

A Case Study of Elementary Schoolchildren's Perspectives on Character: An Exploration Using a
Children's Rights Participatory Framework

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Abstract

There has been for educators of schoolchildren internationally a renewed interest in 'character education' (e.g., Brabeck & Rogers, 2000; Caspo 2001; Covell & Howe, 2001; Halstead & Pike, 2006; Hussar & Harris, 2010; Friday, 2004; Pamental, 2010). Since children's voices are largely absent from such discussions, this qualitative case study involving grade six students explores, *from the perspective of children*: a) the nature of character generally, b) how 'good character', *as defined by the children*, develops; as well as c) children's opinions in particular on the school's role, if any, in character development. In addition, the research investigates the impact on *children's notions* of good character and their feelings of empowerment when provided with an opportunity to engage in meaningful social action of their own design. Also considered are the implications of the findings for strategies in developing school character education initiatives that better respect and allow for children's participation.

The method used was that of semi-structured individual interview and focus group sessions. Some of the central findings relating to the children's views on character and its development included the following: a) the child study participants articulated complex notions about character and its development. The children realized that situational factors could influence behaviour and that an individual's behaviour does not always reflect consistency across situations despite any underlying basic character traits; b) the participants recognized the difficulty in assessing someone's character and cautioned against hasty judgements inferred from behaviour; c) the children expressed the view that positive character traits (as perceived by them) are correlated with positive personal relationships and improved quality of life; d) the participants further held the view that people have different strengths and weakness and that tolerance and valuing individuality in oneself and others builds what they referred to as good character; and e) the children acknowledged that while biology/genetics may have something to do with character development, direct teaching, direct experiences and role modelling are also critical factors in character development.

In addition to their notions about character, the children consistently expressed the view that they should be provided with the opportunity to participate in school character initiatives in a meaningful way both in the design and the implementation of such programming. However, they did not at all suggest that their voice be the primary or determinative one. They suggested that one primary rationale for children's more active participation in the planning and implementation of school character education initiatives is that they as students rightfully have some ownership of what goes on in the school community since it directly affects them in a significant way. They further felt that they had something useful to contribute in this regard as children. The participants also reported the opinion that gaining experience with significant decision-making as part of a school community would serve them well in their future outside of the school setting. In addition, they articulated the view that having the opportunity to participate in making important decisions that would affect their lives, such as in relation to school character initiatives, was in itself a contributor to building good character. The children reported that they felt being part of a democratic decision-making process that included them would build confidence, a sense of self-esteem and greater satisfaction with one's situation at school as well as more generally.

The participants provided various suggestions for how students could be involved in school-related decisions such as character initiatives including the notion that representative small groups from each grade could provide their input to teachers and administrators on the issues. They also suggested processes that involved students voting on issues and student opinion surveys. The findings also revealed that the child-generated social justice project positively impacted the children's sense of empowerment and self-efficacy and reported willingness to participate in the school community in the future. The project also was reported by the children to have further reinforced their reflection on the issue of character and what constitutes good character and its development. In general, the findings regarding the issue of participation reveal that in this sample of child participants there was a deep desire to contribute to school character initiatives to help foster an enhanced sense of school community and a positive school climate.

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Chapter One

Research Problem and Background Context

Research Problem

As 'citizens' of this interconnected and rapidly-changing global village (McLuhan, 1962) children are confronted daily - at home and in school, in the community and through various social media - with complex moral dilemmas and ethical challenges that raise the issue of what constitutes a feasible, relevant and humane response. Hence, questions of character are inevitably highlighted. For this reason it is not surprising perhaps that there is a renewed interest in character education programs in schools internationally. The focus of this study, however, is not on what factors influence character or how it develops, but rather on children's views on such issues and in regard to their right to meaningful social participation. What is striking is the absence generally of children's voices to any significant extent in actually impacting social action initiatives and in discussions of character. There is also the lack of opportunity provided by the schools for children to reflect deeply on the issue of character and on what constitutes 'good character' as well as a lack of linkage between character initiatives in the schools and meaningful social action chosen and developed by the children (as opposed to, for instance, a strict service learning component for credit at the upper grades). Therefore this qualitative study sought to contribute to filling this gap. This study provides a sample of senior elementary schoolchildren in a Northwestern Ontario school setting, through individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussion, the opportunity to reflect on the nature of character generally and on 'good character'

from their perspectives and to decide on, and frame their own, meaningful social action project as part of *their* process in considering the issue of what it means to have 'good character'. The central research questions then addressed in this case study (where 'children' here refers to the select group of child participants from Northwestern Ontario in this study) are as follows:

1. What are children's views on the nature of character generally (i.e. their notions of the behavioural indicia of character) and their notions of how character is developed?
2. What are children's views on what constitutes 'good character' in particular and how it is developed and do they understand that there are shades of grey between 'good' and 'bad' character however defined? Do the children have any understanding of situational factors that influence behaviour and the impact of such factors on whether or not one manifests good character in a particular situation (however 'good character' is defined)?
3. What are children's views on the school's formal role if any (through character education) and informal role (through the general nature or quality of student-teacher interaction) in the development of 'good character' in children?
4. What are children's views on the role, if any, that they as children and students should play in school initiatives regarding character education in terms of the design and implementation of such initiatives? What are the children's views on their right to have a voice generally in how the school operates in ways that affect them most directly in terms of their learning and social life at school?

5. What is the impact on *children's notions* of 'good character', and feelings of empowerment, if any, of giving them the opportunity to design and implement their own social action initiative centred on *their* notions of good character and social justice ?

Purpose

A primary purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of a select small group of children from a Northwestern Ontario school on children's participatory rights and especially in relation to character education initiatives in their school. This by providing them the opportunity to freely express their views on these issues and by having the opportunity to design and implement their own social action project. Additionally, the specific purpose of this study included exploring the use of a children's rights participatory framework to investigate: a) these *children's notions* of character and of 'good character'; b) these *children's views* on how best to develop good character and the school's role, if any, in this regard and c) the impact of the children's engagement in a social action project of their own design promoting social justice on these *children's* notions of 'good character' and feelings of empowerment. The theoretical framework grounding this research is thus one of a children's human rights perspective that emphasizes children's right to participate in decisions that directly affect their lives as that right is articulated at Article 12 (1) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) which states:

Article 12

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

This approach then can be viewed as also falling under what has been termed by some as 'anti-oppressive education' in that it involves giving a voice to persons (here schoolchildren) who often have little or no say in the matters at hand that directly impact the quality of their lives (i.e. here school character education initiatives).

Background Context

The government of Ontario several years ago announced its commitment, including a significant financial investment, to a new Character Education Initiative. According to this press release, these programs are intended to promote teamwork and cooperation by involving students in the democratic process, while also empowering schools to "reinforce shared community values such as respect, fairness, honesty and responsibility" (Government of Ontario, 2006, p. 1). Dr. Avis Glaze, Ontario's Student Achievement Officer and CEO of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, noted that there are many influences that can steer students in different directions and argued that the "publicly funded education system must show leadership by standing tall and promoting the universal attributes that Ontarians share" (Government of Ontario, 2006, p. 2). The phrase "universal attributes" is interesting, particularly in relation to the topic of character education. Is it possible that we share universal attributes in Ontario or anywhere for that matter? That is a question I will return to in a later section, the literature review.

As I pondered this new character education movement taking place in Ontario, Canada, where I reside, I became increasingly concerned about the ability of our educational system to adequately address this issue while also respecting the complexity and diversity of character development. I realized that my concerns and beliefs about this topic were connected not only to my own experiences as a human being and a parent of young children, but also to my experiences as a psychological practitioner. I have practiced as a licensed psychological practitioner for nineteen years in a great variety of clinical applied settings and have worked with clients ranging in age from early childhood to adulthood. I have been a clinician in a therapeutic relationship with persons dealing with a variety of difficult life experiences that test their character and moral courage in ways and to an extent that many of us never experience. Others amongst my clients have had little opportunity to develop a strong sense of self or to conceive of what is their fundamental character and 'internal moral compass'. The latter clients are often erratic and unpredictable and their ethics perspectives often completely situationally-based rather than principled. These types of clinical experiences have brought to my awareness the complex nature of humans and their character. Such experiences also contributed to my questioning of what it means to be of 'good character' along with who should make that determination and how (and whether) the issue of character should be addressed by the schools.

The universality of values or virtues has been debated for quite some time. Hofmann-Towfigh (2007) studied the values endorsed by students across religious and non-religious schools and found that values did, in fact, differ between these school settings. On the other hand, Dahlsgaard, Peterson, and Seligman (2005) examined historical documents associated with Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, ancient Greece, Judeo-Christianity, and Islam in order to determine whether some universality exists with respect to virtues. These researchers identified six core virtues that converged "across time, place, and intellectual tradition" (Dahlsgaar Peterson & Seligman, 2005; p. 210). These core universal virtues of

courage, justice, humanity, temperance, transcendence, and wisdom also included related character strengths (Dahlsgaard Peterson & Seligman, 2005). Of course, each of these terms are open to interpretation thus further complicating the issue of what constitutes 'good character.'

In terms of "shared values," Dr. Glaze was surely referring to "respect, fairness, honesty and responsibility." (Government of Ontario, 2006, p. 1). While these may be admirable qualities, it would seem that the concept of character and the process of character development are far more complex than what can be reduced to any few positive attributes. Even if it were possible to agree on a set of core, universal virtues or values, the behavioural expression of these values would likely vary across individuals, communities, schools, and other settings. As such, the process of character education becomes a very complex endeavour indeed.

It should be noted that the concepts of 'character' and 'good' (moral or ethical) seem to be inextricably tied together in the sense that in order to be of sound character (an aspect of one's internal life) one must demonstrate *good behaviour* (an external manifestation of that internal organization). Hence, the terms 'character education' and 'moral education' are sometimes used here interchangeably for that reason without any intention to reference any particular religious or philosophical perspective. Davis (2003) in fact defined character as "the relatively settled disposition of a person to do what is morally good" (p. 33). He goes on to further explain that although character can be associated with a set of traits such as courage and honesty, these traits must be organized in a certain way in order to determine one's character. Davis provides the example of courage which is often considered a trait of good character. However, as Davis notes, even individuals engaging in behaviour that most would agree is morally wrong can display

courage. In that sense, Davis views traits as the expression of character rather than the foundation of it. Nonetheless, he also views character as a “settled disposition” (p. 34).

Given his use of the term “settled disposition,” it would appear that Davis is associating character with personality. Rivers (2004) questioned whether character and personality traits were synonymous. However, while Davis does appear to believe that personality traits contribute to character, he noted that we do not choose our personality, which he saw as similar to temperament, but that we do choose our character. Berkowitz and Bier (2004) distil this issue quite nicely in their definition of character as a “complex set of psychological characteristics that enable an individual to act as a moral agent” (p. 73). Even if it were possible to agree upon a definition of character, determining the particular constellation of traits associated with “good” character is a more challenging research problem. Even more complex is the puzzle of determining how this constellation of traits affects the development of good character.

While character develops over the lifespan, as with most developmental trajectories, it would appear that childhood and adolescence are particularly critical periods with respect to character development (Damon, 1988). Furthermore, although the family seems to be most influential (Baumrind, 1989; Berkowitz & Grych, 1998; Lickona, 1983; Smetana, 1999), the school also seems to play an important role (Berkowitz & Grych, 2000; Lickona, 1991; Gottfredson, 2001). Given the empirical evidence of the school’s influential role in impacting character development, the Ontario government’s efforts in regards to a character development initiative in the schools is understandable. School character education initiatives are further understandable given the many factors that influence children and can lead to behaviours that are destructive of mutual respect, empathy, collaboration and responsible citizenship; a citizenship

grounded on a democratic perspective and critical thinking that allows for engagement and challenging the status quo to promote enhanced social justice.

While the term 'character education' is a loaded one, a character education program that addresses children's ethical dilemmas by promoting social justice, empathy, and critical thinking may help to build a sense of community. However, in order for character education programs to optimize their effectiveness a thorough understanding of the complex nature of character is needed. Also, given that "moral philosophers, theologians, legislators, educators, and parents all have ideas about what character means, and few have resisted the temptation to articulate a definitive list of virtues that constitute a well-lived life" (Dahlsgaard Peterson & Seligman, 2005; p. 204), it would seem long overdue for children to weigh in on the issue.

Notably, children have been the objects of studies investigating issues related to moral development but generally have not been the subjects (i.e. Kristjansson, 2006). Grover (2004) emphasizes that children have the right to participate in social research, particularly given the potential influence of such research on policy decisions. This is particularly relevant in light of the recent advancements in acknowledgement of children's fundamental human rights which include the child's right to participate in decisions that significantly affect her or him (i.e. see Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990). Since character education school programs will have a direct impact on children's education and their school quality of life, this study is intended to give children a voice on this critical issue. This study thus explored, *from the perspectives of children*, the nature of character, including its development, as well as the children's thoughts on the appropriate role of schools, if any, in character development. Children were also given the opportunity to express themselves through a social justice project they

themselves conceived, designed and implemented in the school setting ; a project inspired by *their* personal reflections during the study individual and group guided discussions on the issue of character and what constitutes good character.

I have, as mentioned previously, adopted a children's human rights participatory frame for this study. My interest in this approach developed in part as the result of my PhD. course studies in this area and I have published in this field in the *International Journal of Children's Rights* (Lake, 2010). This theoretical framework also fits well with my background as a practicing psychological associate who is interested in empowering persons who are particularly vulnerable and helping them to find their own authentic voice and to engage with others in ways that are self-affirming and positive for the individual self and the community.

Exploring these children's perspectives also provided them with an opportunity to think critically on these issues and have a voice. In addition, the child-generated social action project provided an opportunity for these children to engage in behaviour they felt was related to good character. These two opportunities provided to the child participants in the study, critical thinking on the issue of character and the opportunity to engage in meaningful social action via a social justice project, were critical components of this study as they appear to be connected to developing good character. Howe and Covell (2005) noted that taking responsibility (which has been connected by the Ontario government with character education) "does not come out of thin air" but "is learned through experience" (p. 68). The child-generated social action project in this study, which naturally involves a sense of social responsibility and critical thinking, was a way to in fact provide such an experience of engaged responsible citizenship especially since the focus of the participant-generated project was on promoting social justice in the school setting.

Below are the definitions of some key terms that appear in the literature review section that follows:

Definition of Key Terms

Character Education in its earlier iterations focused on instilling in schoolchildren a definitive list of virtues. The terms moral education and values education are associated terms. More contemporary approaches to character education emphasize democratic participation, empathy, engagement in community, tolerance and participation in meaningful social justice initiatives outside the classroom (compare Althof & Berkowitz, 2006; Dekker, 2000).

Citizenship and civics education are terms associated with character education and are approaches tending to focus on knowledge, particularly knowledge related to government and in democratic States especially knowledge relating to constitutional rights (compare Althof & Berkowitz, 2006; Hodge, 2002).

Positive Psychology is an approach to programming and other interventions that emphasizes the individual's strengths and resilience and builds on these rather than employing a remediation deficit model (Park, 2004; Tweed, Bhatt, Dooley, Spindler, Douglas, & Viljoen, 2011).

Participation rights as referred to here relate to the rights outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Article 12. These rights encompass the right of children to participate in decision-making on matters that affect them with due consideration given to the child's age and maturity (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international convention ratified by all member States of the United Nations except Somalia and the United States. It covers the rights of the child in matters of protection, provision (access to essential services) and participation including various civil liberties such as freedom of expression and freedom of association (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990).

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Theories of Moral Development

In exploring how children develop an understanding of good and bad, it is relevant to examine existing theories related to moral development. In fact it is the case that one cannot consider the issue of character education fully without also examining the issue of morality. It has been suggested that “morality is the quality of character, the rightness or wrongness of an action” (Freeman, Engels, & Altekruise, 2004; p. 164). Friday (2004) suggested that “one starts to think morally when one attempts to determine the right course of action rather than merely that which is most desirable” (p. 25). Often, moral concepts include right, justice, good, happiness, pleasure, respect, impartiality, autonomy, freedom, harm, equality, and duty (Friday, 2004). Friday (2004) suggested that good moral thinking is related to serious and sincere efforts to determine the right course of action. However, he also argues that existing “moral theory is built upon the false assumption that the only properly justified moral positions are those that are capable of being universally held” (Friday, 2004; p. 29). Kantianism, or moral obligation, and the concept of justice have been associated with contemporary theories of moral development (Freeman, Engels, & Altekruise, 2004).

Campbell and Christopher (1996) explored the Kantian influences in contemporary theories of moral development. They associated Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development (Kohlberg, 1969), which may be the most familiar moral theory, with Kantian formalism. The latter in the sense that Kohlberg's hypothesized stages of moral development focus on the formal nature of rules, rather than the content of the moral beliefs (Campbell &

Christopher, 1996). Lawrence Kohlberg's (1969) cognitive-moral development theory identified several progressive stages of moral development which he conceptualized as universal. However, Kohlberg described his theory as philosophical and emphasized the role of culture in the development of morality (Rich & DeVitis, 1985). Campbell and Christopher (1996) argue that because formalism requires that "morality be other-regarding" (p. 12), it disregards private values. Furthermore, they contend that the universal and impersonal nature of Kohlberg's stages "ends up reducing morality to legal and political justice" (p. 12).

In his theory, Kohlberg identified three levels of moral development, each with two developmental stages. During the Pre-Conventional Level, rules are first obeyed to avoid punishment and then, by the second stage, are followed to obtain rewards. By the Conventional Level, the child first conforms or is "good" in order to avoid disapproval and then progresses to following rules out of a sense of duty. The final level is known as the Post-Conventional, Autonomous, or Principled Level. At this level, individuals become concerned with honouring social contracts and respecting others' rights, and there is an emphasis on mutual obligation. During the second stage of level three (the highest speculated stage of moral development in Kohlberg's model), one's conscience is guided by general, abstract principles. Kohlberg believed that most adults function at the Conventional level, with only about 20 to 25 percent reaching the final most evolved state of moral development (the Post-Conventional level).

Kohlberg considered his stages to be systems of thought (Rich & DeVitis, 1985). In other words, as his research participants were asked to respond to the presented hypothetical moral dilemmas, the content of their moral judgments (e.g., their decision as to whether or not a man should steal a drug for his dying wife) was not as critical as the structure, or the particulars of

their reasoning, in determining (using the Kohlberg stage model) the cognitive-moral developmental level of the individual respondent. Although it would appear then that an individual who has a good ability to reason logically would necessarily achieve a higher level of moral development within the Kohlberg moral stage model, this is not necessarily the case.

While Kohlberg did argue that the ability to reason logically was necessary for achievement of the higher levels of moral development, it is possible for an individual to approach a moral dilemma logically, but still not act morally (Rich & DeVitis, 1985). Clearly, Kohlberg's ideas were very important; however other perspectives and some key criticisms of his theoretical and research approach began to emerge.

One of Kohlberg's main critics was Carol Gilligan (1982) who argued that his findings were not relevant to females as his sample consisted exclusively of boys. Instead of a formalist conception of moral reasoning associated with justice, as with Kohlberg's theory, Gilligan's theory described a form of moral reasoning associated with care (Jorgensen, 2006). Unlike Kohlberg, Gilligan conducted her research by studying how participants dealt with actual moral dilemmas in their lives (e.g., whether to have an abortion) as opposed to presenting the research respondents with hypothetical moral dilemmas. She proposed that women progress through a focus of care that begins with an initial focus on the self, then the judgment that this focus is selfish, to finally an understanding of the connection between self and others (Rich & DeVitis, 1985). This notion of the connection between morality and the development of the self was in direct contradiction to formalist moral reasoning which completely disregards the self in favour of formal moral rules (Campbell & Christopher, 1996). Although Gilligan's claims regarding

gender differences in moral development and perspectives have been challenged (Brabeck, 1983; Turiel, 1998), her theory did offer another useful perspective on morality.

Kohlberg believed - given his view that moral behaviour was situational - that cognitive moral development was the most critical factor in determining moral decision-making. That is, he held that the highest levels of moral reasoning relied on an understanding of the notion of justice as an abstract principle that must be applied in particular situations requiring moral decision-making. However, Gilligan argued that there was more to moral reasoning than notions about justice (Jorgensen, 2006). Furthermore, Gilligan was more interested in the broader contexts of moral language and reasoning such as relationships and general connections with other human beings. Gilligan felt that Kohlberg's stages reflected Western education and culture and hence represented a somewhat narrow view. Although the two theorists worked together at times and expressed high regard for one another's intellectual accomplishments, they were unable to reconcile their diverse opinions regarding moral development. In any case, some believe that neither Kohlberg's nor Gilligan's theories adequately capture the full picture regarding the factors contributing to sound moral reasoning (Campbell & Christopher, 1996).

Although it would appear that Kohlberg and Gilligan are most often associated with psychological models of moral development, Jean Piaget (1929), a theorist who was well known for his model of cognitive development, was one of the first within the burgeoning field of psychology to formally examine moral development. Another previous well-known theorist within the field of psychology, Sigmund Freud, had presented the issue of morality in terms of an individual's efforts to control innate, unconscious drives (Rich & DeVitis, 1985). As Rich and DeVitis (1985) note, although Freud also viewed morality as universal, he examined morality

within the context of the id-ego-superego conflict. The id was thought to consist of instinctual sexual impulses and drives while the ego represented the self-regulating, conscious processes intended to control the id. However, it is the superego that relates most directly to the issue of morality in that it represented the external social forces and cultural standards that determined “normal” or appropriate conduct. The superego, in other words, was the conscience. Given the strong, innate influences of the id, Freud saw repression as the key to morality.

To illustrate his concept of the id's influence on moral development, Freud provided the well-known example of the Oedipus Complex whereby male children are thought to experience the desire to possess the parent of the opposite sex. However, due to the fear of the same-sex parent, or “castration anxiety”, the male child resists this impulse and, in turn, identifies with his male parent (Freud, 1974; Rich & DeVitis, 1985). This process was thought to be a necessary aspect of moral development. Interestingly, Freud believed it was impossible for females to achieve a strong sense of morality due to weak superego development resulting from having already been “castrated” (Rich & DeVitis, 1985). It was believed that since they did not have the same level of associated anxiety and fear which was thought to control behaviour, they would not be guided in the same fashion. Instead of possessing the unconscious forces necessary for guiding their behaviour, females were left with “penis envy.”

Eventually theorists began to move away from the concept of the unconscious as the primary driving force behind human behaviour, moral and otherwise, and began to increasingly consider the contribution of socio-political factors (Rich & DeVitis, 1985). Piaget, who originally published his thoughts on the subject in 1932, considered moral development to be universal, hierarchical, predictable, and innate (Rich & DeVitis, 1985). However, he readily acknowledged

the impact of social influences and saw moral development as being connected to cognitive development which was the main focus of his work.

Piaget (1929) proposed that children move through four stages of cognitive development, acquiring increasing levels of cognitive skills until they eventually achieve the abstract reasoning ability of an adult which begins at about the age of eleven. In Piaget's view, a child's ability to engage in moral reasoning is necessarily limited by her or his level of cognitive development. For example, Piaget believed that a significant portion of childhood was characterized by egocentrism and argued that morality begins once the child matures beyond this. In other words, a necessary aspect of morality is the ability to think beyond oneself.

Piaget identified two stages of moral development (Rich & DeVitis, 1985). During the first stage, heteronomous morality or moral realism, moral judgments are based upon rules and authority. Fairness and justice are relevant concepts during this stage. By middle childhood to early adolescence one begins to enter the second stage of autonomous morality, or a morality of equity and cooperation where social experiences become a crucial aspect of moral development. Cooperation and egalitarian growth are important concepts associated with this stage. Piaget argued the importance of peer interaction in terms of his view that it was the only "legitimately equal form of moral participation" (Rich & DeVitis, 1985; p. 49). Although Piaget was really the first to examine the concepts associated with morality through the use of observable techniques, his findings and subsequent theories have been the subject of criticism from some social scientists (Andrews, Halford, Murphy & Knox, 2009; Bouwmeester, Vermunt & Sijtsma, 2012; Goswami, 2006; Thompson, 2012).

Harris (2012) challenged Piaget's theories on a number of levels. He disagreed with Piaget's notion of cognitive development as something pursued in an autonomous fashion by the child, like a scientist, and argued that it is more of a collaborative enterprise that involves a reliance on other people for information, like an anthropologist (Harris, 2012). Harris (2012) also argued that children may be able to appreciate moral issues in ways that extend beyond mere rules and authority-based understanding at a much younger age (pre-school) than Piaget suggested. He further suggests that even at a young age, children have a process for weighing how trustworthy their information is (e.g., consensus and attachment to the source) before forming their own conclusions or understandings. He cites a study by Hussar & Harris (2010) in support of his position that provides an example of children going against the norm and deciding to become vegetarians in spite of being raised in non-vegetarian families. Harris (2012) saw this as an example of how children are able to pay attention to all of the various messages in their culture before developing their own moral understandings and acting on them. His experiences studying the biological versus religious conceptions of death held by seven and eleven-year-old children also suggested that theories or understandings developed at a later developmental stage do not necessarily displace the earlier ones, but exist alongside them (Harris & Gimenez, 2005). The Piagetian stage hypothesis of cognitive development has been examined and challenged for decades (Bouwmeester, Vermunt & Sijtsma, 2012; Brainerd, 1973; Case, 1987; Case, 1993; van der Maas & Molenaar, 1992).

In examining the history of moral development theory and moral education one is struck by the diversity of the various theories, and it is important to note that the above is but a sampling of the most notable theories. This level of diversity clearly presents a significant

challenge to those attempting to implement moral or character education programs in the schools. What is the most appropriate focus and where does one begin? At the same time, the concept of moral education is not new.

Moral education by various other names, such as “character development’ or character education,’ has been the subject of much interest and debate since ancient times and many of the above theories are rooted in the ideas presented by philosophers dating at least back to Aristotle. Aristotle and Kant present very complementary perspectives on morality (Begley, 2011); both of which have undoubtedly had a tremendous influence on moral or character education. The following section will explore these perspectives and their relevance to the topic of character education.

The Influences and Relevance of Aristotle and Kant.

Aristotle and Kant appear to be particularly relevant to the topic of moral development though their perspectives differ in some important ways to be here discussed (Begley, 2011). Although Begley (2011) identified the appraisal of moral behaviour as important in a very particular setting, it would seem that human beings engage in the appraisal of moral behaviour frequently, hence providing one reason for the perceived need for character education. Begley (2011) further suggested that the two perspectives-that of Aristotle and Kant- complement each other and could be used together quite effectively to examine moral behaviour.

Kant (1785/2010-13) emphasizes the role of good will in determining what constitutes morality. He referred to “qualities of temperament” that are typically seen as desirable or valuable, such as “intelligence, wit, judgment, and other talents of mind, however they may be

named, or courage, resolution, perseverance” and noted that “these gifts of nature may also become extremely bad and mischievous if the will which is to make use of them, and which, therefore, constitutes what is called character, is not good” (p. 9). Furthermore, these traits, no matter how desirable they may seem, are at the mercy of the will. Kant provides the example:

Moderation in the affections and passions, self-control, and calm deliberation are not only good in many respects, but even seem to constitute part of the intrinsic worth of the person; but they are far from deserving to be called good without qualification, although they have been so unconditionally praised by the ancients. For without principles of a good will, they may become extremely bad, and the coolness of a villain not only makes him far more dangerous, but also directly makes him more abominable in our eyes than he would have been without it” (p. 10).

As such, to Kant, it is the motivation behind the action, or the “good will” that determines the action’s ‘moral worth’ (its moral character or lack thereof). In other words, no matter the outcome, even if “this will should wholly lack power to accomplish its purpose...[or] achieve nothing...the good will...like a jewel, it would still shine by its own light, as a thing which has its whole value in itself” (p. 11). Further, Kant notes that no set of traits can define moral character as the presence or absence of “good will” as the motivation for an action will influence how those traits are employed and to what ends.

In terms of the will or motivation that determines the moral worth of an action, Kant emphasizes the role of duty, in “that such actions be done from duty, not inclination” (p. 14). In other words, an action that does not come naturally to a person, and is motivated by a sense of duty and requires self-sacrifice is considered by Kant to have moral worth. Kant provided an

example of the “duty to maintain one’s life” and noted that “everyone has a direct inclination to do so” (p. 14). However, given that most of us benefit directly from doing so, the moral worth of maintaining our life is devalued due to the selfishness of our motivation. However, Kant went on to explain:

On the other hand, if adversity and hopeless sorrow have completely taken away the relish for life; if the unfortunate one, strong in mind, indignant at his fate rather than desponding or dejected, wishes for death, and yet preserves his life without loving it - not from inclination or fear, but from duty - then his maxim has moral worth. (p. 14).

In addition to the notion that an action motivated by selfishness or fear of consequences does not hold the same moral worth as the same action motivated by a sense of duty, Kant also connected moral actions to “universal law,” that we can judge the moral worth of our actions by considering whether they should be made a universal law. He used the example of lying to illustrate this idea:

The shortest way, however, and an unerring one, to discover the answer to this question whether a lying promise is consistent with duty, is to ask myself, ‘Should I be content that my maxim (to extricate myself from difficulty by a false promise) should hold good as a universal law, for myself as well as for others?’ and should I be able to say to myself, ‘Every one may make a deceitful promise when he finds himself in a difficulty from which he cannot otherwise extricate himself?’ Then I presently become aware that while I can will the lie, I can by no means will that lying should be a universal law. For with such a law there would be no promises at all...Hence my maxim, as soon as it should be made a universal law, would necessarily destroy itself (p. 19).

Kant suggested that any maxim that cannot hold up as a universal law should be rejected, not due to potential consequences to self or others, “but because it cannot enter as a principle into a possible universal legislation” (p. 20). A modern example of this Kantian notion may be the concept of universal human rights codified in international human rights law. The latter being an expression of a socially constructed international scheme for moral conduct.

The importance of reason in this process of appraising the moral worth of an action was emphasized by Kant, in that ‘pure reason’ was valued highly as supposedly leading the path to moral conduct. He noted for example:

whereas a mixed ethics, compounded partly of motives drawn from feelings and inclinations, and partly also of conceptions of reason, must make the mind waver between motives which cannot be brought under any principle, which lead to good only by mere accident and very often also to evil (p. 27).

Given the tension between duty and inclination (emotion) as motivating factors and the emphasis on duty and reason in terms of moral worth, it would appear that Kant placed little value on the emotions and viewed them as something largely to set aside in favour of reason if one was to follow a moral path (Begley, 2011; Baxley, 2003).

Baxley (2003) noted Kant’s emphasis on the person’s ability to discipline and master oneself “instead of yielding to emotion and inclination and by doing so is portrayed as having securely subordinated his sensible to his rational nature,” along with the view that this reduces one’s vulnerability to temptation and makes it possible to “fulfill the obligations incumbent on him as a rational, moral being with a cheerful heart” (p. 563). She also referred to Kant’s idea of virtue including such descriptions as “‘strength of mind,’ ‘soul,’ ‘will,’ or ‘maxims’ and

characterizes it in terms of an 'ability' or 'capacity' (Fertigkeit) or 'courage' or fortitude' (Tapferkeit)" (Baxley, 2003; p. 562). These descriptions do appear to be consistent with Kant's emphasis on reason and rationality, though it is possible also to appreciate the emotions behind a trait such as courage. However, Baxley also pointed out that Kant did acknowledge to some degree a role for emotions in moral behaviour.

Baxley (2003) noted that Kant identified two classes of duties, duties of love and duties of respect. She went on to note that "duties of love are imperfect duties of wide obligation, and they are directed toward the 'natural welfare' or happiness of others...Duties of respect, by contrast, are perfect duties of narrow obligation directed at the 'moral well-being' or 'moral contentment' of others" (Baxley, 2003; p.577). By placing such an emphasis on 'duties of love', it would appear that Kant is indicating that emotions are an important aspect of moral actions in relation to a sense of duty and not something to be completely overruled by reason. In fact, Baxley (2003) referred to the fact that "Kant suggests that we have an indirect duty to cultivate sympathy feelings...that the cultivation of our sympathetic feelings (which includes an obligation to visit scenes of human misery such as hospitals and debtors' prisons) increases our sensitivity to human suffering and thereby renders us better able to fulfill the duty of beneficence" (p. 579). In that sense, Kant viewed emotions, sympathy as least, as facilitating moral action through a duty of love for our fellow humans and thereby important for virtue (Baxley, 2003).

While Kant clearly valued reason over emotion, or inclination, Aristotle, on the other hand, placed a higher emphasis on the role of emotions in moral behaviour. As Begley (2011) noted, "Kant's most moral agent appears to be grudging and deficient in the sensitivities and emotional intelligence...Aristotle, on the other hand, suggests a rational emotional life where

reason and emotion operate in partnership” (p. 26). While both Aristotle and Kant appear to place high value on reason and rationality with regard to moral action, Aristotle seemed to endorse a concern for self, along with a concern for others (Baxley, 2003).

In terms of the concern for self, Campbell and Christopher (1996) noted that “In Aristotle’s view, the purpose of morality is to enable individuals to live the good life, to actualize their potentials as human beings, to achieve eudaimonia” (p. 2). The Encyclopaedia Britannica (2013) described eudaimonism as “a self-realization theory that makes happiness or personal well-being the chief good for man,” but also noted that happiness is not an accurate translation of the word as the Greek word eudaimonia means “the state of having a good indwelling spirit, a good genius.” In his *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle, 1999), Aristotle spoke at length about happiness and appeared to endorse individual pursuits in relation to our achieving our potential as human beings and to become self-sufficient. However, Aristotle clarifies that “by self-sufficient we do not mean that which is sufficient for a man by himself, for one who lives a solitary life, but also for parents, children, wife, and in general for his friends and fellow citizens, since man is born for citizenship” (Aristotle, 1999; p. 10). Aristotle went on to note that “the happy man lives well and does well” (Aristotle, 1999; p. 12).

In contrast to Kant who placed a higher degree of moral worth on behaving well in spite of finding it difficult (e.g., requiring more will power), Aristotle believed that if the act came more easily to the person, it was more virtuous (e.g., requiring little willpower) (Begley, 2011). Aristotle (1999) talked about the harmony that exists for people who identify happiness with virtue “for to virtue belongs virtuous activity” (p. 12) and explained:

the man who does not rejoice in noble actions is not even good; since no one would call a man just who did not enjoy acting justly, nor any man liberal who did not enjoy liberal actions; and similarly in all other cases. If this is so, virtuous actions must be in themselves pleasant (p. 13).

Interestingly, as will be discussed in the findings section of this study, many of the child participants in the current study associated 'good character' (and the ability to exhibit good behavior) with happiness and feeling at peace and satisfied with oneself.

Aristotle (1999) noted that virtuous activities are more permanent and durable than others, including knowledge of the sciences, largely due to the fact that people who are happy will choose to spend most of their lives engaged in such activities:

for this seems to be the reason why we do not forget them. The attribute in question, then, will belong to the happy man, and he will be happy throughout his life; for always, or by preference to everything else, he will be engaged in virtuous action and contemplation, and he will bear the chances of life most nobly and altogether decorously, if he is 'truly good' and 'four-square beyond reproach' (p. 16).

In terms of types of virtues, Aristotle (1999) identified two, intellectual and moral. He considered intellectual virtues to result from a combination of biology, or genetics, and environmental influences (e.g., things learned). However, he considered moral virtues as solely being shaped through experiences, "as a result of habit" (p. 20). As such, given this idea of forming a "habit," the development of moral virtues, according to Aristotle, requires opportunities to engage in or practice moral behaviour or actions. This has clear implications with respect to character education in that providing opportunities for children to actively engage

in moral actions will, in the Aristotelian view, encourage the development of such virtues.

Aristotle (1999), in fact, referred to “states of character” when he discussed the need for learning opportunities:

For if this were not so, there would have been no need of a teacher, but all men would have been born good or bad at their craft. This, then is the case with the virtues also; by doing the acts that we do in our transactions with other men we become just or unjust, and by doing the acts that we do in the presence of danger, and being habituated to feel fear or confidence, we become brave or cowardly. The same is true of appetites and feelings of anger; some men become temperate and good-tempered, others self-indulgent and irascible, by behaving in one way or the other in the appropriate circumstances.

Thus, in one word, states of character arise out of like activities (p. 21).

Campbell and Christopher (1996) who discussed moral development theory in terms of a critique of Kantian presuppositions appear to agree with the connection between moral development and development of character or personality. These researchers suggest that “an account of moral development...needs to be situated in an account of the development of values and of the self” (Campbell & Christopher, 1996; p. 37). They described a three-level development of self involving goals and values. In the beginning, at level 1 it is “a matter of being a self without knowing that self” with goals related to interacting with one’s environment (p. 38). At knowing-level 2, the child is able to know the self and begins to develop meta-strategies for interaction with his/her physical and social world. Characterizations of the child, related to competence, reliability, lovability, and goodness become relevant at this stage. At this stage, the child has an identity but is not aware of it and therefore cannot influence it. By

knowing-level 3, the child will undergo explicit identify formation wherein he or she knows his or her self-representation and can engage in a process of comparisons and judgments of self, and can change in accordance with that information. As such, from this perspective, morality, values, character, and personality are all part of a sense of self, which is influenced by the opportunities for learning and practice that are presented in one's environment. This idea can be clearly connected to character education.

Regardless of their differences, Aristotelian and Kantian perspectives have much to offer the field of education, particularly in terms of character education initiatives. Social justice or action seems to ring loudly throughout much of their ideas, though from an Aristotelian perspective, the person would ideally act effortlessly and with gladness on behalf of others, whereas, from a Kantian perspective, the act would require great self-sacrifice and effort. Character education from an Aristotelian perspective may also involve nurturance of one's strengths, encouragement of individual pursuits, and opportunities for personal growth. From the Kantian perspective, character education initiatives might involve opportunities to challenge children to help others even when they have no desire to do so or if doing so will require great self-sacrifice. Both philosophical perspectives appear to have value, in very different ways, with respect to character education.

Begley (2011) noted that the perspectives of Aristotle and Kant seem to complement each other and suggested that there may be some value in utilizing both. Although she was suggesting this in terms of appraising moral behaviour as it relates to a nursing practice approach, the same may be said in terms of character education. While the above simply touches on the perspectives of these two great philosophers, in the spirit of approaching this issue dialectically, it might be

wise to accept the wisdom of and to synthesize the two perspectives. Perhaps children, in the school environment and otherwise, might benefit from frequent opportunities to engage in moral behaviours that come easily in order to encourage the development of 'virtuous habits,' while also being challenged to sacrifice one's own needs and desires on a more significant level for the sake of others. Also, focusing on developing individual strengths and interests may allow students to achieve their fullest potential as human beings. Campbell and Christopher (1996), on the other hand, argued for the entire field of moral development to be rethought, but cautioned that:

“no one moral conception can be allowed to fence in the moral domain, or tie blinders around our vision of moral development. No matter how attractive or powerful our philosophical arguments might be, we must acknowledge and seek to understand how people arrive at opposed moral conceptions.” p. 42

In exploring these two perspectives, it is clear that there is much to consider in terms of morality and character education as it is a complex endeavour often stimulating opposing and competing ideologies and interests. This is the case currently and has also been evident over the course of history. The following section will illustrate the shifting ideologies and approaches to character education as they relate to past and present character education efforts.

Past and Present Character Education Efforts

In reviewing the history of moral education, the attempts to 'rehabilitate' children during the mid-1800s might be considered one of the earliest formal attempts at character education (Dekker, 2000). These efforts to 'rehabilitate' children resulted in the establishment of many

children's homes and orphanages by the end of the 19th century. Discipline was seen as the key to resolving the alleged deficiencies in children and may have been viewed as the key to morality. As the alleged need to control and discipline children came to be increasingly perceived as important, the educational system responded and became a necessary force in these efforts (Dekker, 2000). Essentially, it was believed that one could effectively teach the perceived deficiencies out of the child, which eventually resulted in the shift of much educational power from the parents to the educators; the latter then viewed as experts in this enterprise of moral development of the child. In time, efforts to influence character development, which had previously been quite rooted in psychological behaviourism (e.g., discipline, promoting good habits), began by the middle of the 20th century to incorporate some of the concepts such as virtuous character traits associated with Aristotle (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2005). It is possible that the changing notion of the "child" contributed to this shift as children began to some small degree to be viewed as individuals in their own right.

By the second half of the 20th century, children were starting to be seen as persons, not property, and the children's rights movement subsequently shifted from being exclusively child protection oriented to the present perspective which encompasses both child protection and children's participation in decision-making (Hart, 1991). This change is evident in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) that was adopted in 1989 and ratified by more than 20 of the member nations a year later (now enjoying almost universal ratification by the member States of the UN). This international human rights law instrument which took 10 years to draft further advanced the status of children by promoting children as unique individuals, not simply members of a family. The 54 Convention articles address issues ranging from the basic right to

survival and development to freedom of thought, expression of opinion, and to the right to participate in decision-making (Wilcox & Naimark, 1991). Although the CRC defines child as “every person under 18, unless national law grants majority at an earlier age” (Wilcox & Naimark, 1991; p. 50), some argue that the concept of “childhood” is socially constructed and not so easily defined (Freeman, 1998). This, in fact, is a criticism of the CRC. In any case, such a significant paradigm shift to viewing children as persons with inherent rights as opposed to just property inevitably impacted the character education movement. However, as Grover (2007) points out, the existence of variations in the concept or definition of ‘childhood’ does not negate the fact that children’s rights are basic human rights that exist for every individual person, including the child, and should be upheld across cultures regardless of age.

By the 1990s ‘moral education’ which had more of a theoretical background had shifted to the concept of ‘character education’ which was largely atheoretical. At this time, ‘character education’ was primarily committed to the somewhat ambiguous goal of “promoting the positive development of youth” (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006). Althof and Berkowitz (2006) clarify the issue of moral versus character education. Moral education, which predates character education, is largely based upon theories of cognitive and moral development, such as those noted above. Its related approaches have been relatively stable and its focus, which has essentially been the development of moral reasoning, has been very narrow. Moreover, moral education has been influenced by the social sciences and has a stronger empirical base. On the other hand, character education, which has been in a constant state of evolution, is broader and more eclectic in its focus, and has philosophical roots.

Given its broad and eclectic focus, character education has been associated with a variety of topics and approaches ranging from specific academic courses or modules to behavioural management systems and whole school culture (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006). Berkowitz and Bier (2005) identified the most common strategies associated with 33 effective character education programs. These strategies included peer interaction, teaching, modelling, mentoring, classroom management, school-wide activities, reform models, and community/family involvement. To complicate things further, each strategy may also include a variety of approaches. For example, the use of peer interaction may involve discussions of moral dilemmas, peer conflict mediation, cooperative learning, and the like (Ferguson, San Miguel, Kilburn Jr. & Sanchez, 2007; Smith, Cousins & Stewart, 2005; Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2010). However, in analyzing the strategies and techniques, it would appear that they can be divided into direct and indirect approaches. The Roots of Empathy (ROE) program is one example of a direct approach to character education.

Carol Rolheiser and Deb Wallace (2005) conducted a program evaluation of the ROE program, which is a classroom-based social and emotional literacy program being utilized within Ontario schools. These authors maintain that this program has been “successful in raising levels of empathy, resulting in more respectful and caring relationships and reduced levels of bullying and aggression” (p. 1). ROE has been suggested as a model for character education programming in Ontario schools. The Rolheiser and Wallace (2005) report maintains that social and emotional competencies, which are explicitly addressed in this program, are critical to character development. It would appear that this program utilizes a combination of direct teaching strategies intended to improve students' ability to manage emotions, make decisions, and interact

appropriately with others, and indirect strategies intended to enhance the safety and caring atmosphere of the school environment. For example, teachers are trained to be non-judgmental in their interactions with students and family/community involvement is encouraged. Generally speaking, it would appear that the ROE program utilizes a variety of techniques that address character development at both the individual and family/community levels and highlight the inter-relatedness of all persons.

While ROE involves some direct teaching strategies, an indirect strategy often used in character education is role modelling. Kristjansson (2006) argues for an Aristotelian approach to role modelling that inspires a form of friendly or admiring envy as well as the belief that one can attain the emulated positive qualities. In other words, Kristjansson (2006) posits that proper role modelling must include an emotional component in addition to the cognitive and behavioural components, and suggests that this may be best achieved by introducing character education to younger students. The proponents of the role modelling approach to character education suggest that at this earlier age children are more amenable to the influence of role models which would enhance the emotional aspects of emulation. Kristjansson (2006) suggests that “pointing to role models or other good examples is not enough” (p. 48) and that in order to be truly effective as a role model, the student must also have the desire and opportunity to make a true connection.

