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THE EFFECTS OF USING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE TO TEACH POSITIVE  
CHARACTER TRAITS TO ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

by  
Christopher Dimakos

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Science in Teaching Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University

Approved by  
Advisor

Date Approved July 10, 2006

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## ABSTRACT

Christopher M. Dimakos

### THE EFFECTS OF USING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE TO TEACH POSITIVE CHARACTER TRAITS TO ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

2005/06

Dr. David Hesse

Master of Science in Teaching

The purposes of this investigation were to determine (a) the effects of using children's literature to increase positive character traits in elementary students; and (b) how character education can be taught to elementary students through the use of children's literature. The researcher chose six character traits to be used throughout the study. Each week a variety of children's literature pertaining to that week's trait was read to the class. After readings, class discussions and role playing activities were held. Students were given a pre/post assessment to judge student learning of positive character traits throughout the study. The results of this study have shown that children's literature is an effective tool to implement positive character traits in elementary students.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. David Hesse for all of his help, support and guidance throughout the writing of this thesis. I would also like to thank my fellow Co-Teach colleagues for the all of their support, encouragement, and laughter these past five years. Last, but not least I would like to thank my family for all of their unconditional love and support as I worked towards attaining my Master's Degree.

## Table of Contents

Chapter I	Introduction	
	Importance of the Study	1
	The Statement of the Problem	2
	Definition	3
	Limitations of the Study	3
	Organization of the Remaining Chapters	3
Chapter II	Review of Related Literature	
	Teaching and Implementing Character Education	4
	Using Children's Literature to Teach and Implement Character Education	10
	Innovative Programs Using Children's Literature for Character Education	13
Chapter III	Methodology	
	Context	15
	Research Paradigm	15
	Data Sources	16
	Data Analysis	17
	Limitations	17
Chapter IV	Findings	
	Introduction	18
Chapter V	Discussion	
	Introduction	25
	Conclusion	25
	Recommendations for Further Research	27
	Implications for Teaching	28
References		30
Appendix: IRB Application		31

## List of Tables

Table 1	Pre and Post Test Results	20
Table 2	Increase in Mean Scores from Pre-Test to Post Test	21
Table 3	Pre and Post Scores of Student's Positive Social Behavior	22

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Importance of the Study

The world around is in a constant state of change, and to keep up with these changes, education has to adjust. In schools around the country, teachers and school administrators see the constant need to redirect students in terms of social behavior. Teachers are not only trying to keep up with a curriculum that is leaning more and more to standardized testing, but are also dealing with challenging student attitude and morale. There are many factors leading to a student's lack of moral values and his/her inability to solve problems in a peaceful, responsible way. Two significant factors can be considered. The first factor is the breakdown of the family due to divorce (the divorce rate has more than doubled during the late 1960's to 1990's). Single parents are becoming so absorbed with day to day activities that moral training is being overlooked (Likona, 2004). A second factor leading to the lack of moral values is the overexposure to mass media depicting violence and sexual content that can negatively influence young students' minds. Research has found that players who had prior experience playing violent video games respond with an increased level of aggression when they encountered confrontation (Bushman & Anderson, 2002). An increase of violent crimes combined with an average of youth viewing television at 20 hours a week is causing a serious problem with young students and moral development. (Likona, 2004) Because of the huge lack of moral education from other institutions, schools across the United States must pick up the slack and help teach values of character to our children.

To address this failure, values such as honesty, patriotism, respect, care, and responsibility should be taught to young children (Likona, Lewis, & Schaps, 2003). The

teaching of values cannot wait until students are in high school; the earlier character education programs are implemented in a students' educational career the better. (Likona, 2004) Character Education has been found to reduce absenteeism, school failures, and behavior problems. It has also been associated with pro-social behavior, bonding to school, moral reasoning skills and academic motivation.(Berkowitz, & Bier, 2004)

Moral values and reasoning can be taught through the use of children's literature. Children's books can easily be used as models for appropriate social behavior. Story books help children relate to characters and experiences on their intellectual and maturity level. Children's literature provides excellent examples from which students can learn; whether it is conflict resolution, sharing, or daily activities, children's stories are a great resource for young students.

Teachers may find the teaching of character education by using children's literature an interesting, and rewarding experience for both the students and themselves.

### The Statement of the Problem

This study will determine the effects of using children's literature to increase positive character traits in elementary students. The following research sub questions will also be explored:

1. How can children's literature be used to effectively teach moral traits to elementary students?
2. Does the use of children's literature increase positive social behavior?



### Definition

Certain terms will be used throughout this thesis and in order to establish a common meaning, are defined below.

Character Education: An effort by schools, communities, and families to assist children in understanding, caring about and acting upon a core of ethical values. Values such as responsibility, respect, fairness, self- control, compassion, honesty, and forgiveness are the focus (Aldridge, 2000).

### Limitations of the Study

The following issues will limit the effectiveness of the study.

1. Given the time frame allotted for this study the research must be conducted during the length of the researcher's student teaching.
2. The class size may represent a population too small to make broad generalizations.

### Organization of the Remaining Chapters

Chapter 2 of this thesis will provide a review of the related literature discussing character education and the use of children's literature to teach positive character traits. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology and implementation of the study using children's literature to increase positive character traits in elementary students. The data collected from the study in Chapter 3 will be analyzed and discussed in Chapter 4. Recommendations for future research on character education and the use of children's literature will be discussed in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

For many years educators have struggled with the teaching of values in the classroom. Character education was always considered to be taught at home by the family. However, not only is this not happening, but it has become a responsibility of schools today. Students increasingly show evidence of a lack in responsibility, respect, and ethics and this is a major concern of educators. (Likona, 2004)

Character education can be defined as an effort by schools, communities, and families to assist children in understanding, caring about and acting upon a core of ethical values. It is about teaching students how to make wise decisions and to act on them (Bohlin, Farmer & Ryan, 2001). According to the Character Education Partnership a holistic approach to character development “seeks to develop the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of moral life.” Through character education students learn to act upon core values by developing pro-social, moral behaviors.

This chapter is separated into three sections. The first section deals with character education and provides a history of why it is needed and how it can be used. The second section addresses the use of literature as a resourceful tool with which to teach and implement character education in elementary classrooms. The third section addresses children’s literature -based character education programs and how they can be used.

