play an important role as stakeholders in the development and the execution of the character education programs for the school in their community.

**Difficulty with Assessment**

A common theme found throughout the literature on character education concerns the difficulty in assessing the efficacy of character education programs, as well as effectively assessing the effects they have on individual students. Traditional methods of assessment such as tests, essays, and research projects are not effective tools for determining whether or not a student has internalized positive character traits and behaviours. These tools can be used to gauge whether or not a student understands what the positive behaviours are, but not if they have been successfully developed in the student (Lewis et al., 2011, p. 228).

Additionally, assessing the effectiveness of a character education programs and practices is also difficult. Berkowitz and Bier (2007) reviewed and studied the existing research on character education in part to discover the common characteristics of effective character education. They used 69 studies of 33 character education programs and concluded by stating that, although they were able to devise a system to rate the efficacy for these 33 programs, their outcome evaluations did not reflect all or even most of the character education practices because
of the numerous variations of character education programs and strategies that are used by educators. Therefore much of what may be considered effective practice was not included in the results of the research because these potentially effective strategies and programs were not a part of their research study.

As there are no standard criteria for judging or evaluating the efficacy of character education programs or practices, it is difficult to assess authentically the successes of particular character education methods (Lewis et al., 2011, p. 229). Although traditional assessment tools are not effective in measuring success in character education, Berkowitz and Bier (2007) found that academic achievement scores significantly correlated with schools that focused on character education (p. 41).

Integration of Character Education

There is a strong opinion in the literature on character education that in order for character education to be effective, it needs to be integrated into everyday classroom practices, discussions, and lessons. In their study, Berkowitz and Bier (2007) found that the most common subjects to integrate character education into the core academic curriculum were language arts and social sciences (p. 41). Gilness (2003) writes about and provides examples of how she successfully integrated character education into her secondary school language arts classes, and Loehrer (1998) uses fictional examples of classroom dynamics in order to provide insight into how a teacher can instil “virtue and character” in students. This focus on “virtue” in character education is seen as the more traditional, and more common approach than the psychological approach as discussed by academics such as Berkowitz. Loehrer (1998) also discusses the three ways that he believes that virtue can be taught: by exposure, by transfusion, and by an “artificial
combination” of the two he refers to as imaginary-memory (p. 6). Exposure refers to a
modelling the specific virtues over a long period of time. This method focuses on the teacher as
model of morality in their own behaviours, as well as the direct instruction of positive traits
Transfusion is when virtue is modelled in a situational crisis. That is, a teacher would model the
use of positive values and morality in their decision-making process when a problem or issue
arises in the classroom environment in order to set an example for students to follow. Loehrer’s
(1998) notion of teaching virtue through imaginary-memory involves using “virtuous stories” in
which the story “actively involves the imagination” to understand the story, and “fuels the
memory with positive input for future events” (p. 7).

Lewis et al. (2011) also argue for the integration of character education into curriculum. They state that if “character education programs are not integrated into the curriculum and if
stakeholders do not collaborate, there is no buy-in for the program and it will not succeed” (p.
229). The sources do not however provide an adequate amount of techniques for best practices of
integrating character education in general, nor for integrating character education into the
secondary school English curriculum in particular.

Conclusion

My literature review leads me to conclude that there is a large amount of research that has
been conducted on character education, and a fair amount of resources for teachers to build
character in schools. The literature however does not fully address the best practice techniques
for secondary school teachers to integrate character education into the English curriculum. The
few sources that do discuss techniques for integrating character education into the English
curriculum, such as Gilness (2003), give merely a handful of examples of integration techniques.
For example, Gilness (2003) states that she has her grade 10 English class write eulogies about their classmates. She argues that by having her students share these “nice words” about each other helps build a “stronger sense of community and camaraderie” (Gilness, 2003). Gilness (2003) also speaks of having students practice ethical decision-making by using the Milton Bradley game called *A Question of Scruples*, as well as reading literature to her students and “following up with Socratic Dialogue and fishbowl debates” (p. 245).

Martinson (2003) gives an example of the need for character education and provides an amusing anecdote of how he used his experience observing all-you-can-eat salad bar etiquette in a Wendy’s restaurant to teach his students about ethics, but the article provides only one technique for character education. Martinson recounts an anecdote wherein a young woman paid for the all-you-can-eat salad bar at a Wendy’s restaurant and proceeded to fork salad onto her husband’s plate even though he himself had not paid for the all-you-can-eat service. Martinson (2003) uses this example to bring up “the complexities involved in responding well to ethical dilemmas confronting individuals and society” (p. 16) with the goal of having students, “think about ethics and their own behavior” (p. 16). However, Martinson neglects to mention whether he was able to integrate this story into the core academic curriculum.

The sources speak largely of how educators must integrate character education into the curriculum, but without offering many practical techniques. The literature focuses greatly on school-wide character education programs and ways in which these programs flourish or fail. However, different classroom and school situations require teachers to be flexible in their methods and adjust their practices to best suit individual students in particular moments in time.

In my own research, I plan to investigate the ways in which secondary school teachers can integrate character education in the English curriculum, regardless of whether the school has
a character education program implemented or not. I would like to discover techniques and strategies for character education integration that can be used in potentially any secondary school English classroom in order to benefit not only my own practice, but also the practice of other teachers as well as the students we serve.
Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This research study investigates the ways in which secondary school teachers integrate character education into the English curriculum. As a qualitative study, it seeks to find practical suggestions that can be used in teacher practice. This study was conducted through the interviewing of two secondary teachers and analysing these data to discover relevant trends and themes.

