

# Positioning Ontario's Character Development Initiative In/Through Its Policy Web of Relationships

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*Constructing a policy web of relationships is proposed as a useful way to identify and understand complex relationships between policies and their contexts. In Canada, the province of Ontario's Character Development Initiative (CDI) and its relationships to student achievement, citizenship education, and safe schools policies provide an illustrative example of the web's utility. Mandated by the Ontario Ministry of Education, the Character Development Initiative was expected to be implemented by all publicly funded school boards during the 2007-2008 school year. This application of the policy web shows how what happens in one policy affects what happens in another and highlights relationships between policies that might be overlooked if one's focus is limited to a single policy's texts, practices, or influences alone. This example also shows how creating a policy web of relationships highlights issues, texts, practices, and ideas important across different policy fields and how a particular policy is positioned in relation to other policies. This knowledge may be used to support, resist, or influence policy at different levels. Mapping the relationships between policies using a web of relationships also provides historical understanding of the policies and knowledge about why policies (re)emerge at particular moments.*

*La création d'un réseau de relations portant sur les politiques est évoquée comme façon utile d'identifier et de comprendre les rapports complexes entre les politiques et leurs contextes. Au Canada, l'initiative ontarienne nommée Initiative de développement du caractère, et ses liens avec le rendement des élèves, l'éducation à la citoyenneté et les politiques sur la sécurité à l'école, offre un exemple de l'utilité d'un tel réseau. On s'attendait à ce que l'initiative de développement du caractère, mandatée par le Ministère de l'éducation de l'Ontario, soit mise en œuvre par toutes les écoles publiques pendant l'année scolaire 2007-2008. Cette application de réseau de politiques démontre dans quelle mesure un changement dans une politique affecte l'évolution d'une autre, et fait ressortir des liens entre les politiques dont on ne tiendrait pas compte si on limitait notre attention aux textes, pratiques ou influences d'une seule politique. De plus, cet exemple illustre la façon dont un réseau de politiques fait ressortir d'une part, l'importance de questions, textes, pratiques et idées d'un domaine à l'autre et d'autre part, la position d'une politique par rapport aux autres. Ces connaissances peuvent servir à appuyer, rejeter ou influencer les politiques à divers niveaux. Un réseau de relations entre les politiques offre également un aperçu historique de celles-ci et une explication de leur émergence à des moments donnés.*

Among details about library day and field trips, my son's weekly school newsletter advises that this month's character trait is *responsibility*. Given Ontario's *Character Development Initiative* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008c), I am not surprised, but nevertheless disappointed. The Character Development Initiative (CDI) purports to develop students' character through a predominantly traditional approach to character education. Character education is the intentional effort by educators to teach values to students (Winton, 2008b). The traditional approach to character education, an approach that relies heavily on explicit instruction of specific values, is subject to wide and long-standing criticisms (Hartshorne & May, 1928; Kohn, 1997; Nash, 1997; Purpel, 1997). The traditional approach: (a) constructs diversity as a problem to be overcome, (b) promotes a deficit view of students, (c) discourages dissent, and (d) fosters "an ethos of compliance in the schools wherein indoctrination and rote learning replace critical reflection and autonomous decision-making" (Nash, 1997, p. 30).

Why has character education reemerged in Ontario schools? Why is a predominantly traditional approach advocated? In earlier work I conducted a rhetorical analysis of a character education policy of an Ontario school district to answer these questions (Winton, 2008a). The analysis demonstrated that the district's new character education policy was related to citizenship education, student achievement, and safe schools policies in the district and province. What the analysis did not explain was *how* the policies are related to one another and the implications of these relationships. In this article, I present a theoretical web of policy relationships that emerged from my previous study. Using Ontario's CDI as an illustrative example, I demonstrate (a) how the policy web of relationships can promote understanding of how policies are positioned in relation to one another, (b) how and why policies change over time, and (c) how policies may be supported or challenged.

It is particularly important to examine Ontario's character education policy web of relationships because the CDI advocates a predominantly traditional approach to character education that perpetuates the status quo (Winton, 2010). This approach reflects neo-liberal and neo-conservative commitments to competition, individualism, standardization, and predictability. It portrays some citizens, particularly those who are socially disadvantaged, as responsible for their "failures" and as morally deficient (Smagorinsky & Taxel, 2005). Understanding how Ontario's CDI is related to other policies: (a) suggests strategies for challenging traditional character education in schools, (b) provides understanding about why traditional character education may be difficult to resist, and (c) illuminates ways educators can take advantage of the opportunities the CDI offers to pursue more democratic goals.