### Teaching and Implementing Character Education

Character Education is not a new subject or category of instruction. It can actually be dated back to the time of Socrates (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). In the United States it goes back as far the founding of the colonies (McClellan, 1999). In the United

States, Character Education became a topic of much interest during the early part of the twentieth century. However, interest waned in the middle of the twentieth century. Character Education did not return to the spotlight of educational research until the mid 1990's when President Clinton's State of the Union address inspired educators nationwide. His speech focused on 10 principles that were known as his "Call to Action for American Education", and his focus on Character Education was the sixth principle. In his 1997 State of the Union Address, Clinton was quoted as saying: "Character Education must be taught in schools. We must teach our children to be good citizens." ([www.law.ou.edu](http://www.law.ou.edu), 2005) All ten of his principles pushed those in the educational community to work hard to improve the quality of education that American children received as well as the citizens that American schools were graduating into the world.

From the mid 1960's to 1990's teen suicide tripled, the divorce rate more than doubled and *The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators* found that births to unmarried mothers increased more than 400 percent (Likona, 2004). According to the 2002 Report Card on the Ethics of American Youth ([www.josephsoninstitute.org](http://www.josephsoninstitute.org), 2005) three out of four students admitted to cheating on an exam in school, and that four in ten students said they would lie to get a "good job" (Likona, 2004). According to Likona these figures show a strong need for character based programs in our school systems.

Educators have been troubled by two main questions when considering Character Education: 1.) Whose values should be taught? and 2.) How can character be measured accurately? Bulach (1997) conducted a study to determine which traits should be taught. He developed a survey to measure the degree to which behaviors are associated with identified traits. The study involved a survey of parents and teachers in a K-12 school

system near Atlanta, Georgia to determine the traits valued by the community. The study was made up of 39 percent African Americans, 52 percent Caucasian, and 9 percent other students. Participants were asked to list those traits they thought should be taught in their school system; the results were then analyzed for the frequency with which each trait was listed.

Bulach (1999) found that teachers and students were in agreement on three important character values to teach: respect for self and others, honesty, and self control. Bulach then asked 130 teachers to list behaviors they would see if a student modeled or did not model those character traits. The instrument that was produced from this study has been used in over 220 schools. (Bulach & Butler, 2002) Students who are exposed to a Character Education curriculum show higher rates of positive behavior, and politeness (Bulach, 2002); however, a weakness found in the study showed that increased positive traits did not last or remain with all students. To overcome this deficiency, Character Education traits must be carried throughout the curriculum and modeled throughout the year with as many real life situations as possible. (Bulach, 2002)

Character Education has been demonstrated to be associated with academic motivation, and aspirations, academic achievement, pro-social behavior, bonding to school, conflict resolution skills, and moral reasoning skills (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). Character Education has also been demonstrated to reduce absenteeism, discipline referrals, pregnancy, school failure, anxiety, and substance abuse. (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004)

Many educators find themselves asking: "If we invest time in developing and implementing a character education program, will academic success improve?" The

answer is yes, student learning will improve (Likona, 2004). Likona found there are two main components that will produce a successful academic and character education: “1) the school’s character education program improves the quality of human relationships between adults and children, and children and each other thereby improving the environment for teaching and learning; 2) and the character education plan includes a strong academic program that teaches students the skills and habits of working hard and making the most of their education.” (Likona, 2004) The Character Education Partnership’s annual National Schools of Character ([www.character.org](http://www.character.org), 2005) explains that schools across the country began character education because of low student achievement and frequent discipline problems, and saw test scores improve along with a decline in discipline problems after implementation began.

A component of student achievement is linked to a strong connection or bonding to one’s school. Whether one calls it attachment or bonding, there has been evidence of this occurring from preschool through high school; an attachment of a student to his or her class, teacher, and school is a critical factor in the effectiveness of Character Education (Berkowitz & Bier, 2000). Research by the Child Development Project has shown that the effectiveness of a character education program in the elementary setting is mediated by the degree to which students view their classrooms and schools as “caring communities” (Solomon et al, 2000). The Child Development Project has also reported that a students’ sense of classroom community is strongly related to the teachers’ use of character and cooperative learning.

There are those in the field of education who are quite enthusiastic about incorporating Character Education into their schools. Bohlin, Farmer, and Ryan (2001)

suggest that there exist 5 main arguments for the implementation of Character Education. The first argument is Inevitability. Bohlin, Farmer, and Ryan state that “children cannot enter the educational system at age four and stay until age seventeen without having their character and moral values profoundly affected by the experience, for better or worse.” (2001) Bohlin, et. al feel that educators should be intentional about helping children to develop good habits (or virtues) and to struggle against bad ones. The second argument for character education is based on the beliefs of our nation’s founders, who felt that the new republic must make character education a high priority. (Bohlin et. al, 2001) The third argument in favor of character education can be found in state codes (or laws) of education. The fourth argument for the teaching of character is actually based on the will of the citizens of the United States. Bohlin, et al. state that the Gallup Organization and other polling companies reported the American people feel that the following should be addressed in our public schools honesty (97 percent), democracy (93 percent), acceptance of people of different races and ethnic backgrounds (91 percent), patriotism (91 percent), caring for friends and family members (91 percent), moral courage (91 percent), and the Golden Rule (90 percent). (2001) The fifth argument for the teaching of character is based on the teachings of the some of the world’s greatest thinkers such as: Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Confucius, Lao-tzu, and Buddha whose teachings advocate giving our conscious attention to character formation. (Bohlin, Farmer & Ryan 2001, 6-7)

For Character Education to be truly successful it must be implemented throughout the entire school. An important way for students to learn good character traits is by simply observing those around them. Teachers, faculty, and staff members need to model the values of character that they want their student to exhibit. (Fixler, 2002) Teachers

serve as excellent and very important role models for students; if a student witnesses teachers helping each other, and acting as team players he or she can learn from example. Not only teachers, but all school employees, including administration, secretaries, and custodians are observed by students on a daily basis; if they model positive behavior and encourage students to not only do well academically but to exhibit positive character traits, students' positive social behavior will surely increase. (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004)

Bohlin, Farmer, and Ryan (2001) developed a checklist entitled *Little Things and Lesser Places* to be used to help educators evaluate and improve the little things and lesser places that affect a school and its character development. The checklist is separated into six sections which include: school bus, hallways, study hall, lavatories, playground, and cafeteria. If there are items that are not being checked off, then they require attention as to how they could be improved. An example of an item from the hallway section is: "Teachers and administrators make eye contact with students and greet them in the hallways." (Bohlin, Farmer, and Ryan 2001, 34-35). Another example from the cafeteria checklist reads: "Teachers and other adults in the school speak with students and visit tables for friendly conversation during lunchtime". (Bohlin, et. al 2001, 35)

There is a need for teachers, parents, and administrators to care: to care for their students, and to create a school culture of care (Doyle and Doyle, 2003). To do this caring "becomes an integral part of the curriculum and uses metacognitive strategies so that students not only act as if they care but also to understand and reflect on issues of caring" (Dolye and Doyle, 2003, p. 259). Character Education isn't just about teaching

or talking about caring for oneself or others, or being a good citizen; it is also about genuinely caring for students and showing how important care can be.

