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STRATEGIES TO TEACH CHARACTER EDUCATION THROUGH CHILDREN'S
LITERATURE

by
Rebecca Quinn

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Science in Teaching Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
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Approved by
Advisor

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ABSTRACT

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STRATEGIES TO TEACH CHARACTER EDUCATION USING
CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

2006/7

Dr. Marjorie Madden
Master of Science in Teaching in Collaborative Education

A fourth-grade reading class was taught a unit in character education to determine if there was increase in knowledge from the pre-test to the post-test after using children's literature and other supplemental activities. The unit was broken up into six different traits; fairness, trustworthiness, responsibility, respect, caring, and citizenship. Each trait was taught over the course of a week while integrating two children's books highlighting the particular trait of focus for the week. The children were also taught using activities, worksheets, journal prompts, awards, and discussions. A teacher journal was also kept to note important findings. The students pre-tests indicate that the children were a little unclear of the definitions of the different character traits. However, after a week of activities, including reading appropriate children's literature there was an increase of their knowledge of the particular trait. The students showed that using children's literature along with supplemental materials is a successful way to teach character education.

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To my parents, for always believing in me. I would not be where I am today
without you.

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Chapter One

Introduction

“May I have your attention please!” said the guidance counselor over the loud speaker. All the students in the second grade classroom briefly paused to listen to what she was going to say. The guidance counselor announced that it was Anti-Violence week. She began talking about the importance of character education and respect for others and yourself. She also sang a song, but it was very broken up and so uninteresting that I do not even remember it. As she was talking, I looked around the room at the students’ reactions to the announcement. There were no reactions; in fact no one was even paying attention. I could not blame them because the guidance counselor was not enthusiastic when she was talking and her song practically put the students to sleep. After she was finished, no one made a comment about what she had said. I was very discouraged because I believe that character education is important and in theory, a morning announcement seems like a good way to convey the information.

Even though I wanted the students to listen to the message because ultimately she was teaching them something important, no one was listening so I just let them continue their morning work. I wanted the students to learn this information because character education is important, but the way the guidance counselor was trying to teach them was very ineffective. I wondered if there was a way to make learning fun and teach character education in a way that the students would enjoy and be enthusiastic to learn.

Purpose Statement

Now more than ever, it is clear that students need to be taught character education (Bryan 2005). There has been an increase of incidences of stealing and cheating in our youth and the schools need to work to develop morally good students (Character 2002). A child develops character during the elementary years and teaching character education in school will only increase the chance that the students will develop these good morals. Piaget, Kohlberg, and Vygotsky all stress this point (Character 2002). Regardless of how one feels, there is a law that requires character education to be taught in schools (Ryan & Bohlin 1999).

The state of New Jersey has required character education to be taught in school and has included guidelines and benchmarks in their standards. The six standards that the students must demonstrate knowledge of are trustworthiness, responsibility, respect, fairness, caring, and citizenship. The standards also list the benchmarks that must be achieved by the end of fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades (Standards 2006).

The Character Education Partnership gave eleven principles of effective character education which include; promoting core ethical values, promoting core values in all phases of life, fostering a caring community, providing opportunities for moral action, involving school staff and assessing results (Schaeffer 2003). Character education is not only a focus on what students should become, but also what they should not become (Burnmaster 2001).

When teaching character education one must go beyond the simple reading of the material. Students must learn about the traits to the extent that they will use them when making decisions. Brynildssen (2003) talks about an approach focusing on reflection and

response. They suggest the use of discussion, debate, role-playing, and journal writing to teach character traits (Brynildssen 2003).

Gibbs and Earley (1996) suggest that another strategy is to have the class create a list of their top ten good qualities in someone they admire. Then throughout the year, they can vote to change the qualities based on the books they read and the character traits they learn (Gibbs & Early 1996). Campoy (1997) has come up with four strategies to use when teaching character education through children's literature. They include the cause/effect/far-reaching effect, perspective windows, the moral dilemma chart, and what's your perspective. These four strategies are discussed in chapter two in more detail, but they seem to be good ways to teach character education. Lanieri (2005) states that using Bloom's Taxonomy is a good way to start class and graphic organizers and Venn diagrams are good ways to organize qualities of character traits (Character 2002).

Sheryl O'Sullivan (2004) said there are four traits to look for when choosing a book. One of them includes books that are deep enough to discuss more than just literal comprehension. Carol Otis Hurst (2002) says that books should be neither completely good nor completely bad. It is important to look at motivations and results of decisions when looking at characters in books. Also choose characters that are not perfect, because humans are not perfect. Bryan (2005) talks about specifically using the tales of the brother's Grimm to teach character education. They provide lessons that students can relate to. Sanchez (1998) suggests using hero books. However, it is important to choose heroes from a variety of backgrounds. Gibbs and Earley (1994) discuss different genres to focus on when teaching character education. They include realistic fiction, modern fantasy, and picture storybooks.

Statement of Research Question

What strategies and books can you use to teach character education through children's literature?

Story of the Question

After listening to the guidance counselor's announcement, I went around and asked a few of the students what they learned from the announcement. Most of the students told me they were not listening because they were doing their morning work. However, one student responded by saying "I think she said that we are supposed to think only about ourselves." This stopped me dead in my tracks because the student misunderstood the guidance counselor saying that you need to respect yourself and take care of yourself to mean take care of only yourself. Another student told me that he did not even know the guidance counselor was speaking.

It blew me away that these second graders did not know anything about character education and had never received any lessons on the subject. I decided to take teach these students a lesson on respect and the classroom teacher agreed to let me teach the lesson the next day. I knew that the message the guidance counselor made was important, but the way she did it did not have any impact on the students. I wanted to teach a lesson that would have an impact on the students. I also wanted them to enjoy the lesson and be engaged in what I was saying and more importantly what their classmates were saying. I went around and asked the students what makes learning fun for them. I got a variety of responses, but the most popular was reading books. One student said, "I love reading books because I can become someone else." Another student said, "Books make learning

fun because it is fun to picture it in your head.” Their responses really sparked my interest in finding children’s literature that was fun and entertaining but also contained a valuable character lesson. I went out and looked through books that would teach these second graders about respect. There were many to choose from but I found the perfect book for this class. I decided that the next day I would read them a story that focused on respect.

I started by asking the students what they thought respect meant. A few of the students had a general understanding but defined respect by saying that it meant respecting others, but they could not define it without using the word respect in the definition. They were able to give me some examples of respect, but it was mainly respect for teachers and other adults. I explained that it was important to respect not only adults, but also your peers, and yourself. Then I read David Goes to School by David Shannon and when I was finished I had the students tell me how David was disrespectful and what they would have done differently.

Then they each cut a picture out of a magazine that showed people being respectful and I glued them together to make a collage. I hung it up in the classroom to remind the students how to be respectful. The students really enjoyed this lesson and now they know what respect means and how to give it. This brought my attention to the lack of character education in schools. I think it is very important to help develop well-rounded children, not only children who can add and read but also make good decisions.

Another reason that I choose to work with character education is because there have been so many school shootings in today’s society and I cannot imagine what must be going through these criminal’s minds to resort to this type of violence. If we can start

teaching character education and values at the elementary level, maybe our future will be much more peaceful.

In certain situations, students need to be taught what to do and also what not to do. By providing them with bad examples, they will learn how they should and should not behave. After defining character education, the focus must turn to what traits to teach. For me, it was easy to choose. I am conducting my research in the state of New Jersey, so I am teaching the six traits that I mentioned before; trustworthiness, caring, respect, responsibility, citizenship, and fairness. They have been clearly defined by the Character Counts coalition and I am using those definitions in my research design.

After hearing about the three simultaneous school shootings in October 2006, I knew I wanted my focus to be on character education. I believe that it is our responsibility to help develop students that will value morals and make good decisions. There has been some debate over whose responsibility it is to teach character education. Many people believe it belongs in the hands of the parents, but in our society it can only help the students by incorporating it into the curriculum. After talking to the students and discovering their interest in children's literature, I decided to try and incorporate that into my teaching of character education. I want to shape the children of today to be the leaders of tomorrow. I believe that using children's literature is an effective way to integrate character education into the curriculum and a great way to connect with your students.