Procedure

Literature Review

I conducted the literature review prior to the data collection and analysis in order to develop a better knowledge and understanding of the current themes in the field of character education in secondary school English classrooms. The limited research on the integration of character education into the secondary school English curriculum prompted me to investigate a broader selection of literature on character education in general and of the place for character education within English curriculum at the elementary as well as the secondary level. The sources that I found came in a variety of forms, including published texts, articles in peer-reviewed academic journals, and documentation published by organizations dedicated to character education. I have organized the literature into prominent themes of discussion by analysing the sources for areas of repetition and connection.

Instruments of Data Collection and Analysis

I collected data through two semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with two secondary school English teachers who express a level of expertise in the integration of character education
into English curriculum. I choose to use semi-structured, face-to-face interviews of teachers for my data collection because interviewing in this fashion would allow me to access the teachers’ beliefs and reasoning for the practices they use, as well as their current and past strategies. I asked my participants questions regarding their experiences with integrating character education into their teaching practice, such as: “What are the different strategies that you use to integrate character education into the English curriculum?”; “Could you describe a lesson you have taught in English class that integrates character education?”; and “Are there any resources that you have found effective to assist in integrating character education into your lessons?” It was crucial to understand these teachers’ rationale for their techniques for my study, including how and why these techniques are effective. In order to evaluate effectively current techniques and develop a collection of recommendations for future use, I must first successfully obtain this knowledge from my participants. Please refer to Appendix B to view the complete list of interview questions.

Both of my interviews were conducted in a private meeting place in the participant’s school of employment in order to ensure conversation without disturbances. Each of the interviews was tape-recorded using a digital recording device with my participants’ consent. In order to facilitate a genuine dialogue, I framed my interviews as a conversation. I wanted to focus on my participants’ experience and expertise and an informal and congenial attitude was crucial for inducing honesty and authenticity in the interview process.

When I created my interview questions, I did so in order to reflect the conversational approach to my interview and ordered my questions in such a way that I felt would follow the flow of natural connections in our conversations. I crafted my questions with the themes I found in my literature review in mind, but I chose not to thematically order my interview questions
because I felt that the frankness of a natural conversational progression would yield more honest responses.

I began data analysis by typing a smooth verbatim transcription with the free online software, ExpressScribe. I used this software to slow down the speed of the audio recordings or the interviews in order to transcribe them accurately. After the initial transcription, I listened to the original recording several times while reading along with my transcription in order to check and maintain veracity.

The recordings of the face-to-face interviews using ExpressScribe software for the audio playback were transcribed by me, the researcher. I read over the interviews several times while examining them for patterns, similarities and relevance to my review of the literature. I coded and analysed the data collected from these interviews using the constant-comparative method. The codes I used were: community, ethics, teacher reflection, student reflection, care, literature, current events, modelling, and the experiences of others. I examined my coded data and categorized them into five themes:

1. Defining character education
2. Teaching character by modelling
3. Teaching character through literature and current events
4. Encouraging student reflection on character and values
5. Community and character

The findings from the data analysis are further elaborated upon in Chapter 4 and discussed in Chapter 5.

Participants

For my recruitment requirements, I sought to recruit teachers who expressed a level of
expertise with character education at the secondary level. I interviewed two participants who are both currently teaching secondary English in a single high school in the Greater Toronto Area. I assigned both participants pseudonyms, Evelyn and Thomas, based on their gender identifications. These participants were selected because of their experience with character education in the secondary school English curriculum, and their school’s particular focus on character education. These participants were recommended to me through a professional connection. Both participants were enthusiastic and more than willing to share their experiences and best practice techniques.

**Ethical Review Procedures**

To ensure the privacy and anonymity of the participants involved in my study, all correspondence and meetings were kept private. The interview participants in my study were given letters of informed consent prior to engaging in the interview process to review, which were emailed to participants. Participants read and signed letters that were collected by me on the day of the individual interview before the interview process began. All participants were offered the opportunity to have any questions regarding the nature and process of my research study answered by the researcher either by email correspondence or a telephone conversation.

As the researcher, I ensured that participants were aware that they could withdraw their voluntarily participation from the study at any time, could refrain from answering any questions without justification or explanation, and could request to change or alter their answers at any time by contacting the researcher. All procedures were conducted as outlined in the consent forms that I provided to my participants. These procedures were not changed at all during the course of the research study.
All personal information that could compromise the anonymity of participants was adapted by using pseudonyms, and my participants were aware of this measure. In order to ensure anonymity, the researcher attentively reviewed the shared data to make certain that participants were personally and professionally shielded from any possible injury. As well, all participants involved in the study were aware of and consented to the role of my research supervisor in viewing the data and verifying all results before finalization of the research project. I also informed all of my participants that they were aware of and welcome to request a copy of the finished research project upon its completion.

**Limitations**

My own personal biases and perspectives towards the importance of integrated character education, as outlined in chapter one of this project is limitation of this study. The researcher brings beliefs about the importance of character education practices within both the elementary and secondary levels of education, as well as positive feelings of the efficacy of character education integration. Thus as a researcher, my interpretation of the collected data for themes and connections may be a major limitation itself. The findings found throughout this research project are based on the researcher’s perspective and informed assumptions. It is important to be aware and cognizant of how the researcher may influence the data interpretation of my research project when presenting the final findings and recommendations.

