

**ACTION RESEARCH: THE DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF THE  
IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF A TEACHER-INITIATED CHARACTER  
EDUCATION PROGRAM IN AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
School of Education in partial fulfillment  
Of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2007

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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This study describes and analyzes the process by which teachers, support personnel, and administration developed “homegrown” implementation strategies that resulted in an enhanced character education program, improved student behavior, and a strengthened community of practice empowered to find its own solutions. The Review of Literature provided an historical and a theoretical background for this investigation.

This researcher became a “catalyst” introducing participants to the action research cycle of observe, reflect, and act. Teachers observed student behavior in relation to the simple character education directives that had been grafted onto the daily announcement form, e.g. “We come to school on time. School is important.” Focus groups reflected upon a variety of teacher strategies, selecting three for implementation by the entire staff. Visuals, additional announcements, and student recognition brought the improvement necessary to upgrade the character education program, energized the people using it, and facilitated a change in student behavior.

The results of the study were analyzed by comparing data from the January interviews to responses found in the June interviews. From principal to five-year-old kindergartener, the empowered community of practice developed a school identity by hearing “Hear at Amadeus” every day and following the desired behaviors that comprised the character education program. It was simple, doable.

Qualitative methodology was also used to analyze the field notes. The NUD\*IST N6 software program codified data pinpointing the evidence of the beneficial changes in both the character education program as well as in student behavior. A descriptive narrative told the story of how the character education program traveled through the daily life of the elementary school. Then a numerical analysis answered the six research questions.

Recommendations for further study include investigation of how changes in administration, staff, especially the “catalyst,” and student population might affect the efficacy of the action research cycle and the character education program itself. A longitudinal study of these factors is recommended to investigate long-term impact. Research could also give voice to students’ perceptions of the program. The study of these questions could open new venues for a practitioner looking for solutions to the problems facing today’s learning communities.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

To God, giving thanks for sending wonderful people to help me:

My Advisor and committee chair, Dr. Kay Atman

Co-advisor, Dr. Carl, N. Johnson

Committee member, Dr. Mary Margaret Kerr

Committee member, Dr. Beverly Melenyzer

The administration of my school for granting permission

All the participants in my study, especially the magnificent teachers

Everyone at Hillman Library and at Posvar Hall

My friends for their encouragement

My family, especially my husband, Paul, and my son, Paul , Jr.

To all those who prayed me through this.

God will provide.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

It was January. Report grades were due. Performance task scores were due. End of the unit scores were due. DIEBEL reading scores were due. Preparation for PSSA testing had started to gather speed. InView testing and TerraNova testing was looming ahead with test-taking preparation to begin in earnest. With a plethora of instructional objectives to be met and subsequent testing to be done, why study character education? Considering the demand for higher test scores, accountability from the teaching profession, and federal mandates demanding that no child be left behind, why teach character education? In Pennsylvania, character education did not merit its own specifically mandated instructional standard, and failed to produce scores of any kind.

But as Einstein has been quoted as saying: “Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts, can be counted” (Roberts, 2004, p.110). American schools have long held more than one focal point of academic achievement. There has been a long tradition of using the public school system in America to inculcate our young with desirable virtues and values that lead to benevolent behavior. This study intended to delve deeply into the implementation of the process of how character education became a viable part of the everyday care and practice in an elementary school through the collaborative efforts of the adults of the school who teach their students.

## **1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM**

### **1.1.1 Rationale for the Study**

To summarize the reasons for teaching character education is to gather the wisdom of ages and garner proverbial childrearing beliefs from many cultures and countries. Such a task demands an organizing framework. Bohlin and Ryan (1999) give five reasons why character education should be included in the curriculum. First, they cite a list of great intellectuals from the East, and the West, who have urged their students to be not only smart, but good as well. Confucius, Buddha, Moses, Jesus Christ, the Greek philosophers, each one illuminates the path to correct behavior through laws, tenets, beatitudes, and writings. On a global level, ancient texts and modern media call for the need to instruct the young in ways of virtuous behavior and attitude.

Secondly, America's founders realized that our democratic process was based upon the ability of citizens to participate. This capacity for moral responsibility was a key element for that participation. The writings of Jefferson and Madison exemplify the exhortations of the period, urging personal goodness as a basis of civic responsibility (Bohlin and Ryan, 1999; Hunt & Mullins, 2005; Pulliam and Van Patten, 2003). For education to reflect its foundation accurately, it must teach personal and civic virtue (Bohlin & Ryan, 1999).

Third, in forty-six of the fifty states, character education is part of the school code, either through explicit laws demanding such instruction or as part of the state's standards and objectives (Costa, 2004). The first example of such legislation was the passage of the "Old Deluder Act in 1647 (Beane, 1990). Since then people have sought to incorporate some form of character instruction into the established educational process. Although Pennsylvania does not explicitly mandate character education, the school district under consideration, Amadeus Area, (pseudonym) has in its mission statement the same motivation that is to teach "all children to become life long learners and ethical citizens."

Furthermore, public opinion demands that children be taught to live in accord with the current standard of decency. The results of recent polls illustrate the public's demand for some type of character education in the schools. Stories of children's behaving badly provide daily fodder for news programs. The public sees the schools as a legitimate venue for improving children's behavior. Families, churches, schools and society in general, want children to realize

their fullest potential through some type of character education. Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup polls over the last twenty years illustrate the public's belief in the need for character education in the schools (Bohlin & Ryan, 1999; DeRoche & Williams, 1998; Hunt & Mullins, 2005).

Finally, schools affect children. It may be facetious to think that children graduate after twelve years of instruction without being formed and transformed by what goes on in the school. Due to its mandatory nature, and compared to other socializing agents, other than the home, no institution has the potential for influencing the lives of children like that of public education (Curry & Johnson, 1990). Consequently, it is appropriate that schools use character education instruction to create a better environment in which a child may grow. In schools, character education involves programs of instruction whose goals include habituating good behavior and attitudes in all the members of the school community for the benefit of the community at large (Bohlin & Ryan, 1999; DeRoche & Williams, 1998; Hunt & Mullins, 2005).

Therefore, character education has a legitimate reason to be considered as a topic of research. The conceptual basis of character education reflects the thinking of the moralists of the past. Second, the American Founding Fathers believed in the need of instruction in order to produce a moral citizenry. Third, presently the majority of state educational codes include provisions for the teaching of character education. Fourth, recent public opinion polls show support for character education as an educational goal with legitimacy for instruction. Finally, schools do exert a great influence on children. Schools teach character education to provide a positive influence on the students under their care.

### **1.1.2 Character Education Theorists**

Just as there are many reasons supporting the concept and need for character education, there are many theories, opinions, and programs that define character education. This makes the search for the "best" character education program for a particular context an extensive exploration.

Character education programs arise from various theoretical paradigms. Nash (1997) categorizes character education theories in three ways: the neo-classical, the communitarian, and the liberationist. The neo-classicists such as Wynne and Ryan (1997), Lickona, (1976, 1991) and

DeRoche and Williams (1998), urge a return to the instructional strategies of education for the young found in the philosophies and religions of a by-gone era. These theorists find character education's best formulas in the Judeo-Christian commandments or in the Greek philosophers of the Golden Age, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Programs exemplifying such theories often use a narrative, a great fable or story from the past, maxims, and exemplars as a springboard for discussion on virtues and values considered to be traditional in orientation (Davidson, 2000; Nash, 1997).

The communitarian theorists see character education as a means for building community because it is only through our interactions with others in a community that we can learn and practice virtue. Character education theorists such as Macintyre (1984), Glendon (1991), and Noddings (1992, 2002, and 2003) are examples of communitarian character education theorists. Schools function as educational communities and therefore serve as conduits for moral instruction. Rogoff and Lave (1984) theorize that it is in sociocultural communities that learning takes place through social and cultural participation. Gladwell, (as cited in Fullan 2003) explains: "If you want...to bring about a fundamental change in people's belief and behavior, a change that would persist and serve as an example to others, you need to create a community around them, where these new beliefs could be practiced, expressed and nurtured" (p. 44). In this paradigm, character education needs the actualization of the concept of community to be effectively taught.

The third category of character education theorists, the liberationists, such as Freire (2004) and Aronowitz and Giroux (1985), call upon educators to illuminate the wrongs of society and lead toward the emancipation of the downtrodden. Virtuous living through character education attempts to eradicate societal wrongs, therefore benefiting all, especially those marginalized by oppressive political structures. Does character education provide a means of socialization that enables children to grow into adults who have the freedom that correct behavior and purpose provides? If it does, then character education programs are suitable curriculum for public schools under the libertarian theory framework (Nash, 1997).

Whether neo-classicist, communitarian, or liberationist, character education has been assigned the job of helping students become the best possible people they can become: a benefit to themselves and the community in which they live.

### 1.1.3 Practical Considerations

These three main theoretical paradigms demand different responses from the school curriculum. “So many theories, so little time” could be the mantra when looking for the best character education program for the individual classroom context.

From the literature, these factors influenced the development of the program:

1. The best character education programs are often the homemade type that fit the context of the school (DeRoche & Williams 1998).
2. The best character education programs focus on behaviors that can be observed (Bulach, 2002).
3. The best character education programs are assessed and then “tweaked” to make them more beneficial to that particular school (Roberts, 1998).
4. This program would be easy to administer for the teacher assigned with selecting the students who would make the morning announcements.
5. It was assumed that since the staff performed the desired behaviors in their everyday conduct, faculty, support personnel and administration wanted to draw the students’ attention to the good example already being set by the adults around them (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, (1934/1978).
6. These behaviors would be characteristic of member of our school’s community of practice which had formed through the preceding years (Lave & Wenger, 1991).
7. Simple behaviors would be understood best. (Clark, 2003)

What isn’t as apparent, however, is how teachers in the classroom translate these theories into everyday instructional strategies. Character education theorists are “strong on prescription and exhortation” but yet have to develop an effective praxis (Nash, 1997; Bulach, 2002; Kohn, 1997). When the bell rings on Monday morning, how does a practitioner convert those theories into instructional strategies that elicit age-appropriate behaviors? From what theory and research paradigm does the classroom teacher glean information that supports the classroom character education program and how does the practitioner translate this knowledge into praxis? Which programs have undergone the scrutiny of research methodology and have been proven to work?

With so many theories to consider, character education could become bogged down in its own voluminous variety.

The impetus for a character education programs can be a vital consideration for its success. Often character education programs are initiated by the district administration. Programs can be purchased for district-wide classroom use. Each one involves time, effort and cost. But the classroom context, the way of life for the educational practitioner, is often missing from the equation (Kincheloe, 2003; Nash, 1997). Is top-down management the best way to promulgate character education in the schools? Could or should teachers themselves initiate research that would point to themes and concepts that might make character education more relevant and applicable, especially in an elementary classroom where theories need to be translated into language and activities that a five year old can understand? Bransford (2000), Kincheloe (2003), and Demetrio (2000), among others, believe that the process of teacher research is a valid path to developing the educational strategies needed to make educational theory relevant and applicable, rather than top-down management directives

Using qualitative action research methodology, this study described and analyzed the complexities that lay behind the implementation process of a character education program at the elementary level. “Good judgments in the context of educational practice will depend upon the quality of the ‘situational understanding’ that underpins them” (Elliott, 2006, p.173) This study went into the classroom, out into the hallways, cafeteria, and playground and into the context, to connect the “knower with the known,” the theory of character education with its practical application (Burton & Bartlett, 2005; Hendricks, 2006; Kincheloe, 2003).

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The focus of this study was to describe and analyze the implementation process of a teacher-initiated character education program at the elementary level.

### **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

What strategies did teachers, administrators, and support staff utilize in the implementation of the character education program?

What factors in the program lent support to its implementation?

What problems occurred during the implementation of the program that limited its success?

What differences did the staff observe in student behavior that illustrated the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the character education program?

What themes and/or concepts emerged through the description and analysis of the program's implementation that pointed to the reasons for its effectiveness or ineffectiveness?

What changes in the program are recommended to insure the success of programs of this nature?

### **1.4 DELIMITATIONS**

#### **1.4.1 Time of the Study**

After the character education program had been implemented for four months beginning in August 2005, the collection of data for this study began during the second semester of the school year, 2006, and continued until the end of the last marking period, approximately from January to June, 2006.

#### **1.4.2 Location of the Study**

The location of the study was a small suburban school district adjacent to a large urban school district found in southwestern Pennsylvania. It was centered in Amadeus Elementary (pseudonym), a school of approximately 300-325 students, grades kindergarten to five.

### **1.4.3 Participants in the Study**

For this study, the sampling included all members of the faculty who were willing to be interviewed about the program, and all of those staff members who offered suggestions and corrections to the program. This included office secretaries, classroom aides, custodians, and food service personnel. Participation was entirely voluntary. The administration was also asked to participate through suggestions and corrections, in both group meetings and individual interviews. At the request of the administration, participants were selected from only support personnel or teachers.

## **1.5 ASSUMPTIONS**

The following assumptions were based on the context of the study, an elementary school with grades kindergarten through five.

1. Responses from participating members of staff personnel would reflect their professional opinions accurately.
2. Staff members would be able to recall the behaviors of students in previous years and compare those to behaviors presently exhibited.
3. The participants of this study, administration, staff, teachers, and students would be able to understand the portion of the announcements that contained the character education protocols.

## 1.6 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Throughout the study the following terms were used, reflecting the definitions given in this section of this Introduction. Care had been taken to utilize those definitions which best reflect the understanding of the participants, illustrating the practical meaning embedded in each word.

### 1. Character Education

This study defines character education as a program of instruction whose goal is to foster beneficial habits of behavior in all members of the school community to the benefit of all the members of the school community (Bohlin & Ryan, 1999; DeRoche, 1998; Nash, 1997).

### 2. Character Trait

Bulach identifies a character trait as “an intrinsic attitude or belief that determines a person’s behavior in relation to other people and to self” (Bulach, 2002, p.80).

### 3. Character

Bohlin and Ryan (1999) describes character “as knowing what’s good, a conscious realization of good and evil; ‘loving the good,’ recognizing the good and evil present in circumstances, loving the person, hating the sin, empathy; and ‘doing the good,’ having the will to act upon one’s knowledge of what should be done (p. 5).

### 4. Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky identifies the zone of proximal development as “...the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (1934/1978 p. 86).

### 5. Situated Learning

“Situated learning can be defined as learning that takes as its focus the relationship between learning and the social situations in which it occurs”(Lave & Wenger 1991, p. 14).

## 6. Community of Practice

Community of practice is participation in an activity system. The participants share understanding of what they are doing and what that means in their lives and communities (Lave & Chaiklin, 1996). Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) define community of practice in this manner: “A community of practice is a unique combination of three fundamental elements: a *domain* of knowledge, which defines a set of issues; a *community* of people who care about this domain; and the shared *practice* that they are developing to be effective in their domain.” (p. 27, emphasis in original)

## 7. Teacher-Initiated Research

In this study the term “teacher-initiated” refers to the development and implementation of a character education program by a fulltime classroom educator rather than formulated by those employed outside of the regular classroom setting (Burton & Bartlett, 2005; Demetrian, 2000; Hendricks, 2006).

## 8. Slogan-based Character Education Program

In a slogan-based program of character education, an adage, proverb, or maxim is taught to students to educate about a character trait under consideration (Carson, 1994).

## 9. Behavior-based Character Education Program

Behavior-based character education programs teach a specific observable behavior that is representative of the character trait under consideration (Bulach, 2002).

## 10. Teacher

“Teacher” designates a person certified in elementary, special education, or special subject education such as art, physical education, library science, technology, or music. That person may be a permanent employee or substitute employee similarly certified by the state of Pennsylvania. Student teachers and interns working in conjunction with an accredited college or university are also included in this category.

#### 11. Support Personnel

Support staff includes the office secretary, librarian aide and primary classroom aides, daytime custodian, and cafeteria staff.

#### 12. Administration

The on-site principal is the administrator for the elementary school in the study.

#### 13. School district

The elementary school in this research project is found in a small, suburban school district situated in the state of Pennsylvania.

#### 14. Synergetic leadership

The concept of synergetic leadership utilized in this study as a model of direction exemplified by an individual that can facilitate the emergence of a collaborative, cooperative energy in order to produce strategies that will implement a common vision or goal (Atman, 1994, 1996).

## **2.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This review of literature focused on three main areas. First, a chronology of character education in America traced the inclusion of moral curriculum from the earliest colonial period to the present in the United States. Secondly, the cited research discussed character education as it was implemented in our schools, including contextual issues and motivation. Finally, this chapter included the rationale for a teacher-initiated program arising from a practitioner's perspective on the problem, and the theorists who provide the conceptual underpinnings for implementation.

### **2.2 A CHRONOLOGY OF CHARACTER EDUCATION IN AMERICA**

#### **2.2.1 The Colonial Period**

Harkening back to the founding of our country, the American general populace has recognized the need for indoctrinating the young with the benefits of virtuous living. William Bradford of the Plymouth Colony reported that the citizens of that colony left Holland because of the danger to Pilgrim youth found in the "licentiousness" of the local Dutch adolescents (Hunt & Mullins, 2005, p. 1).

Initially, schools in the Plymouth colony were founded, not for academic reasons, but for moral purposes. Academics were used to prompt salvation through the reading of Scripture (Noddings as cited in Seymour, (Ed.), 2004). Character education was often in the form of religious doctrine and was the primary focus of the curriculum in the early period of American

history. In 1647 the Commonwealth of Massachusetts passed a law that set the stage for what would be the dominant version of moralistic teaching in the schools until the twentieth century. Based on the belief that “Satan thrived when ignorance existed,” the “Old Deluder Act,” as the law was known, established common grammar schools to expand religious teachings in the lives of young people. Not only was intellectual ignorance to be eradicated through the school, but moral ignorance as well (Beane, 1990, p.19).

The *New England Primer* was the basic textbook in the nascent years of the colonies. It contained passages from the King James Version of the Bible, hymns, and catechism for moral instruction. Students were classified as “vipers” and educated as to fear hell and seek God (McKown, 1935, p. 73). Reprinted in excess of three million copies over the course of the next one hundred and fifty years, The *New England Primer* produced a curriculum of character education that was a synthesis of literacy and morality (Hunt and Mullins, 2005; Pulliam & Van Patten, 2003; Urban & Wagoner, 2004).

### **2.2.2 The Founding of the Republic to the Civil War**

Using a deist orientation, those who played an integral part in the establishment of the Republic placed great value of virtue in character. As character education moved from the religiosity of the New England colonies, it linked the idea of republican government with the ideals of virtue and knowledge. Jefferson and Madison both put great value on personal benevolence. Madison called lack of virtue “a wretched condition,” and Jefferson said that a person’s character was “an echo of all he knew from the lessons of history” (Hunt & Mullins 2005, p. 6). Benjamin Rush insisted that the New Testament virtues be taught in primary schools because without those virtues, there could be no liberty. Even the original version of Noah Webster’s speller contained a moral catechism, defining honesty, mercy, purity of heart and economy because good citizenship was equated with a good Christian living (Hunt & Mullin, 2005; Pulliam & Patten, 2003; Urban & Wagoner, 2004).

Horace Mann, father of the American public school system, insisted upon the instruction in character education through daily Bible readings. Emphasis was on moral conduct, especially responsibility and hard work. To fulfill this mandate and to become truly American, virtue and civic duty had to be taught and practiced. In Massachusetts, as early as the 1830’s, he

proposed a national educational system, one that would teach “character and citizenship” (Bellah, 1992, p. 147). The growing urban areas were seen as breeding grounds for crime; schools could reverse this trend. In other states, Thaddeus Stevens, Henry Barnard and others replicated the moral commission of the New York City Free Schools, which began as an antidote for the criminality of urban growth (Hunt & Mullin, 2005; Pulliam & Patten, 2003; Urban & Wagoner, 2004).

Normal schools were established in the East and Middle West for teacher education. Teachers were to be selected for their virtuous behavior above all else, thereby providing good example for their students. And until 1890, the Bible was considered a textbook for class recitation and instruction. Teaching itself was considered to be a “holy calling” (Spring, 2001, p. 106). Character education would benefit both teacher and student.

In the South, the perennial problem of slavery proved to retard the growth of any incidence of a statewide school system. Henry Ruffner, education secretary for the state of Virginia, made repeated attempts to establish such a system in Virginia. But since he advocated education for freemen, Southerners rejected his proposals. Consequently, due to the polarizing effect of slavery, the educational system of the South reflected the prevailing social classes of each Southern state and impeded any state or regional initiatives in public education. (Hunt and Mullins, 2005)

### **2.2.3 Post Civil War to the Twentieth Century**

Character education in the late nineteenth century was a melding of American and foreign influences. Family, church and, where available, public education put forth a united effort in teaching both the immigrant and native born what it meant to become an American. The rhyming patterns found in eighteenth and nineteenth century American reading primers taught lessons in morality as well as in literacy. The McGuffey Readers, which combined Protestant piety and American patriotism, reflected the virtues of the family and church. It became perhaps the most popular series of textbooks ever published. First published in 1836, the series contained a variety of academic subjects, reading, an occasional arithmetic problem, geography, and a catechism lesson, all arranged in order of complexity (Bellah, 1992; Hunt & Mullin, 2005; Pulliam & Patten, 2003; Urban & Wagoner, 2004). Character education, based on religious

instruction, was intrinsically promoted throughout the curriculum as found in early private and public schools.

America grew and the tenets of religious freedom opened the doors to a multicultural definition of religion. Until this time, the King James Version of the Bible was the major source of moral education in the public schools. Immigrants from southern and eastern Europe brought new forms of religious indoctrination. Increased Catholic immigration in the mid-1880's caused objections regarding the moral teaching found in public schools, which was considered by some to be "too Protestant" (Wynne and Ryan, 1997, p. 34). A conflict ensued which pitted the Protestant hegemony against the newly arrived Catholic minority. Even the National Teachers Association, forerunner of the National Education Association, staunchly supported the use of the King James Version of the Bible in public schools as part of the standard curriculum. The result was the 1890 court case, *Wisconsin v. The City of Edgerton*. The ruling eventually ended the enforced use of the Bible in Wisconsin public schools. Nonetheless, the King James Version of the Bible continued to be used in public schools until the mid-twentieth century with the support of the general public. Not until the 1963 in the U.S. Supreme Court case of *School District of Abington Township v. Schempp* was the mandated use of Scripture in public schools eliminated (Hunt & Mullin, 2005).

In response to this sectarian aspect of public schooling, religious schools were established in great number to guarantee a moral education, especially where public education promoted opposing doctrines. According to the edicts of the 1884 meeting of Catholic bishops held in Baltimore, Maryland, every parish was required to provide schooling for its children. The meeting produced *the Baltimore Catechism*, which instructed the parochial student to "know, love, and serve God." Catholic education was moral education, emphasizing formation of the conscience, according to Church law. Lutherans, Jews, Quakers and other religious affiliations also provided alternative moral instruction (Pulliam and Van Patten, 2003).

Also at this time, American educational reformers such as Charles Murray, Frank McMurry and Charles De Garmo turned to Johann Herbart, a Prussian theorist for direction in establishing schools for the attainment of good moral character. Herbart believed that "it was not the individual mind that needed to be developed, but their social character and morality for which the mind was but a part" (Hlebowitsh, 2001, p. 260). American educators followed the lead set by Herbart, linking everything to the social environment, using an interdisciplinary

curriculum. Ideals appropriate to education were acquired through analysis of the students' world, thereby producing correct behavior and attitude toward one's fellow man (Pulliam and Van Patten, 2003).

#### **2.2.4 The Early Twentieth Century**

With the rising diversification of the American population, and rising objection to the enforced use of the Protestant Bible, the early twentieth century saw religion-based moral instruction in public schools seriously diminished. Later investigation of moral and religious content in American school readers reported that such religious instruction characterized 100 per cent of grammar school readers in 1776-1886, but that it dwindled to about 5 per cent in 1916-1920 (McKown, 1935). The Progressive Era of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century introduced theories of developmental psychology and pluralistic orientation to American education. Scientific management of education and centralization of curriculum and control engendered a more nonsectarian orientation toward the purpose of American education (Urban & Wagoner, 2004).

But with religion slowly being removed from the classroom, what was to fill the void? Most intellectuals and opinion-makers generally accepted secular support for moral education until the middle of the nineteenth century (Wynne and Ryan, 1994). Robert Coles, Harvard psychologist, states: "When religion was removed from the schools, nothing came along to take its place. Teachers were stripped of moral authority they once held—in effect, we have removed right and wrong from schools" (as cited in Wooster, 1994, p. 41). This study sought to find an intervention that teaches right from wrong in a society that presents the same diversity of religious opinion as found in the waning years of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the modern era.

The problem presented itself on the classroom doorstep. "The present place of religious and moral education in our civilization is paradoxical. Everybody knows that the moral health of society and the progress of religion depend largely, if not chiefly, upon the training of the young in matters that pertain to character, yet no other part of education receives so little specific attention," commented George Albert Coe, author of texts on morality and the training of character at the beginning of the 1900s (1904, p. 5). He saw the "massing of people in cities" as

“exposing children as never before to the forces of evil, while family training in religion and morals suffers, according to all accounts, a decline” (Coe, 1904, p. 5). Popular opinion espouses similar demands today, linking this study of the best format for character education to historical precedence. People, now as then, are still trying to discover what works best for instilling good character in children

Writing a century ago, yet sounding very contemporary in his topic, Coe (1904) warned that America was facing an emergency in respect to moral education. The changes brought about by immense numbers of immigrants, and the rise of psychology and secularism was leading to new theories and standards for education and the concomitant teaching of virtue. Many schools adopted secular, nonreligious, moral education, which eventually became character education (Yulish, 1980).

Concurrently, profound changes in American educational theory, curriculum, and pedagogy arose in the twentieth century. Like others in the Progressive Era, John Dewey was cognizant of enormous changes taking place in American society. America was becoming urbanized and industrialized. The greatest period of immigration in America’s history brought millions of those who needed schooling in how to become an American. Dewey’s beliefs reflected this era’s faith in scientific progress and the need for purposeful intervention to “fix” society’s problems, even the moral tribulations (Bellah, et. al., 1992; Hunter & Mullins, 2004).

Dewey comments on his concept of character education:

What we need in education is a genuine faith in the existence of moral principles, which are capable of effective application. We believe, so far as the mass of children are concerned, that if we keep at them long enough, we can teach reading and writing and figuring. We are practically, if unconsciously, skeptical as to the possibility of anything like the same assurance in morals. We believe in moral laws and rules to be sure, but they are in the air. They are something set off to themselves. They are so very “moral” that they have no working contact with the average affairs of every day life. These moral principles need to be brought down to the ground through their statement in social and psychological terms. We need to translate the moral into the conditions and forces of our community life, and into the impulses and habits of the individual (Dewey, 1909, p. 57-58).

Those “impulses and habits” of the individual, found formation in new attempts at character education in the classroom. The decade of the 1910-1920 saw character education programs employed in schools across the United States. In Chicago alone, there were more than

two hundred competing character education plans that schools could put into practice (Wooster, 1994).

Yet the decade ended pessimistically for those who thought the schools could and would teach good conduct and citizenship. The Character Education Inquiry team from Columbia University spent five years examining character education in the late 1920's. The three-volume report found such programs to be ineffective. The Columbia evaluation cited examples of students cheating in order to enhance their good conduct record. And the reason for this discouraging trend lay where it still is found today. Columbia's researchers found that influences outside the home and school held greater sway with young people than prescribed character education. "Learning self-control, as also of service and honor, is largely a matter of accident. Peculiarities of home, church, school, Sunday School, teacher, club leader, and everything else, that deliberately attempt to influence the child works upon him by divers means and with divers results" (Wooster, 1994, p. 29).

A three-volume set, *Studies in the Nature of Character*, published by the Character Education Inquiry Committee and subtitled, "Studies in Deceit," was a thorough evaluation of the effects of moral and religious education. It studied variables such as age, sex, intelligence, emotional instability, physical condition, socio-economic background as well as nationality and religious affiliations (Character Education Inquiry, 1928). Wynne interprets these findings as a realization that perhaps Americans had exaggerated the expectations for the methods of education espoused by the experts of the day (Wynne & Ryan 1997). ). For that reason, the character education program of this study used the collaborative effort of the adults in this school community to become a stronger influence on the children in our care. The program was later investigated to insure that character education has a beneficial effect on the student and such effects are not "left to accident."

So a new path would have to be found. This time, character education entered the classroom through the pages of the social studies curriculum. Perhaps if the student were to observe and critically analyze American life and then formulate his own system of knowledge, he/she would then be able to translate that knowledge into behavior. Consequently, the student would have to be instructed how and why to observe the problems and injustices that shaped American society. Those weaknesses in the American way of life were included in a progressive series of social studies texts, published Ginn and Company in 1929. Written by Columbia

professor of education, Harold Rugg, the series, *Man and His Changing Society*, was adopted by hundreds of school districts across the United States. Rugg believed in a child-centered and social-minded interpretation of social studies. This included lessons integrated from history, civics, geography, sociology, and economics. He gave his book a secondary title, “Next Steps toward Schools of Living” (Rugg, 1936. p. vii).

Instead of the laudatory treatment of America’s past, students were shown the disparity between their country’s potential and actuality. Students were to confront problems and become problem-solvers. Moral education no longer required unthinking memorization of commandments and precepts. Rational thought was to become the adjudicator of human action.

Using the schools to discover what was wrong with the American way of life did not sit well with many who considered such inquiry as an affront to those virtues and virtuous people who had formed the core of traditional American life. Rugg was denounced as one who downgraded our heroes and the Constitution. Civic groups such as the Daughters of the American Revolution, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and American Legion joined the Hearst newspaper chain in accusing Rugg of betraying the ideal of “our country right or wrong”(Fine, 1995, p. 110). Dewey’s emphasis on critical thinking and the resulting self-made conscience, as practiced in Rugg’s curriculum, suggested moral relativism and an affront to patriotic standards of behavior.

Also at this time, the Educational Policies Commission was established through a grant to the National Education Association and the Department of Superintendence in 1935. The Commission, which operated until 1968, had the assigned task of representing public education to the American public. Spanning the era of the Depression, two world wars, and the Cold War, the Commission repeatedly sought to establish character objectives through its numerous publications. Until it was replaced with an ad hoc committee in the late 60’s, its message was that “American democracy relied on moral and spiritual values and that the public school was the foremost agent in their inculcation in the young” (Hunt and Mullins, 2005, p. 161-162). Through the work of this commission, the idea of the dual purpose of American education, that of character and academics, survived the years of academic dominance during the post-*Sputnik* era.

### **2.2.5 From Mid-century to the Present**

Moral absolutes about personal and civic behavior were being replaced by attitudes toward American life that seemed to offer little in the way of guidance for the next generation. After wars, genocide, and the rise of Communism, McCarthyism was the overarching theme of cold war patriotism. Anything that suggested anti-Americanism had no place in the schools, criticism included. With the launching of *Sputnik* in 1957, the Soviet threat was transferred into a school-based drive for knowledge in the fight against Communism (Wooster, 1994).

Similarly, in the sixties, the public felt the strain of three assassinated leaders, the war in Vietnam and heightened levels of negative student behavior and teacher absenteeism (DeRoche & Williams, 1998). Political candidates were using anti-progressive educational reform as a plank in their campaign platforms. Max Rafferty won the 1962 California race for governor by winning over those who agreed with his belief that more traditional subject matter and teaching methods were needed. Progressive education was seen to advocate social reform resulting in undesirable side effects such as amoral behavior, relativist thinking, and favorable attitudes toward socialism and other forms of what was considered to be anti-Americanism (Fine, 1995).

### **2.2.6 Kohlberg and Moral Development**

A new theory of moral education arrived at this time. Lawrence Kohlberg, a developmental psychologist, believed that a child grew through predictable and observable stages of moral maturation. Using young males as his database, he determined that these stages reflected universally held beliefs of goodness and truth, not mere awareness of individually held value systems. Offering his theory of moral development in the 1970s, Kohlberg re-established the need for embracing and acting upon universal ethical principles. One stage of development was based upon the preceding stage. It was the job of adults to lead the child through each stage, to advance as far as possible, and arrive at a moral way of living (DeRoche & Williams, 1998; Hunt & Mullins, 2004).

Rather than confining moral development theories to classroom activities, centers were established to promote a moral atmosphere within the school itself. Pittsburgh was among cities

such as Cambridge, Massachusetts and Scarsdale, New York where Kohlberg and his associates set about establishing systems of schools based on participatory democracy (Wooster, 1994).