My examination of the policy web of relationships begins with the following:

1. I will explain the theoretical bases of the policy web of relationships and discuss how it differs from and adds to existing policy theories.
2. I will briefly review various approaches to character education.
3. I will explain the process of constructing the CDI's web of relationships including the data sources examined.
4. I will discuss the CDI's relationship to citizenship education, safe schools, and student achievement policies.
5. I will conclude by highlighting the contributions and limitations of the policy web of relationships as a conceptual model and analytical tool.

## **The Policy Web of Relationships**

The policy web of relationships combines theoretical elements of Bowe, Ball, and Gold's (1992) policy cycle, Vidovich's (2007) hybrid policy cycle, and Joshee and Johnson's (2005) policy web. It also recognizes that discourses, informed by ideology, shape how policy is produced, understood, and enacted (Ball, 1993; Gale, 1999). Bowe et al.'s (1992) policy cycle conceptualizes policy as comprised of three contexts: (a) influence, (b) text production, and (c) practice. In the context of influence, interest groups struggle over the construction of formal policy. Key concepts and policy lexicon are developed here, and the definitions and purposes of education are debated. Competing groups include government, politicians, media, committees, and grassroots organizations. The context of practice is the area that policy intends to influence and includes its outcomes and effects. Texts representing policy decisions are produced in the context of policy text production. Policy texts are not necessarily internally coherent nor consistent (Ball, 1994; Bowe, et al., 1992). Inconsistencies occur, in part, due to on-going competition between groups vying for the power to define policy problems and solutions. Policy texts "have to be read with and against one another" (Bowe, et al., 1992, p. 21; Gale, 1999).

Further, policies are both text and discourse simultaneously (Ball, 1993; Gale, 1999). Ball (1994), quoting Foucault, explains that discourses are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (p. 21). Policy texts, as discourse, limit what can be said and thought in policy discussions (Bacchi, 2000). Indeed, according to Ball (1994) "the effect of policy is primarily discursive, it changes the possibilities we have for thinking 'otherwise'" (p. 23). Policy discourses are not found only in texts but permeate all three contexts in the policy cycle (Gale, 1999). According to Gale, policy discourses are informed by ideologies as well as appeal to them and are the link between policy and ideology. Ideologies become hegemonic (Gramsci, 1992) through broad strategies including legitimation, dissimulation, and reification (Thompson, as cited in Gale, 1999).

Bowe et al.'s (1992) policy cycle moves away from traditional state-centered approaches of policy and recognizes individuals in schools as important policy actors. Educators are not simply receivers of policy from the state; instead, they interpret policy texts and mandates in light of their individual, collective, and school contexts, histories, beliefs, values, and discourses (Ball, 1994; Bowe et al., 1992). The importance of individuals and their values, skills, motivation, priorities, and experiences on how they interpret policies are similarly recognized by McLaughlin (1987), Bascia (2001), Vidovich (2007) and other critical policy scholars. So, too, is the influence of local conditions, histories, and priorities. Bowe et al.'s (1992) policy cycle challenges traditional state-centred policies that suggest a linear process of policy in which key policy decisions are made "at the top" by legislators and government bureaucrats. These decisions are then written down in policy texts and "sent down" to implementers to be carried out in schools. The policy cycle attempts to eliminate the distinction between policy-makers and implementers by recognizing the agency of individual actors in policy processes. Conceptualizing policy in this way helps democratize policy and education (Ozga, 2000; Vidovich, 2007).

Vidovich's (2007) hybrid policy cycle gives greater emphasis to the constraints of national policies on local policies than does Bowe et al.'s (1992) policy cycle. It views policy as "state-centred" but not "state controlled," yet maintains that there is room for local agency (Vidovich, 2007, p. 290). The hybrid policy cycle distinguishes between influences at (a) macro (including both national and international influences), (b) intermediate, and (c) micro levels, and attempts

to illustrate their relative ability to impact other levels. Similarly, the hybrid policy cycle highlights links between texts and practices at different levels. Finally, Vidovich embeds the contexts of text production at each level and the context of practice *within* the context of influence.

