Exploring Character Education in High Schools: An Investigation of Teacher Characteristics, Pedagogical Strategies and Barriers of Implementation

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Abstract

This case study examines three high school teachers in the Greater Toronto Area who are committed to incorporating Character Education in their teaching practices. The aim of the study is to explore how Character Education can be incorporated into the learned curriculum, using Finding Common Ground: Character Education in Ontario Schools, K-12 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008b) as a conceptual lens. This study, through analysis of participant interviews, highlights similarities and consistencies that emerged in the Character Education initiatives relating to its development, characteristics of educators, program features, student benefits and barriers of implementation. Some key findings relate to Character Education program features and include complete integration with curriculum, exploration of multiple perspectives, student autonomy, reflection, and student action. The findings are discussed in light of the aims identified by the Ontario Character Education policy document namely: learning and academic achievement, community partnership and citizenship development and reflection and self-awareness.

Key Words: Character Education, Character Development, Citizenship Education, Finding Common Ground: Character Education in Ontario Schools
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Research Study

The implementation of character development initiatives in schools is a pursuit to create a learning environment where high standards of moral excellence are enforced and where virtues are taught, either implicitly or explicitly, through the learned curriculum. This pursuit is often loosely termed as ‘Character Education’. Across the extensive literature in the field, there are often discrepancies and ambiguity surrounding what Character Education entails; this will be explored in great depth in Chapter Two. Often, it serves as an umbrella term that incorporates other large educational fields of research such as empathy, global education, critical thinking and holistic education. This ambiguity, however, is not limited to the academic realm, as teachers too, often view these fields as non-distinct.

Despite the large degree of subjectivity across fields of research and teacher opinions, one aspect that is often agreed upon is that the aim of Character Education is to encourage and provide the skills to allow students to become better, more successful and well-rounded human beings. Since formalized education is a value-infused system, equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills on how to be intentional with the parameters associated with the learned curriculum in their classrooms, will allow them to become more effective teachers.

This is a case study of three high school teachers in the Greater Toronto Area who are committed to use Character Education in their classrooms. The study will be conducted using Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario, K-12 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008b) as a conceptual lens – to explore how
Character Education can be incorporated into the learned curriculum. The Ministry of Education published this document in June 2008, as a call to action to Educators in Ontario. This policy document highlights the government’s goals, principles, and motivation for its Character Development Initiative; this document also identifies responsibilities of the school boards, principals, teachers, and students. The document states:

This is the time for us to reaffirm our commitment to the potential of our publicly funded school system to deliver on its promise to educate all students successfully. But it must be recognized that a quality education includes the education of the heart as well as the mind. It includes a focus on the whole person. It means preparing students to be citizens who have empathy and respect for others within our increasingly diverse communities. It also means providing opportunities for students to understand deeply the importance of civic engagement and what it means to be productive citizens in an interdependent world (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 2).

This document also highlights the importance of an equitable and inclusive school, where not only all students feel respected and a sense of belonging, but also where they are expected to excel academically and where citizenship education is supported. In addition, it hopes to be a basis for respect for diversity, parents and community partnerships in Ontario schools.

The image below is extracted from the document and demonstrates the interconnectedness of Character Education with Learning and Academic Achievement, Respect for Diversity, Parent and Community Partnerships and
Citizenship Development. It claims that character development does not exist in isolation and is in fact the product of, linked to, and enhances all these other elements.

Learning and Academic Achievement involves the development of the entire individual, which includes setting high expectations for learning and behavior while taking initiative for their own learning. Community Partnership and Citizenship Development is the development of the student as an engaged citizen who respects oneself, others, property, the environment, diversity and human rights while allowing students to learn about, analyze, question, and contribute to, the building of their communities and nations of the world. Reflection and Self-
**Awareness** involves striving for an ever-growing depth of self-awareness, reflection and understanding while becoming critical and analytical thinkers. Finally, **Respect for Diversity** involves the students learning about respect, empathy and sense of fairness necessary to ensure the fundamental human rights of all people. It reinforces the need for students to demonstrate their commitment to these issues and to be strong advocates in defending the rights of others.

The purpose of using this as a conceptual lens for this study is many-fold. First, it is created by the Ministry of Education and is thus aligned with and supported by the Ontario Curriculum and ministry documents. Some examples of these documents include; Ontario First Nation, Metis and Inuit Education Policy Framework (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007), A Policy for Ontario’s French-Language Schools and Francophone Community (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004), Equity Strategy and Action Plan (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009), Safe Schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008) and Student Success Initiatives (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011). In addition, the ideas presented here are a product of collaboration and consensus from a diverse group of individuals from the community, across many different boards. For this reason, it reflects a spectrum of values and beliefs. Since there is a great degree of subjectivity in Character Education, for this study, it is valuable to use a democratically developed understanding of what it. Furthermore, the frequency of tension and overlap of Character Education, in this policy document, with the other domains of research discussed, is consistent with current literature in this field; this becomes useful in placing this study within context. For these reasons, Finding Common Ground:
Character Development in Ontario, K-12 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008b) will be used as a conceptual lens to explore how Character Education can be incorporated into the learned curriculum.

**Purpose and Significance of the Study**

This study seeks to examine the features of the Character Education initiatives of three experienced teachers in the Greater Toronto Area. The qualitative interviews were conducted to help identify the features that allow their character development initiatives to be effective. Making these features accessible may increase the likelihood that other educators will implement them in their own teaching practices. Immersing students in character development practices will encourage them to take responsibility not only within their own lives, but also their communities. This is fundamental not only for their personal success, but for the betterment of society.

The majority of literature available is international and not specific to high schools. There is, however, extensive literature in the Canadian, high school context in the overlapping field of Citizenship Education. This may be because Citizenship Education is a more defined area of research than that of Character Education. There is, however, extensive research done in Character Education in the United States, the United Kingdom and parts of Asia. It is still valuable to look at these existing strategies and approaches of these international schools to provide context and possibly a foundation for similar programs within the Canadian context. Due to the scarcity of literature involving Character Education for this age group, the need to study this pursuit in a high school context becomes valuable.
Research Topic/Questions

The research question is: how do three high school teachers in the Greater Toronto Area integrate Character Education in their classrooms? In this context, classroom integration refers to content selection, dispositional approaches and specific instructional strategies. Sub-questions target characteristics of the educators, features of these Character Education programs and barriers to implementation (See Appendix A for the complete list of interview questions).

Background of the Researcher

I believe that all students should have access to the best education, and that no education is truly complete without Character Education (Grant, 2009). Equally, if not more valuable than the content students learn at schools, is the development of a strong, moral character and well-rounded individuals. I believe that whilst this responsibility falls on all community members, this is a key responsibility for teachers. In a school environment, I believe it is crucial that all students are given this opportunity to be part of social causes that are larger than them. Personally, this involvement has brought me great satisfaction, better perspective, and a greater understanding of the world around me. Since all of these elements are embodied by Character Education, I am interested in learning about ways, as guided by Finding Common Ground: Character Education in Ontario Schools, K-12, Character Education can be incorporated into the learned curriculum.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

What is Character Education?

The debate on the existence of universal values dates back to the pre-Platonic period. History often affirms that morals and values are subjective and are based on situation, belief and circumstance. For this reason, setting the parameters when discussing Character Education becomes necessary. For the purpose of this study, the parameters set by the document, Finding Common Ground: Character Education in Ontario Schools, K-12 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008b) will be adopted. This includes: Learning and Academic Achievement, Community Partnership and Citizenship Development, Reflection and Self-Awareness and Respect for Diversity. For a full explanation of what this document is and why it was chosen, please refer to Chapter One. This document provides the conceptual framework through which this study will be explored and conducted.

Consistent with other literature in this field, this document suggests that the boundaries of Character Education are not precise. Character Education is described as the teaching of values; however, it often overlaps with other efforts such as Critical Democratic Education and Global Education (Winston, 2010). The following section demonstrates how the parameters set by the policy document are consistent with the current literature in this field. The bolded headings are the different aspects of Character Education, as described by the policy document.

- **Learning and academic achievement**: This is the development of the entire individual, which includes setting high expectations for learning and behavior while taking initiative for their own learning. A study
(Otten, 2000) defines Character Education as: numerous aspects of the teaching and learning process relating to individual student development. Davidson et al. (2008) suggests that this pursuit reflects both performance and moral character that strives for students to achieve their full potential. Some experts in the field (Benninga et al., 2003; Richardson et al., 2009) have found a positive correlation between Character Education, student initiative and academic achievement—enforcing the tie between Character Education and general student learning.

- **Community partnership and citizenship development:** This is the development of the student as an engaged citizen who respects oneself, others, property, the environment, diversity and human rights while allowing students to learn about, analyze, question, and contribute to, the building of their communities and nations of the world. Some experts consider service learning to fall within the aims of Character Education, which involves using direct student experiences to promote values (Gruener, 2006; Stott et al., 2009). Additionally, a study (Haynes et al., 1997) explores the relatedness of Character Education and Democratic Citizenship Education. It asserts that similarities surround dedication to teaching core values, such as freedom, life, equality and encouragement of the common good. Additional similarities involve behaviours aligning with democratic processes—questioning, critiquing, debating, and becoming a leader in the community (Arthur et al., 2000). They argue that
the participation of citizens who are involved in efforts that benefit the community and society are crucial for the progress of society and fall within the aims of Character Education (Arthur et al., 2000).

- **Reflection and self-awareness:** This involves students striving for an ever-growing depth of self-awareness, reflection and understanding while becoming critical and analytical thinkers. This aligns with other studies (Berkowitz, 2004; Otten, 2002) that define Character Education as dispositions relating to ethical and moral competency, and emotional learning. Here, character is viewed as an internal, psychological enterprise that is guided by one’s moral compass and enables one to act as a moral agent. It involves cognitive development related to moral reasoning capacities (Power, 1989).