After reviewing the research, many of my questions have been answered. I have been given many ideas for what books to teach and strategies to use, but what I have not learned is if they really work. I have not seen them in practice and I do not know how the students react to the stories. Therefore, the focus of my research is focused on assessing

prior knowledge about the traits, teaching different strategies through a variety of books and then assessing their knowledge to see if they learned about the traits.

Organization of Thesis

In this chapter, I have provided a brief overview of what my topic is and what other research has been written on my particular topic. I have also included why I am conducting my research and why I chose my topic. In Chapter two, a more in-depth look will be given on the current research found on my topic. That chapter is also broken down in sections. The first section discusses the importance of character education. Then the chapter discusses New Jersey's state standards and the definition of character education. The last two sections present strategies and appropriate books to use.

Chapter three focuses on the content of the study and my research design. I discuss my qualitative study and what I use to teach character education. I also include why these strategies are appropriate resources for my study. This chapter also explains my means for collecting data and how I interpret it. Chapter four looks at and analyzes the data I have collected from my study. Chapter five discusses my findings, conclusion, and if I answered my research question. This will also include what should be done next in the study and implications for teacher and character education curriculum.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

This section focuses on the research that has been previously written on the particular topic of using children's literature to teach character education. There is an extensive amount of quality research on this subject; however, this review focuses on how to use children's literature to teach children about specific character traits. The need for character education in today's world is addressed first in this literature review because knowing why you need to do something is just as important as how to do it. Secondly, the state standards on character education are presented. The benchmarks that should be reached by certain grades are also included in this section. The third section of the literature review focuses on the character traits in the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards and the definition of character education. The fourth section focuses on the strategies, which include teacher strategies, programs, and children's literature. The fifth section talks about the types of books to use when teaching character education. This section focuses on the qualities to look for in a book and suggests examples of appropriate literature.

Push for Character Education

Before the discussion of how to teach character education can begin, one must first look at why character education is so important in today's society. During the nineteenth century, there was a strong commitment to the teaching of character education. However, during the twentieth century character education faded into the background. Bryan (2005) said that with the recent terrorist attacks, school shootings, and violence it is important to teach students how to become morally good people.

Gibbs and Earley (1996) agree that our children of today are acting and behaving in ways that were considered appalling in past years. Even worse and more disturbing, is that they are getting away with behaving in this way. The fact that children have trouble deciding between what is right and what is wrong is shown in the increasing number of people disrespecting other people and property. There have been an increasing number of juvenile arrests and this can be directly related to the decrease of character education in schools (Gibbs & Early 1996). There is a definite feeling of crisis in today's society because of the terrorist attacks and crimes in our schools. There has been a high rate of stealing and cheating in our youth and the schools need to work to develop morally good students (Character 2002). Teaching character education will help to develop people who know and feel what is right and act in appropriate behaviors (Lickona 1991).

There is debate whether character education be taught in schools or at home, but there are many reasons to include character education in schools. Teaching character education will promote self-discipline and perseverance (Devries 1998). A child develops character during elementary school and teaching character education at school will only increase the likelihood that children will develop good morals. Piaget stressed the fact

that a child's environment has an impact on the child's moral development (DeVries 1998). Kohlberg and Vygotsky also stressed the importance of character education in schools because students will develop morally during school whether we focus on character education or not (Tappan 1998). Therefore, it would be more beneficial to teach important character traits to students to promote the development of good morals (Character 2002).

The Character Education Partnership (CEP) working with the University of Missouri-St. Louis found that improved pro-social behavior also improves academic performance (Schaeffer 2003). The study also found reduction in absenteeism, discipline referrals and suspension, problem behavior, school anxiety, and substance abuse. The CEP believes that our world is becoming more complex and potentially more harmful, ethical, and moral issues will come to face us everyday. It is important that we not only teach children academics, but also to produce well-rounded and well-grounded children (Schaeffer 2003).

Ryan and Bohlin (1999) write that philosophers from the past have said that school is a place to learn math and reading, but also to become a good person. Ryan and Bohlin (1999) also argue that the founders of the United States believe democracy can only exist with educated and morally responsible people. The United States Department of Education recognizes the importance of character education and created federal and state laws that require schools to teach character education (Ryan & Bohlin 1999).

This section has been focused around the push for character education in today's society. It is important for schools to take some responsibility for teaching children how

to be morally good. With all the crime that had been happening in our society it is apparent that character education need to be taught (O'Sullivan 2004).

New Jersey State Standards

The New Jersey state education board feels that character education should be taught in our schools. In fact, they feel so strongly about it that they have included it in the state's standards and require that it be taught in all schools up to grade 12. According to the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS) (2006), Character Development and Ethics is included in the Career Education and Consumer, Family, and Life Skills Category. The standards require that schools teach children to develop consumer, family, and life skills to function properly in society. This is stated in Standard 9.2 section D in the NJCCCS. Standard 9.2 also states that students need to develop their own ideas, recognize problems, and choose the most appropriate response. Specifically, the standards list six character traits about which students must demonstrate knowledge. These six traits include trustworthiness, responsibility, respect, fairness, caring, and citizenship.

The NJCCCS (2006) also give benchmarks for grades 4, 8, and 12. By the end of fourth grade, students must demonstrate and identify the six character traits at home, in school, and in the community. They must also complete a project on at least one character trait. Lastly, by the end of fourth grade, they must be able to explain why you must obey rules and laws. By the end of eighth grade, the standards require students to explain and demonstrate how behavior influences and affects others at home, in school, and in the community. The students must also be able to describe and demonstrate the appropriate traits in different settings. They should be able to talk about a problem

including causes, effects, and solutions that they may face. Finally, students in eighth grade should be able to talk about how personal ethics influences decision-making. By the end of twelfth grade, the NJCCCS standards require that students talk about how character influences performance at work. The students should also be able to discuss their duty as a citizen and what happens when laws are broken. Students should also be able to compare different codes of ethics in different fields of work. Finally, twelfth grade students should be able to use a code of ethics to solve problems at work.

The NJCCCS (2006) standards explain what students need to know at certain points in their lives. They reemphasize the fact that character education should be taught in schools, not only because of the issues in our society today, but also because schools need to produce students who can make ethical decisions and function appropriately in our society (New 2006).

Definition of Character Education

As seen in the previous section, research argues that character education needs to be taught (O'Sullivan 2004 & Character 2002). This section provides an in-depth look at what character education really means and what important traits should be taught. Schaeffer (2003) said that character education has existed for many years; it is even embedded in the Constitution and Bill of Rights. Our founding fathers realized that reading and math were not the only important qualities of an educated man. They knew that in order for a democracy to survive, citizens needed a set of core values to follow. In the early 19th century, Alexis de Tocqueville commented, "America is great because she is good. If America ceases to be good, she will cease to be great." He recognized the fact

that only morally good people can create and maintain a great country like America (Schaeffer 2003).

The Character Education Partnership (CEP) describes character education as education for understanding values, caring about them, and being able to act on these values (Schaeffer 2003). The CEP wants students to be able to internalize these traits and make ethical decisions based on their values. Character Education can either be a school wide reform or simply programs in the classroom. Schaeffer (2003) suggests that there are eleven principles for effective character education which include but are not limited to: promoting core ethical values, promoting core values in all phases of life, fostering a caring community, providing opportunities for moral action, involving school staff, and assessing results. Gibbs and Earley (1994) express that character education consists of teaching a person how to behave based on important traits imbedded in laws and traditions. They need to learn the right thing to do, feel the need to act in that way, and have the will to act in the right way.

Character, in Greek, means to engrave. Sheryl O'Sullivan (2004) interprets this to mean that character traits are markings engraved inside us that push us to act in certain ways. Thus, character education is encouraging or engraving these certain traits in our students. Character Education is not only telling our students what they should become, but also telling them what they should never become. It is important to produce productive citizens and teaching student's core values and giving them opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge of these values is important in character education (Burmester 2001). All of these definitions of Character Education show that it is

important to teach a set of values to children to ensure that they use them to make decisions in their lives (Burmester 2001, O'Sullivan 2004).

The New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (2006) list six character traits that must be taught in schools. The coalition Character Counts (2004) has clearly defined six traits and defines a person of character as one who knows what is right and wrong and always tries to do what is right. A person of character also sets good examples and makes our world a better place (Character Counts 2004).