This resulted in classroom techniques that favored totally non-judgmental behavior on the part of the instructor. This often led students into discussions that produced no definitive right or wrong. Students were urged to openly discuss, and feel comfortable discussing, any kind of behavior without qualifying comments or dicta from the adult in charge. Teachers could express their own viewpoints but they were to explain that this was just one of many moral belief systems under consideration (Leming, 1997).

Kohlberg's experimental school where his theories of values clarification could find practical application closed after five years. Later he stated that he realized that moral education must be in part, indoctrinative, simply because in the real world, children act in a less than moral way, cheating, stealing, and using aggression toward one another. His Cluster Schools, although characterized by democratic voting on rules and regulations, quickly descended into anarchy caused by undemocratic misconduct (Griffith, 2000). In a book published after his death, Kohlberg admitted that his theory failed. Permissiveness did not result in morality. "The 1970's may be remembered as the decade of failed educational experimentation" (Wooster, 1994, p. 33). This experimentation was part of the quest for a program of character education, a quest that continues today and formed the rationale for this study.

### **2.2.7 Values Clarification**

The 1970-1990 decades also saw the rise of client-centered therapies formulated by psychologist, Carl Rogers. Using a non-directive approach to therapy, the client was to discover his/her own goals and values. Thus, the encounter group was born as a vehicle for the discussion that would eventually lead to one's own morality. Morality could not, nor should not, be imposed by others. Raths, Simon, and Harmin published a textbook, *Values and Teaching*, which embodied Rogerian values clarification. The book sold over 500,000 copies. Simon urged students to not only question authority but everything else, too. By 1975, over ten state school boards recommended *Values and Teaching* for classroom use (Leming, 1997).

Values clarification proved to be popular among educators. Sidney Simon, Harold Howe, and H. Kirschenbaum published *Values Clarification: A Handbook of Practical*

*Strategies for Teachers and Students*. In a decade that saw forty books published on values clarification, this volume sold 600,000 copies (Kirschenbaum, 1992).

In terms of practical application, however, the nonjudgmental aspect of values clarification proved to be its eventual undoing. For those who considered American education to be too dogmatic, the program offered a more sensitive approach to the increasingly diverse school-age population. But conversely, the nonjudgmental approach to morality raised public resistance to the program; it was seen to be too relativistic in the moral sense. Choice was good, but determining what choice was best for life situations necessitated some guidance from the school community. There were core values that the school system should promote: fairness, respect, and responsibility. Not all choices were equal in value. There needed to be some value clarification beyond the value clarification movement presented by the aforementioned authors (Fine, 1995; Hunt & Mullins, 2005).

### **2.2.8 Cultural Literacy**

Something was needed to teach morality and morality that was more than a personal justification for one's actions (Wooster, 1994). Enter the 1980's, with the realization that in twenty years, almost half of America's school children would be from non-white cultures. The need to address a multi-cultural view of character education arose. Morality came from respect; respect came from knowledge of the contributions that all cultures have made to the American way of life. Diversity was emphasized as one of the key elements to be understood when examining the fiber of the United States. Everyone had value because everyone had contributed. Self-esteem would flow from the analysis of ethnic heroes and accomplishments. And self-esteem would produce moral behavior (Fine, 1995). Self-esteem was to be found in the American lexicon of cultural achievements.

Along with self-esteem, there was resurgence in the concept of traditional values. Those interested in character education, especially when taught in the context of social studies, would produce another prescription for presenting values to children. Allan Bloom (1987) and E. D. Hirsch (1988) decried what they saw as a decline in traditional standards. To maintain social cohesion, in order to avoid self-destruction, Americans must agree upon certain values and principles that could be taught to our young. What constituted an "American" set of values was

listed alphabetically from abolition to Zurich. Cultural literacy was the great leveler, because once a student learned the tenets of its categories, any student could enter into the benefits of our democracy. Learn and join (Hirsch, 1987). By learning of the great and noble deeds of civilizations, Western and non-Western, moral relativism would be replaced by moral principles as illustrated in literature and history

Even though Bloom and Hirsch have been criticized for developing their own political and cultural agenda, it could be readily seen that some type of knowledge of America was necessary along with the virtues transforming the immigrant, as well as the native born, into a law-abiding American citizen (DeRoche and Williams, 1998). With the 1990's came the emergence of formal character education programs, some sponsored by individual school districts such as St. Louis, Missouri, Amherst, New York, the Houston Independent School District and Baltimore County. Other programs were designed by specific character education organizations such as the Heartwood Program of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; the STAR Program of the Jefferson Center for Character Education, the Character Education Curriculum of San Antonio, Texas; and the Child Development Project from Oakland, California (DeRoche and Williams, 1998). These programs offered a complete agenda, reflecting the ideologies of the developing entities, and promising the behavioral outcomes desired by the purchasing districts, cities, or states.

### **2.2.9 Character Education Today**

Currently, character education evokes responses and opinions that are reflective of the overarching questions of the American culture and educational system (Coles, 1986; Fullan, 2003). Inevitably, in a democratic, pluralistic society, a multitude of voices express conceptual paradigms that employ character education as the solution to many personal and societal problems

There has been an evolutionary trend in character education that describes various theories of pedagogy. Seldom does the right or best answer immediately emerge as to what should be done and how. Therefore, Elias suggests the terms such as morals, values, ethics, and to some extent, character be used interchangeably (Elias et al, 2002). All of these terms

designate behaviors or characteristics of personality that have been defined as worthwhile, even essential, to the individual and to society as a whole.

Often character education produces strategies and sensibilities that mirror the behavioral tenets of organized religion (Beane, 1990; Bohlin and Ryan, 1999; Damon, 2002). Thomas Lickona and others categorized as neoclassicists, link together the Judeo-Christian tenets of morality as a foundation for building a working definition of character education sometimes also called moral education (Lickona, 1991). Nonetheless, such character education context must always reflect the non-sectarian nature of the public school house.

What then is to be taught in order to secure happiness for the next generation? Character education can also be seen as a non-sectarian remedy for this loss of that biblical perspective in modern life (Hunter, 2000; Lickona, 1976; Kessler, 2000). To some, the need for character education arises from our secular, democratic society in America. Contemporary society stresses individualism while sacrificing communal good, a concept that formerly was employed to the betterment of all citizens (Bellah, 1996; Jarrett, 1991; Carr, 1991). Therefore, in this context, character education restored the imperative of caring for each other to benefit the self and the community, without religious orientation, fulfilling the communitarian need for establishment of a caring educational environment in which children learn with the help of compassionate adults and peers. Communitarianist educator, Amitai Etzioni, comments:

Today about half the families no longer see it as their duty to pass along values from generation to generation. Unless somebody embraces the agenda of instilling values, children won't have the strength of their values to fall back on. Yes, even when we teach values, children may abandon them. But you have to give them some values on which to go. It sadly falls on the shoulders of the school. If we don't do this, then just as we have adults who are deficient in writing and science, we will find that adults won't have the character and values needed to be decent members of the community or decent employees or decent soldiers (Berreth and Scherer, 1991, p.12).

Character education is seen by many as an answer to the problems arising from normal biological, emotional, psychological, and social maturation. It is the moral duty of caring adults to provide form and structure to such maturation in the form of character education that focuses on mitigating the problems associated with growth. Any type of growth brings change and adults, using instruction and example, can offer stability and moral guidance through such

change (Cohen, 1999; Wilson, 1993; Coles, 1998; Elias et al., 2002; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004).

### **2.3 CHARACTER EDUCATION TRENDS**

Five models of character education programs, as outlined by Hunt and Mullins (2005) exemplify those currently available for adoption by school today. The programs are usually utilized on a district wide basis and various components are available including curricula, posters, related literature, assessment, and media. These specific programs are offered as a sampling of character education programs currently employed by American school districts and illustrate the trend that character education has followed in recent years.

Centered at the Boston University of Education, Kevin Ryan is the founder and director emeritus of the Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character. Along with fostering character education research, in-service teacher development, and stimulating national dialogue on moral education, the mission statement of the CAEC proposes: “To serve as a resource for administrators, teachers, and parents as they seek to fulfill their responsibilities as moral educators” (<http://bu.edu/education/caec/files/mission.htm>). Their programs reflect the neo-classic character education tradition expounded in earlier writings by Bohlin & Ryan (1997).

Similar in content and orientation, six specific values form the “pillars” of the “Character Counts! Educational Program.” These values: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship are seen as transcendent beyond any boundary of race, creed, politics, gender or wealth. Three curricula are presented: “Wisdom for Life,” “WiseLives,” and “Family Wisdom.” In 1992, under the auspices of the Josephson Institute, the Character Counts! Coalition in Aspen, Colorado began with a declaration that explained the need for character education based on the well-being of future generations. Training courses for staff and administrators are also available through both the aforementioned the Center for the Advancement of Character and Ethics (CAEC) and the Josephson Institute (<http://www.charactercounts.org>).

Dr. Thomas Lickona is the founder of The Center for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Rs. Started in 1994, this character education program focuses on respect and responsibility reflecting Lickona’s neo-

classicist orientation as categorized by Nash (1997). The group has trained over 4,000 principals in their twelve-point program and is centered at the State University of New York at Cortland.

Their motto is “Helping schools, teachers, and parents develop good character in youth” (<http://www.cortland.edu/character/aboutus.html>). The site offers a variety of books and publications along with regional conferences on “Smart and Good High Schools.”

Drs. Ryan and Lickona are both on the Educational Advisory Board of the Character Education Partnership, “Leading a National Call to Character.” It categorizes itself as “one of the world’s premier character education organizations.” Its operation focuses on “The Eleven Principles of Character Education,” which also reflects a neo-classic orientation, and is based on traditional, yet nonsectarian, values and virtues. It operates through yearly conferences and awards a National Schools of Character designation to qualifying participants. The CEP believes that virtues such as fairness, respect, honesty and compassion can be fostered in the school setting and that such education should involve thinking, feeling, and behavior. Emphasis is placed on the requirement of the school staff exhibiting moral character. (<http://www.character.org/site/c.gwKUJhNYJrF/b.993761/k.B190/B>).

Fifth is the Developmental Studies Center, which began in 1980. Its purpose is to help a school become a “Caring Schools Community.” The key principles that this organization espouses are: respectful, caring relationships between everyone in the school community; frequent opportunities to collaborate and learn including tutoring and community service, opportunities for autonomy and influence, including the right to have a “genuine” say in the life of the school; and the importance of a common purpose and ideals. Teacher packages are available for educators in grades kindergarten through six. This site offers curricula and a “Read-Aloud Library” as well as research findings and funding resources (<http://www.devstu.org/csc/index.html>)

To reiterate, these descriptions of various character education programs are not meant to be an all-inclusive listing of programs available at the present time. It does represent trends that are indicative of the types of character education programs currently utilized in the United States (Hunt and Mullins, 2005).

## 2.4 CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

In examining any aspect of character education, the context of that examination must be explored. Describing the present situation of public education puts character education into a prism metaphor, where every side offers a different portrayal of the situation. It is impossible to extricate character from the scene of the education (Wynne and Ryan, 1997).

The problem, as some see it, is the school itself. Today's schools are in need of "reinvention" (Wagner, 2003). Standardized testing and the business-driven motivation for schools today provide a poor example of a caring community (Sergiovanni, 2005). Ideally, schools should abandon the concept of competitive grading and the narrow definition of education that permeates public school. Character education must permeate all phases of a student's life to be truly reflective of a moral code of living (Damon, 2002; Wagner, 2003).

Is there time for character education in today's educational context? A focal point of much pedagogical debate is the overarching consideration given to standardized assessment by governmental agencies, administrators and teachers. What is the purpose of academic assessment? For some, it is the notion of accountability for the teaching profession. Former Secretary of Education Ron Paige commented in an interview that even though assessment may be far from perfect, in design and usage, testing is the best way to insure high-quality teaching. Teachers' efficacy can be measured by their ability to instruct pupils in order to receive the grades or scores that funding agencies require. (Renwick, 2002) Under the *No Child Left Behind Act*, (2004) assessment is aimed at ascertaining the educator's teaching practices, which result in success or failure for the student. "These annual tests provide educators with information about each child's academic strengths and weaknesses. With this knowledge, teachers can craft lessons to make sure each student meets or exceeds the standards." (U.S Department of Education, NCLB, 2004, p. 2) Therefore, federally mandated testing judges the teacher's capabilities by the rubric of the students' answers.

Assessment has also been used to judge the quality of a student's effort in learning. In referring to the now-mandated state assessments, author Monty Neill warns that "they can determine whether a student will move up to the next grade or stay behind. They can affect curriculum, instruction, school quality, and children's futures. They can influence the funding our failing school receives. We know that across the United States, state testing programs hold

great power” (Neill, 2000 p. 31). If testing and assessment is a deciding factor in the survival of the school district, then a character education program must allow for the amount of time needed to be spent on tested curriculum. Therefore efforts to implement a character education program must be cognizant of the demands of the testing regime and still be efficient enough to influence student behavior. By stressing responsibility, diligence, and effort, could effective character education programs even enhance the child’s attitude toward testing and scoring well?

Schools have become “data-driven” (Neill, 2000). This is an overriding reality that often escorts the idealistic views of character education researchers and theorists out the classroom door and into the hall, waiting for this phase to pass (Kennedy, 2005). “It’s true that tests can and do drive curriculum, but tests are a way to respond to public pressure for some objective idea of what’s happening to our children” (Stainburn, 2004, p 16). Will character education programs be cut from the curriculum if test scores put the district in danger of being designated as “distressed? What does testing do to students and to the teachers who must prepare them for the testing? The high stakes that are attached to standardized testing, that is, funding, public censure, and possible failure to graduate, do not act as incentives, but rather produce stressful situations, narrowing of curriculum and teaching of the testing methods (Abrams, Pedulla, and Madaus, 2003). The distinction has been drawn between testing of learning, testing for learning and learning testing. The effect on morale in each case is generally negative. Nonetheless, it is contextual reality, grade kindergarten through graduation (Sloane and Kelly, 2003).

## **2.5 CHARACTER EDUCATION AND MOTIVATION**

In the elementary lexicon of values to be taught, responsibility becomes a major player (Lickona, 1999). The child is slowly leaving the concrete operational stage of behavior and can begin to understand the abstract entity, which enables them to mature, that is, to become responsible. Responsibility does not come automatically or without effort and guidance (Howse, Lange, Farran and Boyles, 2003).

The ways in which students see themselves as learners is a major piece of the motivational puzzle. Students see success or failure resulting from external or internal causes (DeCharms, 1976). Therefore, the teacher should help the student set goals, learn strategies,

experience success, and help students attribute that success to effort as skills develop. Students become responsible through the opportunities presented to them through academic and behavior situations (Alderman, 1999; DeCharms, 1976).

Attributional beliefs are a determining factor in success (Alderman, 1999). Through metacognition, students attribute their success or failure to the responsibility and diligence shown in their effort rather than real or imagine influences over which they have little control. Metacognition is a realistic self-appraisal of a student's own work habits; what they do and what they need to do in order to succeed. Metacognition helps students examine their responsibility in education. Character education can help in this self-reflection, attributing success to responsibility, perseverance and similar virtues. It is through metacognition, the student's active reflection upon his learning skills and practices that achievement and responsibility are realized (Zimmerman, Bandura, and Martinez-Pons, 1992; Ericson and Ellett, 1990).

If the child is not motivated, where and when will responsibility come into play? Character education demands effort from the student, who is sometimes considered the missing factor in the success equation (Tomlinson and Cross, 1991). Responsibility, motivation to be responsible, and the reflection upon such responsibility, produce a student who learns and learns more than just academic content, but also forms of behavior that reflect success (Weinert and Kluwe, 1987; Bempechat, 1993).

Discourse on these topics needs to be full and rich. It needs to be inclusive of research and practice. There is ample room for discussion on any aspect of character education, motivation, and the reality of today's classroom (Gibbons, 2004; Hacker, Dunlosky, and Graesser, 1998; Clifford, 1990; Dweck, 1986).

## **2.6 IMPLEMENTATION THEORISTS**

### **2.6.1 Introduction**

This study employs the works of three major educational theorists to substantiate the investigation of the implementation process of character education programs in the classroom. Lave and Wenger's (1991) work on the theory of communities of practice points to the need for

a social situation in which adults act as mentors for children in an apprenticeship role, learning behaviors by example and caring concern. The writings of Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1934/1974; Wertsch, 1985; Wink and Putney, 2002) illustrate the teacher's ability to meet the child in the zone of proximal development where scaffolding techniques can help promote movement to the next level of maturation for the child. He also insists that learning has a social context. Schools act as living organisms in which behavior is exemplified by adults and peers. Finally, the work of educator Nel Noddings (1992, 2003) of Stanford demands that schools become benevolent places where children learn the tenets of acceptable behavior through the caring attention of adults who are in charge of their instruction.

### **2.6.2 Lave and the Theory of Community of Practice**

If virtue is to be taught by the schools, then staff, administration and faculty participation is essential in a variety of roles. This participation can be predicated on the concept of a school's being or becoming a "community of practice" as first theorized by researcher Jean Lave. Through the lens of her research in *Understanding Practice* (Lave and Chaiklin, eds. 1996) and *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Lave and Wenger, 1991), Lave elucidates the necessity of first developing a community of practice in order that learning could transpire. Secondly, she advocates a close examination of the context of the learning to insure its effectiveness.

Community of practice refers to the "set of relations among persons, activity and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 98). In this epistemology, there is a rationale for the school members to act and reflect upon the character of every member, including administration, classroom teacher, support staff and the individual student. The adult becomes an archetype of a character education practitioner. As the practitioner instructs students in the character education process, the adult constantly employs sensitive reflection on the results of the intervention to construct a more efficacious program. This aspect of reflection for the community of practice also fits into the paradigm of action research, through which such reflection is utilized in changing the context of the research (Hendricks, 2006).

As the child gradually becomes cognizant of the adults around him, he moves from the periphery of learning to become one in the community of learners. At any one time, participation moves from level to level with actors progressing in the social context of learning.

We assume that members have different interests, make diverse contributions to activity, and hold varied viewpoints. In our view, participation at multiple levels is entailed in membership in a *community of practice*. Nor does the term ‘community’ imply necessarily co-presence, a well-defined, identifiable group or socially visible boundaries. It does imply participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities (emphasis in the original) (Lave and Wenger, 1996, p. 98).

Brown and Duguid (2000) explain the conceptual premise of community of practice paraphrased below:

- Knowledge lies less in its databases than in its people (p.121).
- For all information’s independence and extent, it is people, in their communities, organizations, and institutions, who ultimately decide what it all means and why it matters (p.18).
- A viable system must embrace not just the technical system but also the social system—the people, organizations, and institutions involved (p. 60).
- Knowledge is something we digest rather than merely hold. It entails the knower’s understanding and having some degree of commitment (p. 120)
- Learners participate, to a limited degree, in the actual practice of experts.

Thus, the staff becomes character educators through example, attitude and enthusiasm (Damon, 2002). The concept of situated experience makes everyday practice of primary importance (Wenger, 1998). And practice is how virtue is obtained. This harkens back to the classical theorists regarding moral education. As James Hunter explains:

The cornerstone of the neo-classical strategy is the Aristotelian argument that virtue is acquired in much the same way as other skills and abilities—through practice. ‘We acquire the virtues by first acting just as we do in the case of acquiring crafts,’ said Aristotle, in a famous passage from his *Nicomachean Ethics*: For we learn a craft by making the products which we must make once we have learned the craft, for example, by building, we become builders, by playing the lyre, lyre players. And so too we become just by doing just actions, and temperate by doing temperate actions and brave by brave actions.... in a word, states of character are formed out of corresponding acts (Hunter, 2002, p. 43).

In schools, we help each other learn, virtuous behavior included. “Learning communities grow out of the recognition that the human mind is limited, making collaborations with other humans and with things a necessity rather than a luxury” (Hung and Nichani, 2002, p. 178). Hung quotes Lave in saying that the “social nature of learning in schools mostly consists of small dimensions of ‘social-ness’ compared with the real-world communities of practice” (Lave as cited in Hung and Nichani, 2002, p. 17). We begin to teach children in a context that is on a small scale, easily absorbed. To avoid the mere preaching of virtue, the school community must practice it and teach by example. Lave says in that way there will be little observable, formal instruction, but many opportunities to actually practice the virtue in the social context. In this way learning “becomes meaningful and motivating” (Hung and Nichani, 2002).

Woven into the daily routine and found in numerous teaching moments, the behavior-based character education program voiced in the daily announcements, discussed in the classroom setting, and practiced by the adults and peers attempted to do just that: delineate the virtues and subsequent behavior that should typify those virtues. Therefore character education need not be a formal curricular program with extensive lesson plans and time allotments within the weekly schedule. The example of those in the community, practicing as well as employing incidental learning techniques, would “teach” each lesson. In that way the strengths of a community of practice would be appreciated. Those strengths include: 1) behavior-based activities that are relevant to the community, 2) close assistance from experts in the physical environment, both staff and other students, and 3) everyday problem-solving that makes up practice (Hung and Nichani, 2002).

Lave theorizes that the challenge for educators is to institute a regimen which will increase the likelihood of learning to occur. In this way, society replicates itself and its values (1991). As in any educational endeavor, the teachers, the society of adults, must buy into the program. In this study, it was assumed that they would and the implementation of such a program would yield patterns of participation that point to utilization and institutionalization of the character education format. As Fullan (2003) summarizes: “If social interaction converts information into knowledge then sustained interaction produces wisdom” (p. 47).

### **2.6.3 Vygotsky, Scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development Theory**

Related to the themes espoused by Lave, Wenger and others are those theories of learning attributed to the Russian cognitive psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, (1896-1934). His theories reflect his teaching experiences during the early part of the century as Russia convulsed into the Soviet Union. He declared his motto to be: “practice and philosophy” (Wink and Putney, 2002, p. 21).

Learning was to be based on social interaction; all higher psychological processes such as beliefs, values, and strategies were to come from the individual’s relations with others as experienced in the context of every day living. Thus, teachers organize activities so that students have opportunities to participate in discourse, and provide assistance as pupils engage in problem-solving, analysis and higher level thinking (Yamauchi, Wyatt & Carroll as cited in Maynard and Martini, Eds. 2005).

The social experience in this educational context would then produce understanding (Gauvin, as cited in Maynard and Martini, Eds. 2005). Vygotsky believed that education outside the real world was as impossible as fire without oxygen. Learning had to be social, creative, and situated in one’s life work (Wink and Putney, 2002). The elementary school of the study, Amadeus Elementary, afforded a real world situation in which social interaction could lead to learning, in both academics and behavior

Vygotsky’s theory of scaffolding explicates this sociocultural methodology. In this construct, the concept of the desired behavior, respect for example, would be held constant. But the behavior associated with respect would be simplified through the intervention of the teacher. The learner would have an opportunity to be successful at every task (Greenfield, in Rogoff and Lave, Eds. 1984). Eventually, the mentoring teacher and the student would become equal in their ability to perform the task, in this case, the desired, respectful behavior. Eventually, the student would be able to perform the task on his own. Respect would become an acquired virtue and the student’s behavior would reflect that acquisition.

Such scaffolding techniques are consistent with character education methodologies found in formal educational settings (Gauvin, in Maynard and Martini, Eds., 2005). The child would not be a passive participant; there would be an active, dynamic role for the student to play in learning tasks and responsibilities, which would be indicative of cognitive development (Rogoff

(1998) in Maynard and Martini, Eds., 2005). Teachers would observe students, ascertain the level of ability, and slightly raise expectations, making the good even better. Behavior would result from the patterned ways that members act and interact, evaluating what is appropriate to know and do in the classroom (Wink and Putney, 2002).

Vygotsky's zone of proximal development provides a relevant conceptualization. In this theory, the ability of the child is not judge by what he can do by himself, but what the child can accomplish with the aid of an adult, or more capable peer (Greenfield, in Rogoff and Lave, Eds. 1984). Learning occurs in a social context, in this case, Amadeus Elementary. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development theory can be readily applied to character education because the theory itself is sensitive to the context in which the learning takes place and appreciates the "centrality of social interaction in moral development" (Tappan, 1998, p. 144). Moral education involves a process of guided participation whereby children, helped by teachers and competent peers, achieve new, higher levels of moral functioning (Tappan, 1998).

Moreover, in his sociocultural theory of development, Vygotsky assumes:

1. That higher mental functioning is facilitated by words, discourse, social interaction which in turns changes and facilitates mental action, and
2. Those mental actions have their origins in social relations with more experienced members of a culture (Wertsch, 1985).

His educational theory is one of cultural transmission. Together, student and teacher make meaning from their relationship and the context in which that relationship exists.

This coincides with Rogoff's assumption that moral functioning, like all higher mental functioning, is a cultural practice or practical activity (Rogoff, as cited in Tappan, 1998). The student would be lead to reflect upon and act upon the directives and example of caring adults in the social context of the school. Tappan concludes, "... in the end, I would argue that the ZPD (zone of proximal development) does entail a specific moral vision that provides a compelling aim or moral education—a vision of the fundamentally dialogic nature of all learning (Tappan, 1998, p. 147). More than just a way of ingesting knowledge, Vygotsky's theories also point to acting in a civil manner towards other human beings. "Recent historical, anthropological, and psychological research appears to go beyond an initial preoccupation based on cultural systems of meaning, to include problems of the direction of action, of feelings, of the formation of self-control and of purposes. It is clearly more and more concerned with the mechanisms by which

culture forms the personality and *directs the conduct* of those who construct their lives with it and in it (DelRio, 1995, p. 385 emphasis in original). In this study, the culture of the school would direct that behavior through the implementation of its own character education program.

Vygotsky stressed intrinsic motivation for behavior. Students need to incorporate the rules of good conduct into their character and then aid in the implementation process by which others learn the same beneficial behavior. It is only logical that rules are set for the child's own good and for the good of others. Manners are to go beyond the schoolyard. Students have multiple realities and education must prepare them for what they will encounter after the day is ended. That includes correct behavior. Students must be prepared to become social members of a community acting appropriately together to construct knowledge (Wink and Putney, 2002).

#### **2.6.4 Noddings's Communities of Caring**

As such, Vygotsky's work exhibits similarities to the theoretical assertions of Noddings (1984, 1992, 2002, 2003). She argues that the kind of discourse that Vygotsky assumes occurs between teachers and students, and between peer collaborators is, at its core, "a profoundly moral activity" (Tappan, 1998, p.152). Development is defined in stages of emergence and social interaction (Wertsch, 1985). Schooling infers an obligation to direct that peer collaboration and adult encouragement into meaningful social interaction for students.

Above all, Noddings (1996) posits that the school should be a caring place, where children learn to "become good neighbors, concerned guardians of the natural world and honest colleagues in whatever activities they pursue (para. 12). Caring forms the foundation of any character education program. The school community provides adults who care enough to model the tenets of caring in their everyday demeanor and instruction (DeRoche & Williams, 1998).

Any type of character education should be promulgated through four actions on the part of adults:

1. Adults should instruct students in practice of the desired trait either in the classroom or when the teachable moment arises.
2. The students' attention should be directed to the behavioral goal of the character education program to facilitate instruction.

3. Adults should engage students in discussion, explaining and expanding upon the behavior that is assigned.

4. In the routine circumstances of everyday schooling, adults should exemplify the behavior so that students see a working model of what is expected. The children realize that the exemplified behavior has value for adults as well (Noddings, 2002).

Noddings emphasizes that although it is everyone's job to raise moral children, America schools were founded with the primary purpose of fostering upstanding character among the enrolled population with academic acquisition as a secondary benefit. Initially, the colonial community established educational institutions with that moral objective, to produce good people as citizens (Noddings, in Seymour, Ed., 2004).

Whether in the form of character education, standardized testing, project-based learning, or any of the myriads of innovative strategies that a school could utilize, educational programs should have at the heart of the matter the individuals involved, not the scores that those individuals achieve. The practitioners in this study were to implement their version of character education using their unique application of pedagogical methodology along with a studied and intuitive discernment of the contextual influences on the program. This study employed data derived from the actions and purposeful reflection of the teachers who used collaborative strategies to establish a community of caring for the students in their care. The study described and analyzed the process by which the creation of the community of caring was accomplished.

## **2.7 TEACHER RESEARCH**

The methodology utilized in this study is based on the concept of practitioner-based inquiry. "The unique features which prompt teacher research are that they emanate from neither theory nor practice but from critical reflection on the intersection of the two" (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993). The problem does not arise from a context found in an academic discipline, but the problem becomes evident from some aspect of the lived experience of the classroom (Demetrian, 2000). Carr and Kemmis expound this theory of practitioner-based research in an attempt "to encourage teachers to develop a more refined understanding of their own problems and practices...since the practical experience of teachers is the source of the problems under

consideration, it must be recognized that the active participation of practitioners in the research enterprise is an indispensable necessity” (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 126). Over time, theoretically, teachers would assume the responsibility of constructing meaning from their practice, reflecting upon that practice, and then acting upon the result of the discourse to improve practice. I interviewed teachers, support personnel, and the administration to use their actions and reflections as data for describing and analyzing the implementation strategies that teachers/staff used within the context of the character education program.

Moreover, this researcher as participant in the program endeavored to describe what transpired from the emic posture of an insider. Since the context of the study was within in an everyday situation, observable in size and location, a participatory research paradigm appeared a suitable methodology for the study (Jorgenson, 1989). Teacher research is anchored in the “lived reality” of an insider and therefore the researcher has “the possibility of crafting uniquely complex understandings of the research question...and hope to avoid the blind spots that come with unexamined beliefs” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 44).

This study arose from an everyday problem, that is, the quest for a more effective character education program. Teacher research is embedded in deep contextual factors that illustrate the complexity of the construct. Holly (2005) comments: “But as explorers of our own terrain and developing scholars of our own practice, we know that meaningful understanding and change demand a kind of wisdom that begins at home” (p. 101). Through the lens of the participants, this study discovered, described and analyzed the actual implementation of the program illuminating the strategies and underlying assumptions involved in producing the desired behaviors, which are beneficial for school community of practice as a whole.

## **2.8 SUMMARY**

When examined in chronological form, character education has always been part of the instructional curriculum in America. In every era, schools were seen suitable conduits for teaching the young acceptable behavior and virtuous civility. Presently, many voices give a variety of reasons for character education although controversy exists over how exactly that is to be accomplished. Theorists such as Vygotsky (1934/1974), Lave (1991), and Noddings (1984,

1992, 2002, 2003), provide a conceptual basis for character education programs while leaving the practical application of such theories open for contextual consideration. Therefore, this study endeavored to describe, examine and analyze the practical applications of the utilized character education program in the elementary school which formed the focus of this research.

Dear Teacher,

I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness. Gas chamber built by learned engineers. Children poisoned by educated physicians . . . Women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates. So, I am suspicious of education. My request is: Help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing, arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more humane” (Fine, 1995, p. 133).

This study had as its goal the “more humane” student that the unnamed author demands. Through this qualitative study, using action research, the collaborative investigation and reflection of teachers was described and analyzed to find an implementation process that proved to be effective for the students receiving the character education program as well as for those others who might have the same contextual factors.

## **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

There are two purposes to this chapter. First, this section of the chapter gives the necessary background for the utilization of qualitative study criteria employing action research as its framework. Secondly, it describes the process for transforming qualitative information into data and then changing that data into theory that leads to knowledge formation. Within that explanation will be an outline of the procedures used with the QSR NUD\*IST (N6) qualitative research computer software for discovering patterns, themes, and relationships in the data.

#### **3.1.1 Chapter Organization**

This chapter assumes a funnel-shaped organization (Roberts, 2004) beginning with the broad category of qualitative research, narrowing to the concept of action research as a field of inquiry, and then specifically describing the study under consideration. The chapter then explains the utilization of interviews and field note journals as valid, reliable, and rigorous forms of data collection. Finally, the focus will be on the particular context of this study, explaining in detail, why both qualitative and action research paradigms are appropriate.

Step-by-step procedures found in the QSR NUD\*IST (N6) software program demonstrate the technical aspects of the data codification used in the study. This leads to an explanation of instrumentation, population sampling, and data collection methods employed in the research.