- **Respect for Diversity:** This involves the students learning about respect, empathy and sense of fairness necessary to ensure the fundamental human rights of all people. It reinforces the need for students to demonstrate their commitment to these issues and to be strong advocates in defending the rights of others. This is consistent with other studies (Howard et al., 2004) that believe Character Education encompasses conflict resolution initiatives that teach peer mediation to help settle conflicts that arise due to differences in students. It also encompasses ethics programs that focus on teaching a set of ethics or morals relating to respect, care and positive relationships among diverse school and community members (Howard et al., 2004; Noddings, 2002).
Despite the common themes that have emerged from current literature in the field, there are some variable ideas and definitions surrounding Character Education. For example, some literature also incorporates health education and religious education within the aims of Character Development. Health education involves drug, pregnancy and violence prevention. Although some of these outcomes are consistent with Character Education (U.S. Newswire, 1999; Miller, 2008; Lopes, 2013), the majority of literature and the Policy document consider it a distinct pursuit. Additionally, some literature uses Religious Education as a foundation of Character Education (Wilhelm, 2008; Smith, 2013). This entails teaching students values and morals in the context of a faith tradition that embeds its rationales and justifications from a divine source. The Ontario Ministry of Education has clearly identified its pursuit for Character Education has no religious basis and should not be mistaken as Religious Education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 7). For these reasons, in this study, Health Education and Religious Education will not be considered domains of Character Education.

**Why is Character Education important?**

According to Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario, K-12 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p.6), the responsibility falls on the community, as a whole, to invest in the character building of the future generation. To ensure students grow up to be kind, and strong individuals as well as active citizens of the globe, it is fundamental that they develop a conscience and a moral code that is humane, compassionate and reflective. It is crucial that every new generation develops a sense of responsibility as citizens of their communities and of humanity.
Character education is therefore, not only vital for the betterment of society, but also to ensure a sustainable future for this planet. The education system, by virtue, is rooted in a system of values. These values are absorbed and reflected in the people that are a part of the system and the work that is produced. All teachers, either intentionally or unintentionally, are involved in the education of character of their students. Therefore, character education requires attention and priority in school communities.

There are many lines of reasoning to justify the importance of Character Education in schools. In this section, some of the benefits are explored and highlighted through select examples. The claimed benefits are presented in terms of improvement in academic achievement, self-esteem, pro-social behavior, school climate, student engagement, violence prevention and development of healthy students. These specific examples have been chosen as they shine light onto distinct but important reasons for the pursuit of Character Education in high schools.

The Character Education Partnership on Character Education programs conducted a detailed study across the United States (Lickona, 2005). After the initial stage of identifying research-based programs across the country, a scoring method was created for research designs and reports so that only scientifically acceptable programs were considered. One aim of the study was to identify any correlation between Character Education programs to academic achievement. Character Education programs that were ranked higher for a variety of assessment criteria, based on a rubric for coding key aspects, also had higher state achievement scores.
Specifically, these programs all shared these following aspects of Character Education: parent and teacher modeling of character and promotion of character education, quality opportunities for students to engage in service activities and promoting a caring community and positive social relationships (Lickona, 2005; Berkowitz, 2005).

In another extensive meta-study (Roseth, 2008), 148 independent studies were reviewed totaling 17,000 students in 11 countries. The focus of this study were schools where classroom competition was actively minimized and collaboration, support, and learning together was encouraged. Although this study did not associate explicitly with Character Education, it is evident that their aims and criteria can easily be aligned with it. The study found that, in adolescents, the focus on peer relationships as opposed to individualistic goals led to greater pro-social behavior, self-esteem as well as higher academic success i.e., classroom competence, classroom grades and standardized test scores (Roseth, 2008).

Other studies suggest that the implementation of Character Education programs in high schools can lead to the improvement of school climate (Cohen, 2009; White, 2011). According to the National Center for Learning and Citizenship, Education Commission of the States, and the National School Climate Center at the Center for Social and Emotional Education, school climate is defined as: School climate refers to spheres of school life (e.g. safety, relationships, teaching and learning, the environment) as well as to larger organizational patterns (e.g., from fragmented to
cohesive or “shared” vision, healthy or unhealthy, conscious or unrecognized) (White, 2011).

A positive school climate encourages the growth of students in a way that is aligned with the development of responsible citizens in a democratic society. By virtue, this climate has values that allow people to feel safe in all ways such as emotionally and physically (White, 2011). It is an environment where students feel respected and engaged. Furthermore, a positive school climate is linked to violence prevention and healthy student development (Solomon, 2002; Schwartz, 2006; White, 2011). Therefore, the implementation of a Character Education program is important as it can lead to an overall improved school climate, which positively affects student safety and engagement, and the development of healthier and responsible students; all of these elements are crucial for the sustenance and improvement of a strong, democratic society.

**Character Education school Initiatives in Ontario**

In the 1970’s the Ontario Ministry of Education provided teachers with discussion guides including Moral Education in the Schools and The Reflective Approach in Values Education by Clive Beck (Cochrane et al., 1978). In the 1980s, it published Personal and Societal Values: A Resource Guide for the Primary and Junior Divisions (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1983) and Curriculum Ideas for Teachers: Values, Influences and Peers (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1984). These documents steered away from moral relativism and focused on specific goals and values. In the late 1900s formal character education policies emerged in many
schools boards around the province. They claimed that the implementation would lead to improve students’ academic achievement, interpersonal relationships, and civic behaviours. In 2006, the Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario’s Schools, K–12 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006) was published. This policy highlighted values and reasoning for its initiative, as well as the responsibilities of all staff members. Representatives from different school boards in Ontario were invited for the Character Development Symposium where this policy was launched. In 2008 this document was revised Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario’s Schools, K–12 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008b) and Character Development in Action, K–12: Successful Practices in Ontario Schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008a) was also released.

This policy mandates character education in all public schools. School leaders must play an active role in the implementation of this effort to ensure engagement and development efforts by all members within their school community. Principals are responsible for modelling selected character traits, ensuring school improvement plans are consistent with this initiative, making professional development accessible, offering opportunities for student engagement that are not limited to the confines of the school community, the integration of character development in all subject areas, extracurricular activities, and collecting data on the effectiveness of these initiatives (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008b).

**Types of Approaches to Character Education In Ontario**

In this section, the three approaches to Character Education, that are consistent with the Ontario Policy Document, are explored. The purpose of this is to
organize and assess the types of Character Education practices present within the field. All approaches are similar in that their attempt is to affect student character; the differences arise regarding the nature of morality, its development, the role of emotion and the importance of context (Nucci & Narvaez, 2008). According to Howard et al. (2004), the three different approaches are: the traditional approach, developmental approach and the caring approach.

The traditional approach suggests that universal values exist and must be taught explicitly to students. This can be done in a variety of methods such as direct instruction, modelling and practice of virtuous behaviour as well as bringing to light heroes of the past and of literature (Nash, 1997; Howard et al., 2004). For example, a teacher may facilitate the development of explicit virtues in their students through the discussion of literature such as The Book of Virtues (Bennett, 1993) and Character Counts! (Josephson Institute, 2001). This approach rejects the idea of moral relativity. This approach is consistent with the aims of the policy document because, at times, it strives to instil explicit values in students and highlights the defined vision it has for relating to characteristics of learning cultures and the school environment including respect, safety, care and inclusivity (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008b, p.3). A critique of this approach is that there is an assumption of the existence of universal values and those who are not compliant, are ignorant or morally inadequate (Winston, 2008).

The development approach (Howard et al., 2004) is less rigid and advocates critical thinking and experience; theorists such as Dewey, Kohlberg and Piaget support this approach. Virtues are viewed as subjective entities that vary across
time and contexts (Rice, 1996; Murray, 2002). According to this approach, character development in students is accomplished through the involvement of democratic decision-making, consideration and discussion of moral dilemmas and cooperative learning (Murray, 2002). This is consistent with policy document as it also emphasizes student engagement, depth of self-awareness and reflection and the development of analytical and critical thinking skills (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008b, p. 5). Some critiques of this approach include the undermining of the role of adults and authority in the community, the large degree of subjectivity and the danger of the oppression of minority beliefs and values (Howard et al., 2004).

The caring approach (Howard et al., 2004; Noddings, 2005) argues that the development of character is achieved through the nurturing of caring relationships; thus, the school structure should be conducive to the development and maintenance of such relationships (Noddings, 2008). The provider of care must consider the needs of the receiver of care—this is the basis for the development of character. In schools, teachers can facilitate character and moral development using this approach by model caring, engage students in dialogue, encourage students to be caring and to validate the expression of favourable behaviour (Noddings, 2008, 2005). This is also consistent with the policy document as a key aim is to develop learning cultures and school communities that are caring, respectful, safe and inclusive; all of these characteristics are strongly related and dependent on the others.

Despite the stark differences in the traditional, development and caring approach, aspects of each are consistent and aligned with the parameters set by the
Ontario's Character Development Initiative policy. The value of such a broad framework is to allow for the incorporation of a wide range of Character Education practices.

**Policy Mandates and Barriers to implementation**

Education is a value-infused system; children spend a large amount of time at school and therefore the school environment plays a large role in their development—both academic and otherwise. The school environment strongly influences student achievement, future successes and character (Berkowitz, 2004; Schwartz, 2006; White, 2011). The Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario K-12 (Ministry of Education, 2008) mandates Character Development initiatives in all Ontario classrooms. According to this document, it should be integrated into policies, curriculum, activities, practices and interactions. However, there is an on-going debate among Teachers and Administrators on whether the role of educators extends to that of Character Education (Nash, 1997; Howard, 2004; Shwartz, 2006; Brannon, 2008). Due to this difference in opinion, teachers have faced opposition in the attempt to include character education in their classrooms, as a school, or as an entire board initiative (Kohn, 1997; Davis, 2003). Often, there is pushback from parents as they are often uncomfortable with the idea of strangers contributing to the development of their child’s character (Howard, 2004; Brannon, 2008). There is a concern that their child will be taught values that are not consistent with their own beliefs (Schwartz, 2006). Since there is large room of subjectivity not only in the understanding of ‘good character’, but also in the pursuit to teach it, there is great disagreement to its value in a school environment.
Additionally, some school and board administrators do not like the idea of allocating valuable class time to teach these ‘intangible’ and ‘subjective’ values (Schwartz, 2006; Brannon, 2008).