### Using Children's Literature to Teach and Implement Character Education

Using literature in the elementary classroom is an effective tool for many reasons. Many teachers incorporate real literature into their curriculum to help students see literature outside of the basal. Many students enjoy reading novels or chapter books because they feel successful completing a book and can find characters that they relate to. The use of children's literature to assist in teaching Character Education is extremely powerful and popular. "Children's literature plays an important function in introducing children to the world outside their immediate lives" (Lamme, Krogh & Yachmetz, 1992 p. 13).

Children attend to many different things when reading or listening to a story. Some relate to a character or set of characters; others may be reminded by the setting of experiences in their lives; while most students can be easily entranced by the illustrations of the book. (Lamme, Krogh & Yachmetz, 1992). Reading and listening to literature, whether it is a picture book, or chapter book can influence children's lives before problems occur and provide strategies for dealing with moral issues. Through these literary experiences, children can be taught moral values and moral reasoning.

Not only does the reading or listening of literature affect children's moral development, but the activities that teachers connect with a particular story encourage character growth. Children's literature stimulates writing, speaking, and facilitates tapping into each child's feelings; this creates a great opportunity to address character building skills. Thoughtful discussion, writing, reflecting, and sharing of books can help



children acquire more sophisticated aspects of moral behavior (Lamme, Krogh & Yachmetz, 1992). Literature is extremely effective in helping children see things from other perspectives. Young children, usually at the more egocentric stages of development, tend to view the world from their own perspectives and cannot see other points of view. The use of literature can be a non-threatening, fun way for children to see the world from a different view.

An activity that is not only enjoyable for children, whether early elementary or upper elementary, but very effective in understanding someone's position or feelings is role playing. Role playing is an aspect of cooperative learning that can be used throughout the curriculum and with many different story books. Krogh and Lamme (1985) found that using role playing to act out a part of a story involving choosing behaviors and their consequences can lead to the development of empathy, and the "ability to reason from more than one point of view." (p. 21)

Jalongo (2004) discusses how the use of a picture book in a kindergarten classroom can be extremely effective. In the picture book *A Bargain for Frances* by Russell Hoban (1975) characters trade items; one of the items was called bad because it was a broken tea set. The message of the story focused on fair play and was not missed by the students. They criticized the tricky character in the book for being "mean", "sneaky", "not nice", and a "cheater". The use of a simple picture book can be instrumental in the teaching of a subtle lesson to an entire class. Thus the power of storytelling becomes an essential way that humans process and share events as well as feelings surrounding those events and experiences (Jalongo, 2004)

Picture books at any grade level along with quality literature will help students “move beyond literal to critical understanding” of literature and daily events (O’Sullivan 2004). Using literature in a Character Education program must include well written books that contain moral dilemmas, books that have enough depth to allow a move from the literal comprehension, books that have admirable but believable characters around the same age as the students, and books that touch on a wide range of cultures that include both girls and boys as lead characters. (O’Sullivan 2004) Moral developmental theorists such as Piaget, Kohlberg, and Wynne “accept that the literature students read will instill character traits in them unconsciously, even if they are never discussed or addressed directly in the classroom.” (O’Sullivan, 2004, p. 641) Many teachers use literature because it so helpful in implementing Character Education and will easily tie into their academic curriculum. As students read or participate in a literary experience they begin to make connections from the literature to real life experiences. Kohlberg, Piaget, and Vgotsky argue that “children will continue to develop their moral codes during their school age years, and that development for good or ill, will take place during these early years.” (O’Sullivan 2004) O’Sullivan and Jalongo (2004) agree that the deeper and richer the literature and the stronger the characters, the easier it will be for students to pick up character traits and to make connections into their daily lives.

Using literature has also been found to be very effective in deepening student responses. When children read text from a basal they usually just read to answer comprehension questions; however, in reading a piece of literature they can read to know the characters, the plot and the experiences felt by characters. Along with feeling excited about reading a “real book” students are making connections to novels; they learn that

reading can be enjoyable and helpful, that it does not need to be done through a text book. Students often respond fuller in written form, as well as conduct quality discussions (Lamme, Krogh & Yachmetz, 1992).

### Innovative Programs Using Children's Literature for Character Education

Lamme, Krogh, and Yachmetz (1992) establish themes that can be taught through the use of children's literature at different grade levels. One of the most basic traits of character education is for students to feel good about themselves- to have self esteem. Books dealing with self esteem discuss different themes or experiences that children encounter, for example, being different from someone, or having patience and understanding (Lamme, Krogh, & Yachmetz, 1992). Further pieces of children's literature can be easily included in any grade's literacy program with fun and innovative activities that foster both academic skills and character building skills (Lamme, Krogh, & Yacmetz, 1992).

Picture books can bring an awareness of character concepts to students in many different forms. Young children especially enjoy stories that utilize animals and imaginary characters. Stories such as *The Mixed Up Chameleon* by Erik Carle, *Cathedral Mouse*, by Kay Charo, *Berlioz the Bear*, by Jan Brett, and *Stone Soup* by Marcia Brown, all carry messages concerning values such as self esteem, responsibility, and sharing. Lamme et. al (1992) state that a unique and successful way to teach conflict resolution and respect of others is through the use of children's literature. For example, *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman has been found to be extremely powerful with young readers (Lamme, Krogh, & Yachmetz 1992). This lovely story discusses a young girls

determination to do and become anything she wants to. It is a great story to use to inspire young readers to reach for their goals and the story also discusses tolerance.