### 3.1.2 Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to describe, examine, and analyze the implementation of a behavior-based, teacher-initiated program of character education at the elementary level. A public school was a valid setting for the presentation of such programs (Bohlin & Ryan, 1997; Bulach, 2002 DeRoche & Williams, 1998). The on-site administration, staff, and parents of the school selected for this proposed study, Amadeus Elementary all had voiced concern that there was a need for more effective character education programs in the school.

“The most effective character education programs are the ones that are personalized to fit the needs and interests of a school, a school district, a community, and children and youth (DeRoche & Williams 1998, p. xviii). In the past, the elementary administration had provided in-service time, and had purchased various components of different commercially prepared character education programs. Moreover, the building principal had proven to be supportive of any teacher-initiated program that might be suggested and seemed feasible for implementation. Such administrative endorsements of change within the system were seen as an important duty of a principal (Fullan, 2003). In this study, change produced a character education program custom-made through the collaborative efforts of the staff and with the approval of the administration.

In fact, the administration of Amadeus Elementary had actively promoted experimentation within the community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) to insure that an improvement would be made. In their article in *Educational Leadership*, Sapier and King have listed experimentation in their criteria of essential cultural norms that affect school improvement (1985). Since neither the state nor the local school district mandated a character education curriculum, it was usually upon the urging or request of the stakeholders that such programs were formulated. As Roberts concurred: “Because of the growing concern from parents and administrators, many such programs have made their way into the public school setting” (1998, p.3). Thus character education intervention at Amadeus Elementary School came from within the ranks of the teaching staff with the expectation that the implementation of that program would be efficient and reliable due to the expertise of those people who made up this school’s personnel.

Studies have indicated that educators are supportive of character education (Davidson, 2000; Davidson & Stokes, 2001). The type of program utilized in this study, an informal program, did not necessitate teacher curriculum guides or established class time for completion (Rogers, 1997). Under these conditions, character education was what children learned in and around school in addition to the formal curriculum presented in the classroom. The morning announcement proposed for use in this study allowed character education learning to take place in this informal atmosphere, similar to settings utilized in advertising (Rogers, 1997; Wynne & Ryan, 1997).

The research questions that follow were designed to describe and analyze the implementation strategies that were being used by staff members in their instructional settings to ensure the effectiveness of the program. The questions also sought to elicit and encourage the collaborative effort that distinguishes professional educators who search for solutions to problems they encounter in their everyday practice. Such solutions would be the result of personal and group reflection, thinking about the implementation and how to realistically improve it (Burton & Bartlett, 2005; Falk & Blumenreich, 2005; Hendricks, 2006). The reflective element of the intervention was indicative of action research protocols (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

The research questions were:

1. What strategies did teachers, administration, and support staff utilize in the implementation of the character education program?
2. What factors in the program lent support to its implementation?
3. What problems occurred during the initial implementation of the program that limited its success?
4. What difference in student behavior did the staff observe that illustrated the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the character education program as it progressed under study?
5. What themes and/or concepts emerged through the description and analysis of the program's implementation that pointed to the reasons for its effectiveness or ineffectiveness?
6. What changes in the program were recommended to insure the success of programs of this nature?

### 3.1.3 Background of the Study: Timeline

The following timeline provides a description of the iterative journey that preceded the study. It began a story of changing the status quo through collaborative effort, experimentation, and reflection and continued in the action research cyclical pattern of activity and reflection (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Hendricks, 2005; Sagor, 1992).

March, 2005: “If we don’t teach it, no one teaches character education.” That was the sentiment of the administrator who had introduced a variety of character education programs, all with a short shelf life and little evaluation to determine why the programs failed to institutionalize. During an elevator ride to the first floor, the principal had remarked that basic civility was disappearing along with the remnants of the winter’s snowfall. As Schein comments: “...useful data can be gathered in situations that are *not* (author’s italics) created by the researcher. Gathering data, building concepts and developing theory is the result of a research *attitude*, a desire to clarify what is going on and communicate that clarification to other researchers. It is my argument that some of the best opportunities for such inquiry actually arise in situations where the setting is created by someone who wants help, not by the researcher deciding what to study” (Schein in Reason and Bradbury, Eds. 2001, p. 228).

Students used manners that spoke of lack of caring and need for instruction. Rudeness was prevalent in the school and other members of the staff cited examples of children behaving badly. This lack of courtesy did not invade the realm of discipline. In discipline cases where there was an infraction of school law, classroom teachers and administration met each serious broach of the school discipline policy with appropriate corrective measures.

April, 2005: The teachers, support personnel and the principal were asked to determine what were the problems related to student behavior. After reading Ron Clark’s book, *The Essential 55*, (Clark, 2003) I wanted the desired behaviors to be similarly stated in a simple manner, easily understood by an elementary audience.

When asked if the PTA should be polled, the administrator said she preferred to keep this segment of the character education program solely under the auspices of the faculty, support personnel and administration. The PTA was presently involved in implementing an anti-bullying project at her request. This program was extremely well done and well received by students and

faculty alike. Therefore, it was the belief of the administration that both programs could be accomplished separately using separate facilitators for each project.

Summer, 2005: I translated the responses of the faculty and support staff along with those of the principal into a daily systematic character education program to be grafted onto the morning announcement routine. (See Appendix B)

Each month had a major focus, e.g. respect, and two ancillary themes such as tolerance and acceptance. This monthly schedule was created two years before by an ad hoc committee formed by the principal. Every week the students would have a specific behavior communicated at the beginning and end of each morning's announcements that represented the major or a minor theme. The announcement would give one clearly described behavior five times during the week, using various verbal cues, motivation techniques, and the daily jargon of an elementary student. The themes and vocabulary were based on that of the community of practice (Lave, & Rogoff, 1984). Care was taken to word each day's announcement slightly differently to provide some variation on the theme. Each announcement would begin with, "Hear at Amadeus Elementary." The assumption would be that students would "hear" the desired behavior and understand that "here" at Amadeus School, this was the way things were done, and this is the way people treated each other as they went about the business of getting an education. Each announcement was a clear concise behavior (Clark, 2003).

August, 2005: On the afternoon of the second and final in-service day before the beginning of school, the elementary school building had a temperature reading in the 90s. In spite of the air-conditioning of the new local county jail, the beginning of the new instructional year under study began with the school having little climate control besides open windows and ceiling fans in the classrooms. The staff had gathered for its first faculty meeting and the heat made brevity a requirement. Therefore, after the principal's business report, I explained the character education program that had been the subject of prolonged discourse last spring. I gave the staff a brief five-minute explanation of Nel Noddling's (1992) criteria for developing a caring community; that is, one where behavior is taught through practice, attention, discussion and example.

Then I explained the mechanics of the program. Each intermediate grade teacher was responsible for: 1) duplicating all the announcements for the assigned month, 2) completing the announcement form, and 3) selecting a student to make the announcements on the public address

system. I assembled a binder containing the schedule for the year and all announcement forms with the character education component already added to the script. Each teacher would pass the binder to the next teacher on the schedule. In accord with the request of the principal, the announcements were aligned with the school's previously decided character education themes. Each behavior was simple as stressed in Clark's book (2003).

As the temperature rose, the first faculty meeting of the year picked up speed. I did not give any type of exhortation for following the program. Part of the rationale for the investigation was to see if the program would operate on its own. The meeting ended. Teachers returned to their classrooms to make final preparation for the opening day.

August, 2005: The next day, the first student day of the new school year, the character education program began without any complications. I formulated the mechanics to cause a minimum of burden to the teachers who were assigned for that month. It continued to move smoothly from month to month, from topic to topic. Neither administration nor this researcher promulgated any positive or negative information concerning the program or the delivery of its message. The character education program was left to stand on its own merits for the first semester of the school year. This was to enable the research to establish a baseline of implementation. Without input from the principal or me, it would then be possible to interview personnel to ascertain what strategies they developed on their own to implement the program.

September-December, 2005: During the first month of school, teachers readily participated in behaviors that reflected the theme for September, respect. They greeted one another in the hall, asked how each other was doing, and generally exemplified the character education behavior described in the morning announcements (Clark, 2003). The themes changed and became more classroom-centered. The desired behavior, such as doing your homework, was more applicable to the individual teacher's practice, and therefore the ability to ascertain the overall compliance of the program became difficult. October's announcements came and went and the program slipped into the routine. November's announcements warranted little discussion. The program was mechanically sound; teachers easily duplicated the format for use in future years. December's announcements followed the same pattern. The question remained to be answered: after four months, was there any effect on student behavior?

January, 2006: This study began with the interviews of the teachers, administrator, and support personnel from which data would be gathered. Local, site-based educators would be

utilized as problem-solvers rather than following a prearranged protocol (Kerr & Reitz, 1991). By that time, the staff had had four full months to form a preliminary evaluation of the program. In those four months, there were no positive or negative motivational prompts or comments made by the administration or myself. I did not want the character education program to be seen as my private property. One of the downsides of a community of practice can be the temptation of ownership (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). The character education program would result from the staff working collaboratively, not merely a study being conducted by a sole participant. When the January 2006 interviews began, the teachers would discuss and evaluate the program on the program's own merits.

## **3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **3.2.1 Qualitative Research: Definition**

Qualitative research can be defined as a type of in-depth study using face-to-face data collection that meets the informants in their natural setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). In using qualitative research for this study, it was acknowledged that the educational setting of an elementary school challenges an isolated, impersonal form of quantitative description and analysis. Qualitative research can take into account the ambiguous conditions of education, which are characteristic of circumstances filled with children and adults, each acting as a variable in the context of the study.

Qualitative inquiry is also personal in its orientation. This type of research seeks to understand how people make sense of their own lives, using a profound familiarity and individual participation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Lofland as cited in Huberman & Miles, 2002). There is an intimate relationship between the researcher and the object of the inquiry, in this case, the school. As the researcher is the primary tool of the research, she uses her practical experience to investigate the behavior and opinions of others in their natural setting. Considered a type of phenomenology, the qualitative approach is based on a philosophical orientation which focuses on people's experiences from their perspective. "Researchers seek a holistic picture, a complete and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon they're studying" (Roberts,

2004, p. 111). Through personal reflection and involvement with the question under study, the researcher gives attention to the meaning assigned to the research by the participants themselves. Qualitative research appreciates the human experience of the people who form the data of the work (Kincheloe, 2003).

This researcher grounded the study in the conceptual conviction that the collaborative human experience of the staff of the elementary school under consideration could produce a character education program that would be efficient and beneficial. Holly (2005) substantiates this concept and comments on recent trends in qualitative research stating that there are...”several changes including a growing number and diversity of people conducting research, including learning communities (or communities of practice) where multiple perspectives contribute richness to the inquiry, research taking place closer to the subject (classroom)” (p. 12-13).

If the data proved otherwise, if that same staff could not implement the program to produce a satisfactory outcome, then those faculty members would attempt to enumerate reasons why the intervention was not efficient or beneficial in its design and suggest improvements. In relation to the character education program, staff members would provide “continuous modifications of a situation and theorizing from the standpoint of action” (Holly, 2005 p. 5).

Moreover, qualitative inquiry demands respect and understanding of the context, producing a description that is deep and rich in its orientation. Kincheloe (1998) explains, “If the lived world is a complex place, then the lived world of the school is a complex place squared” (p. 10). The study examined the intricacies of everyday life in the classroom, playground, cafeteria, and faculty room to produce a comprehensive understanding of factors influencing the final product. Staff members observed and reflected upon what they experience. “Data are not separate from ourselves” (Holly, 2005, p. 139).

### **3.2.1.1 Qualitative Research: Rationale for Utilization**

Qualitative research was appropriate for this study because it corresponded to the following criteria for such inquiry (Roberts, 2004). First, there was a conviction on the part of this researcher that personal experience would add to the relevance and understanding of the topic. After being employed by the district for 34 years, I held a vantage point that enabled the research to be put into an historical perspective that the new program required, avoiding the mistakes

made by programs utilized in the past. Rather than report isolated quantitative statistics, qualitative inquiry would be able to search for rich, insightful data that would allow the results to reflect, catalog, and theorize why the participants held either positive or negative estimations of that implementation process. Holly (2005), quoting Einstein: “Intuition is based in part on experience and points us toward certain kinds of information which can lead to knowledge” (p. 142).

Furthermore, the nature of the research problem demanded close collaboration and knowledge of the inner workings of a school entity, research performed by an insider. There was no need to arrange admittance into the society under consideration. The fieldwork for this study began long before the research questions were formulated. Impressions and reflection had been an ongoing project over the last 34 years in education and 15 years in this elementary school, utilizing both personal knowledge and observation.

Qualitative research also required for a desire for depth: to go beyond numbers into reasons, to establish an understanding of the contextual phenomenon of which little may be known. No one had attempted a collaborative action research project in this elementary school setting. Even though a professional may reflect upon his or her individual practice, a substantive program of research had not been initiated before this study. I looked for innovative insight into 1) the process of teacher-as-researcher, 2) the implementation of a teacher-initiated program of behavior-based character education, and 3) the concept of reciprocal research where both researcher and subject benefited from the study. In researching the character education program, my study progressed. At the same time, Amadeus Elementary School would ‘earn’ a custom-made character education program. I theorized that this reciprocal collaborative research was indicative of the action research paradigm.

Finally, qualitative research would allow the study the latitude to investigate multiple, contextual variables that would be difficult to control in a naturalistic setting. Hendricks (2006) explains that “the general purpose of qualitative research is to understand and interpret phenomena as they occur in natural settings” (p. 2-3). Significant, intricate details could emerge from interviews, field notes, group collaboration and personal observation that might have been lost under less ambiguous circumstances. Fellow practitioners conveyed their knowledge of the context through stories that illustrated how that knowledge was produced and put into action. Through the interview protocol, the faculty lounge discussion, and the hallway anecdote, the

teachers, support personnel and administration told me their stories which they used to describe “complex causal relations while incorporating implicit contextual factors that may be crucial to appreciate but hard to codify or generalize” (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p. 168).

### **3.2.1.2 Action Research: Definition**

When problems arise within the educational setting, whose job is it to find a solution? Who owns the knowledge that would allow a thorough understanding of the problem and knowledge of the implementation strategies necessary to solve the problem? In this study, it was acknowledged that the teachers, support personnel, administration and this practitioner herself would use the framework of action research to search out the causes, apply reflection to the causal data, and formulate a solution that typifies an insider’s view of the situation, a custom-made fit. In response to the problems now facing education, teacher-initiated action research may prove to be essential (Kincheloe, 1998: Herr & Anderson, 2005). Lawrence Stenhouse, quoted in Ruddick & Hopkins (1985) comments that “It is the teachers, who in the end, will change the world of the school by understanding it” (p. iii).

The school district under consideration had been diligent in its search for a character education program that proved to be both suitable and successful. Therefore, this study employed the cyclical operational methodology and overarching concept of action research. It enabled the researcher to follow a line of investigation that would lead to viable solutions to everyday challenges in education.

Action research can be defined as research whose purpose is “to discover if programs and policies are working, for whom are they working, and what can be improved” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 9). Action research contains two inherent areas of focus. First, the teacher-as-researcher needs to concentrate on an element of her practice where she believes she can make a change occur. Secondly, she must examine the effects of that change (Hendricks, 2006).

Reflection is the beginning and end of the cyclical nature of action research. The practitioner uses critical reflection to begin a realistic assessment of a problem that surface in the day-to-day instructional environment. The research questions were formulated and the inquiry centered upon asking which implementation strategies would be used by staff members to construct a more efficacious character education program and why did some strategies work, and

others prove less than effective. Propelled by these questions, I began to formally assemble the contextual, reflective, and observational data that typifies the qualitative research process and try to answer the “why” of success or failure.

This is followed by action—trying those strategies and again reflecting upon the result of that action to determine its benefits and costs. The data came from different sources such as interviews, transcripts of focus group discussions, field observation journal entries (Burton & Bartlett, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Hendricks, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I was the main investigative tool. Through observation and appreciation of the context of the problem, I endeavored to conduct an examination and analysis of the issues impacting the research question. The participants, as collaborative researchers, contributed and selected their solutions to the problem. This led to a change in practice, which began another series of professional reflections to ascertain the effect of that change. And from that reflection, more questions arose, beginning the action research cycle anew (McMillian & Schumacher, 2006). Thus the reciprocal research collaborative increased the knowledge of educational praxis was increased through the efforts of those who stood to benefit most from the research, the teacher in the classroom. By making the results public through this study, the collaborative members venture to add to the general body of pedagogical knowledge.

### **3.2.1.3 Action Research: Contextual Rationale for the Study**

As a teacher, I was cognizant of the lack of civility displayed in our school, not necessarily due to rudeness, but to lack of direction and instruction. It was feasible that collaborative effort among staff members could generate a change. “...explorers of our own terrain and developing scholars of our own practice, we know that meaningful understanding and change demand a kind of wisdom that begins at home” (Holly, 2006, p. 101). Pushing, shoving, and ignoring those who pass in the hall, were some of the many of the small things that daily and cumulatively could produce a rough, cold place to learn. Many teachers, support personnel and the administration recognized and voiced the same concern.

In casual conversations and through discussions at monthly faculty meetings, it became apparent that these behaviors fell under the heading of character education, and the lack of instruction in this area was due to the constraints of limited time and expendable energy.

Character education was relegated to the part of the school day that remained after the demands of everyday instruction were met, and the requisite attention was allotted to standardize testing.

Although each classroom had the obligatory class rules posted, nothing was being done in a school-wide, systematic manner that would invite an atmosphere of caring for one another. As a former high school teacher, I remember vividly how negative behaviors had an escalating effect. Small details of civility and caring were ignored. The overall effect was one of negativity both from the staff and the students. The hallways were not places that reflected respect, but tension, arising from disrespect on a very basic level. The teachers had to be posted in the halls; the security of the students demanded constant vigilance. Was this the best anyone could do in producing a community that exhibited care for one another?

Perhaps it was the memory of that negativity that prompted investigation of action research and how its cyclical methodology of collaboration indicated that it would prove beneficial in the field of character education. Through examination of various character education theories and practices, there arose an image of school-wide participation and transformation. As a teacher researcher, it was possible to raise the standard of civility at my school. The students and staff deserved a community where caring was the benchmark for behavior.

With the support of the administration, and through the framework of action research, I constructed a framework of data collection. I then would analyze the data to yield a collection of strategies that would be discussed to discover the feasibility of school-wide implementation. In the process of teacher research, the staff would be empowered to formulate a solution that reflected an accurate discernment of the context and the wealth of pedagogy that was already exhibited by the staff in other instructional areas (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Then the staff would continue in the role of teacher researchers observing, analyzing, and theorizing upon what we had learned from our collective experiences in order to construct proposals to ensure improvement (Burton & Bartlett, 2005; Kincheloe, 1998). We would work to solve our own problems with emic, iterative comprehension. Through empowered teachers using the protocol of action research, we would attempt to change practice vis-à-vis character education and improve the ethos of the entire school through collaborative effort.

### **3.2.1.4 Framework of the Study**

First, before going forward, it proved judicious to look backward. To avoid the mistakes of the past, it was necessary to examine the history of character education implementation in our school. Staff members had seen a variety of programs come and go. Many of the previously initiated character education programs were conceived, subscribed, and instigated by administration or character education committees. These programs were formulated by agencies that supplied pre-packaged character education materials. If the program presented instructional methodology that proved to be prohibitive as far as time constraints or monetary costs were concerned, that positioned it outside of this particular context. Consequently, the programs often failed to garner adherents (See Appendix A). Often it was a case of “good idea, but bad fit.” Perhaps a custom-made program would be accepted and utilized more readily (Davidson, 2000). Yet the dimensions of that program would have to be supplied by an insider’s measurement. This was where the concept of action research proved appropriate.

Secondly, the program might be more relevant to our situation if it were constructed from a readily identifiable source and if we used a protocol that was already in place. By using Clark’s (2003) book, as a conceptual basis for the proposed action research, our character education program reflected a practitioner’s perspective. Mr. Clark entered teaching from outside the domain of academia and described in his book the practitioner’s prescription and rationale for the behaviors that he promoted. Many of the staff members had a working knowledge of the book and its author.

Moreover, we could also build upon what was already in place, that is, a daily announcement protocol that was easily adapted as the need arose. If the idea of an announcement-based program were easily understood and utilized, would that facilitate its implementation, promotion and success? Considering the constraints of time and effort, I ascertained that an uncomplicated protocol would be the most beneficial and realistic. That is, rather than an elaborate framework of classroom instruction and schedule of school-wide activities, this was a simplistic framework of behaviors organized around the existing monthly character education model. Then I could collect data and analyze that data to see how this protocol worked. If it didn’t, what changes could make it work? We began the process by using the morning announcement format which was already in place and the only school wide communication system available to both staff and students. Then through a series of

collaborative reflections, the staff instituted implementation strategies that produced a working, custom-fit character education program.

Therefore, I used the theoretical concept of action research to describe, analyze and evaluate the process of implementing a character education program on the elementary school level. This was done through collaborative reflection whereby the action researchers “must analyze and interpret the ideas and perspectives of others which can result in the development of a critical community of individuals who collaborate and reflect to solve problems” (Hendricks, 2006, pp. 24-25).

### **3.2.1.5 Data Collection for the Study**

I submitted all appropriate forms to the Institutional Review Board for their consideration and approval. These forms also contained letters from the school principal and district superintendent granting permission for the study. After receiving approval from the University, data collection began in January, 2006.

Employing the paradigm of qualitative research, I gathered data from three sources: my field notes in journal form, group discussions transcribed from the monthly faculty meeting and informal focus gatherings, and individual interviews with staff members. It was of vital importance to the purpose of the study to not only investigate the efficacy of the program, but also to delve deeply into the data to theorize what elements of the program worked or didn't work. Action research often employed comparatively “messy” data collection, always probing, and increasing the scope of the investigation in order to include all implementation strategies and observations, not just those that fit an empirical collection process (Herr & Anderson, 2005). In order to ascertain what implications and recommendations could be uncovered in the data, the question of “why” had to be asked continuously.

The administration had put the topic on the agenda for the January, February, March, and April staff meetings, held on the third Wednesday of each month. These questions framed the discussion at each faculty meeting:

1. What do you think of the program? Is it working?
2. What do we know that will make it work, or make it work better?
3. How can we as teachers utilize the findings that the staff has provided to make the program of greater benefit for everyone?

#### 4. What have you seen that proves your conclusions?

The theoretical underpinnings of the program proceeded from the concepts of community of practice (Lave & Chaiklin, 1984), community of caring (Noddings, 1992, 2002, 2003), and zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1934/1978) as described in the review of literature. This theoretical framework guided the analysis of the practical application of the teacher data. The practical aspect of the data came from the staff, as collaborative researchers putting the emphasis on the realistic, something that was effective, yet useful to the degree that it was utilized on a regular, school-wide basis.

Addressing the faculty as a group in January, I asked the staff to reflect upon and suggest specific strategies that they believe would enhance the program. Teachers discussed successful and unsuccessful strategies and compiled those proposals that seem efficacious and realistic. Before the next faculty meeting, a smaller focus group would corroborate an approach that could be used school-wide based on their own praxis. To enforce the concept of teacher-as-researchers, I asked them to keep anecdotal and procedural data on the strategies they found to be successful.

From focus group meeting to faculty meeting, informal individual interviews used the same questions to glean any classroom-specific ideas that staff members formulated. Most importantly, the individual interviews looked for honest appraisals of the character education program. What was successful in the classroom, hallways, cafeteria, and playground? And how did we know; what did we observe?

#### **3.2.1.6 Theory of Program Acceptance/Rejection**

After witnessing change in the students' behavior as suggested by the morning announcements, it proved to be instructive to ask contributing personnel to theorize a rationale for the acceptance or rejection of the program. Why did the program achieve its goal of changing student behavior through teacher implementation strategies or why did teachers fail to produce those strategies that would have guaranteed the program success?

These reasons were examined according to the criteria postulated by Kennedy (2005) in her book, *Inside Teaching*. The author's research focuses on the reasons why teachers resist change or reform in their everyday practice. As a framework for the study, Kennedy proposed

five reasons for change resistance appearing most often in research (p. 12). Teachers did not incorporate programs of reform or change into their practice for the following reasons:

1. Teachers did not have sufficient knowledge of the reform or of directions that the reform included (Kennedy, 2005). Nor was there sufficient guidance provided in the implementation of the reform. In this study, was there sufficient background, in-service instruction, and monitoring to assure appropriate implementation?

2. Teachers did not incorporate change because they held different values and beliefs than those exemplified in the program (Kennedy, 2005). Possibly, a teacher would see no need for the program, either because the students' behavior was judged to be adequate or judged to be beyond the ability of the program, a case of too little, too late. Did our teachers see the need for character education?

3. Some teachers had attitudes that interfere with the implementation of the program (Kennedy, 2005). Was there cynicism on the part of the professional who had seen one too many new initiatives come and go? Conversely, with so many other things to consider, did the program overwhelm a teacher in a new situation, trying to keep one page ahead of the class? Just as students are criticized for having an attitude problem when work is presented, teachers can assume a negative disposition toward any new reform or practice suggested by colleague or administrator. Was that the case at Amadeus Elementary where the study took place?

4. The teaching situation prevented teachers from changing their practice (Kennedy, 2005). If a first period class was that of a "special" that is, physical education, library, music, art, or technology, the class would probably be in transit during the announcements or perhaps just settling into their place. Whatever behavior the program suggested was lost in the typical confusion that accompanies a change of classroom in an elementary school. Moreover, the program may not have reflected the ethos of the community of practice, adults and students alike. The character education proposal may be another "bad fit;" it just didn't work in this school. If the program was not accepted, was the school environment the reason?

5. The program itself was too unrealistic (Kennedy, 2005). Did the program expect too much from children and staff? Considering the present level of student behavior, was the program grasping at a level of change that seemed beyond implementation?

If the rationale for lack of implementation evolved from these reasons, as theorized by Kennedy, then what alterations could we apply to the program to make it efficacious in this

context? Teachers' questions, comments, additions, and examples became a working document that examined the programs problems and offered collaborative solutions.

### **3.3 POPULATION**

#### **3.3.1 Description of Participants**

The sample population of this study included the administration, teachers, and support staff of a suburban elementary school, Amadeus Elementary approximately fifteen fulltime, regular classroom teachers, two permanent substitute teachers, and teachers of "special subjects" which include art, library, physical education, music, and technology. I also interviewed and included data from four student teachers and one intern. Personnel staff members included secretaries, cafeteria workers and the custodian. This agrees with the findings made by Leming (2000) in which he states, after evaluating the Heartwood character education program: "Findings in this evaluation suggests that the adoption by teachers of a pervasive approach to character education that cuts across all aspects of the curriculum is an important component of an effective character education programme"(p. 423).. Even though custodians, secretaries, cafeteria workers, and the administrator of the building were interviewed, the main implementation process primarily involved the teachers, all teachers. Any participation was entirely voluntary.

At the request of the administration, the study was found in the domain of the professional staff and paraprofessionals employed by the district. Parental input was not to be solicited or recorded as per her request.

#### **3.3.2 Selection Procedure**

At the presentation of the four aforementioned questions at the January faculty meeting, comments, suggestions, criticisms, and additions led me to solicit more information from the staff in private interviews, conducted on site. All members of the staff were interviewed to insure complete coverage of the research questions, garnering comment even from those who saw more

negative than positive effects of the program. Private interviews began with selection of participants who exhibited the willingness to continue collaboration during the faculty meeting. I then asked those who gave indication of positive attitude toward the program if they would form a focus group to specialize in detailed observation, discussion, reflection and data collection. Time concerns were mentioned by the teachers and we decided that focus group activity was to be informal and spontaneous, rather than scheduled and official. The focus groups, with from five to seven members, met in the hallways before class, in the faculty lunchroom, and on the playground with one eye always on the children.

Since I had been on staff at this elementary school for fifteen years, I was well acquainted with most staff members. I believed that as professionals they would cooperate with the data collection to the extent that their personal schedules would allow. This turned out to be the case for both data collection and focus group participation. Their experience in observation and reflection added to the validity, reliability and rigor of the findings. They also proved to have little hesitation in telling me quite candidly their evaluation of the character education program and gave an accurate description of the program context in which it was utilized.

In the reporting of the data, I gave little specific, descriptive information about Amadeus Elementary School in the pages of this study. Since the district identity could easily be traced, and a possible breach of anonymity could then occur, the description of the site has remained undisclosed as to location and specific socio-economic descriptors. I limited the demographics to description that in no way jeopardized its identity. Teachers used self-selected pseudonyms; once again, demographic description of the interviewees only outlined the categories necessary for the research. As Kennedy (2005) comments: "Research of this sort has a small-town quality. All the teachers in the participating schools know one another and know who participated in our study. If I described a teacher...everybody would know who that is ... (use to disguise school district) there are times that individual stories when more contextual information is revealed because it is essential to the story, but otherwise I treat the teachers as if they came from the sample as a whole, rather than from a specific school context or specific reform initiative" (p. 244). As researcher, I employed the pseudonyms at the time of the interviews, in the field notes observation journal and in the coding to insure confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents.

### **3.3.3 Criteria for Inclusion**

Teachers included in this study held permanent certification in elementary education from the state of Pennsylvania or K-12 certification in the area of their specialty, such as physical education, art, music, library or technology. Student teachers and the intern were affiliated with an accredited university. Permanent support personnel such as cafeteria workers, the daytime custodian, office secretary and permanent substitute teachers also participated as did the administration.

## **3.4 INSTRUMENTATION**

### **3.4.1 Interviews: Description**

“If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk to them?” (Kvale, 1996, p.1). For this study, I utilized interviews as the main instrument of data collection. Through a basic question and answer format, I looked for the deep, rich description that typifies qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Kvale (1996) uses the analogy of a traveler who stops talks to people on the way and these conversations lead to new knowledge of the subject. The traveler and the story are both changed through the traveler’s perceptions of the people and land. Similarly, in qualitative research, the researcher changes, changes her practice, and changes the context of that practice through the observations and stories she is told through the interview medium and through the reflective outcome of the study.

Action research is social research, and language forms the material of social research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Through the conversation one clarifies an answer; information is no longer static but becomes a living document influenced by its surroundings. Yet the research interview is more than a conversation. It is a professional conversation (Kvale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The researcher ferrets out data from the informal or formal conversation in order to form an interpretation of the phenomenon being examined:

The use of the interview as a research method is nothing mysterious: An interview is a conversation that has a structure and a purpose. It goes beyond the

spontaneous exchange of views as in everyday conversation, and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge. The research interview is not a conversation between equal partners, because the researcher defines and controls the situation. The topic of the interview is introduced by the researcher, who also critically follows up on the subject's answers to his or her questions...I will argue that... it is in fact a strength of the interview conversation to capture the multitude of subjects' views of a theme and to picture a manifold and controversial human world" (Kvale, 1996, p.6-7).

Since I was very cognizant of the informants in this situation, I accepted Kvale's theory that the interview format could be professionally exercised to gather credible data leading to a deeper understanding of the research question, context, and subsequent conclusions.

#### **3.4.1.1 Interviews: Suitability for Population and Context**

This study judged the effectiveness of the character education program under consideration through collaborative research. Staff members revealed their personal strategies that formed their implementation of this character education program. The data was subjective; it reflected the personal *modus operandi* of each informant, what they claimed as successful or unsuccessful in their past experience. These interviews respected that personal reflection. Hendrick (2006) observes: "The process of action research begins with systematic, critical reflection. The frame for reflection is in terms of action to take, narrowed down to specific actions and outcomes" (p. 28). Such critical reflection preceded the study. How could we teach character education using an efficacious methodology by which the goals and objectives of the program, the various desired behaviors, were achieved? I requested such reflection at the introduction of the program so that the observations necessary for reflection would be gathered from the everyday context of teaching.

The ambiguity that may have existed in the context often could not be quantified, but that same ambiguity was part of the description of the daily teaching context (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Each student became a variable causing the data to form a prism, rather than a mirror of the situation. There was another angle, another side to the story. Interviewing delved deeply to obtain the level of innovative understanding yet allow flexibility in the questioning process (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Therefore, the interview tool was judged to be appropriate in a school setting and with a collaborative research intervention.