Modelling can be an important approach, especially when linked with the social mediation of a moral dilemma, which has been a common tool used in relation to moral development educational efforts. Modelling is particularly relevant to the Vygotskian socio-cultural theory of moral development, which posits that there are both *actual* and *potential* levels of cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky referred to the gap between these two

levels as the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and suggested that guided learning, or scaffolding, could facilitate the advancement of development. Turner and Chambers (2006) suggest that a Vygotskian approach to character education would provide a unifying theoretical base and provide an impetus for programming. Such approaches may include student-centred peer discussions, class meetings, cooperative learning, and shared reading, particularly since it was suggested that the peer-to-peer modelling was more effective than the teacher-to-peer modelling (Turner & Chambers, 2006). However, these authors further suggest that in order for a Vygotskian approach to be truly effective, it should be incorporated into the overall culture of the school to facilitate learning during both structured and unstructured times.

While modelling, using a Vygotskian approach, is one method that may be used to help students develop a structured system of values, ethics, and morals, literature-based approaches have also been used. In fact, as Leming (2000) points out, "virtue-based" literature has been around for hundreds of years. In his evaluation of a literature-based program, Leming (2000) found it to be effective in enhancing ethical understanding and decreasing racial/ethnic prejudice. He suggests a number of reasons for its effectiveness. First, Leming notes that exposure to these stories allows students to experience the lives of others, thus serving to expand their universe. Furthermore, Leming suggests that children's understanding of moral issues is story-like and that in order to advance their development, they must have narrative experiences. Finally, Leming connects social learning to this approach, in the sense that through these stories, children have the opportunity to observe clear models of virtuous behaviour. Fairy tales have been associated with character education as they contain many examples of character traits and models of moral reasoning (Bryan, 2005).

Approaches to character education, such as literature and modelling, are important, but some argue that the timing of character education and citizenship education is also crucial. Hodge (2002) suggests that citizenship education requires a foundation of character education. Given that character education is generally believed to influence personality, values, attitudes, and habits, this would seem to be a reasonable suggestion (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006). Since these traits are being shaped over the lifespan and typically become ingrained patterns with age, early intervention is certainly indicated as a useful strategy. On the other hand, citizenship education, which tends to focus on information related to governmental structures and issues, requires a higher level of cognitive maturity and is typically taught in later grades. However, while the school is a fundamental agent of character development, there are many other critical influences, such as peers and, more importantly, the family.

The family is our first and perhaps most influential introduction to morality and social life. Our initial experience of power in relationships and our freedom to make choices for ourselves occurs within the context of family, and is influenced by overt and covert factors (Smetana, 1999). Parenting style is one overt influence in that parents who are able to provide some guidance around morality, while simultaneously respecting the child's need for personal control and choice, also known as authoritative parenting (Baumrind, 1989), are providing opportunities for moral development that are more consistent with existing theories (Smetana, 1999). As Smetana (1999) noted, power assertion is a critical element in the development of moral maturity and children may learn more from a style of parenting that encourages discussions and explanations about rules. This style of parenting also encourages children's expression of ideas about issues which is consistent with the rights outlined in the CRC. More

subtly, within the context of parent-child relationships, children also internalize a great deal of information about their position in the social hierarchy and their right to hold beliefs and to participate in social practices (Smetana, 1999). Given the important influence of family in moral development and the great moral diversity that exists within families, reconciling the often-discrepant beliefs and practices of the family and educational systems is a great challenge.

Halstead (1999) suggests, “any response to this diversity [within families] requires a delicate balance between the right of the family to initiate its own children into its own moral values, the right of the school to teach the shared values of the broader society, and the right of the child to develop into an autonomous agent” (p. 278). He further cautions against introducing children to conflicting values at a young age as this may disrupt their sense of stability and security. As such, it is necessary to find some middle ground in the form of collaboration, with these two important provisos in mind: the public interest must be maintained and the autonomy of the child must be considered crucial in their moral development. As illustrated in the following section, positive psychology provides a framework for understanding the autonomy of the child in terms of character education and focusing on children's strengths.

The Role of Positive Psychology.

In terms of the autonomy of the child in relation to character education, it may be relevant to consider the encouragement and nurturance of individual pursuits and strengths and participation as an important part of that process. In the spirit of eudaimonism, positive psychology's contribution to character education efforts is the focus on building strengths with the intention of enhancing wellness and, ultimately, happiness. While some have criticized

positive psychology for being too one-sided, for ignoring pathology and negative outcomes, proponents of positive psychology argue that there is great value in building on strengths rather than framing matters in terms of individual alleged “deficits” and attempts at so-called “remediation.”(Park, 2004; Tweed, Bhatt, Dooley, Spindler, Douglas, & Viljoen, 2011).

Strengths (in character and temperament), in general, have been linked not only with well-being and happiness, but have shown potential for preventing or ameliorating the effects of stress or other negative issues. Park (2004) linked strengths of character related to hope, kindness, social intelligence, self-control, and perspective with mitigation of the negative effects of stress and trauma, thereby preventing related disorders or difficulties. This strength-building approach has also been linked in empirical psychological research with positive outcomes related to school success, leadership, and reduced behavioural problems such as substance abuse, suicidal ideation and behaviour, and youth violence (Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998; Scales, Bensen, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). There is also a substantial amount of research that links optimism with the decrease or prevention of depression and anxiety (Gillham & Reivich, 2004; Gillham, Reivich, Jaycox, & Seligman, 1995). Research demonstrates that while strengths can be specified, measured, and shown to have tangible consequences, certain strengths may be much more effective than others in preventing different problems and there may be different consequences associated with different strengths (Park, 2004). As Park (2004) put it, “positive youth development not only has broad-protective factors preventing or mitigating psychopathology but also as enabling conditions that facilitate thriving” (p. 50).

The positive youth development perspective. As Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, and Lerner (2005) noted, the positive youth development (PYD) perspective is a strength-based conception

of adolescence that has very diverse roots, from academia, national policies, and ideas of front-line staff such as youth workers and encompasses a variety of psychological, biological, and sociological fields. This perspective views the relationships between “the developing person and his or her biology, psychological characteristics, family, community, culture, physical and designed ecology, and historical niche” as transactional and changeable (Lerner, et al, 2005; p. 11). Programs are focused on positive youth development when they have systems that focus on the strengths of youth and include components that stress positive adult-youth relationships, skill-building activities, and opportunities for participation at the community level (Lerner, 2004; Lerner, et al, 2005; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Such programs are said to promote the Five Cs of PYD, which include competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Lerner, et al (2005) noted:

In sum, the theory of PYD that has emerged in the adolescent development literature specifies that if young people have mutually beneficial relations with the people and institutions of their social world, they will be on the way to a hopeful future marked by positive contributions to self, family, community, and civil society. Young people will thrive (p. 12).

As such, the positive youth development perspective considers the multidirectional nature of interactions between the aspects specific to the individual, such as biology and psychology, and also the environmental and social factors.

Seligman's approach to positive psychology. In terms of effective positive youth development, Seligman (2002) emphasized the need for alignment in terms of institutions, character strengths or traits, and subjective experiences such as happiness. As Park (2004) noted,

“the good life probably represents a coming together of these three domains” (p. 51). However, this is a very complex issue, combining and encouraging the positive characteristics and strengths of individuals *and* institutions. In fact, strengths of character within the individual alone are complicated. Park (2004) argued that most people would approve of efforts to raise caring, honest, fair, courageous, and wise youth, but also noted that “there is no consensus on the main components of character or virtue, and how these should be conceptualized as psychological constructs” (p. 41). To complicate things further, Park (2004) noted that most research examining prosocial behaviours has focused on one aspect of character at a time, which provides little understanding about the structure of individual character. As Park (2004) astutely pointed out, “some individuals may be wise and have integrity but are neither courageous nor kind, or vice versa” (p. 41). One might imagine there being no end to the potential combinations of character traits or strengths and the degrees of intensity in terms of their expression, not to mention the variability over time and in different contexts. As such, Park (2004) advocates for a “systematic approach to character in multidimensional terms” (p. 41).

Determining *the most ideal combination of traits* to optimize the virtuousness of character or to maximally enhance life satisfaction would seem to be an unrealistic task. In his authentic happiness theory, Seligman (2002) combines hedonic and eudaimonic approaches in his description of pleasure, engagement, and meaning as pathways to well-being and achievement of a full life. Seeking pleasure is quite simply participating in activities that one enjoys, which is connected to well-being in the hedonic sense (Schueller & Seligman, 2010). Engagement is related to activities that are so engrossing or absorbing that one becomes unaware of the passing

of time, while meaning refers to transcending oneself either in terms of a higher sense of purpose or in relation to relationships with others (Seligman, 2002).

In their study examining the connection between pleasure, engagement, meaning, and well-being, Schueller and Seligman (2010) found that the three pathways do not contribute equally to both subjective and objective measures of well-being. They found that individuals with an orientation to engagement and/or meaning reported higher levels of both subjective and objective well-being than those with an orientation to pleasure. Furthermore, while all three pathways were positively related to subjective well-being, only engagement and meaning were positively related to objective well-being and pleasure was negatively correlated with education and occupation (Schueller & Seligman, 2010). These authors were also surprised to note that an orientation to pleasure had only a small correlation to positive affect (Schueller & Seligman, 2010). Schueller and Seligman (2010) suggested that the relevance of engagement and meaning might be linked to goals and the skills and the personal resources they build. For example, in this latter study, engagement and meaning were related to higher educational attainment, which these authors suggest is an example of a resource builder that may not be subjectively enjoyable (Schueller & Seligman, 2010). Schueller & Seligman (2010) explained:

In the case of pleasure, people may subjectively feel that they are getting something out of pleasurable activities, but this does not translate into further resources. For example, eating a piece of chocolate cake indulges one's taste buds and produces pleasure but may interfere with long-term goals of living healthy and losing weight. Many pleasurable activities represent a compromise between short-term and long-term goals. Engaging in

more than just the occasional pleasure can therefore sabotage one's long-term goals (p. 260).

These researchers noted that engagement and meaning may be important pathways in terms of a good and successful life, and suggested that while focusing on pleasure may provide an immediate boost in mood, "nothing is built" (p. 261).

There appear to be many benefits to focusing on strengths and positive character traits, in terms of enhanced success, well-being, happiness and life satisfaction. However, some may question whether this is a role for the school. Park (2004) asserted that "these strengths can be cultivated and strengthened by appropriate parenting, schooling, various youth development programs, and healthy communities" (p.50). Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, and Linkins (2009) suggested that while parents tend to want well-being for their children, the schools' priority is accomplishment and success. These authors advocate for schools to have a role in developing children's well-being in addition to achievement in order to decrease depression, increase life satisfaction, to improve learning, and encourage creative thinking, and they see positive education as a means for accomplishing this (Seligman, et al., 2009). These authors argue that, given that most children attend school, well-being programs can enhance children's well-being on a wide scale and can:

- 1) promote skills and strengths that are valued by most, and perhaps all, parents; 2) produce measurable improvements in students' well-being and behaviour; and 3) facilitate students' engagement in learning and achievement (Seligman, et al., 2009; p. 295).

In their review, Seligman et al. (2009) test the Penn Resiliency Program (PRP) and the Strath Haven Positive Psychology Curriculum for schools. It would appear that the PRP program focuses on enhancing students' competence and ability to problem-solve effectively. By encouraging optimism and teaching students to think realistically and flexibly, their hope is that students will more effectively manage daily stressors and problems. Some of the skills taught by this program include assertiveness, creative brainstorming, decision-making, and relaxation (Seligman, et al., 2009). After reviewing the available evidence, these authors conclude that most of the studies indicate improvements in students' well-being, particularly as it relates to pessimism and depression (Seligman et al., 2009). They also indicate that it would helpful for future research to investigate outcomes related to social skills, positive emotion, and engagement in learning (Seligman, et al., 2009).

The goals of a positive psychology program are: "1) to help students identify their signature character strengths and 2) to increase students' use of these" (Seligman, et al., 2009; p. 300). One such program targets the strengths described in the Virtues in Action classification (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Ultimately it is hoped that attaining the goals in this program and other like positive psychology programs will promote resilience, positive emotion, and a sense of meaning or purpose (Seligman et al., 2009). This positive psychology program increased the quality of performance in Language Arts and improved social skills, but did not improve symptoms of anxiety and depression, character strengths, or participation in extra-curricular activities (Seligman et al., 2009). For that reason, Seligman et al. (2009) recommend combining the positive psychology program with the PRP and talk about the potential to move beyond teaching well-being to also embedding it in the school (Seligman et al., 2009). These authors

provided several examples of the methods for embedding positive psychology into their academic program, including this example:

Geography teachers asked students to consider how to measure the happiness of an entire nation, and how criteria for well-being might differ from Australia to Iran to Indonesia. They also researched how the physical geography of a place (e.g., green space) might contribute to well-being (p. 306).

Generally speaking, Seligman et al. (2009) view the school as an ideal place for interventions intended to enhance happiness and well-being and consider the positive psychology program and the PRP to effective in that regard.

The Strengths Gym was another positive psychology program intended to help children to build their strengths, learn new strengths, and to recognize strengths in others (Proctor, Tsukayama, Wood, Maltby, Fox Eades, & Linley, 2011). The course has three levels in order to address the needs of students in years seven, eight, and nine, with lessons and activities related to “Spotting Your Strengths,” “Strength Builder,” and “Strengths “Challenges” (Proctor, et al., 2011). The intention of the program is to help students recognize their strengths and to “further develop their use and knowledge of the strength” (Proctor, et al., 2011; p. 383). The results of this study suggested that adolescents who participate regularly in character strength-based exercises show improved life satisfaction in comparison to those who do not (Proctor, et al., 2011).

The implicit values school curriculum. Nielsen (2005) suggested that, regardless of our desire or intention, we cannot avoid teaching values in the school setting as values are constantly reflected in our actions. As he put it:

In any classroom there are rules, expectations and specific things taught. Indeed, as soon as a teacher walks in the door, he or she embodies attitudes, ideas and patterns of actions characteristic of his or her persona. In other words, it is not a question of whether or not we should have values education – for this in many ways cannot be avoided. Rather, it might be more useful to ask how we can consciously make our awareness and practices of values as beneficial as possible to children's development (Nielsen, 2005; p.2).

Nielsen (2005) noted that schools are integral in the socialization of children and that the internalization of values is an important part of that process.

In his chapter, *A curriculum of giving for student wellbeing and achievement: How to wear leather sandals on a rough surface*, Nielsen (2011) provided an account of values education, a term which he uses synonymously with character education, resilience education, positive education, civics education, and social emotional learning, as a method for increasing children's well-being and resilience. In his description of a "curriculum of giving," Nielsen (2011) combines the notions of happiness and of meaning in the sense of being something for others. In reference to the established benefits of giving, in terms of health and happiness, Nielsen (2011) suggested that describing a curriculum of giving, as opposed to service learning, better captures the intrinsic value of giving and service in that they "will be of benefit *in and of themselves*" (p. 154). He further explained:

By considering how we as teachers can allow regular opportunities for children to have meaning in their lives via a curriculum of giving - and by being familiar with the research on giving - we are more likely to value the underlying benefit of giving, and not merely see it as a means to an end. Giving, as a principle of living, can be embodied in

almost any situation and of itself has immense value to individual and collective wellbeing (Nielsen, 2011; p. 154).

While Seligman's notions related to the pathways to well-being (especially meaningful activity) and the positive psychology program as described above may include service to others, a sense of purpose could also be an internal, potentially spiritual experience. In contrast, Nielsen's 'curriculum of giving' (2011) appears to effectively synthesize the notions of Aristotelian eudaimonism and the Kantian sense of duty. As such, he outlined four dimensions of giving that encompass a continuum from self-compassion to altruism: giving to the self, giving to relationships, giving to communities, and giving to life (Nielsen, 2011). In the giving to the self, Nielsen (2011) incorporated positive psychological perspectives related to self-soothing, flow, and savoring, and defended giving to self as belonging on the continuum of giving, in that "without giving to the self, with wisdom and awareness, what the self needs, it is hard to give effectively to others" (p. 156).

In terms of giving to relationships, Nielsen (2011) emphasized the importance of providing regular opportunities for giving, such as helping to serve morning tea or reviewing values related to giving such as integrity or respect. The intention of the children's giving to communities is to expand their consciousness and provide opportunities to give beyond the children's immediate relationships with the goal of encouraging the development of empathy and a more global perspective (Nielsen, 2011). Again, Nielsen advocated using a hands-on approach in giving to communities as this provides opportunities to develop compassion, empathy, and generosity without the need for moralizing and allows the children to experience the activity on an emotional level. Nielsen (2011) related giving to life as having gratitude for life itself or 'inner

giving,' which may include such acts as gratitude and prayer. Nielsen (2011) appears to endorse values education and the curriculum of giving, or some similar approach, as a worthy priority for educational systems, as illustrated by his concluding remarks:

Often I am puzzled about the fact that this doesn't seem to be rocket science, and yet testing and quantitative measuring seems more and more oppressive to teachers trying to focus on what matters. What really matters is a whole person approach to education in which academic success is seen as a by-product, however important (p. 161).

Educating the 'whole person' would necessarily move beyond individual strengths and character traits, and even beyond the students' inner circle of relationship, to include opportunities to become more aware and involved on a community and even global level. In the following section, citizenship and global education approaches will be examined in terms of the effort to prepare students to become fully functioning and participating members of society. Also considered is the relationship between character education and citizenship and global education approaches.

Citizenship and Global Education.

In addition to moral and character education, citizenship and civic education have been other associated terms. These terms appear to have a great deal of overlap in terms of goals, perspectives, and approaches, with the terms seemingly shifting or being used interchangeably over the decades. The citizenship and civics education approach tends to focus on knowledge, particularly knowledge related to government and constitutional rights (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006). Through a democratically inspired and operationalized citizenship education, students can

gain knowledge about the concepts of democracy and the structures associated with political decision-making. Furthermore, they can in such a context ideally be encouraged to learn to think critically about policies, to express their authentic personal views, and acquire a sense of responsibility and willingness to engage with social and political issues and affairs. The approach to civics education (conceptualized also as moral education) that occurred in Soviet schools during the 1970s demonstrates that not all education initiatives labeled as citizenship education necessarily are designed to help develop autonomous citizens competent in critical thinking with the confidence to challenge the status quo when necessary. According to Glanzer (2003), the primary purpose of the Soviet moral education program in the 1970s was to build communism. As such, the emphasis was on developing “good, polite, hard working patriots” (Glanzer, 2003; p. 297).

As illustrated above, the focus of moral education and the approaches used not only vary across cultures, but also within cultures, and would often resemble something similar to civic or political education. For example, in Belarus, moral education under communism was linked with political education and the goal was to produce “ideal” Soviet citizens and included a very collectivist orientation (Sidorovitch, 2005). However, after the collapse of communism, the goals shifted to more individualistic orientations such as leadership and voluntary civic participation. In an attempt to de-politicize the curriculum, discussions of moral values were eliminated. However, during the mid-1990s, Belarus experienced severe economic decline accompanied by an increase in behavioural problems among its students, which caused the educational system to re-examine its position on moral education. As a result, moral education was once again considered an important part of the curriculum though the government was then faced with the

challenge of how to best provide this education. In the end, the educational system partnered with the Orthodox Church in the provision of moral education. However, the Belarus government did acknowledge the right to religious freedom and made attempts in its "moral education" initiative to use neutral resources and to engage students in general discussions about human values.

In Vietnam, moral education has been considered a critical aspect of the curriculum with a formalized curriculum that includes textbooks (Doan, 2005). In the primary grades the focus has been on character and personality building which involves teaching respect, love, and good behaviour. Pictures, stories, games, and other similar approaches have been used to teach the various morality-based topics, and after each lesson the students answer comprehension questions. Each lesson addresses aspects of morality related to the self, relationships with others, nature, national identity, and community or societal issues.

Doan (2005) noted that as the Vietnamese student moves through the secondary grades, she or he will notice a shift in the moral education curriculum toward more of a clear citizenship education emphasis whereby the student learns about her or his rights and duties as a Vietnamese citizen. The goal is to develop a socialist citizen with characteristics related to willingness for hard work and a community orientation. This trend continues into the post-secondary education system with mandatory political and Marxist-Leninist philosophy courses being a required component of undergraduate educational programs. However, in addition to socialist principles, Confucianism is a significant factor in moral education throughout all grade levels. The values associated with Confucianism are related to respect and obedience with an emphasis on the superiority of males over females.

Lee and Ho (2005) chronicled the ideopolitical shifts that occurred in China over the past several decades and the accompanying changes in moral education. Under the influence of the Chinese Communist Party the goal of moral education was to nurture love for one's country, the people, labour, and public property. In other words, moral education was inextricably linked with political issues and national goals were the emphasis. However by 1978, in addition to the political aspects of moral education which had been maintained, there was also a focus on behaviour and independence. This eventually evolved into two separate moral education streams, one related ideopolitical education (e.g., Marxism) and the other to morality, with an emphasis on psychological health, virtues, and moral judgment abilities. These authors maintain that as China has moved in their view somewhat toward democratization, moral education similarly evolved with an increased focus on individual well being within society.

In North America interest in civic education, though with an obvious focus on democracy, has been renewed, likely in response to evidence indicating diminished civic attachment in young adults (Galston, 2001). In terms of understanding the purpose of civic education, Galston (2001) summarized the major findings indicating some important links between civic information and civic attributes. He noted that such knowledge "helps citizens understand their interests as individuals and as members of groups" in that the more knowledge one has, the better able they are to understand the impact of policies on their interests and to promote their interests (Galston, 2001; p. 223). Galston (2001) also noted that civic knowledge enhances an individual's ability to understand political events and increases the consistency in terms of their ideological views across issues. He further noted that civic knowledge cannot only alter our views about public issues but can also makes us less likely to mistrust public life and have more understanding for

the behaviours of public officials (Galston, 2001). Finally, Galston (2001) added that such knowledge promotes support for democratic values and increases the likelihood of political participation. Galston (2001) concluded that ultimately “we do not have a compelling reason to doubt that civic knowledge affects civic competence, character, and conduct” (p. 226).

Crystal and DeBell (2002) stated that “democracy cannot survive without a populace oriented toward civic life, ready to form associations, discuss problems, and cooperate in the pursuit of common ends” (p. 113) and indicated the norms for such participation are beginning to develop in childhood and adolescence. In that regard, “civic orientation during youth sets the stage for civic orientation as an adult” (Crystal & DeBell, 2002; 114). In their research involving sixth, eighth, and tenth graders, Crystal and DeBell (2002) wanted to identify factors that would predict youths’ favourable orientation toward and participation in civic life. They found that high levels of interpersonal trust (e.g., that people around them tend to be honest and that people, in general, are likely to be honest) were predictive of civic orientation, even in students as young as 11 years of age. They also found a connection between attributions of social responsibility and civic orientation in that a collective action approach was predictive of the valuation of both the public and private dimensions of citizenship. These authors indicated that these results were in line with Putnam’s (1993) notion of social capital theory and felt it was most significant that these principles appear to exist even for children of a younger age than previously believed.

Perhaps children possess more civic knowledge and awareness than we realize. Bateson (2001) recalled having some understanding of political and civic notions and processes such as parties, campaigns, and voting as a younger child which understanding she gleaned through overhearing conversations and the media. However, although she noted that she had gained very

basic knowledge of civics as a younger child, such as the win-lose nature of politics, she had not yet acquired the more abstract notions related to democracy. For example:

On the one level, it is important to be committed to particular policies and directions, to have preferences and alliances, and to express them. On the next, and more inclusive, logical level, it is important to be committed to a process that may well defeat those preferences: to be able to say, when one's own candidate is defeated, that at least this is a victory for democracy (p. 115).

She goes on to advocate for the need, in light of democracy, to teach citizens to entertain multiple points of view, but even further, to acknowledge the beliefs of others and to appreciate that "divergence is essential to the health of the larger system that includes both the self and others" (p. 117). It is not difficult to see the implications of this approach for character education in that teaching children to not only entertain other points of view but also appreciate that such diversity exists will not only assist them in their civic participation, but also in their ability to navigate their world and to maintain healthy relationships.

Developing the ability of schoolchildren to think critically and to consider points of view different from their own may be a key function of democratic character education. As Caspo (2001) noted:

In traditional school curricula, instruction is organized mostly according to the disciplines of the arts and sciences, and the coherence of knowledge is derived from each discipline. This setup may be satisfactory if the school intends to train future scientists or disciplinary experts, but it does not always fit the purpose of educating citizens. Cultivating students' minds and preparing them to be democratic thinkers

requires a different logic or organization in education than that required by the teaching of the disciplines (p. 135).

He also argued that we may be introducing children to concepts related to society and social organization too late in their development. Given that children begin to navigate their social world very early on and, as such, begin to develop an understanding of related societal concepts, if we do not help children to expand on these ideas or encourage them to think about them within proper contexts, their notions of civics may remain in their primitive form and not develop (Caspo, 2001). As such, it may be necessary to begin addressing these areas for growth early on the educational program.

If one of the goals of character education is the promotion of responsible citizenship, as many school board websites state, then providing opportunities to learn about democracy would be an important part of the program (Underwood, 2001). Underwood (2001) identified public schools as a place where individual rights are guaranteed simply because they are governed by the same rules and laws that protect citizens' rights in society. However he also noted that teaching children about the importance of rights and how to exercise and protect them responsibly is not enough, that in order to truly "equip students with the civic skills they need to be effective participants in a representative democracy, they must be given opportunities to practice those skills within institutions that protect their constitutional rights and offer democratic opportunities" (p. 174). Although Underwood (2001) acknowledged that challenges are associated with doing so (e.g., taking the time to allow a student due process before being expelled would slow the disciplinary process, providing children with an opportunity to express their opinions might be uncomfortable if it involves criticism of anything related to the school),

he also suggested that the benefits outweigh the costs; that students who have these opportunities are more likely to become rights respecting people who have regard for democracy.

Although the above authors have suggested that democracy is something we should want and should instill in our children, the previous examples of moral education initiatives (with an emphasis on citizenship) around the world (e.g., Russia, Vietnam) indicate that some countries do not value democracy and, in fact, see it as something to avoid (Soder, 2001). Soder (2001) defined democracy as:

a political regime that is characterized by freedom, constitutionality, and democracy (in the sense of self-rule by the people rather than rule by the one or the few) in a republican state (in the sense of elected representatives chosen from parties presenting viable and significant alternative philosophies and programs) (p. 185).

Soder (2001) described the conditions necessary for a democracy including the characteristics of a democratic people and advocated that the schools attend to this development of (democratic) character. Some of the characteristics necessary for democracy identified by Soder (2001) include a tolerance for ambiguity, a willingness to act as a result of reasoned probabilities (rather than looking for absolute truths), a desire to satisfy individual needs while also considering the needs of the community, and a desire to keep the impulse to improve within the bounds of reason and prudence.

It would appear that the focus of civic or citizenship education thus far has been on the development of character and providing knowledge or skills related to responsible citizenship in order to prepare children to be productive and responsible citizens in the future, as adults, but what about their right to genuinely participate in civic issues as children? Grover (2011) noted

that many children around the world are assuming adult responsibilities but are denied the protection, assistance, and supports that would be provided under the governing laws to adults in similar situations. Grover (2011) provides examples wherein the CRC provides some protection for children from being forced into situations, such as sexual exploitation or combat, but provides allowances for children of a certain age to be recruited and potentially participate in such circumstances allegedly “voluntarily.” Grover also pointed to the example of child labourers who contribute to State economies tremendously and often at great cost to themselves, but are not allowed access to voting. In other words:

Children and youth in extremely dire situations then, though making highly valuable societal contributions, most often have no voice through the vote to advocate for amelioration of their socio-economic status or other living conditions to any degree whatsoever (Grover, 2011, p. 25).

Given that the vote is a way to influence policies and legislation that infringe on rights or contribute to negative circumstances for individuals or groups, Grover (2011) argues that the CRC does not fully affirm the participatory rights of children. This in that the CRC does not address voting rights for children. Only recently has there come into existence a CRC mechanism for victimized children to bring complaints regarding violations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and/or its first two protocols forward against the State. Under a newly developed optional communications protocol of the CRC, entered into force April 14, 2014, children are now able to bring various categories of human rights complaints against the State forward to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure, adopted December 19, 2011).

In terms of children's ability to fully participate regarding issues related to civil rights and citizenship, Grover (2011) reviewed some social science findings that reveal that even young children understand such notions to some extent, including the fact that they are arguably in many instances unfairly excluded from these processes. Grover referred to Helwig and Turiel (2002) who challenged the findings of the studies in the 1960s and 70s which consisted largely of survey research and developmental studies, and suggested that our understanding of children's knowledge of rights and democratic concepts needs to be revised. After conducting a meta-analysis of key research on the topic, these researchers conclude that children in Western societies, even young children, "possess concepts of rights and civil liberties and prefer democratic social organization of a variety of social contexts" and that a similar pattern exists in non-Western societies (Helwig & Turiel, 2002; p. 266). They suggested that the earlier studies missed these understandings due to their focus on judgments about rights as opposed to their social application. Helwig and Turiel (2002) indicated that children "recognize that freedoms exist that should be guaranteed against arbitrary governmental intrusion" though these understandings are initially based on ideas about individual autonomy and evolve to include societal principles over time and development (p. 267).

Helwig and Turiel (2002) concluded that the studies they reviewed indicated early understandings of such concepts as rights in children's judgments and reasoning with some variability related to specific contexts. It had been demonstrated, in fact, that children assert their own rights and autonomous decision-making in many situations (Helwig & Turiel, 2002).

However, as Helwig and Turiel (2002) pointed out:

Children's views on their own rights and autonomy do not, of course, translate directly into public policy recommendations. Rather, public policy questions about children's rights go beyond the developmental findings on children's moral judgments and implicate issues such as the cognitive ability and competence of children to exercise informed choice as well as touching on other, specifically legal questions, such as important issues and precedents within family and Constitutional law. Nonetheless, a sensitive implementation of any public policy in the area of children's rights and decision making, pro or con, will need to take into account the well-formed perspectives held by children themselves (p. 266).

Although children may have well-formed perspectives, knowledge, and understandings related to natural rights such as freedom of speech, they are also highly aware that they are being excluded from voting rights and other political processes (Grover, 2011). In her book *Young People's Human Rights and the Politics of Voting Age*, Grover (2011) endorsed voting rights for 16- and 17-year-olds (and possibly 14- and 15-year-olds) for a number of reasons, including those noted above. Furthermore, she also considered the implications for civic education in the sense that in order to instill democratic values in youth, they must have opportunities to participate in the electoral process through voting earlier than the current typical age of majority for the vote in many Western countries of eighteen (Grover, 2011). Moreover, Grover (2011) suggested that in order to genuinely meet the standards related to the right to education in Article 29 of the CRC, civics education must address:

- (a) the issue of suffrage as a *basic human rights entitlement for all citizens* barring any legitimate societal interest in an infringement of this right. (Including also inquiry into

controversies about whether the right to suffrage belongs to all *persons*; even non-citizens resident in the State); and (b) the controversies surrounding the youth vote (p. 224).

Whether we call it character, citizenship, civic, or moral education, the complexities and implications are enormous. Not only has citizenship education varied greatly over time but a great deal of cultural and political diversity is also evident. Furthermore, as political shifts occurred within various countries, character education similarly evolved. As such, we can expect character education within Ontario schools to reflect the current political context. However, it will undoubtedly be a significant challenge to develop a unified character education program within such a culturally diverse community. Perhaps Milne (2013) provides some clarity regarding the overlapping concepts noted above by connecting the concept of citizenship to rights- civil, political, and social rights in particular.

In his book, *The History and Theory of Children's Citizenship in Contemporary Societies*, Milne refers to Marshall's notion of citizenship as being connected to civil rights including the "right to a fair trial, freedom from arbitrary imprisonment and violence, freedom of speech, right to own property and rights of contract" (as cited in Milne, 2013; p. 30). Political rights "include the right to vote and to stand for election," while social rights involve the right to health care, education, and a benefit system (p. 30). Milne (2013) further adds that Marshall emphasized the importance of social rights in the concept of citizenship, as those living in poverty, with poor health, or possessing limited education would struggle to exercise citizenship rights related to civil and political rights. Milne (2013) noted that as far as rights and education are concerned:

Education has frequently been held to be the principle course to some nature of 'liberation through knowledge' for children...although since education is ultimately adult made and managed it is not reaching that goal. Education is usually defined by curricula that are intended to bring about consistency of 'production' that is measured by those who achieve qualifications. Standards are set and examinations leading to qualification are rarely open to discussion with children and youth who must sit them to acquire qualification and access to high levels of education. In those areas children's own inputs into education are marginal and rarely reflect children's rights principles (p. 188).

Generally speaking, the rights of various institutions and individuals, including children, are important considerations in the issue of character development and education.

Brennan and Noggle (1997) suggest that as persons, children are entitled to the same moral consideration as all persons but that this does not mean that they should have exactly the same duties and rights as adults. While there is some consensus (as reflected in the large number of states parties that have ratified the CRC) that children should have rights, particularly those related to safety and well-being, some see the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) as affording children the rights of adults and argue that this will lead to the eventual disappearance of "childhood" (Bowers Andrews & Freeman, 1997; Freeman, 1998). Many also view some of the rights outlined in the CRC, particularly those related to choice and self-determination, as impinging on the rights of parents (Guggenheim, 2005). However, others argue that this view is based upon inaccurate interpretations of the CRC and maintain that the real intent of this legal instrument is to promote the dignity of children, adding that the provision of choice must consider the developmental level of the child (Brennan & Noggle, 1997; Melton, 1991). Indeed

the CRC in fact recognizes that children's evolving decision-making capacity is a function of their level of maturity and age, emphasizes the role of the family in guiding children and the child's right to his or her culture (see for instance the CRC 1990: Articles 12 (1), Article 5 and Article 30).

It has been suggested that the overarching goal of character education in terms of current perspectives is to help individuals develop the ability to think autonomously and critically while also acknowledging an obligation to the common good (Bull, 2006; Halstead & Pike, 2006). The contexts in which moral decisions are made have also been perceived as a crucial component of character education (Brabeck & Rogers, 2000). However, schools seem to be all over the map in terms of committing to implementing such programs. Part of the difficulty may be related to the breadth of information available and the numerous perspectives on the subject, from religious to scientific. Even advocates of human rights, which have really become a global concern over recent decades, have weighed in on the issue and have attempted to influence the perspectives on character education (Brennan & Noggle, 1997; Halstead, 1999, Howe & Covell, 2007). In fact, some believe that the goals of moral development education and human rights education are overlapping (Brabeck & Rogers, 2000). Covell and Howe (2001) further assert that understanding one's own rights may lead to greater support of the rights of others and that becoming aware of existing rights violations may teach tolerance and empathy.

Human rights education appears to fit well with what some might think should be the true goal of character education and may, in fact, fill an important gap that some feel has existed in past character education initiatives. For example, in 1997 Kohn noted that character education was, "for the most part, a collection of exhortations and extrinsic inducements designed to make

children work harder and do what they're told" (Kohn, 1997; p. 2). Kohn went on to argue that the point of the established instructional approach was to "drill students in specific behaviors rather than to engage them in deep, critical reflection about certain ways of being" (p. 2). This is similar to Freire's "banking concept of education" whereby the teachers do all of the thinking, teaching, choosing, knowing, and acting, while the students are the "mere objects," which he describes as mirroring oppressive society (Freire, 2006; p. 73). Bishop (2002) connects this tendency to teach children to be obedient with the notion of children as possessions. These notions harken back to character education efforts from the mid 19th century to the early 20th century (Beachum & McCray, 2005; Dekker, 2000).

Beachum and McCray (2005) provided a historical view of character education dating back to the early 20th century, outlining the socio-political influences on the shifting philosophies that were guiding the related efforts. Character education and its related forms have essentially been around for decades and Beachum and MacCray (2005) argue that schools, whether explicitly or implicitly, "remain at the forefront of debates and debacles in the effort to continue this ongoing mission of character education" (p. 5). However, there appears to have been many different notions and a lack of consistency, both historically and currently, regarding what character education should entail and how it should be taught. Beachum and McCray (2005) see community as the "common denominator and key to character education" and argue for a collaborative approach and "collegial attitudes" (p. 6).

Davis (2003) distinguishes between three different types of character education:

- (1) simple moral education (essentially Kohlbergian moral education in the classroom),
- (2) just-community education (a Deweyesque practice emphasizing democratic decision-

making outside the classroom), and (3) simple character education (attempting to build character both in and outside of class one trait at a time by emphasizing good behavior) (p. 32)

Davis (2003) severely criticizes the 'simple character education' approach due to the lack of empirical evidence supporting its range of methods and also given its potential for "doing the right things for the wrong reason but also doing many things that are just morally wrong" (e.g., disingenuously modelling a particular character trait for the purposes of teaching it, forcing "volunteerism" in the form of volunteer hours as a requirement for graduation). He further suggests that "we do have something that we know works, the probing academic discussions of simple moral education (and the just community's practical equivalent)" (Davis, 2003; p. 51).

Kohn (1997) suggested that the approaches to character education would look different if "we were principally concerned with helping children become active participants in a democratic society (or agents for transforming a society into one that is authentically democratic)...[or] if our top priority were to help students develop into principled and caring members of a community or advocates for social justice." (p. 6). These latter goals noted by Kohn (1997) in fact illustrate the role for children's rights in character education. If our goal is to help our children become "principled and caring members" of any community, whether locally or globally, it is necessary for them to develop a sense of responsibility. Human rights provides a framework for understanding our responsibilities as fellow human beings with children's rights not only being particularly relevant to children, but providing opportunities for children to learn to advocate for themselves and others within a rights framework. The following section will explore the connection between children's rights and character education.

The Role of Children's Rights in Character Education

Although moral development has been linked to justice, care, and positive virtues, all theories agree that the context is crucial to moral development and the goal of moral education (character education) is to create citizens who can make moral decisions within these contexts (Brabeck & Rogers, 2000). Human rights have not only been important considerations in this process, but advocates of human rights have attempted to influence the perspectives of these programs. Brabeck and Rogers (2000) argue that the goals of moral and human rights education are overlapping, that although the goal of moral education (character education) is to develop a moral individual and the goal of human rights education is political awareness and responsibility, both encourage the questioning of assumptions and perspective-taking. However, moral education directed to the development of good character typically involves a focus on hypothetical moral dilemmas, while human rights education focuses on real-life experiences that have occurred throughout history. As such, through the use of real examples, human rights education focuses on enhancing students' awareness about fundamental human rights and the importance of protecting them. This process would necessarily involve education about children's fundamental human rights and the violations thereof that are occurring globally.

As noted previously, the issue of children's rights came to the forefront of global consciousness in contemporary times largely with the drafting of UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC). However, while most individuals would agree that children should have rights, especially those related to safety and well-being, many view the rights outlined in the CRC, particularly those related to choice and self-determination, as inappropriate and even as

potentially impinging on the rights of adults (Bowers Andrews & Freeman, 1997; Freeman, 1998). However, others argue that this view is based upon inaccurate interpretations of the CRC and maintain that the real intent of this international legal instrument is to promote the dignity of children, adding that the provision of choice must consider the developmental level of the child (Brennan & Noggle, 1997; Melton, 1991). In spite of the drafting of this Convention and the subsequent ratification of it in most countries of the world, there is some indication that children and adolescents, not to mention many adults, have only a basic understanding of children's rights (Ruck, Keating, Abramovitch, & Koegl, 1998). Given that knowledge about children's human rights appears to have some positive implications in terms of promoting good citizenship (Covell & Howe 2001; Howe, Covell, & O'Leary, 2002), this is unfortunate and not at all conducive to attempts to educate for good character.

Covell and Howe (2001) believe, based on their empirical research, that understanding one's own rights may lead to greater support of the rights of others and that becoming aware of existing rights violations may teach tolerance and empathy. These authors developed a children's rights curriculum that included activities intended to explore issues related to basic needs, equality, alcohol and drug abuse, the environment and health, juvenile justice, sexuality and education. Relevant articles from the CRC are also incorporated into this curriculum. This curriculum was provided to grade eight students in five schools in Nova Scotia, with grade eight students in five other schools used as a comparison group. Their results indicated that the children who participated in the children's rights education program "showed higher self-esteem, higher levels of perceived peer and teacher support and indicated more support for the rights of others" (Covell & Howe, 2001; p. 36). These authors suggest that understanding that one is

worthy of rights can positively affect self-esteem, but also posit that their curriculum empowered students which may have some positive implications for virtuous conduct in defense of rights of self and others as well. Covell & Howe (2001) noted that three of the five grade eight classes in their study became active in school- and community-based activities, such as assisting refugees and working to provide food to those in need.

While it would appear that children's rights education may be beneficial on a number of levels, Covell and Howe (2001) noted that the climate of the school may be a barrier to this process. These authors note that in order to adequately implement such a program, a democratic teaching style must be used in order to appropriately honour the students' participatory rights. This may be difficult within classrooms and schools characterized by authoritarian structures. Notably, in a subsequent study (Howe, Covell, & O'Leary, 2002), these authors found that their children's rights education program also enhanced the teachers' support for children's rights. Indeed, it would appear that teaching children's rights may have implications not only for the moral development of the students, but also in terms of the teachers' acknowledgement and understanding of children's rights, which may, in turn, enhance the school's ability to allow students to participate more fully in school-related decisions.

The many benefits to students and teachers related to the teaching of children's rights are evident in a new education initiative launched by UNICEF Canada (2011) known as Rights Respecting Schools which is currently being utilized in several Canadian schools. It would appear that this initiative was influenced by the research of Katherine Covell (2010) which demonstrated greater student engagement in rights-respecting schools over traditional schools. The Rights Respecting School initiative (UNICEF Canada, 2011) is premised on the idea that "in

order for children to want to achieve they have to feel included, that they belong and that they matter” (p. 2). The Rights Respecting School initiative also highlights children’s right to participate in family, school, and community life as outline in the CRC. The anticipated benefits for students exposed to the Rights Respecting School program as outlined in UNICEF Canada’s (2011) document include decreased bullying, a less adversarial approach to conflict resolution, greater concern for themselves and others, a greater likelihood of higher order thinking, and better school attendance. The benefits for teachers as described in this document include a feeling of empowerment, greater time to teach effectively due to less low level student disruption, and greater job satisfaction due to healthier classroom and school atmospheres. Clearly, the issue of children’s rights is critical for schools and for character education in particular. It is encouraging to see the current philosophy of education in Canada shifting to include a children’s rights perspective.

Given that the rights of various institutions and individuals, including children, are important considerations in the issue of character development and education, determining the status of children’s human rights, as perceived by children, was considered by the current author to be a reasonable initial step in exploring the issue of character education from a children’s rights perspective. Therefore this researcher designed a study to examine the extent to which a small group of elementary students in Northern Ontario felt children’s rights were important and whether they perceived them as being upheld (Lake, 2010).

In collaboration with a local principal and classroom teacher, and after obtaining ethics approval from Lakehead University and the local school board, a grade seven class was selected for the study inquiring into children’s assessment of the existence and importance *for them as*

children of various rights. After obtaining informed consent from the guardians, the participants, the principal and the classroom teacher, a total of 12 students, five females and seven males, agreed to participate. Quantitative data was collected using the 40-item questionnaire used in the ISPA Cross-National Children's Rights Research Project (Hart, Pavlovich, & Zeidner, 2001). This measure addresses the major themes of the CRC, including survival, protection, development, and participation. Each item is assessed on a 5-point scale in terms of the importance and the perceived existence of each of the rights in the lives of the participants. The scale numbers are arranged from least to most important and degree of existence, with one representing a right of no importance or not at all in existence and five representing a right of greatest importance or one fully supported and/or endorsed by self or by others in the child's life. Immediately following completion of this measure, students participated in a brief classroom discussion led by the current author intended to further explore their perspectives about children's human rights.

Generally speaking, the participants rated the importance of the rights included in the questionnaire as higher than the level of their existence in their lives. The rights that were rated as most highly important (mean of 4.5 or higher) by the participants were those related to basic needs and interpersonal issues. Interestingly, the right to have food, clothing, and a dwelling was also rated most highly in existence (mean of 4.67), which is an indication that not only did these participants see basic needs as an important right, but they also felt that this was supported by others. However, the rights rated lowest in existence, with means ranging from 2.58 to 2.92, were those related to fair treatment/support and having a say/influence. The participants expressed similar ideas during the brief classroom discussion (Lake, 2010)

During the classroom discussion, participants indicated that they felt their rights for safety and the fulfilment of their basic needs were being respected. However, they did not feel that their rights to privacy, to be heard, and to make their own choices (e.g., activities, friends, etc.) were being respected (Lake, 2010). They also indicated that they tended to learn about their rights through their parents and the school (Lake, 2010). The participants noted further that adults show respect for children's rights, in the children's view, when the adults meet the children's basic needs, support their ideas, include them in decisions, and listen to them (Lake, 2010). They also felt that adults could improve their support of children's rights by listening to them, not being over protective, allowing greater responsibility as their children grow, and giving help when needed (Lake, 2010). The participants also acknowledged that children have a role in ensuring that their rights are respected in terms of the importance of speaking up. The importance of listening to children was emphasized by the participants as they noted that it is difficult to speak up when they are not feeling heard (Lake, 2010).