The policy cycle and modified policy cycle recognize that policies influence one another, but they collapse policy and other influences together into the context of influence. The policy web of relationships I propose focuses on how policies themselves are related to each other. I am not the first to focus on these relationships: Bascia (2001), for example, discusses historical linkages between policies. Proposing the metaphor of archeological layers, Bascia illustrates through her research on English as a Second Language policy in Ontario, Canada, how new provincial policies are layered on to those that came before. New practices imposed by new policies interact with existing practices as well as teachers' beliefs, life histories, identities, and workplace contexts.

Joshee and Johnson (2005) also theorize about how policies are related and propose a policy web "as a powerful image to think about and map multicultural education policies" (p. 55). Their web sees the rings of the web representing different levels where policies are made. The connections between the rings made by cross-cutting threads represent the idea that different levels may share an area of focus but are not necessarily complementary. The points where the threads meet the rings represent policy texts that have been constructed as a result of historical struggles. The open spaces between the threads represent the spaces for interpretation, reinterpretation, and resistance to policies, thereby contributing to various discourses in the policy field. Like the policy cycle, Joshee and Johnson's web recognizes (a) the complexity of policy, (b) the multiplicity and diversity of policy actors, and (c) the opportunities for state policies to be understood and enacted in a variety of ways. Like Vidovich's (2007) modified policy cycle, Joshee and Johnson's (2005) web highlights connections, however inconsistent, between levels of policy-making and policy texts.

Drawing on Bowe et al.'s (1992) policy cycle and Joshee and Johnson's (2005) policy web, I propose a policy web of relationships that connects the contexts of influence, text production, and practice in one policy cycle to those in other policy cycles. This web is depicted in Figure 1. Drawing on Vidovich's (2007) hybridized policy cycle and Gale (1999), I embed the web of relationships in national and international influences, and add ideology. The dots surrounding the web represent ideologies, and national and international influences that are part of the larger context of individual policies.

The web of policy relationships I propose emphasizes connections between different policies. It recognizes that not only are policy texts connected to other texts, but the three contexts of a policy cycle are connected to contexts of influence, text production, and practice in other policy cycles as well. The web does not eliminate the complexity of policy relationships, but it helps illustrate (a) how policies are positioned relative to one another, (b) how they may be challenged or supported, and (c) how they change over time in response to influences, practices and texts in other policies.

In the remainder of this paper, I show how the theoretical policy web of relationships can be used to identify and examine policy connections: Ontario's CDI is used as an illustrative example. While I focus here on connections between policies at the same level, the policy web of relationships can also be used to identify connections between policies at different levels (*see* Winton, 2011). Before explaining the CDI's policy web, I briefly describe character education.