O'Sullivan (2004) implemented a literature-based program to teach character education. O'Sullivan established criteria for choosing appropriate literature to reach her goal of teaching positive character traits while also incorporating core curriculum standards. The literature selected helped to increase awareness and appreciation of others, cooperation, courage, and responsibility. Some activities O'Sullivan found engaging for students and helpful to reach her goals included journaling, students creating their own book, and graphing skills such as creating a Venn diagram to compare and contrast characters in the stories.

Character education has proven to be highly effective in teaching and is needed throughout our nation's schools. Likona (2004) found that not only is character education effective by increasing positive character traits in elementary students, but has also shown an improvement in student learning.

In conclusion, there are many benefits to using children's literature to teach character education to all grade levels. Children's literature is a valuable tool to connect the students to what is being taught as well as to make a lasting impression of positive traits. Children's literature is extremely easy to access and should be utilized as much as possible with all subject matter. Character education has proven to be an effective tool in developing moral leaders in America's school system (Berkowitz, Bier 2004).

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Context

This study will take place at an elementary school in Gloucester Township, New Jersey. The population of the study as assigned for my student teaching placement is a regular first grade classroom. This study will take place during my student teaching experience from March 2006 to May 2006.

### Research Paradigm

This study will examine the use of children's literature in a character education program; more specifically the use of children's literature as an effective tool in implementing positive character traits in elementary students. Research for this study will be composed of interviews, a pre and post test of the students, and an introduction of positive character traits. Throughout the six weeks of this study, the researcher will introduce a specific character trait each week through a variety of literature centering on that specific trait. Along with reading selected pieces of literature the researcher will conduct group discussions with students and also engage students in role playing activities.

The paradigm for this study will use a qualitative approach. When using a qualitative approach, the inquirer collects open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data. (Creswell, 2003, p. 18) This approach will be effective because character education cannot just be observed or watched; to learn the effectiveness of children's literature on character traits student interviews, group discussions and literature based assignments play an integral part in the evaluation

process. According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) teacher research can be defined as a systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work. This definition of teacher research applies to this study, because it will involve and affect my own student's and their school. This method of teacher research will also contribute to my knowledge of teaching by allowing me to examine how my students perceive and apply character traits in their every day lives. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992) A variety of children's literature including picture books and poetry anthologies will be used to help introduce positive character traits to the sample population of 1<sup>st</sup> grade students.

### Data Sources

Interviews with students and cooperating teachers who interact with this group of students on a daily basis will be conducted. Interviews will be very effective for data collection because they will allow me to ask specific questions concerning the students, what types of character education they have experienced as well as what pieces of literature involving positive character traits they have been exposed to. Interviews will also be important because they will allow me to examine how character education is viewed and if participants have changed at all throughout the study. Character charts and literature summaries will prove to be helpful in this study for two reasons: first because they will help students develop their own thinking and writing skills, and secondly they will allow students to express what they have learned and how they understand specific character traits. Observations of student responses to pieces of literature and possible role playing activities may be used to help study the effectiveness of children's literature in the increase of positive character traits. Role playing will be an effective method of evaluating student responses to certain character traits by allowing

me to establish a scenario and having students work out certain problems that may arise and also by letting students demonstrate specific positive character traits such as sharing or being a responsible student. The researcher received IRB approval in March, 2006.. The research instruments are also included in the Appendix.

### Data Analysis

Collected data will be used to chart student responses to character traits that are introduced and explained through selected literature. The student responses along with a pre and post- test will evaluate possible increases in student's positive traits.

### Limitations

The time spent with students, the assigned classroom sample, the size of the sample population and any prior knowledge of positive character traits will affect student performance throughout the study. Student bias towards certain character traits or stories may play a role in this study as well.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### Introduction

The study was implemented in a first grade classroom consisting of eleven students at an elementary school in southern New Jersey. The site was chosen because of the researcher's student teaching placement. Out of the eleven students that participated three were girls and eight were boys. The students in the class came from lower socio-economic and culturally diverse backgrounds. The school's overall ethnic population is composed of the following: 61.5% white/non-Hispanic, 28.5% black/non-Hispanic, 6% Hispanic, 3.6% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.5% Native American. The school enrolls students from kindergarten through grade 5 and has about 787 students.

This study measured the increase of student knowledge of positive character traits through the use of children's literature. The researcher read a variety of children's literature throughout the course of the six week study that addressed different aspects of positive character traits. After the literature was read, class discussions were held focusing on the specific trait that was designated for each week. Role playing and other activities were held for the students to look at and understand specific positive character traits. Students were also observed throughout the entirety of this study in a variety of settings throughout the school.

Data was collected through the use of surveys, interviews, and a pre and post test. The pre test was administered during the first week of the study. The post-test was administered after the completion of the sixth week. Both of the tests were identical in what questions were asked. Questions on the test applied student's knowledge of the terms tolerance, cooperation, honesty, self-control, trust, and perseverance.



The pre/post test was made up of eight questions. The test was scored using an answer key designed by the researcher. The test was given to the students in small groups and was guided by the researcher. The first question which eleven out of eleven students scored correctly on both the pre and post-tests, asks the students to identify a conflict. Students had to circle one out of three pictures which showed children engaged in a conflict.

Question number two presents three pictures that need to be put into numerical order to demonstrate conflict escalation. Three out of eleven students scored correctly on the pre-test, and seven out of eleven scored correctly on the post-test.

The third question which nine out of eleven students scored correctly for the pre-test, and eleven out of eleven students scored correctly on the post-test asks students about respect. Students had to answer the question “Being respectful is listening while someone is talking”, to which students had to answer yes or no.