As stated, the parameters set by the document, Finding Common Ground: Character Education in Ontario Schools, K-12 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008b) is adopted for this study; this includes: Learning and Academic Achievement, Community Partnership and Citizenship Development, Reflection and Self-Awareness and Respect for Diversity. Also in this section, the three approaches to Character Education, that are consistent with the Ontario Policy Document, were explored for the purpose of organization and assessment of the types of Character Education practices present within the field. In the proceeding chapter, the procedure, participant information, data collection and analysis strategies, ethical review procedures, risks and benefits and limitations of this qualitative study will be discussed.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The aim of this qualitative research case study is to investigate how three high schools teachers in the Greater Toronto Area use Character Education in their classrooms. Sub-questions target characteristics of educators, specific features of these character education initiatives and barriers to implementation. The literature review focused on Ontario’s initiatives thus far, setting the parameters of Character Education for this study.

Procedure

The primary means of collecting data for this study was through three semi-structured interviews. These interviews were with teachers who were teaching in high schools in the Greater Toronto Area, and who claim to actively integrate Character Education in their classroom practices. The interviews were rigid in that all participants were asked the same questions, but were also semi-structured so that there was room for follow-up questions if further elaboration was required. One of these three interviews was conducted online, through Skype and the other was in-person at a high school in the Peel District School Board. The interview was recorded using the Audacity software. The interview consisted of 15 questions and the interviews ranged from 40-50 minutes in length. A complete list of interview questions is provided in Appendix A.

The primary purpose of these interviews was to gather qualitative information on the participants Character Education program elements; a
secondary aim was to bring to light the pushback teachers may face, from other staff and administration, during this pursuit.

**Participants**

The participants for this study consisted of three high school teachers, who teach in the Greater Toronto Area. In addition, they all claimed to actively integrate Character Education, aligned with the Finding Common Ground Policy document, into their classroom practices.

One participant was recruited through a professor at the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education. The participant was the professor’s former colleague and friend who worked in the Toronto District School Board. The professor recommended I contact her after I expressed my struggle with finding participants. This participant, Participant A, worked at an alternative school in the Toronto District School Board. She has been teaching full-time for two years. In her first year teaching she taught Grade 11 students. In her second, and current, year she is teaching Grade 12 Career Studies, in addition to her role as a full-time Guidance Councilor.

The second and third participants were recruited through my previous placement school. During a discussion about this research study with the teachers in the Science department at a school in the Peel District School Board, a teacher suggested I speak to the instructors and designers of the General Learning Strategies (GLS) course at that school; a course that is mandatory for all Grade nine students at the school. After discussing course aims, my research study and goals with the designers and instructors, it became evident that they were a great fit for
the study. They readily agreed to participate and a joint interview was conducted. Participant B had been teaching English for 13 years, moved to Special Education, and is now the Head of Special Education at the school. For the past three years she has been co-designing and teaching the GLS course at the school that focuses on learning skills and Character Education. Participant C has been a Science Teacher for 30 years, focusing on Grade 11 and Grade 12 Biology. In the past few years, he has been also been co-designing and teaching the GLS course.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection process consisted of a recording all three interviews; listening to the recording, and transcription followed this. During this process, I became more aware of the tone I had during the interviews, the way I asked questions, the questions I asked and how I responded to my participants’ answers—all factors that may have potentially affected their responses. I slowed down the interview by half the speed when transcribing for accuracy and efficiency, using VLC Media Player. As I was transcribing, my coding process had already begun. While I was typing, I already began to identify ideas that stood out, organizational patterns of ideas and speech of the interviewee and repetitive ideas. I paused the recording to jot down these initial ideas to ensure I did not forget them later on.

My coding process for the transcription of the interviews was a lengthy process. It took great reflection and trial-and-error to decide how I was going to do it in the most effective and meaningful way. I read through the transcripts again and began jotting down ideas in the margin next to the text. Next, I went through the transcript with a highlighter to bring attention to key words and ideas. I particularly
looked for umbrella terms and large concepts at this stage. I was looking for terms that were encompassing, for example ‘Multiple perspectives’. I then went through the document again with a fine-tooth comb. This time with different coloured highlighter, I looked for specific, key ideas that related to the key aims of Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008b); these key ideas became the codes for the study. I grouped these together into larger categories e.g. Educator Characteristics and Character Education Initiative Features, to generate the themes. I studied and rearranged the groupings a few times to ensure consistent and meaningful categorization.

**Ethical Review Procedures**

The voluntary interview participants were provided with and required to sign a letter of informed consent before the interview was conducted. This was sent to them 2-4 days prior to the interview so that they had ample opportunity to review it and become clear with what this role entails. Prior to the start of the interview, key points were emphasized before the signing of the letter such as; the permission to withdraw at anytime, refraining from answering any questions and the power to omit, or modify their responses at a later time if they wish to. They were also assured that their personal information is confidential and will be protected both during the study and beyond. A signed and photocopied letter was sent back to each participant.
**Risks and Benefits**

There was minimal risk associated with this study. This Master of Teaching Research Project is a partial fulfillment of my Master of Teacher Degree at the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, University of Toronto. The aim of this study is to help identify integral elements that allow character development initiatives to be effective. Making these elements accessible may increase the likelihood that other Educators will implement them in their own teaching practices. Immersing students in character development practices will encourage them to take responsibility not only within their own lives, but also their communities. This is fundamental not only for their personal success, but for the betterment of society.

**Limitations**

Due to the nature of qualitative research, inevitably, there are personal biases that I, as the researcher, brought to this research. This is based on my past experiences and personal ethics and morals. My belief is that all students should have access to the best education, and that no education is truly complete without Character Education. Equally, if not more valuable than the content students learn at schools, is the development of a strong, moral character and well-rounded individuals. I believe that whilst this responsibility falls on all community members, this is a key responsibility for teachers. In a school environment, I believe it is crucial that all students are given this opportunity to be part of social causes that are larger than them. Personally, this involvement has brought me great satisfaction, better perspective, greater understanding of the world around me. These beliefs and
values have inevitably shaped my approach and interpretation of this study. As the Researcher, I may misinterpret what the participant is saying and misrepresent it.

In addition, there may be a bias introduced from the participants based on their personal experiences, their word and language choices, their mood and their ability to remember to recall information.

Furthermore, in order for comprehensive analysis of Character Education initiatives, many qualitative data collections methods should be used such as interviews, observations, documents and audiovisual material. Due to the nature and scope of this study, interviews were the only source of data collection; since is a very one-dimensional source of information; the findings will also reflect these limitations.

Another limitation of this study is that the limited sample size of participants. Since the findings and analysis is based on the experiences of only three individuals, the findings may not be applicable to other Educators, or relevant to other classrooms; due to the very nature of qualitative research, the findings are not generalizable.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the common themes that emerged from analysis of the transcripts. There are five significant themes:

1. Development of the Initiatives
2. The Characteristics of Educators
3. Character Education Initiative Features
4. Student Benefits
5. Barriers of Implementation.

These themes are further divided into subtopics, and it should be noted that there are some overlaps between them. This information is organized below using headers and subheadings.

1. Development of the Initiatives

There were key findings, and some similarities in the development of the Character Education initiatives at the participants’ schools relating to the existing institutionalized principles, and emphasis of a research-based approach.

Institutionalized principles

The mission statements and visions of the schools that all three participants taught at strongly aligned with Character Education initiatives. These values were embedded at the institutional level. At Participant B’s school, the founding Principal had a vision to design a mandatory GLS course on Character Education for all Grade 9 students entering the school. She was successful at doing so, and the course has
continued to be taught. According to Participant B, this former principal spearheaded the development of an institution where Character Education principles were at the heart of school culture.

**Research**

Participants demonstrated that the developments of their Character Education initiatives were largely directed by reflective practices and founded on research. There was a desire expressed by both participants to inform their thinking and practice with some form of data collection and study as they valued the importance of this for the implementation of effective Character Education. This does not, however, discount the influence of personal beliefs and values in this pursuit; although, it does ensure that their attempts are not entirely based on personal whim and ideologies. Participant B states:

> [During the planning process of the GLS course], we went back to our feeder schools and asked the principals, the teachers and students what they needed. We asked, ‘What do you need to be successful in high school?’ And it is a lot of the character education attributes. We looked at a lot of research on it.

Participant B guided the design of the GLS course based on what was needed for student success, both academically and otherwise. There was a thorough process of qualitative data collection from feeder schools, as well as consulting published research studies to inform her thinking. This aligns with the finding discussed in Chapter One, that Character Education and academic achievement are tightly intertwined. In fact, the implementation of Character Education initiatives leads to
improved classroom grades and test scores (Lickona, 2005; Berkowitz, 2005; Roseth, 2008). Evidently, there were similarities in the development of the Character Education initiatives of both participants relating to the institutionalized principles already existing at their schools, and emphasis of a research-based approach.

2. The Characteristics of Educators

All participants claimed to be actively engaging in and implementing Character Education initiatives within their classroom and school communities. Analysis of the transcripts revealed some key educator characteristics and some similarities between the participants; these include: teaching outside the box, acknowledgement of teacher influence, valuing teaching experience, leadership with care, humility and perseverance. These attributes and similarities among participants will be explored in this section.