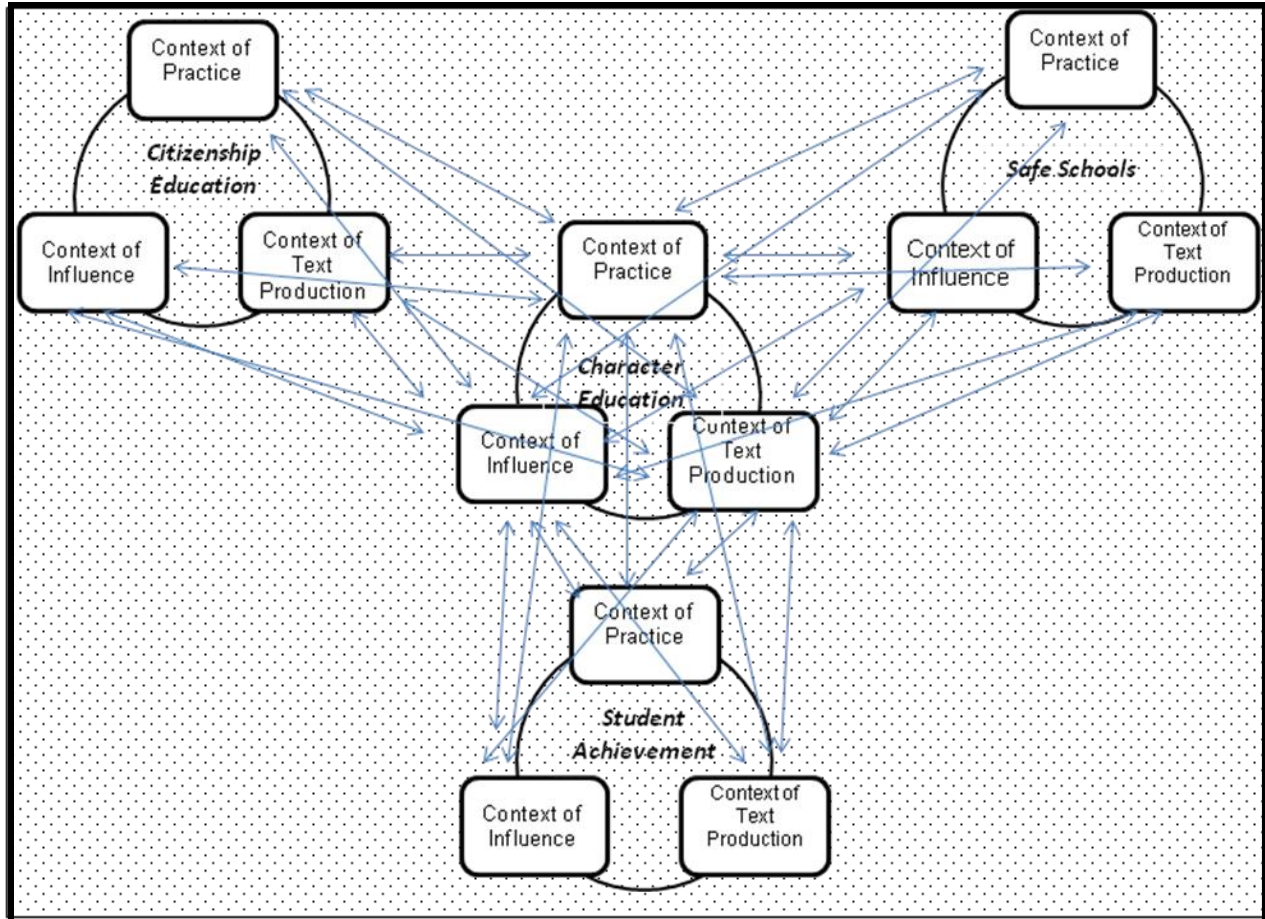


Figure 1. Combines elements of Bowe et al. (1992), Joshee & Johnson (2005), and Vidovich (2007).

### Character Education

Character education is the conscious effort by schools to teach values to students. While not new, character education is enjoying renewed support in many countries including England, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States of America. There are a variety of approaches to character education (Davis, 2003; Howard, Berkowitz, & Schaeffer, 2004; Nash, 1997). Ontario advocates a predominantly *traditional* approach that assumes that there are universal values that must be explicitly taught to students (Winton, 2010). Without this instruction, the traditional approach assumes children will not develop good character. Typical teaching approaches of the traditional approach include (a) direct instruction of values, (b) rewarding behaviours taken to represent selected values, (c) conscious adult modeling of desired behaviour, and (d) the use of literature to identify heroes who demonstrate good character.

Other approaches to character education include *caring* and *developmental* approaches (Howard et al., 2004). The caring approach assumes that morality and character develop through caring relationships. It requires that schools be organized in ways that promote the development and maintenance of these relationships (Noddings, 2008). The caring approach requires teachers, who unconsciously model caring, to (a) engage students in dialogue, (b) encourage students' caring, and (c) confirm students' best selves (Noddings, 2005). Developmental approaches to character education emphasize (a) developmental processes, (b)

critical thinking, and (c) experience. Unlike the traditional approach, they assume that the meanings of values vary over time and across different contexts (Murray, 2002; Rice, 1996). Developmental approaches believe students develop character and morality by (a) participating in democratic decision-making, (b) considering moral dilemmas, (c) solving problems, and (d) working cooperatively with others (Murray, 2002). Ontario's CDI offers support for caring and developmental approaches but its emphasis on universal values grounds the policy in a traditional approach (Winton, 2010).

