Teacher Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Character Building Initiatives at an Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound High School

Adeola A. Alexander

The Graduate Center, City University of New York

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

Follow this and additional works at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds

Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons, and the Other Education Commons

Recommended Citation

https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/1623

This Dissertation is brought to you by CUNY Academic Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of CUNY Academic Works. For more information, please contact deposit@gc.cuny.edu.
TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF
CHARACTER BUILDING INITIATIVES AT AN
EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING OUTWARD BOUND HIGH SCHOOL

ADEOLA ALEXANDER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2016
Teacher Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Character Building Initiatives at an Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound High School

by

Adeola Alexander

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Date

__________________________

Terrie Epstein
Chair of Examining Committee

Date

__________________________

Anthony Picciano
Executive Officer

Supervisory Committee:

Ofelia Garcia

Nicholas Michelli

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT

Teacher Perceptions Of The Effectiveness Of Character Building Initiatives At An Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound High School

by

Adeola Alexander

Advisor: Terrie Epstein

This dissertation uses as its conceptual foundation the research on teacher beliefs to examine how teachers at an Expeditionary Learning School in Brooklyn, New York perceive the character building initiatives at their school. Using thematic case study methodology, the study found that teachers believed that character education is important and should be taught. Not only should character education be taught in schools, but the teachers believed that schools should be intentional about the teaching and development of student character. Teachers also believed that teachers are capable and should be allowed to spearhead the school initiatives intended to develop character. According to the teachers, character building initiatives impact academic achievement in the long run. The study also found that teachers need adequate preparation for the initiatives to be effective and that school leadership must take on a greater role in the implementation and execution of these initiatives.

The findings suggest that Expeditionary Learning School leadership should assess the character development initiatives at the school, based on the experience and perceptions of the practitioners that implement the initiatives. Concurrently, veteran teachers should be used to
turnkey the best practices to new teachers. Teachers believe that there are obstacles to character
development initiatives in the school but offer suggestions for improvement to ensure that none
ultimately hinder the effectiveness of the initiatives. They point to administration and faculty
collaboration in strengthening school initiatives meant to build student character.
Acknowledgements

There is only one way to learn. It's through action. Everything you need to know you have learned through your journey.”

Paulo Coelho, The Alchemist

I am grateful for my journey. And as with most journeys there have been many who have traveled with me. Some have been there from the very beginning, some joined and left along the way, and some have been on the sidelines encouraging and motivating to the end. I am thankful for all who have been there and overwhelmed that I was chosen to travel this way. It will take a while for me to process this journey. My faith waned and wavered but God remained faithful to me. All honor ultimately goes to Him.

My family. There are no words to adequately explain the support I have received from my family. My mother, Jean Alexander, has always encouraged and challenged me to do and become all that God has purposed for me. My family members have read, discussed, edited, questioned and pushed me throughout my studies and in the writing of this dissertation. This was unfamiliar territory but I had familiar people with me. I have been blessed.

My coworkers and colleagues, who daily work with me in school. My principals, for giving me permission to undertake this work. And those who answered my questions about their tangible and intangible work with thoughtfulness and truthfulness. Proverbs says that we should “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it.” This is the work. In the schools in which I have chosen to work, the staff realizes and acknowledges that it is not solely about academics, but about the character that we shape and mold. This is no easy feat. But my colleagues are the best.

My friends. There are people in my life who have played multiple roles in this journey. They exist and/or have existed as family, coworkers, schoolmates, and friends. Their roles may
have intertwined and interconnected, but at every leg of my journey, every detour, twist and turn they have been there as constant reminders that there was an end and that I could make it.

   My students. Over the years, they may have been oblivious to all the lessons I have learned from them. Many have unknowingly and unintentionally propelled me forward. I finish this leg of my journey- for them. As a counselor, I tell them repeatedly that their journey is uniquely their own and that they must chart their course. I spoke to them but I also spoke to myself. My success ultimately affects them in the same way their success has affected me.

   My teachers and professors. I have been blessed throughout my life with awesome teachers. I salute and profoundly thank Professor Epstein, for walking with me through these many years. It has been difficult at times, but she was always there. My thanks to my committee members, Professors Nick Michelli and Ofelia Garcia for sticking with me as well.

   I shall be telling this with a sigh

   Somewhere ages and ages hence:

   Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—

   I took the one less traveled by,

   And that has made all the difference.

   Robert Frost

If I have failed to acknowledge anyone, it is an error of the mind and not the heart. This leg is complete but my journey continues.
# Table of Contents

## Chapter I: Overview

- Introduction .............................................................................................................................. p. 1
- Statement of the Problem ........................................................................................................ p. 2
- Purpose Statement and Research Questions .......................................................................... p. 4
- Significance of the Study ......................................................................................................... p. 5
- Methods ................................................................................................................................... p. 6
- Assumptions ............................................................................................................................ p. 6
- Definition of Terms .................................................................................................................. p. 6
- Description of Character Building Initiatives ......................................................................... p. 8
- Organization of the Study ........................................................................................................ p. 11

## Chapter II: Literature Review

- Introduction ................................................................................................................................ p. 12
- Character Defined ...................................................................................................................... p. 14
- Character Education Defined ................................................................................................... p. 17
- The History of Character Education ......................................................................................... p. 22
- African American Perspectives on Character Education ......................................................... p. 26
- Why Schools? ............................................................................................................................ p. 27
- Obstacles to Character Education ............................................................................................ p. 32
- Teachers and School Climate .................................................................................................... p. 33
- Program Types ........................................................................................................................ p. 34
  - Service Learning ................................................................................................................... p. 34
  - Civic Engagement, Citizenship Training And Political Socialization .................................. p. 36
  - Caring Communities ............................................................................................................. p. 38
  - Health Education .................................................................................................................. p. 40
  - Religious Education .............................................................................................................. p. 40
  - Multi-Cultural Education ..................................................................................................... p. 41
- Comprehensive School Reform ............................................................................................... p. 42
- New York City Outward Bound and Expeditionary Learning .................................................. p. 43
- Evaluations of Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound Schools .......................................... p. 46
- Conceptual Framework ........................................................................................................... p. 49
- Significance .............................................................................................................................. p. 51

## Chapter III: Methodology

- Introduction ............................................................................................................................. p. 53
- Restatement of Research Questions ....................................................................................... p. 53
Chapter IV: Case Studies

Case Study 1: Mr. Greene

On Becoming a Teacher
Most Effective Initiatives
Most Significant Commitment
Somewhat/Less Effective Initiatives
Least Effective Initiatives
Academic Value
Additional Factors Inhibiting Character Development
On Teacher Preparation
Summary

Case Study 2: Ms. White

On Becoming a Teacher
Most Effective Initiatives
General Perspective on the Other Commitments
Least Effective Initiatives
Academic Value
Additional Factors Inhibiting Character Development
Leadership
On Teacher Preparation
Most Significant Commitment
Summary

Case Study 3: Ms. Gray

On Becoming a Teacher
Most Effective Initiatives
Most Significant Commitment
General Perspective on the Other Initiatives
Least Effective Initiative
Academic Value
Additional Factors Inhibiting Character Development
On Teacher Preparation
Summary

Cross Case Analysis
Teacher Responsibility
Administrative Responsibility
Chapter V: Findings and Implications

Research Question 1 ................................................................. p. 101
Research Question 2 ................................................................. p. 105
Research Question 3 ................................................................. p. 108
Conclusions ............................................................................. p. 112
Implications for Further Research ........................................... p. 113
Summary .................................................................................. p. 113

Appendix A: Interview #1 .......................................................... p. 115
Appendix B: The Five Commitments .......................................... p. 116
Appendix C: Interview #2 .......................................................... p. 118
Appendix D: Interview #3 .......................................................... p. 119
Appendix E: HOWL Rubric .......................................................... p. 122

Bibliography .............................................................................. p. 124
Chapter I

Overview

“Intelligence plus character-that is the goal of true education.”
Martin Luther King Jr.

Introduction

The elementary school has a vibrant mural painted along the perimeter of the building. Embedded among the pictures of colorful animals, musical notes, smiling faces and a myriad of images are words boldly inscribed: HONESTY, RESPECT, TOLERANCE, JUSTICE, HOPE, LOVE, and the message “It’s okay to be different.” But why these words? On the building that houses the educational foundations of my neighborhood’s children one would think the key words would be: SCIENCE, MATHEMATICS, HISTORY, READING, LITERACY, TECHNOLOGY, SPELLING, PHONICS and the like. Or perhaps a message, “It’s okay to be a scientist.” Is this not the place where the future’s great scientists, doctors, lawyers, teachers, judges, and presidents will get their academic grounding?

Indeed, it can be argued that honesty, respect, tolerance, justice, hope and love are the qualities that will make students great in whatever career, profession or job they ultimately choose. But the looming questions are what is the role of the public school in instilling these qualities and how should the school implement the teaching of these qualities? And then once a school has established the instilling of values as its mission and decided on how it is going to accomplish this mission, how can the school evaluate if it is working? Do the teachers that enter and exit that elementary school or any other school on which the words are inscribed or the
mission stated feel as if they are really impacting the character of their students? Do the teachers believe it is the school’s job to instill/address the character of its students?

Statement of the Problem

Since the closing of the nineteenth century American schools have been charged with and accepted the role of teaching students not only the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic but also the instilling of character and good behavior. The common school of that time emphasized discipline, responsibility, respect for adults, courtesy, and a clear common goal (Ravitch, 2000). Schools have consistently tried to merge academic mandates with character mandates. How they do this has been varied and very difficult to measure. Over the years, schools have focused on service learning, democracy training, health education, and/or values clarification. There is a body of research on each of these emphases and various researchers focus on the success of these models. But who or what makes a school? A school is comprised of more than the bricks and mortar, it is comprised of more than curriculum, stated missions and brightly painted murals, it is comprised of administration, students, teachers, staff, parents and even the community it is located in. Every constituency plays a vital role in a school. It is important to study how these roles intersect and create the systems that work or at times don’t work.

There are many character development models in schools but there is very little research done on the teachers’ perspectives of these character building models. As the research on teacher beliefs has demonstrated, teachers’ ways of thinking influence their practice (Nespor, 1987). In her work, Nespor presented a preliminary framework for studying teacher beliefs. Her research implied two options for dealing with teacher beliefs. The first is changing teaching by routinizing and monitoring teachers so that the role of beliefs is minimized. The other option is to change or shape teachers’ beliefs. This means helping teachers become reflective about their
beliefs. Nespor pointed to the problem of not knowing exactly how beliefs are shaped but socialization as well as the attention to beliefs have been suggested as ways in which beliefs are supported and/or weakened. Her work ends with difficult questions that she believed must be addressed in future research: “What should the end result of education be? How should one conceptualize student characteristics? How should one orient oneself to the community served by one’s school?” (Nespor, 1986, p. 326).

Calderhead (1996) presents a brief history of the research on teacher beliefs. He recounted the shift from the behaviorist stance of the 1960s to research that focused more on teacher understanding of thought processes, and decision making. He also then distinguished between the terms knowledge and beliefs: “beliefs generally refer to suppositions, commitments, and ideologies, knowledge is taken to refer to factual propositions and the understandings that inform skillful action” (p. 715). He then elaborated and identified the content and forms of teacher beliefs and knowledge that have been researched in the preceding decades. Calderhead summarized Nespor (1986) and Pajares (1992) work as suggesting the study of teacher beliefs to be important in that it helps to “interpret and simplify classroom life, to identify relevant goals, and to orient teachers to particular problem situations.” Additionally, beliefs help “individuals identify with one another and form mutually supportive social groups” (p. 719). Calderhead pinpoints five interconnected areas in which teachers have been found to have significant beliefs.

Beliefs about learners and learning affect how teachers approach teaching tasks and how they interact with students. What teachers believe about teaching varies from knowledge transmission to guidance of children’s learning to developing classroom communities and relationships. Teachers’ beliefs about subject matter also varies from the limited to the extensive and from context to context. Teachers tend to believe that learning to teach for most is restricted
to one’s own classroom experience and their personality. Teaching is a very personal profession and beliefs about self and the teaching role is important in establishing relationships with students. Pajares (1992) stated that paying attention to teacher beliefs “can inform educational practice in ways that prevailing research agendas have not and cannot” (p. 329) Research on teacher belief is an ongoing concern in teacher education today: studies include but not limited to preparing early childhood teachers (Hamre, Pianta, Burchinel, Field, Crouch, Downer, Howes, Laparo & Scott-Little, 2012) and the integration of technology into classroom teaching (Kim, Lee, Spector & Demeester, 2013).

Knowing what teachers think about teaching and learning as well as how they rate the effectiveness of various programs related to teaching and learning will help schools and administrators think about the overall effectiveness of their pedagogical programs, as well as the possible changes in implementation of the programs or the necessity of the programs as a whole. It is important to know from those on the front lines of implementation what their thoughts are about character building schools’ initiatives. “Little will have been accomplished if research into educational beliefs fails to provide insights into the relationship between beliefs, on the one hand, and teacher practices, teacher knowledge, and student outcomes on the other hand (Pajares, p. 327). Why invest money, time and resources into programs that are not well received by teachers at best and are totally ineffective at worst?

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine teachers’ perspectives of the effectiveness of a New York City Outward Bound Expeditionary Learning School’s (Expeditionary Learning School) character development initiatives. Initiatives are activities, experiences or programs that
students engage in throughout the high school years to build aspects of their character. The central research question is:

To what extent do teachers believe that the Expeditionary Learning School’s initiatives promote character development?

To answer the question, three subsidiary questions will be addressed:

1. According to teachers, which initiatives and programs at Expeditionary Learning School foster the most and least amount of character development?
2. How do these initiatives ultimately add value to the academic outcomes in their classrooms?
3. What are the major challenges that the school faces in promoting/achieving character education and how might they be resolved?

**Significance of the Study**

Prevailing thought in education seems to say that character education is important and must be taught. However, very little research has been done with the teachers who are mandated to teach this curriculum to ascertain what they think of it, how it affects the students they work with and how they envision bettering these curricula. Knowledge about teachers’ beliefs about the effectiveness of character building activities and school wide programs can provide important information on the nature and improvement of school initiatives implemented to develop young people’s character.
Methods

I interviewed three teachers that have worked at one Expeditionary Learning School for three years or more. I interviewed each teacher three times. The first interview was to get background information on the teacher, his or her pedagogical experience and history with the school. The second interview delved into the specifics of the character development initiatives they have been involved with and their viewpoints on those initiatives. The third and final interview allowed the teachers to reflect on their experiences and also revise, modify, edit or delete any information that they had previously told me. After the completion of the interviews, I analyzed each interview for themes related to the research questions. From the analysis, I completed a case study of each teacher, summarizing the major findings related to each one and then conducting cross cases analyses, looking for patterns across the three teachers’ responses (Seidman, 2006).

Assumptions

My research assumed that the participants of the interview answered all or most of the questions openly and honestly. It also assumed that the teachers were self-aware and reflective enough to be able to gauge the effectiveness of school initiatives on their students’ character development.

Definitions of Terms

The term character has several definitions. But for the purpose of this study the definition will be limited to the schools’ definition of character, represented by the “Five Commitments” which are Courage, Compassion, Respect, Stewardship and Perseverance.
1. Courage, according to the Expeditionary Learning School is being able to take risks. Courage does not mean that you are fearless, but rather it is the value that people must do what is right and necessary, often in spite of the fact that it is uncomfortable. Courage is the commitment that people make to become active civic leaders.

2. Compassion is knowing how someone else is feeling, as well as trying to understand where s/he is coming from. It is understanding the various aspects that influence an individual, and keeping them in mind in the decision making process. Compassion is the commitment that people make to value the opinions and emotions of others.

3. Respect is something that people give to others without requiring that it be given in return. Respect is reflected in the way one dresses, the words a person chooses, the way people interact with one another. Respect is the commitment that people make to hold themselves to a high standard of positive behavior.

4. Stewardship is the responsibility individuals have not just to care for ourselves and each other, but for our planet and our communities as well. Stewardship is the commitment that people make to affirm the importance of place in daily life, as well as the importance of appreciating (valuing) all life.

5. Perseverance is a commitment to effort. It is continuing to struggle with a difficult problem; it is assembling all the tools for a solution and using them to affect change in ourselves and others. Perseverance is the commitment that individuals make to continued improvement and effort.
Description of the Character Building Initiatives

In addition to the school’s definition of character, the following definitions described the types of initiatives the school implements related to student character development.

1. Crew: “Every …. student belongs to a Crew – a small group that remains together until graduation. Led by a Crew Advisor, Crews meet daily to discuss college preparation, leadership development and personal challenges. Crew provides a safe, consistent environment for students to practice their leadership skills – and to push each other to do more than they ever thought possible” (school website, 2016). The expectation at Expeditionary Learning School is that students and Crew leader remain together for the full four years. Crew curriculum includes, character building initiatives, post-secondary planning, literacy skills, community building and much more. Every Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound School is distinct, but Crew is one of the structures that is consistent at every school in the network.

2. Community Meetings: Community meetings are held either as whole school or grade level meetings. Prior to the 2015-2016 school year, they were held once a month. During community meetings there are readings, commitment awards, announcements, performances, skits, and recognitions. The change of program in the 2015-2016 school year made scheduling whole school community meetings very difficult.

3. Commitment Awards: Teachers and staff members are given the opportunity to nominate students for awards based on demonstration of the Five Commitments. These awards are given out at Community Meetings.
4. Student Led Conferences: “At most schools, parents attend a student-teacher conference. But at the Expeditionary Learning School, parents attend Student-Led Conferences (SLCs), where students lead their own conferences by presenting the knowledge they have gleaned and reflecting honestly on what they must improve in order to succeed” (New York City Outward Bound website 2016). Conferences happen two-three times yearly. Students present their work to their parents, Crew teacher, invited guests and a Student Associate.

5. Student Associate: The student associate is a Crew member that lends support to the Crew student presenting at the conference.

6. Crew Olympics: Crew Olympics are a series of teamwork challenges. Crews compete on each grade level, then the winning crews compete across the grade levels. Students are judged not only on successful completion of the challenges but also on the display of the Five Commitments.

7. Adventure Week: Adventure Week is the name given to the initiative by Expeditionary Learning School. New York City Outward Bound refers to the initiative as Crew Orientation. “Crew Orientation is a three- or five-day, overnight wilderness challenge for all incoming students. Each student, along with a Crew Advisor, attends Crew Orientation as the member of a Crew. Here, they experience the challenges of high-ropes courses and teambuilding initiatives, and develop the skills required to read maps and compasses, to safely backpack and camp, to cook and clean, and to communicate with one another under challenging circumstances.

This transformational week helps students develop individual and group leadership skills, build self-confidence to overcome challenges, and foster a community of mutual support that
allows them to accomplish far more collectively than they ever could on their own. It also prepares students and advisors to return to school, where they will translate their new skills, inner strength and mutually supportive relationships into academic achievement” (New York City Outward Bound 2016). The goal is for all incoming ninth graders at Expeditionary Learning School to attend Adventure Week. It usually occurs in the Fall of Freshman year.

8. Urban Expedition: Urban Expedition is one of the newer Outward Bound initiatives at the school. It is a three-day expedition in New York City. Students travel in their Crews throughout New York City completing tasks and challenges while learning more about the city they live in. Students sleep in various locations throughout the city; it is like an urban camping experience. Students complete Urban Expedition in their sophomore year.

9. Senior Expedition: “The Senior Expedition is an independent project that allows students to pursue a passion in depth and intensely over time. Guided by their Crew Advisor, students develop a project that provides opportunities for them to explore a topic, learn a skill, practice a profession, experience a different culture, or travel to a new place. Students will create their own learning targets for the project and create much of their own exit criteria (again, under the guidance of their Crew advisor). Senior Expeditions may include such experiences as internships, travel, work study, Outward Bound activities or college courses. Students are required to produce ongoing evidence of their progress and a final product that links to the 12th grade Graduation Portfolio.” (school website, 2016) The Senior Expedition has gone through many iterations, with varied staff members guiding the process. It most closely resembles an action research project.
10. HOWL Rubric: Habits of Work and Learning. This rubric helps classroom teachers connect the Five Commitments to classroom behaviors. It has been updated by staff and students in the 2015-2016 school year to simplify and make them more student friendly. The HOWL rubric is intended to be used in all classroom/academic spaces (Appendix A).