Teaching Outside the Defined Box

Participant B expresses her opinion on the importance of steering away from the rigidity and confines of simply teaching curricular content in their classrooms. They value the importance of teaching beyond the defined box of curricular knowledge for the benefit of their students. Participant B states: “Character Education is the softer side of education that often we don’t explicitly teach in a curriculum”. Participant B realizes that Character Education is distinct from teaching curriculum content and that breaking through norms and boundaries for this pursuit is essential for student success. She realizes that it is a less defined area
Acknowledgment of Teacher Influence

As demonstrated, these Character Education programs are founded and molded by research and reflective practices. Despite this, there is a large degree of teacher influence in all practices and procedures surrounding these initiatives. A teacher’s personal morals, values and ethics inevitably influence the emphasis and direction of it. All participants demonstrate a strong awareness of the effect of their personal opinions and biases in the integration of Character Education initiatives. This is demonstrated in many parts of the interviews, but the following quotes show this explicitly. Participant A says:

...But I think it’s your character that decides how you feel about success and what you do with success and how you’re going to impact people in your future. So, I think that every piece of what you’re teaching students should be built from educating their character and helping them grow that way.

Participant A believes that Character Education is important because it shapes how one reacts to life’s success and failures. It affects how one choses to live their life and what one devotes their time and energy to. She believes that since Character Education is crucial to all aspects of a student’s life, there should be extensive efforts made towards this pursuit. In this quote, Participant A expresses a personal belief surrounding Character Education and then continues to state how she uses it to influence her practice. This quote demonstrates the large degree of teacher influence and subjectivity surrounding Character Education initiatives. Furthermore, she states:
So, the priority is leadership because all of my students are going to be in some type of leadership in their jobs, even if they’re not the boss. So I think that content is definitely taught explicitly in university, but how to be a leader is not taught, and I think that a lot of people can make mistakes if they don’t get to explore that early. And so I believe and that I hope that I am able to share this with students: that leadership is about integrity and listening to the people that you’re leading, and respecting them.

This further enforces that personal experiences and values influence the course of Character Education initiatives. In Participant A’s case, she believes that leadership is of utmost importance, infused with integrity and respect for those people that are being led. She believes it is her responsibility to pass these values on to her students, as these skills are not taught in higher education settings. Furthermore, she believes that if they are not taught these values, students can make mistakes. This is perhaps, her motivation for focusing on encouraging these values and skills with her students.

Similarly, Participant C also realizes that he greatly affects the direction of the Character Education course at their school. In this case, however, the realization is more explicit than the previous case. He says:

I think the [GLS] course is based upon things I wish I had in high school, and wish my children had: how to be a better writer, how to be a better person, how to interact, social skills, how to understand bullying, interactions in the school, environmental awareness of course the big picture of what’s going on in the
world...many don’t. Making them [students] aware of global issues as well as that this is a good place to live. It has its faults, but there are other places too. These are complex issues, there are no simple fixes.

Participant C mentions that his decision of what to include in this GLS course is based on his personal values and beliefs. These include skills and knowledge that he considers important for the ‘real world’. The last sentence of the quote brings to light his personal belief on the importance of making students global mindset whilst appreciating the complexities of world issues. He also touches on acknowledging the downfalls and strengths of where one lives. In this quote, Participant C explicitly states reasoning and rationale behind the design of this course.

Participant B states, “So if you are a Science teacher, or an Art or English teacher [teaching the GLS course], your class is going to go in a different direction because you’re bringing your strengths with that connection to your students”. Participant B, the Special Education Department Head and co-designer of the course, recognizes that the teachers she assigns to teach the GLS course will ultimately determine the direction and learning outcome of the course. She states that inevitably, a teachers experiences and expertise influences what is focused on and emphasized with these Character Education initiatives.

Valuing Teaching Experience

Participant C believes that teaching experience and success at character development in the classroom are not prerequisites but can be strongly linked. With extensive teaching experience, comes flexibility and adaptability—both traits that are essential for the implementation of effective Character Education initiatives in
the GLS course. He states:

I've been at this 30 years in the classroom. I think I have enough wisdom and experience to teach these kids life skills. [In] my early teaching career, I don’t know if I could teach GLS [and consequently, Character Education] because at that point, I needed a lesson plan to teach. With my experience, I can walk into any classroom and hopefully, positively get kids to have a meaningful day or period to some degree. I’m at the stage in my career where I can do that.”

He believes the flexibility and adaptability are essential traits for a teacher to have for character development in the GLS course. Both of these traits are crucial for students to have a positive and meaningful experience in this class.

**Leadership with Care**

All three participants expressed care towards their students. Despite them being in a position of authority and leadership, it became evident that these teachers wished well and success for their students. Participant A had a desire to help students beyond the classroom and knew this very early in her career. For this reason she decided to also take a role as a Guidance Counselor at her school. She says, “I really want universities to see who they can be as people as much as I want them to see what they can do academically”. This suggests that she is personally invested in the success of her students’ lives as she cares about what type of people they become after they leave her class and school. Additionally, Participant B states, “I want to make an effort and I want touch on empathy and be empathetic. And I want kids take action on issues”. Here the dichotomy between care and leadership becomes evident. She strives to find a balance between teaching ‘hard’ skills to get
students motivated to take action on important issues, and ‘soft’ skills such as love, empathy and care. In both cases, the element of care becomes evident in their leadership role of character development with their students.

**Being Humble**

All participants, either directly or indirectly, express the importance of being humble and instilling these traits in their students in the pursuit for character development; this is explored in the following quotes. Participant A says, “...It’s your character that decides how you feel about success and what you do with success”. She expresses that success and failures are an inevitable part of life. Development in character, specifically showing humility and being humble, allows one to respond to these changes, in life, in a positive way. She believes that although all students have the potential for success, how one responds to it is a far better indicator of ones character. Similarly, Participant C says, “I learn just as much from them as they do from me...that is the whole trick of this GLS course, I’m a student in the class and they’re teachers”. This suggests that, despite his position of authority, he is willing to reverse this power dynamic in his classroom for the sake of learning and is therefore exhibiting traits of humility in his teaching practice. He realizes that learning potential increases when students are given opportunities for leadership and when he adopts the outlook of a learner. All participants of this study, either directly or indirectly, express the importance of being humble in their pursuit of character development within their classrooms.
Perseverance

All participants showed a certain level of uncertainty with the outcome of their efforts with Character Education initiatives; despite this, they showed perseverance and continued in this pursuit. Participant A said, “…But I don’t know, maybe once they graduate they’ll stop [using what I’ve taught them]. But I hope that’s not the case!” She also says, “But again, I don’t know if it’s going to stick or it’s just because they’re thinking about it at the time [in class]. But I hope it sticks!” Both of these quotes show her uncertainty about the long-term benefits of her Character Education initiatives, but she continues putting in the time and effort for this pursuit. These quotes demonstrate that she does not need immediate results to motivate her to continue or to see the importance of it. In contrast, Participant B says, “But I think it is a foundation and when it’s done well, we can feel it in the hall. You know that every grade 9 student has had this experience”. She believes that while the effect is evident immediately, the benefit itself cannot be quantified. Although every student has been through and experienced the GLS course, the benefit cannot necessarily be observed at the level of the individual; the change is felt collectively as an entire school. It comes down to a feeling—a sense of change in the environment.

These participants showed perseverance in their pursuit of Character Education, despite the uncertainty associated with it, and the ability to quantify long-term benefits.

Evidently many similarities in attributes and values emerged between the participants of this study such as: teaching outside the box, acknowledgement of
teacher influence, valuing teaching experience, leadership with care, humility and perseverance. Although it is not possible to generalize from three teachers, identifying patterns of teacher traits involved in Character Education initiatives may increase the likelihood that other Educators will adopt them in their own teaching practices.

3. Character Education Initiative Features

There were many similarities and consistencies that emerged from the participants’ interviews regarding elements of their Character Education programs. The findings here most strongly align with the research question of this study: how three high schools teachers in the Greater Toronto Area use Character Education initiatives in their classrooms? This section also answers the sub-question regarding the features of these character initiatives. This section on program elements is broken into three sections: A) Characteristics of the program, B) Development in Student Thinking, and C) Experiential Learning and Student Action. These sub-sections are further broken down into specific elements.

A) Characteristics of the Program

This section is a description of the similar and consistent characteristics of the Character Education program and initiatives that emerged during the interviews. The different elements are described here.

Complete Integration

All participants believed that Character Education should be completely infused
within their educational practice in their classroom. They believe that it should not be considered a distinct pursuit from all the other ‘traditional’ practices of teachers, but intertwined. Participant A says, “I think that every piece of what you’re teaching students should be built from educating their character...” Here she is suggesting that Character Education should not be considered separate from or less important than content; it should be a foundation on which everything else is taught. She is suggesting that the teaching of content should be through the lens of Character Education. In this way, students are not always able to differentiate between these two as her agenda when educating character is always revealed to the students. She further states:

I revised the action project to an in class activity; because they’re in class, they can put whatever into it, their conversations count. But as soon as it’s homework, it’s something they have [put effort in] to do, it becomes a chore, as opposed to something they’re choosing to.

The action project mentioned here is an assignment where students consider six major marginalized groups (e.g. the homeless, new immigrant population, people living in low income pockets) in the Greater Toronto Area. Students look at texts and pick the group they are interested in researching. They are then asked to create an action project to build awareness for a marginalized group situation in the school. This aspect of Character Education aligns with the Community Partnership and Citizenship Development as well as Reflection and Self-Awareness as described in the Finding Common Ground: Character Education in Ontario Schools, K-12 (Ministry of Education, 2008). She finds that this character development initiative is
more effective if students are given class time to complete it. Assigning it as homework has been problematic as students start to view it as a chore, rather than a privilege.

Similarly, Participant B states, “The biggest thing for us is the GLS class is that it has the framework of empathy into action”. Here, she suggests that the foundation of everything that is taught in the GLS, and her aim with her students it to allow students to develop a deep sense of empathy for all human beings and all living things. She hopes that this development of empathy for all life becomes fuel for social change and justice. The framework of empathy into action aligns strongly with the two of the aims of Finding Common Ground: Character Education in Ontario Schools, K-12 (Ministry of Education, 2008), i.e. Community Partnership and Citizenship Development and Reflection and Self-Awareness; it is evident that the foundation of the course is based on principles of Character Education and is therefore an example of complete integration.