### **Constructing Ontario's Character Development Initiative Web of Relationships**

The construction of the CDI web of relationships started with identifying the influences, texts, and practices that comprise the CDI's policy cycle. I began by focusing on the CDI's context of text production. I gathered official policy texts, including:

1. *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12. Discussion Paper* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, 2008c).
2. *Character Development in Action: Successful Practices in Ontario Schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008a).
3. *A Guide to Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12* (hereafter referred to as the *Guide*; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008d).
4. *Summary: Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12* (hereafter referred to as the *Summary*; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008f).
5. Memoranda to school districts from Ontario's Ministry of Education.

I also examined government-created training resources and web pages, speeches, and webcasts related to the CDI. I examined each text and webcast and identified explicit and implied references to other Ontario policies as well as policies at different levels or in different jurisdictions.

My analysis of texts in the CDI's context of text production found the CDI was explicitly linked to the province's citizenship, school safety, and student achievement policies. The foundational document of the CDI, *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12. Discussion Paper* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006), states that Ontario's "Character Development Initiative recognizes that academic achievement, character development, and civic engagement are inextricably linked" (p. 3). I present additional, detailed evidence of the links between the CDI's context of text production and these three policies in my discussion below.

Next, I created a theoretical policy web connecting the three contexts of the CDI policy cycle to the three contexts of Ontario's citizenship, school safety, and student achievement policy cycles. This web suggested 27 possible relationships between the CDI and the other three policies (this number does not include relationships that may exist between the citizenship education, student achievement, and safe schools policies). I considered each thread (representing a possible relationship) individually: I looked for and examined texts and other data related to each possible relationship. Thus, the data set evolved and grew in size over the course of the analysis of the web.

Below, I discuss the findings of my analysis of the CDI policy web of relationships. Throughout the discussion I introduce data examined in the process. I begin with a discussion of the international and national influences on contemporary education policy in Ontario, Canada. Then, I use the CDI policy cycle's contexts of influence, text production, and practices to organize my discussion of the findings. In each section, I identify relationships between the CDI and Ontario's safe schools, student achievement, and citizenship education policies.

### **National and International Influences on Ontario's Education Policies**

Education policies are embedded in international and national influences both inside and outside the field of education. These influences include ideologies, policy trends, policies, organizations, and practices at the international level. Contemporary ideological influences on education policy include neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism (Apple, 2006; Ball, 1998). I discuss relevant aspects of these ideologies on character education, citizenship education, safe schools, and student achievement below.

Neo-liberalism believes in the "essential fairness and justice of markets" (Apple, 2006, p. 35), and advocates a global market economy with little state intervention. While not a cohesive policy framework, neo-liberal ideology, which celebrates private ownership, competition, consumer choice, and the individual, has transformed economic, social, and political policy around the world in part through initiatives such as (a) privatization, (b) deregulation, (c) regressive tax reforms, (d) campaigns of state deficit- and debt-reduction, (e) attacks on trade-union rights, (f) opening doors to foreign investment, and (g) the erosion and dismantling of social services (Ball, 1998; Baronov, 2007; Carroll & Shaw, 2001; Lerner, 2000).

Neo-liberal policy reforms have increased disparities between the rich and the poor and have contributed to growing concerns about maintaining social cohesion in Canada (Jenson, 1998; Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, 1999), and other countries around the world (Ball, 1998; Ritzen, 2000). Canada's Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science, and Technology (1999) stated in its *Final Report on Social Cohesion* that "The most serious challenge for decision-makers is to ensure that economic integration driven by globalizing markets does not lead to *domestic social disintegration*."

Partly in response to concerns about social cohesion, citizenship and citizenship education have been redefined in Canada (Joshee, 2004). According to Joshee (2004), citizenship and civic participation are now constructed as volunteerism and helping the less fortunate. Thus, citizenship education is interested in promoting these kinds of participation as part of an overall effort to encourage and improve social cohesion. Canada is not the only country concerned about citizen participation. Nations around the world have introduced policies in schools in response to a perceived crisis in civic engagement, and developing students' commitments to civic participation are key goals of these initiatives (Chareka & Sears, 2005).

In addition, preparing students to serve the economy's needs is now one of the central purposes of public education in Canada. This focus has resulted in (a) closer links between businesses and schools, (b) an emphasis on skills rather than knowledge, (c) a focus on subjects such as math, science and computer science at the expense of literature, history, and the arts, (d) a vocationalization of the curriculum, and (e) an increase in accountability measures including large-scale and high-stakes testing (Osborne, 2001).