11. Learning Targets: Learning Targets are student friendly “I” statements used in academic/Crew classes to sum up the day’s expected learning.

12. Explore Week: For one week in the fall and one in the spring, regular classes are suspended, and students select an intensive course to take. For five days they explore a topic in-depth with visits from experts and fieldwork in the city.

13. College March: The College March became a network wide initiative four years ago. In December, seniors march to the post office to mail their college applications while the entire school, elected officials, and other invited guests cheer them on. Schools have adapted the march based on location and needs.

**Organization of the Study**

The remainder of this study is organized into five chapters, a bibliography and appendixes in the following manner. Chapter two presents a literature review of the related literature dealing with character education, its history and various program types, as well as a discussion of the conceptual framework on teacher beliefs. Chapter three outlines the research design and methodology. The findings are offered in chapter four. Chapter five contains the recommendations of the study. The study concludes with a bibliography and appendices.
Chapter II
Literature Review

Introduction

Restructuring has been a common practice throughout the history of public schools in the United States (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). However, New York’s latest wave of public school restructuring has several noteworthy features. It has in many cases resulted in the closing of large comprehensive high schools and the opening of several smaller schools. Several of these new schools operate in the larger buildings in what is known as the “school within school” or campus school model (Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Wichterle Ort, 2002). Many schools that are partnered with or supported by outside entities such as community based organizations, colleges and even businesses espouse a focus on youth character development.

A quick browse through the 2017 New York City High School Directory will reveal mission statements that highlight the current shift towards character education. The High School for Service Learning claims “to build on the potential of students both as individuals and as valued members of society through a focus on culture, community and civic engagement.” The High School for Public Service: Heroes of Tomorrow “enables students to develop academic and social skills necessary to be productive contributors to society.” World Academy for Total Community Health is committed to ensuring that “students are not only prepared to enter institutions of higher education, but also learn how to make healthy choices in their lives and advocate for the total health of their families, community, nation and world.” Similarly, The School for Democracy and Leadership advertises that their students “will be a positive force in the world, capable of influencing change and contributing constructively to democracy in our
society.” The Young Women’s Leadership School strives to support the “whole girl” and to “instill in students a sense of self-efficacy and community responsibility, characteristics which will support them as they become leaders of the next generation.”

The names and missions of these schools reflect a dual purpose- that of academic achievement and character development. Some schools are highlighting public service, others are centering on service learning, a few are focusing on democracy and leadership, while others are honing in on youth development. Whatever the lens, all are linked to character education. The hope is that this emphasis on character will ultimately affect the student’s academic development and eventually the common good of society.

Even older, larger comprehensive schools have adopted character building structures such as advisory programs that focus on affective issues because the research supports youth character development in schools (Lickona, 1991; Kahne & Westheimer, 2003). Much research has been done on evaluating the implementation of character development programs or schools. Yet even program evaluation studies have not closely examined teachers’ beliefs about the impact of such programs on their lives. Weber and Ruch (2012) studied 247 students, mean age of 12. The study also took into account teacher ratings and grades from report cards but the findings focused on student perceptions. One wonders if the focus, curriculum, funding, resources, time and effort put into these programs make any difference in the quality of schools from teachers’ perspectives. This dissertation intends to focus on one particular school that has as its mission “the preparation of informed, civic leaders.” It is partnered with New York City Outward Bound/Expeditionary Learning Schools- two unique but connected models of educational initiatives that place a high value on character education. The ultimate research
question is: To what extent do teachers believe that the Expeditionary Learning School’s initiatives and programs promote character development?

**Character Defined**

Even in common usage the word “character” has varied meanings. “Character” can be given either a negative or a positive spin. It refers to a broad constellation of attitudes and behaviors beyond merely doing what one is told to do. It is the “thing” that makes each person unique. It encapsulates critical thinking and moral reasoning. It often means being the best that one can be intellectually, socially, ethically, and emotionally. It can also mean breaking the rules and not conforming to the status quo if one’s conscience demands it (Battistich, 2008). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) sponsored by the American Psychiatric Association (1994) states that character is “unitary and categorical- one either has character or not… and it is a social construction revealing of the observer’s values but not of who or what is observed” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, pp. 10). But a convergence of personality psychology and trait theory would instead assume character to be plural and made up of having virtues, strengths and dimensionality. Complicating the matter even further, one’s “character” is also embedded in and influenced by one’s setting and situation. A person can be a character or can have character or have their character shaped by his/her environment.

Character strengths are the psychological mechanisms that drive the virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, transcendence and temperance are all examples of virtues that cross cultural and historical boundaries. Virtues are the main traits valued by philosophers and religious thinkers alike. For example, the virtue of wisdom can be achieved through the strength of one’s creativity, curiosity and open-mindedness. Character strengths are similar in that they involve acquiring and using knowledge. Peterson and Seligman
also focus on situational themes and the habits that lead people to manifest strengths of character in varied circumstances acknowledging that people both bring and take different things from the environment and varied situations.

According to Peterson and Seligman (2004), the study of character had at one time been very important to the field of psychology. That is until Gordon Allport, one of the main personality trait theorists of the twentieth century explicitly banned the term “character” from psychological academic discourse, believing it was better suited to philosophy than psychology. Fueling his argument was the subjectivity of the word character and his desire for psychologists to be more objective. But this banishment did not stop the study of character, its meaning and/or its cultivation. John Dewey, Allport’s contemporary, disagreed and believed that character and virtue were topics to be included in the study of psychology and the use of empirical methodology could inform philosophical discussions of character. Edward L. Thorndike a behavioral psychologist wrote extensively on character and its cultivation. He believed that one’s environment and setting was crucial in shaping one’s character and that morality/character could be quantified in the same way that intelligence could.

Erik Erikson offered one of the first examples of a psychologically informed categorization of character strengths with developmental precursors (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). According to Erikson, all people pass through a set of stages. Once a stage is successfully completed the person develops a character strength which allows him/her to enter the next stage. Maslow also offered a scheme which could be recast as a classification of virtues and strengths. Maslow’s personality theory is based on a hierarchy of human motivation characterized by basic needs that when met lead to self-actualization. He theorized that until the basic physiological needs were met, people would not be motivated by the higher leveled needs (Heylighen, 1992).
Piaget developed a pioneering analysis of how children’s cognitive development and stage development influenced their reasoning about morality and behavior. Kohlberg continued this work but was interested in moral reasoning and not moral behavior (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Kohlberg believed that morality moved through stages and was constructed by children rather than acquired from parents, teachers and/or other agents. Kohlberg acknowledged that his theory of moral psychology had philosophical implications (Nucci, 2006). Positive Psychology refocused the discourse toward the positive aspects of human development and experience and is characterized by three aspects: subjective wellbeing, positive character and positive institutions. For our purposes, the focus on positive character “includes the personality traits and interpersonal skills needed for optimal development” (Berkowitz, Sherblom, Bier & Battistich, 2006, pp. 692).

The perspective presented by Berkowitz and Bier (2006) labels character as a socio-moral competency. Its definition is multi-faceted and psychologically based, incorporating moral functioning identified as moral action, moral values, moral personality, moral emotions, moral reasoning, and moral identity. It is a complex set of psychological traits that develop over a person’s life span but most specifically throughout childhood. Childhood then is the ideal time for emphasis on character development, with the family as the primary, initial and predominant locus of impact. But schools can also be influential on this front (Berkowitz & Bier 2004). As Nucci (2006) notes, “Evidence that children at all points in development are capable of evaluating actions and social norms in moral terms means that educators may engage students in critical moral reflection at all grade levels” (p. 662).

Ethical approaches to character have maintained that all human behavior has moral significance and character growth and development is demanded of individuals. Each individual
is held responsible for self-actualization and maintaining good character. This does not preclude the community from supporting and encouraging actualization. Instead the community in the Aristotelian perspective is responsible for supporting self-actualization (Narvaez, 2006). This psychological perspective which entails virtues, strengths and dimensionality, converges with the socio-moral view of character - that one’s character is a personal set of psychological traits fostered through interactions within one’s social realm. This view supports the idea that children’s moral reasoning, behavior and traits can be influenced by their environment.

**Character Education Defined**

Over the years, character education has seen a shift in terms, often referred to as value clarification, moral education, and citizenship education (Howard et al, 2004, Lickona, 1991). Each variation places differing emphasis on the moral, civic, citizenship, religious and/ or value development of youth. All of the approaches to character education incorporate the relationship between character education and preparing students to become good citizens. This relationship has often caused many divisions and controversies because the definition of “good” is subjective. And the way people conceive of goodness has multiple socio-cultural implications (Peterson & Seligman 2004). Overall, character education is interested, at its core, in promoting certain traits in young people and preventing risky behavior while supporting social and emotional learning (Berkowitz et al., 2006).

Although the definition of character education is varied, many credit Thomas Lickona, a developmental psychologist, with defining character education as schooling that embodies the cognitive, affective and behavioral domains. Lickona (1991) described the two universal goals of education as helping students become both smart and good. Understanding the distinct difference between the two, societies have made deliberate attempts to form intelligent citizens
by educating for character as well as intellect. Similarly, Battistich (2008) defined character education broadly as the “deliberate use of all dimensions of school life to foster optimal character development” (p. 82). This includes curriculum, the instructional processes, the handling of discipline, co-curricular activities and the entire school environment. He cited the goal of character education to be the same as the goals of raising good children and the core concept in youth development. The youth development model focuses on children being understood on their own terms and not as miniature adults. It emphasizes the varied settings in which development happens (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Other researchers see character education less broadly, and instead focus on specific aspects of character development. Park (2004) defined character education as teaching youth certain traditional moral virtues such as respect, compassion, responsibility, self-control and loyalty. He situated civic education as a variant of this with an emphasis on values specific to the country’s legal and political principles such as diversity, patriotism, justice, equality and human rights. Park explained that enhancing these character strengths is a way to buffer negative social behaviors. He has cited Aristotle and other thinkers who believed character can be taught and cultivated through practice and not merely by thinking and/or talking.

Character education, according to Howard, Berkowitz and Schaeffer (2004), is “an attempt to prepare individuals to make ethical judgments and to act on them, that is, to do what one thinks ought to be done” (p.191). According to these authors, there are three approaches to character education: the behavioral-cognitive approach that focuses on “knowing the good;” the caring approach focused on “desiring the good;” and finally the traditional approach which gives primacy to “doing the good.” Another way the authors have distinguished among these approaches is by describing moral knowing as habits of the mind, moral feeling as habits of the
heart, and moral behavior as habits of action. In many curricular programs the three approaches are integrated. Moral knowing, feeling and action are interrelated with each sphere penetrating the other.

Berkowitz, Sherblom, Bier and Battistich (2006) presented “moral anatomy” as an additional framework for studying character education and moral development of youth. In the same manner that Howard Gardner suggested that intelligence is constructed through a profile of competencies, the moral anatomy framework suggests that positive youth development is also not a unitary construct but instead involves psychological competencies needed to become a fully developed person. These psychological competencies include:

- Responsible personal and pro-social behavior: the individual choices that lead to moral behavior.
- Habits of pro-social interaction and character: the enduring propensities to demonstrate virtues.
- Emotional competency: the understanding of self and others – the ability to respond appropriately to socio-moral situations and having the capacity to display appropriate emotional controls.
- Pro-social values and attitudes: the commitment to values and virtues associated with good character.
- Socio-moral reasoning competency: the ability to exhibit age appropriate logic and capacities to perceive, wrestle with and resolve life’s complexities.
- Possession of a mature, integrated, self-system: this includes a central role for moral identities, and self-reflection as a moral being.
- Foundational Skills: skills that support but that are not moral concepts such as empathy, courage and loyalty.

To support schools in their efforts to implement character education, organizations such as the Character Education Partnership (CEP) have as their mainstay the support of educational institutions that want to integrate character education into their curriculum. The Character Education Partnership’s website defines character education as “the proactive effort by schools, districts, communities and states to help students develop important core ethical (recognizing what’s right) and performance (doing what’s right) values such as caring, honesty, diligence, fairness, fortitude, responsibility, grit, creativity, critical thinking, and respect for self and others” (Character Education Partnership, 2016). According to the CEP, character education must include the entire school community and must be infused throughout the curricular structure of the school. The organization has outlined eleven key principles for schools and organizations that wish to incorporate character education in their curriculum (Glazner & Milson, 2006). These principles are:

1. Promote core ethical values as the basis of good character.
2. Define “character” comprehensively to include feeling thinking and behavior.
3. Use a comprehensive, intentional, proactive, and effective approach to character development.
4. Create a caring school community.
5. Provide students with opportunities for moral action.
6. Include a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners, develops their character, and helps them to succeed.
7. Strive to foster students’ self-motivation.
8. Engage the school staff as a-learning and moral community that shares responsibility for character education and attempts to adhere to the same core values that guide the education of students.

9. Foster shared moral leadership and long-range support of the character education initiative.

10. Engage families and community members as partners in the character-building effort.

11. Evaluate the character of the school, the school staff's functioning as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character (Character Education Partnership website, 2016).

Although CEP guidelines seem straightforward, those who challenged these ideals of character education pointed out that all people do not share the same core values. Teachers’ belief and preparation regarding civic engagement can impact their students’ beliefs; however there are times when the core beliefs of educators and schools are in contrast to those of the students and the community or even the national political discourse (Torney-Purta, Richardson, & Barber, 2005). Another concern with the CEP definition of character deals with how these programs are implemented from school to school. Many times implementation exists only in single classrooms or as incubated programs within schools. For some schools it is a focus on service while in others it is the highlighting of certain character traits that are emphasized and endorsed. Many schools that claim to be preparing students to be actively engaged citizens are neither intentional nor proactive in their measures.

Bebeau, Rest and Narvaez (1999) have explored the reasons for the resurgence in character education in the last decade. They pointed to the growing violence among youth, increase in teen pregnancy and increase in other maladaptive behaviors as reasons for the shift in
national attention to the implementation of character education in schools. The authors also briefly examined the differences between direct teaching and constructivist teaching practices related to character education. Those who have supported direct teaching methods purport that schools already teach values and character but need to be more purposeful about it. They believe that one cannot expect children to do good if they are not taught what good is. Constructivists have argued that these didactic approaches are in direct contrast with the social and developmental evidence that point to human behavior being a result of our interpretation of life situations, i.e. the kind of experiences constructivist instruction promotes (Bebeau et al., 1999). They also are concerned about the promotion of some values at the expense of other essential core values.

As proponents of character education, Bebeau et al. (1999) have proposed that character education must be taught in spite of these ideological issues. They suggested a four component model of character education upon which morality is built; the components include moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral character. Moral sensitivity allows the individual to assess and interpret a situation and know how one’s actions will affect others. Once a person is aware of the various possible actions then a judgment of which action is fair, moral and justified is warranted. Moral motivation identifies where and how a person prioritizes his/her value system. Finally, moral character points to the courage an individual has to act on his/her convictions. Bebeau et. al. concluded that the systematic research of character education can only be accomplished if all four components are part of an educational program.

The History of Character Education

The emphasis on character development in schools is not new. The purpose of the common school in the past two centuries has always been “to build citizens, cultivate the moral
and social development of individual students, and bind diverse groups into one nation” (Cuban & Shipps, 2000, p.1). American colonial laws supported the fashioning of young people’s character through a combination of classical and Christian tenets. Bible teaching was to provide a common grounding for morality. However, with the development of nonsectarian schools, the emphasis on religion began to wane. Horace Mann, often referred to as the father of American education, advocated for the removal of sectarian teachings in public schools. Yet he still promoted Bible reading in schools once there was no comment or interpretation. He felt that this would be a way to promote moral behavior (Glanzer & Milson, 2006). Mann wanted the “common” schools to provide a similar curriculum for both the affluent and the “common” person. The Enlightenment ideals of the founding fathers were that education should build knowledge and virtue (Graham, 2005).

David Tyack (1974) cites Rothman in pointing to the nineteenth century as an age of the creation of institutions to “bring order into the lives of deviant persons and, perchance, heal the society itself by the force of example” (p. 72). Asylums, almshouses and prisons were created for this purpose. In parallel, schools were to be the agency for teaching youth the tenets of democracy. The nineteenth century antebellum school reformers believed that publicly funded schools should promote the common good and equip students with essential knowledge of common democratic values. Mid-century schools were expected to support students’ moral character and build citizens (Cuban & Shipp, 2000). Educators of the post-Civil War era, felt that “one might trust ‘parental instinct’ to educate an individual child, but the state required homogeneity; ‘the right of preservation of a body politic’ took precedence over all other rights” (Tyack, 1974, p.75). Increased immigration also fueled the desire that schools were the best system to promote one common language as well as common principles and thought toward
government and morality (Tyack, 1974). During this time, there seemed to be a natural inclination to tie character development with citizenship education.

The 1890’s brought a split in the approaches to character education (Tyack, 1974). There was the “traditional approach” which emphasized traditional values. Action and habit were seen as more important than knowing and desiring. The progressive approach embodied by John Dewey asserted that context rather than absolute rigid values drove ethical decisions and actions. Progressives stressed democratic participation in classrooms, schools, and communities and the role of education in creating citizens.

Character education continued to be important in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century. By 1920, three quarters of the immigrant population resided in the large cities. Newspapers, local communities, churches and synagogues perpetuated immigrants’ native languages, leaving only the schools to engage in the Americanization process. It was the school’s job to make the newly arrived immigrants acquainted with English and American culture, and as well as to prepare them for work. It also was the goal of education to create a citizenry that could participate in a democracy (Graham, 2005). However, an increase in United States Supreme Court cases in the 1930’s forced a decline in character education because educators did not know how to implement programs that would be sound and acceptable to all cultural and religious groups and that still would be constitutionally permissible. Violation of the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause was the basis for many of these cases: this clause prohibits Congress from creating laws that establish a national religion (Vessels and Boyd, 1996). After a low point of character education in the 1940’s, there was a resurgence of interest in character education and “values clarification” in the 1960s. Values clarification rejected the
explicit teaching of character but instead urged teachers to help students clarify their own values (Lickona, 1991).

Kohlberg’s developmental approach to moral education arose in the 1970s and 1980s. Kohlberg claimed there were universal and invariant stages of development. His approach to moral education evolved from his using moral and hypothetical dilemmas in curricula. Later, Gilligan (1982), Noddings (1992) and other feminists opposed Kohlberg’s moral developmental approach and presented a parallel philosophical view known as the caring approach. This approach stressed that caring is relational rather than individual in nature, as in Kohlberg’s view. Noddings believed that emotions and sentiments rather than reason are the stimulus to moral action and that moral decisions need not be universalized (Howard, et al., 2004).

During the 1980s and 1990s there was sweeping legislation and funding to create and implement character education programs in schools. Vessels and Boyd (1996) present several U.S. Supreme Court cases that though not specifically focused on character education did support values education as a constitutionally acceptable practice in schools. This sweeping legislation could be seen as a measure to combat what many considered to be the rising decline in morality and increase in negative behaviors in youth during the period preceding the legislation. The rate of teen pregnancy was up, as well as increases in drug usage, while the graduation rate had been decreasing. Whatever the reason, the Supreme Court seemed to be in favor of character education.

According to Nucci (2004), the cyclical claims of social and moral decay have long fostered advocacy for character education. The anxieties of the general population during the second half of the twentieth century produced a new round of support for character education in schools. Scholars of this period, drawing from an eclectic array of sources and a wide spectrum
of theories, were all concerned with how to construct a sense of community, social justice and the “common good.” Their challenge was to consider the place of public schools within the larger society and to use it to elevate civic values and ideals (Reese, 2000).

There has been increased support for character education programs in the twenty first century. The Carnegie Corporation’s *The Civic Mission of School*, (2003) stated that the high stakes testing movement placed pressure on schools to raise student achievement in math and reading. This testing focus along with budget cuts and lack of commitment to formal civic education had caused a decline in such programs. According to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), schools have reduced courses in government to one semester as compared to the three courses in democracy, civics and government common in the 1960’s. But in recent years there has been a clarion call by CIRCLE, The Carnegie Corporation and other groups to capitalize on youth idealism to better preserve the involvement of US citizens. To this end, it seems as if schools are paying more attention to the development of the citizen, and naturally then to the development of youth character.