**Building Relationships**

All participants, during the interviews, stated the importance of building strong relationships with their students as a prerequisite for the implementation of effective Character Education initiatives. The following quote by participant A brings to light the importance of building a strong relationship with her students and for them to trust her, in order for her to do be effective as a Character Educator. She says:
I don’t know how people who are just Guidance Councilors, how they build relationships with the students. They need to trust you, when you give them a task. For one of my guidance periods, I hang out at the library, when I know the Gr. 11’s and 12’s have a spare. We just talk about things, but I’ll have an agenda. I’ll randomly bring up what I plan to talk to them about in in conversation, and so that way it’s not always a formal appointment. Some of them are getting to know me better and know that sometimes when I’m around I probably want to talk about something specific, but still, because we’ve built that relationship, they’re ok with it.

While reflecting on working with a difficult student who was often found making hurtful, homophobic comments based on his religious belief, participant A says, “We had to build a relationship slowly. I had to tell him how this reflected on his character and how people are interpreting what he’s doing. I asked him, ‘this is reflecting poorly on you, so how are you going to change it? ’.” In her class, all students, especially students that are displaying hurtful and intolerant behavior, are encouraged to reflect on their own actions their natural consequences. She believes that she is only able to successfully implement this practice if she has taken the time and effort to build a strong rapport and relationship with them. Additionally, Participant C says:

The first 2 weeks [of the GLS course] is getting to know the class and not really saying here’s the course outline, here’s what were going to do, here’s what we need to do… as an educator it all begins with a social connection – between the educator and the learners.
He believes that dedicating a significant amount of time during the beginning of the course to invest in and build strong relationships with students is crucial. Due to the nature of the course and its aims surrounding character development, if this is not done properly, the students, and school community at large, will not be able to reap full benefits of it. Some examples of this include icebreakers and team building exercises, brainstorming and discussions about student perceptions of Education, learning expectations and personal goals, collaborative puzzle tasks and blog reflections. He also says:

I get to know the students far closer, faster and better at GLS rather than rigid academic standard. It’s because they enjoy it and they open up, and they connect to you. I mean some love science and some don’t. You can actually differentiate and weave your way and meander through this course and it would still be meaningful. I know my kids far better than if I taught any other grade 9-science class. Not just personal things, but about them, their character.”

He has designed the course purposefully in a way that steers away from curriculum rigidity and towards maximizing their time to build a strong social connection and relationship—with him and each other. Although this is a crucial for any effective teacher, since the GLS course is more about expanding mindsets and developing skills, this becomes a greater priority.

**Multiple Perspectives**

In Finding Common Ground: Character Education in Ontario Schools, K-12 (Ministry of Education, 2008), there is an emphasis on Citizenship Development. This entails the development of the student as an engaged citizen who respects ones
self, others, property, the environment, diversity and human rights while allowing students to learn about, analyze, question, and contribute to, the building of their communities and nations of the world. In addition, there is a focus on Reflection and Self-Awareness, which involves becoming critical and analytical thinkers. From the interviews, an element of developing the skill, in students, of considering Multiple Perspectives emerged surrounding character development initiatives. This idea is also captured in the policy document as described above. The following quotes by participant A demonstrate this.

In English class we discuss who is absent in the text? Who is not represented? And why are these voices not represented and how do we make them heard? We ask ‘what are the other perspectives here and who is missing and why?’

I think international mindedness is being able to look at something from all sides.

In all my lessons we look at everything to see how we evaluate things from many different dimensions. For example, with bullying, if you can see the perspective of the bully, the bullied and the bystander and figure out what the best approach is to fix that then that builds character.

The Moral Courage Club at this school is more of an inwardly focused initiative. So, how are we as a school ensuring that we are listening to multiple voices? And are we a safe, healthy place to speak out against injustice? But we are just
cracking the surface but it’s really to be more inwardly focused and to interrogate what is happening in our own community.

The collection of quotes has been extracted from multiple parts of her interview. The notion of Multiple Perspectives was a reoccurring idea and was expressed in many different ways. She stresses the importance of education being a tool for building students that can interrogate their own biases as well as entertain a number of different perspectives, through critical analysis. The following quote by participant B also supports this idea, “I think it is one of the most important things. At the end of the day we want our students to be to have a meaningful experience and being fully educated means having awareness about others and the world with compassion and empathy”.

Here she stresses the importance of having students think about multiple perspectives of an issue; this entails being aware of other people, their beliefs, and experiences—all through the lens of critical analysis, compassion and empathy.

**Reaching Every Student**

All participants in the study expressed their desire, and the importance they have, for reaching every, single student in their classroom during their Character Education initiatives. Participant A says, “...they listen more and trust me more when it’s just me and them”. She finds that strategies are more effective when she is working with students individually as opposed to as a group, especially for students that are having more difficulty or are more problematic in class. These are the students that are not able to benefit from class-wide instruction. For this reason, she changes her approach and gives them individualized attention so she can reach
them in a more beneficial way. Participant C says, “So if a kid has a lagging skill in
caring or compassion or seems to be having difficulty with those personal
management skills or even academics skills, we can flag them right away. So we can
personalize their learning strategies”.

First, from this, it becomes evident that he is on radar for students that are lacking certain skills relating to character development or academic success. Next, it is clear that once he has identified this, his aim is to come up with a strategic, personalized plan to help that student in that area. This shows that he has the desire to invest additional time and effort into helping students towards success. He also says, “This course allows you to empathize with students and their situations with students that don’t like school”. This quote brings to light the importance of viewing each student as a complex being with different situations and hurdles. He believes it is important to identify students that need help, and provide assistance to those that require it, particularly those that do not show much interest at school. He recognizes the importance of reaching every, single student within his classroom to provide an optimal character education experience.

*Putting into Context*

In all cases studied, the pursuit of character education has been done in a way that is relevant and accessible to students. Aligning the character values and skills, with relevant activities, current events and interests of students, does this. Participant A shared a specific incident which highlights the value of providing meaningful, personal context for supporting learning: “I asked them, ‘so, how can we be acting with authenticity and integrity and love in our social media interactions?’
Following the discussion, a bunch of them unsubscribed to Askfm”1. She recognized that social media and online interactions are a large part of her student’s lives. For this reason, she designed an activity revolving around this, which also encouraged them to think deeply and critically about their online behavior. Having a context relevant topic of discussion drew the students into the activity, which led to greater participation and engagement. It is evident that this was a success as it led to changed student behavior. Following the class discussion, many students unsubscribed, as they had not previously considered the moral and ethical implications of their actions. Here, participant A uses relevant contexts to allow reflection of students’ everyday actions. Additionally, participant C states:

“So we looked at a lot of the things that are again, the softer side of education. We asked our students, ‘what skills do students need in the 21st century?’ And many of the skills were global awareness and awareness of the environment, being caring and compassionate, awareness of human rights, appreciation of others, all of those things.”

Participant C takes a slightly different approach to integrating and providing character education in a relevant way. Although he does also looks at technology, social media and other student interests in the course, this quote focuses on relevant 21st century skills. He adopts a social justice and humane lens to contextualize discussions and activities regarding current events and issues, taking place both locally and globally. As students are constantly bombarded with this

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1 Askfm.com is a website that allows users to ask, often disrespectful and demeaning, questions directly to other users, anonymously.
information in the news and in conversations, it gives them a place for critical, educated analysis through a lens of morality and ethics.

B) Development in Student Thinking

The interviews revealed similarities in how teachers supported the development in student thinking. This was observed specifically in strategies that promoted the integration of student autonomy and student reflection in the Character Education initiatives.

Student Autonomy

A prominent aspect of the Character Education initiatives for Participants B and C is encouraging student autonomy and decision making relating to their experiences within the classroom. This is reflected in both their mindset and the way they have organized the GLS course. Participant B says:

So what is a complete education? What does it mean to be fully educated? We talked to the students about that. Many of the students said ‘Oh you need Math and Literacy’. Then, we turned those conversations into what are the other things you need?

This was a discussion that was had on the first day of class in the GLS course. Right from the beginning, there was encouragement of voicing student opinion and values and then an attempt to develop these ideas in a constructive way. This became a stepping-stone for the development of the remainder of the course;
student input was valued and used to make important decisions relating to their learning.

The following are quotes from Participant B. They are selected because they highlight the degree of decision-making power her students get about their optimal learning preferences in the classroom. “For an assignment, I had them do a presentation. Instead of giving them a topic on what they're going to talk about, I let them choose something heartfelt”. He also says:

For their culminating activity, they have to turn this room into a youth café. So each section, there are 14 of them, get one day and they will showcase a social justice issue. So it might be gender inequality, it might be child rights. And they have this whole room, so they can choose art, food, music, displays and other classes come through. It's modeled on Studio 89 in Mississauga, which is a place for students wanting a place to showcase issues, and now it's a big community event place. They make decisions on how to set up the room the way they learn.

The quotes above provide a sample of the degree of varying freedom her students get relating to classroom assignments. Although, in both cases, a structure is provided, there is significant room for creativity and decision-making—both contributing to the development of student autonomy.

Student Reflection

Providing students with the encouragement and opportunities to reflect was a prominent part of the participants Character Education initiatives. This became evident in a number of different places in the interview with Participant A. The following are a collection of quotes to support this, “I ask my students, 'why is that
your goal?’, ‘who do you want to be in 10 years?’ and, ‘what are the absences you see in our own school?’ “ And “…But it’s [character education] all really to be more inwardly focused and to interrogate what is happening in our own communities”.

Here, participant A is describing her work as a Guidance Councilor, where she works one-on-one with students to help them reflect on their personal goals, values, and issues within the community as a starting point for progress. This presents evidence of a blurring of the lines between what is included in Character Education. This further exemplifies how Character Education is porous and how teachers view it as suffusing all aspects of their work. Furthermore, an essential part of the GLS course is that students are required to write blogs on either directed or undirected topics. It is a space for students to explore ideas, and reflect on experiences and their own learning. Participant C says:

Blogs are the format for student comment, reflection, interaction and learning.