Character Education has been defined in many ways and the six traits have been laid out. Now that the definition of Character Education is understood, it is important to look at how to teach it to students.

Different Strategies and Programs

There are many different effective strategies and techniques to use when teaching character education. Teachers and students must go beyond the literal reading of the material and teach more conceptually. Students must learn about the traits to the extent that they will use them when making decisions (Weaver 1994).

Shawna Brynildssen (2003) argues that there are stages of reflection and response. The activities that are suggested with this strategy are discussion, debate, research, role-playing, and essay writing or journal writing. It is important to discuss issues to promote understanding of the social construction of meaning rather than just personal meaning. A good strategy is to have students write down thoughts and then share them with the class while trying to relate the discussion to their own lives. Brynildssen (2003) states that the next strategy is debate, which helps develop moral reflection. When students debate a position and then switch sides and advocate for the position they had imposed they find

more complex issues in the reading. Another strategy is for students to research more information about a character trait on line and in the library. They may find other characters that relate to their trait and can bring this information back to the classroom and share it with other students. Role-playing is also an effective strategy when teaching character education. It helps students relate and connect to the characters when they become involved in the conflict. According to Brynildssen (2003), the last strategy in this approach is journal keeping or essay writing. This is a good time for students to reflect on what they have learned and apply it to their lives. When teachers give good prompts, the students have a chance to further explore character traits. It is also important to take character education home. By sending home sheets to their parents explaining what the students are doing at school and providing them with opportunities to learn at home will only increase the students understanding of the character traits (Brynildssen 2003).

The Character Counts! Program (2004) has become an important program in teaching character education. This program was introduced in Nebraska and a survey shows that 85% of teachers reported an overall positive different in their students. There was an increase of the behaviors including; helping others and being truthful. Character Counts! stresses an importance of internalizing the six traits of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. When the behaviors are internalized there is an increase of moral behavior (Harms & Fritz 2001).

The Resolving Conflicts Creatively Program is designed is to incorporate character development into the regular curriculum. Students can look at issues in different nations and discuss what could be done to help. This helps reinforce the values of responsibility, caring, and respect. The Resolving Conflicts Creatively Program has

also been created in schools to reduce violence and form caring relationships (Lantieri 1995). This does not talk about the use of children's literature, but it can easily be incorporated into the program.

Gibbs and Earley (1996) discuss two strategies that they believe are effective. The students are to think about someone they admire and write down their good qualities. Then the traits are listed on the board and the students vote on their top ten list of good qualities. Then throughout the year, the students write in journals reflecting on character traits that have been portrayed in the books they read. If they think they have found a trait that belongs in the top ten list, they bring it up for a vote on if it should be included and if so, what trait it will be replacing.

The other strategy that Gibbs and Earley (1996) promote is writing the word *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* on the board, which is German for a sense of community. Then explain that this will help to establish community in the classroom and then ask the students to establish their classroom rules based on how they should behave towards others. Then while reading books with important traits in them, the students can add rules to their list based on what they learned from the books (Gibbs & Early 1996).

Gibbs & Early (1996) believe that is important to have a staff that is prepared to teach character education. Providing an inspiration speaker will help motivate teachers to promote core values in their classrooms. There should also be opportunities for honest reflection. It is important for teachers to display the character traits on a daily basis if they expect their students to learn them. It is important to not only read children's literature but also to provide opportunity to talk about their books and reflect. Gibbs and

Earley (1996) also said that it is important to visit character education program sites to constantly pick up on new strategies and share them with their colleagues.

Campoy (1997) has come up with four Metacognitive-moral strategies to use when teaching character education through children's literature. These strategies can be used at any grade level and if used enough, they will become internalized. The first strategy is Cause/Effect/Far-Reaching Effect. After reading a story, or part of a story, the teacher provides a cause and the student's come up with the effects and far-reaching effects. This promotes responsibility because students look at immediate consequences of actions and also future consequences of their actions. The next strategy Campoy (1997) suggests is Perspective Windows, which shows students how some events could be viewed from different perspectives. The students will have an understanding of how different people see things differently and will become more aware when making decisions. The Moral Dilemma Chart is the third strategy which consists of a four column chart consisting of identifying the moral dilemma, describing what the character did, what you would have done, and reflecting on your decision. The last strategy is called What's Your Perspective? In this strategy you must identify the issue, talk about the perspective of characters to the situation, and the values that produce certain perspectives. When teaching these four strategies it is important to accept all your students' views and to be patient when talking about values (Campoy 1997).

Phi Delta Kappa published an article that focused on why we should use children's literature to teach character education. It discusses using stories to create an attachment to do the moral thing, they provide good examples, and then help make sense of things (Character 2002). Children become engrossed in books and they seem to really

want the good guy to win. Stories, both fiction and nonfiction, provide students with role models to look up to. Books help to teach children the rules of our society. Knowing what is good and moral is more important than knowing a list of rules. Acting in moral behavior is much more than simply knowing what moral behavior is. It is important to good books, look deeper into stories, and focus on values. Phi Delta Kappa says that using journals is a good way to encourage higher level thinking (Character 2002). Journals can be a good way for students to organize their thought before discussing them in class. They can also be used as a way to communicate with the teacher and then the teacher can respond the student's thoughts. Another strategy according to Phi Delta Kappa is to ask the students to write down the most important quotation from the story and why it was important. Teachers can also use Bloom's Taxonomy to start discussions in class and encourage deeper thought. Graphic Organizers and Venn Diagrams can be used to talk about characters to important themes in the stories. Lastly, literature circles encourage students to share their thoughts in small groups (Character 2002, Gibbs and Earley 1994).

Edgington (2002) has written about four approaches used to teach character education. The first is values inculcation, which is simply telling students their important set of values. This can be used with children's literature where they read about events and can identify, understand, and apply, important character traits to their own lives. The next approach is values clarification, which involves students coming up with a list of important character traits. After reading books, students can add to their list and help define their own values. Value analysis is the third approach discussed in this article, which identifies and issue, talk about possible solutions, consider consequences of each,

and take appropriate action (Edgington 2002). Students can use literature to identify issues in the books and discuss alternative solutions to the problem. The last approach is moral reasoning, which is where the students receive situations from the teacher, and the students then have to make a decision and explain their decision. Teachers can use examples from literature to give to the students (Edgington 2002).

O'Sullivan (2004) talks about strategies to use with picture books and chapter books. When using picture books, students can write stories relating the character to their own lives. Venn Diagrams can also be used to compare good and bad character traits. Students can also find their favorite quote and use these quotes to lead class discussions. When using chapter books, students can make webs where they show good and bad character traits and keep journals that include quotes and their thoughts on the books and certain character traits (O'Sullivan 2004).

Using Newberry Medal Books is another strategy focusing on using children's literature to teach character traits (Leal 1999). The twelve steps to follow when using this strategy include; "1. Select the character traits to be evaluated. 2. Acquire a good working definition of each character trait. 3. Explain the process and how to use the three forms (running record, positive, and negative ranking forms). 4. Begin by discussing a familiar piece of literature that the class has already read and enjoyed. 5. Read aloud the first chapter of the familiar book and model your own thinking about specific character traits you see. 6. Continue reading aloud, but now ask students to raise their hands when they recognize a trait. 7. Ask students to write down traits as you are reading aloud. 8. Divide the class into groups of four to six. 9. Discuss group findings as a class. 10. When the entire book has been read, complete the ranking forms together. 11. Try the process with

another piece of literature. 12. A class debate can make a great final activity (Leal 1999 pp.245-7).”

Burmaster (2001) talks about four strategies that can be used to teach traits in children’s literature. The first is to identify a core value, which is when the students read a story, and respond to teacher prompts about key concepts. The next strategy is to explore value conflicts where the students respond to prompts that the teacher presents that focus on uncomfortable situations and how they could react. The third strategy is exploring feelings and developing empathy where the students answer questions based on the characters feelings. The last strategy is examining cultural norms where they tie the concepts of the story into global understandings (Burmaster 2001).

Gibbs & Earley (1994) believe that journal writing is a critical piece in teaching character education. This provides students with opportunities to reflect and express their feelings. It is also a place where students can organize their thoughts before participating in a class discussion. Teachers can either have the students create a free response or answer a prompt. It is important that teachers refrain from using value judgments or requiring students to share with the class (Gibbs & Earley 1994).