Another limitation of this research project is the sample size of participants involved in the study. The sample size was relatively small, and the findings are therefore not to be generalised. However, the objective of this research was to discover the ways in which a group of secondary school English teachers integrate character education into their classes, and thus the results are useful and transferrable to my own teaching practice as well as others within the profession. The
interview questions used in this study and time constraints of the interview process itself were also limited and did not provide ample opportunity to completely tap into the depth of knowledge of the experience and expertise of my participants.
Chapter 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

As was discussed during my literature review, character education can mean different things to different people. The first question related to character education that I asked both of my participants in our interviews was, “How would you define character education?” This question not only provided a framework for our discussions, but also provided me with the ability to understand and contextualize my participants’ responses. This chapter is divided into five themes, the first of which informs the findings in the subsequent sections:

- Defining character education
- Teaching character by modelling
- Teaching character through literature and current events
- Encouraging Student reflection on character and values
- Community and character

Defining Character Education

In order to develop an accurate analysis of the data that I gathered through my qualitative interviews, it was necessary to uncover the similarities and differences in the definitions of character education provided by my two participants. While both participants had similar views on the manifestation and end goals of character education, neither of them provided a solid, unambiguous definition.

When asked to provide her definition of character education, Evelyn succinctly responded, “I would say that character education involves knowledge that is wrapped around ethics.”
Evelyn’s use of the word “ethics” connects to the overarching definition of character education that I found in my literature review, that is, that character education strives to promote the development of positive character traits and student development as ethical human beings.

Evelyn’s response, although pithy and to the point, still requires some unpacking. Throughout the interview, her idea of “knowledge that is wrapped around ethics” became clearer. She continued by stating:

A real important principle [is] that students have to have an appreciation of, you know, their own culture, and their own identity, and respect, but also respect the ideas and cultures of their classmates. And not only respect, but appreciate and enquire, and I think from those things, that's where we develop the ethics around knowledge. And I think knowledge without ethics is really defunct because it serves no purpose if there is, you know, if knowledge isn't interconnected, not just by subject, but by people, from culture to culture, from language to language.

Here, Evelyn expands on notion that “knowledge that is wrapped around ethics.” For her, knowledge without a connection to real-world situations is unusable, and by extension ineffectual. In this quotation, Evelyn also supports her position by referencing respect, curiosity, and appreciation, three qualities that are considered to be positive character traits. This quotation shows Evelyn’s position that the content taught in classrooms can be used to teach ethical values and positive character traits in students.

Evelyn’s understanding of character education as a principle goal of education connects well to Thomas’s definition of character education. When I asked Thomas how he would define character education, he described it as a “pillar” and stated that it “is necessary to all aspects of what we teach.” Here, Thomas echoes Evelyn’s notion that knowledge without interconnection “serves no purpose.” Thomas continued by stating that character education cannot be seen as a “separate part” of the curriculum, but that “it must run through [the curriculum].”

Thomas used an analogy to describe character education’s relationship to the curriculum.
He stated that character education is “one of the elements of blood, if you want to call it.” Blood is an interconnected system throughout our entire body, and allows all of our separate parts to function properly. Blood runs through all individual parts, providing sustenance and energy to drive our anatomical functions. Blood is the life force that drives us.

Thomas’s provided his final thoughts on our discussion at the end of our interview, summing up his interpretation and attitude towards character education:

We're not allowed to mark or quantify attitudes towards school and [students] in things we do, but fostering positive attitudes about themselves, and their environment, and their society, I think that's core to helping them be successful. I have a really good friend who used to always say, “Our only job as teachers is to make people that we wouldn't mind living on our street with.”

Thomas’s comments on fostering positive attitudes in students connect to Evelyn’s notion of character education as the instillation of positive character traits and ethical values in students.

**Teaching Character by Modelling**

My findings show that teachers will also model positive character traits and the ethical decision making process that they intend to cultivate in their students. During my interview with Thomas, he began to recount some of his experiences with students, and particularly not only how he integrates character education into the content of his lessons, but also how he consciously conducts himself in classroom. He explained that while working through a decision, he would self-talk, narrating aloud the decision-making process for the benefit of his students. I asked him if his goal was for his students to emulate his decisions, to which he responded:

No, and absolutely not emulate. And absolutely refuse to tell them what to think, and they get quite upset. “Well I don’t know what to think, why won’t you tell us?” “Because it’s not my job to tell you what to think, it’s to tell you how to think.” And then modelling it, and going through the process right in front of them sometimes of how I figure things out, and why I don’t agree with certain things.

Through modelling the ways in which he arrives at decisions in an ethical manner, Thomas is
able to expose his students to the benefits of embodying the goals of character education.

During my interview with Evelyn, she also referenced modelling positive character traits for her students. She believes that when she is able to demonstrate “things like character, and… caring, and consistency in [the] classroom,” while interacting with students; she constantly demonstrates these positive traits that “align[s] itself with character education.”

Through my analysis, I’ve found that modelling ethical decision-making, values, and positive character traits is frequently interwoven with other forms of character education integration. Although it is an effective technique on its own, I have found that is was often incorporated with other strategies that my participants described.