**African-American Perspectives on Character Education**

According to Gallien and Jackson (2005), character education programs for urban black youth must be culturally mediated and should be steeped in the history, literature, cultural and religious values of African Americans throughout American history. In the study of African-American schools in the segregated South, researchers have found some common characteristics existed in these schools. In spite of the challenges and limited resources, the schools all seemed to include exemplary and well-trained teachers, curricular and extracurricular activities that reinforced the values of the school and the community, parental support and strong leadership (Siddle-Walker, 2000).
The emphasis in segregated schools was on curricular and extracurricular activities to prepare student to participate in a future desegregated world. The curriculum was driven by the *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* and National Education Association’s objectives which included health, human relations, civic responsibility, worthy home-membership, command of fundamental processes, and workmanship (Siddle-Walker, 2000). Complementing the academics of these schools were healthy extracurricular programs that focused on individual student interests, emphasized speaking ability, prepared students for future responsibilities, and reinforced the important values of the school and community.

St. John and Cadray (2005) called for teacher education programs of today to “include a more explicit emphasis on the African American education tradition” (p. 94). They argue that the post-desegregation focus of the majority schools, on standardized testing and academic achievement must be balanced by the ethic of care prominent in the African-American schools of the segregated South. According to them teachers are caught between the progressive education of John Dewey and the standards driven vision of today. The infusion of the African-American teaching tradition would help to balance the moral education foundation with the teaching methods ultimately creating more inclusive learning environments.

**Why Schools?**

Children’s development is unquestionably tied to the social influences around them. Children spend much of their developing years in school and it is necessary for schools to realize that the construction of their development needs intentional focus. Schools are the locus for students acknowledging, learning, appreciating and questioning communal societal norms. “This becomes particularly important in contexts where the norms of peer culture or society at large overlap with morality” (Nucci, p. 662). Teachers have the responsibility and the capacity to
influence conceptions of personal choice and convention especially on hot button issues of today, like social exclusion and school bullying. Moral and character education is less controversial when focused on topics that have widespread societal consensus. Things become more complex when moral education has to move beyond creating good people into the more ethical core of empowering students and engaging them to live moral lives. Nucci believed that the response of schools to this developmental phase should include chances for students to become engaged in governance rather than a defensive response to maintain order and power.

Seligman, Ernst, Gilham, Reivich, and Linkins (2009) say well-being should be taught in schools as an antidote to depression, to help increase life satisfaction and to help in learning and creativity. They point to a worldwide rise in depression in youth. They point to research that says more young people suffer from depression while in high school and that depression is more rampant than it was 50 years ago. Paradoxically, they claim that almost everything (purchasing power, education, rights etc.) is better now than it was 50 years ago. However, human morale is low with happiness and satisfaction only spottily increased worldwide. Lastly, an increase in well-being leads to an increase in academic attainment.

Lickona (1991) has given 10 reasons why schools should be committed to character education. The first is that there is a clear and urgent need because of an increase in youth hurting themselves as well as others, as well as a decrease in the general care and concern for the welfare of others. Secondly, the transmitting of values is and always has been the work of civilization. For a society to remain intact, developing values education is needed. Character education also supports the acquisition of full human development. Additionally, the school’s role as moral educator is even more vital as value-centered influences (parents, religious institutions) decrease. Lickona has referred to this as a “values vacuum” that needs to be filled.
Lickona also argued that even in our value-conflicted society there are shared values though Americans often have intense differences over moral issues.

In addition, Lickona has written that democracies thrive on moral education because democracy espouses government by the people. Democratic citizenship thrives on citizens that care about the common good. He also has claimed that value-free education is non-existent since everything that happens in schools teaches values. Additionally, moral questions are among the great questions facing both individuals and the human race. Over the past few decades, there is also growing support among the federal government, local businesses, educators, parents, and community organizations for character education in schools. Creating a respectful and humane community in schools may also attract and retain teachers who desire to transmit and cultivate sound character. And finally, schools should be committed to character education because values education can be effective.

Families, voluntary associations, entertainment media, and many other sources all affect youth character development. But CIRCLE (2003) still cites schools as one of the most important agencies in developing character and civic attitudes because schools are the only institution mandated to reach all youth in America. Schools are the best equipped to teach critical thinking and deliberation. Schools can encourage young people to interact, and work with others, often bringing together a genuine mix of youth from different backgrounds. And although many community-based organizations and non-school institutions that once had the capacity to engage young people are shrinking in size, capacity and the ability to reach youth, many are partnering with schools to continue to support character development. Overall, there is a demonstrated link between a positive school climate and the development of students (Desimone, 2000; Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Kahne & Westheimer 2003).
Americans expect their schools to teach the individual but also to make good citizens who will preserve national values and pass them on to the next generation. All schools are meant to promote democracy and foster the common good. Seventy percent of Americans want schools to turn students into democratic citizens with values such as honesty, respect, civility and they measure a school’s success based on the percentage of graduates that practice good citizenship (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003). They want students to acquire social values such as a strong work ethic, self-reliance and trustworthiness. Additionally, they want schools to promote political values such as loyalty to the nation and an appreciation of majority rule.

Many believe that schools in a democratic society should level the playing field by supporting equal levels of civic preparation and encouraging youth to participate across social groups. One finding of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) study conducted in the 1990’s (2002) showed that there is a socio-economic gap in civic knowledge and willingness to vote. This apathy is distressing as less privileged students are the most likely to benefit from knowing the candidates and their positions on various issues. Other findings support respectful classrooms with space for discussion and disagreement and find these types of classrooms further engagement and civic knowledge. Additionally, the study found that a significant predictor of the likelihood of voting among students was the explicit teaching and emphasis on elections and the voting process in schools. In sum, the study suggested that schools can be effective in preparing students to be civically engaged (Torney-Purta, 2002).

As discussed earlier, the support for and/or implementation of character education programs rise when there is an increase in youth deviant or at-risk behaviors. Yet, the paradox has been that most character education programs have been in the elementary and middle
schools. High schools seem less inclined to embrace character education because most high school teachers see themselves as subject area professionals (Williams, Yancher, Jensen & Lewis, 2003). Additionally, adolescence presents a unique set of challenges and questions of authority and norms. But if character can be perceived as having two parts: performance character and moral character, then there is a correlation between character development and academic performance. According to Davidson, Lickona, and Khmelkov (2007), “Character is a foundation for, and a critical outcome of, all academic and ethical endeavors” (p. 378). Below the authors make the following arguments for character education in schools:

1. Students need performance character (work ethic, self-discipline, perseverance, initiative, teamwork, etc.) in order to do their best academic work.

2. Students develop their performance character (the ability to work hard, overcome obstacles, find joy in a job well done, etc.) from their school work.

3. Students need moral character (respect, fairness, kindness, honesty, etc.) in order to create the classroom relationships that make for a positive learning environment.

4. Students develop moral character from their schoolwork (e.g. by helping their peers to do their best work through a “culture of critique” that offers constructive feedback, by studying ethical issues in the curriculum, and by using their curricular learning in service projects that help solve real-world problems.)

Davidson, et al. (2007) offered eight targets as the crucial outcomes of schooling. Performance and moral character development increase character education’s relevance to any school’s mission by promoting 1) lifelong learning and critical thinking, 2) diligent and capable performers, 3) socially and emotionally skilled people, 4) ethical thinking, 5) respectful and moral agents, 6) self-discipline and the pursuit of healthy lifestyles, 7) contribution of
community members and democratic citizens and 8) spiritual people (non-religious as well as religious world views). According to Davidson, et.al., character education is the deliberate integration of excellence and ethics. And although these targets are crucial, the effectiveness of any program lies in its implementation. Many education reform initiatives fail because they are executed in isolated classrooms. Quality implementation deals with systematic and faithful enactment that is not left up to individual teachers. In addition, student mobility and level of exposure to the programs are of concern. Comprehensive programming is most effective when it includes curricular issues, parent involvement, classroom management, and school wide reform elements.

Program implementation also must take into account student attachment, since schools are predictors of both student and program success (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). As with the implementation of any initiative, leadership is key. Principal buy in, empowering of staff, and democratic governance are leadership qualities that lead to successful program implementation. Berkowitz & Bier’s research (2004) demonstrated that for any initiative to work, especially any model of character education to be effective, it must be comprehensive either at the school or district level.

Obstacles to Character Education

In 2004, Prestwich reported on the resurgence of character education in schools. In her research she lists the history of character education, the approaches to character education and then reviewed literature about the obstacles to character education in schools. These included: effective implementation, teacher commitment, teacher sense of efficacy, student acceptance of programs, lack of nurturing of character at home (Bulach, 2002, Brown 2001), sense that
society’s ills cannot be changed, no tie in of character education to content areas, no pre-service training for teachers and ingrained teacher behavior that may not be aligned to positive character development. The training of teachers comes up in much of the literature of character education. Most researchers agree that if character education in school is important then teachers must be trained for it. They, point out however, that most teacher pre-service programs lack this training.

Berkowitz (1999) tackled the obstacles to teaching character education in pre-service programs. He points to the disagreement on what character is, the disagreement on what character education is, space in pre-service curricula, limited scientific data on the effectiveness of character education, expertise and resources, and an ambivalence about the appropriateness of character education. Mathison’s (1999) study of 287 teachers--137 of whom were pre-service teachers--offered that time or the lack of time was an obstacle to character education. One third of the teachers surveyed had qualms about mixing their own personal and religious beliefs with education, believed that to do so would be biasing classroom discussions. Walker, Roberts and Kristjansson (2015) cite a lack of moral language as a hindrance to character education. They found that there is no clear and standardized vocabulary in character education as there is in other subjects.

**Teachers and School Climate**

One of the most important factors in the success or failure of any school reform program is the implementation by teachers. The implementation is affected by training, development and buy-in. However, teacher fidelity to the program is also of importance in spite of training, development and buy-in. Furthermore, teacher delivery and fidelity will vary from teacher to teacher and is basically self-guided. Their constant presence and contact with students makes
them an integral component in the implementation process. Beets, Flay, Vuchinich, Acock, Li, and Allred (2008) cited research claiming that there are two overarching characteristics that affect a teacher’s willingness to implement a program: the teacher’s attitude and the school climate.

According to a literature review by Betts, et al. (2008), teacher attitude or disposition depends on a teacher’s enthusiasm and identification with the program and its outcome, their belief that the program is advantageous or preferable to the alternative and its consistency with their own beliefs. School climate refers to contextual characteristics specific to schools that distinguish one from another including but not limited to the support a teacher feels from his/her peer group, school personnel and administration. The National School Climate website (2016) further elaborates that school climate also involves safety, student-teacher interactions, and a range of other dimensions of school life.

**Program Types**

Educators have taken several pedagogical and implementation approaches to character education. Programs include service learning, civic engagement, citizenship training/political socialization, caring community, health education, and religious education. Below is an outline of the literature on each one.

**Service Learning**

Service Learning is an approach to character education that has become popular. Since age restricts youth voting, volunteerism allows access for participation (Camino & Zeldin, 2002). Service learning allows youth to be seen as active citizens with a participatory ethic. Service programs exist in every state (Billig, 2000), but not without controversy. Some question whether a focus on service learning does not interfere with the main academic purpose of schooling or
lessen the role of parents. Additionally, critics question student safety and the compulsory nature of the service.

The impact of service learning is difficult to evaluate because the range of activities labeled “service learning” is quite varied (Nucci, 2004). The general consensus regarding service learning is that it is any experiential activity coordinated by a school that allows for reflection, meets a community need, fosters civic responsibility and has curricular reinforcements. Billig’s research (2000) outlined eleven other essential elements of effective service learning programs in schools. These include clear educational goals that involve students in the construction of their own knowledge. Students must be challenged in both cognitive and developmental tasks. Additionally, assessment should be used to enhance learning and document the meeting of content and skill standards. Service tasks must also have clear goals and meet genuine needs in the school/community. There must be systematic formative and summative evaluation.

Student voice should also be maximized in selecting, designing, implementing and evaluating service learning activities and programs (Camino & Zeldin, 2002). Diversity must be valued by participants, practice and outcomes. In addition, interaction and communication with the community must be encouraged and fostered. Students must be well prepared with a clear understanding of responsibilities, tasks and safety precautions. Student reflection should take place before, during and after service. And finally, multiple methods must be designed to acknowledge, celebrate, and validate student’s service.

In 2009 New York City mayor, Michael Bloomberg initiated a directive for mandatory service plan for all public schools (New York City website, 2013). All principals were required to add a service component to their curricular plan for the year. New York has not yet made service a graduation requirement, but other states such as Illinois and Maryland have.
believe, however, that service has to be linked to the curriculum for greatest effectiveness (Billing, 2000). Although the research on service learning might be skewed based on student self-selection, students in quality service learning programs exhibited improved attitudes (Billig, 2000). According to CIRCLE (2003), a quality program encourages educators to use the programs as ways to boost academic improvement as well as self-esteem. A good program also allows students to engage in meaningful work on public issues and gives students a role in choosing and designing projects. Additionally, programs should provide students with opportunities for reflection and link service to broader curricula. They should help teachers address potentially negative attitudes the approach and the program’s approach should be part of a broader philosophy of education.

**Civic engagement, citizenship training and political socialization**

Another facet of character education has to do with civic engagement, citizenship training and political socialization. These categories are unique yet are often connected by schools and researchers alike. Civic engagement deals with the pro-social behaviors that benefit both youth and their communities (Balsano, 2005). Civic education should enable students to acquire knowledge about the political and economic systems, to recognize the attributes as well as the challenges of good citizenship, to participate in discussions of issues and to gain an awareness of varied dispositions (Torney-Purta, 2002).

Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin and Keeter (2003) have placed youth civic engagement under the umbrella of political socialization. They agreed with the research from the 1960’s that the lessons and experiences of early childhood shape our lives as we age. Recent work has shifted the focus of political socialization away from early childhood to adolescence and early adulthood. Based on their study, these authors pointed to the impact that families have on civic
engagement of youth. They also cited the pivotal place that high schools play in political socialization, which include promoting volunteering opportunities, presenting civic and government lessons, and encouraging participation in governmental clubs and extracurricular activities.

Balsano (2005) also conceptualized civic engagement as a vehicle toward promoting positive adolescent development. She borrowed from research that defines this development through five attributes: competence, confidence, positive connections, character, and compassion or caring. She made a strong connection between civic engagement and youth development. Adolescence is a time of developmental growth with the potential to produce considerable lifelong patterns of healthy behaviors. In light of that, Balsano (2005) questioned whether youth who face social impediments to civic engagement are at risk for developmental disadvantages. These impediments include but are not limited to possible differences in core values between the youth and the adults in their communities and mistrust and miscommunication.

There also are many citizenship curricular programs that try to promote citizenship education devoid of politics (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003). These programs emphasize character through citizenship and service. Kahne and Westheimer have written that these programs are inadequate for promoting good citizens because they deemphasize the need for collective initiatives and detract needed attention from society’s ills. According to Kahne and Westheimer, character traits, though good, are not sufficient requirements for a democracy. They posited that there are three essential components to a successful curriculum for the development of citizens in a democracy: commitment, capacity and connection. These common features move curriculum beyond mere service orientations and character education towards preparing students to be “effective democratic citizens” (p. 35).
Often students are apathetic and wonder why they should be active in issues regarding their community and beyond (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003). Programs that foster commitment examine social problems and issues and show students that society needs improving and challenges them to become committed to impacting these controversial social and political issues. Successful programs also provide meaningful and positive civic experiences. Programs that foster capacity provide students with the skills necessary to be involved and engaged in civic opportunities. These opportunities teach civic skills and engage students in real world projects and allow students to develop and use civic related skills. Connection involves reinforcing the idea that students are a part of a social community that values civic participation. This is done through the creation of a network of supportive peers and role models.

Lay (2007) acknowledged that schools influence the outcomes of political socialization of youth. However, she refocused the issue from that of the civic education curriculum to that of school structure. In her work, she pointed out that school participation of any kind increases the likelihood of political participation. However, small schools often have fewer opportunities for participation. Therefore, she felt that small schools often did the opposite of what they set out to do. She also commented that though large schools offered opportunities for participation, they often did not capitalize on the opportunities offered to youth. Her research implied that though civic education curriculum is important for political socialization there are other structural elements that need to be explored.

**Caring communities**

In *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education*, Noddings (1992) argued against liberal education’s philosophy that “all children can learn.” By liberal education she meant that all students should be exposed to a standardized curriculum. Noddings
argued that schools needed to include “a wonderful range of human capacities” (p. xiii). She stressed that educators should rethink the purpose of education. Noddings felt that educators should view themselves as the progenitors of a large heterogeneous family from various ethnicities and races and then decide how students should be educated. With that in mind, Noddings put forward that the curriculum of schooling should promote caring for self, the inner circle, strangers, the earth and ideas. Battistich, Solomon, Watson and Schaps (1997) also focused on the school and classroom as caring communities. They extended the definition to mean a place where members of the group support one another and have a sense of belonging and share common values and norms.

Lickona (1991) stressed the need for caring communities in the classroom and beyond. He called on the teacher to be a caregiver, a model and an ethical mentor. The classroom should be a microcosm of society where students see the results of their actions and compassionately identify with humanity. He called on schools to allow students the opportunity to develop an awareness of the human condition, to perform service, reach out to the community, and work toward social justice. “To become moral communities that are supportive and caring, schools need to model empathy, altruism, trust, cooperation, fairness, justice, compassion, democracy, and celebration of diversity” (Pine & Hilliard, 1990).

Research also suggests African American women teachers have been exemplars of effective, caring teachers (Beauboef-Lafontant, 2002). These teachers transmitted political clarity to their students, i.e., the recognition that there are relationships between schools and society that configure the success or failure of groups of children, not just individuals. In addition to political clarity, the teachers Beauboef-Lafontant studied exhibited maternal sensibility and an ethic of risk in caring for their students. The teachers perceived teaching not
just as a pedagogical activity, but as a political act in the making of a socially just community for all students.

**Health Education**

Most health education programs in schools that focus on character revolve around sex education. For many, schools are the nucleus of a common, public, moral foundation even in a sphere which is as private as sex. This group of researchers and advocates believe that government intervention is justified when private practices affect the public good in areas like the rise in teenage pregnancy, STD’s and AIDS (Vergari, 2000). However, the passionate debate is not whether sex education in schools is justified. Instead, it is the approach that is passionately argued and controversial. Several questions arise when considering sex education in schools: What can schools teach? How should it be taught? What are parents’ rights concerning sex education in schools? Whose values should be perpetuated and to what end? What approach should schools use: abstinence-based, abstinence-plus or abstinence-only? And should condoms be distributed in school? The asking and answering of these questions invoke morals and values and the chosen approach is invariably toward the molding of character in students.

**Religious Education**

Character education has its historic roots in religious education. The connection between religion and character is undeniable as all religions undoubtedly seek to guide the individual’s character. However, the mandate of separation of church and state causes much debate over how and if public schools can use religious education in the sculpting of character education programs without breaking this mandate. Nevertheless, researchers and advocates over the years have made the argument for the connection between religious instruction or climate in schools and character building among the young.
The connection made by some researchers between religion and character is threefold (Jeynes, 2002). The first is that the religious work ethic, which though commonly connected to Protestantism, can extend to other religions and is seen as a virtue. The second, also seen as a virtue or characteristic of good behavior, is the internal locus of control exhibited by religious people. Third is the tendency of religiously committed people not to participate in harmful or immoral behavior. Some social scientists attributed the decline in student test scores between 1963 and 1980 to the Supreme Court decisions of 1962 and 1963 removing prayer from schools (Jeynes, 2002). They also attributed the increase in the divorce rates and use of illicit drugs during this time to the removal of prayer in schools (Jeynes, 2002). Attributing declining test scores to alleged religious or moral decline has been, of course, controversial, but more recently the Supreme Court has been supportive of the teaching of religion in schools, though unsupportive of school-sponsored devotional activities (Sorenson, 1996).

**Multi-Cultural Education**

Multi-cultural education is not always linked to character education. However, it can be defined as allowing students to examine and relate their values to that of the values and challenges of other cultures (Parks, 1999). Originally focused on racism, multi-cultural education now focuses on sexism, classism and handicapism (Sleeter & Grant 1987). Parks (1999) lays out nine components of multi-cultural education:

- Character education allows students to see that good people come from various cultures.
- Moral education promoting fairness, respect and caring toward all people. Peace education supporting human interactions in the face of divisive influences.
- Peer medication and conflict resolution in the face of overt and covert racism.
• Emotional intelligence allows students to manage resentment resulting from inter racial conflict.