This literature review discusses several important strategies that can be used to teacher character education. The next section will focus on what types of books to choose to help teach character education.

What Books to Use

“Literary characters have almost the same potential for influencing the reader as real people with whom a reader might share a reading experience.” (Weaver 1994 pp. 33-34) Schools need to incorporate character education into their curriculum and one way to

do so effectively is to use children's literature (Bryan 2005). O'Sullivan (2004) claims that there are four characteristics to look at when choosing books to use: well-written books that contain moral dilemmas, books that are deep enough to discuss more than literal comprehension, books with characters that are the same age as the students that they can relate to, and books that cover a variety of cultures with boys and girls.

Laverick, a kindergarten teacher, was interviewed and asked her favorite books to use when teaching character education. She included The Ugly Duckling, The Story of Ruby Bridges, Swimmy, Verdi, and many others. Then she discussed strategies she used when teaching values to children. She looks at books with her students from a positive and negative perspective and they brainstorm ideas and try to apply things to their own lives. She also uses puppets to dramatize important scenes in stories. She teaches by example and she knows it is important for her to exemplify core values if she wants her students to learn them. She uses books in almost every lesson that she teaches and that helps to include character education throughout the day. She also has her students create their own books, which is a great way to assess their understanding of important character traits (ECT 2004).

Carol Otis Hurst (2002) believes that the best books to teach character education are the books in which the characters are neither completely good nor bad. It is important to focus on the motivations and result of their decision when looking at characters in books. Hurst suggests using Brave Irene, Curious George, Kevin Henkes' books, and The Elephants Child for teaching character education through picture books. You can also use non-fiction to teach character education. If the book is well written it will include the person's achievements as well as their faults because after all, no one is perfect. She

suggests using Jean Fritz's Early Thunder and Robert Cormier's The Chocolate War when teaching character education through novels.

Gibbs & Early (1996) have suggested using Charlotte's Web, Hatchet, and Number the Stars. These books provide opportunity for discussion of values and give children a basis on future decision-making.

Campoy (1997) has given many examples of books to use with his four Metacognitive strategies. When using the Cause/Effect/Far-Reaching Effect chart he suggests using Julie of the Wolves, Jumanji, Farmer Duck, A Chair for my Mother, and Iditarod Dream. When using Perspective Windows, Campoy suggests using Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears, The Crocodile and the Dentist, The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs, and Cat and Cat-face. If you want to use the Moral Dilemma Chart, it is suggested to use The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle, Catherine called Birdy, The Giver, Shiloh, and The Bracelet. The last chart is the Perspective Chart and Tuck Everlasting, James and the Giant Peach, Clueless, The Outsiders, and the Hundred Penny Box are suggested.

It is important to choose books with strong literary elements. The characters must become role models and relate to the students. The reading level, the thinking level, and the comprehension level must match the student's levels. The books must also fit the criteria of teaching values. The books must teach a theme and can be either a picture book or a chapter book. This particular article contains four pages of picture and chapter books focusing on specific values (Character 2002).

Bryan (2005) specifically focuses on the use of the brothers Grimm stories to teach character education. Fairy Tales are very popular among children and the tales from

the brothers Grimm provide students with morals that they can understand. The Frog Prince, Rumpelstiltskin, Rapunzel, Hansel and Gretel, Snow-white and Red-rose, and many others provide lessons that students can relate to. Some of the lessons include; keeping commitments, be friendly, evil does not prevail, consequences of disobedience, greed will get you nowhere, and the power of helping others. These fairy tales enrich the lives of children and are a good way to mold values (Bryan 2005).

Sanchez (1998) believes that another type of book that can be used to teach character education is hero stories. Using stories about heroes strike student interest and lead to good discussion and reflection about how the characters relate to every day life and decision-making. Milton Meltzer's biographies are great books to use to teach values. It is also important that you choose heroes from a variety of cultures, countries, and sexes (Sanchez 1998).

Gibbs & Early(1994) believe that it is important to teach many genres of children's literature to explore values. They suggest using contemporary realistic fiction because this gives students an opportunity to read about characters with problems they can relate to. They suggest using Shiloh, Scorpions, and One-Eyed Cat. They also believe that historical fiction can be used to teach character traits. This helps to bring the past to life and students can learn about their heritage and also the heritage of fellow classmates. They suggest using I Am Regina and Number the Stars. Modern fantasy can be used by developing analogies to real situations and a good book to use is Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH. The last genre is picture storybooks, which are good for discussions. They recommend using The Golden Coin, My Friend Jacob, Rose Blance, and It's Mine.

There are thousands of books to choose from and whether you choose fiction or non-fiction, the most important thing is to choose books that are interesting and are relevant to your student's wants and needs. Using many different types of books may be the best strategy because students will be able to learn character education from the perspectives of many different people and they will realize that characters in fiction and non-fiction all possess character traits that we are looking for and also ones to avoid (Character 2002). Also, by using different types of literature, you will provide yourself with more activity opportunities in comparing and contrasting and different ways to analyze the story (Gibbs & Earley 1994).

As the literature review shows, much research has been completed on the topic of character education and the use of children's literature to teach traits. Character Education had faded into the back burner, but has recently become a major focus in schools today because of the traumatic events that have happened in this country. The need for character education has reentered schools and it cannot be ignored (Bryan 2005). Administrators and teachers need to incorporate character education into their curriculum to help develop moral students that will become the leaders of our future. The NJCCCS (2006) and Character Counts Coalition (2004) suggest that the six character traits taught should be: fairness, caring, respect, trustworthiness, citizenship, and responsibility. Finally, research suggests that many strategies and the use of a variety of books are the best way to reach your students (Gibbs and Earley 1996).

Chapter Three

Context and Methodology

The first section of chapter three describes the district and the school in which the study takes place. I also describe the subjects that are involved in my study. The second section addresses the general methodology and the research paradigm. I explain my timeline and the materials and resources that I use. The next section focuses on the data sources that I collect. The last section discusses the analysis and interpretation of my data.

Description of District and School

I conducted this study at the George L. Hess Educational Complex in Mays Landing, New Jersey. The town is located in Atlantic County and there are 1450 students in the school. The school houses Preschool and second through fifth grades. The school is part of the Hamilton Township school district which is made up of two other elementary schools and one high school. All four schools are public schools and they are made up of mixed student ethnicity. The student population is sixty percent White, twenty-four percent Black, twelve percent Hispanic, five percent Asian, and one percent Native American. Thirty-three percent of the student population is also eligible for free lunch which is six percent higher than the state average (GreatSchools Inc. 2007).

Subjects or Participants

The study will be completed in an inclusive fourth grade classroom with 18 students. A special education teacher and a regular education teacher are in the room for

the full day and there is also a full time one-on-one paraprofessional. However, for this study, I will be the only adult administering the unit. The students that I will be using for my research does not comprise or make up the full homeroom. I will be completing my study in the Language Arts class. There are 4 classified students and one student with a 504 plan. Only one of the classified students joins us for Language Arts from another homeroom. The rest of the students are regular education. There are no gifted and talented students participating in my study. The students are all anonymous and were given a number instead of writing their name on anything. There were no pictures or recordings taken and each parent signed a permission slip stating that they were allowing their child to participate in this study. Any names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

Description of Methodology

For my research study, I have decided to collect qualitative data. Qualitative data is any type of data gathered that is not numerical. I am not completing statistical analyses of numbers; therefore, the data I am collecting is qualitative. This type of data will help me to find ways to teach character education using children's literature. The particular research paradigm is teacher research. According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993), teacher research is a "systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work (pp. 23-24)." As noted before I am taking my own notes and making my own observations and analyzing what the students say and write. My teacher research is also empirical in that it includes collecting and interpreting the data from journals, oral inquiries, and classroom studies (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1993).

Timeline, Materials, & Resources

I conducted this study in the spring of 2007 in my student teacher placement. It required 40 minutes a day, 5 days a week for 6 weeks to implement the study. Each week focuses on one of the six character education around which I have designed my study around. Those six traits are fairness, respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, caring, and citizenship. Each week they do two activities. I look at the information collected on these days and analyze what they understood from the story and how they can apply it to every day life. Each week I look to see what knowledge they have on each character trait. I look for specifics that were outlined in the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (2006) and the Character Counts coalition (2004). I have decided to use these specific traits, because I am conducting my plan in a New Jersey classroom. These six traits include trustworthiness, caring, respect, citizenship, responsibility, and fairness.