**Teaching Character Through Literature and Current Events**

In our interviews, Evelyn and Thomas spoke of the relationship between content and character education, and their approaches to integrating character education into the curriculum were similar. They both treated content as a means to the end of character education. For them, character education was the goal, and the content, although useful in its own right, was treated as a vehicle used to deliver the ethical lessons they feel are of utter importance.

Character education is integrated into the English curriculum by introducing students to the experiences of others. This can be achieved through literature, current events, or other curricular content. By connecting their own experiences to the experiences of others, students are able to take on an empathetic understanding of situations that they might not otherwise experience.

When speaking on the topic of strategies used to integrate character education into the curriculum, Evelyn stated that character education integration was accomplished easily through the study of literature. This is due to the fact that she feels “literature is the study of the human condition.” She elaborated by explaining that through literature students and teachers investigate
what makes a protagonist versus an antagonist, coming of age tales, and heroic qualities of an individual.

When I asked Evelyn why she believed that this technique was effective, she responded by saying that using literature to teach character worked because by connecting literature to character, it “makes texts relevant to students.” She went on to provide an example to illustrate her point:

Romeo and Juliet is a fantastic case. It's about two adolescents whose, you know, who are in love, it's young love, their parents don't understand them, they feel like they're gonna die, much of the same sentiments that our average sixteen-year-olds today are feeling.

Through the use of texts such as *Romeo and Juliet*, Evelyn can teach positive character traits such as empathy, respect, and fairness. By investigating which characters do exhibit these positive character traits and which ones do not, she can guide students to realize the value of positive character traits. Evelyn believes that in order to have students develop positive character traits through the use of literature, they cannot simply be exposed to the texts. The students must engage with the texts in a meaningful way wherein they can make connections to their own lives. She noted that one of the reasons that she believes that the works of William Shakespeare are still taught today is “because so many of his messages really resonate or transcend the ages.”

Thomas also spoke of using literature to integrate character education into his lessons. His approach involves not only taking a closer look at the narrative, characters, and events of the text that is being studied, but also examining the context in which the literature was written and is being studied. Thomas provides an example of this strategy:

It's not good enough to talk about why Mark Twain used the n-word in *Huckleberry Finn*, but what is, why is he doing it? What does it say about people who want to take it out? What should we do?

Thomas not only leads his students into a deconstruction of the text itself, but also pushes them
to take into account the constant dialogue that surrounds canonical choices, literary discussion, and the complicated world of ethical decision-making.

Thomas’s responses during our interview also spoke to his desire to have students develop positive character traits by actively engaging with and investigating literature. He uses this form of critical thinking in order in order to successfully guide students to develop their own understandings on pertinent societal values:

I put either young girls, all females or all males in a group for the beauty myth. They have to discuss the beauty myth as found in literature, and concepts of beauty and what makes someone beautiful. If you don't put those things in front of them, then they go around with someone else's notion of what beauty is. As well as developing understandings on societal values, this sort of literary analysis is useful to develop students’ understanding of positive character traits. If students are able to analyse and deconstruct which qualities are considered valuable in particular societies, and why it is that they are upheld, then they will be better equipped to create and apply their own informed ethical standards and develop the positive character traits that teachers are aiming to instil in them. Interestingly, Evelyn had a similar experience while teaching *Pygmalion*. Although she did not focus solely on the idea of beauty, she did have her students explore the notion of the “ideal woman,” a similar exercise.

When students appreciate and engage with a text, learning begins. Content that is relevant and relatable to students allows them to take an empathetic stance and begin to develop an understanding with the decisions at hand, as well as the surrounding forces that influence these decisions. Evelyn speaks of her successes integrating discussions of character into her own classes using Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*:

[When] the students see the themes and the commonalities of their own lives they can really start to appreciate, you know, the texts. And that's where we get into things like, “What is love?” “Is love of parents more important than young
love? Or first love?” In terms of their parents, you know, “Are the parents protecting them or are they doing their children a disservice?” “What does it mean to be part of a family?”

By connecting the lives of the students to the lives of the characters in the play, Evelyn is able to integrate character education into her lessons on a canonical text. For example, through discussion of family dynamics in the play, a teacher could integrate lessons on respect and kindness. By unpacking the tragic deaths of Juliet and Romeo, who rushed into marriage and were fooled by a fake death, a teacher could speak to the values of honesty and patience. For Evelyn, these investigations are “where the character building comes into the curriculum.”

The same techniques that are used to integrate character education into the curriculum while investigating literature are transferrable, and can be used with other texts that tell a story. Both of my participants explained that they investigated current events in the classroom in much of the same way that they would use literature as a means to develop character in students.

Thomas provides an example:

You can use current events in Quebec and say [to the students], “Really? Is that just people in Quebec that do that?” So you get the experience. You get the first-hand comments and you get the piece that you set them up to write, and I do mean setup.

In our conversation, Thomas spoke of setting his students up for certain lesson, and “tricking” them into engaging with texts in a way that promotes the development of positive character traits such as compassion and empathy. He expresses that a teacher can use anything from “current events to ancient text and history” in order to integrate character education into the English curriculum.

Although Thomas and Evelyn take the time to lead their students though discussions on texts in order for their students to evaluate and support their own opinions on the values and character traits that they find, neither of them feels that they simply play the part of an inquisitor.
Encouraging Student Reflection on Character and Values

Throughout my data, I have noticed that effective character education involves individual reflection, both on the part of the student and the teacher. Students are prompted, led, and “tricked” into evaluating their own beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions. Teachers make a conscious effort to make students aware of the fact that they are a part of a community at school, as well as being a part of a larger society.