An informal interview guide was used in this study. I outlined the research topics in advance, but allowed ample space in the conversation for expansion and detours. I decided the sequence and wording for the questions of the interview, letting the answers surface during casual conversation. The goal of the interviews was to increase comprehension. “Qualitative in-depth interviews are noted more for their *probes* and *pauses* than for their particular question formats. Establishing trust, being genuine, maintaining eye contact, and conveying through phrasing, cadence, and voice tone that the researcher hears and connects with the person elicit more valid data than a rigid approach” (McMillan & Schumacher, p. 353, italics added in original.) I listened for the hesitations and the silences that a question elicited, often conveying more meaning than words for an answer.

#### **3.4.1.2 Interviews: Alignment of Interview Questions with Research Questions**

Interview inquiries answered the research questions through the interrogation process. I tape-recorded all discourse, simply explaining that I could not write fast enough to capture every word. Most interviewees appreciated the fact that I valued their observations and wanted to transcribe them correctly, word for word. Only twice did my hand-held tape recorder malfunction. In both cases, I transcribed the interviews using long hand, and the remnants of my Gregg shorthand instruction. Each interview was also recorded by hand on papers which had the interview questions listed and space for the demographic information that was necessary.

The following illustrates the alignment between research question and interview question employed to insure coverage of all issues of the study.

*Research question:*

1. What strategies do teachers, administration, and support staff utilize in the implementation of the character education program?

*Interview question:*

1. What have you done in your daily activities that have made the program work?

*Research question:*

2. What factors in the program lend support to its implementation?

*Interview question:*

2. What part of the program works for your situation?

*Research question:*

3. What problems occur during the initial implementation of the program that limited its success?

*Interview question:*

3. What part of the program hasn't worked for you and can you tell me why?

*Research question:*

4. What differences in student behavior does the staff observe that illustrate the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the character education program as it progresses under study?

*Interview question:*

4. Tell me about any changes in the children's behavior that you've observed that you believe were due to the program.

*Research question:*

5. What themes and/or concepts emerge through the description and analysis of the program's implementation that point to the reasons for its effectiveness or ineffectiveness?

*Interview question:*

5. Look back in your experience and from what you know about character education programs, what have we discussed that will help or hinder the effectiveness of the program?

*Research question:*

6. What changes in the program are recommended to insure the success of programs of this nature?

*Interview question;*

6. What do you think is the key element to getting the program to really be effective, that is, to make a noticeable change in the school behavior?

### **3.4.1.3 The Interview Process**

All interviews were conducted on site. The interview schedule involved each classroom teacher (15) and the four special subject teachers. The principal, office secretary, daytime custodian and cafeteria workers (2), also cooperated through both sets of interviews. As an additional area of investigation, I interviewed the one intern and four student teachers who were assigned to the school for the second semester. This proved to be useful in supplying an outsider's novel evaluation of the student's behavior in general and specifically, the efficacy of the program. Later, I realized that some of the best suggestions arose from these fledgling teachers and their implementation strategies often opened new avenues of inquiry, such as the amount of character education that they had received in their undergraduate instruction. As Wenger, McDermott and Snyder propose: "Successful communities offer the familiar comforts of a hometown, they also have enough interesting and varied events to keep new ideas and new people cycling into the community" (2002, p. 61).

Another facet of the observation came from the fulltime substitute teachers. The district employed two teachers to be on staff for the entire school year, acting as the first teachers called upon when substitutes were needed. They covered all six grade levels, kindergarten through grade five and often taught the weekly special subjects such as music, art, gym, library and technology. By going from room to room, grade level to grade level, subject to subject, their observations, suggestions and reflections provided another side to the prism of information that emerged from this qualitative action research study. They saw the entire "picture." Their ability to compare and contrast age, class, and teaching environments was invaluable.

Following the request of the administration, parental involvement in the study was not admitted. Nor were any students enlisted in the data collection. The study sought to discover implementation strategies that would come from the everyday practice of the professional staff.

The interviews were tape-recorded and I also used a paper script to keep the interview on task but within informal guidelines. These interviews were not idle conversations; there was an expressed purpose to our conversation. All of the participants took their roles seriously and although humor was often found between the pages of the transcripts, informants presented a professional perspective of the program's efficacy and context.

The interview participants included:

**Table 1 Optimum Interview Participants**

<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Category of Participant</b>
2	Kindergarten teachers
2	First grade teachers
3	Second grade teachers
2	Third grade teachers
2	Fourth grade teachers
2	Fifth grade teachers
2	Special education teachers
1	Administrator
1	Custodian
2	Cafeteria workers
2	Fulltime permanent Substitute teachers
4	Student Teachers
1	Full-year Intern
1	Secretary
5	Special subject teachers

This first series of interviews began after the January staff meeting and finished in the beginning of June. This extended interview schedule was the result of added informants, especially the intern, permanent substitute, and student teachers. These newest members of the teaching staff had a unique perspective that provided data that could not be gleaned from interviews with those who had been employed in the district for some time. I allowed time, from January to June, for them to form a judgment of our school and the character education program and interviewed them later in the year. These interviews proved to be especially informative when these latest informants could offer a comparison between our school and the schools they had either attended when young, or schools in which they had done their bi-weekly field observations.

After each interview was recorded, I transcribed all data into the appropriate database. This presented an additional opportunity to become intimate with the data, considering not only

the spoken word, but the speaker and the context in which the words were spoken. Later, I imported this round of interviews into the NUD\*IST qualitative analysis program as INTERJAN. The program assigned each line of text was assigned a text line number for retrieval during the analysis. These text unit numbers appeared as reference for the given statement.

The interviews were analyzed for data patterns of response and strategies. Subsequently, I suggested these implementation strategies at the February 8 focus meeting. From the discussion of the implementation strategies at the focus group meeting, the group determined which suggestions to present at the next faculty meeting in February 2006

At the February faculty meeting, we continued the same reflective protocol. Group discussion centered on the strategies that the focus group discussed and evaluated. The entire group decided if the strategy was applicable for everyone to use. If the strategy was worthwhile, I suggested that everyone implement it for one month to see if it works in each individual situation. During the time between faculty meetings, I again met with focus group members to glean additional strategies that they were willing to try in their practice. The best of the new ideas were then presented to the faculty at the next meeting for discussion and implementation. The agenda included reporting the efficacy of the implementations suggested at the last meeting and then the implementations that the focus group suggests for another round of experimentation, always emphasizing the need for critical reflection and observation. The cycle of reflection, experimentation, and discussion continued throughout this time, from January to the end of the year.

After the May faculty meeting, I again interviewed the staff to see if there had been any change in the efficacy of the program and to see if the teachers-as-researchers had formulated at any further implementation strategies. At this meeting, the character education intervention was evaluated, highlighting the best practices for the community of caring and practice to adopt as part of the ethos of the school. Due to familiarity of the context and the researcher, interviewees proved to be candid in their discussions as theorized in Wenger, McDermott & Snyder (2002).

### **3.4.2 Field Notes Observation Journal**

#### **3.4.2.1 Field Notes Observation Journal: Description**

Besides the interview process, I investigated the situation through the method of observation recorded as journal entries (Burton & Bartlett, 2005). My field notes proved to be an invaluable method of providing the necessary contextual description of the school year that influenced the outcome of the action research. My journal helped to explain the result of the intervention. In many cases, it provided the answer to the “why” questions that remained after the “yes” or “no” questions were answered. The iterative, reflective aspect of action research demanded that this researcher become cognizant of what was happening, who was doing it, and the interpretation that followed the observed event. This was done to understand the larger picture or context of the study (Burton & Bartlett, 2005; Kincheloe, 2003). Field notes helped me capture that “larger picture” on a daily basis.

By observing the context, I amassed data that led to rich description of the setting of the study. At each faculty meeting and at each individual interview, I reminded the staff to keep “their eyes open.” I followed my own advice and recorded not only the event but the underlying causes for the observation. “Field notes are direct observation of what is being said and done as well as impressions or hunches of the observer” (Holly, 2005, p. 145). By investigating those impressions to find the rationale for the event, I could answer the “why” along with the objective examination.

#### **3.4.2.2 Field Notes Observation Journal: Email Utilization**

I began sending an informal weekly email asking for any observations that seem pertinent to the study. This was to enable the teachers to record their perceptions with a minimum of bookkeeping. These emails would have been incorporated into my field notes as journal entries as seen in Figure 1. Unfortunately, this area of data collection did not provide any feedback to warrant continuation. Teachers experienced difficulty in reading and responding via the district computer system. Some had email accounts that simply did not work. Others had little inclination to stop and send an email when weightier matters demanded their attention. Lawrence Stenhouse, an early proponent of teacher research understands the time restraints of

teaching when he comments that the most serious impediment to the development of teachers as researchers “is quite simply shortage of time” (Rudduck & Hopkins, (Eds.) 1985).

### **3.4.2.3 Field Notes Observation Journal: Researcher Entries**

Most data concerning observation of the efficacy of the program I gleaned from informal mention in the hall before class, on the playground, or at the faculty lunch table. The multiple positionalities, teacher, researcher, program developer, senior staff member, acting principal, was a constant consideration. Issuing edicts, demanding the staff to fill out that form, using the vocabulary of speech patterns of academia placed the study in danger of failing from negative perceptions of a hierarchical rather than collaborative participation. Stenhouse warns that: “social sciences too often produce concepts (jargon) that seem like stepping stones into a lake rather than across a river” (Rudduck & Hopkins, (Eds.) 1985, p. 54). The field note journal became increasingly important as I realized that the email format would not produce sufficient amount of data. In order to keep the collaboration in operation, I realized that people did not respond to my emails; they responded to me, personally. As Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder comment: “Many of the most valuable community activities are the small, everyday interactions—informal discussions to solve a problem, or one-on-one exchanges of information...” (2002, p. 60). The data would come from the staff but it would be recorded by the researcher.

This prompted a daily reflection that I entered into a pre-numbered, bound notebook or typed directly into the appropriate computer database. I made a daily record of the casual remark or the studied observation of both faculty/staff and student. More than just a transcription of the facts, I included a reflective account of what the context of the observation included. Holly (2005) verifies this diverse use of field notes, stating that this is a valid collection device, not only for observations, but also for formulating hypotheses, recording methodology and documenting related research issues. When these field notes were changed into text units, I used pseudonyms for concealing demographic information that might have led the reader to identify the site of the study or any participant.

The abandoned email procedure also pointed to the weakness of the observation instrument. It proved difficult to observe, record, and carry on with the daily tasks of instruction all at the same time. Moreover, many situations that occur in teaching don't lend themselves to

predetermined types of behaviors (Burton & Bartlett, 2005) that would have made categorization of those behaviors easier. So I kept the instructions for observations open-ended, asking for anything, at any time, that the teacher or staff member believed would be helpful for me to know in relation to the program's implementation.

Staff member: -----Date-----
<p>Please list any strategies that you have used or thought suitable for the “Hear at Amadeus” character education program as heard on the morning announcements.</p> <hr/>
<p>Did you observe any change in student behavior and if so, please describe the change that you observed.</p> <hr/>
<p>Any additional comments or suggestions will be appreciated. Thanks.</p>

**Figure 1 Faculty-at-Large Email Form.**

#### **3.4.2.4 Field Notes Observation Journal: Focus Group Entries**

Relying on their expertise in the area of practical application of character education, I employed the focus group for more specific reflection, observation, and suggestions. The e-mail format for this group offered a more detailed format to be completed at the end of each week. Again, none of the faculty members used the form as illustrated below. Perhaps it was unrealistic to assume that people would prefer typing an email to talking to the researcher. As a result, my field notes journal took on an even more heightened importance as a method of data collection. When most staff and students had gone home, I found the quiet and solitude more suitable for recording and reflecting upon the events of the day. By reviewing those events in order of importance, I incorporated the observations and suggestions that were meant for the faculty-at-large email form (Figure 1) into prose that was inscribed into my field notes journal as well as focus group entries. These entries answered the same questions as the form suggested in the study, but I did the recording. In the final analysis, it was my study on which we all collaborated.

Those entries were typed into the appropriate database for subsequent analysis and codification. Field note journal text units are identified in the NUD\*IST qualitative analysis program as FIELDJAN or FIELDMAY. The program assigns a text unit number to allow for retrieval when analyzing the data. All information that would have been contained on the focus group email reply form was recorded into the field note journal including focus group date, members, observations, implementation suggestions, and cogent reflections.

<p>Focus group member-----Date-----</p> <p>Please complete the following e-mail and return it to me. Thanks for all your help.</p> <p>1. What character education strategies related to the “Hear at Amadeus” program did you use this week? ----- -----</p> <p>2. Through your observation of the students, did these strategies result in a change in behavior for your students? ----- -----</p> <p>3. Describe something you observed that indicates these strategies were successful or unsuccessful in changing student behavior due to the morning announcement program? ----- -----</p> <p>Thanks, and if there’s anything else, just let me know.</p>
--

**Figure 2 Focus Group Email Reply Form.**

I employed the field note journal for all the focus group recording and reflection. I had imagined focus group activity to follow the prescribed protocol listed in Figure 2. Yet the best observations, implementation strategies and qualifying remarks about the program flowed with little structure as focus group members went about the business of educating. The playground, hallways and faculty lunchroom proved to be very fertile ground for gleaning unscripted,

realistic appraisals of exactly people thought. My position as researcher demanded an accurate, comprehensive recording of data; my positions as collaborative insider demanded the informality that would not separate me from the sources of that data.

#### **3.4.2.5 Field Notes Observation Journal: Faculty Meetings**

Faculty meetings provided a different ingredient to the research. Due to the ever-present time constraints, the character education program was often placed low on the agenda and the resulting conversations were short and to the point. After an introduction from the principal, I used the faculty meetings as an opportunity to update the teaching staff as to the new implementation strategies suggested by the focus group. This usually generated discussion. In each instance, the implementation strategy received approval from the faculty with little or no prompting or endorsement from the administration or this researcher. I documented all discourse in the field notes observation journal for transcription into the appropriate database. I transcribed the action as it occurred and then entered all suggestions, observations, reflections with the accompanying demographic information. Due to the configuration of the library where the faculty meetings took place, the use of a tape recorder proved to be impractical. The participant staff member was contacted if there was any information that needed to be clarified, rectified or expanded.

The first faculty meeting began a series of questioning, reflection, interviewing, and then more questioning, an iterative process indicative of a qualitative study and action research (Herr & Anderson, 2005). The first line of questioning took place during the general, monthly faculty meeting in January. The principal introduced me and the study was explained in terms of a doctoral dissertation data for this researcher and an attempt to improve student behavior on a school-wide basis. I asked for their cooperation by reading the script which I had prepared for the Institutional Review Board. This script had received IRB approval and it delineated the purpose and methodology of the study along with a request for faculty cooperation. The script also promised anonymity for their input.

At that time, this researcher asked the staff for their general impressions of the program's efficacy. As an introduction to that request I reiterated the importance of schools producing not only academic excellence but also ethical people.

My introduction of the study hinged on three main objectives. The first objective was to evaluate the morning announcement program to ascertain its efficacy. Was the program making a change in the children's behavior? Should it be continued? We focus on what we want the future to be for our students and act accordingly (Holly, 2005). Secondly, we were looking for implementation strategies to use, not from experts outside of our building, but from the experts sitting in that room. Rudduck and Hopkins (1985) quote Stenhouse explaining the role of teacher-researcher: "Given that by participating in educational settings he is in a position to interpret meanings in action, he is not able to fulfill his professional role on the basis of probabilistic generalizations but on the contrary is expected to exercise his judgment in situational analysis. Such situational analysis can draw on intuitive organization of experience and probabilistic generalization and theory" (p. 23). Our own teachers would be able to examine their experience and formulate appropriate strategies according to Stenhouse. What would help the program succeed in changing the students' behavior in our own school context?

This introduction of the study outlined the basic methodology that would be used. This protocol was consistent with the action research cycle (Herr & Anderson, 2005). It also enlisted the faculty as fellow researchers in the study, not subjects of a study. Action research proposes a research relationship based on collaboration and cooperation. "This immediately shifts the working relationship from one of the 'expert' researcher informing the 'subjects'—figuring out what is best for them without their input—to one of seeing if a collaborative research relationship can begin to be established" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p.121)

After reading the interview questions, I conveyed my thanks. The interview portion of the data collection would begin immediately and I was looking forward to investigating what had proved successful or unsuccessful as far as implementation strategies were concerned. Now the action research cycle would commence in full gear.

#### **3.4.2.6 Field Notes Observation Journal: Suitability for Population and Context**

"Teachers are very skilled at making observations, perhaps even without being aware that they are doing so; observation is built into their training and they have developed the appropriate skills in order to aid their teaching. Teachers are well aware of the problems caused by not being sensitive to certain developments in the classroom" (Burton & Bartlett, 2005, p. 130). I can state with little hesitation, that after years of informal collaboration on various duties and

projects that the majority of the teachers I interviewed were able to use their honed sense of observation to detect any change in student behavior that was related to the character education program. They perceived which implementation strategies worked and which faltered in their contextual application. Everyday practice yielded only those ideas which would be practical, sustainable, and reliable. The teacher's ability to give a reasonable appraisal of the students' behavior was predicated on the assumption that behavior is both observable and measurable. Character traits such as purpose, commitment, and responsibility may be experienced subjectively, but the resulting behaviors are a third person, public, verifiable referent (DeCharms, 1976).

Additionally, there were no problems with entry into the situation of the study. After approximately 15 years in the elementary school under consideration, I was familiar enough that students and staff did not seem to be affected by my observation. Most were not even be aware of the observation as it took place.

Date-----Location of observation-----
Name of event-----
Context of event-----
-----
Description of event-----
-----
Interpretation of event-----
-----

**Figure 3 Field Note Journal Observation Form.**

The actual data collection in the field did not fit into prescribed observation forms. Those observations were written in my field notes either on the fly as they happened or after the day's end, when the silence of the halls lent itself to the reflection necessary for qualitative study and the sound of the heating univents closing down for the day. I was more than a passive observer, recording only what was seen or heard. A myriad of little pieces of data accumulated during the day like dust motes in a stream of sunlight, took on movement and shape when they were given quiet consideration. The major categories of inquiry were covered. The field notes journal

provided a flexible format so that not only answers could be derived, but also the researcher, tracing the often circuitous route that the data took, was able to arrive at those conclusions embedded in the prose.

I then transcribed the notes. This presented a third opportunity to consider the observation: first, when the event when occurred, second when the event was entered into the field observation journal and third when transcribed from those written in longhand into the computer database. The context and the observation were woven together to produce a qualitatively powerful, rich, and deep fabric of the data. I then imported the notes into the QSR NUD\*IST (N6) software program and coded into the appropriate node categories.

### **3.5 LONGITUDINAL DESCRIPTION OF EVENTS**

The following is a description of the inquiry events embedded within the school year. It illustrates the time restraints placed on the study by various contextual considerations.

#### January 2006:

At faculty meeting, the first round of questioning took place using the following queries to begin discussion:

1. What do you think of the program, is it working?
2. What do we know that will make it work, or make it work better?
3. How can we as teachers utilize the findings that the staff has provided to make the program of greater benefit for everyone?
4. What have we seen that proves our conclusions?

#### January 2006

At this time, I began interviewing the entire staff. I utilized the following interview structure for the entire staff:

<p>Name-----Date-----</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What have you done in your daily activities that have made the program work?</li> <li>2. What part of the program works for your situation?</li> <li>3. What part of the program hasn't worked for you and can you tell me why?</li> <li>4. Tell me about any changes in the children's behavior that you've observed that you believe were due to the program.</li> <li>5. Look back in your experience and from what you know about character education programs, what have we discussed that might help or hinder the effectiveness of the program?</li> <li>6. What do you think is the key element that may contribute to the effectiveness of the program, that is, to make a noticeable change in the school behavior?</li> </ol>
--

**Figure 4 Whole Group Interview Structure (January 2006)**

From the whole group interview responses, I asked a small group of staff members to experiment with any suggested strategies and report the following:

1. What strategies did they employ?
2. Were these strategies successful or unsuccessful?
3. What did they observe that formed that conclusion?

Mid-January to Mid-February 2006: Focus group evaluated data on implementation strategies, reported personal observations and findings amassed through my personal interviews.

February 2006: At the faculty meeting, staff discussed successful strategies that they have discovered and also theorize the reason if strategies were unsuccessful. New strategies from the focus group were given for experimentation by the entire staff.

Mid-February to Mid-March 2006: Protocol was established and afternoon announcements began. Visuals were constructed and distributed. The same protocol was prescribed as that of January-February. Once again, focus group was to collect data on implementation strategies, report their findings through e-mail or personal interviews. Then before the next faculty meeting in March, the group was to reflect and decide upon additional

implementation strategies to be discussed at the March faculty meeting. Due to illness, I did not call a March focus group meeting and I missed the March faculty meeting.

Mid-March to Mid-April 2006: Focus group members shared their reflections on implementation strategies, reporting their findings through personal conversations. Before the next faculty meeting in April, the group reflected upon the implementation strategies that were most successful in changing the behavior of the students and plan ways to incorporate these successful strategies into the program.

April 2006- May 2006: This period of time was distinguished by heightened discussion and evaluation of implementation strategies and reflective process used in making the character education program more efficient in producing better student behavior. Focus group suggestions for implementation were discussed for implementation by the entire staff. After the focus meeting and faculty meeting, I began to interview the entire staff for the second time using the same question structure

May, 2006: Interest in the program continued as did the suggestions for program improvement: this focus group meeting produced one of the best strategies that arose from the faculty for implementation.

May 2006: We began our final implementation strategy suggestion that is, announcing the compliant students' names on the afternoon announcements.

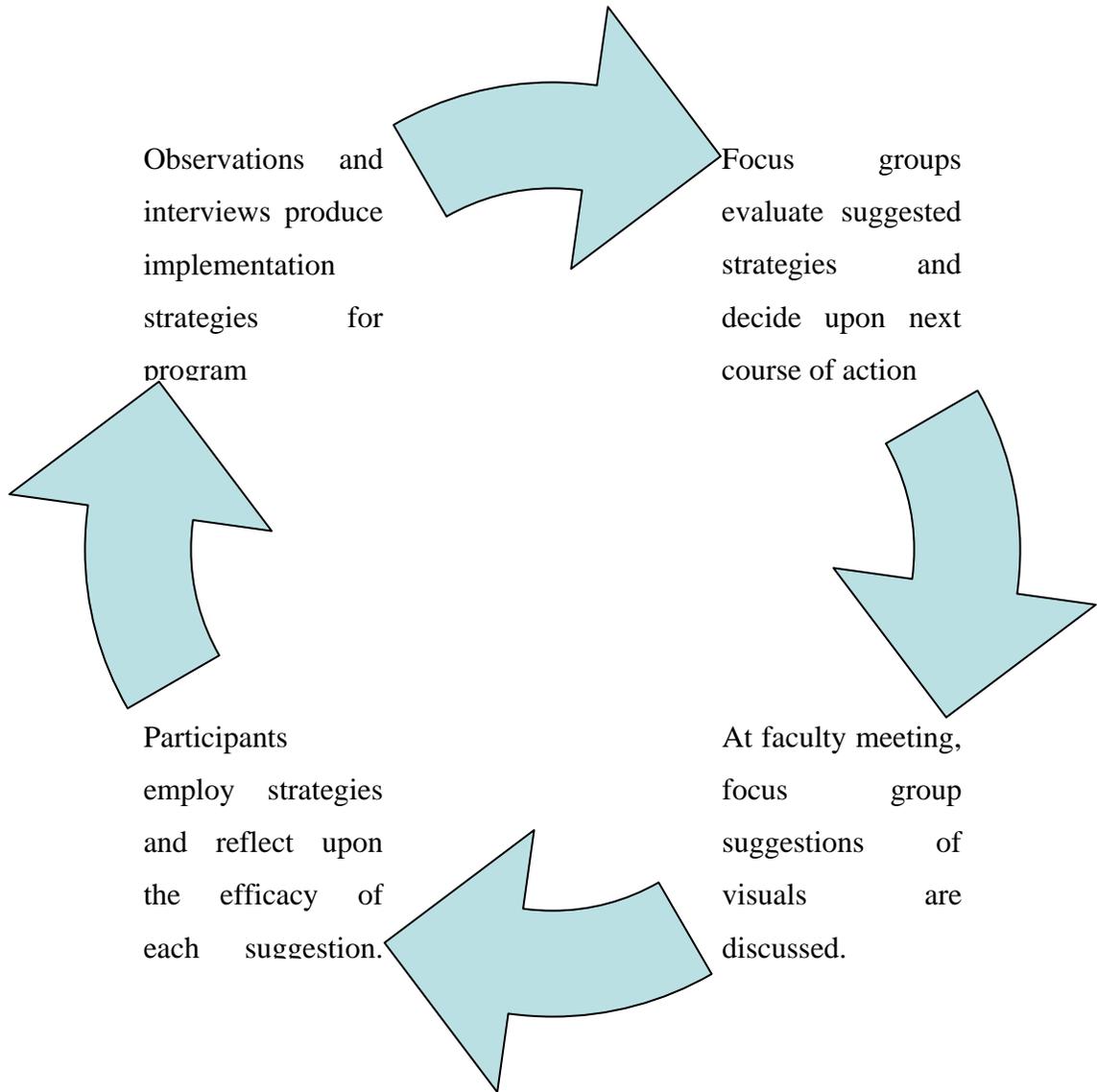
The last formal faculty meeting of the year was held on Wednesday, May 10. At this time, I led the discussion about the focus group recommendations. I also asked the faculty's cooperation as I started the last phase of interviews.

May 2006: The final interview protocol began utilizing the format below

Name-----	Date-----
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What have you done in your daily activities that have made the program work?</li> <li>2. What part of the program worked for your particular class and extra duty assignments?</li> <li>3. What part of the program hasn't worked for you and can you tell me why?</li> <li>4. Tell me about any changes in the children's behavior that you've observed that you believe were due to the program.</li> <li>5. Look back in your experience and from what you know about character education programs, what have we discussed that will help or hinder the effectiveness of the program in the future?</li> <li>6. What do you think is the key element that made the program effective, that is, to make a noticeable change in the school behavior?</li> </ol>	
Additional Comments-----	

**Figure 5 Whole Group Interview Structure (April 2006)**

These interviews continued until June 9, 2006. The data collection section of this study was concluded at that time.



**Figure 6 Example of Action Research cycle at Amadeus Elementary School, Phase 1**

(McNiff, J., Whitehead, J, 2006).

## 3.6 QSR NUD\*IST (N6) SOFTWARE

### 3.6.1 NUD\*IST Software: Strengths and Limitations

Although the researcher is the primary tool in qualitative inquiry, the NUD\*IST (Non-numerical, Unstructured Data-Indexing, Searching and Theorizing) computer software unpacked the inquiry and clarified the processes used in an inductive methodology (Gahan & Hannibal, 1999). Qualitative research can produce huge amounts of non-numerical, unstructured, narrative data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The unstructured nature of the data utilized in qualitative research enabled me to capture the contextual nuances and non-quantitative reasoning that might have escaped a numerically investigated examination of the research question.

By using the format of text units and a tree node arrangement, there was no limit put on the conceptual categories that emerged from the interview-based data collection process. Using the NUD\*IST program permitted this researcher to organize, manage, analyze, conceptualize and present qualitative data. The program, N6, was available on the University of Pittsburgh School of Education computer system which also facilitated its use. Therefore, using the NUD\*IST software program “enables me to convince the readers that my research finds are a sensible outcome of an explicit, systematic method of analysis” (Kee, 2004, p.79).

Additionally, human speech recorded in the interviews and transcribed from the field observations can be contradictory and complex by its very nature (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Therefore, a researcher could employ a data indexing system that allows for an extensive number of categories and sub-categories to manage this complexity (Richards & Richards, 1994). The NUD\*IST computer software program fit these specifications, and therefore was utilized in the collection, coding, and analyzing portions of the study. The program allowed an extensive use of quotations from the interviews and references from the field notes observation journal. This proved to be an important way for voices to be heard from the data.

Segmenting the text and coding those segments required care (Kennedy, 2005; Richards & Richards, 1991; Gahan & Hannibal, 1999). This was done to be able to justify the segmenting of each text unit to make sure that the unit of analysis actually contains the reference that was in the coding. And the coding had to accurately reflect the information that the data represent so that a text unit of data was not taken out of context therefore nullifying the information.

Merriam (1998) also cites researchers who voice trepidation that the use of computers in qualitative analysis will by its very nature remove the data from the immediacy of the study, introduce errors through coding process mistakes, and be improperly used to save time and effort. “Tools do shape tasks” (p. 174) and Merriam warns that using a computer to facilitate data management and analysis must proceed only after a thorough consideration of the purpose of the study and how the software will uphold the integrity of the research. Consequently, it was my job as researcher to make sure that I utilized the data in a manner that was most consistent with the qualitative method of research, resulting in a deep understanding of the phenomenon under consideration. Through a process of continuous codification, analysis and reflection, I attempted to avoid the negative elements of qualitative data software and use the system to its fullest advantage.

### **3.6.2 Data Preparation**

Data preparation began as soon as the information was available. Field notes were transcribed from the field notes observation journal as soon as possible after the data was collected. This phase of transcription occurred on a daily basis. All transcription was recorded in the appropriate database for further analysis and coding.

Interviews were also transcribed on a daily basis from both the handwritten notes utilized during the interview and from the tape recording that was made at that time of the conference. None of the informants on the staff objected to the use of the tape recorder when it was explained that I could not possibly write with enough alacrity to accurately record the participant’s information. These transcribed interviews began with a “header,” a demographic statement of name, grade level or special subject and date of interview. Pseudonyms selected by the informant at the beginning of the interview process were used in the transcription. I used abbreviations for the pseudonyms whenever possible to expedite the transcription phase of the data collection.

The NUD\*IST process involved repeated examination of the data. First the information was heard as given. Secondly, the data was read as transcribed into the database. The data was re-examined as it was then divided into individual sections or text units allowing the researcher to divide the text into usable segments. And the same data was examined in its totality once

more when the codification process began. Consequently, the researcher developed a deep relationship with the data through multiple reiterations of the material.

### 3.6.3 Transforming Transcription into NUD\*IST Text

Raw data was transformed into a usable, importable format by “cleaning” the data, which eliminated all bold, italics, and/or other effects. Pseudonyms were inserted into the text and I kept a list of the substituted names for reference in a secure location. It was at this time that I determined the text unit; the individual interview question and answer or field note paragraph segment. The interview segments were amalgamated under the heading of the teacher’s name, time, place, and the date of the interview. Kee (2004) explains that chunking out the text body into passages and breaking down the passages into phrases not only eases the task of reading, but also allows the researcher to set the units of analyses in NUD\*IST ( p.84). Sub-headers were formed to mark the individual interviews, beginning with an asterisk and ending with a hard return (Gahan & Hannibal, 1999). This allowed me to analyze the data according to the demographics assigned to each teacher as well as to track the change of attitude toward the program as the study progresses.

#### Example 1: Header used as Demographic for Interview Protocol

```
+++++
+++++ON-LINE DOCUMENT Interjan
  *Rudi
  January 18, 2006
  Grade Three
  11 years of experience
+++++
+++++
  [Interjan: 1-496]
```

### 3.6.4 Organization of Coding of Criteria

In qualitative research, action research, (Hendricks, 2006) and in the NUD\*IST computer software (Gahan & Hannibal, 1999), data analysis continues as the coding continues, with indexing of categories that emerge from the text. The research questions facilitated the

demarcation of the coding criteria and the creation of nodes in the node tree format. This format systematized the categories for additional coding and future analysis. “In its most simple sense, coding refers to the act of attaching a label to a text unit to help identify the concept contained in it. Since a text unit may contain multiple concepts, it may be attached with multiple labels” (Kee, 2004, p. 81)

Moreover, if during my coding, the research questions were not being addressed, I could have performed any fine-tuning to the interview process that might have been necessary while the interview sequence was still on going. This proved not to be the case. The informants usually aimed their answers and comments directly at the posed question with only an occasional digression. I could also search for broad categories of codes that correlate to the theoretical basis of the study, thereby establishing a firmer theoretical base for my findings. Then these broad categories were fragmented into specific concepts that emerged from the data. Approximately 565 nodes or conceptual categories were created from the information acquired through the field notes journal and interview protocol.