The participants of this latter study indicated that although they considered their rights to be highly important, they tended not to exist for them at the same level, with two exceptions (Lake, 2010). Interestingly, there were two rights for which the mean level of existence was greater than the mean level of importance: to be able to go as far in school as possible (4.09 and 3.83, respectively) and to have a place to study (3.17 and 3.00, respectively):

It may not be surprising that the participants rated the importance of the rights related to education as lower than the existence. After all, education tends to be very accessible to children in Canada. Unlike some other countries around the world where children are not able to access education for various reasons, all Canadian children are expected to attend

school. Perhaps rights feel less of an issue to the individual when they are seen as fully supported. (Lake, 2010, p. 686).

In terms of gender differences, the mean level of importance for most of the rights tended to be greater for the female participants. This is consistent with the results of a large scale, cross-national study examining children's perspectives of their rights (Hart et al, 2001). When compared to the male participants, the rights that were rated as considerably more important by females included the right to be a good friend, the right to have access to good friends, and the right to have a name from birth (Lake, 2010). The mean levels of importance were higher for males than the females for a few of the rights, though the difference was not as great as those noted above. These included the right to be treated fairly when people think you are wrong, the right to have your needs and wishes considered in plans that might affect you, the right to have money to spend as one chooses, and the right to learn right from wrong. "It would appear that the female participants considered the rights related to interpersonal relationships and identity to be more important, whereas the male participants considered the rights related to having a say/influence to be more important." (Lake, 2010, p. 687)

The mean levels of perceived existence of rights for females versus males appeared more variable for females. For the female child study participants, the mean levels of existence were greater for the right to be a good friend and to have the opportunity to have good friends. For males, the mean levels of perceived existence of rights were greater for the right to have access to the information needed to make difficult decisions and to choose one's own religion and/or beliefs. Although the differences were slightly smaller, females rated the level of existence of the right to live on one's own when ready more highly, while males rated the right to do work that

makes life better for oneself and others more highly. "This is interesting in light of the fact that females rated the importance of the right to do work more highly than males" (Lake, 2010, p. 687).

When comparing the levels of importance with the levels of perceived existence of a right according to gender, some differences were apparent. With the exception of two of the rights, the mean levels of existence were lower than the levels of importance for the female participants. However, two of the rights, the right to be a good friend and to have the basic needs (e.g., food, clothing, and a place to live) fulfilled, were rated at the maximum level for both importance and existence. Though not at the maximum level, these two rights also received the same mean importance and existence levels for males. However, unlike the female participants, some of the rights had mean levels of perceived existence of rights that were higher than the mean levels of importance for males. These included the right: to have the information needed to make difficult choices, to be able to go as far in school as one's talents and efforts will allow, to be protected from having to fight in a war before becoming an adult, to be able to choose one's religion or beliefs about life, and to have a place to study.

In considering the gender differences in the findings of the latter study, Lake noted that: Generally speaking, the female participants rated the rights more highly in importance and indicated that most of their rights existed at lower levels. On the other hand, the male participants indicated that some of their rights existed at levels that exceeded their importance. In other words, even though the female participants considered their rights to be important, they did not feel they existed for them on the same level as their importance. Also, the male participants perceived some of their rights as being upheld for

them, even though they did not consider them to be as important. This may be a reflection of the broader socio-political climate as women have been fighting for their rights throughout history and one could argue that rights continue to be an issue for females today. As we examine these results more closely, this becomes even more evident, since the gender differences appear to follow a stereotypical pattern. The right to be a good friend and to have access to good friends appeared to exist in the eyes of the female participants, while the right to make choices appeared to exist for the male participants. Furthermore, even though females rated the importance of doing meaningful work more highly than males, this right was perceived as existing at higher levels by the males. (Lake, 2010, p. 688-689).

Another key finding of the latter study was the children's perceived lack of voice in decision-making affecting their lives

...the children in this study did not feel they had much of a say in their lives and emphasized the importance of being heard. While this issue has broad implications, considering children's perspectives regarding character education is also an issue of children's rights. ...After conducting a cross-national children's rights research project, Hart and his colleagues (2001) concluded that schools are generally doing a poor job of respecting participation rights. (Lake, 2010, p. 689)

The finding in Lake (2010) that the children felt they had little if any voice regarding rights issues and decision-making by adults which affects their lives as children contributed in part to the decision to adopt a children's rights participatory frame for this dissertation research.

Since character education programs will have a direct impact on children's education and quality of school life and possibly beyond, it will be important to give children a voice on this issue.

Giving children a voice on the issue of character education provides them an opportunity to advocate for themselves in terms of their right to participate in decisions that affect them, including what and how they are learning. It is an opportunity to take action and to assert their own rights. The following section explores the connection between social action and human rights.

Social Action and Human Rights.

Grant and Gibson (2013) noted that, "protection and enactment of fundamental human rights are at the core of twenty-first century calls for social justice," in that there is a significant focus on economic, political, and social inequality (p. 81). Similar to balancing eudaimonism and a sense of duty in the manner that Nielsen (2011) did in his 'curriculum of giving,' Grant and Gibson discussed the importance of social action or justice; balancing individual liberties with social responsibility. In contrasting civil rights versus the United Nation's conception of human rights, these authors provide an illustration of this difference:

Whereas the civil rights tradition might simply guarantee an individual the right to work if he or she chooses and if jobs are available, the UN's articulation of human rights would instead guarantee that any individual who wants to work will work, with government initiatives providing employment when private markets do not, and that he or she will be given equal pay for equal work, earning enough to provide an adequate standard of living (Grant & Gibson, 2013; p. 85).

As such, the government goes beyond simply protecting individual liberty and provides a certain standard of living, thereby addressing both individual liberty and collective responsibility (Grant & Gibson, 2013).

The Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Rights Movement, and more recently, the LGBTQ advocacy efforts are examples of human rights as integrally linked to social justice (Grant & Gibson, 2013). As Grant and Gibson (2013) noted, "amplifying the voices of the weak and oppressed is how human rights - and ultimately social justice - are realized" (p. 91). However, Grant and Gibson (2013) acknowledged social justice education as a complicated task, largely due to the lack of a uniform definition. These authors identified two theories that are often used to inform social justice education, John Rawls' (1971) theory of distributive justice, which focuses on the macro-level political and economic structures "that cause exploitation and material deprivation and prevent self-actualization" and Nancy Fraser's (2003) perspective of injustice also stemming from the "denial of one's lived experience, identity, and culture" (Grant & Gibson, 2013); p. 93). Hence it is the case that:

Twenty-first century social justice education realizes the vision for education established in the UDHR [Universal Declaration of Human Rights]: to educate about basic human rights and fundamental human dignity, to foster the dispositions and attitudes that will protect human rights, and to allow for individuals' full self-actualization and personal development (Grant & Gibson, 2013; p. 94).

These authors also emphasized the role of critical thinking and noted that, in social justice teaching, students are provided opportunities to develop critical thinking abilities through a curriculum that attends to injustice, inequality, and human rights violations (Grant & Gibson,

2013). They provide an example of a high school math class where students used probability skills to determine whether it was likely that black defendants would have randomly received all-white juries, thus using current events and math knowledge to raise consciousness and prepare the students for later potential social justice activity (Gutstein, 2008; as cited in Grant & Gibson, 2013).

Grant and Gibson (2013) advocate very strongly for human rights and social justice education, and view these as critically linked: “human rights are an important sibling of social justice and need to be considered and included as fundamental social justice content” (p. 95). In Merrett’s (2004) effort to define social justice he also included a rights perspective. He provided an example of a definition developed by the British Commission on Social Justice which he contends emphasizes “individual freedoms and civil liberties,” with the understanding that not all inequalities are considered unjust (e.g., expecting to be treated equally before the courts versus not expecting in all instances to be treated equally in the marketplace. Merret, 2004). Merrett (2004) linked this definition to procedural justice (e.g., the right to pursue happiness) as opposed to distributional justice in the form of negative freedoms, such as freedom from hunger, freedom from inadequate shelter, or oppression (Commission on Social Justice, 1994; as cited in Merrett, 2004). In fact, however, there is in many jurisdictions societal debate as to whether governments should take a more proactive approach in ensuring human rights (e.g. ensuring a fair minimum guaranteed income necessary for a decent standard of living) rather than simply avoiding rights infringements by government (e.g. government suppression of free speech). The debate in the United States regarding President Obama’s health care initiative and whether all Americans

should have access to affordable basic health care as a basic universal human right and at what general cost is an example of this ongoing controversy (i.e. Pace, 2013).

Merrett (2004) identifies four reasons for caring about social justice which he connects to various justifications: the religious/moral (attending to the needs and rights of others), economic (an inequalitarian distribution of wealth can hinder national growth), legal (the guarantee that individual human rights will not be impeded), and the political (democratic institutions are more likely to thrive). He also identified three reasons for teaching social justice:

First, schools may be the most important site for social struggle...the public school system...is such an important site for social change...The second point is that democracy is not a permanent structure or final goal...[and] students must learn not to take their civil liberties for granted, or risk losing them in the future...[and] social inequality is inherently manifested in geographical ways - for example, people experiencing prejudice frequently live segregated lives in ghettos, peripheries, and 'on the wrong side of the tracks' (Merrett, 2004; p. 96).

The third point noted above was intended as a rationalization for social justice to be taught by geographers (Merrett, 2004).

Storm (2012) notes the risk for students to engage intentionally or unintentionally in harmful acts such as bullying, sexism, and racism (e.g., through humour or derogatory "theme" parties) without realizing that such behaviour serves to perpetuate oppression. Thus Storm suggests that raising students' awareness and increasing their knowledge, skills, and motivation to engage in social action and to confront such social issues when they arise, through social

justice education, would be highly beneficial (Storm, 2012). She also provides a straightforward and simple definition of social action engagement as:

students' ability to recognize and respond to the 'isms' (e.g., classism, racism, sexism, etc.), individually and collectively, in their daily lives. Examples include, but are not limited to, incidents of bullying, sexual harassment and racial profiling (Storm, 2012; p 548).

Studies in fact do show that enrollment in social justice education courses enhanced student commitment and confidence to take action (Alimo, 2012; Nagda, Kim, & Truelove, 2004) and an increased tendency to engage in social action behaviours (Stake & Hoffman, 2001).

While teaching social justice appears to be beneficial in a number of ways, the following research has focused on teaching strategies that seem to be particularly effective. Storm (2012), a social justice educator, conducted a qualitative study to "explore the students' perspectives of what enabled them to have the knowledge, skills, self-confidence, and motivation to confront [social injustice] issues" (p. 551). Her findings indicated that experiential activities, such as letter writing, videos, and action planning, enhance empathy for oppressed groups and increase knowledge about ways to combat acts of oppression. She also concluded that "through reflection and sharing their lived experiences in the classroom, students can make the 'isms' real for one another" (Storm, 2012; p. 557). Nagda, Gurin and Lopez (2003) take this a step further to emphasize the importance of the students actually practicing what they are learning when they noted that the results of their study:

indicate that active forms of learning in which students actually practice what they are learning are especially influential in fostering understanding of action in solving

intergroup conflicts. Both active learning in the classroom and engaged learning outside enhances students' learning (p. 187).

Since issues related to equality can be divisive and influenced by personal biases that cause individuals to underestimate, ignore or rationalize systemic inequalities Nagda, Gurin, Sorensen, Gurin-Sands, and Osuna (2009) suggest that "students can ingest information about inequality but to truly understand it, they need to engage actively with the material, just as they need to engage in laboratories in science courses that take them beyond mere reading and listening to lectures" (p. 46). These authors suggest intergroup dialogue which involves a process for promoting meaningful communication among students who belong to groups sharing a history of conflictual relationships as a means to enhancing understanding about inequality, as well as facilitating a move toward action and intergroup collaboration (Nagda, et al, 2009).

Through intergroup dialogue people enhance their understanding of themselves, particularly in terms of their connection to the social world, increase their appreciation for the influences of power and privilege, and learn to work as allies (Gurin-Sands, Gurin, Nagda, & Osuna, 2012). In order to accomplish this, intergroup dialogue utilizes some important processes. Gurin-Sands and colleagues (2012) describe the dialogic part as including the communication processes of engaging the self and appreciating differences. They also note that the critical part of the intergroup dialogue model includes the communication processes of critical reflection and alliance building (Gurin-Sands, 2012). The teaching methods involved in this approach include readings and structured in-class exercises. For example, educators may use testimonials that encourage students to share their sense of identity (e.g., gender or race), including how it was formed and its influence on their approach to privilege or discrimination (Gurin-Sands, 2012).

In their study of college and university students, Nagda and colleagues (2009) compared intergroup dialogue regarding issues related to race and gender to a no-treatment control group and a comparison group of student enrolled in a social science class. Differences related to attitudes toward inequality were noticed, as well as differences related to communication processes. Results indicated more of an increase in the critique of inequality and a commitment to action related to addressing it for the students in the intergroup dialogue group than in the comparison groups. In terms of communication processes, the inter-group dialogue participants also showed evidence of “appreciating difference, engaging self, critical reflection, and alliance building more frequently” (p. 52). The authors of the latter study concluded that:

...critical-dialogic communicative engagement is crucially important in the students’ learning-bridging academic content with personal sense-making, interpersonal relating with sociopolitical analyses, and classroom learning with community involvement.
(Nagda, et al, 2009; p. 53).

Excerpts from the students’ final papers illustrated how they connected the inter-group dialogic communication processes to their critique of inequality and commitment to action.

In order to illustrate the students’ engagement of self and appreciating differences, Nagda and colleagues provided examples from the students’ reflections on the process. They noted that hearing from others who shared similarities in terms of gender and race provided more understanding about themselves in that regard, and that hearing from students who were different allowed them to examine the reasons for these differences, as well their sense of social responsibility (Nagda, et al, 2009). For example, after hearing from other women in the group, one woman commented:

'Hearing other women made me feel like somebody had placed my whole world in a jar for me to look at. Piece by piece I took inventory of my beliefs and opinions about gender norms and then I began to reconstruct them' (Nagda, et al, 2009; p. 53).

Comments by a "white woman" in a race inter-group dialogue illustrated the impact of the stories told by the "students of color" on her sense of responsibility:

'Listening to the stories of other students has helped me become accountable for the toll I take in the larger system. I cannot claim innocence if I receive a privilege/benefit that I now know is given to me based on my race/ethnicity' (Nagda, et al, 2009; p. 53).

These authors also noted that the evidence of "alliance building across differences" demonstrated "collaborative change potential" (Nagda, et al, 2009). For example, one woman in their study realized the importance of embracing one another's differences in creating an open and honest atmosphere for working together, and another student noted:

'Building alliances requires much more than just laying down demands on a few issues. It takes full commitment and determination from all parties. Such alliances are formed out of a desire and passion for bettering our world, not because of sympathy. Instead, these relationships should revolve around empathy' (Nagda, et al, 2009; p. 54).

This process of intergroup dialogue appears to be a means for mediating and synthesizing what are, at first, opposing and conflicting perspectives. If we are to be motivated to take action against social injustice; we must first obtain a true understanding of the issues and a genuine concern for the impact of inequality; especially systemic inequality. Nagda and colleagues (2009) noted that the intergroup dialogue process is not a friendly chat, but a:

struggle to move from separate corners to dialogue and action [and that it] must explicitly address the complexities posed by bringing together people who are not only different in their social identities but also positioned differently in the systems of privilege and inequality. It is not simply enough to bring students and community members from diverse backgrounds together. These communicative interactions must be structured and facilitated in productive ways (p. 54).

Hackman (2005) notes that social justice education is more than the examination of difference or diversity but rather includes efforts to pay particular attention to the systems of power and privilege that create inequalities. She also emphasizes that effective “social justice education requires an examination of systems of power and oppression combined with a prolonged emphasis on social change and student agency in and outside of the classroom” (p. 104).

Hackman (2005) suggests further that a social justice education approach incorporates five essential components:

1. Content Mastery, which involves information related to facts, historical context, and macro- to micro-content analysis. Hackman (2005) contends that the information must be broad and deep, and cautions that in order for students to effectively “engage in social responsibility, educators must provide students with enough critical information to do so effectively” (p. 105).
2. Critical Thinking and Analysis of Oppression, which Hackman (2005) describes as the “processes by which we consider perspective, positionality, power, and possibilities with respect to content” (p. 106). She also notes that it is the educators’ responsibility

to help the students to ask who benefits from the systems in question and to consider the aspects of society that maintain the inequalities.

3. Action and Social Change which involve information and tools for empowerment.
4. Personal Reflection; a process for understanding their own beliefs, perspectives, and actions, including the factors that have shaped them (e.g., social position, power/oppressive forces, privilege).
5. Awareness of Multicultural Group Dynamics which involves being aware of “who is in the room” (p. 109) and the impact on the content and process of dialogue (e.g., and “all-white” classroom versus a multiracial classroom discussing race issues)

Hackman (2005) offered this framework in an effort to encourage educators to examine their practices and to truly consider whether they are approaching social justice education /issues in a genuine manner, and whether they are effectively “creating classroom spaces that are empowering and committed to social change” (p. 108). She further indicates that any one of the above components would be beneficial to the classroom (Hackman, 2005), particularly those classrooms that are committed to developing children’s awareness of, commitment to, and ability to address various inequalities and other human rights violations.

Summary and Purpose

If we are to truly commit to developing self-actualized, confident, fulfilled, and empathic citizens, we may need to re-examine the current philosophy of education, which has socio-political dimensions, as it relates to character education. This re-examination of the current philosophy of education necessarily includes listening to the perspectives of the children. Adults have been weighing in on this issue for centuries and since any character education initiative

would have implications for what and how they learn, children should have the opportunity to participate in related decisions, at least according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Wilcox & Naimark, 1991). After all, acknowledging children's right to some degree of self-determination in accordance with their age and maturity, also as it relates to educational decisions, better prepares them to be collaborative members of society by providing children opportunities to participate in school-based decisions.

Using a children's human rights participatory frame then the purpose of this study was in short to: a) explore *children's perspectives* on the nature of character generally and on good character in particular, b) children's views on which processes and institutions (i.e. school, family etc.) significantly shape character development and how, and c) to investigate the impact of a child-generated social justice project on children's notions of character and its development as well as in terms of any potential impact for the children in terms of enhanced feelings of empowerment. It was decided that a qualitative phenomenological case study approach would be the most appropriate method for exploring these issues.

Chapter Three

Method and Procedures

Rationale for a Phenomenological Case Study Approach

Having practiced as a psychotherapist for nineteen years I have had the opportunity to interact with many different people, and through these relationships I have formed an understanding that meaning is socially constructed through human relationships. As I reflect on my practice, I have come to realize that these particular constructed social meanings are connected to the unique individuals in the various sessions even though they may be dealing with common issues. In other words, an understanding of what may be considered a universal issue, such as depressed mood, may transform within the context of the therapeutic relationship. Furthermore, when these very same individuals begin to work with other psychotherapists, the understanding or meaning related to the same issue changes yet again. Perhaps this is a function of the interactions within the context of this new relationship. These experiences, together with recent self-reflection, have contributed to my perspective that individuals within social contexts construct reality and truth, and that there is no objective or universal truth unfiltered by subjective experience. This ontological perspective is quite congruent with qualitative phenomenological research methods and perspectives.

As with many qualitative research methods, one of the goals of psychotherapy is to explore the client's lived experiences (the client's subjective or phenomenological world); often as those experiences relate to a particular issue. However, in so doing, the psychotherapist must be aware of the influence of his or her presence on that process. In other words, this is a

transactional process and meaning is co-created within this relationship. It would appear that my experience as a psychotherapist is very similar to the processes related to hermeneutic phenomenology in that this methodology is concerned about the relationship between the researcher and the research study participant as they *co-create* meaning within the context of the topic being explored (Armour, Rivaux, & Bell, 2009). However, my suitability as a hermeneutic phenomenological researcher is only one rationale for my selection of this methodology for this study.

The main reason for the selection of this methodology is related to the main purpose of this study; that is to give children a voice on an issue directly related to their own education. Whereas topics such as mathematics, language, and science education are perhaps more amenable to quantitative research methods, character education is very personal and politically loaded. While Article 12 of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child indicates that children are entitled to participate in decisions related to all aspects of their education, this is particularly relevant when it comes to educational endeavours intended to affect the development of their character. Utilizing a hermeneutic phenomenological approach for this case study allows for a rich exploration of children's experiences, perspectives, and preferences related to their notions of character and their views on best practice in regards to character education.

Qualitative Sampling

In contrast to the random sampling techniques used in quantitative research, sampling in qualitative research tends to be purposeful in order to gather in-depth, personally constructed data about a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). As such, the sample for this case study

consisted of grade six students from a local elementary school within a city in Northwestern Ontario, Canada.

An effort was made to select a school within the city that has the best potential to provide a diverse sample in that it draws students from various geographical locations. The school chosen is an elementary JK to grade eight school that currently has 390 students attending. The school is located within the city limits and within a neighbourhood that includes both middle-class and subsidized housing. The school has a school council whose membership includes, amongst others, a minimum of one and up to a maximum of two children who attend the school. The mission statement of the school refers to creating a safe positive learning environment, respecting the individual strengths of members of the school community, promoting life-long learning, and working collaboratively with the broader community beyond the school. The school encourages students' respect for self, others, and property through a document provided to members of the school community with clearly stated expectations for the children regarding their daily behaviour as students. The school does not promote any particular religious perspective and does not include any religious instruction in their curriculum. As such, it was expected that this would provide for greater diversity with respect to culture and religiosity. Conversations with the school principal confirmed that such diversity in fact existed within this school.

The cognitive developmental level of grade six students was a significant consideration in this sampling decision to select children from this grade level. Students by grade six who are generally about 11-years-old are believed to possess to some extent adult-level reasoning abilities which will help them to understand and adequately process such questions as were presented in this study (Piaget, 1929). Furthermore, they have not yet entered what some academic

psychological researchers consider the more tumultuous adolescent phase which could be a complicating factor (Boyle, 2007; Elkind, 1994).

Given that qualitative research typically involves exploring the personal lives and experiences of people, there is a high level of intrusiveness. In order to gather such personal information it was necessary for me to obtain an optimal level of rapport and trust while also ensuring the well-being of the participants. Fassinger (2005) accomplishes this by explaining that the initial focus will be data collection for the purposes of the research, but that painful issues may be further explored and addressed at the end of the interview. Ensuring that the participants in my study had adequate resources in place for managing potentially painful experiences provided for a safe and trustworthy research environment. Given that I am a licensed and experienced psychological practitioner, I was prepared to manage this, either through direct intervention or referral to appropriate resources as was explained in the study information letter and consent forms. However, as it turned out there was no need for such intervention of any kind in this study.

After obtaining ethics approval from the Research Ethics Board at Lakehead University and the school board, consent was obtained from the participants and their legal guardians separately. Letters of invitation to participate were sent home with all of the grade six students in the school. A total of eight students, one male and seven females, participated in the study with the consent of their parents or other legal guardian. Once the signed parental consent forms were received by the researcher and before conducting the first interview, the purpose of the study, the nature of voluntary participation (e.g., that they may withdraw from the study at any time), and anticipated risks and benefits were discussed with the participants. After indicating their

understanding and interest in this research study, the child participants then signed a separate child-friendly consent form before proceeding (for information letters and all consent forms please refer to Appendix A).

Methodology

This section describes a qualitative case study approach involving semi-structured interviews with eight grade six students from a local elementary school. Although some interview questions were used, these were intended simply to guide the interviews and to provide a framework for discussions. A flexible interviewing style was utilized which included further question probes as a means to expand the conversation and to encourage further sharing of ideas. These questions can be found in the Procedure and Materials section. One individual interview was conducted with each participant and two group interviews were conducted (pre- and post-group activity).

Following the individual and first group interviews, the participants completed a social action project of their choosing. They participated in additional sessions that focused on planning, creating, and implementing this project. This project was completely chosen by the participants, both in terms of the focus or topic and also in terms of their method of carrying it out. While the researcher provided some support and guidance as needed, all decisions about this project were made by the participants and very little guidance was required. A second group interview was conducted following completion of the project in order to explore the participants' experiences.

All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by the researcher. These transcripts, the project materials, and field notes, which contained the observations of the researcher, were included in the analyses.

Procedure and Materials

Individual Interviews. In order to truly explore the lived experiences of participants, hermeneutic phenomenology utilizes a very open and flexible approach to interviewing (Nielsen, 2000). As such, interviews generally begin with broad, open-ended questions presented within a flexible interviewing style, and then potentially move toward more specific, directive questions as ideas begin to emerge. In the current study, individual interviews lasting approximately 30 minutes were conducted with the students, audiotaped and transcribed. It was anticipated that meeting with the participants individually would increase familiarity with the researcher, thereby enhancing the children's ability to speak honestly rather than their being concerned about providing socially acceptable responses.

Participants met with the researcher in a room selected in consultation with the school Vice Principal. Upon meeting with each child research participant, the purpose of the research and what he or she might expect, including potential risks and benefits of participating in the study were explained. Participants were then provided with an opportunity to ask questions. Once they indicated their interest and understanding, the child consent forms were reviewed and signed. Individual interviews immediately followed the signing of the consent forms. As a *surprise* token of appreciation for their involvement, at the end of the study

participants were given a memory stick in the shape of a video game character (Angry Birds) containing their slide show (an activity the children created to be discussed here in a later section). Although further exploration and discussion occurred as a result of the interaction between the researcher and the participants, the following questions were used to guide the individual interviews and provided a structure also for the focus group discussions:

- What does it mean to have a good/bad character?
- Do you think people **learn** to have a good or bad character or are they born that way?
- Why do you think good/bad character is learned /unlearned? (If yes to character being learned) How do you think people learn to have good or bad characters?
- What is your understanding of character education?
- What does your school do to try to help kids learn to be good/ have good characters?
- How would you teach somebody to be good or do you even think that is possible?
- What can your teacher and school do to better help kids learn good character?
- What can families do to help kids learn good character?
- How would you like to learn about these things?
- Do you think children have any right to participate in decisions about things that will affect their education?
- How much involvement do you have in decisions that affect you at school?
- How much involvement do you think you should have in at least some decisions that affect you at school?

- What types of decisions at school if any would you like to participate in making?
- Do you think it would or would not help children to develop good character if they participated in making some decisions at school about things that are important to them? Why?
- What could schools/teachers/parents do to better involve you in decisions about your education and about character education?

Group Interviews. Following the individual interviews, the students were interviewed once as a group in the same room that had been used for the individual interviews (an additional three group *activity planning* sessions and one group *debriefing interview* followed this initial group interview and will be discussed in more detail in a later section). Utilizing a flexible interviewing style similar to that described above, the focus group continued to explore the students experiences related to the topic of good character and best practices in character education. Although the interview was fairly open in order to enhance the relevance of the information obtained, guiding questions were used to facilitate this process. The guiding questions for the initial group interview were developed in consideration of the emergent themes in the individual discussions. Also, in an effort to minimize the power differential, given that the researcher is an adult, and to encourage a genuine exploration of the issues among the students, they were provided some time to discuss the issues amongst themselves without the interference of the researcher. The children also indicated to the researcher that they were discussing these issues with one another between sessions. Following the initial group interview then the children participated in three additional group sessions in the same room to plan the group activity.

Group Activity. While the main goal of the focus group discussions was to explore the children's experiences and perspectives, the other goal was to provide the participants with an opportunity to share their ideas on good character and character education with others and to move toward putting these ideas into action through an activity. At the end of the first group interview the researcher revisited the idea of the group activity and presented some potential activities including writing (e.g., a children's book), performance (e.g., a play), formal presentation (e.g., showing a documentary on the topic), or participating in social action (e.g., raising money for a charity). The participants very quickly decided and agreed that they were interested in doing a presentation to their school about the character values that were posted in their school. They indicated that they wanted to prepare a slide show and poster for the presentation (for slide show and poster images please refer to Appendix B). Three group sessions were utilized by the children to plan and create their poster and slide show presentation. The researcher was present to provide assistance and guidance as needed though the participants worked very independently. The slide show was presented to their school during the assembly. The poster was on display at that time and was used again during a subsequent presentation to their class. The poster was then left with them to display as they chose. A focus group session also occurred after the activity to explore the children's experiences related to their slide show presentation to their school.

Transcription of Individual and Group Interviews. All data was personally transcribed and analyzed for relevant themes by this researcher. In addition, in order to maintain the rigour of this study, the researcher also kept a journal of field notes documenting her thoughts, feelings,

and reactions during the interviews in order to preserve an audit trail related to analytical decisions made along the way (Armour et al, 2009).

Limitations

The sample used in this study was originally intended to be larger and the researcher had attempted to recruit all the grade six students from the case study school. However, she was unable to recruit more than eight individual participants. This is perhaps not surprising given the sensitive and controversial topics being addressed in this study; namely *children's views* on character and character education as well as on children's rights of participation. The advantages, however, of having a small sample of eight included being better able to get to know the individual children, spending a longer time in interviews with each child, and being able to better establish rapport with each individual child.

Some may consider that not doing a life history and/or a detailed demographic profile of each child participant in this study is a limitation and this is likely correct from certain perspectives. However, the researcher chose not to invade these children's privacy with regard to such information in order to establish a high level of mutual respect. This choice also assisted, in the view of the researcher, in fostering a safe psychological space for these children to express their views on the sensitive topics being explored. In addition, not gathering this personal life history information about these children or profiling them individually in some way greatly reduced the potential risk of violating the children's confidentiality and anonymity. This in that other students in the school who were not participating in this study would not have been able to identify the child participants through their personal information and individual profile.

Although the participants in this study provided valuable information, there are some further limitations associated with the gender composition of this sample. Of the eight participants, only one was male. As such, it is possible that the results primarily reflect the perspectives and experiences of grade six female students from this school. It is possible that having a more balanced gender representation would have affected these results. Having more male participants may have provided opportunities for other perspectives, both in terms of the actual information they would have provided and also by their potential impact on the dynamics during the group work. Since Gilligan (1982) essentially began the debate about morality and gender differences, this issue has been examined quite substantially. While there are mixed opinions, there appears to be some evidence to suggest that gender, or gender identification can influence perspectives related to morality and character (Nunner-Winkler, Meyer-Nikele & Wohlrab 2007). Furthermore, as the preliminary study indicated, gender also appears to be an issue with respect to children's perspectives about their rights (Lake, 2010).

Another limitation related to the sample is potential response bias. Although all of the grade six students were invited to participate, as mentioned, only 8 responded. Also, they were selected based upon parental permission. In other words, it was the parents who initially expressed interest in their child's participation in this study, then the child. It is possible that the parents' perspectives on character and children's participatory rights might have affected the willingness of their children to be involved in research of this nature. Given that the family can influence one's perspectives, it is possible that this had an impact on the participants' views. One might wonder whether being supportive of children's rights and/or having certain perspectives about character might be related to parental interest in this kind of research. It would be

interesting to see if approaching the children first to inquire about their interest in the research study as potential participants, and then the parents or other legal guardians, would lead to any changes in response rates in terms of the children's willingness to participate in such research on character and character education.

In addition to response bias associated with the sample, it is also important to consider the potential impact of bias and other qualities associated with the researcher. Although the researcher was sure to acknowledge and consider biases throughout the course of this study in order to mediate this impact, it is possible that the researcher's support of children's rights and views about character influenced the questions asked and even the interpretation of the results. The responses and reactions of the researcher, in spite of efforts to be neutral, may have served to reinforce the participants' perspectives that were consistent with those of the researcher. Furthermore, if the participants had any desire to be accepted by or to please this researcher, which is possible given that she would be perceived as an authority figure, this would be particularly relevant. The issue of researcher bias is relevant in all research and every effort was made to reflect with awareness on these issues at all times.

In addition to researcher bias, socio-cultural bias may also be a potential limitation of this study. The participants in this study are undoubtedly exposed constantly to opinions and information related to character, rights, and morality through their families, schools, and the media. The topic of bullying has been a particularly hot topic for a number of years. As the participants noted, these forces can be quite influential and may have been evident in some responses such as "you can't judge a book by its cover." It is possible that some of these societal ideas influenced the participants' responses in terms of their potential to see the generally

accepted societal views as the 'right' way to answer or to view an issue. However, it is difficult for any of us to entirely escape these influences on our perceptions, opinions, and, subsequently, our character. These participants also demonstrated an ability to question these forces by sharing some seemingly radical and controversial ideas which are described below in the Findings and Discussion section of this paper.

Although the results of this study are not generalizable due to the small sample size, these child participants provided some highly relevant and valuable insights on children's perspectives regarding character, character education, and children's rights of participation. The qualitative methodology was chosen in order to gather some rich data that would provide some insight into children's perspectives on the issue of character and best practices in character education. It would be valuable in the future to explore these perspectives with more children, of varying ages, diverse socio-economic backgrounds, living in a variety of settings; urban and more rural, diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, religiosity, and mixed gender including LGBT students where possible. Perhaps a mixed-method design would allow for a larger sample size, though it would, in the researcher's view, not significantly resolve generalizability issues in that children's views on character, character education, and their rights of participation are likely to be the product of innumerable unique and interacting factors.

Chapter Four

Results

Part I: Findings and Discussion

As noted previously, the purpose of this study was multi-fold and was in part to explore children's perspectives on character and its development, children's notions of good character and to give the child research participants a voice concerning whether and how school systems might approach the issue of character education. In addition, the study was directed to investigating what impact, if any, engaging in a child-generated social justice project would have on the children's views of character and the impact, if any, on their sense of empowerment. The child participants in this research shared some very specific ideas about character in terms of what it meant to them, how it develops, and the connection between children's participatory rights and character development. The children also shared through the individual and group discussions how the social action project they designed and implemented affected their sense of school community and self-perceptions; including how it impacted them in terms of feelings of empowerment. The quotes from the individual children are attributed to 'Participant (P)' rather than to a person with a pseudonym. The reason for this is to provide a higher assurance of anonymity for the individual child participants given that Part II of the reported findings includes the whole transcript. The researcher wishes to ensure that the individual children cannot be identified by others in the school through the individual child participant's extended speech sample being attributed to a single person with a particular pseudonym.

Findings Organized by Data -Based Emergent Themes

Ideas About Character. Most participants talked about good character being related to being nice, helping others, listening, being kind, being honest and accepting others. They described people with good character as appearing happy, confident, strong, and successful. The participants noted that such people are often smiling, well-behaving, sharing their thoughts, are fun to be around, get good grades, and stand up for people and their beliefs. For example,

Participants (P): Good behaviour. Good character. How do you know when somebody has good character? Because they help a lot of people. They're caring to other people. Happy. Good behaviour. Smiling.

Researcher (R): So what's good behaviour? What do you mean when you say good behaviour?

P: Like happy. They don't bully people or anything. They're not bullies. And they listen, like if you're in a classroom they listen and participate and things.

While most of the ideas expressed by participants about good character were along the lines of helping and caring, some ideas were related to strength and confidence and illustrated by the following comments:

P: Good character is like being different and not caring what other people think and being bad character is like being destroyed because everybody talks about you in different ways and they don't respect what you are.

R: Okay so you said being different and not caring what people think. How does that make you have good character?

P: It makes you a good character because it makes you not be so bad to yourself.

R: Okay...how do you mean?

P: Nods.

R: Okay.....so if you feel better about yourself how does that kind of make you a good person do you think?

P: It could make you a good person because feeling good about yourself makes you think that other people are good about themselves too. Makes you feel like you can tell the person that they're pretty and they're intelligent...that they're caring...they're honest.

R: Okay. Why do you think that is...that if you feel good about yourself you can do that stuff?

P: Well because feeling good about yourself is making like yourself feel good so you'll be happy and you'll express your feelings with others.

Bad character was generally associated with bullying, rudeness, name-calling, and angry attitudes. During the pre-activity group interview, the participants discussed bullying in relation to bad character and even indicated some perceived gender differences in that regard:

R: Okay...so what's...so you mentioned bullying...what kind of behaviour goes with bullying?

P: Violence. Name calling. Making fun of....what (name) said...threatening. (Name) has experience. Yes I have.

R: Ya okay...so some of you have had some experience with bullying right? A lot of us have had that. So bullying behaviour is like violence and name calling threatening...

P: It's kind of different between boys and girls.

R: Okay...how?

P: Girls...they're not violent...girls are usually just like...they name call and they talk behind people's backs. And boys...like they show...physical bullying for boys. Boys are more physical and girls were more talking...verbal bullying for girls...and they call people names and they try to insult them; and sometimes they'll make you feel like..if you're upset then you'll go and tell your friends so that they think you could tell your friends to make them upset...so it's not just you that's kind of being bullied...like all of your friends.Researcher: Ok.

Character as a complex construct. In terms of the complexities of character, one participant seemed to make the point that character is not an absolute construct during the following exchange: R: ...So are there certain things that you sort of connect with having good character?

P: Ya...like...sometimes you could have like a good day and sometimes you could have a bad day and usually when you have a bad day you're not...like you're still the person you are but you seem more like kind of...not mean but a little rude like because you're taking things out on people. But...like...I think because I have things that I'm good at and my friends are good at things that's why were friends. Because we're all different and there are certain things that we can relate to.

This seems to indicate the idea that behaviour and character are two different things, that a person could display "bad" behaviour such as rudeness and still be of good character. This was further apparent in the participants' discussions about bullying.

During the pre-group activity interview participants noted that a person who might be considered a bully is not necessarily all bad and that even bullies behave that way because of their own personal experiences, such as problems in the home or bullying directed at them:

R: Okay...so how do you imagine sometimes that somebody who's bullying could also have good character?

P: Because it's not like they're just one person. Some days they'll be bad....sometimes they'll be good. So they might not like somebody at first... but as they get to know them they start to like them so that might start to treat them the way that person should be treated. And I think that bullying comes not really from you...it comes from more like how your siblings and parents act....your background. The people you look up to...that's why you have to check...like say you have a little brother or sister you have to try to be good role models because they do what you do. It's not really copying; the bullies that bullied my brother....I know that their background that it's not good like their parents... her parents started arguing and so then she took it out on like her and that. It's usually about like what happened to you sometimes...so bullies are only bullying because they got bullied once too; because they have anger; so technically it's about what's going on at home

The above exchange not only highlights the participants' views on the complex nature of bullying, but also indicates a compassionate perspective toward those who engage in bullying behaviour. The fact that we all have positive and negative qualities, even bullies, was evident in one participant's comment that "if you put a person's name in the middle, you can list a bunch of things that's negative and positive about them." However, the participants' ideas about the

complexity of character went beyond the idea of positive and negative traits or our potential to be good and bad, and was extended to include traits and abilities that may be specific to individuals.

Diversity and character. In addition to the idea that people can be both good and bad at times, participants talked about the importance of differences with regard to character. A connection was made between differences and character in the sense that everybody has unique strengths and abilities. Participants talked about differences being a good thing, in that “it would be a pretty boring world if everybody was the same.” The importance of honouring those differences was also expressed when a participant challenged the others to consider whether they would rather “be comfortable in what [they’re] wearing or wearing something that someone else expects [them] to wear?” The resounding reply was “comfortable.” As noted in the previous section, one participant noted that “good character is like being different and not caring what other people think” and went on to note that honouring these different interests and abilities is likely to enhance one’s confidence and that “feeling good about yourself is making like yourself feel good so that you’ll be happy and you’ll express your feelings with others” (e.g., point out other people’s strengths).

The fact that people have different strengths was also noted:

R: Okay...so let me start by asking you what does it mean to have good or bad character?

P: Um...well....we’re all different so like if...you can’t just pick out someone and say well they’re good because that’s who they are. They all have different kind of character traits....like someone could be good at like sports and another person could be good at like dance. So it’s always good to be different from other people.

It would appear that these participants were highlighting the fact that good character includes a wide variety of traits and that a person's strengths were a significant factor. Furthermore, there was some indication of the belief that a person's ability to express and honour those strengths leads to further positive character traits such as confidence and the ability to regulate oneself:

P: Sometimes....other people....like sometimes you can figure it out on your own.

Because you might feel good about what you just did. You know....you feel good and it's something that I should feel proud of myself. And that like goes back to character traits that everybody has something different that they...makes them who they are. Like, I play hockey and baseball so like I play sports and whenever I play...If I'm upset I like to play or just go skating because it's just something that I like to do and then like a couple of my other friends do dance or gymnastics and that's what they like to do.

The impact of acquiring such positive character traits on quality of life was also discussed by participants.

Character and quality of life. The fact that positive character traits may lead to positive relationships was noted by participants. One participant noted:

P: Because if you have bad character then you might not be the best person. Other people may not be fond of you or something. If you have good character then you'll have lots of friends and you'll be happier.

Another participant expanded on the above notion that positive character traits are appealing to others:

P: Well, if you have good character it's kind of something like your friends, and teachers, and like everybody that you know will remember you by. It's like I guess you want to

have good character because if you have bad character then people would be like “Oh this person has bad character. I don't know if I want to be friends with them anymore.

Because I want to be a good character.” Or something like that.

R: Okay....so if you have good character what does that mean?

P: I think it means that you're like a good person because then people will be like this person's a good character I want to start hanging out with them because I don't want to hang out with somebody who's like bad character because then I'd get in lots of trouble.

Generally speaking, good character was connected to success in terms of relationships as well as personal achievement (e.g., good grades, nice house). One participant connected good character with success in noting their belief that “bad kids don't usually like school or education” and another elaborated by noting “if you get good grades for the rest of your life, you can be living in a nice house. You could have what you want. You can do anything.” However, given the complex nature of character, participants indicated that it can be difficult to determine the quality of a person's character and suggested that people not “judge a book by its cover...you have to read what's inside first.”

Character and perception. Although the qualities noted above are some indication of a person's character, given that character is a complex issue, participants cautioned against making a judgement about one's character too quickly. They noted that other people's perceptions of character are not necessarily accurate and that you have to get to know a person before you can judge them. One participant noted that:

I don't know. Sometimes like you could have interests with people that you think they're good people but they're not in a way so you do things that they pressure you into doing.

So like you may have interests but they might have an interest in like a different point of view than you were thinking that they do.

To put it another way by another participant:

P: Ya...like sometimes...I have like a friend...I was like "Oh maybe I could be like her friend"... And we'll be like best friends, but then I started to get to know her...but then she started being rude.

R: So I'm hearing you say that...

P: Sometimes it's like...when you think they're good sometimes they're bad...and sometimes when you think they're bad they're good.

The same participant that talked about listing the positive and negative traits about a person indicated that it is likely to be inaccurate and referred to the experiences of celebrities being scrutinized and judged by others:

P: You have to get to know them before you judge them. And then I found this thing...it says like a whole bunch of things and then it's like "you know my name but you don't know my story" and then it's a don't judge kind of thing.

R: So do you think not judging people is part of character?

P: Ya (everybody). If you put the person's name in the middle, you can list a bunch of things that's negative and positive about them...but I bet you half the things that you list about them isn't true...like mostly the negative things...because you could say that someone's honest and they are honest or you could say that someone's distrustworthy..even though they never told one of your secrets....and done anything to harm you. And sometimes people are famous and a lot of people are judging them

because of what they look like or like how they sing. I'm like why would I judge anybody because they're kind of being rude. I don't get why they're doing that. They don't even know them. They're trying to ruin their life. Ya they try to ruin like famous people's lives.

As such the need to "get to know them before you judge them" was emphasized.

How Character is Learned. Although participants acknowledged a biological component to character (e.g., born that way), they also acknowledged that it is learned and shared their thoughts about how people develop their character through experiences in their environments. Role modelling, direct teaching, and direct experiences were emphasized in the learning of character. It should be noted that the role of the family and modelling were identified first by almost all participants during discussions about how character is learned. As such, participants appeared to emphasize modelling and the role of the family in character development.

Role modelling. One participant noted that although people are "mostly born" with the character they have, she or he also acknowledged that others also play a role:

R: Do you think people learn to have good or bad character or do you think they're born that way?

P: I think they're mostly born that way. They might be inspired by some people like their parents a bit.

R: So they might be inspired you said, eh?

P: Hm..by what their parents do...or by what their friends do. It depends.

R: So there is a little bit of learning that happens then you think.

P: Ya....sort of like 33% is learning I think.

R: Okay....so little bit by their parents and friends they might learn some stuff then.

P: Well just people in general. Especially when they're young.

R: Okay. Since you think there's a little bit of learning from people in general and parents and friends, why do you think it is learned?

P: Because when people are doing something like....let's say somebody was doing something bad...some young person might think that's okay and be like....that's basically what learning is...getting stuff from other people.

In fact, the role of the family in modelling character was emphasized by all participants, with the idea that children tend to act like people in their families. Participants noted that parents can show good behaviour and how to live (i.e., they lead by example). During a discussion related to learning how to talk with and help one another, one participant noted that this is learned from the parents and shared:

R: So where did you guys learn how to do that? To talk to each other and help each other that way?

P: I think we learned it from our parents like we see our parents....I see my parents do that a lot. And I seen friends and family do it too.