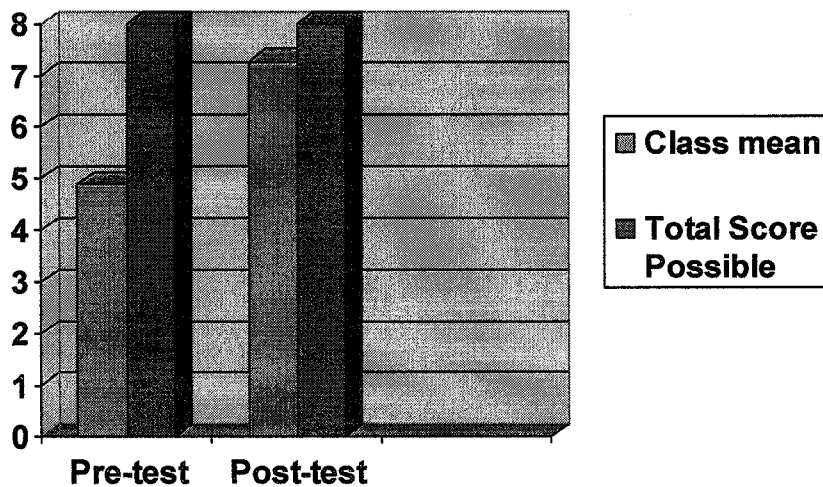
Question number four asks the student about perseverance. Three out of eleven students got number four correct on the pre test, and eight out of eleven students were correct on number four on the post-test. The question asked students “Does perseverance help you do something that is not easy?” with the correct response being yes. Knowing that only three students answered this question correctly on the pre-test demonstrated that many students were unfamiliar with the term perseverance.

Question number five asks “Are you honest when you hide something from a friend?” Out of eleven students, four answered correctly on the pre test, and eight answered correctly on the post-test. The sixth question asks “When I keep my hands to myself, I am using self-control?” Students had to answer yes or no; five students

answered correctly on the pre test and eight answered correctly on the post-test. Question number seven has a picture of blind folded students following a student who can see and asks if the picture shows trust. For question number seven, seven out of eleven answered correctly on the pre test, and eight out of eleven answered correctly on the post-test. The last question, which all eleven students answered correctly on both the pre and post-tests has a picture showing children playing and asks about cooperation.

Tables 1 and 2 provide information pertinent to answering the question “Does the use of children’s literature increase positive social behavior?” These tables show the mean results of the pre and post testing that evaluated the students increased understanding of positive social behavior. The first table shows the results of the pre and post-test scores and their mean’s. Table 1 shows that the class mean for the pre-test was 4.9 and for the post-test was 7.27.

Table 1: Pre and Post test Results

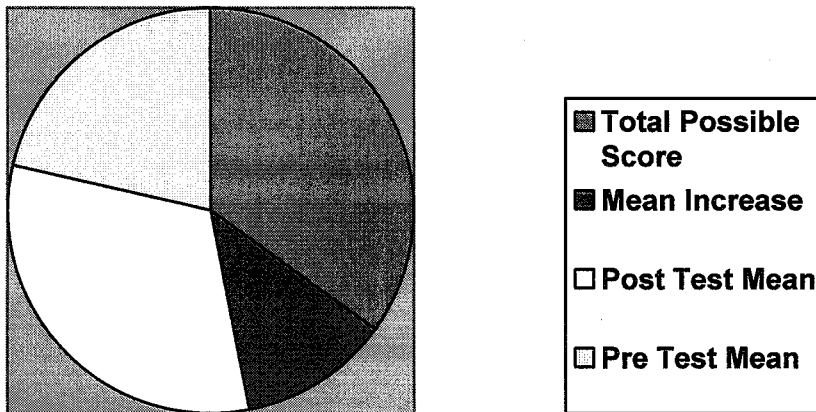


Total Possible Score: 8  
Pre Test Mean: 4.9

## Post Test Mean: 7.27

Table 2 displays the results of the pre and post-test with regards to their mean scores as well as the mean increase from the pre-test to the post test. This increase supports that students have a greater understanding of positive character traits.

Table 2: Increase in Mean Scores from Pre-Test to Post Test



Total Possible Score: 8  
Mean Increase: 2.37  
Post Test Mean: 7.27  
Pre Test Mean: 4.9

Table 3 offers information pertaining to each character trait addressed on both the pre and post –tests. Each question is represented by a vocabulary term addressed during the study, for example the term “respect” represents the question “Being respectful is listening while someone is talking”. The table shows the percentage of each question answered correctly on both the pre and post-test. This table illustrates the growth from the conception of this study. Two of the traits discussed: perseverance and honesty

showed the greatest amount of growth (50%). This suggests that students demonstrated an improvement in patience, working hard towards a goal, as well as telling the truth, and knowing when one is being honest with oneself. The two traits of conflict and cooperation both earned a score of 100% on both the pre and post-tests. This suggests that students had a strong previous knowledge of both traits and were also able to use that previous knowledge throughout the study.

Table 3: Pre and Post Scores of Student’s Positive Social Behavior (N=11)

	Pre	Post	Increase
Conflict	100%	100%	0%
Conflict Escalation	25%	63%	38%
Respect	75%	100%	25%
Perseverance	25%	75%	50%
Honesty	38%	88%	50%
Self Control	50%	88%	38%
Trust	63%	88%	25%
Cooperation	100%	100%	0%

The question “How can children’s literature be used effectively to teach moral traits to elementary students?” was posed to teachers in the school where the study was implemented. A questionnaire was used to derive this information and asked teachers how they use or teach character education in their classrooms, and also if they feel that children’s literature is an effective tool in teaching positive character traits. During my

study I found that all of the teachers interviewed use character education in their classrooms. Teachers also explained how children's literature along with discussions, role playing and small activities proves to be an extremely helpful tool in the teaching of positive character traits to elementary students. Teachers stated how literature along with modeling positive behavior throughout the school allows for students to learn by example.

The questionnaire that teachers answered asked 4 questions. The first question asked how teachers incorporate character education into their classrooms. 9 out of 10 teachers stated that they try to incorporate it into every lesson possible, whether through following rules based on positive character traits, modeling positive behavior, praising students for demonstrating good character, and leading class discussions about positive character traits. Some specific answers included: "I take advantage of classroom incidents and use them as teachable moments. I also read books that have characters dealing with challenging problems and making proper choices." Another teacher responded to question one by saying: "I use literature, praise, and encouragement to model positive character to my students."

The second question asked teachers, "What benefits, if any do you find with the teaching of character education?" 10 out of 10 teachers found benefits of teaching character education Responses included: showing students how to get along with one another, creating a positive classroom environment, teaching traits that can be used throughout life, and improving student self esteem. One teacher in particular said: "I believe I am helping to create better citizens who make better choices and are more compassionate."

The third question asked teachers, "What are some positive traits that you feel are important to demonstrate to your students?" Teacher's responses included: respect, cooperation, patience, sense of humor, sharing, self control, and tolerance.