The first trait is trustworthiness and there are four terms that they use to help define trustworthiness, which include integrity, honesty, reliability, and loyalty. The Character Counts coalition (2004) says that a person should stand up for what they believe in, be honorable, guard their reputation, tell the truth, be sincere, keep their word, stand by loved ones, and to be a good friend. If you are trustworthy, there are also things you should not do. They include to not do anything wrong, do not lose heart, do not lie, cheat or steal, and do not betray someone's trust.

The next trait is respect and the four terms the Character Counts coalition (2004) use to define respect is the Golden Rule, tolerance and acceptance, nonviolence, and courtesy. The coalition says that you should treat others the way you want to be treated, be tolerant of others, resolve disagreements, use good manners, and be polite. They do

not want you to manipulate others, abuse others, use threats or physical force, or use putdowns.

The third trait that Character Counts (2004) and NJCCCS (2006) find important is responsibility. They use duty, accountability, pursuing excellence, and self-control to define the term. They believe that you should know your duty, accept responsibility for your actions, set a good example, do your best, and take charge of your own life. They do not want you to make excuses or blame others.

The fourth trait is fairness, which is defined by justice and openness. The Character Counts coalition (2004) wants you to be fair and treat people equally, be impartial and careful. They do not want you to take more than what you deserve or take advantage of others.

The fifth trait is caring which is defined by charity and concern for others. The Character Counts coalition (2004) wants you to be compassionate, kind, loving, altruistic, and charitable. They do not want you to act in mean, cruel, or insensitive ways.

The last trait is citizenship, which is defined by doing your share and respecting the authority and the law. The Character Counts coalition (2004) wants people to be good citizens and neighbors. They think it is important to volunteer, play by the rules, obey authority and honor democracy. They do not want you to be disrespectful or deceitful to others (New Jersey 2006).

The first day of each week a prior knowledge assessment is administered. It asks about their prior knowledge on the particular trait of the week. The same day, a fiction book is read focusing on that trait. Day two consists of an activity or lesson based around the fiction book. The third day is a reading of a non-fiction book based on the particular

character trait of the week. Day four is an activity based on the non-fiction book. Day five is a review and a post-knowledge assessment of the trait. Over the course of the six weeks, I read 12 books, conducted 12 lessons and administered 6 pre and 6 post assessments.

A poster was also created and it was broken into six columns, one for each trait, and eighteen rows, one for each student. Each week, the students were encouraged to nominate and write awards for their classmates whenever they displayed the character trait of the week. At the end of each week I would see which student displayed the most character and they won a prize.

Data Sources

I am using anecdotal note taking, a teacher journal, teacher and student observations, pre and post student assessments, written work, and student responses and artifacts as primary sources of data. Student artifacts include posters created weekly and play scripts. My teacher journal contains my own reflections on how I thought the lesson went. I included positive aspects and negative aspects from my perspective. I also included my observations as well as those of the students. Their pre and post assessments contained the same basic questions so I compared their answers on their pre test to that of their post test. Also throughout each week, they completed worksheets about the specific character trait. I reviewed these worksheets and noted anything that was surprising or important to this study. I also used our class discussions about the literature as a data source. Their input and opinions of the stories is very important in how effective the book was. Each week, the students also created a poster defining the specific character trait. I reviewed those definitions and looked to see if they reappeared on their post tests. They

also gave each other awards for showing character and I looked at the descriptions of their awards to see what they had been doing. Lastly, I looked at the plays they put on at the end of each week to see if they learned something by the comments or interest in the play.

Data Analysis

After looking at the data I have collected, I separated the data into each character trait and end up with six piles of data. I analyzed each pile by itself because some traits may be able to be taught with children's literature and others may not, so it is important to look at each trait separately.

Then I took the data from the prior knowledge assessment and noted what each student knew before I had started the week's unit on a specific trait. Then I looked at my notes from each day which included observations, student's remarks and conversations, artifacts and anything else seemed relevant to my study. I recorded how involved the students were, how much they enjoyed the lesson, and what they learned from the lesson.

I also looked at the work students produced during the week. I looked at how well they complete their work and how much time was spent on the projects. I analyzed the activities to see if they were on the right level for the students and if relevant and interesting for the students. I also looked at the books to see if the students enjoyed the stories and also understood the content on more than just a literal level.

The last pieces I looked at are their post assessments. I compared their answers to their pre test for more in-depth, thoughtful, and intelligent. After looking at this information, I determined whether using children's literature to teach character traits provided them with a further understanding of the traits than they had before.

Chapter Four

Findings

This chapter is devoted to reviewing the data that was collected from the character education unit that was implemented. Student work will be looked at to determine the difference between their pre and post assessments of each trait and their progress over the six weeks. I selected a random sample of pre and post test and have included a chart showing their responses. Each trait is examined separately and in each section I have included an overview of the activities that were completed during that trait. Also with each trait I have included evidence to support any statements I made about the impact that the program had on the students. The teacher researcher journal will provide insight into what worked and what did not work and what the student's reactions were to different activities and children's books. The poster with the awards will also be used because I will look at what the students wrote about each other and if their knowledge and understanding of each trait became clearer over time. All of this will be discussed with each individual trait. I will close the chapter by tying everything together and discussing my conclusions.

Review Data

Fairness

I started my unit the week of NJ Ask Testing. I knew the students would have a stressful morning and hopefully my lessons would help them to unwind. The first trait that I taught was fairness. I did not give them much background information, I only told

them that they were going to fill out a worksheet. I created a folder for each student and put a number from 1-18 on them. Each student was assigned a number and they received the corresponding folder. The pre-test was located on the first page and consisted of four questions. The first question asked them what fairness is, then how you are fair, then why it is important to be fair and finally a scenario was given and I asked what they would do in the given situation. I noticed early that some students were frustrated. They did not know what to write and many voiced their opinions. I simply told them to do the best they could do and I just wanted to know what they knew about the topic. When they finished, I collected the folders and told them that they could either sit on the floor or stay at their seat while I read a story. I read Eyes of the Dragon by Margaret Leaf. The students really enjoyed the story and were anxious to discuss it the next day. One student's response was, "I did not think I would like it because the cover was boring and it sounded boring, but it was really good in the end." Many students had a good idea of what fairness was right from the beginning. Student #1 wrote on her pre-test that "Fairness is when you give someone some of yours to be equal." However, some students knew said they knew what fairness meant, but did not know how to say it. For example, Student #11 wrote, "Fairness is when you are fair." It was clear that further explanation of the term would have to be provided. The week on fairness continued the next day with a discussion of the book and also a discussion about fairness. As a class, a poster was created with the definition on it. Questions were prompted and presented to the students but for the most part, they created the definition on their own. Then they completed a worksheet about fair and unfair situations. Student #11 said, that she "felt disappointed when her mom left her out of stuff." Student #12 said, "I feel frustrated when I miss my

gymnastics class because I have too much homework.” Student #14 said, “I feel disappointed when someone doesn’t keep their promise.” They showed me a lot about their lives and they helped me to understand where they are coming from and what I should focus my lessons on. The next day they responded to a journal prompt that I created on a power point. A situation was given and they were to respond with what they would do in the given situation. After reviewing their journals, it seemed that they all knew what the right thing to do was. Unfortunately, some wrote what the right thing to do was, but they would have done something differently to make the situation work to their benefit. I realized that you can teach them to do the right thing, but unless they want to do that and be a good person, they will act in best interest for themselves. The next activity that was completed under fairness was responding to statements. A statement was read and they had to decide whether or not the situation was fair. They had a double-sided card that said “yes” on one side and “no” on the other. They thoroughly enjoyed this activity and they were really engaged in it. When the students held up their card I called on a few to justify their answers. Even the students that did not agree with the majority had good reasons for their answer. This was a great activity and really showed that the students were learning and thinking critically. The other story that I read with fairness was I am Rosa Parks by Rosa Parks. When we discussed the story, they were really engaged and I asked questions and had them answer them. Preparing questions ahead of time was really beneficial and there was much more involvement than if it were only discussion. Another project that they really enjoyed that taught them a lot was a group project. Each group received a slip of paper with one aspect of fairness on it. Then each group had to create a poster around that aspect. When they were finished, they presented

their posters. They learned a lot during this project and they all showed fairness by working together well. The last day of fairness was the post test and a play. In the beginning of the week, students signed up for the play and received the script. They had opportunities to practice during the week and the final day would be their performance. They did an excellent job and they helped to reiterate the definition and meaning of fairness to the class. Then each student received the post test. It contained a story that they had to read and then questions following it regarding fairness. There was a lot of improvement from the pretest to the post test. Student #14 said, "A prejudiced student is not fair because they don't get to know them and they judge them on how they act and look." Student #2 said, "its not fair to decide you don't like a person before you get to know them." These are really great answers coming from the group of students that I was working with. I really felt that they had learned a lot over the past week. Then I gave out the award to the student who had the most fairness awards. The award went to Student #17. They class applauded him and were very happy for him. He had received eight awards over the course of five days. One of the awards was about sharing a pop tart. Another was for listening to what others were saying. Another said "accepting differences in others." These awards really showed a mature side to my students. The chart below shows a sample of the student's responses to the question "What is fairness?" on their pretest and how it compares to their post test. This chart shows that there was an increase in their understanding of what fairness meant and what you can do to be fair.