They also identified some specific behaviours that have an impact on character development. For example, one participant noted that if the parents are "rude and like swear a lot and or the parents yell at each other then [the children] learn the swears and how they fight...if they have good character then everybody [the children they are] surrounded with are nice." Another participant noted that when adults yell they are modelling disrespect and suggested that they do not seem to

realize “that kids aren’t going to listen to you when you yell at them...yelling doesn’t make things better. Talk to (us) nicely.” Another participant noted:

R: Okay....so do you think people learn to have good or bad character or do you think they’re born that way?

P: It’s kind of....you’re not born that way...it’s kind of in a way...how you’re brought up by your parents or whoever is your guardian and siblings. It’s how you’re brought up. Like if your parents were very good people then you’d probably be good people. If they were bad people then you’d probably be not so good.

R: So....why do you think it’s learned?

P: I think it’s kind of...when you’re little you do what your older siblings or your parents do because you think being a grown up is so cool and like when you do it...you feel grown up and like you can do anything.

R: So....how do you think people learn to have good or bad character?

P: Well....from experiences and from how you like....people around you have acted... and you learn how good character by like...I’m not sure...

The general ideas about modelling were summed up nicely by a participant’s comment:

R: ...How would you like to learn about how to be good?

P: If you’re bad you can’t really teach someone to be good. It would take a while, but I’d like to learn it from a good person. Basically.

Interestingly, although the participants were clear about the role of parents, these ideas about modelling did not stop with the adults. It was also noted that even younger children can be role models for older children (or even adults). This was illustrated in the following exchange:

R: Okay....let's talk a little bit more about who you learn character from and how you learn character.

P: It really doesn't matter how old or young they are you can still learn from them... because some people are like my age and they learn from me. Instead of copying their older brother..they copy like us....like everybody else. It doesn't matter if you're like the same age as them or younger or older....you can still learn from them.

R: Role models can be all ages.

P: Sometime I do learn from my brother

Another participant took this idea even further when she noted that she always tries to do things "right" in order to be a good role model for her younger sister and went further to suggest that this has also impacted her character:

Parents. Guardians. Siblings. I don't have like a big sister...I have [a sibling] and don't try to do something bad....like I never try to do wrong...I always try to do it right for her; she always follows you because you're the role model; ya cuz she has to do what I do; like sometimes I get annoyed but then I remember that she's a little sister and I know she wants to try to be like me; she always has to go to the same bed time as me; and so now she's getting older and she's trying to be more like me....sometimes I get annoyed, but then I think, if I didn't have a little sister then I wouldn't be like this...would not be doing everything this way...this good.

This participant makes a very important point, that being a role model for a sibling encourages one to focus on how his or her character is being expressed. As such, being a positive role model

for others may have as much or more of an influence on one's own character development as following a role model does.

Direct teaching. Participants seemed to see the school as most connected to direct teaching about character, though they did mention peers, family, and the media/internet. One participant identified sport as a method for learning character:

P: I actually think that I get most of my character from my coaches...just cuz when they take the time..they don't have to but they choose to...take the time to teach us how to do things.....but they don't just keep us focused on things like hockey and baseball...they keep us focused on being good character and being good sportsmen....I don't think I've ever been on a team where we've had bad sportsmanship....we've always been..like even this year...there's always like one or two kids that are like bad...like don't show good sportsmanship but this year we only have like one kid...and even he's kind of improved in that....like we're a good team....and lots of teams that we play are like..they get mad and they don't say good game...they get so mad; they just sort of focus on winning; ya and our coach actually gets really mad at us when the boys are talking in the dressing room about like "oh ya well who's got the most points in here...oh ya me. Ya I scored a goal every game." He says "enough with that I don't want to hear it."

R: Nice. Okay...so you learn a lot through sports that's even about character.

P: Ya even when we lost to a team like 9-2 our coach said he didn't care cuz we played really good and that's all he wants and he wants us to have fun.

Participants noted that teachers "explain stuff to the kids," "talk about bullying," and "explain like what good character is." Participants identified direct character-related teaching strategies

such as discussions about what is good to do and how to handle situations, posting character traits in the school, reading books related to character and doing activity sheets, and assemblies every month that address character. A couple of participants pointed out that learning in general is related to a good life and makes you a better person, in that “they can teach you math. They can teach you anything...that’s related to life.” One participant described a more indirect teaching method:

P: Like what you said about mathematics and that...maybe it should be that you take a period...it should be that you talk about it in every single period because pretty much... like little things....you can find character in every conversation that you talk about...like even if you were to talk about math...you find character in that...you could find character throughout media....you could find it throughout anything really...

R: So you’d like to see it happening in the classroom and learning it just like you’re learning everything else.

P: Well....you see it outside everyday so....I think outside is covered...

It seemed as though this participant was suggesting that since character is related to everything we do, it could be worked into any type of lesson. In other words, this participant was suggesting that it would make sense to look for teachable moments related to character and “talk about it in every single period.”

Direct experience. In addition to actual efforts to teach character, whether through direct or indirect means, participants talked about learning occurring naturally through experiences. For example, some participants talked about internal cues that indicate or guide behaviour related to character in the sense that if you do something bad you get a bad feeling in your stomach, but if

you do something good you get a good feeling in your stomach. As one participant put it, “sometimes you can figure it out on your own because you might feel good about what you just did...you get this feeling in your stomach...it’s almost like butterflies kind of because then you realize things that you should be saying to that person or it just like makes you happy.” Another participant made a similar comment:

P: You can tell because if you do something bad like just saying steal someone’s money you get a bad feeling in your stomach. Sometimes if you did something good you get like butterflies or something and you feel all happy. Like say if a lady drops money or like her purse or her wallet and she goes like on a bus or in her taxi then you try to run after that car and when she gets dropped off you’re like here’s your wallet or purse then you’d get like a good feeling in your stomach.

R: Okay. So why do you think good or bad character is learned?

P: Because you wouldn’t know without learning it because if someone says no you can’t do that that’s bad then you’re like “okay I’m not going to do that again because she just said no that’s bad.” And so if they say you did something good this time, you’re like hey I did something and you get treated well and everything. You can tell what the difference is when you do it.

R: You’ve shared some ideas already, but how do you think people learn to have good or bad behaviour, like how are the ways?

P: Sometimes the adults that are taking care of you are like saying no that’s bad or you can’t do that or you’re grounded or yay you did it here’s like a candy or something, but if

like you do something bad then it's kind of obvious that you did that because then you don't feel that good and like "Aw I don't think I did something good that time."

In essence the participants were talking about how we have the potential to learn on our own based on how we feel about our actions or circumstances.

In addition to learning from how we feel about our actions or circumstances, participants expanded their ideas about the learning that occurs as a result of experiences. They noted that once you've gone through something you'll remember your experiences and that will guide you (e.g., "if they keep getting in trouble and going to the principal's they learn that it's not really good to keep going to the principal's office and that because then you're not going to get a good education"). As one participant pointed out:

R: That's good. How do experiences help you to learn good character do you think?

P: Well....if you have been kind like...say you help somebody that day....that's an experience of being kind....then you remember that and you think "if I can do that then I can help this other person tomorrow or...now that I've done that I can go and help that person who needed that homework assignment done." Or something like that.

R: Okay....so when you do that...you help somebody...what do you think helps you to do that again?

P: Ummmm....I think it's like how the person or whatever you're helping...it seems to say thank you or it's like....even if the person doesn't say thank you...you can still tell that they're thinking it....that they're very....that they're happy that you helped them...or that you did that thing for them.

However, in order to have experiences that might be helpful to one's character development, opportunities are necessary.

In terms of opportunities for character development, a few of the participants noted that they are involved in raising money for a playground that would be for the younger students and that this was teaching them to do for others. One participant talked about the challenges of such self-sacrifice and feeling torn about it while also acknowledging the fact that they were learning about sacrificing for the needs of others:

Sometimes...like we are raising money for a playground...and new playground because we've had the one for a long while and lots of kids are getting hurt on it. So they're trying to teach us.....we're doing little events and things and they're getting the older kids even though we don't get to share it...like we don't get to share in the equipment because we're older...they're still trying to teach us that you're doing something nice for the other kids and that's like me and my friends we don't really want to do this because we never got anything like that but then we're like what happens if like the little kids....like the JKs and SKs would like come into grade one and they go onto the equipment and they don't like it. They don't even have any equipment because it's so bad. You'd feel really bad for them because they don't have anything to do.

This participant provides a nice illustration of the potential role of self-sacrifice and empathy in the development of character. Although participating in the fund raising activity in and of itself appears to be having an impact on the participants, perhaps allowing them the opportunity to explore their thoughts and feelings about it might reinforce any character-related learning.

Through exploration of thoughts and feelings related to actions, educators and other adults may find opportunities to reinforce positive learning. Behavioural contingencies were identified as relevant to character development in the sense that participants acknowledged consequences as playing a significant role in character development. A couple of participants identified getting into trouble or going to the principal's office as a way to deter "bad" behaviour, while praise or rewards can encourage "good" behaviour:

P: If someone was being bad, I would say like don't do that because you might like get in trouble. My [redacted] does that all the time. He's always bad so I'm like "don't do that you're going to get in trouble." And somehow I'm always the one who gets in trouble. And so it always turns on me because I'm the oldest one there.

R: Oh ya. I know what it's like to be the oldest one. So you would teach somebody by telling them that what they're doing is bad..

P: Ya and then sometimes if they're like just going to do it I'd like leave them alone so they would like know what to do. Like I'd say "okay don't do that" and when they still do it I'd just leave them alone and then they'll learn their lesson anyways.

R: How would they learn their lesson?

P: Because like they'd get in trouble and they'd be like grounded or like they'd say go to your room or something like that...or just go for a time out. Then they would know that it's bad behaviour.

R: Now do you have any thoughts about how you might actually teach somebody to be good?

P: Maybe like if they're being good you'd be like "okay you did really good" and they'd be like happy about doing it

They identified the monthly awards assemblies as reinforcing good character and suggested that if the adults gave them "like a good speech like that you're good or you did well" children might feel "happy" about doing something positive. Interestingly, the participants acknowledged that it was important for the various adults in their lives to provide proper discipline and they saw this as being an important part of character development. Participants referred to going to the principal's office or receiving a time out as important information about their behaviour in that "they could know that it's bad behaviour." In explaining the benefits of such discipline, one participant noted that "if they keep getting in trouble and going to the principal's office they learn that it's not really good to keep going to the principal's office and that because then you're not going to get a good education." Another participant summed it up by explaining that in order to teach good character, discipline is important:

R: How would you teach somebody to be good?

P: I don't know. I don't think I'm the greatest teacher. Um just basically teach them...at times you have to basically be a good teacher...strict maybe. You have to be sort of strict.

R: Okay. So being strict is helpful you think, eh?

P: (Nods)

R: How do you think that's helpful?

P: Because kids want to behave more.

While providing discipline was seen as an important role for the adults in their lives, participants shared their ideas about the people who influence character development.

Participants identified peers, teachers, and family members (especially parents) as critical in character development. Teachers were described as influencing character by helping kids who have problems learning, listening to kids, providing discipline, and guiding their behaviour. One participant highlighted the importance of teaching children discipline by holding them accountable in that “if [the students] say they’re not doing it and [the teachers] say you have to do it and they don’t do it...[the teachers] should actually be making them like do something with that activity. Like if you don’t want to do like math and then the teacher said you have to then the teacher should be making them like...encourage the person to like do something in math.” The importance of addressing issues that arise for kids was noted (instead of sweeping it under the carpet and ignoring it). A participant provided an example of the kind of guidance that might be helpful:

R: So what does your teacher do to teach good character?

P: She’s being nice; At the beginning of the year she makes us sign this thing...we come up with a bunch of character traits and that...she writes it down and we have to sign it... and I remember last year there was this boy in our class was being racist and calling like that...so she made him stand up at the front of the class and apologize to every single person...not just the people he was being rude to...but she made him apologize to every kid in the class even if they hadn’t been bullied by him....she asked them who’s every been made fun of by this kid...and everybody in the class put their hand up.

One participant indicated a desire for more guidance from teachers when problems arise between students instead of telling them to deal with it on their own:

R: What could your teacher and school do to better help kids to learn good character.

P: Instead of just...like there's usually...we only learn it once in a while. And we don't really go over the rules just like if someone gets...if someone's upset it's just like the same thing over again. It's like just talk it out. It's like "why are you asking me? Just do it on your own." They don't really teach you. Like they help. They just say the same thing over. If someone's hurt it's just like....they don't actually talk to the person...like "why are you hurt"...they just like say my foot hurts.....and it's like okay like "why"... and it's like "okay then you can go and get an ice pack." So it's like they don't actually talk to the person that helped you.

R: Oh...you mean if somebody got hurt and was helped by some other student...

P: Like they don't actually....like if someone hurt them...like I remember one time there was a kid that got hurt on the playground...like they had like a big fight...it was actually one of my friends and they had like a fist fight. And one kid had like a bloody nose and they didn't really ask like why did this happen...they just said okay go get an ice pack and clean it up.

R: Okay...so when problems like that happen you think that the school could get more involved and find out...

P: Instead of just sweeping it under the carpet.

In addition to the guidance and discipline provided by teachers, participants also noted that parents influence character by providing discipline so that kids can learn what to do, just by being nice (e.g., leading by example), and teaching what matters (e.g., manners and to make sure that you are being nice to people, think before speaking). One participant noted:

R: Oh good. Okay. So what can families do to help kids learn good character?

P: Teaching their kids like what matters andlike my mom taught me manners and to make sure that you're being nice to people and you think first before you speak. And so that like if you wouldn't like something why are you doing it to someone else?

Another participant noted:

R: What can families do to better help kids learn good character?

P: Umm...I think families like parents and siblings and stuff...they shouldn't act bad around their siblings and their kids or whatever because usually kids do what their siblings do and they follow through like with them...and they kind of like look up to you. And like parents should always make sure that like kids do the proper things for school....be like "do that study. Finish that homework that you had to do" or always make sure they have something that they can improve on because it's always the best thing to improve.

Although the influence of family, especially parents, and teachers was emphasized by the participants, they also viewed peers as playing an important role in the development of character.

According to the participants, peers influence character by accepting, supporting, and guiding one another, particularly by standing up for somebody who is being bullied. One participant noted:

R: Okay. How do you think people learn to have good or bad character?

P: I think people learn to have good or bad character by getting to know new people and being...like...what's the word...not being so sensitive. Being strong.

R: How do they learn that by getting to know new people?

P: Because they see other people and some of them get bullied and some of them can get cyber bullied and some of them are just really nice to other people and some of them are bullies. So they know how to stand up. How to not be humiliated and to be nice and try to get their...try to get to know the bullies better. To make them stop.

As noted previously, another participant recognized his/her own role in modelling good character for others, "I have {a sibling} and don't try to do something bad...like I never try to do wrong... I always try to do it right for her; she always follows [me] because [I'm] the role model." In terms of assisting a peer that was being bullied, one participant acknowledged:

R: Now do you have any thoughts about how you might actually teach somebody to be good?

P: Maybe like if they're being good you'd be like "okay you did really good" and they'd be like happy about doing it but then if somebody's like being rude to them then they'll like try being rude too like go on someone else about it...so their feelings could be. But if they try to bully someone I'd say "why are you doing this. You're not supposed to be doing that. I thought you were going to be good."

R: So if you saw somebody doing some bullying you think maybe talking to them about that.

P: Yes. But if they were being rude and they...and the person that I know was like my best friend or something I'd say "just ignore them. Don't worry. Just walk away. Turn around and ignore them."

It would seem that the participants see parents influencing character through modelling, teachers through more direct guidance, and peers through support.

Children's Right to Participate in Decisions. All participants felt that children have a right to participate in some decisions that importantly affect their lives. However, most felt that they did not currently have much involvement and indicated their belief that they should have more. As one participant put it:

R: Okay. So that's helpful....to get recognized when you actually do something that's showing good character. Nice. Okay. So....do you think children have any right to participate in decisions about things that will affect their education?

P: Yes because if it's like something they don't want to do they shouldn't be forced to do it. Because if that's not what they want to do you're forcing someone....you have 6 hours of school each day. You learn something new every day right? There's certain things that you have to do, but if it's a choice they shouldn't have to do it if they don't want to because you're forcing your kid to do something that they don't want to do at all.

R: Can you think of an example.

P: Like....even sometimes when we go on field trips and that....sometimes we'll get options but sometimes you have to and even like in French class people don't want to learn French....sometimes I don't want to either but you don't have a choice in that but some of the activities we do...we get a choice in... so you don't actually have to do something. Our French teacher always says "you don't have to do the work but if you want to get like an R or you just don't want to participate then you don't have to. I'm not forcing you to do it...she says...you just look back on your report card and remember that you chose to do that.

R: Okay. So in a sense you get a choice even when it's stuff you have to do. So are you saying that there are some things that make sense that you have to do but then there are some things that you think it would make sense to have choice.

P: Ya. If it's like one of the choices that I like at our school is....some of my friends go to schools where you have to wear like we have dress codes and that...but some people have to wear uniforms. And my [redacted] she goes to a school that they have to wear uniforms and that and I don't think.....I think if we ever got that at our school I would like say something because I think people have a decision on what to wear in the morning.

Another participant added:

R: Okay.....alright...do you think children have any right to participate in decisions about things that will affect their education?

P: Yes I do because children, kids, they can't really be bossed around and they can't be told like to do that one thing...because if they don't have a choice on what to do then they can't really do anything they want. So if they have a school field trip that they want to do I think the children should kind of not decide it but put their thoughts at least into it....and parents to like kind of put their thoughts in and not tell the teachers to do that but say "well this is kind of what I think we should go on a swimming field trip or I think we should maybe do some more math." Not making them do it, but just a thought.

In terms of the amount of involvement participants felt children should have, there was a range, with some indicating that children should have a lot of involvement and others suggesting that just some involvement made more sense. One participant stated the opinion, "I think we should have most of [the decision-making] because the decisions are about like how we're learning and

what we're going to be doing at school." Other participants cautioned against allowing children to have too much control over their education as they might not make the best decisions:

R: So....do you think children have any right to participate in decisions about things that will affect their education?

P: I don't know because...they shouldn't because if they don't have a good education, they won't get a good job and they might just be like....they might never have enough money to afford things once they're older...and they'll turn out not like...but it depends if like the person is good or the person is bad because that could affect also.

R: So if the person is good do you think they should....like how does that affect whether they should have involvement in their decisions?

P: Well..because if they do then they probably would choose to like stay in the education.

R: Okay. Ya.

P: But if they're bad then they'll probably choose not to because usually the bad kids don't like school or education.

Another participant suggested that even though it is appropriate for teachers to make some decisions for them, students should have some say:

R: Okay. How much involvement do you think you should have in at least some of the decisions that affect you at school?

P: I think we should have not a lot of involvement because it's not exactly the kids' decisions. It's the teachers' decisions too so I think we should at least have an idea...tell them an idea....and if they think it's good then they can use it and if it's not then well it was worth a shot telling them what it was.

Generally, participants expressed an understanding that children should not be allowed to make every decision for themselves. Some might find this finding surprising, particularly if they subscribe to the belief or expectation that if children are allowed to be involved in decisions, they will be unreasonable or unrealistic. Clearly, these participants appreciated that children have limitations when it comes to making some decisions and understood the importance of involving relevant adults, and even deferring to the adults in some cases. Since a clear hierarchical family structure, with the parents at the top, is typically seen as ideal in North America, one might argue that this belief is a by-product of that. While this may be the case, these participants also found a way to honour the hierarchy while also challenging it by asserting their right to at least express what they want, if not actually making the decision. In terms of their ideas about appropriate child involvement in decision-making, some themes emerged around the types of decisions and reasons for involving children in such decisions.

Reasons for involving children in decisions. Most participants acknowledged their belief that children should be involved in decisions about school because these decisions quite simply affect them directly, in that “the decisions are about like how we’re learning and what we’re doing at school.” One participant elaborated further by noting:

R: Okay. Now, do you think children have any right to participate in decisions about things that will affect their schooling?

P: Yes. Kind of. Because it’s kind of their school. They’re involved with the school. It’s not only the parents. It’s not only the people that like own this. It doesn’t matter but they still go to the school so they should be involved more with everything of the school. Just like for instance...just for an example...it would be nice if we like got to have a

Halloween dance and everything, but we have to have like a dance-a-thon or something like that. But the older kids get to. So the kids kind of feel left out and everything. So we want to be like involved and everything. Just because the older kids are older and they're about to graduate it doesn't mean that we don't have the right to do that too.

This participant went on to emphasize that "we have the right to do stuff, but at school we don't get the rights...like a lot of rights." One participant articulated an obvious benefit to involving children in decisions, in that "if the kids like it then they'll learn it better...they'd feel more involved."

The participants also indicated that another reason for involving children in making decisions is because they can; that is children are capable of considering important issues and thinking rationally about things. One participant noted "we might be young but we're pretty mature...some of us are pretty mature." Maturity was identified as a factor to consider when involving children in decisions:

Like we're little kids. Some adults are actually....sometimes they act like they're younger....like they act like they're like five-year-olds or something. Like my mom has a friend that acts like she's five...because she wanders off anywhere she wants to....but some kids when they act mature they should be involved with more things because they're more mature and everything. But when the kids aren't like that mature and they're bad or they do something bad then obviously they don't want to involve them. If they're being good like and they're mature and everything...

This participant nicely pointed out that some adults may be less capable of making good decisions than some children. In addition, this participant's response that children's level of

involvement in decision-making that directly affects them should be linked to their maturity and not just chronological age in fact parallels the same point made in Article 12 of the U.N.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990).

Types of decisions. The participants had some very interesting ideas about the types of decisions they felt they should participate in making. As noted previously, all acknowledged that they should not make all decisions, and that teachers and parents are better prepared to make decisions about some aspects of life (e.g., academic program). One participant did not feel children should have “so much” say about their academic program “because the teachers want you to learn what you need to because when you move off to high school or a different grade you need to know the things...or else you’ll...not be able to move on.” As noted previously, they also alluded to the appropriateness of hierarchy by supporting the need for discipline. In discussing the importance of adult involvement in decisions, one participant suggested that children’s involvement in decisions could create problems at times:

R: ...Okay. Um how much involvement do you think you should have in these decisions that affect you?

P: I actually think our school...I like having a lot of decisions but I think we shouldn’t have this much because sometimes that can take....kids can get a little greedy...and they think that they’re the ones that make the decisions. So it doesn’t matter...it’s always what they want to do. Even like the little things in our classroom...kids think...even they’ll fight over the stupidest things...like cards and that. “I had the cards first...let me use them” or like “No I’m better than you. Let me use them.” And every time my teacher

hears that she makes them say sorry to each other. She tries teaching us that we're all perfect but in different ways.

R: Okay. So you're saying that sometimes if kids have too much involvement that they then start to think they're in charge. Is that what you're saying?

P: Yes. It's happened a couple of times in our classroom that lot of people thought that they're the ones that like are in charge....get to do whatever they want.

However, all participants felt they should be involved in some decisions, particularly those involving field trips and other fun activities like dances, routines (e.g., lunch), sports, and outside activities. One participant felt that they should have involvement in decisions about "lunch time routines and outside what we should do...outside...since I'm in an older grade, I don't have...the privilege to play on the playground or go over to like the older kids' side or something."

Although all participants felt that children should be involved in decisions related to fun activities, many acknowledged that the teachers should have the most say about how and what they learn. However, they also indicated that it would make sense to participate in some decisions related to their academic programming. One participant used art as an example of how that might work and suggested:

R: Okay. So even when it comes to the school work you think that it makes sense to make some decisions about that?

P: Yes. Like art maybe. We should maybe...instead of doing something like drawing or something like that we should be doing like painting because that's more educational than just like drawing. Art...like painting...is more important than drawing and everything because some people become artists and everything.

R: Okay. So.....

P: They need the education.

R: Okay. So I think what you're saying is that people have different kinds of interests...

P: Yes.

R: And you might want to have some say....

P: Yes.

One participant suggested that they should get to pick some of their classes (e.g., music, gym) and the times that they occur (e.g., timetable):

P: At different.....we should have like different timeslike if some kids want to do gym or like...it's hard to explain...like old schools...they used to be able to like pick what things they wanted to be in but they had to be in math. Like just say....my things are like...I picked gym and then I picked band and then I picked like art and everything. Like in different classes they should be in different classes instead.

R: So I think I'm also hearing you say that there are some things that teachers need to decide that you have to do...like math and stuff like that. Right?

P: Like math you have to do it. If you picked your own subjects that you want to do, but one of the things had to be math, but you had to pick...like you could pick what time you want it to be. Same thing...like if you want gym you don't want it like the first...like straight in the morning. You don't want it then. So you'd want it probably at the end of the day or in the middle of snack and lunch.

Another suggested that instead of French they should get to choose another language (e.g., Ojibway). At the very least, there was the idea that school staff should keep them informed about

decisions if not involve them directly, in that “they could tell [the children] about what’s going on.”

While the ideas shared thus far about the types of decisions children might participate in making might seem pretty reasonable to most, participants also had some more radical ideas about involvement in decisions that would usually be left to the adults. One participant noted:

P: Instead of the teacher making the decision....we should do a survey about who should get the award (at the assembly).

R: Okay...the kids could vote on who gets the award

P: Ya. Sometimes at the awards assembly, the same kids get the awards over and over....and some kids try really hard to get the award and they never get picked.

R: So it’s important for them to make sure they’re paying attention and recognizing the kid.....some people get awards for cleaning up the classroom...that’s like everyday stuff.

Potentially even more controversial was the suggestion that students should have some input in terms of evaluating teacher performance:

R: Anything else?

P: Also....like what teachers should be still teaching at the school and if we like that teacher and if we don’t then we should like say something about it because...

R: So you should have some say about how the teachers are doing.

P: Ya and if we don’t like them then we could give them a little heads up like “hey I don’t really...this teacher the one that I really like...like someone that I really like.”

Maybe they could see if there’s like another one that’s nicer or understands kids more.

While this might strike some as overstepping boundaries, it is not unusual for other professionals to have their performance evaluated by the clients receiving the service, or by their students in the case of university professors. In that sense, it might be reasonable to give children a chance to evaluate their teacher's performance. Imagine the impact it might have on teachers' approach to the job if they knew their students would have an opportunity to evaluate their performance and that this information would be at least a part of the myriad pieces of information collected on teacher performance.

The Connection Between Participatory Rights and Character. In addition to sharing their beliefs about their right to participate in decisions and their ideas about the types of decisions that they would like to be involved in making, participants felt there was a connection to participating in decisions and character development. Confidence was a quality that participants connected to good character and participants suggested that participating in decisions would enhance children's confidence. One participant noted:

R: Okay. So do you think it would help the child to develop good character if they participated in decisions at school about things that are important to them?

P: Yes. They'd have better characters because they have their own decisions..say like if they decide their own stuff.

R: How do you think that helps them develop good character?

P: Because they're happy with what they picked. So....like I like gym music science and sometimes reading. And sometimes math, but those are the ones I would like to pick.

Then you'd be like "okay I'm happy with that stuff...so I'm going to..."

R: So it makes you happy to make decisions.

P: Ya. You have better characteristic because you're all like "oh yay I get to do this and this"...like right after recess and everything.

R: So, if you're happy how does that make you have better character?

P: Because you'd be like more better, more confident about what you're doing. So like if I do gym, I like it so if I'm going there I'd get more like muscles and stuff like that so I'd be happy about that. I'd get more physical education. I would...just saying...lose weight or something. Because some people think that they're a little bit heavy. They're like a little heavy. Sometimes they're like "maybe I need to do a little more phys. ed. then. So I have to wear shoes and everything. So I could do gym more. But it would be smart if they did two things every day. Just mix up the schedules like every day.

R: So, you'd like to have some say but you realize that you don't have total control.

P: Ya.

R: Okay. Alright. So, if you're happy and confident what would people notice? What would make people say that person has good character?

P: Because they're smiling. They're happy about themselves. They dress nice. But sometimes if they have like a bad character you can tell because they dress so sloppy and everything. They wear like pjs or just like an old shirt that's worn out. They don't care what they wear as long as they're wearing something. So you can tell if they're happy or not by how they dress and how they act. Like their features and everything.

The views expressed in the above exchange indicate happiness related to making choices related to interest but also those that may be related to perceived areas of self-improvement. Learning

how to make decisions that not only affect the present moment but may have an ongoing impact or lead to future benefits for a person is undoubtedly a valuable skill.

Another participant pointed out:

R: So do you think it would help children to develop good character if they participated in making some decisions at school about things that are important to them?

P: Ya. Like I don't really know why...just something tells me that...because if you're doing things that you enjoy...that's something that you can be proud of. And when you're proud you know that's something that's a character trait about you.

R: Ya so if you feel good about yourself and you feel proud how might that make you be a good person?

P: Because then you know later on that...if I like to...if I'm good at telling jokes and that helps people feel better like if they're having a bad day...that makes them not as upset...I know that that's good character because I just made someone go from a really bad day to a really good day.

R: Okay so if you're happier, you might be more likely to do things that make people feel better.

P: Ya make more friends because...they go "oh the other day this person was upset and now this person was making me feel really happy. I know that they're my friend now because they took the time to make me happy.

The participants also indicated in the above exchange a relationship between positive self-image (feeling proud of oneself) and good character and behaviour with the former helping to reinforce the latter. Further, it is not difficult to imagine the positive impact that having some involvement

in important decisions would have in terms of children's sense of identity (e.g., choosing activities they enjoy) and competence (e.g., as one child stated :“they'll choose things that they enjoy and are good at...and will get better at it”). Clearly, having a strong sense of identity and competence has implications for one's character development throughout the lifespan.

Interestingly, participants not only felt that having some say or control over the types of activities in which they are involved would have an impact on their character, but they also identified the process of being involved in decisions as also potentially impacting character. One participant noted:

R: Okay. Ya. Now do you think it would help children to develop good character if they participate in making decisions at school about things that are important to them?

P: I think so because like if they have their ideas at least out there...somebody thinking about it...they feel more like they can be involved and stuff. And if they have their ideas or if they have an idea inside them they feel like “Oh I can't say this because I might get in trouble for it.” Or “If I say this maybe this won't happen” or anything.

R: So if they are able to share their ideas and they feel more involved, how do you think that makes them develop into better people?

P: I think because then they feel like somebody...at least somebody cares about my idea and even if my idea's not used at least it's out there and somebody's trying to make it better...use it to do something with it....

R: What do you think that does to the person?

P: I think it makes them feel more like they're not alone and that if they have a problem they can tell like their teacher or their parents or somebody like that....and if they have a

problem where like they think that there's something wrong with how the school runs or how their teacher's acting or something....then they can always tell somebody and they don't have to feel so like alone....like they're the only ones that really care about it.

This exchange indicates the participant's view that in addition to enhancing one's sense of personal worth and value, involving children in decisions would increase their connection with others and their involvement in life and school community in particular. This was evident in the comment that in participating in decisions "they don't have to feel so like alone...like they're the only ones that really care about it." This participant went on to explain that the act of being connected to others then increases the chances that children will turn to others for help when needed, "that if they have a problem...where they think that there's something wrong...then they can always tell somebody and they don't have to feel so like alone...like they're the only ones that really care about it."

In addition to increasing the connections with others, there was also the suggestion by participants that involving children in decisions will impact their ability to make decisions in the future in that they will gain experience in making decisions for themselves. As one participant put it, "maybe they'll get involved in more things as they grow up...they'll want to." Also, as noted above, certain participants suggested that through their participation in decisions as children, they will gain information about themselves and what is important to them that they will then use to guide future decisions and hence likely make more positive decisions like "staying in school." However, as noted previously, one participant cautioned that a person's character may also influence their decisions, in that "if they're bad then they'll probably choose not to [stay in school] because usually the bad kids don't like school or education." As such,

guidance from adults was viewed as important. However, it should also be noted that the participants expressed a more nonjudgmental view of 'bad' behaviour in the sense that "it's not like [people are just] one person...some days they'll be bad...sometimes they'll be good...technically it's about what's going on at home." They seemed to understand the complex nature of human behaviour and the impact of environmental influences. As such, the comment about "the bad kids" not liking "school or education" may reflect their potential exposure to a societal stereotype.

How Schools Could Involve Students in Decisions. According to these participants, the most basic thing that schools could do to involve students in decisions is to keep them informed. One participant suggested that school staff should talk to the students more:

R: ...What could school or teachers or parents do to better involve you in decisions about your schooling and about character education?

P: Get them to talk more about what they're going to do. Like ask them more.

R: Ask who more?

P: The kids.

R: Ask the kids.

P: And the parents a bit too.

This participant not only highlights the importance of school staff involving student in decisions, but also encourages parental involvement. In addition to being informed, the participants also indicated that the adults could invite the children to share their opinions about decisions. This same participant went on to suggest that it could be as simple as making the effort to ask the children "...do you want to learn this? Are you okay with learning this? Are you okay with doing

this?" Another participant echoed this sentiment with the comment that schools, teachers, and parents "could talk to me more and ask me what I would like to do."

In addition to adults making an effort to inform and consult children about decisions, participants further suggested a more formal process for inviting children to participate in decisions, perhaps those decisions of a more global nature:

R: So you think teachers should involve kids more in decisions. How could they do that?

P: I think not getting the whole school but kids who they can trust...like teachers they know which kids they can trust and which kids they don't want like to do this activity and I think if they chose the kids who want to be involved and who tell the teacher and are brave enough to tell the teacher..."I want to help you guys decide our next fieldtrip." "Or I want to like help you guys do this thing for math or something." Then the teachers can understand that that's what they want.

R: So spend some time talking to them about that stuff.

P: Ya.

R: So they could invite them to...

P: Ya...and not like the whole class but say like 5 or 6 kids or like 10 kids.

R: Okay...so could the school do anything?

P: Ya.

R: What could the school do?

P: Well...I guess they could always do like...not all the time but maybe on a regular basis ask like a kid in every grade what they think...like what they want to do. And then they can kind of get an idea of...if one kid wants to do this then I bet a couple more kids

in that grade might want to do that too. And then they can kind of get them together and talk about it and stuff. And if they ever need like help then...like something's happening like they're getting bullied or if they're like...something happened in their family or something...they can talk about it and they don't have to be afraid to.

R: How could they help them talk about that stuff?

P: I think they could always like. If they feel okay about it...like if they want to do it... they can always ask the kids questions...not like big questions...but like what you want to do and how would you change the school if you could..or like what you want to do.

As noted above, one participant suggested that teachers could approach children “they can trust...who want to be involved...and are brave enough” to ask things “like what you want to do and how would you change the school if you could.” This participant went on to further suggest that they could “on a regular basis, ask like a kid in every grade what they think...like what they want to do.” There was some indication that this might encourage other children to participate which would then provide opportunities for the school to enhance communication between staff and students and encourage active involvement in school-related issues. It seemed as though this participant was suggesting that forming committees with representatives from different grades would be a good way to involve children in school-based decisions. In essence, such suggestions from certain of the children were directed to their desire for building school community and instituting some additional vehicles for children's democratic participation in the school's functioning.

Participants also suggested that children could be involved in school-based decisions through surveys and votes. One participant recalled a time when the students voted for the movie

they were going to see as a class and also suggested that in terms of character-related awards “instead of the teacher making the decision, we should do a survey about who should get the award [at the assembly].” There was even the suggestion that the monthly assemblies could be used as opportunities to ask the students for their opinions about school-based issues. One participant recalled an assembly where one student expressed an opinion about a decision that had been made at the school level and was told that it was not his/her decision to make:

R: Okay let's talk a little bit about...if you think about how the school runs...what could the school do to include you in decisions? So a survey is one way....they could survey you about different things.

P: Ask you. At the assemblies.....I think they should have kids come up sometimes and say what they think. I remember at one of our assemblies a girl in grade 4 put up her hand and said I don't think we should get a new playground because.....I like our old one...and he was like “I'm sorry but we have to get it and it's not your decision” It's like why do we have to.

It was clear that the participant was still not clear about the rationale for the new playground when he/she stated, “It's like why do we have to?” While the participants clearly acknowledged repeatedly that they should not necessarily get everything that they want, there was the suggestion that “at assemblies...they should have kids come up sometimes and say what they think.” They expressed a desire to be asked about their thoughts and opinions related to matters that affect them as well as a desire to be genuinely heard. This was especially clear in their discussions following their presentation to the school and will be explored further here in terms of the impact of this research on the participants.

Impact of this Research on the Participants. While the goal of this research was to explore children's ideas about character and to give them a voice on the issue of character education, this process appeared to impact the students in ways that were unexpected. Their enthusiasm was apparent very early on. The participants began to express their excitement about talking with this researcher and planning their activity together. They mentioned that they were thinking about it all of the time, "even when I don't think I'm thinking of it I was always thinking about it." One participant expressed "I was really excited and that was all I was thinking about." More importantly, one participant noted that "I felt like it really meant something...like I really did something." In terms of the impact of this research on the participants, a couple of themes emerged related to personal accomplishment and growth, and empowerment.

Personal accomplishment and growth. Participants acknowledged the courage they felt they had for sharing their ideas with the entire school in regards to the presentation they as students had created on the topic of character (Please refer to Appendix B for the slide show and poster presentations). One participant noted, "I think everybody has learned something...I think it changed us by how much courage we have." One participant acknowledged having a fear of speaking in front of large groups of people and stated "I think I faced my fears." Furthermore, in addition to feeling courageous and discovering what they are capable of accomplishing, participants also expressed that it "felt good telling everybody how we feel, our thoughts about it, and how we want to change it."

In addition to feeling good about sharing their ideas, participants also talked about an enhanced sense of personal responsibility in that talking about character seemed to cause them to reflect on their own character. One participant noted:

P: Ya. I think everybody has learned something...and to be better at what you can do. I think it changed us by how much courage we have. I never used to help out in the house...like I'd be really lazy and my mom would yell at me because I wouldn't do anything and ever since I started doing this I've been more responsible.

R: I wonder why...do you have any thoughts about why that changed for you? So how do you think that doing this caused you to make that change?

P: I don't know....just thinking about it every day. After learning this....I think about it even when I don't think I'm thinking of it...I was always thinking about it.

On an even broader level, participants expressed motivation to model in their everyday behaviour at school what they presented to the school, "Maybe if we like show what we're talking about like integrity, empathy, respect, acceptance, and responsibility...I want to show them like how we want to teach it and how they could try to change too."

In terms of modelling the values and ideas regarding good character that they presented to the school, participants approached their activity in a manner that was, in fact, consistent with the way the research group functioned. That is, they were, for instance, respectful in their communication with one another. Although one participant took more of a lead in organizing their efforts, they checked with one another periodically to make sure people were satisfied with their tasks. They expressed their preferences regarding the necessary tasks and were sure to consider one another's preferences and individual strengths when dividing these tasks. Generally, participants approached the activity with confidence and competence requiring almost no guidance from the researcher.

Empowerment. Participants describe an enhanced sense of responsibility as well as a belief in their ability to effect change. This may have been due to the fact that they felt they had succeeded in effecting change in themselves and others through their presentation. As one participant put it:

R: So you think that some of the adults might have learned that kids have some really good things to say.

P: Ya and they have to try to listen....they should listen more...because adults don't always listen....especially teachers...lots of teachers don't listen all the time; so they should try to listen when we have something to say.

R: A lot of adults don't always listen when kids have something to say. So what were you hoping to accomplish by doing this...remember when we first got together and I said okay lets think of an activity that we could do and I threw out some ideas...and you said we want to do a presentation to the school....like you wanted this...you were so sure of this. What were you hoping to accomplish?

P: I was hoping we'd accomplish to have people listen to us and to have everybody to know what we have to say and everything we've done; I hoped to accomplish that people would learn something from it; I was hoping to accomplish to try to change our school... like Mr. (principal) to realize that like everything and how we've been trying to change it.

It was clear from their comments afterward that the participants felt they did change the school.

One participant noted:

P: I could have said the last one but it takes a lot of courage for someone to go up there and say all that stuff in front of the whole thing.

R: It does take a lot of courage...ya. How do you feel that doing that...what you just did today...how do you feel that that's related to character education?

P: We tried to change the school and I think they understood a bit...and even...who read the part that said.."Picture this"...I was thinking...I hope lots of kids are thinking how that is....I was looking around at the whole school and like everybody....some of the grade eights even were listening. I looked at them and they were kind of paying attention. (Named some specific kids they were glad to see paying attention – e.g. bullies). And we changed the school.

R: So you feel like you might have maybe taught some kids some things.

P: Ya. Even the little JKs.

Another pointed out that "even (the principal) was listening and looking like he was happy...I felt like wow maybe we're changing (the principal) in a way too." Through this one action, these participants, even though they were children, felt they had succeeded in influencing a system (their school) and the adult in charge of that system. Furthermore, in the final comments during the last (post-activity) interview, the participants gave some indication of having enjoyed this experience of social activism, feeling of empowerment, and a vision for continuing to see this continue for themselves in the future:

P: Ya. I'm glad that we did it. I was really excited and that was all I was thinking about.

R: You know what...this really changed me too.

P: I felt like it really meant something...like I really did something.

R: I'm an adult obviously...and my research is about children's rights...so I'm a big believer [in] children's rights...I know a little bit more about children's rights than a lot of

adults...but do you know what doing this has changed for me.....is I really saw in talking with you guys...I really saw that kids have fantastic ideas about things and it really for me reinforced that we need to ask kids their ideas. And I think you guys took a really big step in what you did...you shared your ideas...you showed what kids can do...and I think that you could keep that going. You're kind of leaders now. Eh? Do you feel like that?

P: Ya... I feel like that...now that I've done that...I feel like I can do a lot of things to change the world...because even like the smallest things you can change; one of my fears is talking in front of a big group of people but I think I faced my fears....it was really fun and I thought...I still kind of felt a little different afterwards.

The participants' belief that they had influenced or changed their school was reinforced by another unexpected turn of events. Following the presentation to their own school and the post-presentation group interview, the classroom teacher invited the participants to speak to their class about the issue of character. The teacher requested this following an event that had occurred in the classroom prior to any of the presentations by these participants. She noted that a spontaneous discussion related to bullying had occurred in the classroom and that the students who were participating in this study talked a lot about character. As a result, the teacher felt there would be value in having the participants share more of their ideas with the class and requested the presentation. The participants used their poster to structure the discussion, answered questions from their classmates, and facilitated a discussion (with the researcher's assistance) about character, bullying, and children's participatory rights. The participants all spoke during the class presentation and appeared very assertive and self-assured, even the ones who previously seemed very shy.

Generally, participants seemed far more self-assured and confident by the end of this study. Even the participants who appeared passive and unsure of themselves during the initial interviews were sharing their ideas openly and confidently with their class in the end. This certainly reflected their idea that “just because we’re small doesn’t mean we can’t have a say.” This enhanced sense of confidence and empowerment was also reflected in the comment that “kids have something to say...they should listen more...just because we’re kids doesn’t mean we can’t try to change the world...really, it could be the kids who actually save the whole school or save the shelter or something they’re working on.”

Impact of this Research on the Researcher. Just as the participants expressed having been impacted, it quickly became evident that this researcher was also being significantly impacted by this study. Similar to the participants, I found myself thinking often about what was transpiring during the interviews and looked forward to being involved in further interactions with the children. I looked forward to meeting with them as much as they looked forward to meeting with me. I also found myself often feeling surprised by the ideas shared by the participants and impressed by their apparent wisdom. Like them, I felt as though I was involved in something profoundly important.

Some might argue that my perception of my own doctoral dissertation as profoundly important might be somewhat biased. Clearly, I would have chosen a topic for which I had a certain amount of interest, if not passion, and would have some vested interest in a successful outcome. While I would agree that my passion for the topic of this study likely influenced my enthusiasm, I would also argue that the process of interacting with these children was even more influential. I was keenly aware of the fact that my excitement and enthusiasm for the topic

increased exponentially with each interaction. Listening to these children find their voices, exploring ideas that were resonating so deeply with them, and then watching them take on their own social action project with such competence and vigour was inspiring. If I was excited about character and children's rights before this study, I am even much more deeply now.

Thus, this study had a significant impact on me as an adult in spite of my being an experienced clinical psychological practitioner accustomed to interacting with a wide range of persons of various ages, including children, in conversations important to the client. I would suggest that there are likewise some very interesting potential implications for the educational system in terms of instituting a character education program informed by a children's rights perspective. It is unlikely that I am the only adult who would be positively impacted in this manner by such a process. The current qualitative findings suggest that should a school choose to approach character and children's rights education through a similarly transactional process, the potential for positive change in terms of building a stronger school community is greatly enhanced. Even though the express curriculum intent might be to teach the children involved about 'good character' and 'children's rights,' my experiences in doing this research would suggest that all involved, the adults included, will learn something useful as well from each other and from the children. This will then potentially lead to systemic changes as well in creating an even more mutually respectful and democratic place of learning and educational approach. Of course it will require much additional research to investigate such possible outcomes as is discussed in the limitations section of this dissertation.