The fourth question asked teachers if they feel that a school wide character education program would be beneficial. Every teacher responded in the affirmative. Some of the responses also indicated that a school wide program would be beneficial because many students do not have positive role models at home. A school wide program would promote more acts of kindness and would allow for more opportunities to help improve student self esteem. Some responses also discussed that a school wide program would give children the opportunity to become better citizens in society, as well as help improve students' motivation to learn and improve a student's quality of education. One teacher in particular responded to this question by saying: "When a school is unified in their expectations it boosts morale, encourages children to make wise choices, and improves students' attitudes towards their classmates and learning."

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Introduction

The data collected throughout this study as described in this chapter were guided by two research questions presented in this study. The study examined the effectiveness of using children's literature to implement positive traits in elementary students, as well as how children's literature can be used to teach positive traits in elementary students. The data will determine if the students showed improvement in their understanding of positive social skills as well as an increase in positive social behavior.

### Conclusion

The increase of scores from the pre to post test of students shows a growth of student knowledge and understanding of positive character traits. The scores also demonstrate that the use of children's literature along with group discussions is an effective tool to implement and help children understand positive character traits. The increase of scores on the post test shows both knowledge and understanding of positive traits; however actual student application of positive traits after the post- test was given is unknown given the length of the researchers involvement with the class.

The answers to the teacher questionnaire demonstrate that character education is a worthwhile cause, and can be used throughout the day in many different lessons as well as different situations. Teacher answers have also shown the importance of having a school wide character education program; that students can benefit from the exposure and learning of positive character traits. Specific answers from teachers included: "I believe I am helping to create better citizens who make better choices and are more compassionate", "When a school is unified in their expectations it boosts morale,

encourages children to make wise choices, and improve students' attitudes towards their classmates and learning", and also, "Character education is definitely beneficial, fine character leads to a fine community." Teacher answers for the questionnaire as well as interviews helped show how children's literature can be used as a means to help implement positive traits. One teacher in particular who uses literature as a way to open most lessons involving character education had the following to say, "I read books that have characters dealing with challenging problems and making positive choices."

Data collected from this study has shown that the use of children's literature helps increase the learning of positive character traits among elementary students. These findings support the studies of O'Sullivan (2004) and Jalongo (2004) that indicate the use of children's literature helps to bring awareness to and allows for an understanding of positive character traits in elementary students.

Tables One, Two, and Three demonstrate an increase in student understanding of positive character traits. Table Three shows each character trait that was introduced during the study along with the percent of how many students understood the trait and by how much that understanding grew by the end of the study. This data helps explain that by using children's literature along with group discussions and activities such as role playing student's will gain an understanding of positive character traits.

This study has shown that children's literature is an effective tool to teach character education to elementary students. It has also shown that those in the field of education feel that character education is an important and much needed element in elementary education. Data collected from this study focusing on using character education in the elementary schools supports the findings of Bohlin, Farmer, and Ryan



(2001) who suggest 5 main arguments for the use of character education in the elementary school system. Data collected from this study also supports the findings of Fixler (2002) who suggests teachers and other adults who model positive traits serves as an important example for young students. Data represented in tables one through three also help support the findings of Lamme, Krogh, and Yachmetz (1992) which suggests that thoughtful discussion, writing, reflecting, and sharing of books can help children acquire more sophisticated aspects of moral behavior.

This study has shown that character education can be implemented using a variety of children's literature throughout the elementary curriculum. It has also proven that teachers find it to be worthwhile cause. This study is important to the field of elementary education because it supports the research conducted by Bulach and Butler (2002) which suggests that students that students exposed to a character education program show higher rates of positive behavior, and politeness, as well as an eagerness to learn is true.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

It is important to note the number of students involved in this study was small. A sample of 11 students is not enough to prove how effective the use of children's literature is on the implementing of character education. A larger sample population would be helpful in implementing the study. The amount of time spent with the students was not enough.

Character education needs to be presented on a constant basis and for the entire school year. The researcher spent only six weeks with the sample population. A longer length of time studying the students would have bolstered the study findings. By studying the sample population for a longer length of time more could have been done with the

participants, including more role playing as well as longer amounts of time to observe students in different settings displaying positive character traits.

The testing materials as well as the specific character traits chosen for this study may not have been comprehensive enough to validate the student's outcome. For future research other aspects of positive character should be considered as well as other selections of literature. The researcher would also recommend that parental involvement be included for future research as well. Children need to see positive character traits modeled and reinforced at home as well as in the school.

### Implications for Teaching

As a teacher in my own classroom, I would implement character education into every lesson possible. I would use a variety of children's literature to help implement and start discussions about particular traits. Role-playing activities surrounding a certain piece of literature would take place whenever possible. I would also model positive character to all of my students through my own behavior as well as the classroom community being created. Students would be praised for positive behavior and encouraged to be role models for other students throughout the school.

As a teacher, one should always take advantage of teachable moments; character education is a great way to mold our students through these moments. Not only would I take advantage of certain moments in my own classroom, but would act as a role model for others in the school. Character education should not be contained to only one classroom, it should be spread throughout the school building; forming a school wide program would be a crucial and worthwhile cause. Simply by acting as positive role models, teachers and staff can implement an effective school wide character education

program. Daily announcements and group activities would engage students across the grades in positive character building.

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## APPENDIX

Rowan University  
**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**  
**HUMAN RESEARCH REVIEW APPLICATION**

INSTRUCTIONS: Check all appropriate boxes, answer all questions completely, include

\_\_\_\_\_ attachments, and obtain appropriate signatures.

Reviewed: \_\_\_\_\_

Submit an **original and two copies** of the completed application to the Office of the Associate Provost.

**NOTE: Applications must be typed.**

Be sure to make a copy for your files.

FOR IRB USE ONLY:

Protocol Number: IRB-

Received: \_\_\_\_\_

Exemption: \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

Category(ies): \_\_\_\_\_

Approved \_\_\_\_\_ (date)

**Step 1: Is the proposed research subject to IRB review?**

All research involving human participants conducted by Rowan University faculty and staff is

subject to IRB review. Some, but not all, student-conducted studies that involve human participants

are considered research and are subject to IRB review. Check the accompanying instructions for more information. Then check with your class instructor for guidance as to whether you must submit your research protocol for IRB review.