### **3.6.5 Informed Consent**

I gathered the consent of all participants in the study, promising anonymity and confidentiality. During the interview process, the respondents were informed that their legal names would not be published, only the pseudonyms. I knew the sources of any anonymous responses because of the nature of the study (Freado, 1997). I had provided the requisite consent forms, consistent with the University of Pittsburgh’s Institutional Review Board’s protocol for such interviews. The signed forms were kept in a secure location for any future questions or comments concerning the issue of informed consent. (See Appendix C)

## **3.7 DATA ANALYSIS**

### **3.7.1 Method of Analysis**

In qualitative research, data is reviewed and reviewed again and again to discover the necessary categories, themes, and patterns that emerge from the study (Roberts, 2004). Considering the action research paradigm, analysis began as the data were collected. The necessity of making sense of the data as soon as it is gathered became apparent (Hendricks, 2006). Miles and Huberman (1998) recommend this type of continual analysis. Any correction in the collection process could be made then and the collection could proceed in better form due to this interim analysis.

In this study, using the QSR NUD\*IST (N6) software commands, text searches and node searches led to individual instances where a coded word or phrase occurred over and over again, across journal entries and interview transcripts. These instances were displayed as separate text units and using quotations from these search results added to the validity of the findings (Hendricks, 2006). Furthermore, by using specific search commands, I could display the relationship between various textual elements in the form of vectors and matrices, always looking for deep explanations and relationships, pulled from the data.

### **3.7.2 Review of Final Transcription and Coding**

After all the interviews and field journal notes had been transcribed and coded, I reexamined all data to capture the entire vista of the narrative displayed through the interviews, field notes, and observation journal. I searched to make sure that the data truly reflected the situation of the study and the content of the interviews (Kvale, 1996). The validity of the study would be achieved if I accurately portrayed the essence of the experiences of my informants (Morse, 1997). The quotations I used were indicative of the sentiments of the participants. An audit trail of resources pointed to rigor as well as imagination in my findings (Morse, 1997). The

interpretation I gave to the analysis fit, made sense, and deepened the understanding of the outcome of the action research.

The action research report through its definition followed a cyclical chronological sequence to show how the research unfolded. Then these findings were re-presented as I answered each research question through the QSR NUD\*IST (N6) analysis process. Finally, the conclusion illustrated the level of efficacy of the intervention. It raised new questions and asked for more reflection, which could lead to another cycle of action research in this field.

### **3.7.3 Data Analysis: Intercoder Reliability**

#### **3.7.3.1 The Process**

To insure that consistent and accurate coding procedures have been employed, Miles and Huberman (1984) propose the following formula for intercoder reliability

$$\frac{\text{number of agreements}}{\text{Total number of agreements and Disagreements}} = 80\% \text{ or greater agreement}$$

In the NUD\*IST software, the program lists the total number of text units for each separate document. To utilize the above formula, the total number of text units for all data was established through simple addition. Then twenty per cent of that total number was coded by another researcher using the same hierarchical tree node system that I used. Next, using a cut and paste procedure, all the text units for both researchers were compiled. Each node was listed and the results of the Browse command supplies the texts that fell under that category.

By comparing the text units for each category, the researchers marked each set of text units with A=agree (both coders placed that text unit in the same category), M= missed (the primary coder missed that text unit for that category), or O=omitted (the secondary coder over coded that text unit, including it under a category that the primary researched believed was not applicable).

### **3.7.3.2 The Testing**

A fellow researcher at the University Of Pittsburgh School Of Education, Ibrahim Turan, coded approximately one-fifth of my text units as recommended by Miles and Huberman (1984). In the case of this study, 82% congruence was achieved. By this method, text units were once again inspected to insure correct coding and the necessary changes were discussed, negotiated and finalized.

### **3.7.4 Narrative Analysis**

Through multiple readings, analysis, and reflection, the story of my study emerged. Through patterns of interview replies, the necessary descriptive elements formed a narrative that explained the results of the research and the process of arriving at those results. The NUD\*IST methodology allowed me to enter a date, a name, an event, and quickly retrieve the data that were essential for the validity of my conclusions. I could use the transcribed interviews and segments of the field notes journal to match the topic under consideration. Retrieval of cogent evidence was systematic and thorough.

### **3.7.5 Numerical Analysis**

For each research question, the NUD\*IST program retrieved an INTERSECT command showing all data pertinent to that particular research question. The data were cut and pasted onto a WORD document for manual inspection. I carefully counted the citations that represented an opinion or observation from any faculty/staff member. The study was searching for a description and analysis of those implementation strategies and without this manual inspection of the retrieved data, the text unit numbers would have both represented the use of the code word for my question as well as the answer from the respondent. This would have inflated the number of citations concerning each research question response.

The first two sets of documents represented the data that were found in the first and second interview protocols. Each individual tree node category was retrieved using either the data from the first set of interviews begun in January or the second set of interviews begun in

May. Then each research question was analyzed using the field notes, looking for the contextual relationship between the research question and the school environment. These findings were also cut and pasted into a WORD document for further manual investigation. The data were searched through NUD\*IST retrieval reports, and then manually through a thorough rereading of all reports. Then each report category was reread and each citation for the research question was marked and numbered. Therefore the data employed in this study was handwritten during the interviews or field notes observation journal, transcribed during the typing phase, reread during the coding phase, retrieved and made into a document that was again inspected for answers to the research questions. And finally, the data was reread again during the analysis of all retrieved reports. What did each report reflect as far as the research question was concerned? Were the text units truly indicative of the staff's implementation strategies? The repeated inspection of all data and data retrieval processes was intended to eliminate any error in description or analysis of the implementation strategies utilized by the staff for the character education program utilized in this study.

## **4.0 RESULTS OF THE STUDY**

### **4.1 THE STORY**

#### **4.1.1 Setting the Scene**

Amadeus Elementary School was built in the early 1920's of brick and mortar and meant to last. Its box-like shape stood in solid contrast to the surrounding neighborhood of aging slant roof single family homes which abutted the playground fence. When the school was remodeled a decade ago, the original façade was only changed cosmetically. Designated an historical landmark, Amadeus was still teaching neighborhood children with bussing only for special education students. Over time the boys and girls wore away the struggling grass from the edges of the landscaping leaving brown scars in the dirt. The bushes provided by the local greenhouse were shattered by jumping feet. Around the periphery, celebration maples, pin oaks, and hawthorn trees provided leaves to kick in the fall and green to anticipate in the spring. At the time of this study, there were six grade levels: primary grades kindergarten through second and intermediate grades three, four, and five.

It was January, 2007. Driving up to Amadeus, anyone could see its lights shining through the grey skies, classroom windows shouting encouragement for the local professional football team in designs of black and gold. Visitors entering the building met the remnants of old tape stuck to the heavy glass front door, on the walls of the once-grand marble foyer, and on hallway walls. The secretary used any available space to display health department posters, PTA contest announcements, calendar reminders (no school next Tuesday or the following Friday due to in-service programs), and holiday observances. There were district legal notices: "Warning: no smoking for fifty feet around the school building and grounds," and ads left from the yearbook sale. Placards requested that all visitors report to the office. On each of the three

floors, every classroom doorway had a sign with the teacher's name, class picture of all the students therein, and room number. The principal and the secretary had their names and pictures posted beside the office door.

Under everyone's feet, tan linoleum with square pastel inserts caused sound to reverberate while overhead fluorescent lighting proved necessary even on the brightest day because the main halls had few windows and none that would open or emit enough light to maneuver safely. Turning left after leaving the office, the hallway led to the gym, computer room, a classroom or two and the library. Well-thumbed books lined the walls of the double room, decorated with figurines of Madeline, Curious George, Miss Frizzle, and the Cat in the Hat. Reference books stood straight in their alphabetical order, held in place by red plastic bookends. This study began after school in that library where faculty members gathered for the January monthly staff meeting sitting in stiff oak chairs with hard edges and unyielding seats.

#### **4.1.2 Part of the Agenda**

On a round table closest to the door, the principal placed stacks of stapled research articles and agendas for the meeting. She began with a backdrop of mumbled p.a. announcements, paging late-leaving students. The school district belief statement: "Students must prepare for a global economy," was first on the agenda but received no elaboration or discussion. Discourse began with weightier matters such as walk-through observations and science notebook training. Teachers received a format for required testing to be finished according to schedule for both performance task testing and DIEBELS scores in reading. Then much to everyone's relief, the principal announced that the librarian and her aide volunteered to oversee the upcoming PTA magazine sale conducted to offset PTA debt due to poor returns on the fall fundraiser.

To introduce this study, the principal defined the character education program as part of my doctoral dissertation process and also as an attempt to hold the student behavior to a tolerable level now that the dicey part of the year was here. Dicey because the holidays were over and nothing promised any diversion from the school day calendar except an occasion one-day holiday observance or the standardized testing regime. Noting the subtle shuffling of papers as a signal that the time was running short, I began by reiterating the dual purpose of American

education, that is, academic excellence and ethical behavior. I read the script which I had submitted to and received approval from the Institutional Review Board:

I am Elizabeth Svirbel and I am presently a doctoral candidate at the University of Pittsburgh. I would like to ask your cooperation in research that I am conducting to study the implementation strategies employed by this staff to make the present character education program more effective.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. This will involve a personal interview in January and in April 2006, voluntary e-mail replies, focus group participation and discussion, and whole group discussion and participation. The research will be conducted from January 2006 to April 2006. All research will be conducted here at Amadeus Elementary.

The District Superintendent and our principal have given their permission for this study.

All discussion, interviews, and e-mail replies will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms and all data will be kept in a secure location, known only to this researcher.

If you agree to participate, you may withdraw at any time.

I will provide written forms for your signature, assuring that confidentiality.

Thank you for your attention and I look forward to meeting with you personally.

My recitation met with smiles and attention, people moving their chairs to face me. I tried to avoid any assumption of authority over and above my colleagues. I explained that rather than look to the experts on the “outside,” we should look to the experts sitting in that library for the best character education program for “our” school. I stated my conviction that the people sitting in that room knew the context of the school. This would prove beneficial in deciding which implementation strategies would improve the character education program heard on the morning announcements, improvements that would “fit” Amadeus Elementary. Moreover, “April” was being very optimistic.

The bell rang as I continued my presentation. Quickly, since the allotted meeting time was up, I first asked them to do three things: observe what was going on, think of ways to improve the program, and finally, have those suggestions ready for my interviews that would start as soon as possible with their permission. A few teachers asked for the interview questions in advance so they could think over their answers. The faculty audience was beginning to exhibit the restlessness of people with other things to do: stacking their papers, gathering pencils, pushing back their chairs. Because I sat through many faculty meetings and knew the ennui that resulted when one more project was introduced, I quickly complimented them on the

professionalism that I had witnessed on so many occasions. Informally verbalizing their assent with encouraging remarks and thanks, the group responded with affirmation to my request for cooperation.

That was until I mentioned the need to form a focus group. The paper shuffling and averted gazes told me to tread lightly on the subject of forming another committee, especially after the administration announced moments before a litany of things that had to be done. Therefore, the meeting ended without establishing a formal focus group.

People filed out of the library and I went to my room to record the proceedings.

### **4.1.3 Interviews: Tell Me, I'm listening**

The January interviews began the next day with the teachers I met that morning in the faculty dining room. Throughout January I questioned the principal, each teacher, and every support personnel member individually before or after school. There was no schedule for the interviews. All conversations took place at the convenience of the interviewee. Whenever I met a teacher or support personnel member in the hall, I asked them for a time and place. Questions and answers lasted from five minutes to an hour, but usually around 30 minutes.

From the previous September to that January, students had been reading the weekly character education behavior themes during the morning announcements. There had been a tacit evaluation of the program during the previous four months demonstrated by complete answers with qualifying explanations to my interview questions. When asked, the interviewees' answers contained information that reflected an awareness of the program and its efficacy. Teachers told me the strategies they used to implement the program: discussion, repetition, reinforcement, and calling the students' attention to the announcements. Discussion was used more than any other implementation strategy, sometimes on a daily basis. Several teachers wove the character education behavior into curriculum material or inserted the theme whenever an appropriate occasion arose.

For the interviews, teachers usually invited me into their classrooms, their area of expertise. The primary rooms were awash with deliberate design. Posters conveyed a message: learn your numbers, letters, and days of the week, color names, weather symbols (cloudy, sunny, snow, rain), long and short vowel sounds and class rules. There were charts for behavior,

attendance, and classroom helpers each with tiny stickers showing participation. Schedules answered frequently asked questions about days for special subjects and the menu for the cafeteria. In most cases, the teacher and I sat on small student chairs with hand printed nametags on the desk, facing each other with my tape recorder somewhere in between. Occasionally the interviewee went about the room, straightening papers or arranging work on tables while we talked. A stop in the action and comprehensive answer gave evidence to the attention to my inquiry.

In a primary classroom, I noticed the weekly behavior theme written across the top of the front whiteboard in black and gold. It had to be read by the teacher and explained in primary grade vocabulary; the teacher did so as a matter of course. It was a routine, part of the expected daily activity. I asked if the character education program had any effect on student behavior. A veteran primary teacher responded

REILLY: Yes, I really think that there's a lot more people being in tune with each other. You know what was really good, at the beginning of the year when you said that we look at the person that we speak to, we answer, we say good morning, asking how you are. I really saw kids at all grade levels, even the upper grades, carrying through with that. In the past, you would speak to someone, now you get much more of a response, eye contact, much more favorable. And I attribute it to that. Otherwise, they just go on their merry way.....

I think most of these kids don't hear it at home so this is, for some of them, a first initial exposure to good manners and politeness and caring about each other. You know at the beginning of the year, they're just like little crumb grabbers, me first, and that's it. But as the year goes on, and this is drilled into them, over and over, they get it. They adapt to it. You know with anything, CCD or Sunday school, or anything, when they're young, you keep at it, they pick it up and it becomes a part of them.

In the primary grade interviews, criticism focused on the mechanical aspects of the program, not being able to hear or understand what was said by the student announcers. Missing the announcements, lack of reinforcement or recognition, along with questions of comprehension for the younger students were problems that they felt reduced the value of the program.

Lack of time was also a major constraint on the effectiveness of the program. A novice primary grade teacher commented that although she had little time for a formal character education class, she would refer to the character education behavior which she wrote on the board. In my field notes, I summarized her comments:

Her biggest problem is lack of time. The first grade curriculum is crowded with everything that is taught in fifth grade but on a lesser scale. Nothing is eliminated; social studies, science and health are taught to some extent in a primary grade. It is up to the teacher in the classroom to divide the school day providing maximum instruction with minimum wasted effort.

Another primary teacher revealed one more problem related to the success of this program or any school-based endeavor, changing personnel. She was one of four teachers due to give birth before the end of the year. This was in addition to the two teachers on maternity leave at that time. Two veteran teachers were retiring and the principal was leaving for another position in a different district. The program had to stand on its own. The faces of the adults on duty were changing to such an extent that she believed the value of any program would have to be in its efficacy rather than in its sponsorship.

The intermediate teachers were on the third floor. Classrooms reflected the same intentional decoration sending messages to the observer. The pale neutral walls had a less frenzied tone than the primary rooms, fewer baby animal cutouts and busy bee decorations. My interviews took place amidst maps, punctuation charts, and numerous reminders to reuse and recycle. Hand drawn posters advised everyone to “Just say No to Drugs.” Teachers displayed the school mission and anti-bullying warnings. The alphabet hung above the whiteboard in antiquated cursive writing. Desks were arranged in squares of four or rows of five with dark scuff marks etched in the impractical light-toned flooring. The state standards for math and language arts were mounted on colored construction paper and tacked to the wallboard as required by the administration. Dusty muslin travel bags on the floor or hung on the backs of chairs alerted any visitor that this room contained upper classmen, fourth or fifth graders who changed classes, a rite of passage for Amadeus students.

Interviewing the intermediate teachers produced a mixed review of the program. Some gave enthusiastic recitals:

HALL: Every time I hear it I think that it’s a fabulous idea, that the kids hearing that every morning, that it’s a great way to instill good character especially because it’s not built into the curriculum, cannot intermingle religion in your classroom to say its right from wrong, in this aspect. But just being a good person and this is what we do here at Amadeus

EAS: Great

HALL: To make it say, we do this everyday of our lives. I like the school spirit; we do this here at Amadeus. I think that works for a lot of children.

EAS: Okay

HALL: But just in life in general, this is what we do and how we deal with people and how we deal with each other.

Intermediate teachers also implemented a variety of strategies to enhance the program without any prompting or coaching to do so:

EAS: Okay, what have you done in your daily activities that have made the program work?

RUDI: When the announcements are on, I'll have a student repeat what the thought for the day is, what do I want to say, the program. So we'll talk about it and if they see someone throughout the day doing a nice deed, we'll talk about it.

EAS: Okay, what part of the program works best for you, what part of the program do you like?

RUDI: It's on the first thing in the morning and the kids actually get excited to see what's going to be said or activity, or skill, what's the word I'm looking for?

EAS: Umm?

RUDI: Behavior, behavior that they'll be working on for the week.

A permanent substitute teacher gave a very qualified comment. This teacher had been teaching all grade levels, all subjects, and performing any "duty" such as cafeteria and playground assignment. Through her changing schedule, she eventually would meet every student in the building. She commented:

EAS: Okay, do you see any differences because you're all over the school. Do you see any difference in children's behavior that you think are due to the program, or ...yes, do you see any changes in anyone's behavior?

CINNAMON: I think so, I do. I noticed like with the older kids, I've heard them say to each other some of the things that were on the announcements, little quotes about, "This is what we do at Amadeus," and I've heard them say to each other, "That's not what we do here." And I've heard that go between them without me saying it.

Conversely, the program did not appear to be effective in everyone's estimation. Teachers of special subjects such as art, music, gym, technology, and library also met with each student in the school at least once a week. As an equally qualified observer, this special subject teacher disagreed. She saw a different picture of the program's value:

EAS: Have you seen, because you are in the cafeteria, right, have you seen any change in the children's behavior that is related to the little morning announcements

ELA: At the beginning of the year, when it was being reinforced by the home room teachers, I could tell they were really practicing the word and modeling the behavior, even the staff treated each other in the beginning. I did see an effect

with the children and how it trickled down and they started to treat each other the same. But I think so many things have started to change with workload and curriculum and now we're focusing with PSSA (state mandated standardized testing) so much that it's not so much of a focus in the curriculum and I feel that it has stopped and I don't see it anymore.

In the cafeteria, over the cacophony of sixty early arrivals eating pop-tarts and cereal, another special subject teacher lamented the fact that she saw little responsibility for one's own actions in her students. We talked standing next to the milk cooler as she kept her eyes on the diners. If character education was to succeed, she warned that children must be made to realize their own responsibility to the program. She voiced her opinion, that, realistically, if parents could not even feed their children pop-tarts for breakfast, will they have the time to build their characters?

As I continued to interview administration, faculty and support personnel, I transcribed each interview, looking for the suggestion that would move the program to the next level of effectiveness. Analysis of the interviews demonstrated that most of the faculty members held a positive attitude toward the program. Yet they voiced a need for suggestions to improve the program.

At the end of January, I interviewed the principal. Her office was directly above the boiler room. Therefore, even in the middle of winter, the windows were open. Children's laughter and conversation floated in from those waiting outside for school to begin. This room witnessed the adjudication of any serious disciplinary infractions. Precise arrangement of books and binders, file cabinets, and children's figurines bespoke of a desire for order. Recently, the carpet, stained by ill students waiting to go home, was removed and replaced with pink tile giving a cherry expression to the room. In spite of numerous phone interruptions, the principal conveyed her impatience with the program and asked for more repetition of the program behaviors through visuals:

EAS: What part of the program hasn't worked for you and can you tell me why?  
Where do we need to beef it up?

STB: I don't think there's anything; we just need to do more of it. Probably get the words out there more maybe make them more prominent in the hallways.

As I was leaving, she also asked that the announcements be repeated during the day. Like many others, she believed repetition to be a key element in the success of the program.

#### **4.1.4 February: Program Changes**

The end of January, the beginning of February brought the character education considerations to a halt. It was Super Bowl time and that placed the school in a confusing position. The Amadeus Elementary school community members were to be as loyal as any other football fans complete with pep rallies, and black and gold costuming from the principal to the smallest of kindergartener. The winning door decorating contest entry showed the benefit of having a student teacher who dutifully transformed the green roll paper into a football field complete with line markings, field goal posts and cardboard players. Every window carried encouragement for the team. Hallways reflected Super Bowl frenzy: black and gold crepe paper streamers, construction paper banners, team sweatshirts, tee-shirts, caps and trinkets. Yet there was an unspoken undercurrent that meant keeping on task, maintaining discipline, and continuing any weekly testing schedule. It signaled a strange brand of controlled enthusiasm. Finally when the championship game was over, students took credit for the victory recounting tales of their participation that put the team in the winning column. Soon thereafter the black and gold came down, and valentines replaced the football theme. It was time to get back to the business of education.

By the first week in February, I had interviewed most of the teaching staff. The support personnel remained to be done. Four newly arrived student teachers and student intern agreed to be interviewed. Their interviews came later giving them time to observe the school and its students. I asked them to compare and offer suggestions that utilized their prior knowledge even if it was from a field observation or from a school they had attended. How was this program different? How could we improve it? Only one of the student teachers had any instruction in character education. After explaining the premise of the program and the study, they were then able to answer my inquiries

For the February focus group, six early arriving teachers agreed to meet then and there in the third floor hall, three from the third grade, two from the fourth grade and a second grade teacher who joined the group after getting a cup of coffee from the communal pot in the teachers' lounge. They assembled informally, surrounded by valentine decorations of cardboard smiling animal babies, and student-made creations of red construction paper. Focus group membership was merely the people that had been present and offered to help by giving their

opinion. I walked very lightly as far as organizing committees. I had no real authority in this area and from my own past practice I recognized the apprehension of busy people trying to avoid a scheduled commitment. I basically read off the list of suggestions from the interviews and listened for reaction and recommendations.

From the interview data, I compiled the list of strategy ideas especially from the analysis of research/interview question 5: “What would help or hinder the program?” The focus group listened and discussed each suggestion on the list. I began with the notion of restating the morning announcement at noon or at the end of the day. Yes, this would provide the repetition that the teachers believed necessary, but not at noon. There already was enough confusion at noon with lunchtime transitions, bathroom breaks and the normal muddle that accompanies children and adults who are out of the classroom routine. They suggested that I ask the principal because they could not agree upon the time. I offered to put together a new announcement form (See Appendix D). The focus group member who did the morning announcements that month consented to do the additional announcement. They decided that this type of repetition was vital to improving the character education program.

More visuals were needed. The focus group agreed that some type of poster or any type of printed reminder would help the program to become more effective. Children would see as well as hear the weekly reminder. As we continued, the problems associated with this strategy surfaced. Who would make the visuals? How would they be handled? It had to be something simple and easy to use or it would fall into disuse. I had been thinking about this suggestion when I heard it over and over again during the preceding interviews. A third grade teacher suggested a bound book of pages with the behaviors printed in bold in a plastic protector hanging from a hook. I agreed, having had a similar idea. I offered to put some type of visual together. The fourth grade teacher suggested that the visuals be hung everywhere the children passed, hallways, classroom doors, in the cafeteria and the gym. How they would hang from the walls was left to be resolved.

Most focus group members disagreed with the next suggestion, rewarding students who followed the program. Teachers acknowledged that rewards may produce extrinsic compliance but they favored intrinsic motivation for character education. A teacher voiced her concern that any reward system replaced self-motivation with competition. Rewards could also cause jealousy and record-keeping problems. Moreover, some members felt that students received

enough tangible rewards already, almost to the point of making the reward have no impact. Teachers already promised students stickers, certificates, candy, trinkets, popcorn, videos, pizza parties, freebies in the cafeteria. With Valentine's Day coming, such treats would reach the saturation point.

The fourth grade teacher recounted last year's reward policy in which the fourth grade teachers exhibited the names of their students who earned the title of "Student of the Month" on a huge hallway display board. The rubric was difficult to handle; although grades were easy to reward, deportment and attitude were subjective. Occasionally, a student had the required letter grade average, but demonstrated a miserable attitude or dreadful behavior that made the award "Student of the Month" hard to justify. Moreover, most teachers had established reward systems in their classrooms; would this just be duplication? The student recognition strategy was tabled for now. They preferred verbally praising students who performed the assigned behaviors rather than an extrinsically designated character education award.

The remaining implementation strategies on the list received cursory attention. Make sure teachers model the behavior. Of course adults should set a good example. The next strategies were related: have students write their own character education announcements at the end of the month, beginning with fifth grade, and have the fifth graders go to the younger students' classrooms with character education skits and presentations. Most members like these ideas, but no one volunteered to do any of them. The conversation rapidly morphed into a discourse on discipline problems. The teachers perceived the problem as one where most discipline referrals to the office were the result of bad behavior in the hallways, gym, special subjects and the cafeteria. I asked them to think about how the character education program could address these problems.

Time was running short; the 8:15 a.m. bell rang. As people started to leave, I summarized the meeting. At the monthly faculty meeting I'd suggest visuals and repetition. I asked again for observations of student behavior that they believed connected to the character education program, maybe through a Friday email. The 8:20 a.m. bell rang. The focus group members headed to their classrooms to begin the day. I heard the clomping of students coming up the back steps as the winners of the daily "first up the stairs" contest burst through the doors. Students were already lined up at my door so I grabbed my clipboard and began greeting each

one, and asking their lunch preference, collecting lunch money, and listening to the early morning excitement the students brought with them.

The next step, explaining the focus group suggestions at the February faculty meeting, found everyone back in the school library. The district “Belief Statement” was the first item on the agenda: “Learning comes from effort, success, failure, and second efforts. Successful learning builds self-esteem.” Again, this was to be digested without discussion as the principal started outlining the new procedures for Level II certification applications, followed by a reiteration of the district’s attempt to stop parents smoking on school property. Neither topic elicited any discussions as latecomers slipped into the seats closest to the door. The stapled packet of regulations for next month’s state-mandated testing produced subtle groaning. Since the beginning of the year, this test was slowly assuming epic importance for our school. The principal purchased special test preparation books, almost two hundred pages of exercises designed to familiarize students with the “fill in the bubble” test-taking protocol. It was left to the individual teacher to fit these pages into the curriculum without deleting any other content material. Clearly, those test results were going to be a most significant factor for the entire school year.

After selecting a theme for the yearly spring interdisciplinary unit, (The Olympics: Amadeus Elementary, School of Champions), the principal launched into the character education program. In an attempt to stem the rising lack of tolerance and resultant emotional outbursts which had produced an unusually high volume of student and parental complaints, the principal took things into her own hands. In her observation, behavior was getting worse, especially for one certain grade level which needed self-control and daily reminders to follow school rules. Teachers then voiced their agreement with the increasingly negative behavioral situation for this grade level.

After witnessing pushing, shoving, hair-pulling, and general negativity, she and the district social worker went into that grade level classrooms and used an old character education video to illustrate good behavior. For assessment, she asked that each of the sixty students in that grade to write her a note telling how they exhibited the positive behavior that they had just discussed. She received six notes. She was going to treat those six to a pizza party in the office. She felt that this was a successful foray into character education and she planned to continue the program with the other grades. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, she never did.

This proved to be a good segue into my presentation. It was already late in the day so I began by thanking everyone for their time and attention. I reported the findings from my interviews. First, most teachers had discipline protocols established in their classrooms. Secondly, most problems arose outside the classroom in hallways, bathrooms, entranceways where students waited for school to begin, and out on the sidewalks immediately after dismissal. Traveling to and from the cafeteria for lunch appeared to be the biggest problem. Using an adage I remembered from a poster in a fourth grade classroom, I said that if character is what you are when nobody is watching then character education should be the prescription for those problems that occurred outside the classroom.

I reported that there was a real concern about time constraints. Many interview respondents found no time in the instructional day, week or month for a separate character education program. Teachers appreciated the simplicity of this program which did not cut into classroom instructional periods. People agreed by nodding or breaking into little conversational groups while commenting, then returning to me.

Most interviewees and the focus group members recommended repetition and visuals to “kick it up a little.” I used an analogy of radio to television. People believed it was important to see as well as hear the program. Then I displayed a simple spiral bound packet of the weekly behavior themes, colored coded and with page number corresponding to the numbered week of school. I would make these packets and the teachers would be in charge of changing the pages every week. The cafeteria was the biggest problem area; it would have four visual packets posted. The packet would be both the repetition and the visual element that the interviewees advised. The principal suggested that I discuss the mounting mechanism with the daytime janitor. I spoke succinctly, realizing that the principal had already given justification for the changes in her discussion of character education minutes before.

Time was running out; people began to shift in their chairs, shuffling the packets of their testing regulations. I ended my presentation by mentioning that perhaps another reading of the daily announcements which contained the character education theme would also improve the program. The principal suggested that it be done at 2:45 pm. The teacher in charge of the announcements for that month said that she was willing to try it. I volunteered to put together an afternoon announcement form (See Appendix D). I asked them to let me know if they thought the visuals and new announcements improved the program. I heard, “No problem,”

“Good ideas,” “Thanks for doing this,” from various faculty members. As the teachers trudged into the hall, the principal asked that everyone pick up copies of the monthly research articles, “Helping Writers Find Power,” and “The Arts Make a Difference.” People left to work a little longer in their rooms or to hurry home.

The next day I assembled the packets after school in the basement copy room. The cafeteria supervisor came in, sat down and proceeded to tell me that student behavior in the cafeteria was terrible. I showed her the pages in the packets that pertained to lunchtime conduct and she approved. She asked me when I was going to talk to her because she saw me interviewing a teacher during the breakfast routine. Then and there I knew that I must include all support personnel in the interview process. They observed student behavior and could add that information to my research.

#### **4.1.5 A Valentine from the Custodian: It’s Never that Simple**

As soon as I approached the janitor about a mounting mechanism for the visuals, with amazing expertise, he very politely ticked off a list of variations, each one catapulting this simple idea into the realm of structural engineering. A vast array of dowel rods, screws, washers, drill, drill bits, hooks, height adjustments, and other assorted hardware nouns and verbs made the task seem absolutely beyond the realm of the fiscal limitations of the school. Finally, he agreed to give the idea more thought. Therefore, it seemed like a Valentine gift from the janitor to the character education program that on February 14<sup>th</sup>, with the use of a bull nose clip, screw, plastic anchor, drill bits one and two, and a hammer, the visuals that provided the requested repetition went up next to every classroom door, in the hallways, and cafeteria. The custodian did the installation perhaps thirty times without complaint and produced a secure and safe mechanism for the charts, drilling into the eighty year old yellow tile. Even if the program didn’t last, the holes in the tile would. For each weekly theme, there was a different page color with every packet color coordinated in order to have everyone on the same page with the same color. If the visual said, “If someone cuts in line ahead of you, let him, it’s no big deal,” the daily announcement would then expand upon the visual’s idea saying that if it happens again, tell a teacher.

Forget using the school's problematic email system; as I distributed the visuals, I gathered the observation data I needed through conversation. It was easier just to talk to me and for me to listen. As an observation, an intermediate teacher told me that, "we had had a success." After returning the results of the dreaded third grade timed multiplication test, one of her more questionable students very unexpectedly announced to a more successful classmate that there was to be no bragging. Didn't the offender hear the morning announcement?

Another observation came from a special subject teacher who wanted a set of visuals and asked if the custodian could mount the holding mechanism next to her door. She had an interesting reflection. She claimed that there was a noticeable dissimilarity between our school and other schools in which she worked and she credited the beneficial difference to the character education program. At the other schools, the same announcement format was used but without the character education component. There she saw a rougher, less caring atmosphere. She believed that this lack of civility was the result of omitting the desired behaviors from the announcement protocol. Also, the social worker who serviced all the grade schools in the district saw in our students a benevolent awareness of others and their feelings.

Of course, two days later, I observed cheating, lying, screaming at staff members, defiance, name-calling and tattling, recorded in my filed notes journal:

"I hit him in the face twice because he tried to take the basketball."

"Did you complain about the kid to a teacher or were you just being a bully? We don't have bullies here at Amadeus. And we certainly don't want to hear you bragging about how big and tough you are. You're telling everyone that you're a bully. Hitting a kid in the face for taking your basketball is going overboard. It's not done here at Amadeus."

Evidence pointed to the need for further improvement of the program. Real life proved to be messy and inconsistent with the inability to control research variables, namely, everyone in the school. Nevertheless, slowly the identity factor, the way it was done by the members of this school community, began to show up in everyday speech, that of teachers, support personnel and, most importantly, the students. Through certain caring behaviors that everyone tried to practice, one became a member of Amadeus Elementary.