Group Activities. The ideas expressed in the slide show and poster presentations (please see Appendix B) seemed to represent a summary of the themes that emerged from the interviews.

The participants chose to title these presentations “How to Change the World: One Step at a Time” which appeared to reflect the empowerment noted above. This was also evident in the expression of their intent:

“We wanted to share our ideas about how to improve our school.”

“We wanted to talk about what the words we see around the school actually mean.”

This new found sense of empowerment and desire to have a voice on the issue of character was also evident in the children's final thoughts as presented in their slide show:

“Changing the world seems hard but it's not. You just need to know where to start. With this presentation there were 5 easy traits that can make you a better person. Speak up. Say what you want to say and that's what we're doing today!”

“Just because we're kids doesn't mean we can't try to change the world and make it a better place.”

“Just because we're small doesn't mean we can't have a say.”

“Just because we're learning we all make mistakes.”

“Just because we're not in charge doesn't mean we can't be a LEADER.”

The *children's descriptions* used in relation to the “words” or values that were posted around the school by the teachers (‘integrity’, ‘empathy’, ‘respect’, ‘acceptance’, ‘responsibility’) also reflected the character-related themes described above. Participants emphasized traits related to “strength,” “standing up for what it right,” “being honest,” “[showing] you care,” “being polite,” “[showing] you are kind,” and “taking care [of others].” All of these were evident in the previous emergent themes arising from the children's individual interviews and the group discussion.

Summary and Analysis of the Emergent Themes

Ideas About Character. Participants described character in terms of actions and connected 'good' character with being nice, helping people, listening, being kind, and accepting of others. People with 'good' character were associated with happiness, confidence, strength, and success, in the sense that they were often described by participants as smiling, well behaving, sharing their thoughts, fun to be around, achieving good grades, and being willing to stand up for people and their beliefs. The actions associated with bad character included bullying, rudeness, name calling, and angry attitudes. However, there was also the idea that a person could have a bad day and still be of good character, along with the notion that even bullies behave that way because of things they've experienced. As such, the participants were expressing the belief that character was a complex and diverse construct in that everybody has unique strengths, that individual differences are desirable, and that our judgments about a person's character are not necessarily accurate (e.g., that you have to get to know a person before you judge them). The participants expressed the belief that 'good' character was associated with life satisfaction and happiness, particularly in terms of increasing access to and enhancing relationships (e.g., people want to be around those who demonstrate good character).

The Process of Character Development. Given that the participants identified some benefits to 'good' character in terms of life satisfaction and happiness, the processes involved in the development of character and the factors influencing the nature of one's character were also explored. Although participants acknowledged a biological component to character (e.g., that people are born that way), they also acknowledged that it is learned and shared their thoughts

about how people develop their character through experiences in their environments. Participants emphasized the role of family (e.g., parents and siblings) in role modelling character in that children tend to emulate the people in their families. They noted that parents are in a position to demonstrate 'good' behaviour and approaches to life in that they can lead by example. However, participants also noted that even younger children can be role models for older children (or even adults) and that it does not necessarily matter how old or young, people are influenced by one another.

In addition to the notion of role modelling, participants also identified direct teaching as a method for influencing character development. Participants seemed to see the school as most connected to direct teaching about character though they did also mention peers and family. In terms of direct teaching, participants referred to being told what is good to do, how to handle situations (e.g., advice), specific strategies that are taught at school, posting perceived positive character traits in the school, and the monthly assemblies that include a component that addresses character. The participants also had thoughts about specific strategies used in the classroom that have the potential to influence character development such as reading books related to character and doing activity sheets. There was also the notion that teachers could work character into every conversation or lesson, even those related to math.

While the participants acknowledged the influence of direct teaching, particularly in terms of the classroom and school as a whole, personal experience was also identified as a critical factor in character development. Internal cues were connected with behaviour associated with character in the sense that if one does something 'bad' they might notice an unpleasant feeling in their body, especially the stomach and that 'good' behaviour might result in a pleasant

bodily sensation. As such, participants were expressing the belief that we have the potential to learn on our own through our feelings about our actions and that our experiences will serve as a guide for future actions. The issue of raising money for a playground that was intended for the younger students was provided as an example of an experience that was teaching them to do for others. Our experiences of relationships and interacting with others were also identified as having an influence on character development in that we receive a great deal of information about how our actions impact others and how others' actions impact us. In general, the participants identified that experiences can shape character-related behaviour through positive and negative consequences.

The Roles of People in Character Development. As illustrated above, the experiences, teaching, and modelling described by participants emphasized the role of other people in the development of character and the participants expressed their beliefs about the specific roles played by particular people in the process. The participants identified peers, teachers, and family members (especially parents) as critical in character development. They expressed the notion that teachers influence character by helping children who have problems learning, listening to children, providing discipline, and guiding behaviour. Furthermore, the importance of addressing issues that arise for children was noted (instead of sweeping it under the carpet and ignoring it). Also the participants felt that parents influence character by providing input regarding tolerance for diversity and other matters related to social interaction. On the other hand peers were seen as influencing character development through their support and guidance particularly in terms of standing up for somebody who is being bullied. The notion that peers accomplish this by helping others and being friendly was expressed by the participants.

Furthermore, the idea that the character of one person can have an impact on the character of another was noted in the sense that the participants expressed the view that persons with what they termed "bad character" could not teach others to be "good."

Children's Participatory Rights. While the participants had very clear beliefs about what character is and the influences in its development, they also expressed their thoughts about how much involvement they felt they should have in decisions, including those related to character education and otherwise. All participants felt that children had a right to participate in some decisions and most felt that they did not currently have much involvement. While the participants generally expressed the belief that they should have more involvement in decisions that affect them, there was some variability in terms of the amount of involvement with some feeling that children should have a great deal of involvement and others believing that children should have "just some" involvement. Generally participants expressed an understanding that children should not be allowed to make every decision for themselves.

In terms of the decisions children should be involved in making, all participants felt they should be involved in decisions involving field trips and other fun activities like dances, routines (e.g., lunch), and outside activities. Although many acknowledged that the teachers should have the most say in their education, some participants felt that they should also have some say about how and what they learn (e.g., choosing some of their classes, determining their timetable, and which second language they learn). Their ideas about participation in decisions also went beyond those affecting them individually to those also affecting the broader system, such as having some say about who is chosen for the award recognition at the assemblies and having some involvement in the performance evaluations of teachers.

The fact that the participants were willing to share their belief that children should be involved in evaluating their teachers' performances, which is a fairly controversial notion and one that they could expect to be rejected by many adults, might suggest an enhanced sense of trust and openness. It is possible that this openness and honesty was the result of the participants feeling that within the context of the current study they genuinely had the freedom to decide what they shared and how. Generally speaking, the participants indicated their belief that they were mature and competent enough to have some meaningful involvement and that, at the very least, school staff should keep them informed about decisions if not involve them completely. Furthermore, the fact that the child participants in this study expressed the desire for *meaningful* participation in school character initiatives and other school programming affecting them suggests that these children had a notion of the difference between superficial versus impactful participation. These children then seemed at some level to have an intuitive understanding of the civil liberty of freedom of expression which is also covered in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991) and is intricately connected to genuine participation rights.

Processes for Participation. In terms of involving children in decisions, participants suggested that school staff should talk more about what they are planning and genuinely involve the children by asking for their feedback and preferences. They acknowledged that children should not necessarily get everything they want, but that parents, teachers, and principals could take the time to talk about it with the children and seek genuine consultation with them. It was suggested that this could take the form of forming groups of interested children (perhaps a child from every grade) with the intention of talking about their ideas

related to decisions at school. They also suggested that the children could be asked on a regular basis what they think about different plans and ideas related to their school. Other ideas included surveys, votes, and inviting students to share their thoughts and opinions at assemblies.

The Relationship Between Character and Children's Participatory Rights.

Participants made a connection between participation in decisions and enhanced confidence. This was also observed by the researcher in relation to their social action project. The participants collaborated effectively and behaved very respectfully throughout the entire project. Perhaps having the opportunity to truly express their ideas and to decide how that was communicated enhanced their sense of competence and community. They also felt that having the freedom to spend time doing things that are important to their sense of identity (e.g., activities they enjoy) and competence (e.g., they'll choose things they enjoy and are good at....and will get better at it), which would be the case if they participated in such decisions, would have a positive impact on their sense of self. Furthermore, the participants noted that participating in decisions would make them feel more involved and connected with others and they would be more likely to get more involved in things throughout their lifespan due to the opportunities to practice making decisions for themselves and establishing a sense of competence in that regard. Generally speaking, the participants believed that participating in decisions affecting them would cause them to take more pride in what they do.

Part II: The Children's Voices Unedited and Unfiltered

This section contains the full transcript of the participants' responses to the questions posed during individual and group interviews. Including this data is consistent with the notion of children's right to have their voices heard unfiltered by adult interpretation and editing and also given due consideration and weight. Therefore, the material is included here in the body of the dissertation but, so as not to interrupt the flow for the reader, included after the section titled Findings and Discussion (which is the author's interpretive section). The chapter that follows this is the final chapter which discusses the author's conclusions and the applied implications of this research work for children's rights education and character education.

There are several benefits to including the children's voices unfiltered. Including the children's interview responses in their entirety better places the children's responses in context. It also provides an opportunity for the reader to perhaps reach alternate conclusions about the meaning to be assigned to particular responses. This adds a layer of transparency to the data presentation which is required given that qualitative data even more clearly does not lend itself to any particular single interpretation. Further, providing the entire set of interview responses (rather than just selected sample responses interpreted in a particular fashion) allows the reader access to the diversity in the children's responses to particular questions. It also allows for a better appreciation of how particular children interpreted the various interview questions. In addition, in reviewing this data, the reader is allowed more complete entry into the interview process by experiencing all of the responses. Finally, this unedited data set illustrates, in a way that selected quotes cannot, the supportive nature of the interview process that the researcher attempted to employ and which was intended to engage the child participants and to give them a

genuine voice on issues relevant to them. The field notes, which can be found in Appendix C, have not been included here as they contain the author's rather than the children's thoughts and impressions.

The responses have been grouped according to topics in order to better protect the anonymity of the individual participants and also to present the information in an accessible manner. In addition, the numbers assigned to each of the participants (e.g., 1 P, 2 P, etc.) for each of the topics discussed in this section have been randomized such that the interview responses cannot be associated with any particular interviewee. There have been some redactions to preserve anonymity and confidentiality.

What it Means to Have Good/Bad Character

1. Participant (P): I guess it's just good....if you have good character then you have a good life basically...and happy...not miserable like.

Researcher (R): So if you have good character then you're happy and you have a good life. Do you have any thoughts about why that is that you might be happy if you have good character?

P: Because if you have bad character then you might not be the best person. Other people may not be fond of you or something. If you have good character then you'll have lots of friends and you'll be happier.

2. P: It means to be...like...to have... or be nice and not hurt other people.

R: Okay....so when you say be nice what does it mean to be nice?

P: Like pretty much just like not bullying or not being mean.

R: So what are some of the behaviours you might say are related to good character?

P: Listening.

R: Anything else?

P: Well behaved.

3. P: Um...I think it's like how you act and like stuff that you do. It's kind of like your personality.

R: Yes very good. So what does it mean to you to have good or bad character?

P: Well, if you have good character it's kind of something like your friends, and teachers, and like everybody that you know will remember you by. It's like I guess you want to have good character because if you have bad character then people would be like "Oh this person has bad character. I don't know if I want to be friends with them anymore.

Because I want to be a good character." Or something like that.

R: Okay....so if you have good character what does that mean?

P: I think it means that you're like a good person because then people will be like this person's a good character I want to start hanging out with them because I don't want to hang out with somebody who's like bad character because then I'd get in lots of trouble.

R: Okay....good. So if you have good character then people want to be around you and things like that....okay. Is there anything that you notice about somebody with good character? Like what are they like?

P: Well, they're fun to be around. Because...like....you just have fun. You don't have to worry about like "Oh I don't think I want to do this because I might get in trouble." You just know like "I'm just going to go hang out with them and have fun."

4. P: Well when you have a good character you're like nice and you help people and you're not like rude and call people names. But if you're like a bad character you're like a bully and everything. You're rude and think of yourself only. And maybe if you're like a bad character you don't care what you look like. You just don't care at all. And if you're a good character you want to look like good. Like you want to make yourself perfect and everything.

R: What do you mean look like you're good?

P: Like you.....think I don't like how I don't match and everything, but then if you're a bad character you're like I don't care if I match as long as I just get dressed.

5. P: Um...well....we're all different so like if...you can't just pick out someone and say well they're good because that's who they are. They all have different kind of character traits....like someone could be good at like sports and another person could be good at like dance. So it's always good to be different from other people.

R: That's a good point. So are there certain things that you sort of connect with having good character?

P: Ya...like...sometimes you could have like a good day and sometimes you could have a bad day and usually when you have a bad day you're not....like you're still the person you are but you seem more like kind of...not mean but a little rude like because you're taking things out on people. But...like...I think because I have things that I'm good at and my friends are good at things that's why were friends. Because we're all different and there are certain things that we can relate to.

R: So...this is interesting..so..people can be different from one another and I think you're

also saying that the same person can be different depending on what's going on for them.

P: Ya. Like you may not like something at first but then you try it and then like you realize that you do like it so that's another thing that you're good at and you like it.

R: Ya. So..something that you're thinking about with character is strengths that a person has is also kind of what defines them.

P: Mmm hmmm.

R: Okay. That's a really good point. And I think I also heard you say that even if you have a bad day it doesn't mean you're a bad person.

P: No.

R: Is that what I heard you say?

P: It just means that something has gone on that makes you feel upset but then lots of people...Like I know if I'm having a bad day my friends they try to help me by making me feel better. Because like we've been friends for a long time so they know what I like and what would be able to make me feel better.

R: So what kinds of things do you think make somebody a good person?

P: Um...if they're honest and like if they stay true to their word. Like things like if they help out... Just things that kind of build up to who they are.

R: Are there any things that you think might be related to not being a good person?

P: I don't know. Sometimes like you could have interests with people that you think they're good people but they're not in a way so you do things that they pressure you into doing. So like you may have interests but they might have an interest in like a different point of view than you were thinking that they do.

6. R: Okay....so character really is the qualities that a person has that makes them who they are. And makes them different from everybody else. Does that make sense?

P: Ya.

R: Okay so when I tell you that, what do you think it means to have good or bad character?

P: Good character is like being different and not caring what other people think and being bad character is like being destroyed because everybody talks about you in different ways and they don't respect what you are.

R: Okay so you said being different and not caring what people think. How does that make you have good character?

P: It makes you a good character because it makes you not be so bad to yourself.

R: Okay...how do you mean?

P: Well....I've known a lot of people...they don't think they're good enough to be themselves. They think that they need to be a different person.

R: So good character is about feeling good about yourself. Is that what you mean?

P: Nods.

R: Okay.....so if you feel better about yourself how does that kind of make you a good person do you think?

P: It could make you a good person because feeling good about yourself makes you think that other people are good about themselves too. Makes you feel like you can tell the person that they're pretty and they're intelligent...that they're caring...they're honest.

R: Okay. Why do you think that is...that if you feel good about yourself you can do that

stuff?

P: Well because feeling good about yourself is making like yourself feel good so you'll be happy and you'll express your feelings with others.

7. R: So...the first thing I'm going to talk to you about is character. Do you know what character is?

P: Ya.

R: What is it?

P: It's kind of how somebody acts or how you can be as a person.

R: Ya.

P: It's like...it's kind of hard to explain...but...

R: I think you just did a good job of explaining it actually. So what does it mean to have good or bad character?

P: Well...it's kind of like being a good person on the inside and how you act toward other people and being bad character...it's kind of the total opposite of that because it's not really acting that well to other kids or people and it's not having that special part of you I guess. That likes people and makes people feel welcome and stuff.

R: So...in terms of...you talked about how you act toward other people...can you give me an example of what good character would be in terms of how a person would act towards other people.

P: Well you would welcome people into the world...like if there's a new student in your class you don't kind of ignore them...it's not nice to be...it's good to be nice to them. Or if you meet somebody that you want to be friends with or if you don't know you can

always like say "Hi. I'm new here." Or "Do you want to be my friend?" or something like that.

R: So being welcoming is good. Okay. Anything else that you kind of associate with being of good character?

P: Umm...it's kind of like being kind and being helpful too.

8. R: So...do you know what character is?

P: Um...ya.

R: Okay...what's character to you?

P: Um...It's a person that's in a book and they're like telling a little story about the life of something and sometimes they share their feelings in some books and pretend that...put it in a fiction book.

R: Right...ya...that is kind of an example of a character. There's lots of characters in books and stuff like that. Another way to think about character is kind of the qualities about a person that makes them who they are..right...okay so we can have character too. And that's kind of how they create characters in books, too right? So, now that we've talked a bit about what character is, what does it mean to have good or bad character do you think?

P: Um...I don't know.

R: Like if somebody has good character, what do you think they would be like? What are they like....like if you think about somebody who you think "hey they have good character?"

P: Umm...they're always nice to people and they always give people compliments and

sharing their thoughts.

R: Anything else you think about when you think about good character?

P: I don't know.

R: How about bad character. Do you think of anything?

P: They're not really nice...like they don't really compliment you and they're kind of like bullies.

R: So when you think about bullies what kinds of behaviours do you think of?

P: They call you a whole bunch of names. You get picked on a lot at school and then you don't feel good inside about who you are.

R: So when you think about somebody who's nice, what kinds of qualities do you think of in a nice person?

P: Um....I don't know.

R: Think of someone that you think is nice....how would you describe them?

P: If you don't have something to eat at lunch...most of my friends give me food and that and then if you have no one to hang out with they would hang out with you. And.....I don't know.

Character as Innate or Genetic Versus Acquired Through Learning

1. R: Do you think people learn to have good or bad character or do you think they're born that way?

P: I think they're mostly born that way. They [as in people in general] might be inspired by some people like their parents a bit.

R: So they might be inspired you said, eh?

P: Hm..by what their parents do...or by what their friends do. It depends.

R: So there is a little bit of learning that happens then you think.

P: Ya....sort of like 33% is learning I think.

R: Okay....so little bit by their parents and friends they might learn some stuff then.

P: Well just people in general. Especially when they're young.

R: Okay. Since you think there's a little bit of learning from people in general and parents and friends, why do you think it is learned?

P: Because when people are doing something like.....let's say somebody was doing something bad...some young person might think that's okay and be like....that's basically what learning is...getting stuff from other people.

R: So something like they watch people do stuff. Is that what you mean?

P: (nods)

R: Okay. So what are some other ideas about how you think people learn to have good or bad character?

P: Hmm...maybe...some people might just like be born with it or something. I think basically they just get inspired by other people. That must be just how they learn it

2. R: Do you think people learn to have good or bad character...?

P: Ya kind of. Not really but....

R: Okay. Tell me what you mean.

P: Like if.....it's hard to describe it...

R: Like do you think they're born that way or do you think they learn it?

P: Like they learn from their parents because if they're like rude and like swear a lot and or the parents yell at each other then they kind of learn the swears and how they fight and if they have like a good character then everybody they're surrounded with are nice and everything. Sometimes they learn it and sometimes they just get taught themselves. Like teach themselves.

R: Okay. How do they teach themselves?

P: If they say, okay I don't want to do that because that's bad or I wouldn't do that because it really bad so. Like a bad girl and everything.

R: How do they learn kind of what's bad and what's good?

P: You can tell because if you do something bad like just saying steal someone's money you get a bad feeling in your stomach. Sometimes if you did something good you get like butterflies or something and you feel all happy. Like say if a lady drops money or like her purse or her wallet and she goes like on a bus or in her taxi then you try to run after that car and when she gets dropped off you're like here's your wallet or purse then you'd get like a good feeling in your stomach.

R: Okay. So why do think good or bad character is learned?

P: Because you wouldn't know without learning it because if someone says no you can't do that that's bad then you're like "okay I'm not going to do that again because she just said no that's bad." And so if they say you did something good this time, you're like hey I did something and you get treated well and everything. You can tell what the difference is when you do it.

R: You've shared some ideas already, but how do you think people learn to have good or

bad behavior, like how are the ways?

P: Sometimes the adults that are taking care of you are like saying no that's bad or you can't do that or you're grounded or yay you did it here's like a candy or something, but if like you do something bad then it's kind of obvious that you did that because then you don't feel that good and like "Aw I don't think I did something good that time."

R: So it's a little bit about what people tell you and a little bit about how you feel. Okay.

3. R: Okay. Ya. Now..do you think people learn to have good or bad character?

P: Yes because like even at like school and that....everyday our teacher teaches us....like at the beginning we always have to sign this....at the beginning of the year every teacher you have....it's kind of like....it's on the board and you have to sign your name on it and she saves it...like you have it forever and if something bad goes on with your friends or something in the classroom....she brings it back up like she brings the file back up and we'll have to look at it. We all jotted down like one thing that we believe that you should be doing to help people.

R: Oh....so you actually pick out that thing?

P: Ya...we get like five minutes to write a little sentence about what we think we should do to make other people feel better.

R: Okay. Are there other ways you think people learn to have good or bad character?

P: Um...sometimes just from seeing other people...what they do. If someone makes you feel better or if you see someone helping someone outside and...say they fall of their bike or something and they're helping them then you know that's good character because they might not even know the person but they decided to help them.

R: Right. Okay. So...why do you think good or bad character is learned?

P: Because....like I know when they teach it they want you to become a better person so that when you're older you can look back on all the things you were taught and that will help you be a better person.

R: So learning this when you're young can help you be a better person when you're older. Okay. How do you think that might be good for you or for anybody?

P: Because like if you had no clue what good character was at all...like you didn't know anything about good character then how are you supposed to know 10 years from now if you're supposed to help somebody or not.

R: Right. That's a good point. So you did say some things about how you think people learn to have good or bad character. Do you have other thoughts about how people learn that? I think you said seeing other people doing things, learning it at school...

P: Sometimes....other people....like sometimes you can figure it out on your own. Because you might feel good about what you just did. You know....you feel good and it's something that I should feel proud of of myself. And that's like goes back to character traits that everybody has something different that they...makes them who they are. Like, I play hockey and baseball so like I play sports and whenever I play...If I'm upset I like to play or just go skating because it's just something that I like to do and then like a couple of my other friends do dance or gymnastics and that's what they like to do.

R: Okay...and so there's a feeling that you get when you do these things that you're good at or when you do something to help somebody. What's that feeling? Can you describe it?

P: It kind of like...um...a couple days ago I was mad at a friend...I mean we weren't really talking or anything...and so I had a hockey practice and I started to learn new things and you get like this feeling in your stomach that like makes you really....it's almost like butterflies kind of, because then you realize things that you should be saying to that person...or it just like makes you happy. It's like it's [doing what] you enjoy doing.

4. R: Okay. Now do you think people learn to have good or bad character or do you think they are born that way?

P: Mmmm...I think they learn it because like...I don't know...because all the books that I read and like and t.v. shows they like all have a message and it's like trying to get you to be a good person and stuff.

R: Oh, okay. So one of the ways you think they learn it is through things like t.v. shows and books. Okay. Any other ways you think?

P: Well I guess they could learn it through other people too.

R: What people do you think they might learn it from?

P: Probably like parents and teachers and friends.

R: How do you think they learn it from those people?

P: Well I guess they just want them to be a good person and like have lots of friends and stuff. They probably like try to be a good person to be a role model for them.

R: Okay so kids might learn it from kind of watching parents and teachers and stuff like that. Okay. Do you think there's any other way that they teach that to kids?

P: I don't know.

5. R: So do you think people learn to have good or bad character or do you think they're born that way?

P: Well I think....that's kind of hard because it could be both because I've heard of some people that have done both.

R: Yeah...that's a really good point so you might think it might be a little bit of both... how you're born and what you learn. Okay. Why do you think good or bad character is learned?

P: Well because it could be like from their parents and they just follow along what their parents do.

R: Anything else? (indicates no)

R: How do you think people learn to have good or bad character?

P: Well maybe like they've gone through something that has like put them in like a place that is like a good or bad character.

R: Can you think of an example?

P: Not really.

R: So when you say they've gone through something...like what do you mean?

P: Like they went to...like I don't know what you'd call...but it's almost like when you listen to other people's stories and then you like get to know like...

R: Okay....like are you saying that when people go through tough times. Is that what you mean?

P: Yeah.

R: Okay. So when they go through tough times how does that teach them about character

do you think?

P: Well, they'll probably remember all the things that like happened and they'll probably be like better at....like be nicer...not do what they did before.

R: So like learn from mistakes? Is that what you mean?

P: Ya.

R: Now you also said something about when you hear other people's stories....so you're talking about people going through things themselves.

P: Ya.

R: Do you think other people's stories are part of it too?

P: Maybe.

R: Okay...how do you think?

P: Um....I don't know.

6. R: Okay. Good. Do you think people learn to have good or bad character or do you think they're born that way?

P: I think they're born that way.

R: Okay. Do you think that there's any part of it that's learned.

P: Well some of it is not really knowing what people think and like it's just learning that people are not all honest and they don't tell you the truth.

R: Okay. Are there some behaviours that you think go along with good character?

P: Ya.

R: Like what?

P: Like doing what your parents tell you to do. Being good and don't like do anything

bad. Don't go out and like drink or anything. And don't smoke. Being good is just telling and being learned from your parents to do what they expect you to be learned.

R: Okay. So there's some things that you learn.

P: Ya.

R: Okay. So why do you think good or bad character is learned?

P: I think good or bad character's learned because well people don't expect things so if they learn it without even knowing.

R: Okay...how do you mean they learn without knowing?

P: Cuz they talk to other people and meet new people and they don't....and maybe the people don't like you because they think you're snotty or something and you just don't know it so you learn not to know things.

R: Okay....so you're kind of learning through other people. Is that what you're saying?

P: Yes.

R: Okay. How do you think people learn to have good or bad character?

P: I think people learn to have good or bad character by getting to know new people and being...like...what's the word...not being so sensitive. Being strong.

R: How do they learn that by getting to know new people?

P: Because they see other people and some of them get bullied and some of them can get cyber bullied and some of them are just really nice to other people and some of them are bullies. So they know how to stand up. How to not be humiliated and to be nice and try to get their...try to get to know the bullies better. To make them stop.

R: Okay....so they learn how to stand up and not be humiliated.

P: Ya.

R: Are there other ways that you think people learn how to have good or bad character?

P: Not really. I don't know.

7. R: You're doing fine...you're coming up with lots of ideas. Do you think people learn to have good or bad character or do you think they're born that way?

P: They're just born that way.

R: Do you think there might be anything that happens in their lives that will teach them how to be good or bad?

P: Ya probably....like the teachers sometimes they talk about bullying and some websites that you can go on to help cure bullying or something like that. Parents talk about it.

R: So you think some of it's learned.

P: Ya.

R: Okay....a little bit of both maybe...eh?

P: Ya.

R: So why do you think good or bad character is learned?

P: Ummmm....I don't know.

R: Okay....in terms of how you think people learn it, you say teachers teach about things..

P: Ya.

R: Ya okay...parents talk about it. There's websites and stuff....that's a good point.

How else do you think people learn about how to be good?

P: Probably like if you're bullied and someone talks about it to you like the person that's

getting bullied by that person...they will sometimes come back and then sometimes they stop bullying and then they can become nice like one of my other friends

R: Okay...so who might talk to them about it? You said talking to the person who is bullying right?

P: Ya...

R: Okay...who might talk to that person about that? And what do you think they might hear that would teach them to be different?

P: I don't know.

8. R: Okay....so do you think people learn to have good or bad character or do you think they're born that way?

P: It's kind of....you're not born that way...it's kind of in a way...how you're brought up by your parents or whoever is your guardian and siblings. It's how you're brought up. Like if your parents were very good people then you'd probably be good people. If they were bad people then you'd probably be not so good.

R: So....why do you think it's learned?

P: I think it's kind of...when you're little you do what your older siblings or your parents do because you think being a grown up is so cool and like when you do it...you feel grown up and like you can do anything.

R: So....how do you think people learn to have good or bad character?

P: Well....from experiences and from how you like....people around you have acted...and you learn how good character by like...I'm not sure...

R: That's good. How do experiences help you to learn good character do you think?

P: Well....if you have been kind like...say you help somebody that day....that's an experience of being kind....then you remember that and you think "if I can do that then I can help this other person tomorrow or...now that I've done that I can go and help that person who needed that homework assignment done." Or something like that.

R: Okay....so when you do that...you help somebody...what do you think helps you to do that again?

P: Ummmm.....I think it's like how the person or whatever you're helping...it seems to say thank you or it's like....even if the person doesn't say thank you...you can still tell that they're thinking it....that they're very....that they're happy that you helped them...or that you did that thing for them.

R: So it's kind of the response of the person that makes you want to do it again.

P: Ya.

R: Okay.

P: And that you know that if you helped this one person...and then you can help other people. It's kind of like you're experienced.

R: Okay. I get it. So you also said it's about how people...they...you also learn by how people around you act as well.

P: Ya. So....you don't always...you don't want to hang around with the people who you know aren't going to grow up to be like perfect people...but like not everybody's going to be perfect so....I guess you kind of have to learn who to hang out with or play with or be your friend by how you act and how they act and similarities too.

R: Okay....so how do you make that decision...like how do you choose who to hang

around with...like what do you look for?

P: Me....I look for somebody who can keep like....be with me for a long time and never like just leave me....like and if I'm ever like in a hard spot...like if something's happening to me..then they're there for you...and they're not going to come and play with you and then they're just going to leave you....or do something like that.

R: How do you know somebody's like that?

P: You can tell how they act and stuff...one by their family members...like usually if your family members are like that or if your sister or brother's like that...or usually your mom or dad....then you usually would grow up to be...and like...ya.

R: Okay...so what kinds of behaviours would you see...that would tell you "Oh that would be somebody who I could hang out with?"

P: Well...if their older sibling or their younger sibling was like kind to you or if they can like accept you like you can come to that person's house and play with them or something.

Understanding of Character Education

1. R: Have you ever heard of character education?

P: No.

R: When I say character education, do you have any thoughts about what that might be?

P: No.

2. R: When I tell you about it, when I say "character education," do you have thoughts about what that might mean?

P: It might mean....like...the tools that like...teach kids good character. When you hear education then it usually means school.

R: Right. Ya. So what does your school do to try to help kids to be good or to have good character?

P: I don't know. I think they might do stuff back there (points to facilitator's room). They might do stuff for kids that have problems learning or something.

R: So they help kids with problems learning?

P: I think so ya.

3. R: Have you ever heard of that term character education?

P: (shakes head no).

R: Most kids haven't. What do you think that might mean?

P: I really don't know. Maybe like their character like how they look and how their skin colour is and how they act. Like their features.

4. R: Okay....that's good. So, have you ever heard of anything called character education?

P: I don't know. I think I've heard of it before but I'm not really sure.

R: Okay. Do you have any thoughts about what that might mean....character education?

P: I think it's like they're trying to get you to learn about like characters.

R: So what are they trying to teach you in character education do you think?

P: Um, I think they're trying to get you to be a good character. Like they're trying to tell you the difference between a good and a bad character.

5. R: That's okay. Have you heard of character education?

P: I have but I never knew what it meant.

R: Okay. Do you have any thoughts about what it might mean?

P: Maybe like how your.....like your life in school...maybe.

R: Ya definitely....you can see how it relates to school right?

P: Mmm hmm.

R: Right because of the word education in it. So you think it has to do with your life in school?

P: Ya.

R: Any thoughts about what you mean by "your life in school?"

P: Like the grades you get and the marks and maybe how you act....you act differently.

R: What about how you act?

P: Like....how maybe your personality is different at school than it is at home.

R: Okay. Yep. How might it be different?

P: Like if you're nice at home and like you listen and behave....and then at school you're a bully.

R: Okay....so it could be different.

P: Ya.

6. R: Okay. Have you heard of the term character education?

P: Maybe once. It doesn't sound that familiar though.

R: Okay. Do you have thoughts about what that might mean? Character education?

P: Learning character...like character traits....using what you know kind of like background knowledge...like what you know to be a better person.

7. R: Okay. Have you heard of character education?

P: No.

R: When I say character education do you have thoughts about what that might be?

P: Yes.

R: What do you think?

P: I think character education is maybe going to school every day because education is in the word.

R: Definitely school and education go together right?

P: Education is usually seen as when you grow up you can go to college like and university and do nice things with your life. And....that's just like what I want to do. I want to like go on with my life and not be....not travelling. I love travelling.

R: Do you?

P: Ya.

R: Have you travelled very much?

P: I've travelled at least 5 times.

R: Nice. Where have you been?

P: I've been to [redacted]. My next travel, my [redacted] going to take me to [redacted] she said. I've been to [redacted]...to [redacted]....[redacted] and....I can't remember....[redacted].

R: Nice. Wow if you get to go to [redacted]..that's super cool.

P: Ya.

8. R: Okay...have you heard of character education before?

P: Kind of.

R: Okay....so when I say character education, what does that mean to you?

P: It kind of means like...I'm not really sure. How somebody can be educated throughout their years...like at school...how they listen to their teacher and how they act toward the teacher and toward the students in their class...and.....

Teaching Character in the School

1. R: What does your school do to try to help kids learn to be good?

P: Sometimes if you're bad they just tell you to go to the principal's office or just go on the wall for like the rest of the recess so then you know that you're being bad because you're not like playing with your friends. But if you're like good like if you stay there and like don't talk or anything and you're good then they will take you off. But not like all the time because like the kids who go on the wall or in the principal's office they stay in there for the whole recess or for a while they stay there.

R: Is there anything the school does...so the school can do things to teach you what's bad behavior...is there anything the school does to teach you what's good behavior?

P: Ya kind of. Sometimes if you do like just....when we did French usually then we do the whole booklet in like French and we didn't like mess up or anything then the French teacher would give us like something like candy or just give us like a good speech like that you're good or you did well.

2. R: So.....just so you know there's no right or wrong answer in this right? Ya. I just want to hear your ideas so that's really good. What does your school do to try to help kids learn to be good or to have good character?

P: Um....well I guess the teachers..well I guess they get the teachers like to get them to learn about it and like the books that they have in the library.

R: Um hmmm.....books in the library and the teachers...you said something about the teachers too. What about the teachers?

P: Well, the teachers are teaching you like about characters....like the good and the bad....and like how you could be a good character.

R: Okay. Do they actually teach that in class kind of thing?

P: Ya.

R: Okay. Is there anything else your school does?

P: I don't know. I can't think of anymore.

3. R: Is there anything you've noticed about your school that tells you that they are trying to teach kids to have good character? Anything that happens in the classroom...or generally?

P: Usually its stuff that happens when you're not in the classroom a lot, so I don't really see what happens. I just sort of get an idea that schools sort of do that.

R: Help the kids who have trouble.

P: (Nods). That's what they do.

4. R: Okay. So....what does your school do to try to help kids learn to be good or to have good character?

P: We use something that's called TIWAand the T stands for...if you're in a problem with someone the T stands for talking it out. And that I it stands for if that doesn't work then you ignore somebody...and then if that doesn't work then you just walk away from

that person. And then once the problem gets really serious then you ask a parent. And they try to teach us to start doing things on our own especially now that we're getting older. Before...like even if we're doing like a math question or something our teacher always tells us to try it first because when we get older then we'll know that we can work it out on our own.

R: Okay. So who taught you the TIWA?

P: My old principal.

R: Okay. So how do you think learning to do things on your own might help you to develop good character?

P: Because then if you encounter like a problem later on you're not going to be looking to someone else to be...like "what do I do?" You'll know that you can do it on your own.

R: Okay. Is there anything else that your school does to try to help kids to learn to have good character?

P: To have a good character we learn it in class and that but outside on the playground we're split up by our age divisions so the primaries go on like by the equipment and then the 3s and 4s usually stay in the middle and then we stay on the other side and the intermediates there...and so they split us up so that we don't like conflict with other people. They just try showing us like even at assemblies every month we have like a different character trait and downstairs in our lunch room on the wall we have respect integrity honesty and trust...like all those are written up against the wall.

5. R: What does your school do to try to help kids learn to be good or to have good character?

P: They make them learn and learning is learning for yourself to be a better person...and in school we talk about bullies. We talk about nice people. And we even talk about...like to each other....about who might be a bully...who we think is a bully....and we might be cyber bullied.

R: So you have conversations with each other like between friends and stuff about that.

P: Between friends.

R: Okay. Do you think those discussions might be helpful?

P: Well some of them. If we talk to the person that might be getting bullied to stand up for themselves and not be so scared and tell them that we'll be there and we got their backs. I think they'd feel better.

R: Okay. Do you guys do that sometimes?

P: Ya.

R: Wow...okay. Has the school kind of taught you to do that or do they...

P: (Name)...our teacher...if someone's like having an argument she helps us get through it. She knows what to do about it and she can help us.

R: So where did you guys learn how to do that? To talk to each other and help each other that way?

P: I think we learned it from our parents like we see our parents....I see my parents do that a lot. And I seen friends and family do it too.

R: And do you think (teacher's name) helping you do that....helping you work through conflicts...is that part of it as well?

P: Ya.

R: Okay. Is there anything else your school does to help kids learn to be good or have good character?

P: They have character traits....responsibility, empathy, respect, and everyone respects each other for the way they are and others too. Respect....empathy....what's that other one?

R: Responsibility maybe?

P: Ya.

R: Okay. Good. That's pretty good. Those are hard to remember....all those words, eh? Okay...so the traits are kind of listed places. Okay. Anything else?

P: No.

6. R: What does your school do to try to help kids learn to be good?

P: Sometimes when someone gets in trouble, they talk to the principal and then if they kept getting in trouble and going to the principal's office they learn that...it's not really good to keep going in the principal's office and that cuz then you're not going to get a good education and that.

R: Okay....what else does your school do to try to help kids learn to be good?

P: (Long pause)

R: Remember there's no right or wrong answer....whatever you think is happening that might be related to that is the right answer. Do you see anything happening in the classroom or in the school in general that you think might be "Oh they're helping us to learn to be good?"

P: (Pause. Shakes head)

7. R: Okay....so what does your school do to try to help kids learn to be good or to have good character?

P: Well I know that kids who are good they will reward them and stuff. Our school has like awards assemblies and stuff for kids who've been doing something good and it's for all the grades...and I find that that's nice because you can be awarded from helping that person that sits next to you and is struggling with math or helping that person walk across the street with their big bags or something like that.

R: Wow. Okay....so how do you think that helps?

P: I think it helps because it kind of encourages you even if you don't get that award that day. There's always going to be another time that you can get the award and you can always try harder....that get to that goal and get that sheet of paper that says congratulations to you.

R: That's pretty meaningful eh?

P: Ya.

R: To get something like that.

P: It's like you've been awarded with like....doing something that like to you is not super big but I guess it's really big to whoever saw it.

R: So I guess what you're saying is that you don't have to do something humongous to get this award....it could be something....

P: It could be just...picking up a bag for that person who dropped it or somebody who's struggling with their math or science....you could help them or something like that.

R: Ya. Okay.....is there anything else your school does?

P: Um...they....we do stuff like we have fun days sometimes....like we can have...like even just my class...we do lots of fun stuff together and....like last year we were like all in the same class since we're all in the same grade. We did like Wii day and we had like movie day and we did like fun stuff....that's rewarding in the end because you see that like so much fun to do that and if you do that one thing for the teacher then maybe you can get rewarded by it.

R: Okay...so the fun day is like a reward for like....

P: Kind of ya.

R: Kind of good behaviour or...

P: Ya.

R: Okay...is there other ways that fun days help people learn good character?

P: Well....I guess it's like I said with the reward...it's kind of like rewarding to get it because it's like "Well we can do this...then if I do another one then maybe I'll get another day to play games or to like bring our electronics to school or like watch a movie or something.

8. R: Okay. So...what does your school do to try to help kids learn to be good or to have good character?

P: Well they....I haven't actually like seen anything but I think they'd like talk to the person...or like.....I've never actually had come across that question...

R: Okay....so you think maybe one of the things they do is they talk to people? If they're talking to people do you know what they might be doing or saying to them to kind of help them learn to have good character?

P: Maybe they're asking them why they're not having good character.

R: So they're talking to the kids maybe who are getting into trouble and stuff like that.

Okay. Are they doing anything in general...even if kids aren't getting in trouble....to kind of help kids learn to have good character?

P: Um....well they'll talk to the whole school and explain like what good character is. They have done that before.

R: Okay. When do they do this?

P: Um.. In the beginning of every month at an assembly.

Teaching Good Character

1. R: Okay. That's fine. You're doing a great job. How would you teach somebody to be good...or do you even think that's possible...do you think you could teach someone that?

P: Well, ya I guess. You could be like a good character and like be a role model for like the younger kids. And you could sort of teach them like you don't want to be a bad character because like you get in trouble....like with things that you do and you want to start hanging out with like good characters.

R: Okay...so teach them that if they do something that's not good then they'll be in trouble eh? Do you think getting in trouble is part of learning that?

P: Well ya I guess because if you get in trouble then you learn that I don't want to do that again because I don't want to do the same thing.

2. R: How would you teach somebody to be good?

P: I don't know. I don't think I'm the greatest teacher. Um just basically teach them...at times..you have to basically be a good teacher...strict maybe. You have to be sort of strict.

R: Okay. So being strict is helpful you think, eh?

P: (Nods)

R: How do you think that's helpful?

P: Because kids want to behave more.

3. R: Okay. Good. How would you teach somebody to be good?

P: By taking like the time...by taking little steps and showing them like how to be good...by helping people. Or even just saying hi to someone...people can make people feel better by like...how do you know they're not having like a bad day. If you just like say hi to them that might make them feel better. Just teaching them the little things that make everybody's day a lot easier.

R: Ya okay. I think you're also saying that showing these good qualities like modeling them for other people is also what you're doing when you do that right?

P: Ya.

4. R: How would you teach somebody to be good?

P: If someone was being bad, I would say like don't do that because you might like get in trouble. My [redacted] does that all the time. He's always bad so I'm like "don't do that you're going to get in trouble." And somehow I'm always the one who gets in trouble. And so it always turns on me because I'm the oldest one there.

R: Oh ya. I know what it's like to be the oldest one. So you would teach somebody by telling them that what they're doing is bad..

P: Ya and then sometimes if they're like just going to do it I'd like leave them alone so they would like know what to do. Like I'd say "okay don't do that" and when they still do it I'd just leave them alone and then they'll learn their lesson anyways.

R: How would they learn their lesson?

P: Because like they'd get in trouble and they'd be like grounded or like they'd say go to your room or something like that...or just go for a time out. Then they would know that it's bad behavior.

R: Now do you have any thoughts about how you might actually teach somebody to be good?

P: Maybe like if they're being good you'd be like "okay you did really good" and they'd be like happy about doing it but then if somebody's like being rude to them then they'll like try being rude too like go on someone else about it...so their feelings could be... But if they try to bully someone I'd say "why are you doing this. You're not supposed to be doing that. I thought you were going to be good."

R: So if you saw somebody doing some bullying you think maybe talking to them about that.

P: Yes. But if they were being rude and they...and the person that I know was like my best friend or something I'd say "just ignore them. Don't worry. Just walk away. Turn around and ignore them."

5. R: Okay. So how would you teach someone to be good?

P: Well, I'd probably talk to them about what a good character is and I'd tell them like... it's not like....say if they were getting into trouble I'd tell them like...I'd remind them of all the things they've done and let them think about it and then.....ya....they'll probably like be a bit nicer or they'll have good character.

R: So when you said you'd talk to them about all of the things they've done, what do you mean?

P: Like if they've done anything bad I'll remind them about that and then they'll probably be like just think about it for a bit and they'll be nicer because they'll remember how it's a mistake.

6. R: How would you teach somebody to be good?

P: I would teach someone to be good by telling them that they're good enough to do anything and they can be extraordinary....and they can stand up for themselves. I can connect...I can put myself in people's shoes and if I know they're getting bullied, I can stand up for them too.

R: Okay...so you would teach people by kind of talking to them about stuff.

P: Ya.

R: And doing things that are of good character as well right?

P: Yes.

R: Anything else you would do to teach people?

P: I'd just like.....have them talk to me and I'd give them advice on what to do.

7. R: No? That's okay. How would you teach somebody to be good?

P: I would talk about...like if they're bullying someone that it's not really that cool if you bully someone cuz then they probably won't focus in class cuz they're probably going to be thinking about bullying...thinking what would happen next.

R: That's good...okay so talking to them is one way. Ya. Giving advice I guess you're also talking about.

P: Ya.

R: Is there anything else you would do to teach somebody how to be good?

P: Um...Probably telling them experiences that I had with bullying.

R: Ya that can be really helpful too sometimes, eh?

P: Ya.

R: Okay...anything else?

P: No.

8. R: Okay. So how would you teach somebody to be good?

P: I probably would....I'm not sure...well...I guess I would show them like the right steps to go and how to start doing one thing and then they could always start from where they think is the best place to start...and you can kind of just show them the steps of how to get there...and if they want to do something big or if they want to do something like... finish a test or something...then you can always just tell them....like show them how to do that one thing and then...it's as if you're showing them what to do and how to like improve on it.