• Service learning that allows students purposeful experiences with people of varied classes.

• Antiviolence education teaches students to take steps to reduce violence that results from racist influences, such as gang behavior.

• Critical thinking instruction teaches strategies for analyzing arguments, and considering other views.

• Global education addresses racism as a human problem identifying racist influences in international conflicts.

**Comprehensive School Reform**

The success of any program depends on implementation. Piecemeal implementation often has proven to be fruitless. Traditionally in New York, students have been required to take a civics class to graduate high school. Many of these classes have not taken into account the students’ experiences and civic orientations. Because a student’s civic orientation is shaped through daily experiences and interactions beyond classrooms and schools, civic oriented classes and programs within schools which build upon students’ out-of-school experiences may have a greater capacity to enhance young people’s sense of efficacy or ability to make a difference in society (Rubin, 2007).

With this in mind, many existing schools have incorporated character development programs into their curriculum by creating advisory classes (Darling-Hammond, et. al.,2002). Many newly opened schools in New York have sought to have character education as the basis of their structure. In many instances, the school’s name reflects this conscientious decision to
focus on an area of character development. To this end, some schools have been making a more concerted effort to create institutional contexts that serve to influence the character of their students.

Cooper and Jordan (2003) wrote primarily about African American male achievement in public schools. They noted that certain school structures led to the maximum academic achievement for these young men. They explored ways in which comprehensive restructuring can incorporate approaches to build positive self-concepts, social and intellectual competencies and eventually enable students to graduate. They cited the 1996 *Breaking Ranks* Report by the National Association of Secondary School Principals. The report listed several core themes that are central to school reform initiatives and included several mandates for high school reform that focused on character development.

The Report recommended that high schools be learning communities that function as a transitional experience toward the next stage of life. Therefore, the school should provide for the development of good citizenship and full participation in a democracy while also playing a role in the personal development of youth. There should be a deliberate focus on allowing students to participate in an increasingly technological society while also promoting and equipping students for increased interdependency on others in spite of differences. And finally the high school must be an institution that advocates on the behalf of its students (Cooper & Jordan, 2003).

**New York City Outward Bound and Expeditionary Learning.**

There are five Core Practices of Expeditionary Learning Schools. These Core Practices “work in concert to promote high achievement through active learning, character growth and teamwork” (ELS Core Benchmarks, 2003, p. 3). These national, core practices are Learning
Expeditions, Active Pedagogy, Culture and Character, Leadership and School Improvement, and Structures.

Core Practice III states that “teachers foster student character through challenging academic work, service, and the expectation that students are courteous respectful, and compassionate” (p. 32). Expeditionary Learning Schools and Outward Bound schools make character development explicit by articulating a set of character traits and codes of conduct consonant with the design principles. These character traits must express the school’s vision for a productive community. Additionally, they must be clearly stated in school documents and in the school’s code of conduct. The traits must be fostered through learning expeditions and instructional practices as well as through activities specifically focused on community building. The traits must be reinforced within classrooms, in common areas throughout the building and in school-related activities.

There are six Benchmarks that correspond with Core Practice III: Culture and Character. Listed below are the Benchmarks.

Benchmark 1: Building School Culture and Fostering Character

- Rituals and Traditions
- Knowing Students Well
- Character Traits
- Service and Service Learning
- Physical Environment and Tone

Benchmark 2: Ensuring Equity and High Expectations

- Equity
- High Expectations
• Passages and Graduation

• Structures that Support Equity

Benchmark 3: Fostering a Safe, Respectful and Orderly Community

• Clear Expectations Schoolwide

• Teaching the Code of Conduct and the Character traits

• Welcoming the Community

Benchmark 4: Promoting Adventure and Fitness

• Adventure

• Physical Education and Fitness

• Safety

Benchmark 5: Developing a Professional Community

• Building and Modeling an Expeditionary Learning School Culture

• Practices and Protocols for Effective Collaboration

• Focus on Growth over time

Benchmark 6: Engaging Families in the Life of the School

• Welcoming Families and Building Relationships

• Communication

• Participation in the School

Outward Bound was founded by Kurt Hahn in 1941 in Germany. The program was so successful that it led to the establishment of Outward Bound programs throughout the world. By 1975 there were 200 Outward Bound programs in the United States, and 10 years later over 542 adventure courses offered by U.S. universities (Hattie, Marsh, Neill & Richards, 1997). Outward Bound was founded to counteract what Hahn felt was a decline in society and emphasized the
four pillars of physical fitness, self-discipline, craftsmanship, and service (McKenzie, 2003).

Expeditionary Learning is an instructional design model that grew out of Outward Bound (Thomas, 2000). The feature of the model is project based learning centered on learning expeditions that combine character development, service, community building, fieldwork, teamwork, experts and intellectual inquiry.

**Evaluations of Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound Schools**

There have not been many recent evaluations of Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB) Schools. John Thomas (2000) presented an overview of schools that used project-based learning. In a summary of findings published by the New American Schools Development Corp (1997), Thomas reported gains in student achievement in nine of the ten schools studied between 1995-1997. Another study, highlighted by Thomas and conducted by the Academy for Educational Development, (2000) revealed that Expeditionary Learning Schools influenced school climate and student motivation. Specifically, attendance in the schools increased to over 90%, while suspensions and disciplinary problems were unusually low. Although impressed by an instructional intervention that could boost not only student achievement but also student motivation, Thomas observed that these effects could be the result of the entire model of school wide reform and not as a result solely of project-based instruction.

Hattie, Marsh, Neill and Richards (1997) used a meta-analysis to study the Australian Outward Bound program. Their review of the literature found significant emphasis placed on the positive effects of the programs while ignoring the negative effects. Their aim was to measure the effectiveness of the Australian Outward Bound Program across six categories: academic, leadership, self-concept, personality, interpersonal, and adventurous-ness. Their findings revealed that those that focused on the academic enhanced problem-solving competencies helped
motivate students toward academic gains. In relation to personality, the authors found that effects were high on assertiveness and reduction of aggression. Their overall conclusion was that the effect on self-esteem was very high. What was most impressive, however, was the longevity and follow up gains of the Adventure Program.

Mckenzie (2003) studied one Outward Bound Program in Western Canada. She concluded that the Outward Bound program had strayed from its original mission of promoting compassion through service. Compassion through service was more on the periphery of the program, while identity formation emerged at the forefront of the mission. Besides this, she studied both the positive and negative outcomes of Outward Bound Course Components. There were approximately 29 course components including backpacking/mountaineering, the solo, rock climbing, having leadership responsibilities, camp set-up and cooking, the course-end run, group discussions, games and initiative activities, the service project, and the final expedition. She placed the components in five groupings: achieving success, challenge, learning new skills, being responsible for oneself, and having fun. Among the positive outcomes were that the physical environment of the wilderness setting encouraged self-awareness, responsibility, and restoration. Students’ self-concepts, motivation and interpersonal skills were positively affected by course instructors’ expectations and interpersonal skills. Group work also increased self-awareness, concern for others and concern for the environment. Conversely, positive outcomes diminished when students failed to succeed, there was a lack of physical challenge, negative group interactions and/or personality conflicts arose, and bad weather and lack of food accompanied outdoor experiences.

As an employee of Outward Bound Canada, Mckenzie’s role as researcher was quite interesting. Her interview and survey findings tended to support Outward Bound Canada’s
Wilderness Program as one that built character yet did not fully promote the virtue of compassion through service. She believed that the Outward Bound course she studied “works,” but questioned if it was “working” in the way she and other Outward Bound staff members wanted it to work.

In *Leadership Lessons from Comprehensive School Reforms* (2003), Farrell presented a chapter entitled, *Expeditionary Learning Schools: Tenacity. Leadership and School Reform* in which he explained the history of Outward Bound and its relationship to Expeditionary Learning. As a school reform, Farell believed Expeditionary Learning schools are more mission driven than many other reform movements, and that it has a school centered approach. It focuses on professional development for the whole staff and believes that school leaders must have time to develop and support the school’s vision. “All the leadership literature suggests that the first and most essential attribute of leadership is the ability to attract and retain good people and get them working well together” (p. 29). Farrell focused on principals of Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound Schools and the many points of training offered by the model for school leaders. But he pointed out that the Outward Bound model is aimed to bring out the leader in everyone. Farrell believed in school autonomy for successful Expeditionary Learning implementation. When the partnership between Outward Bound and Expeditionary Learning began, he pointed out that the testing and accountability structure was not as prominent and with the shift in the Comprehensive School Reform Movement to intervention in low performing schools, Expeditionary Learning school had to adjust to the times by addressing these issues through curriculum changes.
Heath’s dissertation (2013) focused on an Expeditionary Learning middle school in the Midwest. She focused on three school practices (Crew, Community Meeting and electives.) Her findings suggest that the Expeditionary Learning Model “comes from and is perpetuated by a privileged, white, middle to upper class male, Christian, heterosexual, and European perspective, which can create certain tensions and possibilities when placed into an urban setting (p iii).” She also found that literacy was infused in the non-traditional spaces of Crew, Community meeting and electives, but that teachers were not capitalizing on the rich literary cultures represented by the students. Logan’s dissertation (2013) looked at the learnings of the graduates of Expeditionary Learning high schools. Her findings indicate that students benefit from three realms of transformative learning experiences: community, academic challenge in the real world and deep experience of people and place.

**Conceptual Framework**

Milson and Mehlig (2002) offer that character development is a complex, difficult to measure construct. However, the research identifies teachers as vital to the process of character development in youth. They go on to say that, “A teacher who is motivated and persistent regarding character education is likely to believe in his or her own ability to build students’ character and the ability of teachers in general to overcome negative influences outside of the classroom (p. 48).” Farell (2003) wrote that, “Nothing is more important to the quality of a school than the quality and behavior of the people working and teaching there” (p. 29). Behavior, I would add, is linked to beliefs. Or as Fang (1996) has written, “Regardless of the forms they take a teacher’s beliefs or philosophy can affect teaching and learning in one way or another” (p. 50). Teachers’ views are important and teacher training in moral education should be based on
needs assessments done by teachers with experience. There is “symbolic capital among current practitioners (Walker et al 2015, p.89).

There is a body of work on teacher beliefs and efficacy, which in itself is the theory that what teachers believe about their ability to teach affects how students learn. Tschannen-Moran, Hoy and Hoy (1998) focused on two dominant frameworks of teacher efficacy and its role in schooling. “Given the importance of a strong sense of efficacy for optimal motivation in teaching, we would do well to examine how efficacy is developed, when it is the most malleable, and what factors may lead to its improvement (p. 234). Mathison (1998) found that teachers supported character education but believed the responsibility of character education is in the home. She also reported that many more English teachers surveyed felt that issues of right and wrong were part of normal classroom discussion, in comparison to their STEM counterparts.

One can find research on teacher beliefs and efficacy in most of the content areas. Wallace and Kang (2004), for example, studied teacher beliefs surrounding inquiry in science; Etmer and Ottenbreit-Leftwich (2010) looked at ways in which teachers’ beliefs must be changed to incorporate technology in the classroom; Stipek et al. (2001) studied teacher beliefs in the elementary mathematics classroom and Doppen (2007) assessed a teacher training program’s influence on a cohort of social studies teachers’ beliefs. There are also studies of pre-service teacher beliefs. In a study of pre-service teaching programs, Sanger and Osguthorpe (2010) examined the literature on the moral work of teachers and found very few references. They contended that teaching is moral work and that teachers are drawn to the profession because of its moral nature. They also noted ignoring what teachers believe during pre-service training did a disservice to their practice and set them up for frustration. “Thus, even if we assume that the content of educators’ beliefs are far from sufficient for predicting practice, we
claim that the explicit discussion of what educators believe, why they hold those beliefs, and the practical implications of the beliefs held, must serve as the primary currency of teacher education” (p. 572).

I found one study on teacher beliefs about character education in the elementary school. Milson and Mehlig (2002) surveyed 254 elementary schoolteachers. They found that these teachers believed in their ability “to discuss issues of right and wrong…and to use strategies that might lead to positive changes in students’ character. They also believed that they can foster traits such as honesty, responsibility, courtesy, compassion and respect.” (p. 52) A teacher’s efficacy was based on two dimensions: their perception of personal influence and their perception of circumstances outside of the classroom. The only obstacle that Milson and Mehlig point to in schools adopting character education programs was the lack of preparation in teacher education programs. And although much of their findings are transferable, there is a gap (that they also acknowledge) in the literature around teacher beliefs on character education in the secondary schools and particularly around teacher perceptions of specific initiatives.

This study fills a gap in the literature by examining high school teachers’ beliefs surrounding a specific curriculum: character education, in a high school. If we agree that character education is important, and that teachers’ beliefs and perceptions are important to practice and to student outcomes, then it is important to analyze what teachers have to say about the character education initiatives at the high school level in context of a specific type of school.

Significance

Since 1987, New York City Outward Bound has worked with 60,000+ students, teachers, administrators and parents in over 300 youth serving organizations. According to their website there are ten public schools in New York City that have fully adopted the model. “Our schools
utilize the EL Education school model, which is rooted in the principles and practices of Outward Bound, and support the development of student character and good citizenship while also fostering a culture of achievement” (New York City Outward Bound, 2016). It is imperative to look at how teachers think and feel about the initiatives implemented in each school that support and develop the character of students as they are the gate keepers of these initiatives. A focus on teacher beliefs will add to the research because it will allow schools, especially the Expeditionary Learning School in which the research will be conducted, to become more reflective of its practices.
Chapter III
Methodology

Introduction

“Character” is one of those words that complicate any conversation, mostly because it can mean very different things to different people” (Tough, p. 58). Studying such a complicated word can only be made more complicated when one includes adolescents, teachers, New York City and public education. But as more New York City public schools add character-building components to their programs, it is necessary to look carefully at the outcomes of these additions. And it is even more critical to think about how teachers, who are often the most responsible for the roll out of these initiatives, feel about said initiatives.

This study raises important questions about the role that various school programs/initiatives play in a student’s character development and how teachers perceive, implement, understand and rate the effectiveness of these initiatives. The Expeditionary Learning School in which the study took place is partnered with Expeditionary Learning Schools (ELS) and New York City Outward Bound (NYCOB), two organizations for which character development is pivotal to their missions. The results of this study should prove instrumental to the school as well as to its partner organizations. It contributes to ongoing research regarding character education in schools and teacher perceptions of character education.

Restatement of Research Questions

This study focuses on one central question:

To what extent do teachers believe that the Expeditionary Learning School’s initiatives and programs promote character development?
To answer the question, three subsidiary questions will be addressed:

1. According to teachers, which initiatives and programs at Expeditionary Learning School foster the most and least amount of character development?

2. How do these initiatives ultimately add value to the academic outcomes in their classrooms?

3. What are the major challenges that the school faces in promoting/achieving character education and how might they be resolved?

Setting

Expeditionary Learning High School is located in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, New York. The school was founded in 2007 with an initial freshman class of 37 students. Since then the school has grown to 395 students in grades 9-12. It is partnered with Expeditionary Learning Schools and New York City Outward Bound. The school is a limited unscreened school, meaning that eighth graders must place the school on their high school application, and once they have visited the school during an open house, at a high school fair, or otherwise have learned about the school through contact with personnel, they can be selected for enrollment. There is no separate application, screening of middle school grades, testing or zoning.

The school is in a large building that houses two other high schools and a newly opened charter elementary school. According to the 2014-2015 Quality Review, the school population is comprised of 91% Black, 7% Hispanic, 0% White, and 1% Asian students, with boys accounting for 63% of the students and girls accounting for 37%. The average student attendance rate was about 91% with 76.7% of students having a 90+% attendance rate. The average teacher attendance rate was 94%. Four percent of the student body are English Language Learners, 22%
students are designated as having I.E.Ps, 11% are over-aged and under-credited and 13% live in temporary housing. The school had a 76% graduation rate in 2014 above the citywide and borough-wide graduation rate of 70% and the peer group graduation rate of 69%.

Of the 56% of the teachers that took the NYC School Survey for the 2014-2015 school year (compared to 81% of teachers citywide), 83% had over three years’ experience, but it is unclear if that experience is solely at the Expeditionary Learning School. In addition, the following responses to questions on the survey provide a sense of the overall teaching staff’s beliefs about character development, school programs overall and the administration.

1. “How many teachers at this school feel responsible for helping students develop self-management?” 29% responded all, 43% responded nearly all, 21% most, and 7%, none.

2. The school really works at developing student’s social skills: 50% strongly agree, 36% agree, 7% somewhat agree, and 7% strongly disagree.

3. The principal, teacher, and staff collaborate to make this school run effectively: 36% strongly agree, 21% agree, 29% somewhat agree, 7% disagree, 7% strongly disagree.

4. Adults at this school teach students the perseverance skills they need to succeed after high school: 71% strongly agree, 21% agree, and 7% strongly disagree.

5. I feel respected by the principal at this school: 21% strongly agree, 43% agree, 14% somewhat agree, 14% somewhat disagree, 7% strongly disagree.

6. I feel respected by the assistant principal at this school: 10% strongly agree, 70% agree, 10% strongly agree, and 10% strongly disagree.
7. At this school we have so many different programs that I can’t keep track of them all. 43% agree, 21% strongly agree, 21% strongly disagree, 7% agree, and 7% strongly disagree.

In 2014, the Expeditionary Learning School transitioned to a new principal, and two other initiatives came to play in the school in a major way. These initiatives’ impact on the school were not included in this study, but were referenced or alluded to in the interviews so are mentioned here. The first is that Expeditionary Learning School was allowed to join the New York State Consortium Schools. This was a long process that was granted at the departure of the old principal. The changes affected graduation requirements at the school in that students are exempt from four of the five required New York State Regents Exams and instead complete Performance Based Assessment Tasks or PBATs. The PBATs are research papers that students have to present and defend in front of a panel at the culmination of their subject matter classes. This change also led to a shift in school-wide grading procedures to a Standards Based Grading Model, which prioritizes summative assessments over formative assessments in the classroom.

The second initiative has been a move toward Restorative Justice Practices. Restorative Justice seeks to stem the school to prison pipeline by changing the discipline structures in school. It is based on a community structure and rather than relying on suspensions as a response to wrong doing, Restorative Justice Practices seeks to repair harm done to the school’s community in more just ways by community members that have caused hurt instead of through suspensions. Although Restorative Justice Practices and Performance Based Assessment Tasks are not solely Expeditionary Learning or Outward Bound sponsored, many schools in the Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound network are in the Consortium and or practice Restorative Justice.
Participants

I invited all teachers that have worked at the school for at least 3 years to participate in this study and three teachers volunteered to be interviewed. The school’s character building initiatives span across the four grade levels (grades 9-12) and focusing on teachers with at least 3 years’ experience in this school ensured that these teachers were acquainted with a wide range of initiatives and the school and they also represented a stable group of teachers over their three-year or more tenure.

The purpose of this study is to gauge teacher beliefs about the effectiveness of initiatives at an Expeditionary Learning School in developing student character. The sample for this qualitative study is purposive in that the teachers selected all work at the same Expeditionary Learning School, are directly involved in the specified initiatives and have had enough experience at the school to have been involved in and/or witnessed all of the initiatives (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007.)

Data Collection

In December 2015, teachers that met the criteria were emailed about the opportunity to participate in the confidential interviews. Teachers were asked to participate in three interviews each. This method as described by Seidman (2006) allows teachers to make meaning of their teaching experiences in the Expeditionary Learning School. The first interview was a focused life history interview (Seidman, 2006) where the interviewee was asked to describe their overall teaching experiences in other schools and to give a brief history of themselves. The second interview focused specifically on their experiences with the character building initiatives of this
Expeditionary Learning School. In this interview participants were asked to tell the story of their experience with each character building initiative. It was an opportunity for them to focus on the concrete details of their lived experience (Seidman, 2006.) The last interview allowed the teachers to reflect on their work with the character building initiatives and the effects on students, as well as review and revise, if needed, an outline of their views.

Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. The questions were open-ended and allowed participants to freely construct their answers. Each interview was audiotaped and later transcribed. Teachers were interviewed after school at their convenience.