Table 1 Fairness

| Student number | Pre-test response | Post-test Response |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2 | "Fairness is helping someone with a helping hand." | "Fairness is when you are nice to other people and take turns. You also follow the rules." |
| 12 | "Fairness is a nice thing to do." | "Fairness is when you give someone some of yours to be equal." |
| 18 | "Fairness is getting good grades and going to school." | "Fairness is by treating each equally." |
| 6 | "Fairness is to be nice and fair to people." | "Fairness is when you work together and take turns." |
| 3 | "Fairness is when you take turns." | "Fairness is when you compromise and get to know people before you judge them and accept each other." |

Caring

The next trait was caring and the first thing the students did was take the pre-test. Many students defined caring as helping someone or taking care of someone. This showed that they may have a general idea of the word caring, but time would have to be spent on further understanding of the definition and application of the meaning. I also read The Wednesday Surprise by Eve Bunting. I really enjoy this story, but it did not go over as well as I would have liked. Many of the boys were disinterested and the book was a little below their grade level. The book had good content but would work much better with a younger grade level. When we created the poster of caring, they were able to provide a lot of insight. They were able to cover all aspects and I adjusted them slightly for the poster. A few students summarized the story and we talked about how caring was

shown in the story. Then they completed two worksheets. The first one was completed as a class and they talked about what was happening in the picture. One picture was a boy who had fallen on his bike. Student #13 said "I would give him a band aid. Also, I would call for help and take him to his house." The second one they completed on their own. The next day started with a journal prompt. They always complain when it comes to writing, but they settle down and get to work. The prompt was about an animal that was being taunted by a group of kids. The question asked what each student would do if they saw this situation. Many wrote that they would yell to stop, however some wrote that they would not do anything if the kids were bigger than them. This shows that the students do not feel safe in their own neighborhood. I explained to them that the right thing to do would be to tell an adult to get the kids to stop that way they would not be putting themselves in harms way. I chose Florence Nightingale to read to them but because the story was long, I only read selected parts of it. Most of the students had no idea who Florence Nightingale was and it was really hard for them to follow the book I was reading because it jumped around a bit. The book was a good choice, but I needed more time to read it so they would have a background on the character. Then we had a short discussion about men and women who are caring and helpful. They also wrote cards thanking these people for what they have done. Many chose community helpers and the armed forces which were great ideas. However, many students did not know what to write besides the words "thank you." Next time, I would create one card from the whole class and incorporate everyone's ideas into one card thanking a group of people. The next day they completed a journal prompt first. This was about a boy who was getting presents from his grandmother that he did not like. They were to write if he should say something

or just accept the presents. This journal had mixed results. Some student said that he should politely tell her that he does not like the presents and suggest some idea for next time. Student #1 said, "He can give them to charity if he doesn't like them." Then I broke the students up into pairs and gave them a biography of a famous person that is caring. Unfortunately, the students had not heard of many of the people and they were struggling with the comprehension. With some help, they were able to put together a short skit. Although they had a hard time completing the project, the end result was great. Next time, I will choose biographies that are easier to read. We closed the day by going around the room and letting each student give an example of community service that shows caring. This was a great idea and I was pleasantly surprised by the suggestions they gave. Responses included cleaning up their block, donating old clothes, donating food, having a sale to raise money for a good cause, or participating in events for a good cause. Student #13 actually signed up for a walk for autism and raised over \$500. On the last day of caring, the first thing we did was the play. They really enjoyed it and were able to do it with minimal support from me. I gave them time to rehearse but they did not need a lot of direction. I was very impressed with the play that this group of students put on. They also completed their post test where they read another story and answered questions. Student #13 wrote that caring was "helping and thinking of others." Student #7 wrote, "Caring is when you are thoughtful to a person." The students really seemed to grasp the idea that caring was about thinking of others and doing things for them to make their lives better. Then I gave out the award for the caring person of the week. Unfortunately, the participation in this has dropped because many students forget to fill the awards out and they complained that they were not getting awards and they were not

going to write them for other people. Here is a chart of the pre test and posttest responses to the question “What is caring?” As you can see, the students clearly had a greater understanding of the word and were able to apply it and relate it to their own lives.

Table 2 Caring

| Student Number | Pretest Response | Posttest Response |
|----------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 13 | “Caring is helping.” | “Caring is helping and thinking of others. By saying thank you and giving to people who are in need.” |
| 7 | “Caring is when you care.” | “Caring is when you are thoughtful to other people.” |
| 6 | “Caring is to care for people.” | “Caring is when you take care of other people and their stuff.” |
| 3 | “Caring is when you help someone.” | “Caring is when you help someone out and expect nothing in return.” |
| 2 | “Caring is helping.” | “Caring is when you can excuse me. You can help pick up litter on the road. Shows caring for the earth.” |

Trustworthiness

The next week, the trait was trustworthiness and the students took the pre-test before we started discussing anything. Student #12 wrote, “Trustworthiness is when you tell a secret and they don’t tell anyone.” Student #13 wrote, “Trustworthiness is being honest and telling the truth.” Student #2 said, “Trustworthiness is when you tell someone you are going to do something and you do it.” These three responses were the best responses in the group. Most of the other students said that trustworthiness is when you trust someone. It was clear that they had exposure to the word and had a general idea of what it meant, but had trouble putting it into words. I also read Sam, Bangs, and

Moonshine which was another book that I really liked. There were mixed reviews with this book. Some students became bored because it was a longer book but there were some students who clapped when it was over because they enjoyed it so much. About half way through the book student #7 said, “Ugh, is this over yet?” To my surprise student #15 shot back and said, “Shh, I like it.” Unfortunately, you can not please everyone and because the book relayed the message I was trying to portray, I thought it was a good choice. The next day we discussed the story and even the students who did not like it the day before were participating and actually eager to talk about the story. Then we completed the poster defining trustworthiness. Many students had a lot of prior knowledge and were able to contribute to the definition. I found that the students tell stories about how they or someone else was trustworthy. I took what they told me and we discussed how we can use that to write our definition. Then I put the students in partners and they each wrote about how their partner is trustworthy. They were very sincere with their responses and wrote some very nice things about their partners. Student #8 wrote that, “Student #18 was trustworthy because his desk is next to mine and he doesn’t take anything off my desk.” This was the last day before Spring Break and I was nervous that they would forget what they learned when they came back, but when they came back they responded to a journal prompt and gave great answers. The journal prompt was about a girl who found a sweater she liked in the lost and found at school. She was trying to decide whether or not to take it even though it wasn’t hers. Many of the students were able to make the right decision and say that she should not take the sweater because it did not belong to her and if she did take it she would not be trusted. Then we did an activity where each student had a partner and one person is blindfolded and the other person has

to give them directions so they can get from one side of the room to the other while getting around obstacles. This was my favorite activity of the whole unit and the students responded very well to it. They gave great directions to their partners and they asked to do it again almost every day after that for a week. The next day started with my reading of Clara Barton. They really liked the story but it was long so I could only read parts of it. Luckily, they had some prior knowledge of who Clara Barton was and were able to follow the story. They were also able to relate the story to their own lives because the Red Cross still exists today and they were able to talk about how it helps millions of people. They talked about Hurricane Katrina and 9-11. It was really great to see them connect with the story on a personal level. Then we did some scenarios but many were too honest and some said if they found money on the ground in a store that they would keep it. However, I began to ask them what the right thing to do was and they knew that they should turn it in. It is important to let them know you want them to answer with the right thing to do, not necessarily what they would do. They took their post test the next day by reading a story and answering questions about it. They read The Boy Who Cried Wolf and although almost all of them had previously heard the story, they still enjoyed it and understood the moral of the story. Then a group of students performed a play on trustworthiness. However, this group did not rehearse as much as they should have and I had to step in a few times to keep them on track. This made it confusing for the audience and did not go as well as the previous plays. We closed the section on trustworthiness by going around the room and saying one thing we learned. Everyone was able to contribute something positive to the conversation. They showed a lot of growth and there was an

improvement on the post test. The chart below shows 5 students responses to the question, "What is trustworthiness?"