Improving Teachers'/School's Ability to Teach Good Character

1. R: What do you think your teacher and your school could do to better help kids to learn to be good?
P: I guess the only way you could get better is to focus more on it.
R: Okay. What do you think they might want to focus on to help kids learn to be good?
P: Um....maybe teaching them to work on a time...I guess. I guess they think they're...if they're bad in the classroom then they hold them back.
R: So if they don't behave you think that.....what should happen?
P: That they should teach them to do stuff and then like and keep doing it until they want to behave and learn.
R: So if they don't behave you teach them to do stuff?
P: Try to convince them that they could be better if they focus more on their learning something.
R: Okay...so you teach them how to focus better.
P: (nods).
R: Is there anything else that you think you might want to teach them that would help them to be good...as a school or a teacher?
P: Not really, no.
R: And you also said to keep doing it until you convince them to behave.
P: Well try your hardest anyway.
2. R: So what do you think your teacher and your school could do to better help kids to learn good character?

P: Maybe actually listening to the kids when they're telling them what happened.

Sometimes they don't listen to you. One time I got in trouble because I by accident hit someone and the person said that I hit them purposely because I got tripped by one of my friends so I tripped them by accident because I was hurt and my head was hurting so I tripped them by accident because I like stretched my leg out. I didn't see them coming so they tripped and I didn't want them to get hurt so I was like "are you okay" and they were like "don't touch me" and I was like.....And then the principal got mad at me. I was like "why me. I didn't do anything." And they like don't listen to you at all. And maybe if they actually do some discipline because like they don't do anything...if they say they're not doing it and they say you have to do it and they don't do it...they should actually be making them like do something with that activity. Like if you don't want to do like math and then the teacher said you have to then the teacher should be making them like... encourage the person to like do something in math. Like just a little bit of easy math or something. At least like do something like that or like if they get in trouble instead of just ignoring it anyways and just leaving it alone.....like some of the teachers do that like they don't really care they just leave them alone...they just leave the person alone that got hurt...so I wouldn't do that I'd just tell them like to be good and go to the principal's office or like or say sorry or like that but they don't do that here.

3. R: What could your teacher and school do to better help kids to learn good character.

P: Instead of just...like there's usually...we only learn it once in a while. And we don't really go over the rules just like if someone gets...if someone's upset it's just like the same thing over again. It's like just talk it out. It's like "why are you asking me? Just do

it on your own.” They don’t really teach you. Like they help. They just say the same thing over. If someone’s hurt it’s just like....they don’t actually talk to the person...like “why are you hurt”...they just like say my foot hurts.....and it’s like okay like “why”... and it’s like “okay then you can go and get an ice pack.” So it’s like they don’t actually talk to the person that helped you.

R: Oh...you mean if somebody got hurt and was helped by some other student...

P: Like they don’t actually....like if someone hurt them...like I remember one time there was a kid that go hurt on the playground...like they had like a big fight...it was actually one of my friends and they had like a fist fight. And one kid had like a bloody nose and they didn’t really ask like why did this happen...they just said okay go get an ice pack and clean it up.

R: Okay...so when problems like that happen you think that the school could get more involved and find out...

P: Instead of just sweeping it under the carpet. My friend’s [redacted] was bullied a lot here. And a couple of months ago he moved and now he has like friends. Like he was always scared to go into sports and that because of the people that bullied him were there. Now at his own school he has like friends and people like him and he goes to like dances and sports and

R: Okay. Wow. That’s good that that happened for him then. Ya. Okay. And did you say that the other thing is that they could spend more time talking about good character? They do a little bit of it...

P: Ya. My teacher does a lot of it but our principal not so much.

R: Okay. So they could focus more on it.

P: Ya.

R: Is there anything that you think they could do that would show more of a focus?

P: Sometimes...like we are raising money for a playground...and new playground because we've had the one for a long while and lots of kids are getting hurt on it. So they're trying to teach us....we're doing little events and things and they're getting the older kids even though we don't get to share it...like we don't get to share in the equipment because we're older...they're still trying to teach us that you're doing something nice for the other kids and that's like me and my friends we don't really want to do this because we never got anything like that but then we're like what happens if like the little kids....like the JKs and SKs would like come into grade one and they go onto the equipment and they don't like it. They don't even have any equipment because it's so bad. You'd feel really bad for them because they don't have anything to do.

R: Right. So by having you raise the money you're realizing that you're doing something good for someone else. Wow that's really good. So do you think they could do more of that kind of stuff?

P: Ya and our principal said that if we have enough money left over they're going to get something for us to play on or use. Like we have...they used a bit of money and we got this thing you throw a ball into and it comes out the other side. And we got like snakes and ladders and like this ball you have to bounce it. The boys play it all the time. We got that painted onto our sidewalks for people to play.

4. R: Okay. What can your teacher and school do to better help kids learn good character?

P: They could talk to them more and get them like...get them listening and better knowing of what good character is and how they could be a good character.

R: So they could actually teach it.

P: Mmm hmmm.

5. R: Okay...what can your teacher and school do to better help kids learn good character?

P: I think...our teacher she can always...she does...she already does a lot. But like teachers....when they explain stuff to the kids or when they're nice enough to show them how to do that hard problem or something...that's good and like...and the principal....if he...if somebody's ever struggling or something...he can always help them with it and show them how to do it....and same with like teachers.

R: Okay....anything else you think the teacher and school could do to better help kids learn to be good people?

P: Ummm...maybe like...when the kids do something you like reward them because then they know..”Oh if I do this again then maybe I'll get rewarded again.” Or they can try to do something like...something fun that improves work like.

6. R: Okay. What can your teacher and school do to better help kids learn good character?

P: Teachers at school?

R: Mmmm hmm.

P: I think they can help them by maybe a group of people...maybe they don't like each other...maybe they need to get along more...or either they just don't want to talk to each other. Teachers and school can help people be more friends and not like argue and they can do that by talking and not just standing there and being like “Oh it's okay if you guys

fight.” They’ll say “You guys need to be friends. You guys need to get along. You guys need to talk to each other more. You guys can’t be arguing and telling each other you’re not beautiful or you’re ugly or who to go out with.

R: Okay...so you think they should...when that’s happening...make sure they get in and help you guys figure it out...when that’s happening.

P: Yes.

R: Okay. Anything else that you think your teacher or the school as a whole could do?

P: I don’t think so.

7. R: Okay...what can your teacher and school do to better help kids to learn good character?

P: Ummm...

R: Do you think there’s something they could do to make kids learn how to be good?

P: Ummm...

R: You don’t really see too much right now...right...you were saying?

P: Ya.

R: So you were saying was that something that you think makes a person have good character is when they do things like share food, sharing, and hanging out with you, and being nice, complimenting and sharing thoughts....do you think about what the school could do to teach people to do more of that?

P: Probably make a club and that people could join. Learn how to be more better and like be a better person in the world like make other people feel good about themselves.

R: Do you think that's something the school could do too is to teach people how to feel better about themselves? What do you think would help people feel better about themselves?

P: Um....

R: Do you have thoughts about what makes people feel better about themselves?

P: Having lots of friends to be by their side and protecting them.

R: So you said something about a club....would this be a specific kind of club or could it be any kind of club? What do you think this club would do?

P: I don't know.

R: Would it be a way just for kids to come together? Is that what you mean?

P: Ya.

R: To spend time together? Okay. Ya. So it could even just be something that they're interested in and they just go and do it but they're interacting together....is that what you mean?

P: Ya.

8. R: Okay. What could your teacher and school do better...do to better help kids learn good character? What ideas would you have about that?

P: Well I guess like they could plan like activities for like kids to do that like to learn more about good characters.

R: Okay. That's a great idea. Do you have any thoughts about what kinds of activities might help with that?

P: I don't know...maybe like a book or something.

R: Do you have any thoughts about what the book might be about?

P: Um. I think about like a good character and a bad character and what kind of trouble a bad character can get into and like what a good character does.

R: Do you like to read?

P: Ya.

R: I can tell. Okay. Any other thoughts about what they could do to better teach that?

P: No.

Teaching Good Character Within the Family

1. R: Okay so help the kids do something about something they've done wrong. Okay.

What can families do to help kids learn to be good?

P: Well, when they're grounded you can tell that you did something bad because you're not allowed to do anything like watch t.v. or anything. And you're like okay this isn't good I'm like going to try to be nice to my parents now so then parents discipline them so they can learn more about like what to do. They're like our teachers but they're more in our life than the teachers.

R: That's right. Are there any other ways that they teach kids to be good?

P: Maybe by just like telling them to sit down and they say no I'm not doing it and run then start screaming....it's not good when the parents get mad at them and start spazzing out on them. That's what some parents do and then....I tell my mom and because sometimes she does it but not usually.....I tell her "quiet down. Don't be so loud and everything." It would be smart if they like calmed down and don't yell at their kids. Some

parents don't care what their kids do. And sometimes the kids steal. It's not that good.

Like half the people that go to this school sometimes steal not all the time and so the parents don't care at all. Some people go to juvie and the parents don't even care they just relax and don't even care.

R: So you're saying that the parents need to care about what the kids are doing.

P: Ya like they have to give them discipline but they don't. Some of them don't. My parents do because they get mad. My dad would hate if I stole something. He'd be like "don't do that."

2. R: Okay. What can families do to help kids learn good character?

P: Um....

R: Do you think families do things to try to help kids learn how to be good?

P: Ummm....I can't think of anything right now.

R: How do you think you learn to be good in your family?

P: Well....my dad....he's like "don't steal." I'm like "I won't." And he's like "Well ya" and then he showed me a video about some countries a boy got run over by a truck and that so then like "okay I'll never do that."

R: Okay so they tell some things that....okay...they talk about things right?

P: Ya.

R: About good behavior and stuff like that. Okay. And what can happen. That kind of thing?

P: Ya.

3. R: Okay. That's good. What can families do to help kids learn good character?

P: I think they could start like maybe get them to do more good things around the house.

R: Okay. Like what kinds of things are you thinking?

P: Maybe like helping their brothers and sisters or their mom and their parents.

R: Okay. Anything else?

P: No.

4. R: Oh good. Okay. So what can families do to help kids learn good character?

P: Teaching their kids like what matters andlike my mom taught me manners and to make sure that you're being nice to people and you think first before you speak. And so that like if you wouldn't like something why are you doing it to someone else?

R: Anything else families can do?

P: Um. I can't really think of anything.

5. R: Okay. What can families do to help kids learn good character?

P: They'll probably....since it's the family they'll talk to their kids and see if ...like tell them like what's going on and what a good character...tell them what a good character is and why they're explaining it.

6. R: Okay. You're doing a great job. What can families do to help kids learn good character?

P: They can show their children or their children's friends what they should do with their lives or not be just one of their kind of people or do things differently than they are now.

R: Okay...so can you tell me what you mean by that?

P: Like maybe some of them are like shoplifters, some of them could be drinkers, some of them could be addicted to smoking. They could be like anything. They don't want

their children or their children's friends to be like that so they're teaching them different than they are now.

R: Okay....so if the kids themselves are doing those kinds of things, the parents and stuff can kind of teach them to do other things or to help them not do that. Is that what you mean?

P: Ya.

R: Okay. So help them if they're doing...if they're in trouble eh?

P: Yes.

R: Okay. Anything else families can do?

P: Umm...no.

7. R: What do you think families do to help kids to learn to be good?

P: Maybe the parents...or like the family....try to have good things around them maybe.

R: Okay...so the family does good things to show them how to be good. Is that what you mean?

P: Ya. Maybe the person will see that I will be more happy if I do that. Have better character.

R: I think what you're saying is that if the other family members show good behavior the kids are likely to copy that....see that it makes people happy.

P: (nods).

R: Anything else you think families do?

P: Not really no. Except for maybe talk to them and tell them like do this and well....ya...

R: So tell them what happens.

P: (nods).

8. R: What can families do to better help kids learn good character?

P: Umm...I think families like parents and siblings and stuff...they shouldn't act bad around their siblings and their kids or whatever because usually kids do what their siblings do and they follow through like with them...and they kind of like look up to you. And like parents should always make sure that like kids do the proper things for school....be like "do that study. Finish that homework that you had to do" or always make sure they have something that they can improve on because it's always the best thing to improve.

Participants' Preferences for Learning Character

1. R: How would you like to learn about these things?

P: I would like to learn....kind of nice and not too too strict. If you misbehave then like you've got to be strict.

R: So there's a part of you that thinks being strict is good?

P: (nods).

R: But not too too strict.

P: No.

R: So if there's some bad behavior say....you think there should be something that happens.

P: (nods)

R: What do you think should happen?

P: Some sort of punishment I guess. Like be punished somehow.

R: So that's if there's some bad behavior. (nods). How would you like to learn about how to be good?

P: If you're bad you can't really teach someone to be good. It would take a while, but I'd like to learn it from a good person. Basically.

R: So how would a good person teach you how to be a good person? How would you like a good person to teach you to be a good person?

P: Maybe be a little strict but like show them like good things. A good life. Maybe. And to have a good future.

R: If you think about being in school, do you think that you could learn that in a classroom? Is that something they could teach? How do you think they might want to teach kids to be good in a classroom? How do you think that would work?

P: There's a lot of different kids in a classroom. A lot of different character in the classroom, so it would probably be pretty hard to do something that they all like. Maybe, like, just saying that doing good things they're going to have a good life.

R: That's a good point that there's a lot of different kinds of character in the classroom, right? So how do you teach it to a whole classroom? So you said showing them things?

P: Ya. Showing them good things. It might work. It would be different for every person though. So it would be pretty hard.

R: What do you think good things might be that they would show you?

P: Like helping people and stuff like donating to charities and stuff.

2. R: Okay. How would you like to learn about these things?

P: I think like maybe....like I was saying maybe a teacher like reading a book to the class and then maybe like....doing like an activity sheet on it or something.

3. R: So, how would you like to learn about these things?

P: Just by being nice to me because like my mom doesn't usually be nice to me when she's telling me like "don't do that." She's always like "DON'T DO THAT." Or something like that. I'm like "you don't have to yell at me." I start crying sometimes.

Because that's what my dad does....he's like "don't do that because..." He just sits there and sometimes listens and then he gets so ticked off that he starts yelling at you like "DON'T DO THAT." And then I start crying because like he could have just told me like nicely. Because when he's on the phone you should hear him talking he's like (loud imitation of his voice without words) instead of going like "Hi."

R: So what would you like them to do instead of yelling?

P: Like just be nice to me instead of yelling at me.

R: What are some of the things they should say to you?

P: Like...."don't cry. I'm sorry." My mom never says sorry to me. I'm serious.

Whenever she does something to me I usually do something back to her and she says "say sorry." I'm like "you did something first so why don't you say sorry?" Some parents don't even say anything.

R: So are you saying that you would like to see some of the adults show good behavior?

P: Yes.

R: So that you know how to learn...

P: Yes. Because some...like my mom or dad or some other adults...they swear right in front of kids even though they're like four or older. It doesn't even matter they still catch on. They repeat you. Like one of my friends when she....her first word was a swear because her parents constantly swear.

4. R: Okay. How would you like to learn these things?

P: I'd like to learn them by probably....I'd like to learn them by my family or even a teacher that I trust.

R: How would you like them to teach this stuff to you?

P: Um....probably like talking to me about why I need to learn about good character.

5. R: That's good....you're thinking of lots of stuff. How would you like to learn about these things?

P: What do you mean?

R: Like say your principal came to you and said "Hey we gotta teach about good character. What do you think we should do?"

P: In the assemblies we talk a lot about it and like I said we always focus on...every month we focus on a different character trait....like acceptance I think is the one this year. And we have responsibility which was last month...and as much as we talk about it I think we should start doing like little plays almost kind of. We had a play done last year on it but that was at the end of the year. And we should start doing a little more focus and activities that involve being nice to people. Like in our class...like my teacher has this bingo chart so if you're doing something good or you're being nice to somebody you're ready...you get put up onto the bingo chart. So when your name....it has 36 squares so

everybody gets their name up there at least once....or at least we try to. So then on Friday we spin like two dice with like the letters and numbers and if yours is there you get like a little prize.

6. R: How would you like to learn about these things?

P: I'd like to learn them by my friends, family, teachers. I wouldn't want to end up like on the streets or something. When I'm older I want to be in a house. I want to be living happy. I want to live life like I'm supposed to.

R: Okay. So how can your friends, families, and teachers help you learn what you need to learn so that you can have that life?

P: They can teach you math. They can teach you anything, but.....anything that's related to life. And if you get good grades for the rest of your life, you can be living in a nice house. You could have what you want. You can do anything

R: How about some of these things like you talked about standing up to bullies and helping people...how can your friends, families, and teachers...how would you like them to teach you how to do that?

P: Um....I'd like them to teach me how to stand up for myself...like sometimes I can be weak...I can not stand up for myself because I feel so lost. I can drown off and I can not believe in myself anymore.

R: And how would you like them to teach you to stand up for yourself better?

P: Watching them from the bullies that bully them...sometimes....and from that they can be more irresistible. So that the bullies won't bully them anymore. They won't try to bully anyone else.

R: Okay...so you really value strength. You see that as really connected to good character.

P: Ya.

7. R: Okay. How would you like to learn about some of these things?

P: Um....

R: Like if the school was thinking about doing some more things to teach kids how to be good and to have good character and they wanted to know how people wanted to learn those things what would you say?

P: I don't know....

R: Who would you like to learn them from?

P: Teachers parents friends siblings.

R: How would you like them to help you learn this stuff? Like what would you want them to do to help you learn that stuff?

P: (Long pause)

R: It's hard to think of things sometimes eh?

P: Ya.

8. R: Okay...how would you like to learn about these things?

P: I'd like to learn by personal experiences and how I like to kind of do after what my friends or something...like not copy them...but kind of try to do it the same way as them.....because then if I try it out and it works then I can always do it again. If doesn't work, it's worth a try. It's always worth a try.

Children's Right to Participate in Decisions that Affect Their Education

1. R: Okay. So....do you think children have any right to participate in decisions about things that will affect their education?

P: Ya.

2. R: Do you think children have any right to participate in decisions about things that will affect their education or school?

P: Ya.

3. R: Okay. Now, do you think children have any right to participate in decisions about things that will affect their schooling?

P: Yes. Kind of. Because it's kind of their school. They're involved with the school. It's not only the parents. It's not only the people that like own this. It doesn't matter but they still go to the school so they should be involved more with everything of the school. Just like for instance...just for an example...it would be nice if we like got to have a Halloween dance and everything, but we have to have like a dance-a-thon or something like that. But the older kids get to. So the kids kind of feel left out and everything. So we want to be like involved and everything. Just because the older kids are older and they're about to graduate it doesn't mean that we don't have the right to do that too.

R: So if you were asked, you would have said "I'd like for the grade sixes to have a dance."

P: Ya. If I was asked to go I'd say "What about the grade sixes and what about the little kids?" And they'd be like "Well they're not allowed." I'd be like "That's not right."

Because we have the right to like do stuff but at school we don't get the rights...like a lot of rights...to do stuff.

4. R: So....do you think children have any right to participate in decisions about things that will affect their education?

P: I don't know because...they shouldn't because if they don't have a good education, they won't get a good job and they might just be like.....they might never have enough money to afford things once they're older...and they'll turn out not like...but it depends if like the person is good or the person is bad because that could affect also.

R: So if the person is good do you think they should....like how does that affect whether they should have involvement in their decisions?

P: Well..because if they do then they probably would choose to like stay in the education.

R: Okay. Ya.

P: But if they're bad then they'll probably choose not to because usually the bad kids don't like school or education.

R: Okay. Do you think that if you're in school and you participate in decisions about your schooling...do you think that would have an impact on whether kids stayed in school or not?

P: Maybe.

5. R: Okay. Do you think children have any right to participate in decisions about things that will affect their education?

P: Yes.

6. R: Okay. So....do you think children have any right to participate in decisions about things that will affect their education?

P: Yes because if it's like something they don't want to do they shouldn't be forced to do it. Because if that's not what they want to do you're forcing someone....you have 6 hours of school each day. You learn something new every day right? There's certain things that you have to do , but if it's a choice they shouldn't have to do it if they don't want to because you're forcing your kid to do something that they don't want to do at all.

R: Can you think of an example.

P: Like....even sometimes when we go on field trips and that....sometimes we'll get options but sometimes you have to and even like in French class people don't want to learn French....sometimes I don't want to either but you don't have a choice in that but some of the activities we do...we get a choice in... so you don't actually have to do something. Our French teacher always says "you don't have to do the work but if you want to get like an R or you just don't want to participate then you don't have to. I'm not forcing you to do it...she says...you just look back on your report card and remember that you chose to do that.

R: Okay. So in a sense you get a choice even when it's stuff you have to do. So are you saying that there are some things that make sense that you have to do but then there are some things that you think it would make sense to have choice.

P: Ya. If it's like one of the choices that I like at our school is....some of my friends go to schools where you have to wear like we have dress codes and that...but some people have to wear uniforms. An my [redacted] she goes to a school that they have to wear

uniforms and that and I don't think.....I think if we ever got that at our school I would like say something because I think people have a decision on what to wear in the morning.

7. R: That's okay...let me ask you this....do you think children have any right to participate in decisions about things that will affect their schooling?

P: Ya.

8. R: Okay.....alright...do you think children have any right to participate in decisions about things that will affect their education?

P: Yes I do because children, kids, they can't really be bossed around and they can't be told like to do that one thing...because if they don't have a choice on what to do then they can't really do anything they want. So if they have a school fieldtrip that they want to do I think the children should kind of not decide it but put their thoughts at least into it....and parents to like kind of put their thoughts in and not tell the teachers to do that but say "well this is kind of what I think we should go on a swimming fieldtrip or I think we should maybe do some more math." Not making them do it, but just a thought.

Current Involvement in Education-Related Decisions

1. R: How much involvement do you have in decisions that affect you at school?

P: I don't know. I don't actually make a lot of decisions. Not that much.

R: Do you ever get asked questions about what you would like to do at school or what you like to learn or how you'd like to learn it?

P: Sometimes but not really no. I mean like the class might shout out and suggest something.

R: Okay. So sometimes as a class you get asked some ideas.

P: (nods).

2. R: Okay. How much involvement do you have in decisions that affect you at school?

P: Um... well decisions...not that much....but a decision that I can make outside...I can make a decision about what I want to play. I have a decision of what I want to do and I have a decision to do a lot of things, but I don't use them all at school.

R: Okay....so in terms of at school you're involved in deciding what to play outside and all of that.

P: Yes.

R: Do you have....are you involved in any other decisions about school?

P: Um...decisions making....not so much.

3. R: So how much involvement do you have....well you're kind of getting to it already... how much involvement do you have in decisions that affect you at school?

P: Actually not a lot. More of the older kids get to do stuff. This last year was like the first time we got to do something that was actually what we wanted to do. We were the leaders for the snow day...for like the thing. So it was kind of fun, but like for me it wasn't because I was wearing shoes and it was snowing. So we're sometimes involved with it, but we don't get like a lot of things to do when we're little kids we don't get to. When they're teenagers they get a lot involved in....

R: Okay so you don't get involved in.....

P: We don't get involved with a lot of stuff. We don't get to like go to dances...like that. We get like dance-a-thons with the little kids. We don't really want to be with the little

kids. We're older kind of. We're like double digits and everything. We think were all like way older. We're actually tweens so we're kind of in the middle of kids and adults.

R: So you're treated like you're.....

P: Like we're little kids. Some adults are actually....sometimes they act like they're younger....like they act like they're like five-year-olds or something. Like my mom has a friend that acts like she's five...because she wanders off anywhere she wants to....but some kids when they act mature they should be involved with more things because they're more mature and everything. But when the kids aren't like that mature and they're bad or they do something bad then obviously they don't want to involve them. If they're being good like and they're mature and everything...

R: Okay. So you think that the amount of involvement you have in making decisions might have to do a little bit with how mature you are.

P: Ya. Because when we're eleven...some eleven-year-olds act like they're six or seven because they watch little kid shows that are on TVO Kids...well no TVO Kids are fine but.....Tree House...that's what I meant. Some people watch Tree House still and they're like my age.

4. R: Ya. Okay. So how much involvement do you have in decisions that affect you at school right now?

P: A lot. Like considering....Our teacher teaches us a lot around this time especially Remembrance Day the they didn't have....that they had a choice to fight for our country but they chose to die for us so like we have choices in Canada that we can do like and our teacher says that we should be very thankful for that because lots of people don't get

these choices like what to do. And she says that it revolves around our school because every school has different rules but our school has a lot of rules that involve us choosing what we want to do.

R: Okay. Like what?

P: Some of the activities that we do...like sports and events we get to choose from. And some of the...we have an Ojibwe and a French program so a lot of kids in our class like to get...it's usually grade six...you get to choose between Ojibwe and French.

5. R: Okay...so you're not sure whether kids should have a right to participate or not.

Okay. How much involvement do you have in decisions that affect you at school?

P: Not much.

R: Not much?

P: Not much.

6. R: Okay. How much involvement do you have in decisions that affect you at school?

P: I mostly sign up for sports and I always participate.

R: So you have some involvement? Do you have a lot of involvement...or just a little bit?

P: Just a little bit.

7. R: Okay. How much involvement do you have in decisions that affect you at school?

P: I don't know.

R: Do you feel like you have some involvement in decisions about school?

P: Not really.

8. R: Okay. How much involvement do you have in decisions that affect you at school?

P: Umm...I don't have lots of involvement but I have enough to kind of understand what they're doing....like at school assemblies our principal tries to like tell us everything what's going on...like recesses and what we're doing and like all those activities we're doing that month or something like lunch what we're doing for lunch and if we have concerns we can always just tell him or tell our teacher and they can always try to make it better for us.

R: Okay....so you get lots of good information about what's going on and you're invited to express concern and give feedback.

P: Not for everything but for enough stuff to kind of understand.

The Level of Involvement Participants Would Like to Have About Educational Decisions

1. R: How much involvement do you think you should have in at least some of the decisions that affect you at school?

P: You should have like a lot because if the kids like it then they'll learn it better.

2. R: How much involvement do you think you should have in some of the decisions that affect you at school?

P: A lot because you...we might be young but we're pretty mature. Some of us are pretty mature. Even though we're not mature it doesn't mean that we can't be involved with a lot of things.

R: So even if you're not super mature, you can still be involved.

P: Yes. We should be more involved with everything... than little things like

dance-a-thons and like that stuff.

3. R: Just a little bit...okay. How much involvement do you think you should have in at least some of the decisions that affect you at school?

P: Probably a lot.

4. R: Okay. So you feel like you have a lot of involvement in decisions. Okay. Um how much involvement do you think you should have in these decisions that affect you?

P: I actually think our school...I like having a lot of decisions but I think we shouldn't have this much because sometimes that can take....kids can get a little greedy...and they think that they're the ones that make the decisions. So it doesn't matter...it's always what they want to do. Even like the little things in our classroom...kids think...even they'll fight over the stupidest things...like cards and that. "I had the cards first...let me use them" or like "No I'm better than you. Let me use them." And every time my teacher hears that she makes them say sorry to each other. She tries teaching us that we're all perfect but in different ways.

R: Okay. So you're saying that sometimes if kids have too much involvement that they then start to think they're in charge. Is that what you're saying?

P: Yes. It's happened a couple of times in our classroom that lot of people thought that they're the ones that like are in charge....get to do whatever they want.

5. R: How much involvement do you think you should have in at least some decisions that affect you at school?

P: Well...not as much but still....a couple or a bit.

6. R: Not so much....okay. How much involvement do you think you should have in at least some decisions that affect you at school?

P: At least about five.

R: Okay.

P: Maybe sometimes you just don't want to learn. You want to just sit there and be lazy. You don't want to be at school sometimes. And you don't want to wake up early just to get to school.

R: And do you think you should be able to decide that sometimes.

P: Yes.

R: Okay. So you said about 5 decisions....so I'm guessing you don't think you should make all of the decisions about school.

P: Yes.

R: Just some of them.

P: Yes.

R: Okay....why not....why not all of them?

P: Because people would think you'd be greedy. They wouldn't want to have like a part of you that...they wouldn't want to be with someone....be a friend with someone that's greedy. Wouldn't want to be someone that's snotty like. You don't want to do something....be with somebody.....or like do things because you're so lazy and greedy and you don't want to do the things that your friend want you to do.

R: Okay....do you think that teachers and parents and other adults should be making some of the decisions for you?

P: Yes.

7. R: Okay. How much involvement do you think you should have in at least some of the decisions that affect you at school?

P: I think we should have not a lot of involvement because it's not exactly the kids' decisions. It's the teachers' decisions too so I think we should at least have an idea...tell them an idea...and if they think it's good then they can use it and if it's not then well it was worth a shot telling them what it was.

8. R: Okay. How much involvement do you think you should have in some of the decisions that affect you?

P: I think we should have most of it because the decisions are about like how we're learning and what we're going to be doing at school.

Types of Decisions Participants Would Like to Have Some Involvement in Making

1. R: So what kinds of things do you think you should be involved in.

P: The dances. The Halloween dances Christmas dances. Even the glow-in-the-dark dances those are cool.

R: What about stuff that happens in the classroom do you think you should be involved in making decisions about that?

P: Yes. But not about the math. Well, we should be...like if we...don't feel like doing like a lot of questions at least like the top amount...we could pick at least four questions only. That would be like the top amount. We could pick higher if we want to, but probably won't.

R: Okay. So even when it comes to the school work you think that it makes sense to make some decisions about that?

P: Yes. Like art maybe. We should maybe...instead of doing something like drawing or something like that we should be doing like painting because that's more educational than just like drawing. Art...like painting...is more important than drawing and everything because some people become artists and everything.

R: Okay. So.....

P: They need the education.

R: Okay. So I think what you're saying is that people have different kinds of interests...

P: Yes.

R: And you might want to have some say....

P: Yes.

R: About doing that at school.

P: At different.....we should have like different timeslike if some kids want to do gym or like...it's hard to explain...like old schools...they used to be able to like pick what things they wanted to be in but they had to be in math. Like just say....my things are like...I picked gym and then I picked band and then I picked like art and everything. Like in different classes they should be in different classes instead.

R: So I think I'm also hearing you say that there are some things that teachers need to decide that you have to do...like math and stuff like that. Right?

P: Like math you have to do it. If you picked your own subjects that you want to do, but one of the things had to be math, but you had to pick...like you could pick what time you

want it to be. Same thing...like if you want gym you don't want it like the first...like straight in the morning. You don't want it then. So you'd want it probably at the end of the day or in the middle of snack and lunch.

2. R: Mm hmm. Okay. What types of decisions at school would you like to participate in making?

P: Uh...I think I'd like to participate in maybe like the activities that we're going to be doing and stuff.

R: Okay. Like any particular kinds of activities? Like what are you thinking? Like school work or fun activities or....?

P: I think like the fun activities.

R: Okay. Like how do you think that you could be involved in that... making that decision?

P: Maybe like seeing what the kids want to do.

R: Okay. So they could ask the kids.

P: Mmm hmm.

R: What kinds of fun activities do they do at school that you might want to have some say in?

P: Well they have like the Halloween dance-a-thon where we raise money and then we go to the dance-a-thon and all the money goes to the playground...for a new playground.

R: Ya...okay.

P: And we have like movie nights and stuff...and maybe the kids could decide like what movies they want and like have like things that like the kids could go there and buy.

R: Okay. Okay. And do you usually get to have some say in terms of....like did you get to decide about the dance-a-thon or...?

P: No not really.

R: Okay. Would you like to have been asked about that?

P: Ya.

R: So you'd like to actually have them come and ask you about what kinds of activities you're interested in.

P: Ya.

R: Okay. All right....how about with school work? Is there anything in that that you'd like to have some involvement in?

P: Um. No.

3. R: What decisions at school would you like to participate in making?

P: Maybe like what field trips you're going to go on. Some of what you learn...and how you learn it.

R: What do you mean...how you learn it?

P: Like if you get taught in a specific way or something.

4. R: Okay so they shouldn't be able to decide everything. So you mentioned a few examples already what types of decisions at school would you like to participate in making? I think you already said field trips and fun activities.

P: Ya that and....I don't know... I think that we should have more curriculum activities like outside of school. We don't have many outside of school. It's kind of like well you can do that on your own time but people have commitments like my friend does

gymnastics so that's what they do. A couple of my other friends do swimming. I do hockey. A lot of boys in my class do karate and that. But there's nothing that involves from school like math classes and soccer teams and that so it's nothing...we don't have anything.

R: So do you think some of that should happen at school? Is that what you're saying?

P: Ya.

R: Okay. So you'd like to have some say as to what you're being taught. Like what would you tell them? Like if they were to ask you..."What do you think you should learn at school?" What would you say?

P: Um...how to make our own choices...like we're not taught that much like right from wrong...like we're just learning about it kind of about media...we learn through media what to do and how to be like safe...then you get your own choices...so that when you're older you know right from wrong...and even like the little things from like locking your doors at night to make sure that you're safe to like big things like make sure you have certain things so that when you get hurt like first aid...they teach us to make sure that we're prepared all the time.

R: Ya. That's important eh? Now you mentioned a lot that you really like sports and stuff. Are you saying that you would like to see more of that happen at school? So if you were asked about that you would say "We should do some more sports at school?"

P: We're actually starting to do a couple of more sports at school. They used to only have volleyball teams for like the high school but this year intermediates...now they're bringing volleyball into juniors. And we're learning that through gym period and we've

only done floor hockey once. And we do three pitch at the end of the year like we do a lot of them.

R: And that's kind of getting back to some of the things you were saying earlier on where everybody's different everyone's got their own interests right? And so probably people would have different ideas about what they'd like to do at school.

P: Like in soccer because for the junior grades 4 to 6...and so when we went to the junior soccer our whole class was there like my whole class and the boys team and the girls team...and then there was only like a couple grade fives. It was always us but now we're not sure. I want to go into volleyball and a couple of my friends think that they don't want to go and some of them do and some of them don't.

5. R: Okay...so what types of decisions at school would you like to participate in making?

P: Maybe like....Because we always would be eating at lunch and then the bell would ring and we're still eating...so probably like eating longer.

R: Okay...like the time for lunch?

P: Ya.

R: Anything else?

P: No...not really.

6. R: Okay. Ya. What types of decisions at school would you like to participate in making?

P: I think more of the stuff that happens to all of the kids like say like lunch time routines or outside...like what we can do outside...or what should go up that we could play with...or something like that.

R: Anything else?

P: Also....like what teachers should be still teaching at the school and if we like that teacher and if we don't then we should like say something about it because...

R: So you should have some say about how the teachers are doing.

P: Ya and if we don't like them then we could give them a little heads up like "hey I don't really...this teacher the one that I really like...like someone that I really like."

Maybe they could see if there's like another one that's nicer or understands kids more.

R: Okay. Is there anything about like related to you specifically that you'd like to have some decisions... some involvement in about...

P: I think like some lunch time routines and outside what we should do....like more activities outside and like more things we could do because to me it's kind of boring outside...because since I'm in an older grade, I don't have as much....like I don't have the privilege to play on the playground or go over to like the older kids' side or something.

7. R: Okay. What types of decisions at school would you like to participate in making?

P: Um.....making bullies stop bullying.

R: Okay...so you'd like to have some involvement in how the school is doing that?

P: Ya.

R: Okay...Anything else that you'd like to....

P: Maybe how children get fed...because not all the children here have food to eat at lunch or snack...

R: Are there any decisions about you at school that you would like to have some involvement in deciding?

P: Umm....no so much, but there's one about....I want the decision to not be like...not get the kids that are trying to be bad....to get more....not like different than others. I know a lot of people that don't fit in because they're different than others.

R: And so what would you like to be involved in deciding about that?

P: Um...making different decisions for people.

R: Okay. Do you think you should have any involvement in decisions about what you're learning and all of that stuff?

P: Not so much because the teachers want you to learn what you need to because when you move off to high school or a different grade you need to know the things because... or else you'll....maybe there's tests, marks and...not be able to move on for the next year.

8. R: What types of decisions at school would you like to participate in making?

P: Could you say it again?

R: What types of decisions at school would you like to be involved in making?

Remember... it could be anything. Whatever you think...is the right answer.

P: (pause)

R: So right now you get to decide about the sports you play...right? You can sign up for the sports you like.

P: Ya.

R: Are there other things that you'd like to make decisions about at school?

P: Probably like the bullying program and that....um...

R: Okay...so what do you mean you'd like to be involved in deciding about that...the bullying program?

P: Umm.....

R: Like would you like to be involved in deciding what the school's going to do about it?

P: Ya.

R: Okay. Anything else you'd like to decide about at school?

P: (pause).

R: Anything about your classroom...or your school work...or anything like that?

P: Not sure.

R: Okay...that's okay. That's alright.

Participation in Educational Decisions and Impact on Character Development

1. R: Do you think it would or would not help children to develop good character if they participated in making some decisions at school about things that are important to them?

Do you think it would help character?

P: Yes.

R: Why do you think it would help them learn to have good character by participating in decisions?

P: Because they'd feel more involved maybe.

R: And how do you think that teaches them to be good....to be more involved?

P: Because maybe they'll get involved in more things as they grow up. They'll want to.

2. R: So do you think it would help children to develop good character if they participated in making some decisions at school about things that are important to them?

P: Ya. Like I don't really know why...just something tells me that...because if you're doing things that you enjoy...that's something that you can be proud of. And when you're proud you know that's something that's a character trait about you.

R: Ya so if you feel good about yourself and you feel proud how might that make you be a good person?

P: Because then you know later on that...if I like to...if I'm good at telling jokes and that helps people feel better like if they're having a bad day...that makes them not as upset...I know that that's good character because I just made someone go from a really bad day to a really good day.

R: Okay so if you're happier, you might be more likely to do things that make people feel better.

P: Ya make more friends because...they go "oh the other day this person was upset and now this person was making me feel really happy. I know that they're my friend now because they took the time to make me happy.

3. R: Okay. So do you think it would help the child to develop good character if they participated in decisions at school about things that are important to them?

P: Yes. They'd have better characters because they have their own decisions..say like if they decide their own stuff.

R: How do you think that helps them develop good character?

P: Because they're happy with what they picked. So....like I like gym music science and sometimes reading. And sometimes math, but those are the ones I would like to pick.

Then you'd be like "okay I'm happy with that stuff...so I'm going to..."

R: So it makes you happy to make decisions.

P: Ya. You have better characteristic because you're all like "oh yay I get to do this and this"....like right after recess and everything.

R: So, if you're happy how does that make you have better character?

P: Because you'd be like more better, more confident about what you're doing. So like if I do gym, I like it so if I'm going there I'd get more like muscles and stuff like that so I'd be happy about that. I'd get more physical education. I would...just saying...lose weight or something. Because some people think that they're a little bit heavy. They're like a little heavy. Sometimes they're like "maybe I need to do a little more phys. ed. then. So I have to wear shoes and everything. So I could do gym more. But it would be smart if they did two things every day. Just mix up the schedules like every day.

R: So, you'd like to have some say but you realize that you don't have total control.

P: Ya.

R: Okay. Alright. So, if you're happy and confident what would people notice? What would make people say that person has good character?

P: Because they're smiling. They're happy about themselves. They dress nice. But sometimes if they have like a bad character you can tell because they dress so sloppy and everything. They wear like pjs or just like an old shirt that's worn out. They don't care

what they wear as long as they're wearing something. So you can tell if they're happy or not by how they dress and how they act. Like their features and everything.

4. R: Do you think it would help children to develop good character if they participated in making decisions at school about things that are important to them?

P: Ya.

R: Okay. How do you think it would help?

P: Because maybe like kids could help like set up things and make them like "Oh I kind of like helping people" and like...what they're doing maybe they'll start...

R: So they might learn that they like helping people.

P: Mmmm hmm.

5. R: Okay. Do you think it would help children to develop good character if they participated in making some decisions at school about things that are important to them.

P: Yes.

R: Okay...How do you think it would help them?

P: It would help them by....maybe they need to think about something and they just can't do it because the teacher may be getting mad at them that they're not listening and knowing what they need to know...but knowing what they need to know is not always... is not always handy to them.

R: So...can you explain that to me a little bit more?

P: Like maybe someone's having a hard time with their family and they need to think about what's going on in their family, but they can't think because their teacher's not there for them. Maybe they don't know that this is happening because she or he is not

telling them...so I think that kids should have time alone to be by themselves and think for a while.

R: Okay...so if they have some freedom...or some involvement in deciding whether they have time alone or not, then they'd know how to take care of themselves a little bit better. Is that what you're saying?

P: Ya.

R: Okay. They could ask for what they needed.

P: Yes.

6. R: Do you think it would help children to develop good character if they participated in making decisions at school about things that are important?

P: Ya.

R: Ya? Okay...

P: Because...it might just get them...like after everybody's gone and done it..that they'll probably act a little different.

R: Okay....how do you think they'd act different?

P: It depends on like what they're doing. Um...maybe like they'll act different by being like better at what they do...

R: So why do you think they'd be better at what they do if they make decisions for themselves at school?

P: Well...maybe because if they make good decisions....like if they make better decisions then they'll be better at like doing what they do...and like all that kind of stuff.

R: So do you think they might choose things that make them feel good?

P: Ya.

7. R: Do you think it would help children to develop good character if they participate in making some decisions at school?

P: Ya.

R: Ya? Okay...how? How would it help them? So if they got to make some decisions...how would that help them learn to be a good person?

P: Ummm...

R: Not sure?

P: Not sure.

8. R: Okay. Ya. Now do you think it would help children to develop good character if they participate in making decisions at school about things that are important to them?

P: I think so because like if they have their ideas at least out there...somebody thinking about it...they feel more like they can be involved and stuff. And if they have their ideas or if they have an idea inside them they feel like "Oh I can't say this because I might get in trouble for it." Or "If I say this maybe this won't happen" or anything.

R: So if they are able to share their ideas and they feel more involved, how do you think that makes them develop into better people?

P: I think because then they feel like somebody...at least somebody cares about my idea and even if my idea's not used at least it's out there and somebody's trying to make it better...use it to do something with it....

R: What do you think that does to the person?

P: I think it makes them feel more like they're not alone and that if they have a problem they can tell like their teacher or their parents or somebody like that....and if they have a problem where like they think that there's something wrong with how the school runs or how their teacher's acting or something....then they can always tell somebody and they don't have to feel so like alone....like they're the only ones that really care about it.

What Schools, Teacher, and Parents Could do to Improve Children's Involvement in Educational Decisions

1. R: So one last question, what could schools or teachers or parents do to better involve you in decisions about your education and about character education?

P: Well, maybe instead of controlling your kids you'd be like "okay what do you want to do for activities in the summer or like anything else." Because then you'd say "okay I want this" instead of just the mom saying or the dad saying "you're doing this, this, and this." And then you're like "I don't like those three."

R: So what should they do instead of controlling?

P: They should be saying "okay what are the three things that you want to do this summer or for like school?" I'd say like "okay I'd like to do like choir or horseback riding and like military school...just like air cadets or something like that or sea cadets." That'd be something....that would be my favourite. I would do those.

R: So you would like to have some say about some of these things.

P: Ya. But we don't have to have everything we want. Because some kids are like spoiled rich because they're like really rich and they have a lot of money....so those kids get whatever they want. The parents who have like a lot of money they shouldn't be letting

the kids have a lot of stuff. They'd say "okay this is as much as you get, if you want more then you have to get rid of that. If you want one more thing then you have to get rid of something from your room." Like me. I have a bunch of stuff in my basement...like there's a bunch of toys in my basement but they're like barbies and everything and I really don't play with them unless my niece comes over. So my mom says if you get one more Barbie you have to take one out. Or if you get one monster high then....Well I don't have a lot of monster highs.

R: How do you think that helps a person learn to be good?

P: Because then you're like "okay I can't get a lot of things so I'm not going to be all like....oh ya I'm so pro and everything....I'm so rich everybody has to be my friend and everything." But if you don't have a lot of stuff like have a lot of money then obviously you're going to be like okay not a lot of people have to be your friend and everything. Because if you're spoiled and everything and don't have a lot of stuff then you'll be like okay...then whoever wants to be my friend then they can be my friend. But if you're spoiled rich like if you're spoiled rotten then obviously you'll be like "okay I have everything I'll give you this and this and this" and everybody will want to be your friend because you're telling them that if you be my friend I'll give you this. You're like bribing them.

R: So then they don't necessarily like you for who you are.

P: Ya. That's what one of my friends are because there's this girl named....at (name of another school) and I have a friend named.....there and she's only being her friend because she's rich. Because ... pays for everything for them everywhere they go.

Because when....went to the CLE she asked if wanted to go. So it's like....because then is always with her instead of me and she's like my best friend and everything so she turns on me every time she's with her.

R: So is there anything else that you'd like to tell me about the stuff that we talked about today? Anything that I didn't ask that you might want to mention?