When I asked my participants if they assessed the effects of character education on their students, both responded that they did, but that they did so informally. When I inquired further into these informal assessments I discovered that my participants were able to incorporate student reflection on positive character traits and values into curricular activities. For example, while Evelyn stated that during a group assignment she would assess her students for their ability to effectively collaborate with their peers, she also mentioned that she “will have students reflect upon their group work experience through a reflective piece.” This is in part to provide an evaluation of their learning skills for their report cards, but also to make it necessary for students to realise and take stock of their own character traits. Evelyn feels that this form of reflective self-assessment done by students gives them “a sense of voice and autonomy,” and gives them some ownership over their own actions as well as the outcomes of those actions, both academic and ethical.

While speaking with Thomas about assessing the effects of character education, he brought up what he felt was a good example of the value of reflection in order to instil and assess character. After he has returned student work back to the students, Thomas encourages his students to review their work, and reflect upon how their effort is reflected in the feedback. Although this tactic is often primarily used to have students grow academically, it also
encourages students to realise some of their own positive character traits as well as reveal these traits to the teacher. Thomas believes that by “requesting the opportunity to redo work because there's something more they can do with it,” the students demonstrate that they want “to be their best instead of doing what they think gets them the highest mark.” For Thomas, this display of perseverance, accountability, and the desire to improve is representative of the effectiveness of character education and its desired results.

**Community and Character**

A person does not exist in a vacuum. A person’s good character shows itself within the community in which they live. Part of the community’s role in character education integration is investigating (and assessing) the ways in which students interact with others in their communities. Another aspect is examining the differences between other communities, and connecting these investigations to personal growth. The community of the classroom also brings into play questions of character as students from diverse experiences and backgrounds integrate and debate real world issues in the microcosm of the classroom.

I quoted Evelyn earlier in this chapter stating her belief that in order for knowledge to have a purpose, and for character education to be effective, it is necessary for content knowledge to be interconnected by not only subject matter, but also by people. The importance of people in this view of Evelyn’s spoke to the importance of community in character education. One aspect of the importance of community is teaching students how to understand their place as a member of community, and the inherent responsibilities involved that influence individual choices. Evelyn stated:

> Education just isn't about subject matter or the acquisition of facts. It's the acquisition of “How do we learn?” and “Why do we learn the way we do in science?” and “How can the things I'm learning in my classes affect me and the world around me?”
According to Evelyn, the development of traits such as curiosity, empathy, and responsibility is influenced by the connections that students make between the knowledge and skills they gain within the walls of the school and the ways in which this knowledge and these skills impact not only individual students, but also the local, regional, and global communities with which students are associated.

Evelyn continued to elaborate on the importance of teaching students about the role they have in within these various communities. I had asked Evelyn if she believed that character education was an important aspect of a student’s overall education, to which she responded:

Absolutely. I mean […] when I went to high school, we didn't have Civics and [Career Studies] embedded into the, into the curriculum. But they brought back Civics for the idea of the importance of teaching students civility, and character, and what it means to, to display good citizenship.

Evelyn’s mention of civility, character, and citizenship as crucial aspects of a student’s education speaks to the importance of student’s understanding their role in a community.

Thomas’s feelings on the importance of the students’ recognition of themselves as members of larger communities are reminiscent of Evelyn’s. When discussing the necessity for students to recognize their own roles as members of various communities, Thomas explained that part of character education is teaching students how to navigate the different expectations and realities of the world can start on the smaller scale of the school. This was particularly relevant to the school in which Thomas teaches, as he explains, “because we have a, for lack of a better phrase, or more precise phrase, multicultural society in the school, and within the classroom, we need to address questions of religion, cultural practice.” These sorts of conversations about community and cultural practices also align well with the investigations into literature and current events that I discussed previously in this chapter.
During our discussion of the ways in which he assesses character in his students, the role of community awareness in students is interwoven into Thomas’s response:

I also assess [character education] within assignments because I like to build any unit or any individual assignment so that the last quality is what I call extension: whether they can make a value, concrete value judgment on society, and how that's reflected in whatever we're studying or discussion within the class context.

Thomas integrates character education into the English curriculum by connecting the work that the students are doing to both societal values and the community of the classroom. This approach is evocative of Evelyn’s definition of character education as “knowledge wrapped around ethics,” which can be found earlier in this chapter. Thomas’s desire is that his students understand not only how their thoughts, opinions, and values affect their own lives, but the lives of those within the communities in which they inhabit as well. He sums up this belief by stating, “I think of anything that I’m doing, that I want to make them at least aware that everybody else has their rights and they have to respect that.”

On a smaller scale, Evelyn spoke of the importance of engaging students in discussions on the values of recognizing the roles and responsibilities in more intimate communities. When we discussed the technique of using literature as a method to integrate character education into the curriculum, Evelyn gave examples of questions that she would pose to students. One of the questions that she wanted students to carefully consider was “What does it mean to be part of a family?” This is the sort of question that prompts students to consider and ultimately argue the values and behaviours that are crucial to being a member of a family, potentially the most comprehensible and familiar community to students. Evelyn and Thomas’s statements show that character education can be more effective by making these connections to communities personal to students.
Students’ recognition and involvement within community is one facet of the role of community in effective character education. My data also show that another important role in effective character education is the role of community support. This support involves all members of the community, including teachers, parents, students, and administrators.