To illustrate this concept of school identity and belonging, the following entry in my field notes journal pointed to this process:

Friday, February 24, 2006: A new student arrived today. The secretary escorted him to my room. Later the principal dropped by to be formally introduced. The

child barely broke a smile. If cold calculation had a face, it would look just like my new student. The morning went well. He answered when he could, was quiet when he couldn't, and could shoot basketball for our weekly spelling basketball contest.

This time of grace lasted for four teaching periods and through one lunch period. Thereafter, two fifth grade patrols arrived at my door, labeled him as the perpetrator and nailed him as the one who flipped the middle finger at them when they asked him not to run. At first he just flat out said no to their request. And when questioned, he denied everything with that steely glance that reeked of guilt and familiarity with the ways of the law.

It's the last week in February, and we have five new students coming this week. Our district is changing. A special subject teacher wondered if our school had a sign in the front of it telling the world to send us its crazies. We used to get about four transfer students all year. Now we have about twenty. Few are gifted; many are learning disabled. Family wreckage washes upon our shores with more frequency than ever before. Such transient populations must slowly, but surely, be inculcated to our ways at Amadeus

This was my line of reasoning with the young man who happened at my door this morning. Here at Amadeus, we act a certain way. That's it. Listen and learn. This kid seems savvy enough to watch his step and keep a sharp eye for the Amadeus legal system. Good luck. Let's see if the morning announcement program works on this one. What strategies will the staff use to get this one in Amadeus shape?

The February focus group recommended two suggestions for improvement: visuals and an afternoon announcement. Adding the afternoon announcement (See Appendix D) did not work as smoothly as mounting the hooks for the visuals. The announcements were often late and therefore lost in the normal classroom din of getting ready to go home. Sometimes the new protocol was forgotten all together. "We were planting our seeds and I forgot entirely, I'm so sorry," said the teacher in charge of announcements.

This highlighted one of the negative aspects of the program mentioned in the interviews, the efficacy of the program suffered if the mechanics of the program didn't work well. Often the teacher in charge for the month allowed any child in the class to deliver the announcements over the public address system. Basically, the child had to read the format into the phone in the secretary's office. Not everyone read equally well. This caused some of the character education behaviors to be lost in stumbling prose and whispered diction.

Consequently, I began to wonder who should read the announcements. Who should participate in the program? To illustrate the problem, the field notes journal offered this commentary:

Monday, February 27, 2006: Two special education students did the morning announcements today. The first student handled the situation rather well, taking the lead with most of the information. But as I dropped off my daily attendance and lunch count, I noticed that her partner was a girl who was primarily non-verbal. She read her part with halting pain in her voice and I can't imagine that she volunteered for the job.

This raises the problem of who should read the morning announcements. Should we be equal opportunity employers with everyone grades one to five eligible for the job? Or should there be an announcers' club with try-outs and some semblance of ability before handing the microphone over to a child?

Perhaps this should be the point of discussion at the next focus meeting. Should we appoint a faculty person who will be in charge of the entire operation? Originally, one person was in charge of the announcements for the whole year. Now that the character education program is part for the format, perhaps the program demands a more structured operation once again.

To further illustrate the situation, the afternoon announcements were made after the dismissal bell rang as children walked out the door. Since the weather was getting nasty with wind and snow, many parents took shelter in the vestibule of the school. They commented that the announcements were on and the children were gone for the most part or in the act of leaving. It was embarrassing to see and hear such negative comments, but if the same special education students that read the morning announcements were in charge of the afternoon segment, it was not a big surprise. The girls are learning disabled. Should the special education kids be skipped entirely?

#### **4.1.6 March Forth: Whose Program is This Anyway?**

This question hung in the air every time the announcements went poorly. The answer to would have to wait. My project was not most people's first priority. In the teachers' lounge the talk repeatedly reverted back to the state mandated testing schedule. As the March testing approached, even I asked myself, "Am I doing enough instruction?" "Am I covering the right topics?" It was apparent from the constant conversation on the topic that the administration and teachers placed premier importance on this test. The total scores must be within the annual yearly progress (AYP) scores or there was to be trouble afoot. There was no state-mandated testing for prosocial behavior. At this juncture, character education was not the primary focus of the school's efforts.

The opportunity to set a date for the March focus meeting never materialized. Due to illness, which struck the entire school, (the secretary sent home 16 vomiting children the day before) the scheduled date for both the focus group meeting and monthly faculty meeting came and went. For the first time in my 35 years in the district, I was out sick for three consecutive days. Focus group meeting, faculty meeting, I missed everything.

The only report of the faculty meeting came at lunch as the teachers gave me an informal recap. As far as the character education portion of the agenda, the sole question asked was about changing the weekly theme. The answer came from a permanent substitute, the newest member of the team, who said that all one had to do was listen to the announcements, then match the theme with the visual page. It was regrettable that I was unable to be there, but the answer to the question was found.

Illness kept me out of school for the beginning of the month, and March was my month to supervise the announcements. In my absence, the teacher next door selected a student from my room and filled in the blanks on the announcement form. The student practiced, went to the office, and delivered the announcement without any problem. As part of the announcement protocol, the character education program now had a niche in the routine. It was embedded in the everyday activities of the school.

With barely three months left to the school year, I thought March was the time to do something about the poor announcing that often plagued the program. After talking with the principal and union president, I submitted a proposal asking for extra-duty pay for a faculty member to operate an announcers' club complete with tryouts and selected membership. This would enhance the likelihood of the character education behaviors being heard, understood, and followed.

On the morning of March 27, 2006 I sent everyone an email asking them what they thought of an announcers' club for next year, "a regular schedule of good readers" who would audition or at least practice the day before they read. Most replies were positive. "That's a great idea." "Great idea!" "I love it." "It could be an honor and would be less painful for many of us." "I think the Announcers' Club idea sounds good."

Yet no one volunteered for the job. Ignoring my effort to provide the quality I thought necessary in the announcements, the teachers kept trying to involve as many students as possible for each month's announcements. As one email explained: "I think that students having the

opportunity to read is good. Then even students who may not have the courage to audition may try because a friend or his/her teacher encouraged throughout the classroom's month. Just a thought." She was telling me that the program needed as many participants as possible.

She was right. As evidence of her opinion, one day, after dropping off my attendance and lunch count in the office just as the announcements had begun, I noticed two parents standing in the hall, listening, and beaming. I asked if the announcer was their child; they nodded, not saying anything in order to catch every word their child said. The concept of involvement, of community, outweighed the perfection of delivery. This conclusion found evidence in my field notes journal from later the same day:

March 27, 2006: Third grade students are now enthralled with the announcements. They ask me over and over to deliver them on the public address system. Soft-spoken girls, who need to be begged in order to get them to speak up in the classroom, practice their elocution so that they can go to the office and do the announcements. Now it seems obvious why we've had some less than sterling deliveries. Teachers would rather not disappoint a student who really wants to do the job.

Demonstrating another aspect of program ownership, the newest members of our teaching staff, a student teacher used the same tenets as in the character education program for a Social Studies unit in her class. On the wall outside of Mrs. G's room, Miss J, the student teacher, had arranged posters of good "advice" from her students to the general student populace that passed that wall everyday on the way to lunch or to their special subjects. In the middle of the posters were the same character education rules heard on the morning announcements glued on neon-colored paper. The posters covered three areas: responsibilities to others, respect for the school and others, and respect for themselves. When I asked the rationale for the hallway posters, the student teacher told me that she developed this as part of her Social Studies unit, and the children seemed to be enjoying the discussions that ensued.

On the last day of March, I mentioned to the early morning faculty lounge "association" the need for a March-April focus group. They responded with mumbled affirmation but hurried off to other matters. Later that day, the focus group that did develop was the first lunch group of teachers, anyone who did not go out to eat which was permitted on any in-service day. They munched their packed lunches at tables littered with Avon catalogues, professional development

notices, cheap paper napkins, and half-emptied salt shakers. Comprised of five senior members of the faculty they sat one or two at each table facing the center of the room and each other.

In between bites, I asked them if there were any suggestions to improve the character education program. They offered opinions that resonated with experience and intuition. They were pleased that the mechanics were better this year than in the past when grades one and two also made the announcements. The younger students needed to hear and understand the announcements, but not necessarily make the announcements. The announcers' club was a nice idea but they didn't want to do it. Perhaps a younger teacher who needed the money would take the job.

There were no other ideas as to making the program more effective; the program was going well. Some lingered over a second cup of coffee. Conversation drifted on to other topics, the end of testing, the change in the weather, up coming events. There was little discussion on formulating new strategies to improve the program. This might have reflected the senior status of the teachers with little interest in another program, or "just not today, please, I'm eating my lunch."

#### **4.1.7 Spring: The Season of Distraction**

Due to the upcoming spring break, the principal moved the monthly faculty meeting to April 5, two weeks earlier than usual. My position on the agenda was near the end of the meeting. To my surprise, the principal began by complementing the program saying that it was doing a great job. The staff actually applauded. I began my remarks by commenting on an earlier announcement. The principal noted that kindergarten registration was running at 26 for our school, 8 for another nearby elementary school. I speculated that the large number of registrations for our school was due to the exemplary character education program we had. People laughed nodding their heads in affirmation.

I reiterated the need for observation asking for e-mails or just plain discussion if the staff witnessed any behavior that they believed was due to the program. Then I begged their indulgence for another round of interviews that would begin near the end of the school year. As I was leaving, I thanked the principal for her gracious remarks and she assured me that two of the

cafeteria monitors said that they saw great improvement. “They said you could really see a difference.”

It was April and spring was upon us, the season of distraction. Daydream out any window and see green, not grey, buds, not branches, fun and the beginning of the end of the year. As prelude to the upcoming three day vacation, my classroom “Spring Break” observance consisted of games and treats along with a video cartoon explaining Passover in childlike vocabulary. In anticipation of dismissal, students gathered their craft banners complete with felt bunnies and flowers and the pysanka eggs they colored meticulously with felt-tipped pens. Students folded and shoved in their backpacks their essays on “My Favorite Pet” which used cat or dog faces, paws, and feet to form a frame for the written words. I returned the brown envelopes of the weekly take-home papers. After writing reminders for next week in their notebooks, my class lined up by the door smiling and excited. Air with the scent of newly cut grass oozed through the huge windows blanking the north wall of my classroom. The bell rang, and the parents and students were off the premises in record time.

With an early dismissal for students, the school district began its in-service activities. Teachers participated in a wellness afternoon and complimentary luncheon. At first glance, this would have been an ideal opportunity to meet with faculty members that I didn’t see on a regular basis to ascertain how they thought the program was going. Rethinking the situation, I realized that people looked and acted fatigued. This was not the time. The interest in my action research was purely my own. It seemed the community of practice wanted to go home after finishing the agenda.

Time seldom travels as fast as it does on a school vacation. On our first day back, I found a surprise on the playground, graffiti on the blacktop; it was not the usual subject matter. Someone (no one knew or admitted it) had written character education themes with sidewalk paint and chalk. “Treat others as you want to be treated.” “We don’t brag when we win,” which was almost a verbatim repetition of a previous week’s character education theme. Concurring with this playground testimonial, I interviewed another cafeteria worker, and she remarked that she noticed the visuals as she delivered the lunch envelopes. She reported that “she takes them to heart.” People could listen to and see what behaviors were expected of everyone at Amadeus Elementary.

#### **4.1.8 May: Interviews and the End is near**

May brought balmy days and playground duty on a regular basis. Usually, students were allowed to go outdoors for recess only when the temperature was above 40 degrees. Grassy areas were now dotted with dandelions; no herbicides permitted on school grounds. The playground walls had been painted by the students long gone under the supervision of the art teacher, reflecting themes of interdisciplinary units of the past. On one side of the steps, third and fourth grade children played kick ball against the wall showing astronauts planting the American flag on the moon. Where the fifth graders played dodge ball, dinosaurs roamed a prehistoric landscape that occasionally had out-of-place grey rectangles, signaling obscene graffiti that had been painted over by the custodian. It was time for circle games, four-square, and pick-up basketball, running as fast as you can, playing in the dirt along the fence. Children returned to their classes with sweaty foreheads and faint lines of dirt on their necks.

On the playground that first week of May, students danced around a huddle of teachers anxious for conversation with other adults. These six teachers, grades three to five, formed the final focus group. A fourth grade teacher reiterated his belief that the character education program was of vital importance. Nonetheless, the fifth grade teacher said that she still observed kids ignoring the themes and denying that they heard them. An intern then commented that the character education program needed an incentive to produce more compliance and everyone agreed. The intern suggested that since students love to hear their names on the morning announcements for their birthday, teachers could report the name of the student that they see following the character education behaviors and have that name mentioned on the announcements. It would be very simple to do. The teacher who was in charge that month agreed enthusiastically. Just call her with the names. Later that day, I reformulated the afternoon announcement and the principal approved it via email. (See Appendix E)

Now the afternoon announcements contained a child's name that was "caught" following the theme behavior. The first time the student recognition portion of the announcement was broadcast my class was only half paying attention, exhausted and hot after walking back from the spring band concert at the high school. With the ceiling fans trying to dispel the heat and humidity, the name of the student congratulated for being good was almost lost in the noise. Nevertheless, some students heard the difference in the format and registered the novelty of the

idea in their smiling eyes or by mouthing the news to a friend (no talking during the announcements, please). The character education program entered a new phase at Amadeus Elementary.

That same week, the PTA scheduled an assembly focused on character education. This was not coordinated, more a coincidence. Since the principal was out of the district that day, she had asked me to introduce the speaker to the student body. I began by reminding them of the morning announcement themes concerning assembly behavior. Sit quietly, never talk while the speaker is talking or performing, and say hello to your friends by smiling. After the program, the presenter told me that he was very impressed with the students' good behavior.

The May faculty meeting on the 10<sup>th</sup> began late and ended later. Teachers straggled in, sitting with their grade levels or lunchtime cliques. The windows were opened and the breeze filtering through the screens smelled like damp earth, like summer. There were blouses without sleeves, sandals with no hose and ties were not seen again. This room, that once seemed cozy in the colder months, now seemed stuffy and cluttered with too many stacks of books needing a home. Teachers totted water bottles or sweating cans of soda. The state grant which produced the classroom ceiling fans had run out of money when it came to the library.

The agenda included a handout on the bird flu pandemic, and notification of the inclusion of science in next year's state mandated-testing. The principal regretted the scuttling of a reading program which had been in operation for only two years. The Title I reading teacher worked diligently to implement this assessment program; now it was gone. Furthermore, many people suspected or knew the next announcement; one of the two retiring teachers would not be replaced. The reason was money. Classes would have thirty or more students per room especially in the intermediate grades. This produced gloomy comments about what was in store for next year.

By the time the discussion moved onto the character education program, the bell had already rung. A few teachers left; most agreed to stay. Quickly, I made three points. First, if the program was to be used next year, the binder would be given to the first class room on the list, unless the proposed announcers' club was established. Secondly, I reported that the focus group believed that the program would be more efficient if the students received recognition for performing the behavior described in the weekly theme. The teacher in charge had done this for last two days and I told them that today I noticed that in my classroom more students stopping to

listen to the announcements. Any teacher could call or email the name of a deserving student to the teacher scheduled to do the announcements. I gave everyone a copy of the new afternoon announcement format so that the teachers could see the change. Finally, I mentioned the final round of interviews that would be coming up. I thanked everyone for their observations and cooperation. Meeting over, the teachers and the principal plodded out into the hall, already muggy from the oncoming thundershowers.

As May progressed into June, the reaction to the program became more positive. The suggestion to give recognition to anyone “caught” behaving as the character education program was working. Listener ratings for the afternoon announcements went up according to the interviews. One teacher entered the name of another teacher who was seen standing respectfully during the Pledge of Allegiance; even teachers were included and expected to follow the rules here at Amadeus Elementary. I questioned a permanent substitute who covered all classes about the student reaction to this innovation. She reported that only once did she witness this reward meeting with sophisticated snickers and rolling eyes. She immediately took it upon herself to define what behavior Amadeus Elementary considered laudable. The perpetrators, a new transfer and her cohort, stopped and became quiet.

The “caught being good” segment of the afternoon announcements was producing exemplary behavior, some of it occurring whenever a teacher came into view. Teachers reported to me during lunch or when I met them in the hall that even some of the less than sterling members of the student body had been observed holding doors for teachers, saying “Good morning,” and generally following the current behavior theme or that of a previous week.

Probably the most beloved event in the school year was the PTA-sponsored children’s fair. It arrived every year in the middle of May, a signal that school was almost over, a time for free fun and games. The smell of popcorn rose to fill all three floors of the building. More than the usual number parent helpers were in the building and could be seen setting up the duck pond, collecting raffle tickets and working the bake sale near the gym stage. The fair disrupted the usual protocol of using the gym as a holding area for early arriving students because the parents had set up an elaborate carnival with an Olympic (Amadeus School of Champions) theme. Because the gym was now off-limits, the students were going in every direction, being thrown out of the children’s daily routine. Usually the principal would make new arrangements, but she was out of the district attending a meeting.

Ten minutes before the bell was to ring, a primary teacher walked through the third floor hall on her way to the teachers lounge for a coffee. She was a newer member of the staff, an overworked first grade teacher. As she passed other staff members, she recruited helpers to organize the students as they entered, taking it upon herself to lead the volunteers. She did what had to be done, assuming the cooperation which she received. Teachers hurried downstairs and sorted students from each grade level, lined them up, and order was restored. The morning proceeded calmly. The day ended with congratulations on the afternoon announcements for a rather nefarious third grader who was “caught” holding the door without being asked. He basked in the compliment. The students in my class now stopped everything to hear if their name was to be mentioned.

#### **4.1.9 June: So soon?**

The month of June popped in with more thunderstorms forcing everyone on the windward side of the building to close the windows cutting off any air circulation. Rain pelted the glass as my students began the delicious task of cleaning out desks and backpacks. Students continued to work on their assignments as the teachers quietly packed away their apple-shaped pencil holders, apple-shaped note paper, decorative apple tissue box covers and personalized blackboard erasers with painted apples on the wooden base. Classrooms and hallway lights stayed off to help keep the heat down even if the effect was only psychological. Fifth graders roamed the building asking for autographs in their yearbooks. Students observed summer birthdays with a wealth of sticky cupcakes and sweet orange drink. The empty cork strips attached to the hallway walls for display no longer showcased student research assignments. Huge grey garbage cans took up strategic places in the hallways quickly filling with discarded workbooks, notebooks, and unclaimed science projects, folded poster board jammed into the overflowing receptacles.

Marking a rite of passage, the fifth grade walked to their “graduation” at the community center. Grades k-4 stayed in their classrooms finishing any last minute assignments. On the playground, children opted for benches in the shade. Being sent to the air-conditioned principal’s office was a child’s only escape from the high temperatures. The children giggled and smiled when they heard on the announcement who was caught being good and there was a list of student

names waiting to be broadcast. The announcements were well done and the teacher in charge added jokes to the afternoon protocol which proved to be an attention-getter.

I observed a marked difference in student end-of-the-year behavior. The joy of ending a school year was palatable, yet there was less of the usual dysfunctional behavior that accompanies the last days of school. I witnessed students politely greeting adults in the hall, using character education themes to correct each other, especially in the cafeteria where I hung extra copies of the reminders that pertained to eating and cleaning up. Other teachers witnessed the same behavior as documented in the second set of interviews which continued through June:

EAS: All right, and you said that you did see changes in specific kids' behavior. There were specific kids.

BUBBA: Certain ones that came from other schools; the atmosphere there is, you can tell right away that it's a lot different. So they're coming to a school where we insist that they behave. So it does affect them. It does change them.

EAS: So you really had to do little preaching.

BUBBA: Right, I think it's the overall essence of what you're trying to put across. It starts to communicate to other students that this is what we do in Amadeus. This is how we behave.

Teachers presented more observations than I expected. I had received few emails on the subject. Electronic communication was not as facile as waiting and telling me during the final interviews. One teacher reported that she saw a relationship between the length of time a student spent at our school and behavior. She commented:

EAS: Tell me about the changes in the children's behavior that you've observed, that you believe are due to the program. Now you said you think it hasn't helped some kids.

SR: I think the kids who like the recognition; they like to point out to me that they're following the good character program.

Some kids, I'm not saying that they're not following the program; you know how they are. They just go around and bumble.

For example, S., she's new. She hasn't gotten into the swing of how we do things here at Amadeus. And so just kind of does her own thing. You know, be nice to others; she hasn't had the program all the way through either.

EAS: When did she come?

SR: March.

EAS: What about the new girls that came in September? Do you think it wore off on them?

SR: I think it works for them. They follow it like everyone else. They seem eager to please.

The program fit the contextual restraints of time and curriculum. Many of the interviewees recognized the simplicity of the program and credited that simplicity with the program's effectiveness:

MB: One thing I wanted to tell you, when we were doing the DIEBELS (reading) testing, it was a first grader, when they have to give the word.

EAS: Yes, the word in a sentence...

MB: Somebody used the word related to the announcement in the morning. I can't remember who it was or what it was, but I remember thinking I have to tell it to you. Use the sentence related to the announcement in the morning.

EAS: So something is sticking.

MB: Something, they are hearing it. There's proof. The only thing that would make it better is that if you could take a time, although the day is so full, maybe once a week to read a story about that concept, you know fairness, some sort of related story. I know that there are stories out there in children's literature that are easy, short. That would have to be, the classroom day is so full, I don't know.

EAS: Time is a problem.

MB: Yes.

EAS: So what do you think is the key element as far as making this effective? If it works, what makes it work?

MB: It works because it's stated simply. The words are easy to understand. It's working because they're getting the constant exposure and reinforcement. And I think if you start something like we are and we continue it and they hear it again, in first grade, then second grade, third grade, fourth grade, fifth grade, then it becomes more of the pattern.

EAS: So it's a pattern here at our school.

MB: Yes, yes, at our school, this is what we do. This is how we reinforce this. This is how we keep this pattern going. And the more they see it, same thing when we teach them vowel sounds and letter sounds; you use the same concept. You teach it to them in first grade and second grade, and hopefully, they start applying it more in third grade. We've learned with the word building and other things that I do, it's that constant reinforcement, that constant exposure, that constant practice, that helps to make it work.

Amadeus Elementary had students with problems that needed more help than the school district could provide. Yet these students were part of the community of scholars that needed to be taught and needed to learn character education, maybe not from what they did but from how others reacted to their problems. For example:

PF: It all intertwines; it all intertwines. We want them to be wonderful kids. This is constant reinforcement. Here at Amadeus, not just here in \_\_\_ grade.

EAS: So you think this is a school-wide ethic.

PF: I do.

EAS: Because you hear it and it's everybody?

PF: And I think all the teachers, I don't know anyone here who lets bullying slide off their back. It's disgusting thing.

EAS: Okay, I agree. So all the teachers buy into it?

PF: Absolutely. And I'll bring up sometimes, "Did you hear what they just said. This is what you do."

She continues, commenting on a student who had a very bad day:

PF: Now this is a child who the other kids could go, "You're so goofy... But not a word, but you know what they did? They were writing him notes. "I'm sorry you feel bad today." "I'm your friend." "When you feel better, we'll play in the playground." And this is not that I'm walking around saying to children, "You write him a note, and don't you dare say anything." I didn't have to say a word. I felt good that they had a lot of this in them. I mean they couldn't have been nicer and kinder to him.

The security manager said to me afterwards, and I always meant to tell you this, "I cannot believe how kind the children were to him...."

EAS: Well, that's because of you.

PF: It's because of the whole situation. We all want them to be this way. The security manager said he couldn't believe that they were consoling him... The security man was totally in surprise. He said he couldn't believe how they act. I said that we really push this at Amadeus. We really push this kindness at Amadeus... If I never got recognition from the "wonderful ones," he made me feel like I made progress. If they never come out super high on the PSSA, (state-mandated standardized testing) maybe in character they'll come out real high.

EAS: And the fact that the security manager from another school, and he goes into the other elementary, middle school and the high school. And he noticed that your kids were being so kind. And that's character.

The same teacher felt that the program was successful because it was repetitive, short, and to the point. In her experience, that's what worked with kids.

Beside each classroom door, the visuals presented a constant stream of repetition. No instructional time was necessary. A permanent substitute teacher asked me if she could keep the visuals; she was moving to another school next year. She also downloaded all the daily announcement forms with the behaviors that corresponded to the visual "flip and clip chart.

Through the interview questions, a change in people's perception of the program emerged. In the January interview, one teacher believed the program would "just fall to the wayside"

EAS: What about do you think the teachers would benefit if they knew about it ahead of time, we're going to concentrate on this, this week? Or send out a schedule, or do you think that's unnecessary?

SR: I think it's unnecessary because most of the teachers won't do anything extra for it anyway. I mean they just wouldn't. They might in the beginning, but as they got busier, it would just fall to the wayside.

EAS: So do you think its being busy, the fact.

SR: I think it's being busy, having so many other things on their plate. Not that we don't think it's important, it's just that there are so many other things going on. Especially when you get toward the holidays and the PSSA's coming up. And then, it's the end of school.

EAS: Okay, is there anything else?

SR: I just think it's very important. I wish we could find more time

By June, the program proved worthy of her time and effort; the implementation suggestions made through the action research cycle changed the program. The same teacher was willing to start the binder through its schedule for the following fall:

EAS: Looking back in your experience and what you know of previous character education programs, what have we discussed that might really help this program? What should we keep?

SR: Keep it exactly like it is. They get a little bit every day. They hear it on the announcements everyday, twice a day. It's outside the classroom on the clip and it reminds them everyday what they ought to be practicing and doing.

EAS: So what do you think the key element is?

SR: The recognition for doing what they ought to do, especially now that we've implemented the recognition of putting it on the announcements. A couple of the kids said yesterday, I did that and I wasn't on the announcements. So I really need to ask a teacher write down what they did.

EAS: Do you think that's better?

SR: Yes, they're reflecting and thinking about what they're doing. It's irregular. It's not every time they do it. It's, "I'll catch you when I catch you."

EAS: Do you think this will be used next year? I'm not going to be here.

SR: I hope it is. I hope there's a group of us who come together. Has anyone volunteered to take it over?

EAS: No.

SR: I think it would be a good thing to do if one of us was in charge of it each month, especially up here.

EAS: Could we use the same schedule that we used this year, going from room to room to room? But that means you would have to start it. Were the mechanics easy that if I give you the binder you just go?

SR: I think so. I would start it off. I would make sure it got sent to the right spot after me.

The special subject teacher, who in January also thought the student behavior would merely revert back to the pre-program form, altered her perception noting:

EAS: Tell me about any changes in the children's behavior that you've observed since the beginning of the year that you believe may be in part due to the program.

ELA: I've honestly heard them make reference when their name is on the announcements for being caught doing good; they'll come up and tell me "My name was on the announcements." And I'll ask them for what and they'll know; they'll be able to state what they were doing, what was the theme they were caught doing and they were caught doing good and that their name was on the announcements for holding a door for a teacher.

EAS: So it's still something positive, even for the older kids?

ELA: Yep.

Both morning and afternoon announcements kept asking for bathroom manners, "Do your business, flush, wash your hands, and get out." Students reacted to this seriously; there was not the laughter I expected. No "wise guy" asked for a definition of "do your business." The custodian gave hard "enamel" evidence of change for the better:

MC: No, no, not on the top floor, that's funny because this year I had virtually no trouble up on the top floor, where as last year and the year before, they were ripping the sinks off the walls and busting everything up. But this year, was fantastic.

EAS: What about the third floor as far as stuff on the walls? Because the year before that we had trouble with that.

MC: I can't even recall going up there once for a problem. Maybe one time the toilet overflowed because they threw some paper towels in the urinals, and kept flushing it, but I can't even remember the last time I was called up to the top floor.

EAS: So this year, the older kids...there was some responsibility.

MC: Oh, yes.

EAS: So the part of the program that worked was the older kids less damage.

MC: Much less really compared to previous years...

That is not to say that the program worked for everyone at all times. After a particularly rambunctious lunch period, punctuated by the smell of oven fries and hot dogs, a teacher on cafeteria duty said that one of the intermediate grades was obnoxious to the point of defiance. Nothing could quiet them down. Nothing worked or seemed to be working. After lunch, a girl from that same grade was crying with loud sobs and covered with blotchy hives because her best friend, a new girl on campus, called her a whore and used descriptive adjectives to qualify that statement. Such names had not been regularly heard and never tolerated at Amadeus. The perpetrator had been in our school for only three months. Unfortunately, her followers modeled

her behavior. The adults observed this negative authority and its effect on our school environment.

A teacher of a primary grade believed the program did not work for her class as well; nothing would. Two new students came in January and exhibited behavioral problems that neither she nor her student teacher had the therapeutic background to correct. She dealt with inappropriate sexual references, threats of bombing the school, property destruction. This proved to be the tipping point in her room, just too many behavioral problems to handle in one room. After repeated trips to the office and notifying the parents who “blew it off,” or said it was just the student’s “personality,” she stated that her group of students was now beyond the suggestions of prosocial behavior reiterated in the announcements. She gave the only totally negative evaluation of the efficacy of the program, a change from her January replies.

As June progressed from spring into summer, the weather signaled that Amadeus Elementary was ready for summer vacation. The building was remodeled ten years ago and workmen sealed shut the hallway windows as per the fire code. The heat entered, rose, and had no escape route. After one or two days of summertime temperatures, the classrooms hovered around ninety degrees from morning to dismissal. It affected everyone making teaching and learning an uncomfortable effort. Through it all, teachers and students continued their learning assignments. Teachers took inventory and sent the list of missing texts and incompletes to the office; no book, no work, no report card.

June 7 was the last full day of school and field trip time for my classroom. I observed students following the character education themes of the last weeks about holding the door for the next person, saying “Excuse me,” and cleaning up after they ate at the Science Center tables. The other teachers and parents rated the behavior as very good in comparison to previous years. Children listened politely as the elderly tour guide described the press box at Heinz Field as a place of journalistic “impartiality.” They quietly gave the gentleman their attention as I paraphrased most of what he said in words that a group of children who still believed in Santa Claus could understand.

Thursday June 8 the final day of school was a half-day for all students. The morning announcements wished everyone a happy and safe vacation and added a few more students to the “caught being good” list. Several of the teachers said that they had to add one of their students to the announcements because the student was just so good all year and being on the

announcements was “such a nice reward.” Students sat quietly waiting to hear their name, or the name of a neighbor, sibling, or friend. When the bell rang at 11:10 my class threw confetti made from old worksheets in the air. Because some of the girls wanted to stay and help, I raised my right hand and promised to clean up the mess myself.

That afternoon teachers checked the list of from the office that asked for performance scores, door keys, book inventories, student referral forms, and summer mailing information. I finished my last research interview at 2:45 p.m. It was with the custodian as he cleaned out an air filter on the univent in the basement stairwell. The other retiring teacher and I threw a grand retirement party in the cafeteria, thanking the staff for all their help. The principal tearfully announced that she also was leaving, her dream job had materialized. Along with the projected amount of maternity leaves, about a third of the staff would be missing when the bell rang again in the fall.

Teachers packed away the spiral-bound visuals for next fall. I gave the binder with the announcement forms and the schedule to the first teacher on the list. She said it was no problem, a change from January when she thought the program would not last. She would start the morning announcements next year at Amadeus Elementary, complete with the character education program firmly embedded in its format. As I left, I turned to see her place the binder, not on a shelf, but strategically on the corner of her desk, ready to go.

## **4.2 FINDINGS**

### **4.2.1 Making it Work: The “Doable”-ness of Action Research**

Action research takes an investigator one step further, beyond the theoretical into the practical. This study confirmed that the character education program initiated at Amadeus Elementary was doable, practical with a theoretical backbone. The elementary school population required a plan that really worked. All parties benefited from this reciprocal research; the community of practice at Amadeus Elementary produced an effective character education program and this study was

formed in and by the process. Monetary costs were minimal: paper, binding, mounting material for the visuals, and the use of a public address system. There were no workbooks, extra assignments, or correcting of papers to be done. The program did not demand bookkeeping procedures. The real price of the character education program was effort, time, and leadership.

Dressed in work clothes, the action research cycle demanded effort. Teachers, support personnel, and the administration reflected upon and isolated those factors that helped or hindered the efficacy of the plan. Adults remembered what they observed, substantiating their claims. I interviewed, recorded, and analyzed the suggestions for implementation strategies that the focus groups scrutinized and the entire staff tried. The administration encouraged me to instigate and continue the research. It was a team effort; everyone helped.