These are set up for students to post comments, questions and reflections on issues as well as the course work. It allows for a safe Internet space where students can interact with the teacher and other classmates. In some lessons there are specific directions for Blog entries; but however, the Blog is an extension of the learning environment, and sometimes, it’s left open for students to discuss and think about whatever they want on the course.

It also is a means for Participant C to understand each student’s journey both within and outside his classroom. This is used to guide and adapt course as it progresses. This is an example of reflective practice—both for the students and the teacher. The value of self-reflection as a part of Character Education is that it
EXPLORING CHARACTER EDUCATION IN HIGH SCHOOLS

C) Experiential Learning and Student Action

There were many similarities and consistencies that emerged from the participants’ interviews regarding features of their Character Education programs. In this section, how teachers support student action and community involvement in these Character Education initiatives will be explored. These findings show that the participants of this study value the importance of community involvement, of their students, and view it as a critical pedagogical tool for character development.

The following quotes are from Participant A: “Fulfilled positive traits can impact people around you, can impact the world and your own future”, “It’s all about what they do when they graduate university. How are you going to make a difference when you’re an adult?” and “I want to know what kind of impact each student would have wanted to make in you’re their own life, their community, and in the world.” From these quotes it is evident that Participant A believes that students are the most successful when they are able to take their thinking and reflections and direct it into action with some level of impact. When students are immersed in an attempt to make a difference through actions on both a small and large-scale, that is the ultimate attempt of her pursuit. She believes that success is measured by ones impact on society and what these students chose to devote their time to after they leave school. It is clear that a prominent element of her character development initiative is to encourage student to make impact at the community level. The
following lengthy quotes are from Participant B.

So much of the course is set up as experiential learning. One of the GLS Culminating activities is designed to promote the idea of experiential learning and linking it with our social justice values. Some of our GLS lessons have been formed in collaboration with our community partners. These lessons begin with “educating” students on world issues. Our partners include: The Stephen Lewis Foundation, Right To Play, Mississauga Woodlot Stewardship, Daughters for Life Foundation and Sleeping Children Around The World. Lessons help students to understand empathetically the social justice issues each partner represents. Finally, students will take action on an issue and develop an experiential learning task.

There is a specific emphasis on experiential learning as a key method of instruction – that is, learning acquired wholly or in part through practical experiences inside and outside the classroom. The curriculum expectations incorporate a broad range of experiential learning ... students also learn about active and responsible citizenship through opportunities to make contributions to their communities and schools

From these quotes, it is evident that a prominent aspect of the design of the GLS course is to give students the opportunity to work with organizations within the community relating to social justice values to implement some sort of social change. There is great emphasis on students being engaged and involved with the community to develop these critical values and skills as well as experiencing being a
part of positive, societal change. The structural value of the GLS course is that it creates the opportunity that is resourced by a teacher with a flexible curriculum to facilitate & support Character Education through the facilitation of student action.

4. Student Benefit

The perceived student benefits of Character Education that emerged from Participant C’s interview are consistent with that of literature (Benninga et al., 2003; Richardson et al., 2009) discussed in Chapter Two. Similar to these research studies, Participant C believes that the pursuit of integrating character education in ones classroom does not only lead to an improvement of character; it is strongly tied to improvement in many other aspects of ones life—such as academic achievement. This is the development of the entire individual, which includes setting high expectations for learning and behavior while taking initiative for their own learning leading to academic improvement. He says:

[In GLS] Students will learn how to develop and apply literacy and numeracy skills, personal- management skills, and interpersonal and teamwork skills to improve their learning and achievement in school, the workplace, and the community. The course helps students build confidence and motivation to pursue opportunities for success in secondary school and beyond.

Participant C believes that the benefit of character development seeps into academic achievement and success beyond the confines of the school.
5. Barriers of Implementation

This section relates to the sub-question of this research study regarding barriers to implementation of Character Education initiatives in schools in the Greater Toronto Area. Participants believe that enforcing such initiatives can be challenging when working within an institution that already has established practices and values and with differences in opinions relating to the value of Character Education. Participant A says:

I’m at an independent school and there are a lot of issues of censorship. So I can talk about controversial issues and what we do when were faced with those, or how we handle ourselves with integrity, but I can’t necessarily write an article of how we’re doing it. Or I can talk to kids individually about supporting each other in stressful times and how we become good peers, but I can’t do a group about that because it would be in the announcements and then parents are involved. So that’s a huge barrier. They want to know the good things but they don’t want to see how they got there. Independent schools have own priorities. They want to see students acting a certain way but are not invested in the process of getting them there.

Participant B says:

The biggest barrier is that it takes away from options and the whole school; a lot of teachers say I don’t think we need it [GLS] because it takes away from choice. They don’t see the importance or value in it. Also, at this school every grade 9 student takes it, but whenever you introduce it as something you have to take something, there is always pushback [from other staff].
From these quotes, it is evident that there are often factors, which limit the level of embrace or result in pushback from school administrators and staff towards Character Education initiatives, as there is disagreement on its implementation, importance, its effectiveness, and its convenience.

The research question of this study is: how do three high school teachers in the Greater Toronto Area integrate Character Education in their classrooms? Sub-questions target the nature of these Character Education initiatives and the barriers to implementation. The findings of the study, discussed in Chapter Four, are summarized here. The themes are: the planning or development stages, participant (Educator) characteristics, program features and barriers to implementation.

Through the data collected, I found that the planning or development stage of the Character Education initiatives pursued by teachers and schools were largely directed by reflective practices and were founded on research. The development of their initiatives involved a process of qualitative data collection from feeder schools, as well as consulting published research studies to inform their thinking about the contents and pedagogy of their Character Education initiatives.

The interviews also revealed that the participants had many common characteristics relating to their Character Education initiatives. First, there was an acknowledgement of their personal influence in all practices and procedures surrounding these initiatives. They recognized that their personal morals, values and ethics inevitably influenced the direction and emphasis of this pursuit. Furthermore, despite the fact that they were in a position of authority and leadership, it was evident that these teachers genuinely cared about their
students—they wished them wellness and success. Additionally, they expressed the importance of traits such as humility and humbleness, and instilling them in their students. Finally, all participants showed perseverance despite the uncertainty associated with the outcome of their efforts; they did not need immediate results to motivate them to continue, or to see the importance of their Character Education initiatives.

Additionally, there were many similarities and consistencies that emerged from the participants’ interviews regarding elements of their Character Education programs. All participants believed that Character Education should be completely infused with their other educational practices within their classroom; it should not be considered a distinct pursuit. Also, all participants stated the importance of building strong relationships with their students as a prerequisite for the implementation of effective Character Education initiatives. Furthermore, there was an emphasis of considering multiple perspectives of different issues within the classroom; this entails being aware of other peoples, their beliefs, and experiences—all through the lens of critical analysis, compassion and empathy. Also, in all cases, the pursuit of Character Education has been done in a way that is relevant and accessible to students by aligning values and skills, with relevant activities, current events, local and global issues and interests of students. Furthermore, similarities in the development in student thinking arose relating to opportunities of student autonomy and reflection. Finally, there was an emphasis on the incorporation of experiential learning and student action; students were given the opportunity to work with organizations within the community relating to social justice in the
attempt to implement social change. There was great emphasis on students being engaged and involved with the community while developing critical thinking and analytical skills.

Also, it was found that there are often barriers to implementation with Character Education initiatives as there are often factors, which limited the level of embrace from school administrators and staff; this is due to disagreement on its importance, effectiveness, implementation and convenience.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the research aims and findings will be summarized, followed by links between Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools K-12 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008b) and Study Findings. This is followed by a discussion of how the literature in Chapter Two relates to the findings of this study. This is broken down into the elements identified by the Ontario Character Education Policy document: Learning and Academic Achievement, Community Partnership and Citizenship Development, Reflection and Self-Awareness, and Respect for Diversity. The discussion of the relationships between literature and study findings continues and is broken into the three types of approaches to Character Education as discussed in Chapter Two—the Traditional Approach, Developmental Approach and Caring Approach. The purpose of such organization is for the presentation of a clear discussion of the relationships between the key aims of the policy document and current literature with the findings of this study. Embedded within this discussion are the implications for practice and future studies. The chapter concludes with a consideration of Implications for Practice, Challenges, the Qualifications, Limitations and Next Steps is explored.
Ontario Character Education Policy and Study Findings

Here, the key aims and messages of Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools K-12 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008b) is highlighted with a brief discussion of how the findings of this study align with them. An in-depth discussion of study findings and this policy document, with other literature in the field, is found in the following section.