When Thomas provided his definition of character education, he wrapped up his feelings on the subject by stating that character education should be the “constant message in the hallway” of the school. By referencing the hallway instead of the classroom, Thomas creates an interesting picture of character education. Although individual teachers can integrate character education into their lessons and classrooms, my data analysis suggests that the consistency of community support to help foster the development of positive character traits and values within students is also crucial.

A supportive community can be seen within the interactions between students and teachers, regardless of whether or not a particular teacher currently teaches a particular student a course. Thomas expresses one of the ways in which this notion manifests in his practice: “I tell the students, once you're mine, you're always mine.” Thomas went on to explain this personal adage of his to me. Thomas’s belief is that his relationship with students does not end when they complete their course with him. He believes that as a teacher, and as a member of many of the same communities, he has a vested interest in the development of these students.

Thomas sees his role within the community of the classroom and the school not as teacher who strictly delivers lessons to his students, but who learns and grows along with them. Thomas uses a causally scientific analogy to describe his own place within the school and classroom community:

The relationship between [myself and the students] is very Newtonian. That the body acted upon is another body. So I get more from them, quite often, than
I’m giving, and sometimes I can give more than they want to take.

As Thomas reflects on his own role as a member of these communities, he actively engages students in exploring what it means to be a part of these communities.

A supportive school community can lead to positive effects on students’ character. By taking the time to show students care and compassion in their interactions, teachers are better able to understand and share the experiences of other community members with the end result of character education in mind. Thomas recounted an experience with a student in the school that illustrates this point well:

I was not directly teaching [this student], but the other teachers who were teaching him had difficulty getting him to school on time, and their question for me was “How are you getting him to show up for hockey and be all this, we can’t get him here to school on time?” […] So, coincidentally, within a couple days I happened to be walking out of the main building to the portable pack, and this ten-year-old boy is coming in about a half-an-hour late for school, and I asked him […] And he said, well, he said, he verged on crying and said, you know, “What do you want me to do? This is really difficult. I have to get my brothers ready for school.” Now, at this time I knew he had an eight-year-old brother, wasn’t aware that he had two even younger brothers […] Now he was a ten-year-old-boy getting his eight-year-old brother to school on time, and then getting his three-year-old and eighteen-month-old brothers cleaned and dressed and taken to the aunts so that they could get babysat while he went to school. And he’s ten. And there was absent parent in the situation. So I’m standing there, absolutely humbled, a little bit humiliated, and just stunned at my own arrogance that this little boy has taught me a more valuable lesson about what it is to have character and he was just upset that he was late.

Thomas’s tale is illustrative of a time that he was able to appreciate the positive character traits of an individual student in a school setting outside of the classroom. Although this anecdote, on the surface, is an example of how a teacher can learn positive character traits from a student, upon closer examination it demonstrates the influence that community members can have on each other. Thomas shares the insight he gained through this experience with his fellow community members, including students, in order to emphasize the importance of a supportive
community to the development of character in students.

This is not an isolated example of seeking out a student in order provide support. Thomas noted that his students like to say that he “likes the hunt,” in that if he feels “like there’s a character issue, or a quality issue, or an experience issue that this student is missing, I’ll find them outside of the class, [...] and address some of these issues directly.” Thomas expressed the opinion that in the community setting of the school, he takes the time to address these issues of character “both subtly and directly,” which allows him “to get an opportunity where students respond.”

Another way that supportive communities assist in the development of positive character traits in students can be seen in the ways that students interact both within their own communities and with communities with whom they come in contact. Evelyn commented on the effectiveness of students combining their own knowledge with the community context:

So many positive ways in that students, when they understand the relevance and the real world relevance of what they’re learning in their classrooms, and that, you know, the content that they’re learning has an impact on their community, they’re so much more apt to reach out to their community and to become leaders in their community.

Evelyn was able to describe a time when she could see that the positive effects of the supportive school community allowed the students of the school to clearly display leadership qualities:

When we took […] a hundred students from the entire student body, a sampling from the entire student body here at (school) to Freedom Day in Dundas Square in Toronto, you know, celebrating difference, and freedom, and liberty, and the breaking down of boundaries, and […] having that sort of unity because the students were together and they were from all pathways […] promoted equality, it promoted sharing, but it also promoted
identity because all the students were asked to wear some sort of (school) gear. And so that [...] singled them out as (school) students, and although they identified themselves, they set themselves apart. That created a community outside of our community that students could be proud of. And to be able to represent [...] and to celebrate [...] the idea of freedom, and equality, I think was a wonderful character building experience.

Evelyn felt that this story showed how the students in the school both celebrated and embodied the positive character traits and values that she, as a teacher and a community member, had been actively fostering. She thought it was amazing that they were able to bring the school “community to other communities,” and give the students the opportunity to apply and further develop their character by connecting them to real-world situations and by showing students the significance of positive values and character traits.