Table 3 Trustworthiness

| Student Number | Pre Test Response | Post Test Response |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | "Trustworthiness is when you trust someone." | "Trustworthiness is when you can rely on someone and know they won't lie." |
| 15 | "Trustworthiness is to earn peoples trust." | "Trustworthiness is when you tell the truth and not lie. To do what you say you are going to do." |
| 8 | "Trustworthiness is telling the trust." | "Trustworthiness is when you keep your word and do something when you say your will." |
| 4 | "Trustworthiness is when your parents like trust you." | "Trustworthiness is when you believe that someone is telling the truth and you keep you word." |
| 5 | "Trustworthiness is when you trust somebody very good." | "Trustworthiness is being honest and telling the truth." |

Respect

The fourth trait that was covered was respect and the first thing they did was take the pre-test. Student #5 wrote that respect means, "To treat others the way you want to be treated." Most of the students were able to write something that really defined respect and it was clear they had been taught the definition before. Then I read Mrs. Katz and Tush and they students really liked this story. It was short enough to keep their interest and it was about celebrating a Jewish holiday. One of the students was able to chime in and tell the class more about the holiday and how he celebrates it. This was a great book because

the students were able to relate it to their own lives, especially the one Jewish student. The next day we had a great discussion about the book and everyone talked about their own holidays and traditions with their families. They all showed a respect for other traditions by listening to and embracing what their peers were saying. Then we made our poster with the definition of respect. After our discussion about the book, they were really able to contribute some good things to include on our poster. They also completed a worksheet where they learned that you should not only have respect for other people, but also for yourself. The next day they worked on a journal prompt about littering and what the right thing to do in that situation is. Many of them said that they should ask the person that littered to pick up the trash and throw it away. Then they partnered up and interviewed their partner. They were to find similarities and differences and all came to the conclusion that different does not mean bad. I showed them that is it good that everyone is different and they all agreed. Then I read The Value of Respect which was a story about Abraham Lincoln and what he did in his life that earned him respect. This was a good story because it was on their grade level and they knew about Abraham Lincoln and were able to follow the story and stay interested in it. The next day they did an activity that would bring home the meaning of respect and how important it is. They wrote about who their role model was and why they respected them. Many of them had some great responses. Student #17 wrote, "My role model is my dad. He is my role model because he shows respect for other people. I respect him and he respects me. That is why my dad is my role model." Student #7 wrote, "My role model is my uncle because he is just like me. I respect him because he likes football and he teaches me how to play better." Student #14 wrote, "My role model is Miss Quinn. She is my role model because

she's really nice and understanding. She is also respectful to everyone." This really lifted my spirits and reiterates the fact that teaching how to be respectful must go hand in hand with showing respect. The last day of respect was focused on the post test and the play. For the post-test, they read a story and then answered questions about respect. Student #4 said that you show respect in school by "listening to the teacher and using good manners." Student #14 wrote, "Respect is when you don't tease or be rude to someone and to treat other people kindly even if they are different." Student #10 wrote, "Respect is treating other the way you want to be treated." When they completed the post test, a group of students put on the play. I made sure to tell the audience to be respectful because the last play did not go very well. This one went much better. The cast was well rehearsed and the audience was well behaved. This play was a success and helped to provide closure to the topic for the week. Then I gave out the respect award. I was pleasantly surprised to see that there were a lot of awards for the week and there was actually a three way tie for first. Their pretest and posttest answers also showed a great deal of improvement. I picked 5 students randomly and charted their response to "What is respect?"

Table 4 Respect

| Student Number | Pretest Response | Posttest Response |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 7 | "Respect is when you are not disrespectful." | "Respect is not being mean and listening to your teachers." |
| 10 | "Respect is when you care for someone else but yourself." | "Respect is when you say please and thank you. To treat others the way you want to be treated." |
| 16 | "Respect is when you be good." | "Respect is to have manners, listen to the teachers, and respecting |

| | | |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | | everyone's opinion." |
| 14 | "Respect is to not be rude." | "Respect is when you don't tease or be ruse to someone and to treat other people kindly even if they are different." |
| 14 | "Respect is when you don't splat out what you think about someone." | "Respect is when you treat others the way you want to be treated." |

Responsibility

The fifth trait was responsibility and like all the others, it started with the pre-test. Student #1 defined responsibility as "taking care of the things you are supposed to." For the most part, all of the students said responsibility was when you do something. It seemed that they had a broad understanding of the word, but more clarification was necessary. I read A Days Work by Eve Bunting which was another book I really liked. The students also seemed to enjoy it and because it was a shorter story, it was able to hold their attention. The next day we created our poster on responsibility and they had a little trouble with this. I had to present different scenarios to get them to understand the meaning and aspects of responsibility. We did two worksheets, one focusing on school responsibility and the other focusing on home responsibility. Many of them showed that they had responsibilities at home and there were consequences when things did not get done. They seemed to understand the importance of their responsibility and then we related it to a larger scale to show that is it important for everyone to do their part. We also discussed the story and the students talked about their parents and their jobs and that responsibility. Again, it was great for the students to relate this to their own lives. On the third day, they did a journal prompt about a father that promised to take his son out but he had to work late the night before and was very tired. Many of the students said they

would let their fathers sleep, but a few said that if their dad promised, they should follow through. In this situation, I can see both points of view and in the future I would not use this journal prompt because it is too general. Then I had the students think about their pet at home or think of a dream pet. They listed all the responsibilities of their pet and what would happen if they did not take care of them. Many students had pets but did not realize everything that went into caring for a pet. This was another great activity because they were able to relate to it and see the importance of being responsible. Then I read the story of Harriet Tubman and her commitment to freeing the slaves. The students had already read a story about Harriet Tubman, so this was just a refresher to have a good discussion the following day. The next day we had a great discussion about Harriet Tubman and what a hero she was and how she assumed the responsibility of freeing slaves and she worked hard to accomplish her goal. Then the students were broken up into groups of four and create a pamphlet that would be given to a new student to the school that outlined the rules and their responsibility as a students. This was another activity they enjoyed and it really made them think about what their responsibility was as a student so they could tell someone else. On the final day focusing on responsibility, they read a story and answered questions about responsibility. Student #7 wrote, "Responsibility is to do good with out being told." Student #14 wrote, "Responsibility is when you don't lie about doing something wrong." These students view responsibility differently, but both are ideas that we covered and I was surprised that both aspects were addressed. Then the students performed the play. Despite the fact that there were more students in the play than in the audience, they till did a fantastic job and kept the attention of the audience. The results of their pretest and post test response to "What is

responsibility?” are shown below. You will notice again the increase in knowledge from the pre to the post test.