If you determine that your research meets the above criteria and is not subject to IRB review, **STOP**. You do not need to apply. If you or your instructor have any doubts, apply for an IRB review.

**Step 2: If you have determined that the proposed research is subject to IRB review, complete the identifying information below.**

Project Title: The effects of using Children's Literature to increase positive character traits in elementary students.

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Approved For Use by Rowan IRB: 7/04

**Step 3: Determine whether the proposed research eligible for an *exemption* from a full IRB review.**

Federal regulations (45 CFR 46) permit the exemption of some types of research from a full IRB review.

If your research can be described by one or more of the categories listed below, check the appropriate category(ies), complete questions 1-5, and complete the Assurances on the last page of the application.

If your research cannot be described by any of these categories, your research is not exempt, and you must complete the entire "Human Research Review Application."

\_\_\_\_\_ **Category 1** - Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as: (a) research on regular and special education instructional strategies; or (b) research on the effectiveness of, or the comparison among, instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Category 2** - Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior, unless: (a) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that the human participants can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the participants; and (b) any disclosure of the human participants' responses outside the research could reasonably place the participants at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the participants' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

*(Note: Exemption for survey and interview procedures does not apply to research involving children. Exemption for observation of public behavior does not apply to research involving children except when the investigator does not participate in the activities being observed.)*

\_\_\_\_\_ **Category 3** - Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude,

achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under Category 2 above if: (a) the human participants are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; or (b) federal statute requires without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.

**Category 4** - Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that participants cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the participants.

**Category 5** - Research and demonstration projects which are conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine: (a) public benefit or service programs; (b) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs; (c) possible changes in or alternatives to these programs or procedures; or (d) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs.

**Category 6** - Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies: (a) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed; or (b) if a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. *(Note: Exemption categories cannot be applied to research involving fetuses, pregnant women, human in vitro fertilization, or prisoners.)*



**Please answer Questions 1-5 below**

**1. WHAT IS THE OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH?**

To determine the effects of using Children's Literature to effectively teach and implement positive character traits in elementary students.

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**2. DESCRIBE THE DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH INCLUDING WHAT WILL BE REQUIRED OF SUBJECTS (ATTACH ADDITIONAL SHEET IF NECESSARY):**

Subjects will be presented with a variety of children's literature centering around positive character traits. Students will participate in activities including interviews and role playing. Teachers in the building will also be interviewed.

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**3. DESCRIBE THE SUBJECTS WHO WILL BE PARTICIPATING (NUMBER, AGE, GENDER, ETC):**

My study will be composed of 11 first grade students, and teachers selected from the James W. Lilley Elementary School. I will also be interviewing 10 staff members of the school.

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**4. DESCRIBE HOW SUBJECTS WILL BE RECRUITED (e.g. ADVERTISEMENTS, ANNOUNCEMENTS IN CLASS, E-MAIL, INTERNET)**

Students in my classroom at James W. Lilley Elementary School in Sicklerville, New Jersey will be given the opportunity to participate. Teachers will be randomly selected and asked to participate.

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**5. WHERE WILL THE RESEARCH BE CONDUCTED:**

The James W. Lilley Elementary School, in Sicklerville, NJ.

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NOTE: IF THE RESEARCH IS TO BE CONDUCTED IN ANOTHER INSTITUTION (e.g. A SCHOOL, HOSPITAL, AGENCY, etc.) A PERMISSION LETTER FROM AN ADMINISTRATOR ON THE LETTERHEAD OF THAT INSTITUTION MUST BE ATTACHED.

IF THE RESEARCH IS TO BE CONDUCTED AT ANOTHER UNIVERSITY, A SIGNED COPY OF THE IRB APPROVAL FORM FROM THAT UNIVERSITY MUST BE ATTACHED.

ATTACH THE CONSENT FORM TO THIS APPLICATION. The Consent Form must address all of the elements required for informed consent (SEE INSTRUCTIONS).

NOTE: IF THE ONLY RECORD LINKING THE SUBJECT AND THE RESEARCH WOULD BE THE CONSENT DOCUMENT, AND THE RESEARCH PRESENTS NO MORE THAN MINIMAL RISK OF HARM TO SUBJECTS, YOU MAY USE AN ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURE FOR CONSENT. IF YOU WISH TO REQUEST PERMISSION FROM THE IRB TO USE AN ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURE, ATTACH A COPY OF THE FIRST PAGE OF YOUR RESEARCH INSTRUMENT OR A LETTER WITH THE REQUIRED INFORMATION (see Instructions).

**If you are requesting an exemption from a full IRB review, STOP. Complete the last page of this application (“Certifications”), and forward the completed (typed) application to the Office of the Associate Provost for Research, The Graduate School, Memorial Hall.**

**IF YOU CANNOT CLAIM ONE OF THE EXEMPTIONS LISTED ABOVE, COMPLETE ALL OF THE ABOVE AS WELL AS THE FOLLOWING ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR A FULL IRB REVIEW.**

Does your research involve a special population?

\_\_\_\_\_ Socioeconomically, educationally, or linguistically disadvantaged racial/ethnic group

\_\_\_\_\_ Pregnancy/fetus

\_\_\_\_\_ Cognitively impaired

- Elderly
- Terminally ill
- Incarcerated
- No special population

At what level of risk will the participants in the proposed research be placed?  
*(Note: "Minimal risk" means that the risks of harm anticipated in the proposed research are not greater, considering probability and magnitude, than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. The concept of risk goes beyond physical risk and includes risks to the participant's dignity and self-respect as well as psychological, emotional, or behavioral risk.)*

Minimal Risk       More than Minimal Risk        
 Uncertain

**1. HOW WILL SUBJECTS BE RECRUITED? IF STUDENTS, WILL THEY BE SOLICITED FROM CLASS?**

The students that are participating in my study will be from my student teaching assignment, and will not be taken out of class.

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**2. WHAT RISKS TO SUBJECTS (PHYSIOLOGICAL AND/OR PSYCHOLOGICAL) ARE INVOLVED IN THE RESEARCH?**

None.

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3. IS DECEPTION INVOLVED IN THE RESEARCH? IF SO, WHAT IS IT AND WHY WILL IT BE USED?

No. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. WHAT INFORMATION WILL BE GIVEN TO THE SUBJECTS AFTER THEIR PARTICIPATION? IF DECEPTION IS USED, IT MUST BE DISCLOSED AFTER PARTICIPATION. All participants will be given the opportunity to review my final report/thesis.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. HOW WILL CONFIDENTIALITY BE MAINTAINED? WHO WILL KNOW THE IDENTITY OF THE SUBJECTS? IF A PRE-AND POSTTEST DESIGN IS USED, HOW WILL THE SUBJECTS BE IDENTIFIED?

No personally identifiable information will be recorded, and there will be no identities associated with materials used in this thesis study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. HOW WILL THE DATA BE RECORDED AND STORED? WHO WILL HAVE ACCESS TO THE DATA? ALL DATA MUST BE KEPT BY THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR FOR A MINIMUM OF THREE YEARS.

The data recorded will be stored in the researchers file cabinet and will not be available to anyone but the researcher.

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**CERTIFICATIONS:**

Rowan University maintains a Federalwide Assurance (FWA) with the Office of Human Research Protection (OHRP), U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. This Assurance includes a requirement for all research staff working with human participants to receive training in ethical guidelines and regulations. "Research staff" is defined as persons who have direct and substantive involvement in proposing, performing, reviewing, or reporting research and includes students fulfilling these roles as well as their faculty advisors.

Please attach a copy of your "Completion Certificate for Human Participant Protections Education for Research Teams" from the National Institutes of Health.

If you need to complete that training, go to the Web Tutorial at <http://cme.nci.nih.gov/>

**Responsible Researcher:** I certify that I am familiar with the ethical guidelines and regulations regarding the protection of human participants from research risks and will adhere to the policies and procedures of the Rowan University Institutional Review Board. I will ensure that all research staff working on the proposed project who will have direct and substantive involvement in proposing, performing, reviewing, or reporting this research (including students fulfilling these roles) will complete IRB approved training. I will not initiate this research project until I receive written approval from the IRB. I agree to obtain informed consent of participants in this project if required by the IRB; to report to the IRB any unanticipated effects on participants which become apparent during the course or as a result of experimentation and the actions taken as a result; to cooperate with the IRB in the continuing review of this project; to obtain prior approval from the IRB before amending or altering the scope of the project or implementing changes in the

approved consent form; and to maintain documentation of consent forms and progress reports for a minimum of three years after completion of the final report or longer if required by the sponsor or the institution. I further certify that I have completed training regarding human participant research ethics within the last three years as indicated below my signature.

Signature of Responsible Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

**Faculty Advisor** (if Responsible Researcher is a student): I certify that I am familiar with the ethical guidelines and regulations regarding the protection of human participants from research risks. I further certify that I have completed training regarding human participant research ethics within the last three years as indicated below my signature (attach copy of your “Completion Certificate for Human Participant Protections Education for Research Teams” from the National Institutes of Health).

Signature of Faculty Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

## Character Education Teacher Interview

1. How do you incorporate character education into your classroom?
2. What benefits, if any do you find with the teaching of character education?
3. What are some positive character traits that you feel are important to demonstrate to your students?
4. Do you feel that a school wide character education program would be beneficial? If so, how?

## Character Education Student Interview Questions

1. Did you like the story that was read today?
2. What did/ didn't you like about the story?
3. Have you ever heard of or talked about (specific trait for that week) before?
4. How did you like the characters in the story?



Dear Parent/ Guardian,

I am a graduate student from Rowan University and will be student teaching in Miss Conte's classroom. As a part of my time spent with Miss Conte I will be implementing a study as a part of my master's degree focusing on character education and how the use of children's literature will increase positive traits in elementary students.

Each week I will be reading a series of children's books to the class that will focus on a particular trait. After the reading I will lead a discussion with the class and ask them some interview questions. For some traits I will lead the children in different activities such as role playing and decision making. All data recorded will remain anonymous.

Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate in this study will have no effect on your child's standing in his/her class. Each child's participation is voluntary; if you choose to not allow your child to participate I will not include them in any type of interviews. If a child does not participate their standing in the class will not be in jeopardy. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me or Dr. David Hespe.

Sincerely,

Christopher Dimakos

Please check off whether or not you wish to have your child participate in this study by checking off the appropriate statement below and returning this letter to your child's teacher by February 10, 2006.

I grant permission for my child to participate in this study.

I do not grant permission for my child to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent/Guardian)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Pre/Post Assessment**  
**Conflict Resolution and Character Traits**

**1. Identify a conflict.**

*Color in the circle below the picture that shows a conflict.*



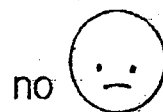
**2. Listen to story. Show how conflict escalates.**

*Put a ring around the first thing that happened. Put a line under the next thing that happened in the conflict. Put an X on the picture shows conflict at its worse.*



**3. Being respectful is listening while someone is talking.**

*Color the happy face for yes or the sad face for no.*





4. Does perseverance help you do something that is not easy? *Like learning to ride a bike or learning to read.*

yes  no 

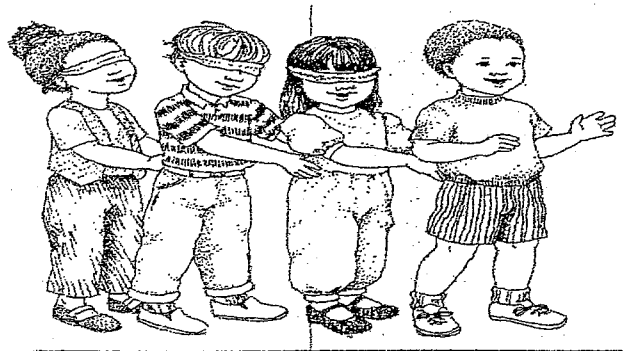
5. Are you honest when you hide something from a friend?


yes  no 

6. When I keep my hands to myself, am I using self-control?

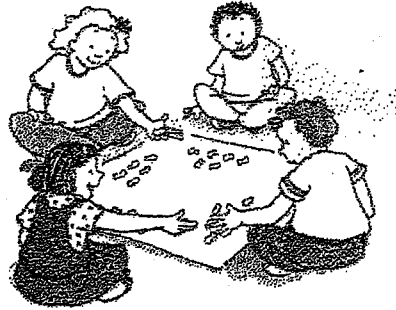
yes  no 

7. Does this picture show trust?



yes  no 

8. Does this picture show cooperation?



yes 

no 