Conclusion

My interviews with both of my participants began with their personal definitions of character education, and although they did not perfectly align with one another, these definitions proved to be similar. The responses provided by my participants, which were filled with illustrative examples of pedagogical practices and inspirational anecdotes, produced five themes outlined in this chapter: definition of character education, teaching character through literature and current events, teaching character through modelling, encouraging student reflection on character, and the role community in character education. I conducted these interviews with the intention of discovering the ways in which secondary school teachers integrate character education into the English curriculum. My findings, however, do not exclusively reveal strategies for the integration of character education. They do point to the need for educators to employ a myriad of approaches when striving to cultivate positive character traits and values in
students. These areas will be examined in more detail and compared to the results of my literature review in the following chapter.
Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

I conducted this study in order to discover the ways that secondary school teachers integrate character education into the English curriculum. I wanted to use the findings not only to inform my own teaching practice, but also assist other teachers in doing so. I began this research seeking to address the question, “In what ways do secondary school teachers integrate character education in the English curriculum?” Although I was able to learn strategies that teachers use in order to integrate character education, I did not uncover a specific set of “one-size-fits-all” techniques that can be easily listed as a how to guide for educators.

My analysis of the data that I collected revealed five themes. My findings pointed to the relevance and importance of the definition of character education, teaching character through literature and current events, teaching character through modelling, encouraging student reflection on character, and the role community in character education. These themes are closely tied to the themes that emerged during my initial literature review.

Relation to Literature Review

There is a strong relationship between the findings in my data analysis and the themes that I discovered in my literature review. One theme that is prevalent throughout my literature review is the integration of character education into curriculum (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007; Gilness, 2003; Lewis et al., 2011; Loehrer, 1998). As I conducted my study in order to seek out the ways in which secondary school teachers integrate character education into the English curriculum, this theme from the literature is constantly interwoven throughout my findings.

My review of the literature indicated that there is no single definition of character
education (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007; Bohlin, Farmer, & Ryan, 2001), and my analysis lends credence to this theme. Although both of my participants provided similar interpretations of character education, it is interesting to note that they did not share a single, concrete definition of the term. Through analysis of the interview data, I was able to uncover the unifying threads to their understandings, but this lack of a distinct definition correlates with the issues with defining character education that I found in my literature review (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007; Bohlin et al., 2001).

The literature also established the need for safe and supportive communities in order to ensure the efficacy of any form of character education (Gilness, 2003; Gomez & Ang 2007; Lewis et al., 2011; Lickona & Davidson, 2005; Smith, 2006). This theme is strongly in line with my findings on the importance of community in building character effectively in students. Similarly, the literature pointed to the theme of difficulties with assessing character education in students (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007; Lewis et al., 2011), and in the discussions that I had with my participants they certainly spoke to this theme. However, potentially in part due to the direction that I led the discussion, this was not a theme that emerged in my own findings.

My study did not formally evaluate the efficacy of the character education integration techniques and strategies that were recommended by my participants and supported by my analysis. However, the question of the efficacy of character education techniques is certainly relevant to my findings.

**Interpretation and Evaluation of Findings**

During my interview with Thomas, he stated that he takes a “shotgun approach” to integrating character education into his teaching, in that he believes that a teacher should “use everything and try to make sure that you make some contact” with the students. The findings in
my data analysis suggest that this is an effective means to integrate character education into the English curriculum. When asked for specific strategies and techniques, Evelyn and Thomas’s responses would more often than not be an instance of more than one theme found in Chapter 4 of this paper.

There exist many complexities for teachers who desire to incorporate character education into their practice of teaching, and many considerations that must be taken into account when deciding to integrate character education into curriculum. The complex interpersonal relationships that exist between teachers and individual students, as well as between teachers and the classroom community as a whole, result in intricate environments that require an artful approach to any educational setting. However some of the best ways for teachers to promote positive character traits and values is by adeptly taking advantage of these perpetually changing dynamics.

Although the purpose of my research was to discover ways in which secondary school teachers integrate character education into the English curriculum, my findings did not solely provide integration techniques. For instance, the importance of a safe and supportive community, a theme that emerged in my literature review, was reinforced in my own findings. A safe and supportive community is, however, not technically a strategy for the integration of character education integration into English curriculum, but instead a necessity to ensure the effective implementation of more specific integration techniques.

**Implications**

Now that I have completed this study, I plan to incorporate the strategies that I have found throughout the course of my research into my own teaching practice. Although part of me wishes that this study had provided me with more concrete techniques, the research that I conducted
during my literature review lessened my hope for such easy answers. I now understand more clearly that the process of character education integration, like much of teaching, is fluid and requires frequent adjustments to its approach, depending on interpersonal, classroom, and community dynamics.

Throughout my teaching career I plan to have similar conversations with educators. As I truly do wish to improve my own ability to instil positive character traits and values into my own students, I feel that it is important to continually engage in these discussions with my peers. At this point I am not sure if I will formally research this topic again, but am certain that I will take part in informal action research on a regular basis.

My research does not necessarily fill a gap within the field of character education research. It does augment the available resources available to current and pre-service teachers, as well as the interested education community at large. It is an accessible piece of qualitative research that provides direction for integrating character education into secondary school English curriculum.

As I am myself a teacher candidate, my research is written from the point of view of a pre-service teacher. This detail means that my research is of value to future teacher candidates who wish to learn strategies for character education integration that will be able appreciate, understand, and apply to their own developing practice.

**Recommendations and Further Research**

Further study on the subject of character education integration into the secondary school English curriculum is needed. More qualitative research would provide additional strategies and techniques for character education integration in the secondary school English curriculum, which would be beneficial to pre-service and current teachers, as well as the educational community as a whole. In the next section, I have outlined the qualifications and limitations of my study, which
should be taken into consideration by any researcher who is contemplating continuing study in this field.