Measuring students' knowledge using standardized tests is now the norm in education in the United States, England, and Ontario, Canada. Test scores serve as proxies for students'

achievement. In Ontario, the Literacy and Math tests for Grades 3, 6, and 9 (Math), and the *Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test* are designed to measure how much of the Ontario curriculum has been learned by students. Sanctions for poor performance include public exposure as a poor-performing school as well as increased direct intervention from Ontario's Ministry of Education.

Ontario's government pledges to have 75% of students meeting or exceeding the provincial standards (Ontario Liberal Party, 2007). Extensive human and financial resources have been dedicated to achieving this goal. The province's Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat intervenes in schools with low test scores, provides professional development for educators, and introduced the CDI.

The CDI also reflects the expansion of a second ideology, one that is sometimes closely connected to neo-liberalism: that is, neo-conservatism (Apple, 2006). Neo-conservative ideology includes a collection of social and political attitudes (Nevitte & Gibbins, 1984). Central neo-conservative political attitudes include the beliefs that government size, spending, and influence should be reduced while the private sector should be better supported (Nevitte & Gibbins, 1984). The hallmark social component of neo-conservatism is the celebration of the moral authority of tradition (Apple, 2006). The commitment to traditional values has played an important role in the growth of neo-conservatism in Canada (Lusztig & Wilson, 2005). It has also given rise to the character education movement in Canada and the United States (Winton, 2008a).

Other key elements of neo-conservatism include (a) a fear of diversity, (b) a commitment to standardization, and (c) a desire for greater control and predictability. These concerns are evident in Ontario in the introduction of policies such as the *Safe Schools Act* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) and a provincial *Code of Conduct* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001). The *Code of Conduct* outlines "provincial standards of behaviour . . . [and specifies] the mandatory consequences for student actions that do not comply with these standards" (p. 1). Kohn (1997) identifies character education initiatives as mechanisms designed to "make children work harder and do what they're told." Their point, he argues, "is to drill students in specific behaviors rather than to engage them in deep, critical reflection about certain ways of being" (Kohn, 1997).

## **Related Texts**

Connections between the CDI and citizenship education, safe schools, and student achievement policies are explicit in many texts. For example, an Ontario Ministry of Education Web page, introducing the CDI to parents, lists "improved academic achievement," "safe and orderly schools," and "responsible citizenship in classrooms, schools and communities" as three goals of the CDI (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008b).

*Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12. Discussion Paper* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006) links character education to citizenship education's contexts of practice and text production by citing (a) the province's Grade 10 Civics course, (b) the 40 hours of community service required for a high school diploma, (c) Ontario's *aménagement linguistique* policy, and (d) other "Kindergarten to Grade 12 Ministry guidelines and courses" (p. 5). In addition to deeming citizenship education an "essential element" of character education, *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12* dedicates two pages to the connections between these two policies (Ontario Ministry of



Education, 2008c, p. 16). The *Guide* links the character attributes promoted by the CDI to citizenship practices when it states that the attributes “bind us together and form the basis of responsible citizenship” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008d, p. 3). This text also refers to Ontario’s growing diversity (noted by Joshee [2004] as influencing citizenship education in the province) as “an opportunity for communities to find the beliefs and principles they hold in common” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008d, p. 5). Finally, concerns about civic disengagement leading to policy efforts to increase students’ commitment to civic participation (Chareka & Sears, 2005) are linked to character education in the *Summary*: “Character development creates opportunities for students to develop the skills required for positive and effective participation as citizens in their schools and communities” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008f, p. 5).

Student achievement’s context of practice is also explicitly linked to the CDI in multiple texts. *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12. Discussion Paper* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006) identifies alignment between character development and the province’s *Student Success/Learning to 18* initiative (a policy designed to increase graduation rates) as a key component of the implementation of Ontario’s CDI. The CDI’s Web site identifies “improved academic achievement” as one of its goals (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009/2011), and a memorandum sent to school officials on January 16, 2007 states that in boards with character education programs, the CDI will take academic achievement to a new level (Glaze, Zegarac, & Giroux, 2007). Further, the Minister of Education claimed in a speech that “there is a demonstrated relationship between systematic, intentional implementation of character development initiatives and student discipline and achievement” (Wynne, 2006). In these statements the CDI is linked to student achievement’s context of influence since character education is supposed to improve achievement.