P: Maybe like how the parents control the kids. Because parents really don't control their kids at all.

R: So you're talking about how there needs to be some discipline. Right?

P: Yes.

R: So discipline but also let the kids have say.

P: Yes. But not like "okay do whatever you want and everything and I'll be like on the bed sleeping." Like that. Some of the people that don't have a lot of money the parents don't really care because they don't have a lot of money. So they're like "okay I don't really care because I have no money so I don't need to control my kids." You can do whatever you want and like lay down and then your kids can get stolen and then like your parents don't care.

2. R: Okay. So...what could schools and teachers and parents do to better involve you in decisions about your education?

P: They could tell you about what's going on. They can tell you about maybe longer things of learning because maybe you don't get a lot of time because you're never at school....because you need time alone to be learning this stuff. And maybe you have a

math test the day you come back to school and you don't know anything so you fail the test.

R: Ya...okay...so they could keep you informed about what's going on. Talk to you about things. Anything else they could do?

P: I don't think so.

R: Okay. Is there anything else that I haven't asked you that you'd like to tell me about the stuff that we talked about today.

P: No I don't think so.

3. R: What could schools teachers or parents do to better involve you in decisions about your education and about character education?

P: Um....Could you read the question again?

R: Ya....(repeats).

P: Well....um...like...one time for like the movie night they asked us if we wanted to watch this movie or this movie. Maybe they could do that more often. Or like for the dance-a-thon...see what songs we'd like to play.,,

R: So they could ask you....ask you guys more often right? About these different things.

P: (Nods).

R: Okay. Is there anything else you think they could do?

P: No.

R: Okay. Thank you for answering these questions. Is there anything else you want to tell me related to this stuff that we talked about? Any other thoughts or ideas you had?

P: No. Not really.

R: Okay.

4. R: Okay so what could schools and teachers and parents do to better involve you in decisions about your education?

P: That I don't know. Just taking the time....at night maybe...to talk about it.

R: Taking the time to talk about it.

P: Even if it's for like 5 minutes. Talk about like what you could do...or sometimes my mom will ask me like how was your day....like how was that good. I'd be like... something really funny happened...and they're like I remember the other day for Halloween a kid in my class fell and our class is like a family because we've all been at least in each others' class for like 3 years. Because we've all been in each other's class and some of us have been in each others' class since like JK. But all of us in class have been which each other in the same class for at least 3 years together so we're like a family. So we know everybody's name off by heart and we know all the last names and we know what they like if you're making a joke about them then you know that some of them might take it seriously so you don't make jokes about them, but some of them are like really funny and they don't care.

R: So taking the time to get to know each other, eh?

P: Ya

R: Okay. That's awesome.....thanks so much for doing this with me.

5. R: Okay. One more question....What could schools and teachers and parents do to better involve you in decisions about education?

P: To involve me.....maybe they could talk to me more and ask me what I would like to do.

R: Okay. That's really good. Thank you for sharing your ideas with me. Is there anything else that you would like to say about all this?

P: Um...no not really.

6. R: Okay...that's okay. So...last question...what could schools and teachers and parents do to better involve you in decisions about your education?

P: Ummm...

R: So right now you feel like you just have a little bit of involvement in decisions and you think you should have a lot....what could the schools and parents and everybody do to help you have more involvement in your decisions?

P: Probably if you have like a form for something and you don't feel like it's fun then you can sign it then you can go in the club and then see how it is and then you can actually like it...cuz you don't know how the club or program would be until you join.

R: Oh sohaving opportunities to try things. Is that what you mean? Okay. And what if you don't like it? What if you don't like something? Then what?

P: Ummm....

R: Should you then get to decide whether you stay with it or not?

P: Ya.

R: Okay. Is there anything else that I didn't ask that you would like to say about some of the stuff we talked about today?

P: No.

7. R: Right. Okay. So what could schools teachers and parents do to better involve you in decisions that affect your education?

P: I think they...well...teachers they should try to involve the kids more....in stuff that the school is choosing to do instead of kind of forcing the kids to do it in a way. And I think parents should try to stick up for their kids if their kids are having a hard time or if something's happening at school they should try to tell the teachers or head school boards or somebody that they need help....and if they could get help then it would like help them a lot. It would make them feel better.

R: So you think teachers should involve kids more in decisions. How could they do that?

P: I think not getting the whole school but kids who they can trust...like teachers they know which kids they can trust and which kids they don't want like to do this activity and I think if they chose the kids who want to be involved and who tell the teacher and are brave enough to tell the teacher..."I want to help you guys decide our next fieldtrip."
"Or I want to like help you guys do this thing for math or something." Then the teachers can understand that that's what they want.

R: So spend some time talking to them about that stuff.

P: Ya.

R: So they could invite them to...

P: Ya...and not like the whole class but say like 5 or 6 kids or like 10 kids.

R: Okay...so could the school do anything?

P: Ya.

R: What could the school do?

P: Well...I guess they could always do like...not all the time but maybe on a regular basis ask like a kid in every grade what they think...like what they want to do. And then they can kind of get an idea of...if one kid wants to do this then I bet a couple more kids in that grade might want to do that too. And then they can kind of get them together and talk about it and stuff. And if they ever need like help then...like something's happening like they're getting bullied or if they're like...something happened in their family or something...they can talk about it and they don't have to be afraid to.

R: How could they help them talk about that stuff?

P: I think they could always like. If they feel okay about it...like if they want to do it... they can always ask the kids questions...not like big questions...but like what you want to do and how would you change the school if you could..or like what you want to do.

R: Ya. Okay. Great those are some good ideas. Is there anything else you want to tell me about the stuff that we've been talking about...maybe that I didn't ask you or other ideas you have?

P: I don't think so.

8. R: Okay. One more question and then we're done. What could school or teachers or parents do to better involve you in decisions about your schooling and about character education?

P: Get them to talk more about what they're going to do. Like ask them more.

R: Ask who more?

P: The kids.

R: Ask the kids.

P: And the parents a bit too.

R: The kids and parents?

P: (nods). If the parents don't like what they're doing then they should have a say in that.

R: Do you think the kids should have a say in it if they don't like it?

P: Yes.

R: What do you think they should ask the kids and parents about?

P: About like what?

R: About schooling and character education and stuff like that. What kinds of things do you think you should be asked about?

P: Like do you want to learn this? Are you okay with learning this? Are you okay with doing this?

R: Do you have anything else you want to say about the stuff we talked about so far?

P: No.

Pre-Activity Group Interview

Researcher: Sounds like you guys are ready to have some conversations...so that's awesome.

People can talk as much as they feel comfortable talking. There's no pressure. I'm going to ask some similar things, but I just want to get some discussion going around some of this and it sounds like you guys are already ready for that so that's awesome. In some of the individual interviews we talked about good character right? And what it means to have good character...so

I want to just talk a little bit...hear from you guys....about how you know when somebody has good character. What do you see?

Participants: Good behaviour. Good character. How do you know when somebody has good character? Because they help a lot of people. They're caring to other people. Happy. Good behaviour. Smiling.

R: So what's good behaviour? What do you mean when you say good behaviour?

P: Like happy. They don't bully people or anything. They're not bullies. And they listen, like if you're in a classroom they listen and participate and things.

R: Okay...so what's...so you mentioned bullying...what kind of behaviour goes with bullying?

P: Violence. Name calling. Making fun of....what (name) said...threatening. (Name) has experience. Yes I have.

R: Ya okay...so some of you have had some experience with bullying right? A lot of us have had that. So bullying behaviour is like violence and name calling threatening...

P: It's kind of different between boys and girls.

R: Okay...how?

P: Girls...they're not violent....girls are usually just like....they name call and they talk behind people's backs. And boys...like they show...physical bullying for boys. Boys are more physical and girls were more talking...verbal bullying for girls....and they call people names and they try to insult them; and sometimes they'll make you feel like..if you're upset then you'll go and tell your friends so that they think you could tell your friends to make them upset....so it's not just you that's kind of being bullied....like all of your friends.

R: Okay...so bullying isn't something you connect with good character is what you're saying.

Can people who are bullies also have some aspects of themselves that are good character?

P: Sometimes....not all the time. They're rude sometimes...that's why their called bullies.

R: Okay...so how do you imagine sometimes that somebody who's bullying could also have good character?

P: Because it's not like they're just one person. Some days they'll be bad....sometimes they'll be good. So they might not like somebody at first... but as they get to know them they start to like them so that might start to treat them the way that person should be treated. And I think that bullying comes not really from you...it comes from more like how your siblings and parents act....your background. The people you look up to...that's why you have to check...like say you have a little brother or sister you have to try to be good role models because they do what you do. It's not really copying; the bullies that bullied my brother...I know that their background that it's not good like their parents...her parents started arguing and so then she took it out on like her and that. It's usually about like what happened to you sometimes...so bullies are only bullying because they got bullied once too; because they have anger; so technically it's about what's going on at home;

R: Wow...so it's something to help people...

P: Don't judge a book by its cover.

R: Nice...

P: You have to read what's inside first.

R: Ya...So you have to be careful about judging people. Do you think the same goes for bullies? Like do you think you have to be careful.....

P: Ya...like sometimes...I have like a friend...I was like "Oh maybe I could be like her friend"... And we'll be like best friends, but then I started to get to know her...but then she started being rude.

R: So I'm hearing you say that...

P: Sometimes it's like...when you think they're good sometimes they're bad...and sometimes when you think they're bad they're good.

R: So people can have good things about themselves and not so good things.

P: Like my [redacted]...I thought she was going to be really nice to me...but then after a while...when he got married to her...she started being really rude. Did she change your brother at all? Mmmm hmmm.

R: So I'm hearing you say that even with bullies they learn that stuff, they learn that kind of behaviour...and they might not be bad people, but they've learned to behave that way or they've had maybe bad things happen to them that's kind of caused them to behave that way. That's what I'm hearing you say?

P: (Nodding).

R: So...these things can be learned. Character can be learned...is what you're saying right?

P: You have to get to know them before you judge them. An then I found this thing...it says like a whole bunch of things and then it's like "you know my name but you don't know my story" and then it's a don't judge kind of things.

R: So do you think not judging people is part of character?

P: Ya (everybody). If you put the person's name in the middle, you can list a bunch of things that's negative and positive about them...but I bet you half the things that you list about them

isn't true...like mostly the negative things....because you could say that someone's honest and they are honest or you could say that someone's distrustworthy..even though they never told one of your secrets....and done anything to harm you. And sometimes people are famous and a lot of people are judging them because of what they look like or like how they sing. I'm like why would I judge anybody because they're kind of being rude. I don't get why they're doing that. They don't even know them. They're trying to ruin their life. Ya they try to ruin like famous people's lives. Let me ask you guys this right now, would you rather be comfortable in what you're wearing or wearing something that someone else expects you to wear? Comfortable.

R: So you're talking about how people really judge celebrities even though they don't know them, do you think that happens in real life too? Like do you guys see that happening in real life?

P: I don't think I've ever seen it but I know it's happening. That was happening to me because they were being bullies even though they didn't know me....the mother's doing something that's not good cuz all he does is write in his book and there's other people doing basketball...and then they ripped his pages off. It would be a pretty boring world if everybody was the same...like if we all wore the same shirt.

R: So what about character....do you think...how does that relate to good character?

P: Being different.

R: Being different is part of good character?

P: Never listen to people. Never take what some people say as seriously....they try to make you....because sometimes they just want to bug you...and they do it to be...you can't take stuff that seriously....so seriously. Like if somebody said..."Oh..." they don't say anything..."I hate

your shirt.” It’s not nice but you can say....”okay then you don’t have to get that shirt.” “My shirt is my choice to wear.”

R: Okay...so is that part of good character too...like being able to just let things...

P: Just let things go through you...

R: Okay.

P: Don’t take stuff so seriously. I read this picture and it’s actually kind of funny....but I read it and I laughed...it said something like “you don’t like me...good...I don’t wake up every day to impress you.” You don’t have to impress people.

R: It sounds like you guys get a lot of information off of the internet.

P: Ya. If people have to wear this special eye shadow or this special pair of shoes then they’re not really special because they’re being forced to do what they don’t want to do; I always say it’s a free country just do what you want.

R: So you guys really think it’s important to be yourselves....and be different....you don’t have to be like everyone else. So how do you guys think that you...where do you most learn good character? Like where would you say you get most of your learning from?

P: Parents. Guardians. Siblings. I don’t have like a big sister...I have [a sibling] and don’t try to do something bad....like I never try to do wrong...I always try to do it right for her; she always follows you because you’re the role model; ya cuz she has to do what I do; like sometimes I get annoyed but then I remember that she’s a little sister and I know she wants to try to be like me; she always has to go to the same bed time as me; and so now she’s getting older and she’s trying to be more like me....sometimes I get annoyed, but then I think, if I didn’t have a little sister then I wouldn’t be like this...would not be doing everything this way...this good.

R: So even just being a role model helps you to have good character.

P: To be honest...I think I get most of my character from my parents; I actually think that I get most of my character from my coaches...just cuz when they take the time..they don't have to but they choose to...take the time to teach us how to do things....but they don't just keep us focused on things like hockey and baseball...they keep us focused on being good character and being good sportsmen....I don't think I've ever been on a team where we've had bad sportsmanship....we've always been..like even this year...there's always like one or two kids that are like bad....like don't show good sportsmanship but this year we only have like one kid....and even he's kind of improved in that....like we're a good team....and lots of teams that we play are like..they get mad and they don't say good game...they get so mad; they just sort of focus on winning; ya and our coach actually gets really mad at us when the boys are talking in the dressing room about like "oh ya well who's got the most points in here...oh ya me. Ya I scored a goal every game." He says "enough with that I don't want to hear it."

R: Nice. Okay...so you learn a lot through sports that's even about character.

P: Ya even when we lost to a team like 9-2 our coach said he didn't care cuz we played really good and that's all he wants and he wants us to have fun.

R: Wow...and work hard and....Is working hard part of good character?

P: Ya. I have a [sibling] at home and he just turned [redacted]. He's not like...[redacted]. He's different. He was bullied for pretty much his whole life at school....[redacted]. In [redacted] he moved to (another school) and somebody [redacted]...I wasn't there but he told me the story about how a kid punched him in the shoulder and it [redacted]. And it's not like he's going there...he's not trying to fake it...but it's not like he's going there to try to impress them...he's

going there because he has to go to school and My [redacted] comes home every week with something to say about being bullied.

[redacted]

R: I'm just wondering because he is going through some hard stuff...and if there's anything about him that helps him to get through all that.

P: I don't know....my dad says he's on his side....[redacted]...but he says never start a fight.

R: Okay....let's talk a little bit more about who you learn character from and how you learn character.

P: It really doesn't matter how old or young they are you can still learn from them...because some people are like my age and they learn from me. Instead of copying their older brother..they copy like us....like everybody else. It doesn't matter if you're like the same age as them or younger or older....you can still learn from them.

R: Role models can be all ages.

P: Sometime I do learn from my brother (the one from previous discussion).

R: Do you think if bullies feel some guilt then that might be connected to good character?

P: Ya...cuz sometimes like if you have cancer you're bald and their like you go to school and they're like baldy.

R: So let me ask you this...you guys have great ideas...what does your school do right now to teach good character?

P: Sorry...nothing. They teach us nothing. I think the only people in this school that teach it is our teacher and maybe 3 or 4 other teachers.

R: So what does your teacher do to teach good character?

P: She's being nice; At the beginning of the year she makes us sign this thing...we come up with a bunch of character traits and that...she writes it down and we have to sign it...and I remember last year there was this boy in our class was being racist and calling like that...so she made him stand up at the front of the class and apologize to every single person...not just the people he was being rude to...but she made him apologize to every kid in the class even if they hadn't been bullied by him...she asked them who's every been made fun of by this kid...and everybody in the class put their hand up.

R: So he had to kind of make amends.

P: Mrs....who is our teacher...lots of teachers in the school...[redacted]; they don't really show the thing that teachers should be showing; I find that our principal cares more about safety or [redacted] or making the school perfect [redacted].

R: Okay...so it sounds like one of the things that your teacher does...it sounds like she does a lot to teach good character...you obviously really appreciate your teacher...but she cares about your well-being....when there's some behaviour happening that is unacceptable she deals with it.

P: There are some teachers at our school that I think actually do a lot about it. Named some teachers. I find that teachers who have kids...they can connect with the kids better than people who have no kids....she can connect with us because she knows how kids act.

R: So how do you think teachers connecting with you teach good character?

P: Because they're connecting with us and saying like be good and everything and they know that you're being....like how you feel because you're that age; they know what to say; because they have kids at home...they know that...they understand; they understand us because they have kids at home that are the same.

R: Is there anything that you can think of....that if you think about all the things that happened at school...is there anything that you think that the school does to actually teach you?

P: Not really....we don't do anything but when we do its repetitive things again....so the only thing that we really have in our school to show it is the stuff in the basement that says respect, and that...but nobody pays attention to that...it's just a decoration so why even pay attention you're just wasting your money on stuff that nobody pays attention to...you don't teach it so why even bother; and I noticed that our school used to have like 400 kids and now there's just over 300....that's because everybody's moved. Half our class moved. [redacted]....I understand that some teachers...they always try to help us [redacted].

R: Okay...so I want to ask you this...this is a really important one...I really want to hear your thoughts on this...what could your school do...like the way your school teaches you things like math, language and stuff like that...reading..so tell me what your school could do to teach you character.

P: I think that....

R: Did you say set a better example?

P: Ya.

P: I think that we need younger teachers...teachers that can understand kids and that can relate to kids....and that's how they can connect to us; and maybe if they don't yell at us because they always constantly yell at us...it's really mean...and not all of the teachers...I don't think they realize that kids aren't going to listen to you when you yell at them as much as you want to yell at them...they're not going to listen to you because you're showing disrespect to them...yelling doesn't make things better...talk to them nicely...that's what I like about Mrs...

R: Is that part of setting a good example?

P: Ya. If she gets mad at us...she doesn't even yell at us..she just says "okay please stop that so that next time...."; Honestly...I think they should treat us more fair....and like actually listen to us like what we have to say and actually help us with our problems...they think the little kids are more important;

R: Okay...so listen to us...okay.

P: Like what you said about mathematics and that...maybe it should be that you take a period... it should be that you talk about it in every single period because pretty much...like little things....you can find character in every conversations that you talk about...like even if you were to talk about math...you find character in that...you could find character throughout media....you could find it throughout anything really...

R: So you'd like to see it happening in the classroom and learning it just like you're learning everything else.

P: Well....you see it outside everyday so....I think outside is covered...but this thing we need to work on is school more and a agree about the yelling because what kid's going to listen to you when you're disrespecting them. You need to take a moment to realize that you are not going to help you and your school....you're not going to help them with the things they need to know. I just want to say one thing....I find that the worst part of our school is either the bullying or last year [redacted].

R: Okay...now I want to hear from.....about what do you think the school could do?

P: I don't know.

R: Okay...that's okay. If you don't have any ideas....that's okay. Maybe you'll think of something as we go along. How about you.....?

P: I think they should do more fun things that the kids would actually like want to do....like activities....that the kids would actually want to do.

R: How do you think that would help to teach good character?

P: Because if the kids want....if they make learning about good character...they make it into an art activity...like painting...then the kids would be like "well this is actually really fun we should do this more often" They could learn about it more and more. That's what we're doing...we're rotating through the classroom so that we can see what they're doing.

R: So.....do you have any thoughts about what the school could do to teach good character?

P: Make like a democratic kind of system.

R: So you feel that the kids should have some say about things.

P: Mr (principal) never believes us when we tell him that the teacher are yelling at us. He believes all of the teachers. It's kind of like when restaurant owner say the customer is always right.....the kids are always right.

R: I'm hearing you say that you definitely think there's some problems with your school. I'm hearing you say that you'd like to be listened to more. I'm hearing you say that you'd like to have some say at school so what could the school do to include you decisions? Like how could they do that?

P: Like a survey; like I said about the movie night...they gave out the votes about which movie we wanted to see. I think we should have say in like stuff that we do like field trips or for stuff; I think that we're not involved when they're thinking about the fun activities and all of us said that

we'd like to do more fun activities but it has to include character...like things that we could actually learn from...like we're not just going to go on a trip to the movies but not learn anything...we're going to go to a movie that we can see that are really educational...let's let them pick...like even when we did our open reading like when the teacher reads to us..we got to pick....our teacher give us option on like what we want to learn; whereas our school gives us like nothing.

R: Okay...so you'd like to have some say about what you're doing

P: Like even outside...I think we should have a say about where we play...I think a lot of the teacher think that because we're in grade 6 that we don't want to play on the playground they're too old...or the baseball diamond is too kiddish for the grade 6s...my dad said when he was a kid he didn't have to go anywhere...it didn't matter where they played. Just because we're younger than the grade 8s doesn't mean we can't go to dances.

R: Should it be just fun activities that you should have a say in or would you like to have say in other things?

P: Everything; just because we're younger they think that we're not mature; I know that the school board or other people could get mad at them like "why are you letting the kids choose between if they want to learn about multiplication or division"...even though we have to learn about certain things...once you get to grade 7 you're learning about harder things and grade 8 it's harder things...and so on...once you get to high school and that...and college or university and all the.....you have to realize that you're not learning any new things now it's all old stuff....so sometimes I think in math...why are we learning this stuff...it's not like you actually use it...mental math I think you need to learn a lot about.....

R: So you do think there are some things that you have to learn.

P: My mom always says you stay in school because you need an education to do everything. I think in a way we're forced to do things that we don't want to do.

R: Do you think you should have some say in terms of how you learn?

P: I think how you're learning is kind of up to the teachers...like ways that you can like teach somebody.

R: Okay let's talk a little bit about...if you think about how the school runs...what could the school do to include you in decisions? So a survey is one way....they could survey you about different things.

P: Ask you. At the assemblies.....I think they should have kids come up sometimes and say what they think. I remember at one of our assemblies a girl in grade 4 put up her hand and said I don't think we should get a new playground because.....I like our old one...and he was like "I'm sorry but we have to get it and it's not your decision" It's like why do we have to.

R: Okay...I hear that this is an important issue for you. So the assembly they could ask kids to come forward and say their things....what else could the school do?

P: Instead of the teacher making the decision....we should do a survey about who should get the award (at the assembly).

R: Okay...the kids could vote on who gets the award

P: Ya. Sometimes at the awards assembly, the same kids get the awards over and over....and some kids try really hard to get the award and they never get picked.

R: So it's important for them to make sure they're paying attention and recognizing the kid.....some people get awards for cleaning up the classroom...that's like everyday stuff.

Post-Activity Group Interview

Researcher: So I was just wanting to talk to you guys about how you felt about what just happened....you just did your presentation. What was that like?

Participants: I was nervous; I felt confident but I was still nervous because it was in front of the whole school.....most of the people.....it felt weird but it was really fun; I was looking around the whole place and some of the 8th graders weren't even listening; ya most of them weren't; I wasn't really nervous, but...I wasn't really nervous, but I was...it was like an instinct to be nervous.

R:what did you say on the way up here....you said...

P: I could have said the last one but it takes a lot of courage for someone to go up there and say all that stuff in front of the whole thing.

R: It does take a lot of courage...ya. How do you feel that doing that...what you just did today...how do you feel that that's related to character education?

P: We tried to change the school and I think they understood a bit...and even...who read the part that said.."Picture this"...I was thinking...I hope lots of kids are thinking how that is.....I was looking around at the whole school and like everybody....some of the grade eights even were listening. I looked at them and they were kind of paying attention. (Named some specific kids they were glad to see paying attention – e.g. bullies). And we changed the school.

R: So you feel like you might have maybe taught some kids some things.

P: Ya. Even the little JKs.

R: How do you think this activity was related to children's rights?

P: I guess it was like how we had the slide that was like our thoughts; it looked like they really listened to that....it's kind of like kids telling kids what they think should happen...and maybe they trusted us or something

R: And so you feel that maybe kids talking to other kids....first of all you're getting to say what you want to say...

P: Usually kids listen to kids.

R: You were also saying that you feel like you might have taught some kids some things

P: Like where we said "Just because we're small doesn't mean we can't have a say." That's kind of what I thought of....

R: Ya ...so you kind of have a right to have a say...and you did that today. Okay...that's awesome. So what did you learn by doing this activity?

P: That it's very nerve wracking to go up there in front of 300 people and present; but at the same time it feels good to have done it (shared some stories of how nervous they felt).

R: So what makes it feel good? What do you feel good about?

P: I guess just feeling good about telling everybody how we feel our thoughts about it and how we want to change it...even just doing this at the school I feel like we did something....even Mr. (principal) was listening and looking like he was happy...I felt like wow maybe we're changing Mr. (principal) in a way too.

R: So you feel like even just doing this....you did something to make things better.

P: I think we helped like actually changing like the school.

R: Okay so you said you thought the other kids might have learned something. What do you think they might have learned?

P: Probably like listen to what people are trying to say and that maybe it could be really important ...like stuff that they need to know; and maybe they're thinking that maybe it could be them in a couple of years who could be doing that like what we did....and like I said I think kids listen better to kids saying things

R: Okay...so you might have inspired some younger kids to speak up about things.

P: And maybe some older kids because I could tell they were listening.

R: Now what do you think that the teachers or the principal might have learned from your activity?

P: That kids have something to say. That they should listen more. I hate when people say oh kids are too young to do this...just because we're kids doesn't mean we can't try to change the world....really it could be the kids who actually save the whole school....or save the whole shelter or something they're working on

R: So you think that some of the adults might have learned that kids have some really good things to say.

P: Ya and they have to try to listen....they should listen more...because adults don't always listen....especially teachers...lots of teachers don't listen all the time; so they should try to listen when we have something to say.

R: A lot of adults don't always listen when kids have something to say. So what were you hoping to accomplish by doing this...remember when we first got together and I said okay lets think of an activity that we could do and I threw out some ideas...and you said we want to do a presentation to the school....like you wanted this...you were so sure of this. What were you hoping to accomplish?

P: I was hoping we'd accomplish to have people listen to us and to have everybody to know what we have to say and everything we've done; I hoped to accomplish that people would learn something from it; I was hoping to accomplish to try to change our school...like Mr. (principal) to realize that like everything and how we've been trying to change it.

R: Do you have other ideas about things that you could do related to character?

P: Well we did the presentation...maybe we could something like try to make a video or something....like a music video...add a song and make characters...ya like you can get like a movie maker.

R: So...we kind of did this organized activity...you did this presentation...and you said some really important things...and you shared your thoughts and had a voice on things. Do you have thoughts about what you could do now? We're not going to organize another thing, but could you do something less organized to kind of keep this going? What are some ideas about that? What can you do now....you've made a big step to change some things....how do you keep that going?

P: Maybe if we like show what we're talking about like integrity, empathy, respect, acceptance and responsibility and like everybody ...and I think that now that we've had experience like we know how to do it...since we have it on a poster board...we could have it in the school maybe like when we do it in our class...I want to show them like how we want to teach it and how they could try to change too. We don't even...like we never tried to change anything about ourselves...we tried to change the school....how the world is...we all wanted to change the world...they're just trying to change something that's important to them.

R: So you can show that this stuff is important to you by actually living it. Do you feel like doing this has changed you?

P: Ya. I think everybody has learned something...and to be better at what you can do. I think it changed us by how much courage we have. I never used to help out in the house...like I'd be really lazy and my mom would yell at me because I wouldn't do anything and ever since I started doing this I've been more responsible.

R: I wonder why...do you have any thoughts about why that changed for you? So how do you think that doing this caused you to make that change?

P: I don't know...just thinking about it every day. After learning this...I think about it even when I don't think I'm thinking of it...I was always thinking about it.

R: You guys were really excited about this.

P: Ya. I'm glad that we did it. I was really excited and that was all I was thinking about.

R: You know what...this really changed me too.

P: I felt like it really meant something...like I really did something.

R: I'm an adult obviously...and my research is about children's rights...so I'm a big believer of children's rights...I know a little bit more about children's rights than a lot of adults...but do you know what doing this has changed for me....is I really saw in talking with you guys...I really saw that kids have fantastic ideas about things and it really for me reinforced that we need to ask kids their ideas. And I think you guys took a really big step in what you did...you shared your ideas...you showed what kids can do...and I think that you could keep that going. You're kind of leaders now. Eh? Do you feel like that?

P: Ya.... I feel like that...now that I've done that...I feel like I can do a lot of things to change the world...because even like the smallest things you can change; one of my fears is talking in front of a big group of people but I think I faced my fears....it was really fun and I thought...I still kind of felt a little different afterwards.

Chapter Five

Conclusions and Implications

Placing Participants' Views on Character in a Historical, Philosophical, and Social Science Context

In terms of the ideas expressed by the participants, they seemed to have a solid understanding of what character meant to them and how they felt it was developed. Interestingly, the traits they associated with good character- as evidenced by the previously mentioned quotes and others in the transcripts- were consistent with those identified in existing philosophical/religious literature. Peterson and Seligman (2004), after examining extensively various religious and spiritual historical documents, identified core virtues (courage, justice, humanity, temperance, transcendence, and wisdom) that they believed to be universal. In terms of these core virtues, the students in this study seemed to emphasize traits associated with Transcendence and Courage though they did also talk about some traits associated with Justice, Temperance, and Wisdom (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). They also made a connection between character and quality of life, with the idea that good character is connected to having a good life. In fact, a study by Gillham et al (2011) suggested that strengths associated with Transcendence were most likely to predict greater life satisfaction in high school students. The virtue of Transcendence is associated with "something or someone earthly that inspires awe, hope, or even gratitude - anything that makes our everyday concerns seem trifling and the self seem small." (Peterson & Seligman 2004; p. 39). As such, these participants appear to be expressing the importance of positive relationships and a sense of purpose in relation to character. On the other hand, the values posted in their school (respect, responsibility, empathy, integrity, and acceptance) indicate

an emphasis on Courage, Justice, and Humanity. These participants and the school system seemed to differ somewhat in terms of the character traits they associated with good character though there was some overlap.

The participants not only expressed their ideas about the traits they associated with good character, but they also exhibited them throughout the course of this study. They displayed courage in their willingness to share their ideas with the whole school, all the while knowing that they were risking being judged negatively or even rejected by their peers, or critiqued by teachers. They were also connecting to, and taking responsibility for a cause that was greater than themselves by taking some small steps toward “changing the world” and their school. As they worked together, they demonstrated respect, kindness, leadership, teamwork, and open-mindedness. Furthermore, in their perspectives about bullying, they showed understanding, forgiveness, and empathy.

The participants' perspectives on bullying were one example of their view of character as a complex and diverse construct. They placed great value on the fact that everybody is different and that the environment plays a significant role in the development and expression of character traits. The role of the family, especially parents, was emphasized as most influential in character development, particularly in terms of discipline and the modelling of values and behaviour. This is certainly consistent with Smetana's (1999) notion of the family as our first and most influential introduction to morality and social life. Participants tended to associate school staff with direct teaching, positive reinforcement, and providing experiences in relation to character development. Experiences in general were emphasized as critical in the development of character.

Participants talked about learning related to character occurring naturally through experiences, such as attending to internal cues and consequences related to behaviour. Relationships and interactions with others were also emphasized in their ideas about how experiences can shape character. This is consistent with the Deweyan notion that the relationship between organisms and their environments is transactional, and that our values are experienced or formed as we engage with the world (Pamental 2010). This was also certainly evident in the description of the impact of this research on the researcher. Pamental (2010) noted that it is not enough to just teach children about morality, but that “we need to engage their already existing interests in such a way that the school experience - their transactions with the school environment - further develop those interests, transforming them *in the light of* those ideas about morality” (p. 23). As noted in the Impact of this Research on the Researcher section, it might be argued that such transactions have the potential to change the school environment as well as the students themselves.

Providing Children with the Experience of ‘Lived Democracy’

It was these “transactions with the school environment” that may have been the most enlightening aspect of this study with some important implications for approaching character education. As Pamental (2010) noted, “in order to inculcate the ‘moral ideas’...- the fundamental moral ideas of a democratic society - the experiences of the students need to reflect those ideas” (p. 24). Through their exploration of their perspectives on character and children’s participatory rights, the child participants seemed to find their voice on the issue and then felt motivated to share their thoughts and opinions. In so doing, they expressed a deeper

understanding of and began to embody the very values they had been identifying in relation to character. As noted previously, they approached the activity with courage and integrity and began to see their own responsibility with respect to character and their interactions with their environment. They expressed acceptance and understanding for others, even bullies, and described a sense of accomplishment and empowerment. They even, in their own words, noted that they had been transformed by the experience. Speaking from personal experience, the participants were not the only ones transformed by the experience. In fact, it is difficult to find the words to describe fully the impact this experience has had, and likely will continue to have on the child participants, the researcher, and the administrative staff and teacher involved. It was clear, however, that inviting children to participate and to share their opinions can be beneficial in ways that extend far beyond the child.

The children who participated in this study demonstrated a maturity and wisdom that exceeded the expectations of this researcher. Their perspectives about character and children's participatory rights, which they appeared to share openly, were very balanced and non-judgemental. They indicated an appreciation for the social hierarchy and the important role of adults in decision-making while also advocating for their right to participate in decisions that importantly affect them as children, even those that would be more traditionally left to the adults. They also seemed to appreciate the complex nature of character in the sense that they understood both that everybody has a unique combination of traits or strengths that influence character, and that the environment plays an important role in the development and expression of character. While the ideas expressed by these children were very important, the most critical finding of this

study is that we truly can benefit from including children in the conversation, that they have valuable opinions and ideas; ideas that have the potential to change us all.

Simon (2010) suggested that “the assumption that children come to the classroom without skills, capacity, or experience relevant to social activism is problematic” (p. 302). She further cited a study by Vasquez (2004) wherein four- and five-year-old students advocated for themselves (with the support and guidance of the teacher) after discovering that they were being excluded from a school-wide activity due to their young age. These students surveyed other kindergarten students, documented reactions, created a petition, and wrote a letter to the principal (Vasquez, 2004). The participants in this current study certainly demonstrated considerable knowledge, skill, and competence in their approach to their social activism, thereby neither wanting, nor requiring, much assistance from the researcher. If anything, any assistance provided by the researcher was related to helping with the menial tasks as assigned by the participants. This provides further support for the value of involving children in decisions where feasible and the capacity for even young school-aged children to be very effective in that regard.

Perhaps the capacity for children to be effectively involved in decisions that affect them requires a shift in traditional power structures in order to be fully actualized. In referring to Michel Foucault's ideas, Piro (2008) noted that disciplinary power tends to be associated with the educational system in that the “school may be a space deliberately designed for supervising, hierarchizing, and rewarding” (p. 42). In terms of disciplinary power, which may most typically be associated with such places as prisons, Foucault (1977) referred to the prison as “the place of observation of punished individuals” which “takes two forms: surveillance, of course, but also knowledge of each inmate” (p. 249). However, Shah and Kesan (2007) noted that the architecture

associated with surveillance and observation is also reflected in other buildings, including schools, where there is a theme of constant surveillance and general visibility. Furthermore, in addition to the physical layout of the schools, Piro (2008) described a regime of power being created by schools defining the norms in that “by setting out to use disciplinary power to promote what is normal, abnormality and deviation are, de facto, defined” (p. 41).

This process of defining the norms was evident in the fact that the school system identified the character traits associated with good character, which were then posted in the school. The fact that the students had not appeared to question this process before may be an indication of the subtle nature of disciplinary power. As Piro (2008) put it, “people are being shaped, but are unaware of the shaping” (p. 41). The internalization of disciplinary power, which can cause people to unquestioningly accept their inferior position, may explain why it seemed that the participants in this study had not challenged these ideas previously (Foucault, 1977). As Ohman (2010) notes from Foucault, power is a natural part of social life but through the provision of a discursive space “individuals themselves can formulate a resistance to the dominant structure” (Jones & Brown, 2001; p. 717). This is one way to consider what transpired during the course of this study. Within the context of genuine interest in the participant’s ideas, the students began to inquire, discuss, and debate about character and children’s rights, and through this discourse took charge of the knowledge about the posted character traits and thereby shifted the existing power structure in that moment. As such, although I, as an adult professional, entered their existence with a certain amount of power, the transaction between researcher and participants shifted the power structure to such a degree that the students took charge and not only directed the project, but also took it a step further to present their “truth” about character to

the entire school; a very powerful position to be in. Given that most of us relate to being self-governing individuals in that we are not commanded to act in any particular way, but act in ways that seem sensible (Ohman, 2010), it would seem helpful for children to have the experience of self-governing before leaving the disciplinary power structure of the school system. The results of this study, certainly suggest that children are capable of participating fully in such transactions and of making valuable contributions personally and more broadly.

Children as Social Activists

While children's participation is clearly important, the benefits noted above may have also been influenced by the fact that they chose an activity related to social activism. This was an interesting aspect of this study in that these participants adamantly chose social activism as their preference over an activity related to volunteering. Gilster (2012) suggested that activities related to social activism and volunteering are very different and result in different benefits. She noted that social activists seek to create change, whether it is at a community or global level, while volunteers seek to provide service. The results of her study associated volunteerism with a decrease in hopelessness; and neighbourhood activism, in contrast, with a sense of control and mastery for those involved (Gilster, 2012). As Gilster (2012) points out, control and mastery are important for empowerment in the sense that "working for [the] collective good—neighborhood good in particular—is associated with having a sense of control [in] one's life and the social context in which one lives" (p. 779). This was certainly evident in the comments of the participants following their slide show presentation in that they expressed a sense of

accomplishment, empowerment, and a vision of themselves as responsible members of the school community, which may include ongoing social activism also in the larger community.

This potential shift in the participants' perceptions of themselves as responsible citizens and social activists is similar to the results found by Youniss and Yates (1997) in a study which required adolescents to work in a soup kitchen for the homeless as part of their program. In addition to changing their views about the homeless from a more negative perspective to one that indicated an appreciation for the humanity of the homeless, the participants saw themselves as more involved citizens with the capacity to use their talent and power to address social problems in the future. Thus Youniss and Yates (1997) demonstrated that volunteerism can sometimes stimulate an interest in social activism. It would appear, furthermore, that participation in social activism, as occurred for the children in the current study, has the potential to enhance children's sense of social engagement and responsibility which has a clear connection to character education. As such, social activism may be a valuable component of any character education program.

In terms of social activism and character education, this study would suggest that involving children in decisions related to social activism is critical. Although these participants thought it was positive that they were involved in a school-initiated volunteer activity, raising money to erect a new playground for the younger students, they also expressed some resentment and some confusion related to why they were doing that. This contrasted greatly to the enthusiasm shown in their approach to the social activist project the children themselves selected and formulated as part of this study. This would suggest that when children are able to choose activities that are meaningful to them, such as those with a social activist objective, it enhances

their sense of engagement and commitment. One might wonder why adults often choose these activities for children rather than encouraging children's participation in such decisions. Perhaps systems have a tendency to underestimate children's capacity to think critically and to make appropriate pro-social decisions when guided by adults as facilitators. However, one must also consider the influence of the traditional power structures noted above on a school's willingness or lack of willingness to invite students to participate in school-related decisions.

The Relevance of Children's Participation Rights to Character Education

Inviting children to actively participate in decisions that affect them may in fact be a critical component of character education. Pamental (2010) pointed out that "if our experiences in school paint a very different picture of social life than what we are experiencing, and preparing to experience, outside and after schooling is done, our habits will be split, and so will our personality" (p.23). This echoes the participants' perspectives on the matter in that they suggested that participating in decisions would enhance their confidence, commitment, happiness, and sense of identity. Clearly, this would have positive implications in terms of their ability to engage in life and have fulfilling relationships. The participants also indicated that by participating in certain significant school decisions they would learn how to make decisions, which would enhance their ability to make good decisions in the future. Hart (1992) noted that "it is unrealistic to expect them [children] suddenly to become responsible, participating adult citizens at the age of 16, 18 or 21 without prior exposure to the skills and responsibilities involved" (p. 5).

In order to become "responsible, participating adult citizens" it is important for children to have opportunities to truly participate in decisions. The child participants in the current study

supported child participatory rights while also acknowledging that some decisions are best made by adults. However, they felt that it was important for them to be involved at a level that is appropriate for their stage of development (maturity) and/or the situation. This is remarkably similar to the wording of Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) regarding children's participatory rights. They indicated that the adults in their lives should keep them informed, at the very minimum, but also suggested that adults should ask them what they think about relevant issues, to at least consider their (the children's) views. They also offered some suggestions about some formal (e.g., committees, surveys, speaking at assemblies) and informal methods (e.g., making a habit of asking the children what they think about things, getting them together to talk) for involving them. In order for this to be a genuine attempt to involve children, it is important for such efforts to be organized in such a way as to "maximize the opportunity of any child to participate at the highest level of his [or her] ability" (Hart 1992; p. 11).

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009) emphasizes this need for the involvement of children to be genuine and "urges States parties to avoid tokenistic approaches, which limit children's expression of views, or which allow children to be heard, but fail to give their views due weight" (p. 26). In order to ensure effective and meaningful participation, the Committee recommended that the following requirements be integrated into all legislative and other measures for the implementation of article 12:

- (a) "Transparent and informative - children must be provided with full, accessible, diversity-sensitive and age-appropriate information about their right to express their

views freely and their views to be given due weight, and how this participation will take place, its scope, purpose and potential impact;

- (b) Voluntary - children should never be coerced into expressing views against their wishes and they should be informed that they can cease involvement at any stage;
- (c) Respectful - children's views have to be treated with respect and they should be provided with opportunities to initiate ideas and activities. Adults working with children should acknowledge, respect and build on good examples of children's participation, for instance, in their contributions to the family, school, culture and the work environment. They also need an understanding of the socio-economic, environmental and cultural context of children's lives. Persons and organizations working for and with children should also respect children's views with regard to participation in public events.
- (d) Relevant - the issues on which children have the right to express their views must be of real relevance to their lives and enable them to draw on their knowledge, skills and abilities. In addition, space needs to be created to enable children to highlight and address the issues they themselves identify as relevant and important;
- (e) Child-friendly - environments and working methods should be adapted to children's capacities. Adequate time and resources should be made available to ensure that children are adequately prepared and have the confidence and opportunity to contribute their views. Consideration needs to be given to the fact that children need differing levels of support and forms of involvement according to their age and evolving capacities;

- (f) Inclusive - participation must be inclusive, avoid existing patterns of discrimination, and encourage opportunities for marginalized children, including both girls and boys, to be involved. Children are not a homogeneous group and participation needs to provide for equality of opportunity for all, without discrimination on any grounds. Programmes also need to ensure that they are culturally sensitive to children from all communities;
- (g) Supported by training - adults need preparation, skills and support to facilitate children's participation effectively, to provide them, for example, with skills in listening, working jointly with children and engaging children effectively in accordance with their evolving capacities. Children themselves can be involved as trainers and facilitators on how to promote effective participation; they require capacity-building to strengthen their skills in, for example, effective participation awareness of their rights, and training in organizing meetings, raising funds, dealing with the media, public speaking and advocacy;
- (h) Safe and sensitive to risk - in certain situations, expression of views may involve risks. Adults have a responsibility towards the children with whom they work and must take every precaution to minimize the risk to children of violence, exploitation or any other negative consequence of their participation. Action necessary to provide appropriate protection will include the development of a clear child-protection strategy which recognizes the particular risks faced by some groups of children, and the extra barriers they face in obtaining help. Children must be aware of their right to be protected from harm and know where to go for help if needed. Investment in working with families

and communities is important in order to build understanding of the value and implications of participation, and to minimize the risks to which children may otherwise be exposed;

- (i) Accountable - a commitment to follow-up and evaluation is essential. For example, in any research as to how their views have been interpreted and used and, where necessary, provided with the opportunity to challenge and influence the analysis of the findings. Children are also entitled to be provided with clear feedback on how their participation has influenced any outcomes. Wherever appropriate, children should be given the opportunity to participate in follow-up processes or activities. Monitoring and evaluation of children's participation needs to be undertaken, where possible, with children themselves." (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009; pp. 26-27).

With regard to the abovementioned requirements, Save the Children (2014) published a series of booklets described as a toolkit to assist in the implementation of ethical child participation and to evaluate the effectiveness of such efforts. With these benchmarks in mind, information on the school board's website (for the school from which these participants were drawn) indicates a commitment to student participation and involvement as well as a strength-based approach to learning which is consistent with the wishes of the participants of this study. Furthermore, a provincial document specific to character development in Ontario schools, "Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12," indicated that "student engagement is essential in the character development process" and that "meaningful participation and involvement of students is central to the success of the initiative" (Ministry of Education, 2008; p. 5). This document refers to "student leadership development and expanded

opportunities for student voice and engagement” (p. 26), ensuring “that students play a key role at all stages of the development of this initiative” (p. 28), and other comments related to engaging students in the “development of plans and decisions for the implementation of the character development initiative in their school” and “expanding their roles in the classroom” (p. 30).