My research suggests that future research on the ways in which secondary school teachers integrate character education into the English curriculum is a rich area that can be explored and studied further. Further research in this topic could include a larger quantity of participants, who could provide varying experiences and viewpoints. Longer interviews that seek to have participants support their responses with examples of character education integration techniques would be beneficial and would provide a greater number of strategies. As well, investigating student perceptions of their own development of positive character traits and values could substantiate the efficacy of particular character integration techniques.

Qualifications and Limitations of the Study

I feel that through this study, although it was small, I was able to gain valuable information into how to integrate character education into my own practice, as well as provide insightful research that can be easily accessed and utilized by current and future educators. One of the limitations of this study was that I interviewed only two participants. Although I was able to gain knowledge from my two participants, I would have liked to have had conducted a third, and potentially fourth, interview. I contacted several potential participants for my study, but due to time constraints and the busy schedules of practicing teachers, ultimately I was only able to interview Thomas and Evelyn. The addition of one or two more sources of data might have allowed me to unearth more concrete strategies for the integration of character education in English curriculum.

Another limitation of my study was that both of my participants were teachers in the same school. Although both Thomas and Evelyn provide different experiences and points of view to
their teaching practice and thus to this research, the fact that they are currently teaching within the same community means that their experience with effectively integrating character education into the English curriculum is targeted at the same community of students. By interviewing participants who taught in different communities and to different demographics of students, my findings might have provided different techniques and strategies.

If I were to complete this research study again, I would conduct the interviews with my participants differently. Although my participants provided solid responses to my interview questions, I feel as though I did not dig as deeply into their responses as I, upon reflection, would have liked. If I had pressed my participants a little more to elaborate on their responses, I might have been able to uncover more specificity to their techniques in my findings.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, I believe that it would be beneficial for all teachers, whether they teach English in secondary schools or not, to integrate character education into their curriculum. As education at its core is meant for preparing students for life outside of the walls of the school, educating students as to how to flourish in their lives and use the knowledge and resources that are available to them in order to make sound, ethical decisions, character education should be a tenet of any student’s education. By integrating character education into curriculum, such as the English curriculum, teachers are not faced with “yet another thing” that they need to add to their already overflowing plate. Educators who choose to integrate character education into their curriculum do not ignore the importance of academics in their practice. They supply their students with the content knowledge and academic skills that lead to student success, while bolstering their ability to succeed by acquainting them with the positive character traits and values that students need in order to ensure students understanding of themselves as well as their
changing place within the world.
REFERENCES


Appendix A: Letter of Signed Consent for Interview

Date: ________________, 2013

Dear ____________,

I am a graduate student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at University of Toronto currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. As part of the requirements for this program and my own personal research interests, I am studying how secondary school teachers integrate character education into the English curriculum. I believe that your level of experience and knowledge on the subject will provide invaluable insights into my topic.

The primary research gathered will be used for a major research paper that is designed to give teacher candidates an opportunity to explore educational topics using qualitative research techniques. My research supervisor, who is overlooking the process, is Dr. Elizabeth Campbell.

The interview process will take approximately 30 – 45 minutes and be recorded using a digital audio recording device. I may potentially request a follow-up interview that would take 15 – 30 minutes of your time, but you are not required to engage in the follow-up interview if you do not so desire. The interview may take place at any time or location that is convenient to you.

All names and any other vulnerable information will remain confidential, and will only to be seen by my supervisor and myself. The contents of the interview(s) will be transcribed verbatim and used as part of my research paper with the possibility of publication. The contents may be discussed/used during informal class discussions, conferences, and/or journal articles, with all vulnerable information remaining confidential. The raw data from the interview will be disposed of within 5 years of the interview date. You are free to decline answering any specific questions and may withdraw from the interview at any time. You will be informed of the interview questions ahead of time and will not be subject to any risk or harm at any point during the process.

If you agree to the conditions above, please sign the attached consent form. Please do not hesitate to contact me and/or my research supervisor, Dr. Elizabeth Campbell, if you have any further questions or concerns. Thank you for your time and your consideration.

Sincerely,

Joshua Harney
Phone: 416-268-4090
Email: josh.harney@mail.utoronto.ca

Dr. Elizabeth Campbell
Phone: 416-978-0232
Email: ecampbell@oise.utoronto.ca
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Joshua Harney and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: _____________________________________________

Name (printed): ____________________________________________

Date: _____________________________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. Could you please state your name and your profession?
2. How long have you been a teacher?
3. Which courses, grades, and sections are you currently teaching?
4. How much experience do you have teaching the Ontario English curriculum?
5. How would you define character education?
6. Do you feel that character education is an important aspect of a student’s education? Why or why not?
7. What are the different strategies that you use to integrate character education into the English curriculum?
8. Why do you believe that these techniques are effective?
9. Are their techniques that you have used in the past that you no longer feel are effective?
10. Could you describe a lesson you have taught in English class that integrates character education?
11. Can you recount any experiences with particularly tough students or situations that stand out as exceptionally memorable?
12. Are there any resources that you have found effective to assist in integrating character education into your lessons?
13. Can you identify the effects of character education in students over the course of their high school careers?
14. Do you assess the effects of character education in your students, and if so, how?
15. Have you ever had met any challenges or barriers to integrating character education into your lessons, e.g. from parents or administrators?
16. Is there anything that you would like to add, or a response that you would like to either elaborate upon or clarify?