The investment of time walked a thin chalk line drawn around the regular curriculum, extra practice for standardize testing, and the numerous interruptions found lurking in the school calendar. As the interviews repeatedly recorded, teachers felt that the school day was already full. When character education was taught, it was taught incidentally, through the announcements, visuals and numerous individual strategies found in the daily routine. Interviews, focus groups, and faculty meetings each heard the ticking of the clock. The investment of time was long enough to produce an effective program, but not so long as to be prohibitive.

No classroom time was confiscated from the daily or weekly schedule. Character education was not put into a time segment, that is, “this is where students learn character education,” and then when the bell rings, “this is when students do not learn character education.” It was not a once a day, or once a week, or once a month program. The program became a part of the daily, then twice daily routine, not a segmented interruption. Moreover, with the use of visuals, students could learn character education just by walking down the hall and noticing the theme for that week. The program required time but administration, teachers, and support personnel used the time that was already there.

Leadership involved a teacher-leader who was willing to invest energy in solving problems. I was that leader, a leader among leaders: the adults willing and able to produce an effective program and lead students through it. It was everyone’s “big idea”. Teachers had enough memory to sift through past character education programs and knew what would work at Amadeus Elementary and what mistakes to avoid. Even the best-made shoes won’t be worn if

they don't fit. Leadership also required an administration that was able and willing to trust the teachers and the support personnel to perform professionally. Participants invested their energies because those in leadership tacitly gave them the power to make it work. No one checked on the outcome of the focus groups; no one asked for a report on implementation strategies. The results of the program could be checked any time students were observed in the cafeteria, hallways, when they passed an adult in the hall.

#### **4.2.2 Making It Clear: The Issue of Prosocial Behavior**

Implementation strategies transformed theories involving community of practice, zone of proximal development, and caring communities into student-ready behaviors. The announcement protocol translated terms such as respect, kindness, or responsibility, into understandable, prosocial, action (Goldstein, 1988). Respect required that a student greet an adult by name and say "Good Morning" (Clark, 2003). When being corrected, respect meant that students refrain from rolling their eyes, whining or answering back in a "dis"-respectful manner (Clark, 2003). Respect asked for a "yes" or a "no," not just a mumble or a nod (Clark, 2003). Respects came in the colors of common courtesy, "thank you," or "please," or "no, thank you" (Clark, 2003). Children exhibited respect for school property by staying on the paths outside and showed respect for their country by standing with attention for the Pledge of Allegiance. No ambiguity here, just very elementary directions for a very elementary audience.

Similarly, students were told to be kind by letting anyone share their lunch table and including others in games and activities (Clark, 2003). It was kind to congratulate a winner and never cut in line (Clark, 2003). If someone dropped something, pick it up for them; it was the kind thing to do (Clark, 2003). Holding the door for the person behind you was kindness in action as was writing a consoling note to a classmate who had a very bad morning (Clark, 2003). For those in the community of practice who had not been taught these behaviors, the program itself performed a kindness by teaching ways of socialization, of membership, of belonging. The principal commented, "If we don't teach character education, no one will." So the teachers, support personnel and administration, the "we" taught it. Such instruction allowed anyone who followed those instructions to "fit in" and become a bona fide Amadeus student.

Rather than decry the lack of student responsibility, adults made it quite clear what responsibility looked like. Students who were responsible did their homework; they organized their desk and backpack; they cleaned their place in the cafeteria after eating (Clark, 2003). Responsibility meant being good even if no one was watching, in the halls, outside, in the entrance way in the morning, or in the boys' bathroom on the third floor. The character education program developed into the Amadeus Elementary owners' manual.

### **4.2.3 Making It the Property of Amadeus Elementary: The Issue of Identity**

Every character education announcement began with "Hear at Amadeus...." The behavior that followed described how people acted if they were members of the school community. Listen and learn and belong. Students quoted the message to each other. Teachers, veteran and novice, used the character education announcements to validate what they had been instructing in the established curriculum e.g. social studies, and as the opportunity arose. Students read writing on their playground and the visuals at every door with a character education message. Anyone could join the school community. The character education program gave the details. Behavior became the membership card of the community.

The study answered the research questions and began to answer the behavior problem of Amadeus Elementary. This meant that with effort, time, and leadership, a school could teach character education in a way that respected the context of the school and the perception of the problem as seen by the people involved in its solution. The framework for the program was the action research cycle: observe, reflect, act; observe, reflect act. The community of practice followed these steps thereby initiating a process by which it defined itself (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

### **4.2.4 Reflections on the Role of Catalyst in Action**

Why and how did this character education program work? In any action research project, there must be a catalyst, someone who realizes that all the necessary pieces are present and then puts

the pieces together to form a cohesive plan of implementation. What would be the job description of that catalyst? What did I have to do to energize the action research cycle to produce an effective program? First, as the catalyst, I had to listen. People described the behavior problem in the everyday vocabulary of the faculty lounge, the hallway, and the playground. I had to be able to hear and separate the whine of the cynic from the legitimate complaint. Listening generated background information which helped in avoiding the repetition of mistakes found in past character education programs. I heard that people were busy already and did not want anymore demands put on their classroom time. I learned that good suggestions are easier to make than to carry to fruition. Interviewees cautioned me to avoid suggesting strategies for someone else to do. Listening and paying attention gave validation to the opinion and experience of my collaborators.

In addition to listening, as the catalyst of the action research cycle, I had to assume the role of servant rather than master. There was no way in which I could have received the cooperation that I did receive if my stance had assumed an authoritative posture. Because I knew the tight schedules that had to be followed and the pressure exerted to produce the AYP scores, it was *my* job to fabricate the visuals, the revised announcement form, come prepared to meetings with the analysis of interviews and focus meeting suggestions. I could not ask others to do what I thought they should do but that I was unwilling to do myself. Participants witnessed the importance of the program by my work. If the program was worth my effort, then maybe there was something to be gained for everyone involved.

Moreover, in the lateral arrangement of authority that I assumed, I continued to be one of the teaching staff, rather than a quasi-administrative operative. As a catalyst, I absorbed the contextual information necessary to yield the best outcome from the action research cycle. Contextual factors included attendance baby showers, faculty room lunches, and hallway chitchat. Teaching was the common denominator that stimulated cooperation. In this context, I, as the catalyst, worked within the structure of the community of practice rather than observing and commanding from above.

Finally, there had to be authentic care about the program and the people it benefited. This was not a purely academic exercise which could be labeled null if it did not succeed. The study involved children who needed an effective character education program and adults who had little time to start again from the beginning. Action research delivered an outcome that had

to be benign at least and beneficial at best. The dynamic of “role model” operated in this context; I had to be what I wanted others to be. This meant each day of the program especially required my effort, time, and leadership. Without my conscious knowledge of the developmental increments, I gradually found myself following the morning announcement behaviors, being a template for others. My example was the lens through which the community of practice saw the results of the program, the benefit for adults and children alike. The community of practice engendered the character education program and the character education program arose from the attributes of the community of practice: caring, kindness, responsibility, effort. I was not allowed to be anything less than what I asked others to be. I doubt if the program would have worked otherwise. There had to be authenticity in the program, in my behavior, and in the example I set for others to follow (Stringer, 2004).

The steps that led to the development of an effective community of practice reflect all three components of the role of catalyst: listening, serving, and caring. Was there success every day in every behavior? Of course not, being human can mitigate the any dream of a perfect success. Nonetheless, every morning and afternoon, the community of practice heard the desired prosocial behaviors repeated on the announcements, with recognition acting as motivation to try again as everyone grew into becoming Amadeus Elementary.

## 5.0 NUMERICAL ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Michael Fullan comments: “Teaching has long been called a ‘lonely profession,’ always in pejorative terms. The professional isolation of teachers limits access to new ideas and better solutions, drives stress inward to fester and accumulate, fails to recognize and praise success, and permits incompetence to exist and persist to the detriment of students, colleagues, and the teachers themselves” (Fullan, 1993, p. 34). If the aforementioned statement is true, then it follows that an open exchange of abilities and suggestions is required for educational progress. Through individual interviews and the medium of action research, this study mitigated those resulting negative factors of teacher isolation by the sharing of implementation strategies utilized in this study.

Undoubtedly, part of the program’s efficacy was found in this exchange of ideas which represented the experience of each individual teacher or staff member. “Group suppression of intuition and experiential knowledge is one of the major reasons why bandwagons and ill-conceived innovations flourish (and then inevitably fade, giving change a bad name). It is for this reason that I see the individual as an undervalued source of reform.” (Fullan, 1993, p. 35) Individual implementation strategies might have been lost in the “lonely profession.” Instead, I involved individuals, the various focus groups, and faculty meeting members in the discourse. Seasoned professionals and intensely involved novices generated suggestions that arose from experience and the intuitive ability to discern what could work. And when time for collaboration was not part of the regularly scheduled class day for the teachers, the focus group served as an assessment tool for the perceived efficacy of each implementation strategy. The collaborative vision of a better character education program impelled the community of practice to construct a program that reflected the authentic need at Amadeus Elementary.

### **5.1.1 Research Questions: Results**

Each research question was individually investigated using an identical process. The following presents each research question, the corresponding interview question, a table illustrating the interview responses and an explanation of each response. Explanations are embedded in the context of the study, Amadeus Elementary School and are indicative of a common understanding of usage.

#### **5.1.1.1 Research Question 1**

*Research question:*

**What strategies do teachers, administration, and support staff utilize in the implementation of the character education program?**

*Interview question:*

**What have you done in your daily activities that have made the program work?**

After coding all interviews and field observation journal entries, I ran a text unit search for each research question and the corresponding interview question related to the character education program featured in this study. To investigate the changes in implementation strategies utilized by the staff, I conducted a Boolean search using NUD\*IST N6, cross-referencing each coded response with the interviews from January 2006 and the same coded response with the interviews from May 2006.

**Table 2 Implementation Strategies Utilized by Faculty and Staff Members**

<b>Implementation strategy</b>	<b>January Citations</b>	<b>May Citations</b>
Repetition	2	8
Discussion	17	12
Rewards	1	2
Reinforcement	4	8
Songs	1	0
Example	1	1
Attention	2	11
Modeling	1	1
Visuals	0	5
Spelling bonus point	0	2
Recognition	0	6

**Explanation of implementation strategies reflecting daily activities that have made the program work:**

1. Repetition: Those interviewed repeated the theme of the character education program or asked the student to repeat the desired behavior for that week.

2. Discussion: Adults in the school initiated a discussion with the students concerning the desired behavior of that week or used the classroom activity or context to explain the desired behavior of the week.

3. Rewards: Adults rewarded students with a treat or privilege when desired behavior was demonstrated.

4. Reinforcement: Adults in the school used positive or negative reinforcement as an implement strategy. This included verbal reprimands for lack of compliance or verbal encouragement when desired behavior was exhibited.

5. Songs: The teacher taught the students songs whose themes coordinated and reinforced the desired behavior of the week.

6. Example: The teacher used various examples from the context of the classroom or school environment as an implementation strategy for the character education program.

7. Attention: As an implementation strategy, those interviewed brought the character education program's desired behavior to the students' attention. In other cases, the teacher/staff member requested that the students focus their attention on the announcement which proposed the desired behavior.

8. Modeling: Those interviewed demonstrated the desired behavior explicated in the character education portion of the daily announcements.

9. Visuals: Adults utilized the visuals that were formulated to accompany the character education program. The visual was used as a discussion topic, reinforcement ploy, or as incidental learning through the interviewees' attention to changing the topic as the character education theme changed on the daily announcements.

10. Spelling bonus point: Students earned an extra bonus point on the weekly spelling test if they could recall the character education theme of the week or spell a relevant word designated beforehand by the teacher.

11. Recognition: Adults in the school verbally recognized students who demonstrated the desired behavior as elucidated in the daily announcements. The teacher/staff member either congratulated the student in the situation as it occurred or had the child's name read on the afternoon announcements as being seen following the character education suggested action.

As previously stated, the program was initiated on the first day of the 2005 school year. The interview process began near the end of January 2006. In the interim, there was no discussion among teachers, administration, and researcher as to the need for implementation or suggestions as to the way implementation should occur. Therefore the above strategies were initiated by the staff and continued without instruction from the administration or myself until the focus group suggestions were instituted in February 2006.

Through the January interview protocol, discussion was the most prevalent implementation strategy employed by staff and faculty. This follows Nel Noddings's criteria for developing a caring community; that is, one where behavior is taught through practice, attention, discussion and example (1992).

Moreover, adults engaged students in discussion, explaining and expanding upon the behavior that was assigned. Right from the beginning of the study, the teachers/staff used discussion as a method for implementing the character education program. Additionally, Noddings believes that, in the routine circumstances of everyday schooling, adults should exemplify the behavior so that the child sees a working model of what is expected. The child realizes that the behavior has value for adults, as well (Noddings, 2002). In the interview, modeling was cited as an implementation strategy along with repetition, reinforcement, songs and rewards.

Noddings (1992) postulates that adults should lead the students in practice of the desired trait either in the classroom or when the teachable moment arises. The students' attention should be directed to the behavioral goal of the character education program to facilitate instruction. Through the citations found by the NUD\*IST6 text searches, and examined for applicability to the topic, eleven of the teachers or staff members recognized the need to focus the student's attention on the behaviors expounded by the program as an implementation strategy.

By May the action research cycle had been in operation and the changes in implementation strategies reflected a more cohesive, unified response to the character education program. There were more strategies given in the May interviews and a greater number of staff members following the activities suggested through the action research protocol. Once again, discussion was utilized to promote the desired behaviors that were stated in the daily announcements through the public address system. Interviewees could recall more

implementation strategies than in January including an increase in attention given to the program, reinforcement and repetition. None of these implementation strategies required additional funding and reflected incidental learning rather than an established class period or time segment. The program was becoming institutionalized; a part of the everyday ethos of the community of caring and the community of practice. “None of us is as smart as all of us” when suggestions are gathered by a researcher and tried by staff and results observed and reported.

Fullan observes:

There are two basic reasons why *every person* (author’s italics) working in an enterprise committed to making continuous improvements must be change agents with moral purpose. First, as we have seen, since no one person can possibly understand the complexities of change in dynamically complex systems, it follows that we cannot leave the responsibility to others. Second, and more fundamental, the conditions for the new paradigm of change cannot be established by formal leaders working by themselves. Put differently, each and every teacher has the responsibility to help create an organization capable of individual and collective inquiry and continuous renewal, or it will not happen (1993, p. 39).

Furthermore, the adults of the school used the program to initiate strategies that they believed would translate into better behavior and learning for the child. The experiential and intuitive knowledge of the teachers and staff followed Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development theory. The adults in the real-life context set the standard for behavior through their implementation strategies thereby hoisting the child to a higher level of performance. Moreover, in his sociocultural theory of development, Vygotsky assumes that higher mental functioning is facilitated by words, discourse, social interaction which in turns changes and facilitates mental action, and those mental actions have their origins in social relations (Wertsch, 1985). The everyday interaction of teachers and students through the various implementation strategies utilized by each adult produced a change in behavior that is, learning.

It was not at the behest of the administration that these strategies were put into play. From the beginning of the school year until the time of the January interviews, there had been no formal or informal cajoling of staff members to utilize any of the character education programs. Michael Fullan believes that it is an individual responsibility to act that promotes change for the good. He states:

It is only by individuals taking action to alter their own environments that there is any chance for deep change. The 'system' will not, indeed cannot, do us any favors. If teachers and other educators want to make a difference, and this is what drives the best of them, moral purpose by itself is not good enough. Moral purpose needs an engine, and that engine is individual, skilled change agents pushing for changes around them, intersecting with other like minded individuals and groups to form the critical mass necessary to bring about continuous improvements. (Fullan 1993, p.40)

### **5.1.1.2 Research Question 2**

*Research question:*

**What factors in the program lend support to its implementation?**

*Interview question:*

**What part of the program works for your situation?**

Categories for this research question emerged as the coding was completed. When a participant's interview illustrated a factor of the program that added to the program's efficacy, then that information was translated into a node under both the research question and interview question tree node of the NUD\*IST6 program. After coding all interviews and field observation journal entries, I ran a text unit search for each to the factor which was applicable to this second research question. I conducted a Boolean search using NUD\*IST N6, cross-referencing each coded factor with the interviews from January 2006 and the same coded factor with the interviews from May 2006.

**Table 3 Factors of Program that Support its Success**

<b>Factors Supporting Program Success</b>	<b>January Interview Citation</b>	<b>May Interview Citation</b>
Simplicity	3	12
Morning announcements	9	3
Emphasis	0	2
Discussion	4	2
Incidental Learning	1	2
Repetition	2	3
Reinforcement	2	1
Curriculum	2	3
Visuals	2	4
Awareness	0	2
Afternoon announcements: recognition	0	5
Afternoon announcements: reminder	0	1
Themes	0	1

**Explanation of program factors that lend support to its implementation**

1. Simplicity: Interviewees stated that the themes of the character education program were stated in “down to earth” terms and therefore, understandable for the school population.
2. Morning announcements: Those interviewed cited the character education portion of the daily morning announcements as contributing to the program’s efficacy.
3. Emphasis: Interviewees replied that the efficacy of the program was due to the emphasis that it put on the desired behaviors through the daily announcement format.
4. Discussion: The interviewees believed that the daily character education announcements elicited discussion that proved to be beneficial to the efficacy of the program.
5. Incidental Learning: The daily announcements made the desired behaviors “ingrained” in the students without a formal class period being employed to instruct students in the program.

6. Repetition: Students benefited from hearing the character education theme repeatedly during the usual announcement protocol of five school days.
7. Reinforcement: The daily announcements gave faculty and staff members an opportunity to provide reinforcement for the desired behavior whether in the classroom or in the general school environment.
8. Curriculum: Teachers found that they were able to incorporate the daily announcement theme into their classroom curriculum through various topics such as a social studies discussion of citizenship or in general conversation during circle time in the primary grades.
9. Awareness: The character education program was an efficient modality in raising the students' awareness of desired behaviors.
10. Afternoon announcements (recognition): The afternoon announcements proved to be a convenient and effective way of changing the behaviors in the school. By announcing the names of those children who the teachers/staff recognized as doing an exemplary job in following the program, it was easy to provide positive reinforcement for a job well done.
11. Afternoon announcements (reminder): The afternoon announcements proved to be effective as a reminder of the desired behavior stated in the morning announcements.
12. Themes: The themes were efficient, pinpointing the behaviors that needed to be rectified by the program.

Derived from the amassed data and text searches, the most relevant factor contributing to the program's efficacy was the element of simplicity. The program did not demand excessive amounts of curriculum time or supplementary materials. When related to the findings in the first research question, that is, what implementation strategies were utilized by the staff/faculty in

relation to the character education program, discussion of the topic, talking to students as Noddings (1992) recommends for establishing a caring community, worked for the interviewees. The program was simple enough to be utilized by adults through discussion. It was easy to use, so they used it.

This ability to ascertain what was making the program work falls under Brown and Duguid's (2006) criteria for a community of practice. As previously stated, they explain the conceptual premise of community of practice as knowledge that lies in its people rather than in its databases (p.121). It is people, in their communities, organizations, and institutions, who ultimately decide what it all means and why it matters (p.18). The factors of the program that supported its implementation were discovered through reflection and the social system—the people, organizations, and institutions involved (p. 60). Finally, the teachers and staff assessed the strengths of the program through their commitment to the program and to the students that the program would impact. “Knowledge is something we digest rather than merely hold. It entails the knowers understanding and having some degree of commitment (p. 120).”

### **5.1.1.3 Research Question 3**

#### ***Research question:***

**What problems occur during the initial implementation of the program that limited its success?**

#### ***Interview question:***

**What part of the program hasn't worked for you and can you tell me why?**

As seen in the previous question, categories for this research query emerged as the coding was completed. When a faculty or staff interview illustrated a factor of the program that detracted to the program's efficacy, then that information was translated into a node under both the research question and interview question tree node of the NUD\*IST6 program. After coding all interviews and field observation journal entries, I ran a text unit search for each factor which was applicable to this third research question. I conducted a Boolean search using NUD\*IST N6, cross-referencing each coded factor with the interviews from January 2006 and the same coded factor with the interviews from May 2006.

**Table 4 Program Factors that Limit its Success**

<b>Factors Limiting Program Success</b>	<b>January Interview Citation</b>	<b>May Interview Citation</b>
Missed announcements	4	3
Reinforcement	1	1
Time restraints	3	1
Lack of full attention	2	4
Lack of full attention (age level)	1	1
Timing of announcements	2	5
Timing of announcements (lunchtime)	0	1
Comprehension	3	2
Curriculum	2	0
Curriculum (PSSA)	1	0
Students don't care	1	3
Computer problems	1	0
Olweus bullying program	1	0
Delivery	2	2
Concurring activity	1	0
Visuals	0	2
Doesn't know	0	2

**Explanation of Program Factors that occurred during the initial implementation of the program that limited its success:**

1. Missed announcements: Those interviewed indicated that the announcements could not be heard to due ineffective sound system or students were not present in the class room when the announcements were made.
2. Reinforcement: Adults in the school did not provide reinforcement for the desired behavior whether in the classroom or in the general school environment.
3. Time restraints: The lack of time in the school day for proper implementation diminished the efficacy of the program.

4. Lack of full attention: Lack of full attention to the daily announcements on the part of the student reduced the efficacy of the program.
5. Lack of full attention (age level): The effectiveness of the character education program was diminished by the children's lack of attention caused by the immaturity ascribed to their age.
6. Timing of announcements: The teacher indicated that announcements occurred when the classroom situation prohibited full attention to the daily announcements contain the character education's desired behaviors thereby decreasing the program's inefficiency.
7. Timing of announcements (lunchtime): The teachers and administrator indicated that the program would be more efficient if the daily announcements were repeated at lunchtime in addition to the regularly scheduled edition.
8. Comprehension: Teachers and support personnel members indicated that the program's desired behaviors as stated on the daily announcements needed to be explained to the younger students in kindergarten.
9. Curriculum (PSSA): Teacher articulated that the upcoming PSSA testing reduced the time available in the curriculum to implement the character education program as cited in the daily announcements.
10. Students don't care: Those interviewed members believed that if the program did not work it was due to apathy exhibited by the students.
11. Computer problems: Teacher expressed concern that program would be less due to the lack of computer access.
12. Olweus bullying program: Teacher believed that the character education program would be less helpful because it would eventually be discontinued as was the Olweus anti-

bullying program that the school administration formerly purchased and employed as a character education program component.

13. Delivery: Those interviewed believed that the poor delivery (reading of the script by student announcers) of the program's desired behavior in the daily announcements caused the program to be less valuable.
14. Concurring activity: Because the students were assigned work to be done while the announcements were being delivered, the teacher believed that the character education program was not as successful as it could be.
15. Visuals: Teachers indicated that the visuals connected to the character education program were either too hard for the kindergarteners to read or that a copy of the visuals was missing from the instructional area (gym).
16. Did not know: There was no suggestion given to explain any inefficiency of the program.

In both the January and May interviews, technical problems emerged as the program's primary difficulty. Either the announcement arrived at the wrong time, when students were actively engaged in other classrooms or other activities, or the public address system was dysfunctional for that area in the building.

From the January interview protocol, the teachers, and especially the administrator, stressed the need for more repetition in the form of another daily announcement routine. Therefore, the morning announcement script was easily reconfigured for an additional edition at the end of the day to be used as a vehicle for repeating the desired character education behavior. In doing so, the teachers who felt that their students who had not devoted their full attention to the daily announcements were offered another opportunity to draw attention to the behavior. This process is also described by Noddings (2002) as a sign of a caring community, that is giving attention to the people and concepts that produced a benevolent atmosphere in a school.

Observations from the field notes journal produced contextual factors that negatively affected the program. In January, the school had week-long activities in conjunction with the city's professional football team. The school's standardized testing protocol increased instructional time demands. Therefore the program announcements needed improvement to allow for greater efficacy in the time allotted to its implementation. Springtime distractions and end of the year enthusiasm also made compliance more difficult.

By June, the focus group suggestions had alleviated some of the negative factors through repetition of the themes in an afternoon announcement routine, student recognition and visuals provided more replication and promised greater comprehension of the program's desired behaviors. The problem of poor delivery had not been addressed either through an announcers' club which would screen and train announcers or through the classroom teachers who did not select student readers but allowed everyone to participate, regardless of the students ability to read the announcements over the public address system.

#### **5.1.1.4 Research Question 4**

##### ***Research question:***

**What differences in student behavior does the staff observe that illustrate the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the character education program as it progresses under study?**

##### ***Interview question:***

**Tell me about any changes in the children's behavior that you've observed that you believe were due to the program.**

A majority of faculty/staff members could report an observation that was indicative of the desired change in behavior promulgated in the daily announcement character education program. More could list improved behavior by June.

Exceptions emerged from the data. One primary teacher noted that she believed that nothing would affect the negative behavior of the students in her class. New students who joined the class after the first interview protocol merely increased the disruptive behavior. The janitor, although he later gave incidents that reflected an improvement in student behavior, originally

stated that he thought very little had changed and more punishment needed to be meted out in order to produce a noticeable change in behavior.

Otherwise, the following chart reflects teacher/staff observations of desired behavioral changes found in the students which they attributed to the daily announcements with its character education component.

**Table 5 Observed Differences in Student Behavior Attributed to the Program**

<b>Observed differences in student behavior illustrating the effectiveness of the program</b>	<b>January Interview Citations</b>	<b>May Interview Citations</b>
Greeting in the hall	6	3
Awareness	3	3
Politeness	9	4
Quoting character education theme	2	4
Inclusion into peer group	1	0
More caring	4	5
Fewer office referrals	1	0
Not as “wild”	1	1
Friendship displayed	1	2
Responsibility	2	2
Teamwork	1	0
Respectful	1	7
Behavior in general	3	6
Behavior in the cafeteria	1	6
School pride and spirit	0	1
Less damage	0	1
Comparison	3	0

**Explanation of observed differences in student behavior illustrating the effectiveness of the program**

1. Greeting in the hall: Students were observed greeting adults in the school by name as they passed in the hall as instructed on the daily announcements.
2. Awareness: Students exhibited an awareness of other people and their responsibility toward the school.

3. Politeness: Those interviewed observed that the program produced increased politeness as demonstrated by the students.
4. Quoting character education theme: Students were overheard referring to, or could recite when asked, the character education theme for the week as expressed on the daily announcements.
5. Inclusion into peer group: Teacher reported that students included others who seemed to be excluded due to character education program which articulated that desired behavior.
6. More caring: Students displayed a more caring attitude towards other students than previously exhibited.
7. Fewer office referrals: Support personnel member said that she noticed that this year there were fewer office referrals for inappropriate behavior than in previous years.
8. Not as “wild”: Custodian indicated that there was less damage to school property and teacher on cafeteria duty reported that students did not seem as “wild” or rambunctious as in previous years.
9. Friendship displayed: Those interviewed reported an increased display of friendliness among students and toward staff members.
10. Responsibility: Students exhibited more responsible behavior, especially noticeable in the cafeteria relating to cleaning up after eating.
11. Teamwork: Teacher commented that students seem to be working more as a team than previously observed.
12. Respectful: Faculty, support personnel and administration reported that students displayed more respect toward teachers, staff, and each other than notice in other years.

13. Behavior in general: Interviewees believed that student behavior was noticeably improved.
14. Behavior in general (cafeteria): Students were observed cleaning up after themselves and helping others in the cafeteria as the character education program had suggested as desirable behavior in the daily announcements.
15. School pride and spirit: One faculty member noticed an increased esprit de corps among the students in the school.
16. Less damage: The custodian reported less damage to the physical plant than previously noted, especially in the bathrooms.
17. Comparison: Student teachers observed that the students of Amadeus Elementary fared favorably to those students in other schools that they have visited as far as behavior is involved.

**Table 6 Other Behavior Observations**

<b>Observed differences in student behavior illustrating the ineffectiveness of the program</b>	<b>January Interview Citations</b>	<b>May Interview Citations</b>
Null observation	6	3
Negative observation	5	4
Other causation	2	4
Only in the beginning	1	0

**Explanation of observed differences in student behavior illustrating the ineffectiveness of the program**

1. Null observation: Interviewees noted no appreciable improvement in student behavior that they believed due to the character education program as articulated in the morning announcements.

2. Negative observation: Those interviewed stated that student/students that they have in class or meet in the school environment are beyond the influence of the character education program; their behavior defies correction.
3. Other causation: Lack of improvement in student behavior or increased dysfunctional student behavior was due to other influencing factors such as new student/students that impacted classroom behavior in a negative manner.

Although, in January, six interviewees could not directly ascribe any behavior change directly to the character education program, by June that number was down to three and most interviewees could produce an example of a beneficial behavior modification that they believed was directly related to the character education program.

Vygotsky's theory of scaffolding explicates this sociocultural methodology. In this construct, the concept of the desired behavior (respect, e.g.) was held constant by the adults. Everyone was to exhibit respectful attitudes and behavior towards others and themselves. But the concept of respectful behavior proved difficult for the primary children to translate into the desired behavior. Therefore, the behavior associated with respect would be simplified through the intervention of the teacher. The learner would have an opportunity to be successful at every task (Greenfield, in Rogoff and Lave, Eds. 1984). Eventually, the mentoring teacher and the student would become proficient in their ability to perform the task, in this case, the appropriate behavior. Subsequently, the student would be able to perform the task on his own (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). This was evidenced by the observation of the teachers and staff as they responded to this research question.

Students were more respectful of each other and of adults. They exhibited a more caring attitude and more responsibility toward their duties as a student. The cafeteria was cleaner. And the teachers witnessed incidents where the students themselves began to influence their peers through repetition of the character education theme, such as not causing others more work, or by modeling the correct behavior, the old prescription of setting a good example.

There were students that teachers felt were beyond the influence of the program. A teacher, whose January interview was quite positive, had changed as her class had changed due to the rise in students' dysfunctional behavior without consequences severe or relevant enough to

produce any beneficial change. New students, not accustomed to the community of practice were found to be difficult to inculcate with the character education program's behavior demands. Other students displayed symptoms of severe social and emotional maladjustment to the extent that they were impervious to the behavior suggestions made on the daily announcements. One frustrated teacher remarked that nothing fazed her students and she was "ready to take the bridge." Teachers recommended more intensive interventions via the office or school social worker. Some students were beyond the rectification of the program.

#### **5.1.1.5 Research Question 5**

***Research question:***

**What themes and/or concepts emerge through the description and analysis of the program's implementation that point to the reasons for its effectiveness or ineffectiveness?**

***Interview question:***

**Look back in your experience and from what you know about character education programs, what have we discussed that will help or hinder the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the program?**

After coding all interviews and field observation journal entries, I ran a text unit search for each research question and to the corresponding interview question related to the character education program featured in this study. To investigate the changes in implementation strategies utilized by the staff, I conducted a Boolean search using NUD\*IST N6, cross-referencing each coded response with the interviews from January 2006 and the same coded response with the interviews from May 2006.

These suggestions became the discussion agenda for each focus group meeting. Focus group members gave immediate feedback to each suggestion. The visuals, additional afternoon announcements, and student recognition arose from these comments. Both ideas had received the most affirmation from the interviews. Both ideas involved very little curricular time or effort from the staff. And both implementation strategies proved to be very effective when put into operation on a daily basis.

**Table 7 Factors adding to the effectiveness of the program**

<b>January suggestions</b>	<b>Citations</b>	<b>May suggestions</b>	<b>Citations</b>
Student : Older to younger responsibility/discussion	2	Student responsibility / involvement	3
No ideas/good as is	1	Recognition	7
Reflection in notebooks	1	Better delivery	1
Use of safety patrols	2	Bulletin board/star student	3
Continue	1	Parental notification	1
Incidental learning	2	Part of printing curriculum	1
Announcements at noon	1	Visuals	3
Repetition	1	Continue as is	3
Contest/best week/posters	2	Repetition	2
Visuals	4	Coordinated literature	1
Afternoon announcements	1	Visuals with pictures	1
Reinforcement	3	Announcements at noon	1
Recognition/reward	2	Reinforcement	1
Assembly	1	Emphasize conduct in specials	1
Start young/educating/respect	1	Afternoon announcements	1
Emphasis/demonstration in cafeteria	1	Discussion/role play	1
Doesn't know	1	Doesn't know	1

**Explanation of factors that would help or hinder the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the program (January Interviews):**

Nowhere in the responses for this research question did any participant provide a negative aspect of the program that would hinder its effectiveness and should be changed or deleted. From the January pool of suggestions, the focus group recommended visuals as the factor that would most enhance the program. In the May interviews, the teachers stated that the program would be more effective due to the inclusion in the afternoon announcements of the names of the students who were “caught being good.” They also said that the program would be enhanced by its continuation and by the repetition that the extra announcement protocol produced.