Table 5 Responsibility

| Student Number | Pre Test Response | Post Test Response |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3 | “Responsibility is when you can be depended on.” | “Responsibility is when I do everything I am supposed to without being told.” |
| 4 | “Responsibility is to like clean up your toys.” | “Responsibility is to prove that you can do the things you are told to do.” |
| 18 | “Responsibility is to use good manners.” | “Responsibility is when you can be depended on.” |
| 11 | “Responsibility is when you can trust someone.” | “Responsibility is to do your chores and things people want you to do.” |
| 10 | “Responsibility is when you do good things.” | “Responsibility is when you do something and do it right away without being asked.” |

Citizenship

The sixth and final trait was citizenship. The students took their last pre-test of the unit. I believed this to be the trait that would need the most instruction and I was proved right. Student #11 wrote, “Citizenship is when you help other people.” While this is true, it is not very specific and it more a definition for the word caring. Student #1 gave the best definition and wrote, “Citizenship is helping your neighborhood and protecting the earth. After the students completed their pre-test, I read City Green. This was another lengthy book at least for them, but they really enjoyed this book and were anxious to see how it would end. I could tell they would have a lot to say the next day. The following day we created our poster on citizenship and I had to help a lot with this poster. Many students were only thinking in specific terms and needed to be more general. After a

lengthy discussion, we came up with a solid definition. Then we discussed the story. Many of the students were inspired by the young girl who created a garden in the middle of a city block. We brainstormed simple things they could do that would have the same impact. The next day the students were put in groups again and were instructed to make a travel brochure about their town or a made up town. They were to highlight the main attractions of their community to try and get people to want to visit. A few groups made up towns, but the groups that made their brochure based on their town came up with a lot of great ideas. This helped them to realize that there are many great things right here in their community and they need to make sure they do their part to keep it that way. When they completed and presented their brochures, I read A Picnic in October. While the students enjoyed the story, the discussion on the following day needed to be prompted. They did not understand in the beginning how to tie it into citizenship. I explained that the people in the story were so thankful to be living in this country, they celebrated the Statue of Liberty which is an important symbol in our country. When we finished this discussion, they took a quiz about some historical facts. I was very surprised by their responses. Student #17 wrote thought the symbols on the flag stood for “stuff”. Many students had no idea what the name of our national anthem was or what holiday commemorated our country’s independence. This was shocking and I took this opportunity to answer all of these questions and make sure the students knew the basic facts about the history of our country and how it is run today. On the final day of the unit, they read a story and took their post-test. I was unpleasantly surprised at how little they wrote for the definition of citizenship. Many wrote that it was only doing good things for the community. I made sure to reemphasize the true meaning of the word and provided

closure to the unit by giving an overview of the importance of character education. Their last pretest and post test chart is shown below. I selected 5 students response to “What is citizenship?”

Table 6 Citizenship

| Student Number | Pre Test Response | Post Test Response |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5 | “Citizenship is to be a citizen.” | “Citizenship is to do good things for your country.” |
| 9 | “Citizenship is when you are a good person.” | “Citizenship is when you care about your country and vote.” |
| 6 | “Citizenship is when you show it.” | “Citizenship is when you help the environment and stuff.” |
| 11 | “Citizenship is when you help someone with something.” | “Citizenship is caring for your community.” |
| 15 | “Citizenship is to pick up trash and litter.” | “Citizenship to take care of your environment and your community.” |

Conclusion

Overall, I was happy with the way the unit went and felt they learned a lot. I was reassured of this assumption because our class won the Manners Matter Most contest for fourth grade. There is a contest each month where the related arts teachers vote on the class with the best manners and over the course of the three months that I implemented the unit, my class won the contest twice beating out the other thirteen fourth graders. This was a tremendous honor and the class was very pleased with themselves. I also saw a change in behavior in the classroom. A lot of awards were being written and overall the students were more polite to each other and the teachers. One of the girls in my class befriended a special education student in the self-contained class with cerebral palsy. The

boy was new to the school and had a hard time finding friends. He was pretty content spinning around in circles for the whole recess, but one student in my class took him under her wing and made sure he interacted with other kids during recess. I was very proud of her and encouraged others to follow in her footsteps. For the most part, the stories that I read were appropriate and the students enjoyed them and learned a lot. However, as I mentioned before a few of the stories were long and one or two were a little below grade level and too juvenile. There was also an increase in knowledge in the definition of the traits because the students were able to write more on the post-test than on the pre-test. After reviewing the data, I can say with confidence that the integration of children's literature and supplemental activities into a character education unit increased their understanding of the six character traits.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Implications

This chapter is dedicated to a summary of my findings, conclusions and implications of the study, as well as suggestions for future research. I begin by summarizing my study and what I found to be significant data in answering my big question about character education and using children's literature. Then I talk about my conclusions and implications of the study beyond my particular study. I discuss the implications and conclusions about using children's literature to teach character education. I also discuss what this means for the teaching of character education. Finally, I conclude by making suggestions for future research in this area.

Summary of Study and Findings

My research topic is about using children's literature to teach character education. The first thing that I focused on after completing the literature review was creating a unit based about the six selected character traits and selecting children's literature that would help teach those traits. After creating my unit and choosing my books, I implemented it in a fourth grade classroom. I spent one week on each trait, supplemented with activities, two read alouds, journal prompts, and instructional activities. I also conducted a pre-test and a post-test to determine if there was any increase in their knowledge of the trait after one week of instruction. I found that the majority of the students were able to generate more developed answers describing aspects of the trait after being taught. In chapter 4, I went into much detail about specific student responses to the pre and post-tests as well as

their comments and opinions stated in class. Overall, I found that the students enjoyed the unit and learned a lot about the character traits. They also gave awards to each other complimenting them when a trait was displayed. This showed that not only were they understanding the information being taught, they were also applying that information to their daily lives. There was an increase in acceptance in the classroom and an overall positive atmosphere. They really took what they were taught to heart and their change in attitude and behavior was apparent.

Conclusions and Implications of the Study

I taught this unit to a fourth grade class; however the majority of the literature that I chose was on a lower level. I found that in many cases the literature was too juvenile and students seemed somewhat little bored with the material. With a more appropriate selection of books, I believe that the students would have been even more connected with the stories and also the lessons I was trying to convey. I believe that using children's literature was a great way to teach character education. Hearing about other students and how they displayed the certain character trait showed students how they could use it in every day life. Sometimes simply telling a student how to do something right is not enough. However, by using children's literature, they were able to see the character trait in use and could make connections to their own lives and apply it. I do not believe that this study would have worked if I only read a book to my students. These books were supplemented with many activities, journal prompts, plays, worksheets, and discussions that helped to enhance the message that was being conveyed in the story. I believe that when all of these elements compliment each other, they can really change the way students view the world and their place in it. These stories empowered my students and

showed them that with hard work and the daily use of these character traits, they will be respected and can do anything they want. It showed them that kindness, telling the truth, and being a good person can go a long way in this world. I believe that these lessons instilled important values in my students that they will be able to take with them for the rest of their lives. I also believe that character education is not something that should be taught 40 minutes a day, 5 days a week, for 6 weeks. These values should be taught, reinforced, and used 365 days a year and 24 hours a day. They will not last unless parents, teachers, and peers are reinforcing the use of these traits and encouraging the students to continue to use these values every day. Character education is something that is sometimes overlooked in a child's life. Many times the parents leave it to the teachers and the teachers leave it to the parents. If nobody takes the responsibility to teach these values, they will get neglected and the children are the ones who suffer. We all need to work together to instill these values in today's youth so they can become fair, responsible, respected, trustworthy, and caring citizens of society.

Suggestions for Future Research

After completing my study, there were many things that I looked back on and was really happy with the way they went. However, there were also a few things that I would have changed. First of all, it is very important that the literature that you use is grade appropriate. For the most part, mine was fine but there were a few books that I would have liked to change. Although they worked and conveyed the message, in looking back I would have chosen a different text in some cases. I would also change my pre-test and post-test to be a little more similar. The only common question on my pre-test and post-test was asking "What is (the character trait)?" I would suggest that the pre and post-test

be more similar so you have more hard evidence to compare. I would also rehearse the plays more. The students usually practiced on their own and on the day of the play; consequently, it was a little unorganized and I had to direct them a lot. I enjoyed the plays and I would not take them out, I would just dedicate more time to rehearsing for them. As long as teachers are motivated to teach character education, the students will benefit from it.

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APPENDIX

Pre-Test

Number _____ Date _____

Fairness
Pre-Test

1. What is Fairness?

2. Why is it important to be fair?

3. How are you fair?

4. At recess, the third graders were playing the fourth graders in a game of kickball. The third graders were up first. They scored three runs. Then it was the fourth graders turn. They also scored three runs. On their second turn up, the third graders had just scored one run when the bell rang. As they went to line up, the third graders shouted, "We won 4-3!"
Did the third graders win fair and square? Why or why not?