While the comments in the Finding Common Ground document (2008) may seem to indicate a commitment to children’s participatory rights, it was difficult to find any evidence to suggest that this, in fact, was occurring in any consistent, systematic way. As a justification for this character development initiative, the document refers to the “many studies” that “highlight the importance parents place on character development and repeatedly refer to the concerns and priorities of parents (Ministry of Education, 2008; p. 10). The perspectives of Human Resources and Social Development Canada and Canadian employers were also represented and reference was made to Emotional Intelligence (Goleman, 1996) and Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1999). Children’s priorities and/or perspectives regarding their social and educational life at school were not included. Further, there was no reference to any research identifying children’s views on character development or character education or their views regarding their level of awareness of and expression of their participation rights at school and in the community and how that might be impacting their character development. In addition, although the document refers to “human rights, constitutional rights, and federal and provincial legislation”, there was no mention of children’s human rights specifically (Ministry of Education, 2008; p. 6). This is particularly concerning in light of the United Nations’ view that “respect for the right of the child to be heard within education is fundamental to the realization of the right to education” and that “

education authorities have to include **children's** and their parents' views in the planning of curricula and school programmes (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009; p. 21). In their "Toolkit for Monitoring and Evaluating Children's Participation" (2014), Save the Children have items indicating the degree to which "human rights education is included in the curriculum" (p. 9), "children's rights training is provided for professionals and policy-makers working with children" (p. 9), and whether there are "programmes for parent education on children's rights available" (p. 10).

Although it cannot be presumed that the perspectives of the students in this study represent the views and experiences of all students in their school, city, or province, it would appear that these particular students have not received education related to children's participation rights, nor have they been fully experiencing their right to be heard at a level that they desire or should reasonably expect. Unfortunately, it would appear that the students in this study are not alone in their concern about the need to improve the level of respect accorded the views of children. The United Nations' Committee on the Rights of the Child reports periodically on issues related to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child around the world and in terms of Article 12, it would appear that many countries are not adequately respecting the views of children.

In terms of how we are doing as far as the implementation of Article 12, the Committee expressed concern in its most recent report at the time of this writing that in Canada "there are inadequate mechanisms for facilitating meaningful and empowered child participation in legal, policy, environmental issues, and administrative process that impact children" (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2012; p. 8). They further recommended that "the State party promote

the meaningful and empowered participation of all children, within the family, community, and schools, and develop and share good practices” (p. 8). The Committee’s observations related to Australia indicate concern “that there are inadequate mechanisms for facilitating meaningful and empowered child participation in the policies and decision-making affecting them in schools” (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2012; p. 8). They further identify the “inadequate fora for taking into account the views of children who are below the age of 15” (p.8). Concern about the right of the child under 15 years of age to be heard was also expressed with respect to Finland (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2011). Similar concerns were expressed regarding Sweden (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009) and even more serious concerns for India (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2000), Indonesia (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2004), Afghanistan (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2011), and China (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2013). It should be noted that these represent only a sample of the Concluding Observations reported by the United Nations in terms of the barriers to full implementation of the Convention, with particular attention paid to Article 12, around the world.

The views of the participants in this doctoral study, together with the concerns identified by the United Nations, indicate that we, in fact, are not doing a good job of including the voices of children within educational (and other) systems. Although the precise reasons for this is unknown, one might wonder if the province’s traditional approach to education may be a factor. Traditional schools tend to focus on standardized curricula and fostering changes on the individual level in terms of acquired knowledge (Matusov, St. Julien, Lacasa, & Albuquerque Candela, 2007). This is certainly reflected in the standardized approach to curriculum

implementation and measurement of academic achievement, as well as a mission statement related to student success. However, as Matusov and colleagues (2007) point out “the main problem with a traditional pedagogical regime is that it does not communicate the curriculum’s potential social activism” (p. 22). These authors also suggest that some students in a traditional educational environment come to be known, to themselves and/or others, as deficient, which certainly has implications for identity, character development, and future success as well as for level of participatory engagement.

As noted previously, social activism appears to be connected to well-being and empowerment which has strong implications for future success. Matusov and colleagues (2007) posit that school environments that incorporate social activism are morally just, as they encourage the weakening and elimination of oppressive practices by “empowering students to make the world more just” (p. 36). They also suggest that “it is justified intellectually because social activism promotes students’ focus on successfully changing the essential relationships of the world they live in” (Matusov et al, 2007). These ideas were certainly supported by the results of this study. Although it was apparent that the participants in this study varied in terms of academic ability and success, these differences or potential ‘deficiencies’ did not surface as an issue for this group. The participants utilized each other’s strengths to work together and achieved success in terms of challenging to some extent a social system that did not, in their view, listen sufficiently to the voices of children. In the end, they all expressed a sense of success and empowerment in that regard.

If the goal of character education is to create responsible, participating citizens who are able to engage in life and contribute to their community, it would appear that providing

opportunities for children to participate in decisions and to engage in social activism is a critical component of character education. Kohn (1997), in fact, suggested that engagement is critical in that “the process of learning does indeed require that meaning, ethical and otherwise, be actively invented and re-invented...that children be given the opportunity to make sense of such concepts as fairness and courage” (p. 12). Although there may be some universal virtues, there may also be some variability between schools in terms of what is emphasized in regard to good character (Hofmann-Towfigh 2007). As such, being sure that the values being endorsed by the school are consistent with the values being endorsed by the students is a good place to start. As far as the development of good character goes, these participants emphasized the need to respect the individual strengths of the students, and to provide the flexibility and space in order for them to develop these to their utmost capacity. Moreover, they wanted to be heard and involved in decisions related to this. They saw this as being strongly connected to the development of good character and school community.

The participants' apparent desire to participate in decisions affecting them and their understanding of the connection between participatory rights and character echoed the perspectives expressed in the aforementioned reviewed literature. This suggested a rather sophisticated and intuitive understanding of human rights and children's human rights in particular, in spite of the apparent lack of formal education in that regard. In retrospect, the design of this study effectively met the requirements for ethical participation as listed above. The child participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study and understood that it was voluntary. It was respectful in the sense that they were able to determine how they participated (e.g., time commitment, activities) and their choice of the social justice activity made it very

relevant. Perhaps because the activity was chosen by the participants, it was child-friendly. The children were able to use their creativity and available skills to create both a poster and a power point presentation. The activity was inclusive in the sense that participants were invited to contribute in any way they felt able and they appeared able to find a way to contribute in a meaningful manner, with encouragement from one another. The safety that was created during this researcher-participant interaction was evident in their ability to be honest and to freely express their wishes and perspectives even though some may have been unpopular with many adults (e.g., their expressed interest in being involved in the evaluation of teachers). Although there was much to be learned by the participants' perspectives themselves, the impact of this safe and authentic research environment for child participation on the children, this researcher, and potentially, their teacher, principal, and the whole school community was perhaps the most profound aspect of the findings. The children expressed a sense of empowerment and enhanced confidence, to the point of *themselves choosing* to present their ideas to the entire school. This further caused their teacher, with what seemed to be genuine interest, to invite them to further discuss their ideas with their individual class. These children expressed that they truly felt heard by the other students, the teaching staff, and their principal. More importantly, though, they felt compelled to share more and to take a lead in the future in terms of having a voice on issues relevant to them. Clearly, there is much to be learned from that.

In the next section are described the implications of this study regarding recommended general principles that, according to the children, should underlie school character education strategy and in fact are also borne out by the study findings themselves regarding the impact of the study on the child participants. As it happens these recommendations are also consistent with

the children's human rights participatory perspective that grounded this work and are, in addition, endorsed by this author.

General Principles for Creating a Child-Friendly, Engaging, and Democratic School

Character Education Initiative: A Children's Perspective

The findings of the current study which gave children a voice on the topic of character and school character education initiatives suggest that the following general underlying principles are likely to be conducive to development of an engaging child-friendly and effective school character education strategy:

1. Providing children a voice on the design and implementation of the school character education initiative such that the children's input actually has some influence in that regard;
2. Connecting the school character education initiative to meaningful social action that promotes social justice and involves social action that is framed in large part and implemented by the children themselves with adult support where needed;
3. Allowing for deep reflection by children during class time on issues of character, good character and the shades in between and on how the issue of character relates to various aspects of school life and school curriculum subject matter;

4. Allowing for ongoing consultation with children from various grade levels or a rotating representative group from each grade level on the design, implementation and modifications and improvement of the school character education initiative

To the above list reflecting the children's views (endorsed also by the current author) the author would add the following:

5. Use of the toolkit (Save the Child, 2014) to implement, monitor, and evaluate children's participation within the classroom, the school, the school boards, the province, and the country.

In conclusion, the current study makes a novel scholarly contribution to the field of children's participatory rights and character education by using a children's human rights lens (Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 12) through which to examine the issue of character from a child perspective. The study revealed children's views on *the link* between children's participation rights and character education/development (these views were expressed in the context of a research study that allowed children to craft their own project relating to character education). In addition, the study design provided children a safe space to offer their opinions on the impact of this research on their perspectives on character and children's rights, what they would like to see occur in terms of school programming regarding children's rights and character education, and opportunities for their engagement in social activism. The study also offers the first assessment of the Canadian Ontario Ministry of Education school character education initiative in terms of the degree to which it reflects regard for children's participatory rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Documentation and Ethics Approval Letter

Lakehead

UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Education

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(807) 344-6807
sonja.grover@lakeheadu.ca

Kristine Lake
Graduate Student
Joint Ph.D. in Educational Studies Program
Lakehead University
(807) 767-0761
kelake@lakeheadu.ca

Dear Possible Participant,

I am a graduate student at Lakehead University. I am doing a study that I hope will give students a chance to share their ideas about character education in the schools.

I would like to talk with you and some other students in your grade. You will be invited to participate in one 40-minute individual interview and four one hour group discussions. We will meet during the school day in a room at your school. I will be asking you to share your ideas about character, good and bad character, how we learn good character and how children's rights might fit with this. You will also be invited to take part in an activity that you will be involved in choosing. This activity will give you a chance to do something helpful for others (e.g., children affected by poverty or child labour). The group may do this through a presentation, something written, a performance, or another action.

All interviews and discussions will be audio-taped. Your privacy will be protected at all times and if I share anything said by you, I will not include your real name or information that might identify you.

If you would like to be part of the study, you must sign the informed consent form on the next page. If you would like to participate, please sign and return this form to your teacher by _____.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at (807) 767-0761 or kelake@lakeheadu.ca. You may also contact Lakehead University's Research Ethics Board at 343-8283 or my dissertation supervisor Dr. Sonja Grover by email at sonja.grover@lakeheadu.ca.

Sincerely,

Kristine Lake, M.A.
Psychological Associate



Faculty of Education

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Kristine Lake
Graduate Student
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Participant Informed Consent Form

In this study we are asking you to share your ideas about character and to do something helpful for others.

I have read the letter of information. The study was clearly explained to me. I agree to participate and understand:

1. That I am a volunteer. I can choose not to answer any question and I can stop doing the study at any time without penalty.
2. That there is no risk of harm associated with this study.
3. That the information I provide will be confidential.
4. That the researcher would have to break confidentiality if: somebody is at risk for serious harm, I mention that a child is at risk for harm, I disclose sexual abuse by a health care worker, or if the court asks for my records.
5. That the information I provide will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at Lakehead University for 5 years.
6. That I can ask to get information about the project after I have completed the study.

I agree to have my interview/focus group audio taped. Yes No

Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____



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Kristine Lake
Graduate Student
Joint Ph.D. in Educational Studies Program
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Dear Parent/Guardian,

The Ontario government recently announced plans to implement a character education program. I am interested in exploring children's perceptions and experiences regarding character or moral development, and the factors that may influence this.

I would like to investigate this issue by inviting your child along with a sample of other child volunteers of the same grade level to participate in one individual interview (40 minutes in length) and four one hour focus group discussions to be held throughout the school year, during the school day, in a room at the school, and at a time designated by the school. These discussions will be facilitated through a series of guided questions concerning the children's interpretations of the concept of character, good and bad character, how one can learn good character, and the possible connection between character and children's rights. The individual interviews and focus group discussions will be audio-taped and then transcribed for analysis. All data will be presented as group data and any reference to individual statements by students will conceal the real name of the speaker and any identifying information. Your child will also be invited to participate in an activity of the group's choosing related to social justice (e.g., presentation, written document, performance, or social action related to child labour, poverty, or other topic).

This study is in partial fulfillment of the doctoral requirements of the Lakehead University Faculty of Education, joint Ph.D. The title of this study is *Children's Perspectives on Character: Exploring Elementary School Children's Perspectives on Good Character and the School's Role in its Development*. At the completion of the study, all information (raw data) gathered during this study from the children as well as field notes will be securely stored and kept at Lakehead University for five years and then destroyed. Your child will not be identified in any publication or other dissemination of the results of this study.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study which explores children's views regarding character education. However, should your child experience any unforeseen distress requiring proper follow-up, this will be arranged by the researcher (who is a licensed psychological associate in Ontario) in consultation with you using school or community resources.

The benefit to your child's participation in this study includes the opportunity for the child to voice an opinion on the topic of government character education initiatives in Ontario and thus to contribute to the larger public discussion on the issue. Your child will also have the

opportunity learn about how research is conducted, will have the experience of sharing opinions with others, and will learn about other children's views related to social/educational issues.

If you wish to give permission for your child to participate, please sign and return the attached consent form to your child's teacher by Thursday, October 4th. Participation in this study is completely **voluntary**. This means that your child can refuse to participate, may leave the study at any time, and may refuse to answer any of the questions without penalty. If your child would like to be part of the study, you must sign the informed consent form on the next page.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at (807) 767-0761 or kelake@lakeheadu.ca. You may also contact Lakehead University's Research Ethics Board at 343-8283 or my dissertation supervisor Dr. Sonja Grover by email at sonja.grover@lakeheadu.ca.

Sincerely,

Kristine Lake, M.A.
Psychological Associate



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Kristine Lake
Graduate Student
Joint Ph.D. in Educational Studies Program
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Parent Informed Consent Form

In this study we are asking your child to participate in some individual and group interviews exploring his or her perspectives about character, as well as a group activity related to social justice. The researcher in charge of the study Kristine Lake, a graduate student in the Joint Ph.D. in Educational Studies Program at Lakehead University.

By signing this form, I indicate that I have read the cover letter and understand:

1. That I give permission for my child to participate in the study and agree to allow the discussion portions to be audio taped.
2. That my child is a volunteer, that he/she can choose not to answer any question, and is free to stop doing the study at any time without penalty.
3. That there is no apparent foreseeable risk of physical or psychological harm associated with this study, which involves children expressing their views about character and character education. However, should unforeseen distress occur for my child, the researcher who is a licensed Psychological Associate will be in a position to manage that circumstance and in consultation arrange for any necessary follow-up.
4. That the data provided by my child will be held in strictest confidence at all times and reported only as part of group data. Any reference to individual statements my child may have made during the study's focus group discussions will be identified using a fictional name for the child with no identifying information other than gender and age. Since my child will be involved in focus group discussions with other children, those children will know the identity of the discussion participants but will be urged to keep this confidential.
5. That confidentiality must be breached under the following conditions: if my child is at risk for seriously hurting him/herself or somebody else, if he/she provide information indicating that a child is at risk for harm, if he/she discloses sexual abuse by a health care practitioner, and if the court requests his/her records.
6. That the information my child provides will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at Lakehead University for 5 years.
7. That I can ask to get information about the project after my child has completed the study.

Placing my name below shows that I have read and understand the information above and I agree to allow my child to participate in the study.

I agree to have my child's interview/focus group audio taped. Yes No

Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____



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Kristine Lake
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March 9, 2012

Dear Education Officer,

The Ontario government recently announced plans to implement a character education program. I am interested in exploring children's perceptions and experiences regarding character or moral development, and the factors that may influence this.

I would like to investigate this issue by inviting a sample of your grade six students to participate in one individual interview (40 minutes in length) and four one hour focus group discussions to be held throughout the school year, during the school day, in a room at the school, and at a time designated by the school. These discussions will be facilitated through a series of guided questions concerning the children's interpretations of the concept of character, good and bad character, how one can learn good character, and the possible connection between character and children's rights. All interviews will be audio-taped and then transcribed for analysis. All data will be presented as group data and any reference to individual statements by students will conceal the real name of the speaker and any identifying information. Your students will also be invited to participate in an activity of the group's choosing related to social justice (e.g., presentation, written document, performance, or social action related to child labour, poverty, or other topic).

This study is in partial fulfillment of the doctoral requirements of the Lakehead University Faculty of Education, joint Ph.D. The title of this study is *Children's Perspectives on Character: Exploring Elementary School Children's Perspectives on Good Character and the School's Role in its Development*. At the completion of the study, all information (raw data) gathered during this study from the children as well as field notes will be securely stored and kept at Lakehead University for five years and then destroyed. Your school board, school, and your students will not be identified in any publication or other dissemination of the results of this study.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study which explores children's views regarding character education. However, should your students experience any unforeseen distress requiring proper follow-up, this will be arranged by the researcher (who is a licensed psychological associate in Ontario) in consultation with the parent or legal guardian using school or community resources.

The benefit to your students' participation in this study includes the opportunity for them to voice an opinion on the topic of government character education initiatives in Ontario and thus to contribute to the larger public discussion on the issue. Your students will also have the opportunity learn about how research is conducted, will have the experience of sharing opinions with others, and will learn about other children's views related to social/educational issues. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. This means that your students can refuse to participate, may leave the study at any time, and may refuse to answer any questions without penalty.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at (807) 767-0761 or kelake@lakeheadu.ca. You may also contact Lakehead University's Research Ethics Board at 343-8283 or my dissertation supervisor Dr. Sonja Grover by email at sonja.grover@lakeheadu.ca.

Sincerely,

Kristine Lake, M.A.
Psychological Associate

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Kristine Lake
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Dear Principal,

The Ontario government recently announced plans to implement a character education program. I am interested in exploring children's perceptions and experiences regarding character or moral development, and the factors that may influence this.

I would like to investigate this issue by inviting a sample of your grade six students to participate in one individual interview (40 minutes in length) and four one hour focus group discussions to be held throughout the school year during the school day, in a room at the school, and at a time designated by you and the teacher. These discussions will be facilitated through a series of guided questions concerning the children's interpretations of the concept of character, good and bad character, how one can learn good character, and the possible connection between character and children's rights. All interviews will be audio-taped and then transcribed for analysis. All data will be presented as group data and any reference to individual statements by students will conceal the real name of the speaker and any identifying information. Your students will also be invited to participate in an activity of the group's choosing related to social justice (e.g., presentation, written document, performance, or social action related to child labour, poverty, or other topic).

This study is in partial fulfillment of the doctoral requirements of the Lakehead University Faculty of Education, joint Ph.D. The title of this study is *Children's Perspectives on Character: Exploring Elementary School Children's Perspectives on Good Character and the School's Role in its Development*. At the completion of the study, all information (raw data) gathered during this study from the children as well as field notes will be securely stored and kept at Lakehead University for five years and then destroyed. Your school and your students will not be identified in any publication or other dissemination of the results of this study.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study which explores children's views regarding character education. However, should your students experience any unforeseen distress requiring proper follow-up, this will be arranged by the researcher (who is a licensed psychological associate in Ontario) in consultation with the parent or legal guardian using school or community resources.

The benefit to your students' participation in this study includes the opportunity for them to voice an opinion on the topic of government character education initiatives in Ontario and thus to contribute to the larger public discussion on the issue. Your students will also have the opportunity learn about how research is conducted, will have the experience of sharing opinions with others, and will learn about other children's views related to social/educational issues.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. This means that your students can refuse to participate, may leave the study at any time, and may refuse to answer any questions without penalty.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at (807) 767-0761 or kelake@lakeheadu.ca. You may also contact Lakehead University's Research Ethics Board at 343-8283 or my dissertation supervisor Dr. Sonja Grover by email at sonja.grover@lakeheadu.ca.

Sincerely,

Kristine Lake, M.A.
Psychological Associate



Faculty of Education

(807) 344-5476
(807) 344-6807
sonja.grover@lakeheadu.ca

Kristine Lake
Graduate Student
Joint Ph.D. in Educational Studies Program
Lakehead University
(807) 767-0761
kelake@lakeheadu.ca

Dear Classroom Teacher,

The Ontario government recently announced plans to implement a character education program. I am interested in exploring children's perceptions and experiences regarding character or moral development, and the factors that may influence this.

I would like to investigate this issue by inviting a sample of your grade six students to participate in one individual interview (40 minutes in length) and four one hour focus group discussions to be held throughout the school year, during the school day, in a room at the school, and at a time designated by you and your principal. These discussions will be facilitated through a series of guided questions concerning the children's interpretations of the concept of character, good and bad character, how one can learn good character, and the possible connection between character and children's rights. All interviews will be audio-taped and then transcribed for analysis. All data will be presented as group data and any reference to individual statements by students will conceal the real name of the speaker and any identifying information. Your students will also be invited to participate in an activity of the group's choosing related to social justice (e.g., presentation, written document, performance, or social action related to child labour, poverty, or other topic).

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Graduate Student
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School Board/Principal/Teacher Informed Consent Form

In this study we are asking your students to participate in some individual and group interviews exploring their perspectives about character, as well as a group activity related to social justice. The researcher in charge of the study Kristine Lake, a graduate student in the Joint Ph.D. in Educational Studies Program at Lakehead University.

By signing this form, I indicate that I have read the cover letter and understand:

1. That I give permission for my students to participate in the study and agree to allow the discussion portions to be audio taped.
2. That the students are volunteers, that they can choose not to answer any question, and are free to stop doing the study at any time without penalty.
3. That there is no apparent foreseeable risk of physical or psychological harm associated with this study, which involves children expressing their views about character and character education. However, should unforeseen distress occur for the students, the researcher who is a licensed Psychological Associate will be in a position to manage that circumstance and in consultation arrange for any necessary follow-up.
4. That the data provided by the students will be held in strictest confidence at all times and reported only as part of group data. Any reference to individual statements the students may have made during the study's focus group discussions will be identified using fictional names for the child with no identifying information other than gender and age. Since the students will be involved in focus group discussions with other children, those children will know the identity of the discussion participants but will be urged to keep this confidential.
5. That confidentiality must be breached under the following conditions: if a student is at risk for seriously hurting him/herself or somebody else, if he/she provides information indicating that a child is at risk for harm, if he/she discloses sexual abuse by a health care practitioner, and if the court requests his/her records.
6. That the information the students provide will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at Lakehead University for 5 years.
7. That I can ask to get information about the project after the students have completed the study.

Placing my name below shows that I have read and understand the information above and I agree to allow the students to participate in the study.

I agree to have my students' interviews/focus groups audio taped. Yes No

Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Lakehead

UNIVERSITY

Office of Research

February 28, 2012

Tel 807-343-8934
Fax 807-346-7749

Principal Investigator: Dr. Sonja Grover
Co-Investigator: Kristine Lake
Education
Lakehead University
955 Oliver Road
Thunder Bay, ON P7B 5E1

Dear Dr. Grover:

Re: REB Project #: 109 11-12 / Romeo File No: 1462452
Granting Agency: n/a
Granting Agency Project #: n/a

On behalf of the Research Ethics Board, I am pleased to grant ethical approval to your research project titled, "Exploring Elementary School Children's Perspectives on Good Character and the School's Role in its Development".

Ethics approval is valid until February 28, 2013. Please submit a Request for Renewal form to the Office of Research Services by January 28, 2013 if your research involving human subjects will continue for longer than one year. A Final Report must be submitted promptly upon completion of the project. Research Ethics Board forms are available at:

http://research.lakeheadu.ca/ethics_resources.html

During the course of the study, any modifications to the protocol or forms must not be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. You must promptly notify the REB of any adverse events that may occur.

Completed reports and correspondence may be directed to:

Research Ethics Board
c/o Office of Research Services
Lakehead University
955 Oliver Road
Thunder Bay, ON P7B 5E1
Fax: (807) 346-7749

Best wishes for a successful research project.

Sincerely,



Dr. Chander Shahi
Chair, Research Ethics Board

/scw

Lakehead Research...CREATING THE FUTURE NOW

955 Oliver Road Thunder Bay Ontario Canada P7B 5E1 www.lakeheadu.ca

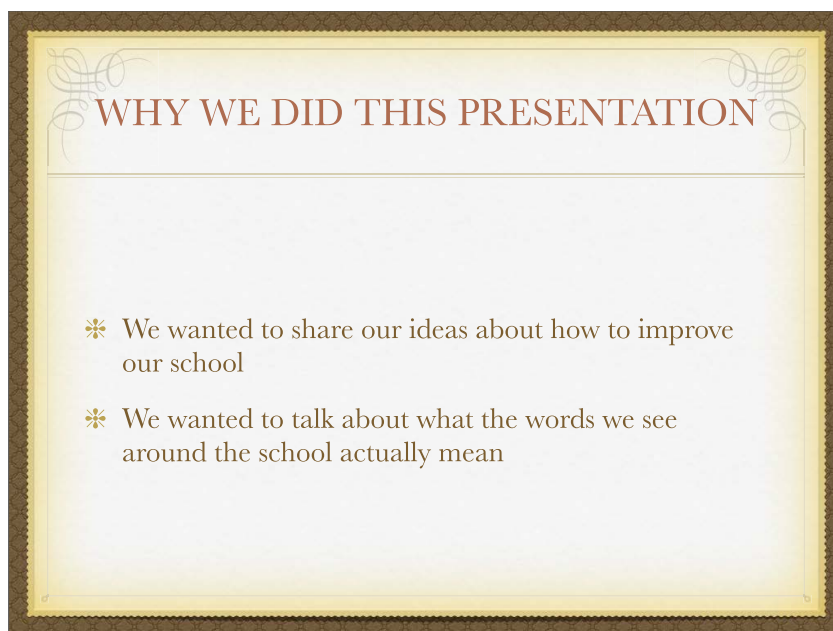
Appendix B

Slide Show and Poster Presentations

Slide show presentation: These slides were created by the participants to explain the values that had been posted in the school. The participants added their own descriptions to explain the words (values).



Monday, August 5, 2013



Monday, August 5, 2013

INTEGRITY...

Integrity is having the strength to admit you did something wrong whether it was in the past or present. Another example of integrity is standing up for what is right. We all make mistakes and if we don't learn from them we will continue to make the same mistakes. The main part of integrity is being honest, so tell the truth; if you don't tell the truth you could get in a lot more trouble than you would if you just be honest!

Monday, August 5, 2013

EMPATHY

Putting yourself in other peoples' shoes is something called empathy. Think before you speak because we all have feelings, so if you don't have anything nice to say don't say it at all. People struggle all over the world so don't judge, you know their name not their story. If someone's hurt reach out. Show you care!

Monday, August 5, 2013

RESPECT

“Treat others the way you want to be treated”

“Be Polite”

“If you wouldn't like the way that you're treating someone there's a good chance that they don't want to be treated like that either”

Respect falls under all of these sayings, so if you follow these you know you're showing respect!

Monday, August 5, 2013

ACCEPTANCE

Picture this...

It's your first day at your new school and the bell rings for recess. Everybody runs outside... Except for you. Then a little girl runs up and asks you if you want to play. Do you know what that little girl just showed? She showed acceptance. Acceptance is something that shows you are kind enough to know we're all different and it doesn't matter what you look like or where you come from.

Monday, August 5, 2013

RESPONSIBILITY

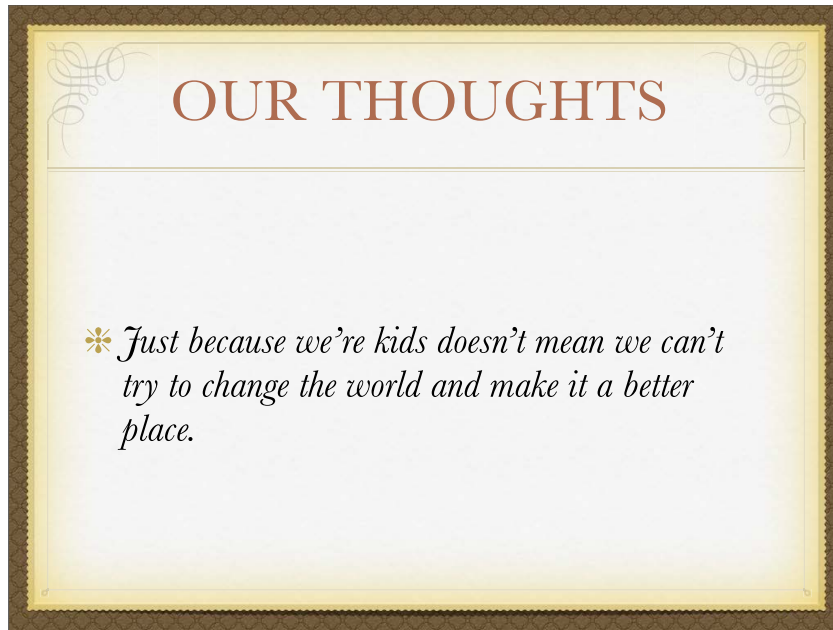
*No matter how old you are you have a responsibility.
Even if it's feeding a pet or taking care of your siblings
do the best you can! You may not like having
responsibilities but it pays off in the end. This is also
called maturity and no matter your age you are mature .
You just have to show it!*

Monday, August 5, 2013

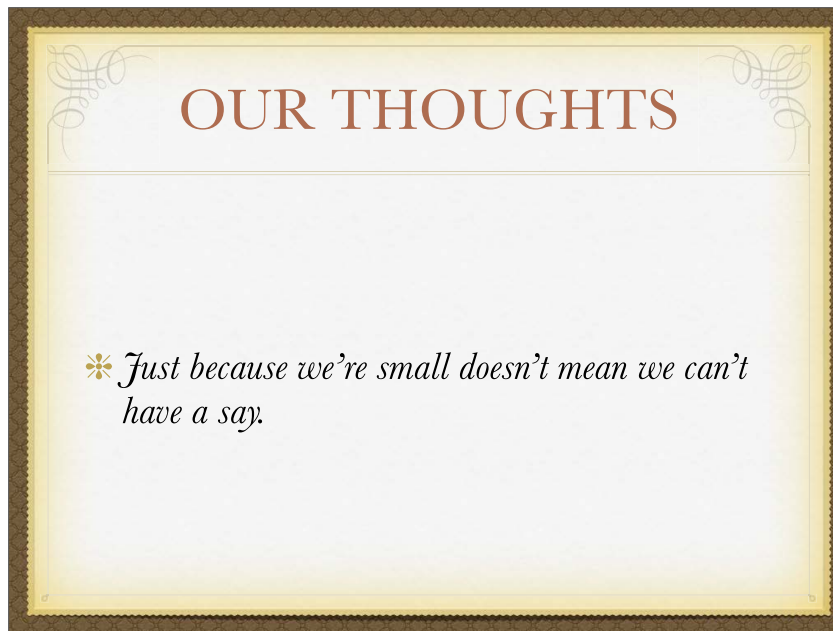
OUR THOUGHTS

*Changing the world seems hard but it's not. You just need
to know where to start. With this presentation there were 5
easy traits that can make you a better person. Speak up. Say
what you want to say and that's what were doing today!*

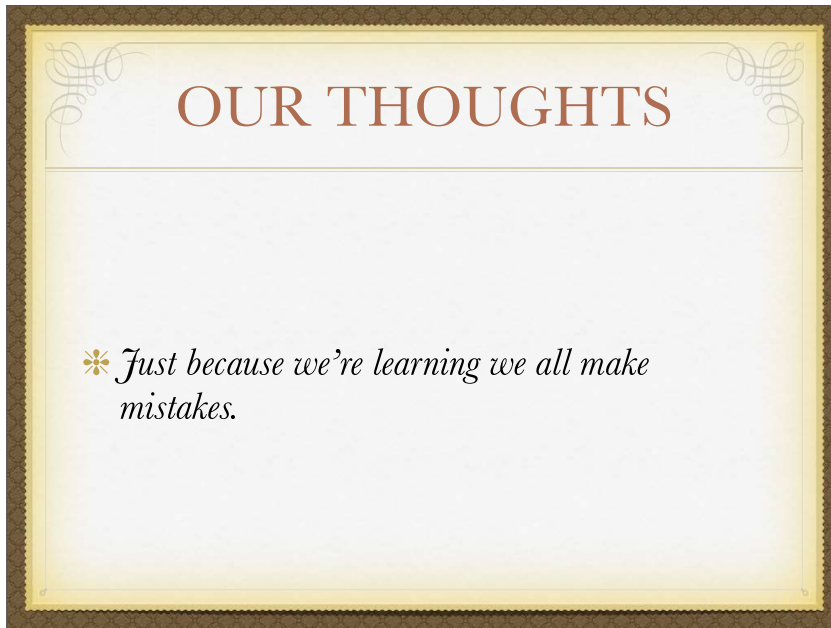
Monday, August 5, 2013



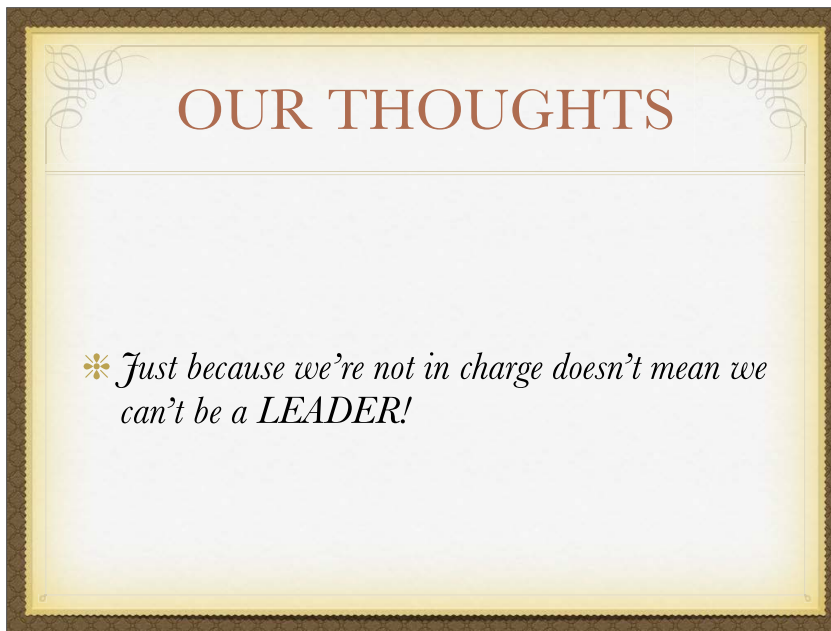
Monday, August 5, 2013



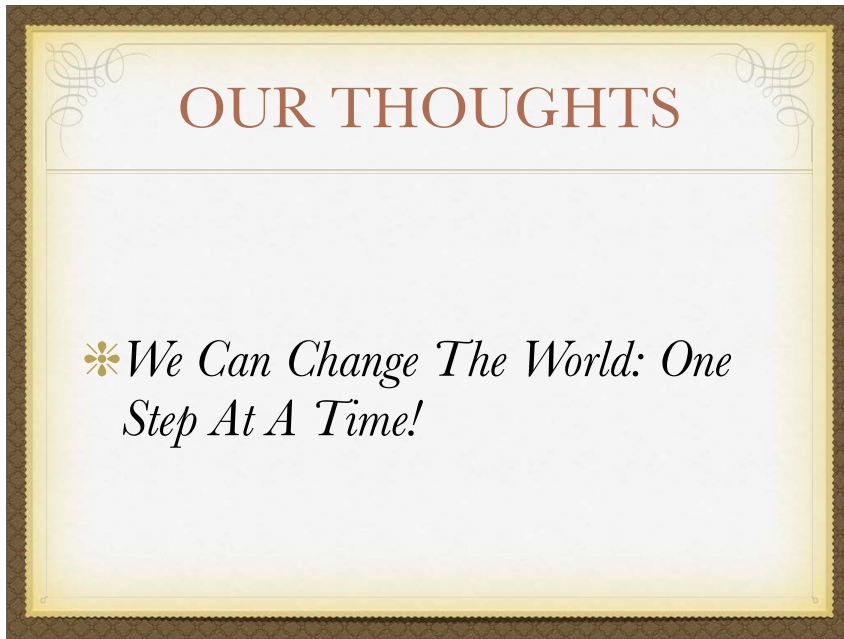
Monday, August 5, 2013



Monday, August 5, 2013



Monday, August 5, 2013



Monday, August 5, 2013

Poster: Participants chose all related images and words on their own.





Acceptance

accepting people for who they are.

Don't Judge!

Celebrate differences!

accept other people and don't leave people out.

it's about what's in the inside.

be happy to be different from others.

smile

TOGETHER WE CAN CHANGE THE WORLD.



TIME

Integrity

were not perfect
we all make mistakes.

Strength
of
Character

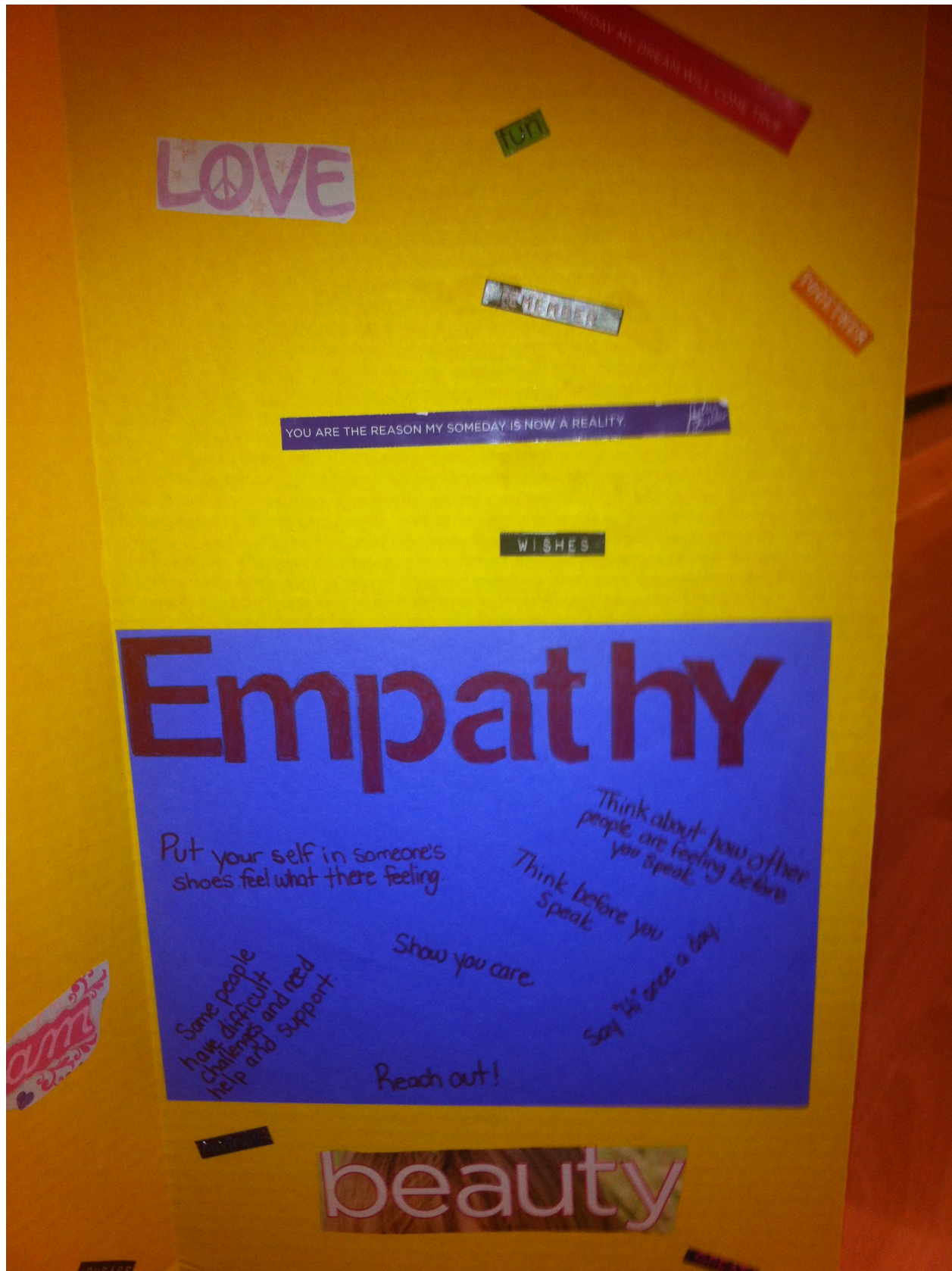
Tell the
TRUTH.

Honesty

Stand up for whats right.

Don't be afraid
to admit your mistakes









friends



The best piece of advice I ever received was:
from the Alanis Morissette song "You Learn."



You live you learn
You love you learn
You cry you learn
You lose you learn

When I was 17, my dream was: this—the way my life is right now!



Never, ever, ever compare yourself to beautiful girls. There's always someone gorgeous who will make you feel like you're not. It's a total confidence buster!

The first step toward making your dream a reality is: realizing what that dream is. It will be the one thing you never want to stop doing.

“Being fearless isn't being 100 percent not fearful. It's being terrified—and jumping anyway.”

by Taylor Swift

HOL



Appendix C

Field Notes

Field Notes Related to Individual Interviews

- I observed character education efforts in the school: the five values (acceptance, empathy, responsibility, respect, and integrity) were posted, Roots of Empathy (a character education initiative) display, the awards assembly was occurring one of the interview days and a research participant had received an award (she mentioned it, but did not seem very excited)
- the students showed a willingness and an interest in participating and answering the questions
- engaged well and shared willingly
- the students did not seem to be aware of what character education was; there appeared to be some nervousness about not knowing this
- I found myself feeling very excited about engaging with the students and discussing these very important issues with them
- I was surprised by some of their answers (e.g., not feeling like they should make all of the decisions themselves); I thought they might have been a little more demanding; I also did not expect them to acknowledge the importance of discipline
- worked to be careful to ask open-ended, non-leading questions; to be aware of my biases related to children's participatory rights and character; tried to ask questions in such a way that the children were free to truly share their opinion; their openness and excitement may have been an indication that I accomplished this for the most part (e.g., that they were really sharing their ideas)
- Ideas to explore further during the group interview: How do you know somebody has good/bad character? What does your school do right now to teach good character? What else could they do? What does the school do to include you in decisions? What decisions would you like to participate in?

Field Notes Related to the Pre-Activity Group Interview

- students noted that the values were posted in the school, but indicated that nobody pays attention to it; that they aren't taught and are just decoration; the students were very adamant about the activity (the social action project for this research study that the children were to decide upon themselves) being a presentation to their school about what these values mean
- even after I suggested some other possibilities (e.g., charity work, doing a play, etc.), they insisted that this was what they wanted to do; they seemed very passionate about this
- the students required very little assistance from this researcher; they occasionally asked about definitions for some words; I helped glue and cut
- students worked to create the slide show and poster presentations simultaneously; they organized themselves according to interests and strengths (e.g., the student with the neatest printing was in charge of doing that for the poster, the ones who were best with computers worked on the slide show); a couple stood out as taking more of a leadership role
- students checked in with one another and praised each other as they went along; "You're doing such a great job;" "What do you guys think about...;" they were polite, cooperative, and collaborative
- students mentioned that they were not necessarily used to working with the other participants and that they really enjoyed the experience of collaborating together
- on a number of occasions, students expressed excitement about the project; they mentioned that they looked forward to meeting; expressed pride about the activity and felt that they were doing something really important

- things to explore after the presentation: How did you feel about doing the activity? How do you feel the activity is related to character education? How do you think the activity is related to children's rights? What did you learn? What do you think others learned? What were you hoping to accomplish? Do you have ideas about other things you could do in terms of character education and children's rights?
- the classroom teacher approached me to share that an unplanned discussion occurred within the classroom after some bullying occurred; she noted that the students who were participating in this study talked a lot about character during this discussion; she requested that the students do a presentation to their class and facilitate further discussion; this was discussed with the participants and they agreed to share their poster and discuss the issues with their class; this was scheduled to occur after the slide show presentation to the school

Field Notes Related to the Post-Activity Group Interview

- the day of the presentation; the students indicated that they felt good; felt like they may have taught some things; had an influence; inspired some people
- noted that they felt inspired themselves to be better people after this activity and talking about character
- felt like leaders on the issue
- seemed to feel empowered; the students appeared quite different by the end of this study in the sense that some showed greater confidence (e.g., willingness to share their opinions, presented to the school in spite of nervousness)
- it would seem that providing children with the opportunity to take the lead may lead to more powerful change, especially in themselves; they felt empowered and wanted to lead by

example; notably, throughout this activity nothing was taught to them - it was simply the exploring and sharing of their ideas

- interestingly, the system appeared curious about and interested in their ideas
- in terms of character education, perhaps just having the conversations may be the most important part - along with giving children the opportunity to truly lead and share ideas
- during the poster presentation to their class (at the request of the teacher), the participants presented the poster and talked about what we had been doing; the other students asked some questions and there was some general discussion about character, bullying, rights; the participants were vocal, assertive, self-assured (even those who were previously shy)