**Procedures**

1. At the beginning of December, 2015, I gave all teachers in the school an information sheet about the study and ask those interested to respond

2. I selected and explained the research to participants and obtained the proper consent forms based on the Hunter College and New York City Department of Education Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval guidelines for this study.

3. I interviewed the three participants between December 2015 and February 2016. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and each interviewee participated in three interviews.

4. I conducted analyses of the interviews and wrote up the results, starting in February 2016.

**Data Analysis**

Each interview was audio taped and then later transcribed. Once the interviews were completed, I wrote up a profile of each teacher, based on their responses to the research
questions. These profiles were meant to capture the views and experiences of the teachers through their stories (Seidman, 2006). The profiles were then analyzed using thematic analysis. I used codes that categorized each teacher’s background experiences, the character building initiatives that the teachers identified as the most valuable for their students and the ones that had lesser values. I also coded teacher responses about the challenges or obstacles to greater character building in the school, as well as potential ways to improve less effective initiatives. From the thematic analyses, I revised the profiles as case studies, summarizing the major findings of each one and then conducting cross cases analyses for patterns in responses (Seidman, 2006).

**Ethical Considerations**

One potential risk of the interviews would be that participants may feel some discomfort in speaking about the school with another school employee. To minimize the risk, participants were given the right to decline to answer any questions, as well as to leave the interview at any time with no penalty. They also had the right to have me delete all or part of their interviews after the interviews had taken place (until February 1, 2016). Participants were reminded that the interviews were confidential and that they would have the opportunity to read and edit the case studies before publication.

**Researcher Profile**

In 2006, I was invited to work with a team that was presenting a proposal to start a new public school in south Brooklyn. I had worked previously with another group the year prior on a request for proposal, so I understood the time commitment and effort that went into the work. That school proposal had not been accepted and I was wary about putting in the effort again.
Additionally, I had started another graduate program so did not really have the time to dedicate to another project. But, I said yes. I joined my former coworkers and participated mostly virtually in creating a school on paper bound in a folder. We interviewed and our proposal was accepted.

At the same time, the school I began my teaching and subsequent guidance career in was closing that June. I needed a job, and interviewed for a position at the school I had just helped conceptualize. I got the job and then began to assist in the hiring of the founding staff of the school. My former coworker became my principal and boss. The summer of 2007 was tough.
The school opened in September 2007 in a larger school that was phasing out. The school was small and it was new.

Through protocols, discussions and debate, the founding staff members decided upon Five Commitments (related to character education) that would be the basis of the Habits of Work and Learning that we wanted espoused in the school. Since the school’s opening many initiatives have been planned and executed, kept and discarded, but the Five Commitments and our school’s commitment to them have remained. I have been a part of it all, making decisions and executing initiatives.

Working in this newly founded school, as well as my studies at the CUNY Graduate Center and my work as a guidance counselor heightened my awareness of the closing of larger schools, the opening of smaller schools and what seemed to me to be a paradigm shift towards character education. I began to wonder why schools were seemingly placing more of an emphasis on character. I also began to wonder how character development could be measured or determined. Realizing the difficulty in determining character development in students, I began
to wonder how the mission of building character is sustained in a school. Who are the armor bearers of the standard? What if their values and beliefs are not in line with the mission of the school? I began to think of the many initiatives executed at the school that were meant to implicitly/and or explicitly build character. I wondered if the commitments we chose were the right ones: did they resonate with the students, did the words mean the same thing to them as they did to us? What did the teachers, especially those hired subsequent to the choosing of the commitments, really think of the initiatives and how did that affect implementation, our students and our school?

Throughout the years, I have had the opportunity to sit in on interviews and hiring committees. I have also been to countless professional development meetings hosted by Expeditionary Learning, Outward Bound and/or the school itself. I, have been privy to conversations by staff and decisions of administration. As the school grows and changes, I have wondered about the system of schools and what causes various initiatives to succeed while others falter. The question surrounding whether teachers have to buy-in to the initiatives of the school for them to work is continuously on my mind. If so, how do you cultivate the buy-in? Which initiatives do teachers more naturally subscribe to? How? And Why? Do teachers value the values of the school? How do teachers influence character growth and how do teacher’s values impact the role out of these initiatives?

The founding principal and another critical founding member left the school in 2014. After an intense hiring process, a new principal was named. The last two years have been years of change and transition. As was expected many staff members left, new teachers were hired,
the assistant principal was a founding staff member but the school had never had an assistant principal prior.

**Limitations**

There are two major limitations to this study. The first is that of generalizability. The sample size of three teachers is very small and therefore the study cannot be generalizable to all teachers in Expeditionary Learning Schools nor even to all teachers in this Expeditionary Learning School (Yin, 2012). However, this study highlighted the commonalities and differences between these teachers’ stories and perceptions of the character building initiatives. These highlighted stories provide insight into the value of these initiatives within the school from the teachers’ viewpoints.

My role in the school and in this research is very complicated and I am very aware of both my biases and concerns, outlined above. By sticking closely to the interview transcripts and re-presenting the teachers’ views as honestly as possible, I have tried to overcome whatever biases I may have. My purpose and hope is that by allowing the teachers to speak about their experiences in the school, educators at the school including myself and beyond will be able to think more deeply about our beliefs and their intended and unintended impact on students and the school’s character development initiatives.
Chapter IV
Case Studies

Case Study 1: Mr. Greene

Our first teacher case study is Mr. Greene. Mr. Greene presents a bit of a conundrum at Expeditionary Learning School. He is the epitome of an old school teacher and that would be how he describes himself. He is very respected by staff and students alike, his discipline, routines and structures are both emulated and questioned. He is a simple man that tells it as it is but isn’t unkind in his words. He has been in the community for decades and has taught Physical Education in the building for 29 years. He has taught not only the older siblings of our current students but many times has also taught their parents. He is the Assistant Football coach.

Mr. Greene makes his expectations very clear to students. He expects them to be on time, prepared and to participate. If for any reason a student cannot do any of the above, he expects a valid written excuse. All of which he is consistent in doing himself. If he is ever or has ever been absent it is a shock to the entire school community. Students literally run to his class in a school where the students rarely hurry to class because his class is very structured. Late students must complete their warm up and the rest of the class can’t begin the activity until all students have completed the warm up activity. The “problem” with Mr. Greene however, is this: many students cannot maintain his standards. They miss one class and they fail. He gives opportunities for make-up, but it is difficult for many students to navigate this rigid structure. Though his colleagues laud his discipline and structure, they are torn because they feel his grading policy is difficult for teenagers. They openly fight for him against administration but negotiate to no end with him regarding their students. I have always been able to speak to Mr.
Greene regarding students, their needs, etc. He is always willing to work with students and offer make-up Physical Education sessions etc. But students have to be willing to make up the classes— he rarely excuses them.

His Crew class though is another story, not that he excuses students or passes them easily. But they love him. He circles up- the class is usually in a circle so everyone can see each other- a staple in Expeditionary Learning Schools. He assigns roles such as greeter, quote reader, etc. and all of his students participate. His Crew class is the picture of what Crew is supposed to be and often the model for new teachers seeking assistance in running Crew. For the 2015 school year Mr. Greene’s Crew class has been asked several times to run whole school community meetings when attempts at getting it off the ground have faltered. He brings discipline and structure to his Crew in the same way he teaches his other classes. And it works for him and for his Crew students. In sum, Mr. Greene is an enigma at Expeditionary Learning School. He believes in the community, the kids and the school but his approach is often hard to align with the current realities of the school and its administration.

**On Becoming a Teacher**

Had this man been told he was going to be a teacher he would have highly doubted it. When he first entered college, he had no intention of becoming a teacher. He had no specific career path in mind but he wanted to do something sports related. His intent was to work with ESPN or some broadcasting outlet. Walking on his college campus he stumbled across the Physical Education major and has been a teacher for the past 29 years. His 29-year tenure as an educator has all been in the same building, although at two different schools. The first school was a large comprehensive school that was housed in the entire building. This school phased out in 2010. The second school, in the same building, was the smaller Expeditionary Learning
School that opened in 2007. He joined this school in 2009. His decision to join Expeditionary Learning School was fueled both by the closing of the larger school as well as his feeling that Expeditionary Learning was in line with his teaching philosophy. He also lived in the community and was averse to travelling far for work and was an alumnae of the larger comprehensive school. He feels very rooted in the community.

Mr. Greene said he believes unequivocally that it is the school’s responsibility to teach character education. His original school did not intentionally address character education; in his opinion that was left up to the discretion, ability and willingness of the teachers. He, however, thought character education is developmentally appropriate for adolescents, especially given what he called the “current breakdown of the family unit,” by which he meant single parent homes. He also cited a lack of discipline at home and the absence of grandparents and the wider community as parental surrogates. Consequently, Mr. Greene saw the school as part of a broader safety net for youth and as an appropriate place to foster in youth traits like respect, responsibility and care. From our conversation I saw that Mr. Greene was very concerned about our students’ future and about preparing them for what they will meet “out there.” The initiatives that he seemed to value the most do two things: take students outside of their comfort zone and are memorable.

**Most Effective Initiatives**

Mr. Greene believed that Crew was the most effective initiative in developing the Five Commitments in students. Currently, he has an eleventh grade Crew class. Crew is the cultural arm of the school- the advisory structure. The term is taken from the Outward Bound metaphor of a boat’s crew- where no one is a passenger. Ideally, Crews stay together for the four years of high school with the same Crew advisor. This was Mr. Greene’s second Crew class. He was very
proud of the fact that adults in the school say that his Crew is pretty good. His current Crew name is Legacy 2.0, and his first Crew was called Legacy because the students wanted to leave a mark once they left the school. At his request, many of his Crew members were the siblings/relatives of his original Crew class. He believed that Crew deepens the student understanding of the Five Commitments.

I absolutely believe it [Crew] increases your understanding of the Five Commitments. I think you have to keep umm reminding them to be respectful to have courage when things get tough you know to show stewardship to touch on all Five Commitments.

It was an opportunity for the Crew teacher to remind students daily of the commitments. He believed that just constant reference to the commitments keeps students “on point.” In talking about Crew he highlighted courage and stewardship as the most important commitments.

Next, he believed that Student Led Conferences (SLC) and Adventure Week were effective. Student Led Conferences are conferences held multiple times a year in lieu of traditional parent teacher conferences. The conference typically consists of the student presenter, his/her parent/guardian, the Crew teacher, a student associate and possibly an invited guest. At the conference, the student depending on grade level is asked to present products from academic classes, their grades, progress toward graduation, goals, post-secondary plans and applications, etc. Students are asked questions based on presentation and asked to create goals to be discussed at next meeting.

I believe so because I actually observed a Student Led Conference before I was in this school. I was invited to come in as an observer and I remember the young lady I remember that day. It was a senior young lady, her parent and she was…she had her book and her book was huge. She was so well prepared but the mom was not… even
though she was a very good student... the mom was like on her like and I was going
“She’s good,” and mom asked more questions than the teacher. More than she was
presenting and she had to be you know...she had to be courageous that day. She had to
have everything on point because mom was holding her to such a high standard. I know
she’s gone on and done well but that day I said this Well, even though that’s probably the
best one I’ve ever seen I said Well this girl had to have all Five Commitments to just
stand there and take all this from mom who obviously has very high standards.

Mr. Greene mentioned a conference he observed prior to his start at the school. He cited
it as the best SLC he has seen to date but mentions how tough the young lady’s mother was on
her daughter despite how well the daughter had done in the conference. Mr. Greene felt that the
student exhibited courage that day but that she definitely showed lots of respect, stewardship,
perseverance and compassion throughout the conference.

Every ninth grader is expected to participate in Adventure Week during the Fall of their
freshman year. It is a weeklong adventure wilderness course upstate New York sponsored by
New York City Outward Bound. Adventure Week was an uncomfortable experience for Mr.
Greene because he didn’t consider himself to be an outdoorsman. But he participated with both
of his Crews and prior to that during new teacher orientation.

You might not be feeling your best. It might be cold...it was very cold the second time
we went. It was very cold. Sixteen degrees one night umm so the whole gamut you had to
have compassion. I remember some kids helping some kids that were a little heavier and
just carrying more weight somebody that was struggling...carrying more weight for
someone else. Cooking, you know. It was unbelievable to see them grow in that process.
While I was going “Wow, they’re doing more than anything I could have done at that
age.” And also I went back and a couple kids left as like the toughest kid in the group, they did not come back as the toughest kid in the group. The group realized, “You’re not really that tough when you’re not at home.” And so when they came back that kid’s demeanor was different towards the Crew and about themselves. They carried themselves differently.

It took students out of their comfort zone and students that were tough in Brooklyn weren’t as tough in the wilderness. Every student has a job to do. He was amazed by what students did on the long marches, carrying heavy back packs, helping each other through the course. He mused that he doesn’t think he could have done what they did throughout the course. To Mr. Greene, this was the initiative that is most spoken about by kids and he wished every student could go. He felt parents that did not allow their children to go were doing them a disservice and that it was the thing that alienated students in Crew because they did not share in the memory that was so often rehashed. He mentioned compassion as a commitment that developed during Adventure Week.

**Most Significant Commitment**

In recounting which commitment was the most important for the school at this time, he began by talking about the commitment that he felt he struggled the most with- compassion. He thought perhaps most men struggle with this. But then he said none of the commitments was above any other. Courage was needed in every facet of life. Compassion, if expected, must be given and stewardship was necessary for our school environment. He pointed out that students need perseverance because something was always going to go wrong and students had to push through in spite of it. He faltered for a moment and then remembered the one he was wearing on his shirt. Respect. The one he talked the most to the kids about. The one he felt was absent
from the lives of people nowadays. He believed people once respected societal institutions—churches, libraries, doctors’ offices and schools. But respect for these places was missing as well as a respect for people in positions of authority. In Mr. Greene’s experience, Crew helped reestablish this respect for position. He taught his students to respect the position of people even if and when they disagreed with them. This was emblematic of his struggle with administration and his students’ desire to fight for him although they themselves felt his grading policy was difficult for them and their peers.

**Somewhat/Less Effective Initiatives**

Mr. Greene believed that several other initiatives contributed to student character development, but much less so than the most effective ones. Mr. Greene thought that Community Meetings were effective but only for those on stage or those receiving awards. Community meetings have gone through several iterations over the course of time, but they were a time when students got together either as a whole school or by grade level. Initially they happened twice a month but the frequency had waned due to school-wide schedule changes. During community meetings, there is a reading, announcements, celebrations and awards for both academics as well as for the Five Commitments.

Community meetings had helped his particular Crew students because he felt that it allowed them to be on stage in front of the whole school and lead the meetings. Being on stage was something he himself didn’t enjoy doing and didn’t think his original Crew students would have enjoyed it either. He was astonished by the leadership that some of his students assumed in this particular venture. The act of “putting oneself out there in front of people,” Mr. Greene believed, develops the commitments. In talking about Community Meetings he highlighted courage and perseverance as the commitments that have been reinforced.
In the school students are nominated by teachers for commitment awards. At one time students nominated other students for these awards but traditionally teachers nominate students that have demonstrated a commitment. At one time in the school’s history, a student that earned all five commitment awards also received a school shirt— at that time students wore uniforms so wearing the shirt was seen as an accomplishment. In talking about this initiative, Mr. Greene recounted a young man who received an award for the first time after three years in high school and having been so proud of his accomplishment. He felt the awards meant something to students because the school “instilled that in them.” Winning a commitment award was a sense of pride and that students wanted to be recognized for upholding the commitments.

Toward the end of every year, students compete in Crew Olympics. Crew teams are given various challenges where together they must exhibit teamwork and problem solving skills. Teams are judged not only on their completion of the task but also on how well they uphold the Five Commitments. Crew teams then go to semifinals and final rounds and have the esteemed title of Crew Olympics Champions. Crew finalists also go to The New York City Outward Bound Center and challenge another school’s winner. In Mr. Greene’s opinion, Crew Olympics “absolutely” helped increase student understanding of the commitments during the duration of the events. Although he jokingly mentioned that it is the teachers that struggle with the commitments during Crew Olympics because of the competitive nature of both students and staff. He believed the Olympics brought crews together. He mentioned respect and perseverance as the commitments most developed by Crew Olympics.

Urban Expedition is a new initiative to the school. Tenth grade Crews are given a three day overnight Outward Bound course in New York City. They participate in teambuilding exercises and challenges in the city they call home, rather than in the wilderness. Mr. Greene did
not participate but his students reported on the things they did not like. Mr. Greene felt not having the students’ Crew Advisor there as a go between was a hindrance to their getting the full experience and students they asked him if they were going to do it again now that he was back at school.

**Least Effective Initiatives**

It was difficult for Mr. Greene to choose initiatives that were not effective. Initially he picked Urban Expedition only because he had not gone on it. When pressed he then picked Explore Week as well. Explore Week is held twice yearly and commonly called intensives in the Expeditionary Learning School network. It is when there is a suspension of traditional classes for one week and teachers create elective week-long classes that are filled with fieldwork in the community, at colleges, in museums, at Conservation centers, basically anywhere that connects to the expedition, expert talks/demonstrations and the week culminates in student presentations of learning. The courses are often inter-disciplinary and are cross grades. Students chose from a menu of course offerings and are with one or two teachers for the entire week. Mr. Greene felt that Explore Week if done correctly could have an effect on students’ character development, but cited that there are too many opportunities for students not to participate. Additionally, this is another initiative that he rarely participated in. He did participate one year and recalled the experience favorably; however, in years subsequent he offered gym classes so that teachers could get relief during the week. Students received an hour of gym each day so teachers can get their prep periods during the day for contractual purposes.

**Academic Value**

When asked if these initiatives ultimately added value to students academically. Mr. Greene answered in the affirmative. He explained that Student Led Conferences gave students a
deadline. They forced students to get their work together because they had to perform or present. He felt Adventure Week challenged them in ways similar to the challenges of life beyond high school. And PBATs and Senior Expedition allowed students to talk about real life issues the way they would be expected to in college.

Additional Factors Inhibiting Character Development

Mr. Greene cited the gang culture and the lack of family/community involvement as the greatest obstacles the school faces in promoting character development. Young people need to align themselves with something and he felt that gangs gave them the family replacement they were seeking. He also felt that because of the lack of structure at home, cyberspace was giving young people morals. School was important in teaching certain behaviors in the absence of family and community organizations. But he felt that the gang culture was seeping in. Mr. Greene believed that the solution was to be very tough on the Five Commitments. He also believed that the school leadership had to empower teachers to be very tough in enforcing the standards. He didn’t believe that enforcement should be punitive but rather he took a stance that these are our rules and if you want to be here you have to follow these rules.

Leadership shifts have affected the school in a negative light because Mr. Greene didn’t feel the emphasis is on Crew or on some of the other effective initiatives. He felt as if under the past administration Crew was valued more and teachers were supported more. He believed that there is a sense that the school is expected to work without the proper supports. Additionally, the preparation time for SLC seemed cramped compared to earlier years; he felt that overall teachers and students weren’t given enough time to prepare for the initiatives. But he also acknowledged that many teachers/teacher leaders have left the school. Teachers who were in charge of the implementation of Senior Expedition, Urban Expedition and other initiatives left the school in
the past two years and that had a serious effect on the roll out of initiatives. This lack of knowledge, experience and discipline caused the school to change and fostered a loss of relationship. And he felt that relationships were the “thing” that is very important in the school. In a small school where teachers and students were asked to do so much, relationships among students, families, teachers and administration were important.

**On Teacher Preparation**

In reference to teacher preparation to build character through these initiatives Mr. Greene felt that what was ultimately missing in the Department of Education was true mentorship. He recalled his experience with a mentor as a young teacher and how invaluable it was for him. In comparison in this school, where teachers were asked to do more, Mr. Greene felt that teachers needed the support of their peers and the opportunity to observe other teachers that were implementing the initiatives well. He pointed out that successful Crews weren’t all run exactly the same. Teacher personality was important to value but still teachers should formally be allowed to observe and learn from one another in settings such as weekly professional development meetings. He recalled that when he started at the school, he went on a mini-version of Adventure Week prior to the school opening. He also remembered that the school used to devote professional development days to some of the character initiatives such as the conferences and Crew. He felt the loss of these type of opportunities for teachers hurt the school’s effectiveness/morale because not only was it a time for teachers to learn the initiatives but also a time to build community as well.