The year ended without any action on the student responsibility suggestion or the bulletin board being assembled outside of the principal’s office. Both ideas, though very credible, would demand further focus group discussion, subsequent recommendation to the entire staff, and staff member involvement to construct and update the bulletin board, and formulate student behaviors that would increase their responsibility in the program.

This question confirmed Kennedy's (2005) findings on change in the schools. She theorizes that if teachers do not have sufficient knowledge of the reform or of content, it will not succeed in enacting change within the real-world school context. Additionally, if there was not sufficient guidance provided in the implementation of the reform, the reform program would fail (Kennedy, 2005). In this study, the teachers, support personnel, and administration had background in the form of previously experienced character education programs. They knew what worked and more importantly, they knew what didn't work in this context. Focus group suggestions, such as more repetition through an added announcement routine, the addition of visuals, and using the afternoon announcements to recognize students following the program, were generally well accepted as implementation strategies that increased the efficacy of the program.

Kennedy's (2005) research also disclosed that teachers did not incorporate change because they held different values and beliefs than those exemplified in the program. Suggestions voiced in the May protocol demonstrate that this is not the case in this study. At least seven of the interviewees stated that the program would be more effective if continued. If a reform was to succeed, according to Kennedy, then it had to reflect the values and beliefs that the teachers considered necessary and important. The plethora of ideas suggested that teachers were reflecting on the program, how to make it better. It was not judged to be inadequate in the majority of the interviews. Only one teacher bemoaned the fact that the children in her class seemed to be beyond the suggestion of the program, a case of too little, too late. The teachers saw the need for character education and were willing to accept this program and even work to improve upon it.

Perhaps it was this continual improvement of the program that defused the cynicism that often accompanies a new idea according to Kennedy (2005). Was there cynicism on the part of the experienced professional who had seen one too many new initiatives come and go? According to the text searches performed by the NUD\*IST program, experienced teachers as well as novice instructors offered support and suggestions for the continual improvement of the program. With so many other things to consider, did the program overwhelm a teacher in a new situation, trying to keep one page ahead of the class? The simplicity and repetitious nature of the program proved valuable to the newer staff members as they had little time or effort available for additional preparation or complexity in their everyday schedules. (See research question 6).

Also referring to Kennedy's research, the context of the teaching situation did not prevent teachers from changing their practice that is, implementing a new character education program (2005). If a first period class was that of a "special" that is, physical education, library, music, art, or technology, the class would probably be in transit during the announcements or perhaps just settling into their place. But when interviewed, the teacher and student teacher who experienced such disruption still found ways to utilize the program through discussion, visuals and incidental learning. The program was not lost in the typical confusion that accompanies a change of classroom in an elementary school.

Finally, the program itself was not too idealistic or unrealistic as Kennedy's findings warned as a symptom of an unsuccessful reform (Kennedy, 2005). The character education themes were selected by the staff. Early on in the process, staff and faculty members were consulted as to the behaviors that they wanted to see exhibited by the students. And using their experience, they judged correctly as to the level of behavioral change that could be expected from children in the primary and intermediate grades. Did the program expect too much from children and staff? Considering the present level of student behavior, the program grasped at a level of observable behavior-based change that seemed achievable through implementation strategies that they themselves had formulated.

#### **5.1.1.6 Research Question 6**

##### ***Research question:***

**What changes in the program are recommended to insure the success of programs of this nature?**

##### ***Interview question;***

**What do you think is the key element to getting the program to really be effective, that is, to make a noticeable change in the school behavior?**

Again using the NUD\*IST6 program, text searches were run for both the research question and the interview question. Then a Boolean search was utilized to show the change in responses from January to June. The following chart illustrates the faculty/staff replies to this question.

**Table 8 Factors to insure the success of the program**

<b>Key factors to insure the success of the program</b>	<b>January Interview Citations</b>	<b>May Interview Citations</b>
Repetition	10	13
Rewards	5	4
Reinforcement	4	4
Respect	1	0
Simplicity	1	4
Parental involvement	1	1
Parental involvement (notification)	0	1
Continuation	3	7
Working together	1	2
Student responsibility	2	0
Student responsibility (writing assignments)	1	0
Visuals	3	3
Assemblies	1	0
Modeling	2	1
Discussion	1	0
Delivery	1	0
Incidental learning	1	2
Consistency	2	6
Monitoring	1	1
Punishment	0	1

**Explanation of changes in the program recommended insuring the success of programs of this nature**

1. Repetition: Interviewees reported that repetition of the character education themes is the key to success for programs of this nature.
2. Rewards: Those interviewed believe that providing rewards for following the behavior objectives of the character education program is the key to an effective program.
3. Reinforcement: Providing reinforcement from the adults in the school for student correct behavior is the key element for success of this program voiced by these faculty/staff members.

4. Respect: Showing respect to adults, other students and themselves was considered a key element for an effective program of character education.
5. Simplicity: The successful character education program must be simple enough for all grade levels' comprehension and simple enough not to impose a burden on the teacher's instructional time.
6. Parental involvement: For each interview series, one teacher stated that parental involvement, taking the essence of the program home, would enhance its efficacy.
7. Parental involvement (notification): In the May series of interviews, one teacher believed that a weekly notification sent to parents explaining the weekly desired behavior voiced in the daily announcements would prove to be the key element for success in this program.
8. Continuation: Teachers and support personnel considered continuation of the character education program the key to its success. The mechanics of the program were already in place.
9. Working together: Three teachers expressed their opinion that the program enabled the school to work together to such a degree that the program proved successful.
10. Student responsibility: During the January course of interviews, two members of the teaching staff decided that giving students more responsibility in their behavior would ensure an efficient program.
11. Student responsibility (writing assignments): One support personnel member believed students should be given the responsibility of writing the daily announcements and this would increase the level of observed desired behavior.

12. Visuals: In January, teachers recommended use of a visual to enhance the quality of the product and after employing such a device, some believed those visuals to be part of a successful program.
13. Assemblies: One teacher mentioned having an assembly on the character education theme as one of the key factors for a successful program.
14. Modeling: Faculty members regard the good example provided by adults modeling the correct behavior as a key element in a competent program.
15. Discussion: In the January interviews, a teacher considered daily class discussion as vital to the program's capability.
16. Delivery: Clear, audible delivery of the daily announcements was cited as key to the program's ability to change behavior. This staff member was located in an area where the public addressed system experienced many problems.
17. Incidental learning: If the students could see and hear the themes of the character education program at every turn, it would produce more of the desired behaviors highlighted in the daily announcements.
18. Consistency: In the May interviews, an increased number of interviewees believed that a school-wide cohesive policy in character education would prove to be the key element in making the program work.

Riding on the results of research question 5 concerning program factors that helped or hindered the efficacy of the program, research question 6 asked for one specific factor that was the key component to the success of the program. Repetition was the most commonly cited key element. By using an additional announcement routine, that is, adding the afternoon edition, the need for repetition was met. The administrator on site even wanted a third edition at noon, to

enhance the use of repetition as an implementation strategy. This remained to be implemented as the school year came to a close.

The second most frequently proposed key element was simply continuing the program. Although this was beyond the scope of this study, the need to resume the program when school began again in the fall was apparent. This parlayed into the concept of consistency, the need for everyone to “be on the same page” when instructing students in the acceptable ethos of the school.

Announcing the students’ names when found following the program was an easy way for the teachers to provide recognition and positive reinforcement for those students whose deportment deserved praise.

All of the above key elements of a successful character education program were simple. They demanded little class room time and little extra effort on the part of the teachers and staff members involved. In this character education program, the benefit of reciprocal research became apparent. The researcher benefited from the ability to conduct the study and the school gained a workable construct for teaching desirable behavior. Teachers willing to follow the program benefited because it was easy to do so and eventually became institutionalized, but adaptable, through the action research cyclical protocol of observation, reflection, action, observation, reflection, and action.

## **6.0 DISCUSSION**

### **6.1 ACTION RESEARCH AND SCHOOL CHANGE**

As seen in this investigation, action research can be used and used effectively on a small, one-school scale and with little or no monetary cost to the school or participants. The benefits of action research for schools can be seen in claims made by Levin and Greenwood (as cited in Reason and Bradbury, Eds. 2001). To paraphrase their findings:

- Action research is context-bound and addresses real life problems.
- Action research is inquiry where participants and researcher co-generate knowledge through collaborative communicative processes in which all participants' contributions are taken seriously.
- Action research treats the diversity of experience and capacities within the local group as an opportunity for the enrichment of the research/action process.
- The meaning constructed in the inquiry process lead to social action or these reflections on action lead to the construction of new meanings.
- The credibility/validity of action research knowledge is measured according to whether actions that arise from it solve problems (workability) and increase participants' control over their own situation (p. 105).

Therefore, action research may be utilized for efficacious and beneficial school change with minimum investments of time and expense.

The concept of synergetic leadership (Atman, 1994) can also be used to explain the dynamic construct found in action research when school personnel act collaboratively to produce change. Synergy is the combination of separate forces within the community of practice that allows the total effect to be greater than the sum of those of the individuals involved in the action:

The Synergetic Leadership Model offers an explanation for the complex process that takes place as the leader/teacher/researcher orchestrates the interaction between the climate of the context (trust leads to bonding, shared vision and

empowerment) and the development of the vision that lead to mission, mission adaptation ( a goal resulting in action) , and finally a product.

As this interaction takes place, the shared energy that results facilitates increasingly greater understanding, appreciation, and a willingness to participate in the process both individually and as a fellow worker – a member of a special group whose commitment to the goal becomes the driver that moves the group toward the goal’s accomplishment.

Through this dynamic process, the ‘whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts’ and, in spite of difficult problems that may arise and set-backs that may occur, an unusual phenomenon of joy pervades the group, the process, and the outcome” (Atman, 1996).

Due to this researcher’s position as an insider, one who had been dealing on a daily basis within the context of the study, trust-building could occur on a spiraling basis, developing into a bonding that denoted trust on the part of the teachers, support personnel, and administration. The researcher’s agenda was known; bonding between participants produced a shared vision of what a school could be and should be like when an efficacious program of character education was in place. This led to a sense of empowerment that facilitated the process of program implementation.

This empowerment also presented a restraint on the part of the researcher. For the action research paradigm to generate a truly participatory product, this researcher had to enter the inquiry as a member of the community of practice rather than the validating mechanism for any change that transpired. I could not “lead” the implementation. I provided a heuristic for the study of the school, empowering all members of the research team, that is, the entire collaborative entity, to follow the path formed by the action research paradigm and fueled by the synergetic leadership model (Atman, 1996).

## **6.2 CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

From the data amassed in this research, character education programs can be utilized as a way of producing a desirable change in student behavior. Observable behavior changes resulted from this inexpensive, easily enacted, locally suitable format. If there is a public address system within the school and there is support for character education on the part of the staff, faculty and

administration, then the elements of this program can be generalized to fit the context of another location.

Moreover, a character education program needs to be behavior-based and evaluated to insure efficacy. First, the behaviors must be simple enough to reach an elementary audience. Primarily, through incidental use of discussion, not necessarily a regularly assigned character education class, the tenets of the program can be promulgated to its desired audience. Secondly, school districts can assume this type of behavior-based program with little or no monetary commitment. Conversely, there does have to be a commitment on the part of the staff to employ the various implementation strategies that have been highlighted in Chapter Four. The “community of practice” has to be in place or the administration has to allow and advocate such a body to form and operate within the school.

Finally, the action research cycle must be employed to assure that there is a constant evaluation of the program taking place. There should be a mechanism for reflection on the part of the main change agent, the focus group members, and the staff as a whole. All of this can be done formally, with the administration offering group time through regularly established faculty meetings or informally, as the need arises. The participants must continue to study the implementation process of the program and to note additions, corrections or omissions that should take place, what needs to be added, eliminated or changed.

### **6.3 ACTION RESEARCH AND TEACHER EMPOWERMENT**

To make research more relevant and therefore useful, administrations empower those who face the educational problems in their everyday, classroom existence, draw from them the expertise and intuition to solve the problem within the context, thereby making the solution “fit” the problem. “Rather than viewing teachers and administrators as the source of educational problems, they are viewed as the solutions. This bottom-up approach to school improvement emphasizes the need to professionalize and empower the nation’s teachers” (Melenyzer, 1991, p. 3)

In this study, by surveying the staff and asking them to formulate the list of desired behaviors they wanted to see in a character education program, they became empowered to voice

their concerns. And yet, as the researcher, I gave them a framework from which to choose, using Ron Clark's *The Essential 55*, a book that became a practical reference for staff research. This proved to be a workable mix of theory and practice. As Heron and Reason comment:

Research is usually thought of as something done by people in universities and research institutes. There is a researcher who has all the ideas, and who then studies other people by observing them, asking them questions, or by designing experiments. The trouble with this kind of way of doing research is that there is often very little connection between the researcher's thinking and the concerns and experiences of the people who are actually involved. People are treated as passive subjects rather than active agents. We believe that good research is research conducted *with* rather than *on* people. We believe that ordinary people are quite capable of developing their own ideas and can work together in a co-operative inquiry group to see if these ideas made sense of their world and work in practice (Heron & Reason (2001) p. 179).

This study exemplified how a change agent catalyst, the researcher, a cooperative administration, and an empowered staff produced beneficial change for the educational system. All three roles were involved in the research. This suggests that an empowered staff is a professional community whose members "reflect upon their role and in turn interacts with both the school's cultural norms and leadership in the accomplishment of empowerment" (Melenyzer, 1991, p. 404).

#### **6.4 CHARACTER EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE**

To allow success from programs that attempt to enact change in the schools, build communities of practice. "None of us is as smart as all of us," and in a community of practice, everyone benefits (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Essential to the study, the theoretical concept of community of practice formed the overarching modus operandi for the research. *Community of practice*, when explained and understood, can act as a viable conduit for change. It utilizes and respects the knowledge that lies in the community's people. The community of practice decides what a program means and why it matters. It acknowledges the understanding that the members hold and it operates on the level of commitment that members can afford to invest in a new idea. Finally, using the theory

of community of practice puts in place a viable system that recognizes the social aspects of learning, the adults, the children, and the parents who have or haven't taught them what a child needs to know (Brown and Duguid, 2000).

## **6.5 STUDENT BEHAVIOR AND VYGOTSKY'S THEORIES OF ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT AND SCAFFOLDING**

To enact a character education program, assume a stance of increased desired, acceptable behavior, starting from a higher standard and expecting that the child will reach that higher level of desired behavior with adult help.

Vygotsky's zone of proximal development provided a relevant conceptualization for this study. Through the implementation strategies enacted by the staff, the child's level of desired behavior rose. The staff could cite instances when they observed the program in action. In this theory, the ability of the child is not judged by what he can do by himself, but what the child can accomplish with the aid of an adult, or more capable peers (Greenfield, as cited in Rogoff and Lave, Eds., 1984). The learning occurs in a social context, in this case, school. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development theory can be readily applied to character education because the theory itself is sensitive to the context in which the learning takes place and appreciates the "centrality of social interaction in moral development" (Tappan, 1998, p. 144). Moral education involves a process of guided participation whereby children, helped by teachers and competent peers, achieve new, higher levels of moral functioning (Tappan, 1998).

Moreover, in his sociocultural theory of development, Vygotsky assumes:

1. That higher mental functioning is facilitated by words, discourse, social interaction which in turns changes and facilitates mental action, and
2. Those mental actions have their origins in social relations (Wertsch, 1985).

Through the data focusing on the implementation strategies of the participants, social interaction produced the desired results using discussion, visuals, repetition and recognition provided by the adults. Children were not left to "figure it out" by themselves. Adults provided

that “guided participation” which Vygotsky recommended through his theory of Zone of Proximal Development.

Teachers referred to the character education program themes as a normal course of the day’s activities. The child was not a passive participant; there was an active, dynamic role for the student to play in learning tasks and responsibilities, which would be indicative of cognitive development (Rogoff as cited in Maynard and Martini, 2005). Teachers observed students, ascertained the level of ability, and slightly raised the bar, making the good, better. Behaviors result from observations of the patterned ways that members act and interact, and from an evaluation of what is appropriate to know and do in the classroom (Wink and Putney, 2002).

Therefore, the data recommends a consistent, school-wide character education program, anchored in Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development that allows the child to rise to the next level of desired behavior. Through Vygotsky’s theory of scaffolding, teachers are urged to lead the way, clearly spelling out and exemplifying the behavior as they themselves socially interact with the students.

## **6.6 SCHOOL-WIDE ETHOS: NODDINGS’ COMMUNITY OF CARING**

Schools and their programs should reflect a “community of caring” philosophy (Noddings, 2002). If a student’s behavior is to be amended, then any type of character education should be promulgated through definitive, comprehensible action on the part of the adults involved in the process.

Such action should be the hallmark of a community of caring found in an educational setting. According to Noddings (2002), adults should lead the students in practice of the desired trait either in the classroom or when the teachable moment arises. This can be done through incidental learning using techniques such as visuals and modeling. In the routine circumstances of everyday schooling, adults should exemplify the behavior so that the child sees a working model of what is expected. The child realizes that the behavior has value for adults, as well (Noddings, 2002).

The students’ attention should be directed to the behavioral goal of the character education program to facilitate instruction. A series of repeated announcements focusing on the

desired behavior is necessary to gain the students' attention. The data revealed that the staff felt that repetition was one of the key factors in the success of the program. Teachers saw this repetition along with a concerted effort to discuss and draw attention to the program as efficacious. Adults should engage students in discussion, explaining and expanding upon the behavior that is assigned.

## **6.7 RECIPROCAL RESEARCH: A THEORY OF RESEARCH AND SCHOOL CHANGE**

Any program seeking cooperation from a group of professional practitioners should have the underpinning of reciprocity. It seems unwarranted that a researcher should ask for cooperation from a faculty with nothing for them to gain from the study except possible increases in knowledge of pedagogy. Can anyone now assume that there is enough time in the school day for new additional programs and studies without practical benefit for all those involved? Such cavalier use of the research protocol ignores the fact that there is something very important already going on in the school and particularly in the classroom.

Research must be simply explained, no artificial jargon; the distance between researcher and informants is to be eliminated, and the benefits must be forcefully apparent. There needs to be greater accommodation for the practitioner in the field and his/her accumulation of expertise, respect for teaching load, and lack of time. "In co-operative inquiry these exclusive roles are replaced by a co-operative relationship so that all those involved work together as co-researchers and as co-subjects" (Heron and Reason, p. 179 in Reason and Bradbury, Eds. 2001). We all benefit from the elimination of outsider/insider roles and assignments. Research becomes an embedded construct in the daily operations of the practitioner as the researcher benefits from the enculturation into the domain of the practitioner through collaborative discourse and discovery.

## **7.0 IMPLICATIONS**

### **7.1 CHALLENGES**

Three challenges emerge through the analysis of the process and product of this study. First, there is the importance of sharing the action research paradigm with practitioners. Second, there is a challenge to administrators to empower teachers and other members of the staff to enable them to solve problems utilizing their professional expertise. Finally, if the empowerment is present, teachers could use that power to try the action research methodology in their own classrooms and in their own schools.

Sharing the action research methodology with the teacher in the classroom by the research community through professional development opportunities is vital to improve the scenario in schools today. My study validates Lawrence Stenhouse's prediction that the problems of schools will be solved by teachers themselves because they understand it (Rudduck & Hopkins, 1985). The contextual factors that color every classroom, school, and district can either debilitate a solution that does not respect those contextual factors or those same factors can produce a solution that is both theoretically sound and practically efficient. Academics can assist in this sharing of methodology by eliminating obtuse jargon and simplifying the guidelines for the action research cycle.

When empowered by a motivating administration, my study points to the ability of concerned in-house adults to examine the myriad of influences that construct the daily life of a school and focus those influences into a clear picture of what has to be done. This research would have never taken place without the empowering approval of the principal and the superintendent. To me, this pointed to an intrinsic trust in the professional abilities of the participants on the part of the administration. Without this trust, people may simply feel insecure in their attempts and subsequently fail to act. Finally, my study challenges the notion of

an inert faculty waiting for other agencies or governing bodies to come and solve its problems. A challenge goes out to practitioners themselves to seize the impetus for educational reform. Those involved on the classroom level can begin by doing the hard work of self-examination and reflection. The problems found in today's schools call for a commitment to try to find an answer. With forethought and purpose, the action research cycle can facilitate exploration of solutions to problems that are all too familiar to the teacher in the classroom. If the tools (action research methodology) are present, and the empowerment is evident, then there is little rationale for cynical despondency or the abdication of the ability to meet today's educational challenges.

## **7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Many areas of this study lend themselves to additional investigation. Inquiry originating in the description and analysis of the implementation strategies utilized in the character education program and the use of action research methodology present many venues for exploration.

Re-evaluation of the impact that the program has had on student behavior would be beneficial to determine if the program continues to achieve its desired goal of improved prosocial behavior (Goldstein, 1988). After one, two, or three years of program implementation, will teachers be able to see incremental improvement in student behavior? Additionally, further research could survey student reaction to the program to give voice to the attitudes and perceptions of those most intimately involved. Overall, how will the entire community of practice change as a result of the character education program?

A school is an organic, dynamic construct with constantly changing variables. It may prove beneficial to investigate the impact of change on the program. Does the action research cycle remain viable through the Synergetic Leadership Model (Atman, 1994, 1996)? Do the teachers and other staff members continue to change and improve the program when the catalyst change agent is not on site? What factors found within the school context permit or constrain the formation of new leadership for the program? Moreover, how do the dynamic contextual factors embedded within any school environment affect the program? Will an increase in standardized, high stakes testing diminish the commitment necessary to implement the program? Will a

changing enrollment, faculty, support personnel, or administration require a change in the content and implementation of the character education program?

“It takes a village to raise a child.” If the oft used adage is true, then what happens to that child if the village or community fails to instruct the child in the prosocial behaviors found character education? This may happen through negativity, lack of support, or silence. How must a school’s character education program amend itself to address lack of support from beyond the school’s walls? Parental support for character education may be an assumption. What can a school do if there is parental or community opposition to a character education program that may be perceived as value-laden or sectarian?

Moreover, is there a level of dysfunction that renders a school-wide character education program ineffective, resulting in little or no change in student behavior? When does dysfunctional student behavior go beyond character education and demand a therapeutic intervention? What is the tipping point in a classroom or school when such dysfunction emasculates the character education program? Is there a remedy for such negativity?

In general, further study of the action research cycle could explore those variables that allow such methodology to operate within a classroom, school, or district. What is the optimum population size, administrative posture, faculty demographic and attitude, along with the preferred professional development protocol that would empower personnel to participate in action research?

Clearly this study asks many questions that, if answered, promise to be advantageous for schools and those who learn within their walls. Continued discourse on character education and action research can generate novel theories and strategies for implementation that validates these topics as worthy of further research and reflection.

## APPENDIX A

### PREVIOUS CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Previous character education programs of the elementary school under consideration consisted of the following components. Each component had been added to the repertoire of strategies through in-service meetings.

“Contact for Kids,” was a video-based program from Atlanta, Georgia, created by the Connecting with Kids Network (*Connect!* CWKN, Atlanta, Georgia, 2002). The basis of the program was a weekly fifteen-minute video, using age-appropriate themes and actors to illustrate various character education traits such as courage, responsibility, honesty, and kindness. The creators of the program then presented a corresponding televised lesson on the following Saturday on a local television channel to enhance the home-school connection advocated.

After viewing the video in the classroom, each teacher distributed a form created by the teacher assigned as coordinator to be used for a reflection paragraph written by each student. The coordinator read all the submitted forms, sometimes hundreds, and selected the paragraphs that best exemplified the character trait portrayed in the video. The winning essays were displayed on a character education bulletin board next to the principal’s office near the front door of the school.

Through the in-service process, the principal and the program coordinator gave instructions illustrating expected steps in the implementation of the program. Unfortunately, the necessary classroom time was never agreed upon or found in the weekly schedule. It was simply hoped that the teacher would somehow eliminate or condense the curriculum, or weave the program into the language arts class, even though the language arts series used at that time was very time intensive.

The essays that were to be displayed on the bulletin board demanded extra time on the part of the staff. First, each half-page essay had to be read and evaluated to the criteria of the program by the homeroom teacher. Then the coordinator, who had attended the program's introductory conference, had the job of selecting the best of those essays submitted by the classroom teachers. She assembled a bulletin board and displayed the winning paragraphs.

Many of the essays were written in cursive handwriting, making it very difficult, if not impossible, for the younger children to read them. By the end of the year, many of the staff expressed regret in not finding the time for this component the school's character education program which they believed necessary and valuable. It was not feasible under the time constraints of the school week. No formal assessment of the program was completed during the course of its implementation or anytime thereafter.

For further consideration, the principals of the elementary schools formed a committee of teachers to prepare a month-by-month teacher packet of character education information consisting of one primary trait for each month and two ancillary traits which were to be the focus of classroom discussion. The information packets contained a wealth of information including classroom activities, literary pieces in the form of folk tales from various ethnic groups, and a compilation of slogans or axioms that illustrated the thoughts of the sages when describing the benefits of performing each virtue. Posters with the corresponding character trait word were also included in the monthly faculty packets.

Bulach criticizes such programs by commenting: "The current practice of designating a character trait of the week or month is not working because a word such as "respect" has a different meaning for each person...There is very little change in the behavior of students and most character education programs, although they may be meeting state mandates, are ineffective and take time away from the regular instructional program" (Bulach, 2002, p.187). This program was not assessed as to its efficacy, but was considered by the administration as an on-going part of the character education syllabus.

Problem arose concerning the implementation of the committee's work. Members from one grade school desired pre-designed character education lesson plans. They believed the teachers in their building would prefer these lesson plans which demanded little preparation. Conversely, committee members from other elementary schools disapproved of any formal, scheduled character education lessons. They believed that character education would prove

more efficacious if the teachers wove the monthly topics into the daily experiences of the school community. This disagreement caused considerable consternation and each school decided to follow its own path in this area.

The administration also enlisted staff members to learn and introduce teachers to the Olweus Anti-Bullying Program. This commercially produced program of anti-bullying strategies grew out of various studies indicating a need on the part of educators to eliminate aggressive behavior, especially in the school context (Olweus, 2001). A preliminary pre-test survey was distributed to the third grade, but proved too extensive and difficult to administer on a level that would have produced relevant data. The program would still be found in various activities throughout the school year, some of which were conducted by the PTA's Safety Committee. Every classroom was equipped with a poster in the school colors that delineated the district's anti-bullying program. The posted rules were:

1. We will not bully others.
2. We will try to help others who are being bullied.
3. We will make a point to include others who are easily left out.
4. When we know somebody is being bullied, we will tell an adult at school and an adult at home.

The administration had been approached by the Committee and was given considerable latitude in the program's development. This reflected the administration's policy of empowerment for various stakeholders in the school community to complement the administration-initiated programs with strategies arising from a perceived need and developed by all the members of the educational community (Fullan, 2003). One class period in length, an anti-bullying program run by the PTA Safety Committee focused on anger management skills, anti-bullying facts, selecting good friends, and the importance of using kind words. A series of three classroom lectures was also utilized.

Additionally, for a short time at the elementary level, the school district employed a guidance counselor to be utilized at both of the K-5 buildings. As part of his duties, he presented a monthly, grade-level discussion about character education topics, centering on the "Golden Rule." The students watched videos or participated in group discussions on topics such as honesty, responsibility, respect, and tolerance.

But when the guidance counselor retired, he was not replaced. Instead, a social worker was hired who would be able to go into the homes of her clients, which was something that the guidance counselor was not permitted to do. The character education aspect of the former guidance counselor's job was lost because the social worker did not have the necessary certification to teach in the classrooms.

Finally, the "Thought for the Day" morning announcement portion of the program was instituted. This coordinated with the character traits listed on the faculty monthly calendar and on the PTA monthly newsletter. Children wrote the adage on the back of the weekly spelling test. "Slogan systems die form lack of attention and interest" (Carson, 1994). At this juncture, the administration, when approached, said that a behavior-based formatted program would be better and requested that such a program be designed.

**APPENDIX B**

**MORNING ANNOUNCEMENT FORM**

**Good Morning**

**(Week One, Day One)**

Today is -----

And this is -----with the Amadeus School  
News.

(Wait and count to 10.)

(Say) **Hear at Amadeus, we learn the names of the teachers, custodians, cafeteria workers,  
and the principal, and greet them by saying “Good Morning” or “Good Afternoon.” If  
you’re in line with your class, say hello with your smile. And that’s what we do here at  
Amadeus (Clark, 2003).**

(Wait and count to 5.)

Today’s hot lunch will be:

-----  
-----

----- (Count to 5.)

The weather for today will be:

-----  
-----

-----So we’ll probably  
be/not be going outside at recess today.

(Count to 5.)

Happy birthday to:

-----In room-----on-----  
-----In room-----on-----  
-----In room-----on-----

Announcements from the office are:

-----  
-----  
-----  
-----  
-----  
-----

(Count to 5.)

**Remember to learn the names of all the adults in the building and greet them by name. It's what we do here at Amadeus.**

(Count to 5.)

This is -----for the Amadeus School News. Thanks for listening and would you please rise for the Pledge of Allegiance. “I pledge allegiance to the flag.....”

## APPENDIX C

### INFORMED CONSENT

Study: Action Research: The Description and Analysis of the Implementation of a Teacher-Initiated Character Education Program in an Elementary School.

Researcher: Elizabeth Anne Svirbel  
Employment Affiliation: Classroom Teacher Phone: 412.885.4410

Location of Study: Amadeus Elementary 123 Street  
Anytown, Anystate USA

Affiliated School: The University of Pittsburgh  
Supervising University Professor: Dr. Kathryn Atman

Purpose of the Study: To describe and analyze the implementation process of a teacher-initiated character education program in an elementary school.

Procedures to be followed: Pre- and post-interviews, focus group discussion, faculty meeting discussion, e-mail inquiries and responses, researcher journal.

Time and duration of the study: January 2006 to April 2006.

Benefits of the study: improved implementation of the current character education program

Persons who will have access to the records, data, tapes or other documentation: Researcher, Elizabeth Anne Svirbel

I understand that participation in this study is voluntary and I understand that as a participant, I may withdraw from this study at any time by notifying the researcher.

Statement of confidentiality:

The participation of the staff in this project is confidential. Only the researcher will have access to the staff's identities and to information that can be associated with their identities.

Therefore, I hereby agree to participate in the aforementioned study.

Name (printed) -----

Signature-----

Date-----

**APPENDIX D**

**AFTERNOON ANNOUNCEMENT FORM**

READ SLOWLY PLEASE, NO ONE WILL UNDERSTAND IF YOU GO TOO FAST.

Hello, this is the afternoon edition of the Amadeus School News.

Before leaving for home, please take a minute to make sure you have all assignments.

*(Count to five and READ ONLY THE BOXES THAT ARE CHECKED.)*

Announcements from the office are: -----  
-----  
-----

Remember here at Amadeus (repeat this morning's Hear at Amadeus statement): -----  
-----  
-----

-----This is -----for  
the Amadeus School News. Thanks for listening and see you tomorrow at Amadeus  
Elementary, School of Champions.

**APPENDIX E**

**AFTERNOON ANNOUNCEMENT WITH STUDENT RECOGNITION**

READ SLOWLY PLEASE, NO ONE WILL UNDERSTAND IF YOU GO TOO FAST.

Hello, this is the afternoon edition of the Amadeus School News.

Before leaving for home, please take a minute to make sure you have all assignments.

*(Count to five and READ ONLY THE BOXES THAT ARE CHECKED.)*

Announcements from the office are: -----  
-----

Remember here at Amadeus (repeat this morning's Hear at Amadeus statement): -----  
-----

And -----was seen-----  
-----

----- . Way to go! Keep up the good work. This is -----  
-----for the Amadeus School News. Thanks for listening  
and see you tomorrow at Amadeus Elementary, School of Champions.

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