Table 1.0: Comparisons and Contrasts of Study Findings with the Ontario Character Education Education Policy Document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008b)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Aims of Policy</th>
<th>Study Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Character development is about excellence in education, communities that are vibrant and caring, and students who will think critically, feel deeply and act wisely. • A quality education is about more than academic achievement – it is about the development of the whole person.</td>
<td>• Highly consistent with these policy aims, it was found that students also benefited in many other aspects of student life such as academically (do better in school), intellectually (ability to think critically), emotionally (empathy and care) and socially (better peer relationships and school climate).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Parents and families have the primary responsibility for the development of their children’s character, with the support of their school and community.</td>
<td>• There was no evidence or attempt at parent or family integration or cooperation in character development initiatives in this study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student engagement is essential to all character development processes.</td>
<td>• Highly consistent with policy aims, there was an attempt at getting students active and engaged within their community. Student engagement was encouraged aligning discussions, assignments and projects relevant with student interests and issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Character development must be a</td>
<td>• Although mandated by the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exploring Character Education in High Schools</strong></td>
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<td>whole-school effort. All members of the school community share the responsibility to model, teach and expect demonstrations of the universal attributes in all school, classroom and extracurricular activities.</td>
<td>Ministry of Education, the barriers of implementation that are present for the character education initiatives suggest that it is not a school-wide effort and is not integrated as it should be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Respect for diversity must be at the heart of our policies, program, practices and interactions.</td>
<td>• Highly consistent with policy aims, there was a focus is to be empathetic, tolerant and respectful towards all individuals and groups. There are attempts to help students understand diverse opinions and beliefs through assignments and first hand engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning cultures and school communities must be respectful, caring, safe and inclusive.</td>
<td>• Highly consistent with policy aims, there was an emphasis on leadership with care and building strong relationships between students and teachers and students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Character development must be integrated into the curricular experiences of students and embedded into the culture of the school and classroom in an explicit and intentional manner.</td>
<td>• Highly consistent with policy aims there was an attempt at complete integration with everyday practices and curricular experiences within the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Character development is not a stand-alone initiative; it has linkages with learning and academic achievement, respect for diversity, citizenship development and parent and community partnerships.</td>
<td>• Consistent with policy aims, participants incorporated other large pursuits such as empathy, global education, critical thinking and holistic education within their character education initiatives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evidently, many of the major findings of this study are highly consistent with and align well with the key aims of the Character Education policy document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008b) (Table 1.0). These include: Character Education emphasizing a holistic education that also leads to academic success, student and community engagement, respect for diversity, building relationships and a positive school environment, and integration with many aspects of school practices. Furthermore, both the policy and the findings acknowledge the overlap of other educational initiatives with Character Education; however, there were some minor differences in what these were. The findings emphasized empathy, global education and critical thinking whereas the policy focuses on learning and academic achievement, respect for diversity, citizenship development and parent and community partnerships.

However, some findings were inconsistent with the policy aims. First, there was no evidence or attempt at parent or family integration or cooperation in character development initiatives in this study. This may be because classroom teachers view this as a responsibility beyond the scope of their work—and a role better suited for school administration. Given the ambiguous definition of Character Education, it is not surprising that schools are limited to connect with families on this agenda; as this study suggests, schools themselves are not clear about the parameters of Character Education, which makes it challenging to export this onto students’ families. A question that arises is how can teachers ensure that the character development initiatives at school complement what is being done at home?
Additionally, the table also highlights the disconnect between policy mandates and school practices. Character Education in schools is mandated by the Ontario Ministry of Education whereas the barriers of implementation suggest that, in practice, it is not a school-wide effort where all members of the school community share the responsibility to model, teach and expect demonstrations of the universal attributes in all school, classroom and extracurricular activities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008b). In this study it was found that Character Education initiatives are not as integrated as it should be. In one case, the principal founded the school with a focus of Character Education; despite this, there was tension in implementing the mandatory GLS course for all Grade 9 students since many teachers did not see the importance of it. Furthermore, it was found that formalizing such initiatives makes it known and leads to the involvement of parents, which is unfavorable in the eyes of administration.

Due to the pushback received from other teachers and administration, it is no surprise that there is a lack of conversation surrounding school-wide initiatives and collaborative efforts among teachers. In order to stimulate school-wide conversation, there would have to be a radical change in school culture and values. Raising awareness about the aims and benefits of Character Education initiatives could help teachers overcome some of the barriers of implementation discussed in this study. This could involve offering a professional development session for staff, parents and community members. In this, it is essential to clarify that Character Education does not have a religious basis, is not about indoctrination, compliance or exclusion and not about the government imposing a belief system on its citizens—
rather, it is about academic success, developing critical minds, inclusivity and making a positive impact. Evidently, despite the strong alignment of study findings with policy aims, there are certain aspects of this study that are less consistent or completely removed from the aims Ontario Character Education policy (Table 1.0).

**Ontario Character Education Policy, Literature and Study Findings**

The findings of this study are highly connected to and align with not only the Character Education policy document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008b), as discussed above, but also to the current literature in the field. These relationships will be explored in this sub-section of this chapter. First, this is broken down into the elements identified by the policy document: Learning and Academic Achievement, Community Partnership and Citizenship Development, Reflection and Self-Awareness and Respect for Diversity. Next, the discussion of the relationships and study findings continues and is broken into the three types of approaches to Character Education as discussed in Chapter Two—the Traditional Approach, Developmental Approach and Caring Approach. The purpose of such organization is for the presentation of a clear discussion of the relationships between the key aims of the Ontario Character Education policy document and current literature in the field, with the findings of this study.

The implementation of character development initiatives in schools is a pursuit to create a learning environment where high standards of moral excellence are enforced and where virtues are taught, either implicitly or explicitly, through the learned curriculum (Power, 1989; Otten, 2002; Berkowitz 2004; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008b; Davidson, 2008); this pursuit is often loosely termed as
'Character Education'. Across the literature in the field, there are often discrepancies and ambiguity surrounding what Character Education entails (Miller, 2008; Lopes, Wilhelm, 2008; 2013; Smith, 2013). Often, it serves as an umbrella term that incorporates other large educational fields of research such as empathy, global education (Gruener, 2006; Stott, 2009), critical democratic education (Winston, 2010) and holistic education (Haynes et al., 1997, Arthur, 2000). This ambiguity, however, is not limited to the academic realm as the findings of this study show that teachers too, often view these fields as non-distinct. The practices and design of the Character Education initiatives described in this study also incorporate aspects of empathy, global education, critical democratic education and holistic education. Some prominent examples of this include projects including the critical analysis of and engagement with marginalized groups within the community and deconstruction of current social justice issues accompanied with action projects for positive, social change.

According to Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario, K-12 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008b), Character Education includes, but is not limited to 1) Learning and Academic Achievement, 2) Reflection and Self-Awareness and 3) Community Partnership and Citizenship Development. In the following section, these three key ideas are explored in light of the study findings and current literature in the field.

1) **Learning and Academic Achievement** involves the development of the entire individual, which includes setting high expectations for learning and behavior while taking initiative for their own learning, often leading to academic
improvement. In this study, it was found that the benefit of character education extends into academic achievement, as teachers noted an improvement in work skills and habits, as well as grades after the implementation of the mandatory GLS course. This finding invites many implications for practice. There are many facets to the GLS course; for example, there is a large emphasis on self-improvement and awareness as well as community involvement and student action. As discussed, Character Education encompasses both of these aims. It would be worthwhile to study what particular aspect (i.e. student engagement, community involvement, building relationships, student autonomy, student reflection etc.) of the GLS course leads to an improvement in student learning and academic achievement. A study conducted in the United States suggests that these aspects are parent and teacher modeling of character and promotion of character education, quality opportunities for students to engage in service activities and promoting a caring community and positive social relationships (Lickona, 2005). Shedding light to this pedagogy and specific strategies could inform Character Educators for a more effective practice. Additionally, the correlation found in this study between the implementation of Character Education initiatives and improvement in learning and academic achievement is not necessarily a product of causation. There are, however, other research studies (Benninga et.al, 2003; Lickona, 2005; Berkowitz, 2005; Richardson et al., 2009) that support this. An extensive study was conducted in the United States to identify any correlation between Character Education programs to academic achievement (Lickona, 2005). Character Education programs that were ranked
higher for a variety of assessment criteria, based on a rubric for coding key aspects, also had higher state achievement scores (Lickona, 2005).

2) Community Partnership and Citizenship Development is the development of the student as an engaged citizen who respects oneself, others, property, the environment, diversity and human rights while allowing students to learn about, analyze, question, and contribute to, the building of their communities and nations of the world. This was found to be a consistent focus of the character development initiatives of the participants involved in this study. There was an attempt at getting students active and engaged within their schools and community—through this, respect, empathy and critical thinking was developed. There are many implications for practice with this strategy. First, what type of interactions and involvement with the community allow for the deepening of the character traits discussed above—respect, empathy and critical thinking? In extension, what types of environments, support by teachers and level of student impact is required for optimal development of these traits in students? These questions could positively affect the effectiveness of such character development initiatives by allowing them to set parameters of these student experiences that more favourably support student growth. Second, how can teachers, most accurately and effectively, assess the development of these traits as a product of student community involvement? This relates to another finding of the study; it was found that teachers are often unable (or uninterested) to quantify or assess the level of impact of their efforts with Character Education yet continue to persevere and continue putting effort into this pursuit—as they see a value in it. This suggests that
the moral compass of the participants involved in this study is principle-based as opposed to consequence-based.

3) Reflection and Self-Awareness involves striving for an ever-growing depth of self-awareness, reflection and understanding while becoming critical and analytical thinkers. A crucial component of the Character Education initiatives of the participants was reflection and self-awareness. This aligns with other studies (Berkowitz, 2004; Otten, 2002) that define Character Education as developing dispositions relating to ethical and moral competency, and emotional learning. In this study it was found that students were encouraged and given ample opportunities to reflect; this was done through a variety of means such as conversations and writing blogs. The aim of this was to provide students with the means for undirected, deep reflection opportunities about themselves, their learning, and important issues. There are many implications of practice associated with reflection and self-awareness, as there are limited ways of assessing improvement within the classroom. While the improvement in a student’s ability to spearhead a cause can easily be measured through observation and impact, one’s ability to reflect deeply is more challenging. Reflection and increase in self-awareness is an internal process and although a teacher can use indicators such as assessing the students progress in conveying their thoughts into words, there is greater uncertainty associated with this. Furthermore, some may argue that the degree of empathy an individual has is an innate characteristic and attempting to teach it in schools is a worthless cause. Another study conducted in Poland found that students that regularly reflected, who had a great sense of self awareness and
complacency, were more likely to partake in self-improvement and cope better with negative situations (Brojek, 2011). Thus, a potential area for research is exploring the optimal practices and strategies of student reflection within the classroom that lead to an increase in self-awareness.