In closing the last interview, Mr. Greene said that he felt the school should acknowledge the invisible children of our school. He felt that we spent too much time on the students that
weren’t doing well and not enough time on the students that were quietly persevering and pushing through. At this point he talked about giving out t-shirts for the high flyers in gym. He noted it isn’t easy to get that t-shirt but he mused: “You’ll be surprised to see the students that get the shirts. We need to acknowledge them.”

**Summary**

Looking over the three interviews, it is important to note that the most referenced initiative was Crew. Mr. Greene made mention of Crew 26 times over the course of the conversation. Adventure Week and Student Led Conference came in second with 16 mentions each and were also tied to his idea of students being taken out of their comfort zone. He also felt that those initiatives along with Senior Expedition added value to students academically but he expressed that in terms of life after high school. Community Meeting came in third with 12 references. Mr. Greene believed these initiatives were effective because they required that students focus on a deadline and use academic skills like research, writing and discussion of important issues. All of the other initiatives did not get mentioned much beyond the questions specific to them. And although Mr. Greene felt all of the commitments were of equal importance, he spoke most about respect. He mentioned the word respect 35 times over the course of the interviews. Courage was mentioned 19 times with compassion being mentioned 16 times. Perseverance and stewardship were both mentioned 8 times by Mr. Greene.

Mr. Greene also believed that the school’s leadership, as well as that of the New York Department of Education, had not provided much support for teachers in developing the commitments with students. In his opinion, the new leadership continued with certain initiatives because they already existed but either did not understand the importance of the commitments or
just expected them to run smoothly. He felt that budgetary constraints also limited the full
development of some of the initiatives as the cut back of some of the professional development
days prior to school opening could be traced to the reduction of funds. Early on in the school’s
tenure, staff would be invited to school at the end of August to plan before the school year began.
This is no longer a practice. This, in addition to the lack of family support for developing
character and the infiltration of gangs, were the greatest obstacles to character development
among the students in the school.

**Case Study 2: Ms. White**

Ms. White is a passionate person. She has been very active in the teacher’s union and has
been the union representative for the last year and a half. She was the Faculty Advisor for the
Student Activism club. She is a fighter. She hates the establishment and the status quo. She is
firmly against anything she believes to be a racist or sexist practice; she is unafraid to speak her
mind and to stand up for what she believes in. This often puts her at odds with the
administration. She teaches a highly rigorous class and although students complain they seem to
be always prepared and fully engaged. She has grown over the years as a teacher, and loves
working with and for the students. In staff meetings she asks lots of questions of the
administration and school policy. This quality makes her a good union representative as she isn’t
afraid to speak up to administration, but it also makes her seem aggressive in some situations.
She has actively sought to build community among staff but has a clearly delineated line
between faculty and administration that causes tension at times. She is quick to point out that
there is no “community” at our school. I have worked closely with Ms. White when she was
testing coordinator, and she was careful and detailed in that role. She dedicated hours after
school ensuring that everything was complete and well planned. I appreciated her attention to
detail in that role.

**On Becoming a Teacher**

Ms. White had been a teacher for the past six years. Initially, she didn’t want to be a
teacher. She was positive of that fact but she wasn’t sure what she wanted to do. She worked at
an after-school program and realized she loved mentoring, working with young people and
explaining things to them. It was after working there for a while and coming to the realization
that she enjoyed the work that she decided to go back to school and become a teacher. She spent
her first year at a vocational high school in Brooklyn as a long term substitute. This school was a
transformation school, a euphemism for a school that had been deemed failing. To fix this
problem, she says the New York City Department of Education threw lots of money at the school
but also constantly scrutinized the school. Teachers had access to lots of overtime but in
exchange there were two school quality reviews in one year. She felt that many of the student
and teachers had given up because they felt the school was on the brink of closing. But there
also were lots of teachers that cared deeply about the school and the students and who worked
tirelessly to turn the school around. However, the administration wasn’t supportive and the idea
that the school was closing prevailed most of the time and resulted in a less than positive
environment.

Regarding character development, the school that Ms. White had taught in as a whole
was not intentional about it. She felt that the strong emphasis on sports allowed the athletes to
have an avenue for character development. There was also a Community Based Organization
(CBO) that offered support and a place for students that were not athletes to be and that offered
those students a potential space to build their character. But as she tells the story of one student that used the CBO and for whom she saw positive changes of behavior, it was almost as if he accidentally became involved with them because teachers were “figuring out” he needed services and referred him to the CBO. Other than sports and the CBO, Ms. White, couldn’t really identify intentional efforts at character education.

After her first year of teaching as a long term substitute, Ms. White joined the New York City Teaching Fellows. Through a friend, she had been on an interview at a school and she felt that that job was a “go.” However, the principal of Expeditionary Learning High School reached out to Ms. White because he had received her resume through the Teaching Fellows program. Ms. White, interviewed and had to do a demo lesson. This is what sealed the deal for her: she was impressed that the school actually wanted to see her interact with students and was disappointed that the other school had not requested a demo lesson. So she’s been with Expeditionary Learning for the past 6 years. She believes that content knowledge in the sciences, history, math and literature is unbelievably important in schools, but things like socialization and collaboration are equally important for schools to deliberately focus on in teaching. Her goal is for her students to understand science content in a really deep way but she would much prefer them to additionally learn to be analytical and critical of their world and to value the collaboration and compassion that’s necessary for true research. She believes that character development in schools is the most important thing we (educators) can try and get right.

**Most Effective Initiatives**

Throughout the interview Ms. White stressed that “it” had to be more than talk. The “it” meant several things but most importantly it meant character development, and in her opinion,
character development thrived in places in our school when it wasn’t only given “lip service” to.

So, Ms. White believed that Adventure Week, Crew Olympics and Crew were the most important spaces in which character development lived in the school. It was here in these initiatives that students not only learned about the Five Commitments but were forced to practice them.

I do think that that [Adventure Week] is one of the best immersions in the Five Commitments … I’m sort of tempted to say Crew Olympics cause really that idea and in a way it actually Crew Olympics is sort of revisiting Adventure Week a little bit. In that whole like you can’t succeed on your own but I think Crew because being used in the right way and being given the space to build in as much … it’s the group of people that each student sees every single day for all four years. It’s the only thing that’s consistent all the way through so there is the ability to have that art of development and deeper understanding of what the commitments are, why they matter and how they apply to your life, how you can sort of improve on them…

I really think that actually as silly as it might sound right like everyone has a basic understanding of what respect is sort of although maybe not everyone understands it. That respect sometimes it’s not just because you get it that you give it no matter what you know students have a general understanding of courage and I of course do too, but I think that having spent four years really having that be part of my like daily thinking I’ve definitely increased and sort of changed like my own understanding of what some of them mean especially stewardship because no one knows what that means in the beginning.
She believed that Adventure Week increases student understanding of the Five Commitments “110%.” She branded it as the most important thing we do and was a strong proponent of having it in multiple years for the students that do not get to go for whatever reason, as well as for students to be reminded of their potential. Adventure Week took students and teachers out of their element. It was uncomfortable. No cell phones, sleeping outdoors etc. And the only way to get a little bit of comfort was for all students to collaborate and persevere together. The only way, for example, for students to accomplish the ropes course, or to cook and clean, was for everyone to collaborate. She specified that Adventure Week helped students develop courage.

Ms. White hesitantly mentioned Crew Olympics as most effective initiative because it was almost like a revisiting of Adventure Week in that students were called upon to exhibit the Five Commitments in the same way. She “jokingly” mentioned that she as a teacher struggled with Crew Olympics because of her competitive nature. She said that she had already begun speaking to her Crew about Crew Olympics, even though it happened towards the end of the year. She promised them that she would be less competitive but also that winning Crew Olympics wasn’t only about succeeding at the tasks but also about exhibiting commitment to the Five Commitments as a team. (Let it be noted that at the time of writing her Crew had won the ninth grade Crew Olympics and had advanced to the Semi-Finals with the highest score in the whole school.) She highlighted respect and perseverance in speaking of Crew Olympics.

But her real answer to the question about the most effective initiative was Crew itself. As a Crew advisor she peppered her language with the Five Commitments. She did this not only because they are the school’s commitments but because she felt as if they really are good words to focus on. She felt that students know what respect and courage are and she does too, but
spending four years with a group of students focusing on those things together in both good as well as difficult times increased everyone’s understanding of the commitments including hers. This was Ms. White’s second Crew; her first Crew graduated last school year.

**General Perspective on the Other Commitments**

Student Led Conferences (SLCs) generated lots of courage and perseverance, according to Ms. White. She believed the conversations that students were forced to have make them think critically about their grades so that students had to talk about how they plan to improve if their grade wasn’t where it is supposed to be or even if it was, students spoke to the commitments it took to get the grades they got. Through constant discussion about commitments and their role in achieving strong grades, the SLCs promoted the ability of students to analyze their work. Ms. White definitely felt that it becomes easier for students to pinpoint how the commitments affect their grades as they get older.

She believed that the HOWL Rubrics (Habits of Work and Learning) cause students to focus on the Commitments in their academic classes. Students and staff created this rubric to assess student daily ability to exhibit the Five Commitment in academic classes. It made explicit what respect, for example, looks like in a classroom. Some teachers then asked students to rate themselves on the rubric at the end of class. However, Ms. White didn’t use them in her class or at least not the way she felt it should be used or in the way in which she’d seen it used effectively in other classes. She noted that the former principal requested that the rubrics be used but she just never got the knack of using them well. So although the new administration also asked teachers to use the rubric and although the school is moving more in the direction of assessment through the HOWL rubric, Ms. White wasn’t there yet. She spent most of her early years at the school trying to figure out how to teach Science so she found the rubric hard to implement.
Least Effective Initiatives

Ms. White found it harder to pin down what she thought the least effective initiatives were. When pressed, she said that the Community Meetings and the College March weren’t very effective in developing the Five Commitments. When she first arrived at the school she was amazed by the Community Meetings and how well run they were. She quickly realized they weren’t what she called “the run of the mill assemblies.” Rather, it was a gathering of 300 students plus all the staff in one place to not only celebrate the display of commitments by students but also the place where students and staff actively demonstrated the commitments. It was where stewardship as the umbrella commitment was most demonstrated. She felt then as if everyone strove to protect our space by demonstrating respect, courage and compassion through listening to speeches or performances. But now with new administration there had been a change and Community Meeting had become a “crazy assembly.” There was still courage displayed by the Crew that ran it, but not a general display of community by all of the constituents.

In the same way, Ms. White felt that College March was great for the students that participated but not necessarily for the underclassmen. College March was a tradition adopted by all Expeditionary Learning Schools about four years ago. On this day in December all seniors from across the network “march” to mail their college applications. All of the students bear witness to this rite of passage and cheer the seniors on. Local politicians and business people also participate. Local news outlets also report on the day. It is a great public relation event. At the Expeditionary Learning school, the “march” component was downplayed as students march to a mail truck outside the building instead of to the post office. And they were cheered on by a New York City Outward Bound middle school and a select group of
underclassmen and then there was a pep rally witnessed by the entire student body. Ms. White felt that for the seniors, the buildup and the process to the march had the potential to be character building. But for students in the other grades, she was not sure that it developed character because either they weren’t participating or many younger students don’t know or understand the process and there wasn’t much conversation about the event/process before the day it happened.

Also, Ms. White felt that she had heard many of the students question why this or that senior is allowed to march when perhaps they weren’t graduating. She felt that the school needed to do a better job explicitly linking the commitments to the march for it to be more effective.

**Academic Value**

When asked about how the initiatives added to students academically, she initially focused on the school’s move to standards based grading and how habits of work were essential to students’ academic growth. She gave the example of students needing to do homework for grades but for practice, which in turn prepared them for their PBATs. She believed that that is how the Student Led conferences came in to play as a nice intersection of the end product and the habits of work it took to get there. She said it was the teacher’s job to reiterate this in the classroom because Student Led Conferences only happen two or three times a year. She then talked about Adventure Week being an “awesome reference point” for a teacher. For example, she said was able to encourage a student to push through a problem in an academic setting who she saw persevere through an obstacle course. Ms. White thought the HOWL Rubric was also excellent for use in academic classes but admitted she never got the knack of using it. She proclaimed that Senior Expedition and the College March were the “holy grail” of where the initiatives boosted academics because they were finish line initiatives.
Additional Factors Inhibiting Character Development

According to Ms. White, the biggest factors that schools have to fight in the quest to develop character were racism and sexism in the world. In a world where students of color were constantly being disrespected and told they weren’t worth much, she questioned how a school can counter this constant negative barrage. “We’re only one part of students’ lives”, Ms. White, stated, “so although we are trying to tell a different story- the world, media and society at large is telling a story that is negative. Ms. White believed that racism and sexism, are rooted in the 300-400-year history of our society, but that we must still teach young people that there was hope for change. Instead of fighting each other they must fight against the system.

Leadership

When asked about the shift in leadership, Ms. White was surprised that she had not really mentioned that at all even though she had such strong feelings about it. She felt that the current administration paid lip service to the character development initiatives at our school. She believed they “focus” on it because it was the right thing to do but if they really felt that it was important then they would pay more attention to it. She reported that students felt disrespected by the leadership, and she questioned how was it possible for students to give respect to someone like those in the administration when they felt the administration never showed students any respect. She thought that this was just the growing pains of the upper classmen as they transitioned from one principal to another. But she reported hearing underclassmen stating that they too feel disrespected. She asked, “If you really felt that this is good for kids, then why just pay lip service to it?”
On Teacher Preparation

As Ms. White thought about teacher preparation for the implementation of the initiatives, she initially thought of Adventure Week and how prepared she felt for it because she had gone on a teacher orientation. Having to wear what she called “the student hat” made her more empathetic towards her students. But then she reflected back on the HOWL rubric. She took the blame for not implementing the rubric with fidelity because the past administration would say that teachers should take the first two weeks of the school year and talk about how the HOWL Rubric related to the Five Commitments in academic classes. However, she didn’t do that, so using the Howl Rubric never became a habit in her classes. But she didn’t feel that new teachers were even given that minimum guidance on using the HOWL rubric to connect the Five Commitments to academics so that at least they had the option to use or ignore it.

Ms. White also thought that because a large portion of the staff were new to the school and they hadn’t had much guidance in working with different initiatives like Crew, Community Meetings, and Student Led Conferences that this had created problems with logistics and implementation. Teachers were left to figure it out on their own and weren’t even told the rationale or importance of the initiatives. For example, Ms. White pointed out that if teachers were given specific roles in Community Meetings then the meetings would run more smoothly. Teacher preparedness for the initiatives depended on how much guidance and support teachers received for implementing the initiatives and the turnover in staff had played a large role in the loss of continuity of certain initiatives.

Most Significant Commitment

Ms. White felt that the answer to her question is “a cheat.” Stewardship was the most important commitment for our school at this time. She was cheating because she actually
thought all of the commitments were important but that all fall under the commitment of stewardship. It’s the commitment that she felt was the hardest to understand, claiming it took her three years to get it. It’s the environmental commitment introduced as “leave no trace” but that encompassed so much more. Leave No Trace is a term crucial in Outward Bound, especially when students and staff participated in wilderness courses. However, Ms. White felt stewardship was about maintaining our community and culture especially in times of change, growth and diminishing space. (In addition to Expeditionary Learning School the building houses was co-located with two other high schools and an elementary charter school, the latter of which was growing and taking space from the three existing high schools.) The initiative in which she mentioned stewardship the most was Senior Expedition. Senior Expedition is an action research paper that twelfth graders worked on in their last semester at the school. They identify a problem in their community, use both qualitative and quantitative method of research, create an action plan and in few cases implement the action plan. They then exhibit their expeditions for the school community. Ms. White cited stewardship here because students in the creation/implementation of their action plans are helping to positively affect change in their community.

**Summary**

Ms. White believed the initiatives and the school’s focus on the Five Commitments specifically added value to the academics taught in classes. The initiatives provided reference points where she as a teacher can push students out of their comfort zones, especially if she had experienced their success on Adventure Week, a time for example when students have been out of their comfort zones. She used the experiences during Adventure Week in class to remind students of what they were capable of and help them transfer the skills to the classroom. Ms.
White also seemed torn between thinking about teacher responsibility and administrator responsibility when it came to character development. In classrooms, and in Crew she mentioned teachers having to use the initiatives and/or to reference the Five Commitments. However, she didn’t feel that teachers are properly guided on ways in which they could incorporate the Five Commitments into the academic classes (the HOWL Rubric, for example) or in Crew, particularly the teachers new to the profession. She felt that follow through was an important problem in the school at large though. There were new initiatives being mentioned or implemented such as Restorative Justice but not much follow through on how teachers were to use these initiatives. Ms. White also said that teachers feel that there was no disciplinary follow through by the administration. In ending the interview, Ms. White said that character development was the most important thing we can try to get right.”

Over the course of the interviews, Ms. White referenced Crew 23 times, the initiative that she believed was most effective in promoting character development. Community Meeting was mentioned 13 times. Most of the other initiatives were not mentioned as often. Student Led Conferences were mentioned 9 times with Adventure Week 9 and Senior Expedition being mentioned 9 times.

Interestingly enough, respect was mentioned 23 times in the interview. Courage came in second with 21 mentions. Perseverance was mentioned 14 times with stewardship garnering 13 mentions. Compassion was mentioned 9 times.

**Case Study 3: Ms. Gray**

Two years ago, when the school decided to add a faculty speaker to its graduation ceremony, the students voted almost unanimously for Ms. Gray to be the first faculty speaker.
She is very popular among the students and is actively engaged with the planning of student activities. She is a hard worker. She is blunt and serious in her classroom but has a good rapport with her students. She is a great teacher but tells her students and administration that she is leaving teaching and the school. Every year. Her classroom is her domain, she hates interruptions when she is teaching and she gets results. She had a very hard time with the transition of administration. Last year was very hard for her as she constantly butted heads with the new principal. Much of it was not in reference to her teaching but rather regarding her planning of student activities. She is very carefree and last minute and the new principal is the total opposite. This year has been better. She constantly laments the skill level of the kids, her inability to continue to teach, the state of education etc. But with all of that, she is champion for the students and they know this. I have had a good working relationship with Ms. Gray. We have collaborated a lot over the years.

**On Becoming a Teacher**

Ms. Gray, always wanted to become a teacher. But she was from a family of nurses therefore nursing was the career she entered college to study. After a year in a nursing program, she came home crying to her mother, who finally gave in permitting her to study education with the warning that she didn’t have the required patience to become a teacher. Ms. Gray had taught in three schools over the course of her thirteen-year teaching career. She began at a Catholic middle school then moved to a large comprehensive high school before coming to Expeditionary Learning School where she has been for the past seven years.

Ms. Gray liked her first job at the Catholic school but felt that the community was very segregated so she was uncomfortable. It was a middle school with very few discipline problems. Parents were actively engaged. After three years of teaching she moved into the Department of
Education. She was afraid, but felt that it was there that she found her teacher identity. She learned not to be afraid of kids and to work with and for them. Although she liked her school, she was in danger of being excessed because of her lack of seniority. She wanted a more stable position and met the then principal of Expeditionary Learning at a job fair. She did a demo lesson and an interview and felt as if she spent almost a full day at the school. She felt welcomed by staff and students and then decided to teach at the school because she liked the vibe.

At the Catholic school where she began her career, character education was under the umbrella of religion. Students went to the church across the street for confession, a priest visited campus regularly and in Health class they were taught abstinence. At the public high school there was a community based organization that ran a program similar to “Scared Straight.” Students that were “at risk” or under credited took a class, where formerly incarcerated people would often be guest speakers. Ms. Gray did not feel the class was taken seriously by the kids and only focused on a small population of students. Since working at the Expeditionary Learning School Ms. Gray believed that it is indeed the school’s duty to teach character. This belief was strengthened as she sees the commitment to character development waning. She pointed to Crew, though difficult for her, as a microcosm where her students felt safe. She said Crew was currently her least favorite part of the day because she had a tenth grade Crew that is going through the sophomore slump. But Crew still allowed the students a place to decompress and to check in and check up with each other.

**Most Effective Initiatives**

Definitely when they’re in smaller groups. I feel like they’re able to do or display the Five Commitments. So Adventure Week is number one. They’re out of their element,
they’re out of their safety zone and so they kind of have to depend on each other and also people they don’t know. And it’s hard, and the people what I realize who always are like leaders in Brooklyn and in the classroom they’re the ones who don’t fare so well out in the wilderness of the Catskills. And so they have to kind of depend on other people and maybe people that they hadn’t necessarily been nice to or acknowledged before and those people have to show them compassion…they have been able to form relationships and have respect for each other that they didn’t necessarily have beforehand.

Ms. Gray believed that students exhibit the Five Commitments best when they were in small groups. She chose Adventure Week as the initiative where students were out of their “safety zone” and had to depend on one another. This made it one of the most effective initiatives for developing the Five Commitments. It is an opportunity for them to develop leadership skills, as the student who was/is a leader at home usually doesn’t fair as well in a different environ. Adventure Week allowed other students who might not have been acknowledged as leaders before to step up and show compassion to their peers. Ms. Gray went with her first Crew on Adventure Week but then did not feel mentally or physically prepared to go with the second Crew. She felt that Adventure Week was rough but allowed the Crew to show compassion to one another because of the highs and lows. Ms. Gray said they were all so out of their comfort zone that they needed each other to make it through the week.

Interestingly enough, Ms. Gray then picked community meeting as the second most effective initiative for character building. Community meeting is the exact opposite of the small group setting that she had picked out before that allowed students to develop character. It must be also noted that Ms. Gray was referring to the community meetings prior to the change in administration. She was always sure to separate “community meetings of old” with current
meetings. She enjoyed these meetings because the Five Commitments were on display and acknowledged in the whole community. Through performances, speeches and awards, she felt that community was built and along with said community- character was also developed in our students.

**Most Significant Commitment**

Ms. Gray chose perseverance as the most important commitment. She believed that her students get off put too easily by the slightest inconvenience. It’s either that they reacted really badly to situations or ignore them altogether. For the adults in the building, she felt as if compassion was lacking. The root of this was the fact that people were overwhelmed and their ability to be compassionate suffered because of it.

Although this question was not asked, Ms. Gray did point out that the commitment that she never used is stewardship. Not because she thought it was unimportant but rather because she didn’t really understand it beyond the aspect of cleaning up after oneself. She said she generally just straightened up her own room when one class leaves because there was usually another class entering.

**General Perspective on the Other Initiatives**

Ms. Gray has had two Crews. After her first Crew graduated, she requested to not have a Crew. She felt the relationship was intense and felt that she needed to focus more on her academic classes as well as her new role with student activities. This request was honored for a year. Then due to an increased number of freshman entering the school last year, there was a need for more Crew teachers. Ms. Gray was asked to take a Crew and they are currently tenth graders. Ms. Gray felt that Crew as an initiative to develop character depended on both the Crew- the students themselves- and the teacher’s commitment to talking about the Five
Commitments. In her original Crew class, she said that there were “mother hens” students who had a natural penchant for compassion, or students that were naturally respectful so they helped all other students develop because they exhibited the commitments. She says in this Crew she tried to bring up the Commitments once a week and was usually greeted with an “eye roll.” She thought though that that’s just general teenage angst. She knows though, that her students know the commitments and she asked them to identify them when they were being displayed or when a student wasn’t displaying it and she needed to push them in that direction.

**Least Effective Initiative**

Ms. Gray only could point to one initiative that she felt was the least effective at developing student character. And surprisingly enough, it was the same one she listed as being most effective - community meeting. The difference was in the meetings held in the last two years. In the last two years, the school had seen the loss of several staff members, one of whom would plan and execute the community meetings. Since his leaving, the meetings had changed hands several times. Additionally, this year, because of spacing and scheduling changes, it was much more difficult to hold whole-school community meetings. These factors had led to less community meetings. The infrequency of the community meetings and inconsistency of leadership (of the community meetings) had made the tone of the meetings more information giving than community building. Ms. Gray felt that this initiative was ineffective and that students are often more disrespectful than respectful at these meetings. At this point she said that she dreads community meeting time. She could think of no other initiative that fit into the category of least effective.
**Academic Value**

The question of whether the initiatives added value to students academically seemed to stump Ms. Gray. She said she didn’t know if it was because of the hard time she was currently having with the seniors but she felt she might be in a box and could not see out. But she mentioned that during Crew Olympics, students came to school and she believed that students absolutely learned more when they were in school than out. So Crew Olympics boosted attendance. She also pointed to the constant academic advising that happened in her Crew. She felt that that was aimed at helping students know and take charge of their academic standing but she was unsure if it always helped. Ms. Gray felt as if she needed to think about this question more.

**Additional Factors Inhibiting Character Development**

These two sections are combined for Ms. Gray because the greatest factor Ms. Gray believed was affecting the character development initiatives in a negative way was the change in leadership. She felt that there was no fidelity to the initiatives but rather just an obligation to continue with them because they already existed. She likened it to a teacher being asked to teach someone else’s lesson plan. She thought there was no buy-in from staff around the Five Commitments so there could be no buy-in from students about the five commitments.

“Character development starts with leadership”, Ms. Gray emphatically said. Throughout the interviews she compared the new and old principal. She believed the new principal in time might be a better principal but for now was trying too hard to fill the unfillable shoes of the old principal. She wondered though, what would be better: Should the current principal abandon the initiatives altogether or just keep working with them although they were now implemented
poorly? She didn’t feel that the new principal was able to deliver the story behind the initiatives in the same way the old one was.

On Teacher Preparation

Ms. Gray felt that in her early years at Expeditionary Learning School she was well prepared to tackle the Five Commitments, Crew, Adventure Week and the other initiatives. Now, she did not feel that the new teachers were adequately prepared. There were too many other things taking precedence and the people whose job it was to prepare the new teachers were spread too thin. She said that by the time you get an email announcing an initiative, the initiative was to be incorporated into teaching the next day and teachers don’t have any time to process or prepare for it. She was sure that the new students did not know the Five Commitments well and hadn’t drunk the commitment “kool-aid” because new teachers don’t know the commitments and hadn’t been offered the commitment “kool-aid.”

Summary

Ms. Gray spoke most of two initiatives: Crew and community meetings. She mentioned both 29 times throughout the course of the interviews. All other initiatives were basically limited to the questions asked about them but talk of Crew and community meetings flowed throughout. She could not speak much to how the initiatives boosted academics besides pointing to the increased student attendance during Crew Olympics and the transcript reviews she did in Crew. Regarding the commitments, she mentioned respect 19 times in the course of the three interviews. Perseverance and compassion were mentioned 12 times and highlighted as the commitments most needed in the school for students and staff respectively. Courage and stewardship are mentioned a total of two times each. Her parting words for me were that
“Character Development starts with leadership.” She did not feel that the current leadership is invested in the Five Commitments or the character development initiatives of the school.

**Cross Case Analysis**

All three teachers from Expeditionary Learning School agreed that it was the school’s responsibility to teach character. In conversation with them though, this responsibility came up in several ways: teacher responsibility, administration responsibility and initiatives. Ms. White reflected and emphasized that the teaching of character was the most important thing that a school could get right. None of the teachers in their past public school experience could describe school-wide character development initiatives. They talked about individual classes and community based organizations. Mr. Greene talked about what he had done/and continued to do in his class to build character. Ms. White and Ms. Gray mentioned organizations that had targeted audiences or referred students.

**Teacher Responsibility**

Each teacher mentioned that they felt that it was necessary to highlight the Five Commitments throughout the day, in their classes and or during the varied initiatives. Mr. Greene said “just hitting on the Five Commitments keeps them on point.” Ms. White used the term “pepper my language” with the Five Commitments and Ms. Gray spoke of the teachers’ “commitment to talking about the Five Commitments.” Throughout all of the interviews, in discussing initiatives that were deemed effective and also less effective, they mentioned the teacher’s responsibility in making connections, referring explicitly to and highlighting the Five Commitments for students. For example, each teacher referred to teachers who they had witnessed effectively using the HOWL rubric in an academic class, yet none of them used it well or at all in their classes. Ms. White explained that she had been given explicit instructions on
how to introduce the rubric but still had not done so. However, she did not feel that new teachers were given any guidance on the use of the rubric.

All three teachers raised the fact that the new staff had not been or were not being told to explicitly highlight the commitments or had not been put into positions where they could “wear the student cap.” So for new teachers trying to get their footing in the classroom, it was difficult to concentrate on emphasizing the Five Commitments. The participants believed that for new teachers, their language around the five Commitments was either not as strong or just lip service at its worst. The participating teachers also mentioned that the departure of other teachers who ran specific initiatives caused the initiatives to change. And although other teachers had taken on the tasks or been assigned the task, there was still a marked difference in implementation and effectiveness.

**Administrative Responsibility**

All three teachers mentioned that the change in administration did seem to affect the implementation of initiatives. They mentioned not knowing or being able to tell whether the current administration truly valued the initiatives or was just continuing with them because they had already existed. They also felt that the current administration did not prepare teachers well to implement said initiatives. Two of the three explicitly mentioned the use of emails in communications. Mr. Greene said that in a school where teachers are asked to do much more, it took much more than an email and mentioned sit down conversations. Ms. Gray alluded to the fact that by the time you got an email explaining an initiative, it was rolling out the next day. Ms. White did not mention emails but instead talked about logistics. She felt that teachers were not clearly assigned tasks and roles during specific initiatives and that affected the initiatives themselves. Ms. White also mentioned that students did not feel that the administration
displayed the Five Commitments toward them. Therefore, it was difficult to tell students to give respect if they weren’t feeling respected. Mr. Greene on the other hand said that he made a point to tell his Crew students that they must respect a person’s position and title even if they disagreed with their actions.

Ms. Gray did not know if it would be better for the administration to scrap initiatives totally instead of implementing them poorly. She emphasized that character education had to come from the top and gave several analogies to express this point. She felt that the old administration talked about, explained and exhibited the commitments so that staff “drank the Five Commitment “kool-aid” and in turn talked about, explained and exhibited the Five Commitments.

The Initiatives

All three teachers rated Adventure Week as one of the most important initiatives for developing character at Expeditionary Learning School. Adventure Week is one of the first initiatives that students are introduced to at Expeditionary Learning School, with the exception of Crew itself. Students camp out in the wilderness for five days and participate in various challenges and adventure experiences. The teachers mentioned that it takes both the teachers and the students totally out of their comfort zones. All three teachers mentioned Adventure Week as having been difficult for them and Ms. Gray elected to not go on Adventure Week with her second Crew because she did not feel prepared. However, they all stated that Adventure Week pushed students to step into leadership, to collaborate, to be compassionate, to persevere, to practice stewardship and respect, and to be courageous. Two teachers mentioned that role reversals commonly occurred during the week as students who were tough in Brooklyn were not generally the tough student during Adventure Week.
Ms. Gray mentioned that not only did Adventure Week allow students to develop the Five Commitments but also allowed them to more easily exhibit the Commitments in a small group and out of their element. All teachers talked about as a strong point their and their students’ abilities to refer back to Adventure Week. The teachers saw Adventure Week as a shaping experience and Ms. White was a proponent of it occurring at least one other time to include the students that do not get to go the first time. Mr. Greene also mentioned that students that did not go were left out of the experience and that was unfortunate. Ms. White also mentioned that she referred to Adventure Week and the perseverance needed in her academic class as a way to motivate students.

Both Mr. Greene and Ms. White discussed Crew as another initiative that developed character effectively. But all teachers noted that this was a much more slow going initiative, as it lasted for the full four years of high school. Because students and teachers see each other daily during Crew, it made it harder at times to see student development but the teachers knew that the bond was crucial in building character. Ms. Gray noted that students, even when seemingly disrespectful to each other, always came to the defense of or the aid of a crew member. They all acknowledged that Crews were run differently based on the personalities of the Crew Advisor and the students themselves. All three teachers had had one Crew that graduated and during the 2015-2016 school year had their second Crew class.

Ms. White added Crew Olympics as an effective initiative because it melded the strengths of both Crew and Adventure Week. Crew Olympics happen in the Spring of every year. Students face various challenges and are judged not only on winning/completing the challenge but are also rated on their display of the Commitments. This display of the Commitments is not only judged during the competition but students are observed throughout the school day and
points are added or deducted based on the Five Commitments. Although all three teachers joked about the competitiveness of Crew Olympics among the teachers and students, they also acknowledged the community building aspect of Crew Olympics. The winning Crew represents the school at a network wide competition against other New York City Outward Bound Schools.

Ms. Gray mentioned community meetings as one of the most effective initiatives at building character. She believed that it was a place where the Five Commitments are on display and students and teachers looked forward to coming together. All teachers acknowledged a difference between community meetings under the leadership of a dedicated staff member that no longer worked at the school and more recent community meetings.

**Least Effective Initiatives**

It was very difficult for the teachers to name two initiatives that were the least effective and there was very little consensus. Two teachers mentioned community meetings as not being effective in building the Five Commitments because only the specific Crew running the meeting or students participating in the meetings had to display courage or the other commitments. For the same reasons, one teacher mentioned the College March as being ineffective.

**Most Important Commitment**

This question stumped the interviewees. Both Mr. Greene and Ms. White said they were all of equal importance. But Mr. Greene said he struggled with compassion the most. Concurrently Ms. Gray felt that the adults in the building needed compassion especially under the new administration at this time and that the students needed to focus on perseverance. Ms. White felt that Stewardship covered all of the Five Commitments and therefore it was the most important commitment for the school at this time in its history.
Obstacles to Character Development

Two of three teachers looked outside of the school when asked what were the greatest obstacles to character development. They discussed lack of parenting and the gang culture as well as racism and sexism. However, the three teachers did have a lot to say about the new leadership, both in terms of administration as well as leadership of the initiatives themselves. The teachers saw the loss of many of the teachers/staff who were connected to the initiatives as an internal obstacle, one that they believed negatively impacted character development.

Summary

Each of these teachers have been at Expeditionary Learning School for at least five years. They all have had some experience with another public school and were able to reflect on the course of their professional lives. They came to Expeditionary School out of necessity, not particularly because they were seeking out an Outward Bound School or an Expeditionary Learning School. However, they all agreed that character development should be explicitly taught in schools. And they all agreed that Adventure Week was an important initiative that explicitly developed the character of students. But Crew was the initiative that all three teachers talked about the most. This might be because of its duration and that most of the other initiatives are tied to or incorporate Crew.

Choosing a hierarchy of commitments was difficult for these teachers, but compassion was chosen by two of the three as being very important, particularly for the staff. However, the commitment that they all mentioned the most was respect. Not only did these teachers feel that character development in schools was important, they all acknowledged the teachers’ role in developing the character of students. In this case it was about developing a culture of language around the Five Commitments and using them as reference points for students. But they also all
acknowledged that leadership, and teacher preparation were important in implementing the initiatives and in their ultimate effectiveness. They believed that the administrations expected the initiatives to run well with little guidance and support for their implementation.
Chapter V

Findings and Implications

“My teachers were on a mission” (Bell Hooks p. 2)

This study focused on teacher perceptions of the character education initiatives at an Expeditionary Learning School. In this paper, I reviewed the definitions and history of character education and the value of looking at teacher beliefs as a conceptual framework. I then asked three teachers to give their opinions about specific initiatives designed to develop the character of students at the school. For the purposes of the study, character was defined by The Five Commitments of the school: Courage, Compassion, Respect, Stewardship, and Perseverance.

Research Question 1: Findings and Implications

According to teachers, which initiatives and programs at Expeditionary Learning School foster the most and least amount of character development?

In answer to the first question about the most and least effective school initiatives in increasing student understanding of the Five Commitments and fostering character development, all of the teachers believed that Adventure Week developed student leadership and fostered a sense of community, as students had to work together in small groups. They also mentioned Crew, with the idea that teachers had four years to build relationships with students and see the development of their students in all aspects, including character development. The least effective initiatives were those the teachers believed only involved a few students, like Community Meetings and College March, the latter of which only affected the senior class, rather than the entire school.
It is interesting to note that although the respondents struggled with identifying the initiatives that had the least effect, there were initiatives that they hardly spoke of during the interviews at all. The initiatives that these teachers identified as being the most effective were mainly the initiatives that they mentioned throughout all of the conversations. We had to refer to the list of initiatives repeatedly in order for the teachers to pick which was most or least effective. Although I cannot be sure if these teachers took the 2014-2015 school survey or what their answers were, it does make me think of the 21% of teachers that strongly agreed and the 43% of teachers that agreed with the statement that the school has so many different programs that it is hard to keep track of them. The teachers who participated in the study reported not feeling as if they had enough time to prepare for the next initiative because by the time the email communication arrived, they felt as if the initiative already was happening.

In a school that has so many initiatives there were some underlying implications that come from these teachers regarding the most and least effective initiatives regarding character development. The participating teachers believed that the most effective initiatives do the following: build relationships and take students out of their comfort zone. According to the teachers, Crew does both as it allows deep relationships to be formed peer to peer as well as teacher to student. Teachers are also able to build strong relationships with parents as well. The respondents believed that Crew provides the foundation for many of the other initiatives. At the same time, the teachers believed that Crew needed to be better supported and that teachers should observe each other’s Crews to glean best practices. However, they also stressed that Crew relationships and performance were based on teacher personality. Overall, then, the findings suggest that the school needs to capitalize on the teachers’ beliefs that Crew is important to
character development and provide more opportunities for teachers to work together, pair up and or shadow one another around maintaining the effectiveness of Crew.

Adventure Week happens very early in the life of a student at the school but it is a pivotal experience, according to the teachers I interviewed. They believed that it takes students out of their environment and places them in a situation where they are totally dependent on one another. This experience helps solidify the Crew relationship. The teachers believed that there needs to be more experiences like this so that students that are unable to go on the first trip would not feel alienated while also giving all students the opportunity to shore up the established relationships. Urban Expedition is another potential trip that could fill this gap; unfortunately, it is a new trip that had not been fully experienced by these teachers. So even though the verdict is still out, the teachers believed in general that students need these trips to help develop the Five Commitments. They also believed that these trips serve as a reference point for students in classrooms and in situations outside of the school and after high school. Again, these findings highlight that the school should do all in its power to ensure that all students participate in these trips and/or offer other trips that can offer similar benefits.

Community Meetings and College March were mentioned as the least effective initiatives. Both of these initiatives are school wide initiatives that the teachers believed could be made better if more students were involved. They definitely made a distinction between Community Meetings of old and the ones now. Some of the differences between the meetings held now and the ones before had to do with frequency and leadership of the initiative. The teachers believed that the lack of frequency of the meetings undermined their effectiveness. In the past, one non-teaching faculty member was fully in charge of the production of the meetings and although all the students were not involved in the production, students displayed the Five
Commitments throughout. One teacher suggested that all teachers be given roles so that there was more teacher buy-in throughout the meeting. In reference to the College March, the teachers felt that the younger students needed to understand what the march was about well before the march occurred so that students would be more invested and look forward to the march. The teachers believed that student buy-in was not fostered enough for the march to be successful for all.

The implications about the least effective initiatives suggest that perhaps the school needs to evaluate all of the character development initiatives, using the findings from the teachers in the study. Do the initiatives build relationships and do they challenge students by taking them out of their comfort zones? If indeed there are too many initiatives to keep track of, or if it is too late for a teacher to prepare for an initiative once they are informed about it, then the findings may suggest reducing some of the initiatives that do not fit either criteria and allow for better management, implementation, fidelity, and preparation.

If Expeditionary Learning School pays attention to the characteristics pointed to by these teachers regarding most and least effective initiatives, the school would be in line with some of the 11 principles laid out by the Character Education Partnership (2016). The principles state that the initiatives should: provide students with opportunities for moral action, strive to foster students’ self-motivation; engage the school staff as a learning and moral community that shares responsibility for character education and attempts to adhere to the same core values that guide the education of students; foster shared moral leadership and long-range support of the character education initiative; evaluate the character of the school, the school staff’s functioning as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character.
Research Question 2: Findings and Implications

How do these initiatives ultimately add value to the academic outcomes in their classrooms?