**Types of Approaches: Relationship to Study Findings and Implications for Practice**

In this section, the discussion of the relationships between literature and study findings continues, in addition to implications for practice. It is broken into the three types of approaches to Character Education as identified in Chapter Two—the Traditional Approach, Developmental Approach and Caring Approach (Howard et al., 2004). Each approach is explored independently with the corresponding elements/ themes that emerged from this study. The purpose of such organization is for the presentation of a clear discussion of the relationships between the key aims of the policy document and current literature with the findings of this study and implications for practice.

**The Traditional Approach: Humility and Empathy**

The traditional approach suggests that universal values exist and must be taught explicitly to students. This can be done in a variety of methods such as direct instruction, modelling and practice of virtuous behaviour as well as bringing to light heroes of the past and of literature (Nash, 1997; Howard et al., 2004). This is consistent with the findings of this study as the participants, at times, were explicitly encouraging and teaching certain values such as humility and empathy. Another participant expressed that her primary aim for the GLS course was ‘empathy into
action’. Empathy into action is the development of empathetic individuals who use this as a fuel for social change and justice; this is the foundation for all her teachings and practices with this course. It is evident that a key aspect of the Character Education initiatives involved the teaching of explicit values.

A critique of this approach is that there is an assumption of the existence of universal values and those who are not compliant, are ignorant or morally inadequate (Winston, 2008). In practice, there may be individuals who do not agree with the teaching of certain explicit values. A point to consider is: is it ethical for authority to dictate the moral teachings of a classroom and does this align with the democratic values—a cornerstone of character education?

An alternative to this in the classroom is adopting a democratic approach to Character Education initiatives that involve the teaching of explicit values. In the classroom, the Educator can encourage students to reflect on and express the values and morals that are the most important to them, followed by definitions and descriptions of what this looks like in practice—both within their personal lives and within the school environment. Teachers could facilitate a discussion around this and one of these democratically determined values could be focused on each week or month.

The Developmental Approach: Critical Thinking and Multiple Perspectives

The development approach (Howard et al., 2004) is less rigid than the traditional approach and advocates critical thinking and experience. Virtues are viewed as subjective entities that vary across time and contexts (Rice, 1996; Murray, 2002). According to this approach, character development in students is
accomplished through the involvement of democratic decision-making, consideration and discussion of moral dilemmas and cooperative learning (Murray, 2002). This was consistent with the findings as there was an emphasis on critical thinking and multiple perspectives in the Character Education initiatives discussed in this study. One participant, on numerous occasions, stressed the importance of having students think about multiple perspectives of an issue and claimed it to be the foundation of her course. This entails being aware of other people, their beliefs, and experiences—all through the lens of critical analysis, compassion and empathy. In practice, this involved critical analysis and discussions surrounding texts, marginalized groups and current issues. In this case, it is evident that she is not imposing her personal beliefs and morals onto her students but rather encouraging them to explore the spectrum of possibilities. In this way, students bring forth their subjective beliefs and biases for a constructive analysis. The development of this skill in a student population is imperative for an environment where every student can feel safe, learn and thrive.

Some critiques of the Developmental approach include the undermining of the role of adults and authority in the community, the large degree of subjectivity and the danger of the oppression of minority beliefs and values (Howard et al., 2004). In a class discussion, the students that are quiet may not voice their opinions and ideas and so there may be a misrepresentation of the different perspectives. The teacher, and the students that are more confident and willing to participate, may have a greater influence and steer the class opinion in one way. One way around this is to first have students do individual reflections and analysis on an issue where
they are invited to think of all the possible perspectives. Then, take turns sharing their ideas with the class. Finally, there could be an open class discussion surrounding these ideas. This way, students are given an opportunity to reflect and gather their thoughts as well as disassociate their personal beliefs from analysis of the issue. These are both factors which may encourage shyer or less willing students to participate—allowing for a more balanced and equitable approach to this exercise.

**The Caring Approach: Leadership with Care**

The caring approach (Howard et al., 2004; Noddings, 2005) argues that the development of character is achieved through the nurturing of caring relationships; thus, the school structure should be conducive to the development and maintenance of such relationships (Noddings, 2008). The provider of care must consider the desires of the receiver of care—this is the basis for the development of character. In schools, teachers often do this unconsciously by being caring by nature and encouraging and engaging students in discussion to promote the expression of the students’ best self (Noddings, 2005, 2008). The strength of this approach is that these educators are actively acknowledging the need for care and support of all students and perhaps oppressed, minority students would benefit the most from the care. Although this approach does not work to eliminate the root problem of the oppression (Roberts, 2011), it does introduce a positive influence in students’ lives if done effectively.

A finding of this study suggests that participants of these Character Education initiatives demonstrate leadership with care. This means that despite
them being in a position of authority and leadership, these teachers wished well and success for their students, and expressed this care to them. This was expressed either through their beliefs, speech and claimed actions. In this study, the element of teacher care was also demonstrated through the desire of reaching every student in their classrooms. There was a commitment to providing an optimal character education experience for all their students.

Feeling cared for and caring for is a very subjective idea. Although all these teachers, being in the role of leadership, claim to care about their students, the question arises: How is this care expressed and how well received is it? Although these teachers may have good intentions towards their students, this may be distorted in translation. How certain students identify as 'care' may not align with the teacher. Therefore, in order for students to feel cared for, a greater understanding of student perception is required. Undoubtedly this will vary from classroom to classroom and student to student. Teachers must then be able to, working within their professional boundaries, accommodate for this subjectivity in order to create this feeling of belongingness and care in their classroom. It may also be interesting to further explore the extent of care these teachers have for their students—as this can also have great implications within the classroom.

Evidently, in this study, elements of all three approaches to Character Education, the Traditional Approach, Developmental Approach and Caring Approach were evident. The participants of this study embraced aspects of all three approaches in their Character Education initiatives, which suggest that in practice, they do not necessarily cause tension; they are complementary.
Character Education Program Features: Other Implications and Questions

Due to the varying nature and scope of the findings, there are many additional, unexplored implications and further questions relating to Character Education program features; these will be explored here. The following sub-sections arose out of the identification of themes through the coding process described in in Chapter Four.

Complete Integration

The concept of complete integration of character development initiatives with the curriculum was discussed—primarily in light of class projects and assignments. In all cases, the discussion of the integration of character development involved large assessments that required substantial planning. There was limited discussion surrounding less elaborate aspects of the classroom such as everyday student-teacher interactions and passing conversation. A question to explore is what do these every-day interactions look like and how can teachers optimize them for character development?

Student Autonomy

Another theme that arose in consideration of teacher practice was the consideration of the nature and approach to fostering student autonomy. Given the nature of school structures, there are many restrictions within the classroom that inhibit the genuine promotion of student autonomy. Teachers must perform within government and school policy and curriculum guidelines.
Fostering greater degrees of student autonomy does not exist in schools and therefore there should be discussion of where the effective boundaries lie and what is practical relating to character development initiatives. After accounting for policies, physical and time constraints, an important point of discussion is: how can student autonomy be maximized within these restrictions, for optimal student Character Development?

**Qualifications, Limitations and Next Steps**

A discussion of Qualifications and Limitations of this study is found in Chapter Three. Additional limitations of the study arise, by the continued conceptual ambiguity of Character Education and its variable embrace across the province. All schools are mandated to embrace Character Education, however, the competing priority demands leads to diffuse application. The GLS model is a rich example of how building a dedicated, mandatory course with an explicit Character Education mandate is one way to better assure that Character Education receives due attention. In order to assess the efficacy of such an approach, a wider data set, observation of classroom practice and large scale and qualitative data gathering from students to measure impact, is required. Without a larger study of Character Education in Ontario, the policy may well continue to be relegated to reduced impacts.
Conclusion

This case study examines three high school teachers in the Greater Toronto Area who are committed to incorporating Character Education in their teaching practices. The aim of the study is to explore how Character Education can be incorporated into the learned curriculum, using Finding Common Ground: Character Education in Ontario Schools, K-12 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008b) as a conceptual lens. This study, through analysis of participant interviews, highlights similarities and consistencies that emerged in the Character Education initiatives relating to its development, characteristics of educators, program features, student benefits and barriers of implementation. Some key findings relate to Character Education program features and include complete integration with curriculum, exploration of multiple perspectives, student autonomy, reflection, and student action. The findings are discussed in light of the aims identified by the Ontario Character Education policy document namely: learning and academic achievement, community partnership and citizenship development and reflection and self-awareness.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: ______________

Dear ______________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying character education in middle schools in the Peel District School Board, for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. David Montemurro. My research supervisor is Dr. David Montemurro. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of up to a 60-minute interview that will be tape-recorded and follow-up e-mails. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the tape recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are minimal risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher name: _______________________

Phone number, email: ____________________
Instructor’s Name: ________________________________

Phone number: ___________ Email: ________________

Research Supervisor’s Name: ______________________

Phone #: _______________ Email: ________________

**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 my voluntary participation at any time without any penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by ________________(name of researcher) and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: ________________________________

Name (printed): ______________________________

Date: _______________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. Could you provide a brief overview of your teaching experiences?
2. How would you describe character education?
3. Why do you think character education is important?
4. How long have you been integrating character education in your teaching practice?
5. Why did you decide to integrate it into your teaching practice (both within your own classroom and other school initiatives)?
6. Can you provide an overview of the character education programs that use in your teaching practice (both within your own classroom and other school related initiatives)?
7. What are the aims and priorities of your approach to character education? How do you achieve them?
8. What are some specific strategies that you have used that you have found to be particularly effective with students? How do you know they are effective?
9. What are some specific strategies that you have used that you have found to be particularly ineffective with students? How do you know they are ineffective?
10. Can you measure success or failure with character education? If so, how do you do it?
11. Are there any specific curriculum/ content areas that you target for character education?
12. What are general student attitudes towards character education? Can you recall any specific incidences that stand out to you?
13. What are some benefits that you have observed when integrating character education in your teaching practice? Can you recall any specific instances?
14. What are some barriers/ challenges to the integration of character education in your teaching practice? Can you recall any specific instances?