It is hard to argue against the idea that the function of a school is to attend to the academic attainment of its students. And throughout the years, proponents for character education, in any of its forms, have suggested that the implementation of these programs have bolstered and must bolster the academic achievement of students. “If academic achievement is the focus of high schools, they are likely to see character education as relevant only to the extent that it supports the academic mission, narrowly defined as teaching and learning the formal curriculum” (Davidson et al., 2007, p. 371). Of the 56% of teachers that responded to the 2014-2015 School survey, 71% of teachers strongly agreed and 21% agreed that adults at this school teach students perseverance skills they need to succeed after high school.

When the teachers of the Expeditionary Learning School were asked if the character education initiatives added value to the academic outcomes of the students, the responses varied. These teachers believed that some of the initiatives added to academic outcomes, especially the Student Led Conferences, which they used for academic advising and encouragement and giving students direction; the Senior Expedition, which asked students to write analytically as they would in college; and the PBAT’s. And one teacher noted that the school’s shift to standards based grading melded together academic attainment and habits of work, which were related to character development.

The responses of these teachers are all in line with the research on character and academic development and the vision of the Outward Bound network of schools that places “character and intellectual development on equal footing” (NYCOB, 2016). Ms. White
specifically mentioned the intersection of character development and academics. Davidson et al. (2007) argued that character development helped students do their best academic work, while doing school work helped develop student character. And Weber and Ruch (2001) noted that, “Character strengths are relevant for academic self-efficacy” (p. 330). Even Ms. Gray, who had the most difficult time relating character development to academic outcomes thought the idea that the initiatives increased attendance could be correct. Over 76% of students at Expeditionary Learning Schools have over 90% attendance and the school boasts 91% attendance overall.

Ms. Gray’s difficulty in connecting character development and academic outcomes, as well as Mr. Greene’s and Ms. White’s speaking of the HOWL Rubric as being a powerful tool that they did not use is also in line with previous research. Prestwich (2004) pointed out the inability of teachers to connect character education to academics as an obstacle to character education initiatives. According to Williams et al. (2003), teachers teach based on how they have been taught. Not having a model of this type of teaching in their personal experience makes it difficult for some teachers to replicate in their classrooms. Teachers do not naturally “process character education into their curriculum” (Williams et al., p. 4). Additionally, we have noted that character education initiatives wane in secondary education because high school teachers see themselves as content specialists (Williams et al., 2003).

Nevertheless, there are some implications from the teachers’ beliefs about the connections between character development initiatives and academic outcomes. The respondents believed that Student Led Conferences are places where they can naturally connect the Five Commitments to academic achievement. If this is the case, then all teachers need to leverage the conferences in such a way that discussion of the Five Commitments is at the
forefront of the conferences, along with the academic transcripts and goals. The administration therefore should encourage teachers to ensure that the conferences are conducted in this way.

Additionally, two teachers mentioned having seen the HOWL Rubric being used in the classroom effectively to underscore the academic learning targets. Ms. White remembered being given explicit verbal instructions on how this could be done seamlessly at the beginning of the school year. The teachers believed that new teachers need training in how to implement the character development initiatives effectively. Likewise, if the goal of the initiatives is to ultimately add academic value to character development, then teachers need explicit professional development and instructions on how to connect the two.

These teachers also believed that Senior Expedition and the College March are two initiatives that combine both character and academics. Both happen in the senior year; teachers were not sure how or if these initiatives can affect the underclassmen prior to them having to participate fully in them. They did believe that there was more involvement of the underclassmen in years prior but feel that that involvement has waned. The implication here is that there needs to be more build up to these initiatives in the years leading to senior year. Based on the findings, I suggest that upperclassmen Crews partner with/mentor underclassmen Crews in an effort to link the four-year trajectory of initiatives. This will benefit both the students but also potentially newer teachers. Perhaps seniors need to survey or interview the underclassmen about topics of interest as they begin to do their research for Senior Expedition. Perhaps seniors need to have panel discussions with underclassmen at varied times in the college application process to make the journey to College March more transparent.
Research Question 3: FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

What are the major challenges that the school faces in promoting/achieving character education and how might they be resolved?

To recap, the participants listed three major challenges that the school faced in promoting character education. The first is the lack of parenting and guidance in the home and the gang culture present in the community. While some researchers (Bulach, 2001, Lickona, 1991) have encouraged close working relationships between the family and schools to foster character education, others believe that lack of character is nurtured at home and character education programs can’t combat this (Brown, 2002). Although the teacher acknowledged this is an obstacle, he did not feel that it was insurmountable. According to the teacher, the school should continue to host events that encourage parents/guardians and community members into the school. This can forge a partnership allowing parents and community partners and stakeholders to know that they have an ally in their efforts to develop the character of their children.

Combatting the gang culture is a harder feat but getting more students involved in the after-school programs and clubs would be a starting point. In addition to after school programs, there needs to be greater emphasis on students getting involved in service activities. The suggestion for service-based activities is based on the literature (Davidson et al., 2007; Billig, 2000; Lickona, 1991; Parks 1999) and also because it is listed in the Core Practice Benchmarks of Expeditionary Learning (2003). Participating in service allows students to bring the Five Commitments to life. It allows them to be positive contributors to their communities and members of organizations and groups and may alleviate the need to be a member of a gang.

Ms. White cited racism and sexism as the biggest obstacles to character development in the schools and pointed out that America’s history rooted in racist and sexist practices made it
difficult to change the narrative. She felt that if students were constantly being disrespected outside of the school, then the school being only one part of the students’ lives, had an uphill battle to fight. Her solution to fight racism was a good one: to show young people that they have and are allies and could contribute even in small ways to combat the foundational systems of racism and sexism. Pine and Hilliard (1990) agree with Ms. White: “We educators can address the problems of racism and educational equity by confronting and challenging racism…improving pedagogical practices, elevating the self-esteem of all children, and teaching character development” (p. 596). Ms. White’s solution to combating this obstacle to character education is also linked to the tenets described by Parks’ (1999) analysis of multi-cultural education.

The implications for this are that the school can incorporate multi-cultural education as part of their character education initiatives and pay attention to topics of racism and sexism. If Heath’s (2013) analysis is correct about Expeditionary Learning being grounded in a privileged, Caucasian, heterosexual, male framework then it would behoove a school that services students that are from different backgrounds to incorporate a multi-cultural perspective that reinforces the Five Commitments. This type of attention to the school community would ultimately foster community and affect school climate.

The third obstacle to character development initiatives at the Expeditionary Learning School offered by the teachers is the shift in leadership. These teachers felt that the new principal was not fully vested in the initiatives of the Five Commitments or the leadership paid lip service to the Five Commitments but did not display them. However, in contrast though to the teachers’ beliefs that leadership was an obstacle to the implementation of the character education initiatives at this school, 36% of the teachers strongly agreed, 21% agreed, and 29%
somewhat agreed that the principal, teacher, and staff collaborate to make the school run effectively. We can’t tell from this question, however, exactly how teachers view the leaders but it is an indication that the teachers and staff make an effort to work with the administration, or that more than half the teachers agreed that the principal, in collaboration with teachers and staff, collaborate effectively.

Leadership is the most significant issue in school reform initiatives. Farrell (2003) stated that the principal is the single best predictor of success at Expeditionary Learning schools. And although Farrell pointed out that Outward Bound and Expeditionary Learning focuses on bringing out the leader in everyone, the actual school leader is pivotal in this process. Berkowitz and Bier (2004) wrote leadership is essential in the implementation of any reform movement. Not only is leadership buy-in key but empowering of staff also is necessary (Berkowitz & Bier 2004, Farrell 2003).

In the same vein as leadership, the teachers in the study believed that the new teachers were not being given enough support in the implementation of the initiatives. Throughout the research, there have been calls for character education in pre-service programs (Berkowitz, 1999; Mathison, 1999; Sanger & Osguthorp, 2010). The teachers I interviewed reported receiving training prior to beginning their work at the school and prior to implementing the initiatives. They also saw other teachers implementing initiatives. They all claimed that either this is not happening now or it is happening sporadically and ineffectively.

Given these findings, there needs to be renewed focus on teacher leadership. Teachers need to be placed in charge of the implementation and execution of specific initiatives. This would benefit both the teachers and the administration. It would give teachers greater agency as well as take some of the load off the administrators. Teachers that have had a lot of experience
with the initiatives should be positioned to train newer teachers. The teachers believed there is value in the initiatives and need to help train others. “In general, helping teachers feel a greater sense of control over their professional lives in schools will increase their sense of teacher efficacy and make for greater effort, persistence and resilience” (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998, p. 239). The school needs to tap into the “symbolic capital” of the more experienced teachers (Walker et al. 2015). More veteran teachers at this school need to become the mentors the interviewed teachers felt the new teachers require and train them much like they felt they had been prepared. It is true that leadership is responsible for effectively implementing initiatives and must totally buy into them. But part of the model of Expeditionary Learning is that all staff are leaders. There also needs to be a commitment on the part of administration and staff to communicate and demonstrate the commitments.

The findings support the need to return to pre-service or before school orientation of teachers. Inculcating new teachers into the school’s values, i.e. the Five Commitments, is important so that they in turn can use the language in their interactions with students. Teachers in the study believed that talking about and emphasizing the Five Commitments is important in the transferring of the ideas to the students and helps with their development. Referencing the Five Commitments gives teachers a standard “moral language” removing that as an obstacle to character education in the school (Walker et al., 2015).

The job now, especially with the change of leadership and turn-over of staff, is for the leadership and staff to decide which of the initiatives should be carried forward and which yield the most benefit. This is especially important with the introduction of and implementation of new initiatives. Once all staff members have made this determination, it would behoove the
administration/leadership to place teachers in positions to re-imagine the initiatives and implement them with greater fidelity throughout the school.

**Conclusions**

- The participating teachers of Expeditionary Learning School believed that character education in schools is important. They believed character development is important for students in school and beyond. They believed that schools should be intentional about character education and that they have been prepared to implement the initiatives. “The literature on character education typically identifies teachers as a crucial factor in the development of character in youth…teachers believe that they can handle this responsibility” (Milson & Mehlig 2002, p. 52)

- The respondents believed it is the responsibility of teachers to implement and spearhead character development initiatives. They believed that it is the older staff members’ responsibility to mentor and guide other teachers about initiatives. As with the Williams et al. (2003) study, success of any approach is strongly dependent on teachers’ commitments to emphasize and encourage character education.

- The participating teachers believed it is the responsibility of administrators to foster a culture that values character education. It is the responsibility of administrators to support, guide, prepare and motivate both teachers and students regarding character development initiatives. These teachers believed more genuine communication is needed. “The social architecture of the school has to be built by the people in the school, led usually by the principal. It takes time” (Farrel, 2003, p. 31).
• The teachers in this study believed that in the long term character education can affect the academic outcomes of students. “Put simply, promoting the development of good character traits in schools seems to lead to higher attainment” (Walker et al., 2015, p. 89).

**Implications for Further Research**

I never could have imagined in how many directions this study would go. There are many ways in which future research could expand. One could look at how the other constituencies of the school perceive the character development initiatives. How do the administration, students and/or parents believe that the initiatives impact character? I am also interested in the lives of the alumni. What do they think of their high school experiences and what if any impact has these initiatives had on them long term? Given that the school is in a transitional phase, it would be interesting to note how these initiatives are faring four years from now- what changes occur and what are the outcomes? How do the newer initiatives impact the character of the students? Additionally, I could not focus on the issues of race and gender, but future research should examine how these impact the delivery and reception of these initiatives.

**Summary**

To what extent do teachers believe that the Expeditionary Learning School’s initiatives promote character development?

Expeditionary Learning School opened in 2007. Its website claims it is a school to arm students with the knowledge, skills and character necessary to serve as informed, thoughtful and courageous civic leaders in their own communities and beyond. The effort to build character has been intentional. There are many initiatives that are designed to develop the character of students based on the Five Commitments- Courage, Compassion, Respect, Perseverance and Stewardship. From this study, it is clear that these teachers believed that character development
is imperative in schools. The teachers interviewed also believed that The Five Commitments are good commitments for both the students and staff at the school. They feel prepared to implement the initiatives but recognize there are obstacles to effectively implementing them. These teachers struggled to articulate the academic value of all of the initiatives but have ideas for improving the initiatives. The participating teachers believed that schools should engage in character development. They believed that with some more planning and attention to details by leadership and teachers collaboratively, the initiatives of the Expeditionary Leaning School do aid in student understanding of the Five Commitments. If both leadership and teachers can build a community that collectively believes in the stated mission of the school to build character and work toward this mission then, the school will benefit from the better implementation of the initiatives.
Appendix A: Interview #1

General Information to Participant: The purpose of study is to examine initiatives. As explained in the consent form, your participation is confidential—only I will know your identity. And we will use a pseudonym throughout the interview.

You have the right to withdraw from any of the interviews or to not answer any of the questions. You also have the right after the interview (until February 15, 2016) to have any information you provided deleted or not used for the study. Also, please do not disclose to others that you have participated in the study.

Today’s interview is to obtain some general information on your teaching career.

1. How did you decide to be teacher?

2. How long have you been a teacher? How long have you been a teacher in this school?

3. If you taught at another school, please tell me about your experiences at the other school? Did the other school intentionally address character development?

4. In your opinion, how did the efforts at that school affect the character of the students?

5. How did you decide to teach at this school?

6. In general, do you think a school should intentionally address students’ character development. If yes, why and how? If not, why?
Appendix B: The Five Commitments

Background Information: This interview is related to the character development initiatives at this school. Character for our purposes is related to the Five Commitments. Below is some information about the Five Commitments that you may use as a reference.

The Five Commitments are: Courage, Compassion, Respect, Stewardship, and Perseverance.

According to this school, the commitments can be described in the following way:

**Courage** is being able to take risks. Courage does not mean that you are fearless, but rather it is the value that people must do what is right and necessary, often in spite of the fact that it is uncomfortable. Courage is the commitment that people make to become active civic leaders.

**Compassion** is knowing how someone else is feeling, as well as trying to understand where s/he is coming from. It is understanding the various aspects that influence an individual, and keeping them in mind in the decision making process. Compassion is the commitment that people make to value the opinions and emotions of others.

**Respect** is something that people give to others without requiring that it be given in return. Respect is reflected in the way one dresses, the words a person chooses, the way people interact with one another. Respect is the commitment that people make to hold themselves to a high standard of positive behavior.

**Stewardship** is the responsibility individuals have not just to care for ourselves and each other, but for our planet and our communities as well. Stewardship is the commitment that people make to affirm the importance of place in daily life, as well as the importance of appreciating (valuing) all life.
Perseverance is a commitment to effort. It is continuing to struggle with a difficult problem; it is assembling all the tools for a solution and using them to affect change in ourselves and others. Perseverance is the commitment that individuals make to continued improvement and effort.
Appendix C: Interview #2

1. Do you have a Crew Class? What grade level Crew Class do you have?

2. Do you believe that Crew increases student’s understanding of the Five Commitments? Please explain.

3. In reference to Community meetings, do you think that community meetings increase student understanding of the Five Commitments? Please Explain.

4. Do you think the Commitment Awards increase student understanding of the Five Commitments? Please explain.

5. Do you think Student Led Conferences and Presentations of Learning increase student understanding of the Five Commitments?

6. Does working with a student associate increase student understanding of the Five Commitments? Please explain.

7. Does Crew Olympics increase student understanding of the Five Commitments? Please Explain?

8. Does Adventure Week increase student understanding of the Five Commitments? Please Explain.


10. Does Explore Week increase student understanding of the Five Commitments? Please Explain.

11. Do the daily learning targets increase student understanding of the Five Commitments? Please Explain.
12. Does the HOWL Rubric increase student understanding of the Five Commitments? 
   Please Explain.

13. Does the College March increase student understanding of the Five Commitments? 
   Please Explain.

14. Does Senior Expedition increase student understanding of the Five Commitments? 
   Please Explain.

15. What do you see as the 2 most effective initiatives for developing the Five commitments? 
   Why are these effective? Be as specific as possible.

16. What do you see as the 2 least effective initiatives for developing the Five commitments? 
   Why are these ineffective? Be as specific as possible.

17. What do you see as the greatest obstacles the school faces in promoting character 
   development? What are some possible solutions?
Appendix D: Interview # 3

Background Information: disclosure

Interview three begins with a review of the last three questions asked in interview two, a review of the responses, asking for modifications and asking them to comment on the other responses given.

1. What do you see as the 2 most effective initiatives (and maybe you can think of things I didn’t mention here) for developing the Five Commitments? Why are these effective? Be as specific as possible.

Please review profile that I have written based on your previous interview responses.

Is there anything that you’d like to add, modify or delete from your responses?

2. What do you see as the 2 least effective initiatives for developing the Five Commitments? Why are these ineffective? And again, Be as specific as possible.

Please review profile that I have written based on your previous interview responses.

Is there anything that you’d like to add, modify or delete from your responses?

3. What do you see as the greatest obstacles the school faces in promoting character development? What are some possible solutions? Please review profile that I have written based on your previous interview responses.

Is there anything that you’d like to add, modify or delete from your responses?
4. Thinking back to all of the initiatives, how do they ultimately add value to the academic outcomes in their classrooms?

5. Please speak to the change in leadership and its affects if any on the character development initiatives, their introduction and implementation? Please be specific.

6. Please speak to the overall preparation of teachers to implement these initiatives. How were you prepared for your role in these initiatives? How should teachers be prepared for these roles?

7. Last words/thoughts for me about the character development initiatives?
### Appendix E: HOWL Rubric

### HABITS OF WORK AND LEADERSHIP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOWL LT</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can show courage by actively participating.</td>
<td>Student is consistently mentally &amp; physically present.</td>
<td>Student is mentally &amp; physically present most of the time.</td>
<td>Student is mentally &amp; physically present with intervention.</td>
<td>Student is often absent or distracted in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student volunteers daily.</td>
<td>Student volunteers frequently.</td>
<td>Student volunteers with prompting.</td>
<td>Student rarely volunteers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student completes daily work on time.</td>
<td>Student frequently completes work on time.</td>
<td>Student completes work on time with prompting.</td>
<td>Student fails to complete work on time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can show respect and compassion in my interactions within my community.</td>
<td>Community member uses appropriate language and tone in all spaces.</td>
<td>Community member uses appropriate language and tone most of the time.</td>
<td>Community member uses appropriate language and tone with prompting.</td>
<td>Community member uses inappropriate language and tone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community member respects personal space and takes care of property.</td>
<td>Community member respects personal space and takes care of property most of the time.</td>
<td>Community member respects personal space and takes care of property with prompting.</td>
<td>Community member is disrespectful of personal space or does not take care of property.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community member is mindful of other’s time.</td>
<td>Community member is usually mindful of other’s time.</td>
<td>Community member is mindful of other’s time with prompting.</td>
<td>Community member is not mindful of other’s time or distracts others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can show stewardship by showing responsibility and care for my community.</td>
<td>Community member adds value to the community by being responsible with his or her words and actions.</td>
<td>Community member adds value to the community by being responsible in his or her words and actions most of the time.</td>
<td>Community member adds value to the community by being responsible in his or her words and actions with prompting.</td>
<td>Community member detracts from the community by acting irresponsibly in his or her words and actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community member takes pride in his work through craftsmanship.</td>
<td>Community member often takes pride in his work through craftsmanship.</td>
<td>Community member takes pride in his work through craftsmanship with prompting.</td>
<td>Community member does not take pride in his work through craftsmanship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOWL LT</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Needs Improvement</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can show perseverance by working through challenges.</td>
<td>Student attends school and class on time each day.</td>
<td>Student attends school and class on time most days.</td>
<td>Student attends school and class on time most days with intervention.</td>
<td>Student is frequently absent or late.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student is prepared for class with materials and HW.</td>
<td>Student is usually prepared for class with materials and HW.</td>
<td>Student is sometimes prepared for class with materials and HW.</td>
<td>Student is frequently unprepared for class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student uses all available resources to work through challenges independently.</td>
<td>Student uses available resources to work through challenges independently most of the time.</td>
<td>Student uses available resources to work through challenges independently with prompting.</td>
<td>Student does not use available resources to work through challenges independently.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bibliography


Kim, C., Kim, M. K., Lee, C., Spector, J. M., & DeMeester, K. (2013). Teacher beliefs and
technology integration. Teaching and Teacher Education, 29, 76-85.


National School Climate Website. (2016). *What is school climate and why is it important?*


New York City High School Directory online versions retrieved from


distinct school and community contexts. *Teacher’s College Record.* 2, 449-481.