Character education policy texts also make a connection between character education and the province’s safe schools policy. In addition to explicitly referring to the safe schools policy text itself (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b), the CDI’s texts assert that character education helps create safe school environments and feelings of safety (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). They also identify “safe and orderly” schools as a goal of character education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009/2011).

### **Influences on Ontario’s Character Development Initiative**

Influences on the CDI include incidents, activities, reports, and behaviour in the contexts of influence, and practice of citizenship education, safe schools, and student achievement policies. These relationships are evident in the rationale and expectations of the CDI.

In the student achievement policy’s contexts of influence, for example, there is concern that the academic achievement of students in Ontario is in need of improvement. This concern is promulgated by politicians (e.g., McGuinty, 2009), in media reports (Stack, 2006), and through provincial initiatives such as the creation of Ontario’s Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011). As stated above, raising students’ test scores and improving student achievement is a core priority for the current government (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008c). Academic achievement in Ontario is often linked to students’ success in the workplace and Canada’s economic success. For example, in a speech at the 2009 *Global Education Competitiveness Summit* in Washington, D.C., Ontario’s Premier stated:

If you think about the world we live in today, it's a world where you can borrow your capital, copy your technology and buy your natural resources.

There's only one thing left on which to build your advantage, build a strong economy, and a great society: talent.

And that's what I want to talk to you about today, about what we've been doing in Ontario to nurture our talent by improving education. (McGuinty, 2009)

Concerns about competitiveness, employment, and academic achievement in Ontario's student achievement policy's context of influence are important in the CDI's context of influence as well. *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12* links the CDI to employment in a discussion about the needs of Ontario's workplaces. The text explains that the Conference Board of Canada's *Employability Skills Profile* states the need for workers' personal management skills including respect for diversity and honesty (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008c). It also states that character "is nurtured in cooperative education and work-experience programs that reflect the call from the business community for schools to develop well-rounded individuals capable of thriving in a global economy" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008c, p. 24). Improved academic achievement and employability skills are identified as benefits of character education by Ontario's Ministry of Education (2008c, 2008f).

Another influence in Ontario's character education policy cycle is concern about safety in schools. There is a perception that schools are unsafe and are becoming more so due to incidents in the safe schools policy cycle's context of practice and reports in its context of text production (e.g., Rushowy & Marlow, 2007; School Community Safety Advisory Panel, 2008). These reports and incidents are connected to the character education policy cycle's context of influence since they pressure governments to find approaches to reducing violence and enhancing school safety. Formal character education is purported by advocates to be an effective strategy to achieve these aims (Character Education Partnership, 2007; Havercroft, 2004), and the values nurtured as part of the CDI are described as a foundation for "school communities that are respectful, safe, caring and inclusive" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008d, p. 3).

In citizenship education's contexts of practice and text production, concerns about low levels of voting and civic deficits are widespread (Cook & Westheimer, 2006; Hébert & Sears, 2001). Politicians, academics, popular authors, and the media in Canada and around the world bemoan (a) low voter turnout, (b) low civic engagement, and (c) the pervasive ignorance of their citizenry (Hébert & Sears, 2001). These concerns have given rise to a renewed focus on citizenship education in schools, policy and research (Chareka & Sears, 2005). The increased focus not only attempts to teach students about political processes and encourage civic participation, it also attempts to promote social cohesion through the development of "shared values, mutual trust and the willingness to care for those less fortunate" (Joshee, 2004, p. 148).

The need to promote social cohesion has arisen in part to the widening gap between Canada's rich and poor and its increasingly diverse citizenry (Peck, Thompson, Chareka, Joshee, & Sears, 2010). The Character Development Initiative (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008c) states:

With increasing ethnocultural and racial diversity the need to find common ground based on our values and beliefs, in communities and as a province, takes on greater significance. Building consensus on what we hold in common is essential for the development of peaceful communities and enduring relationships. (p. 17)

Concerns about civic behaviour and increasing diversity in the citizenship education policy's context of influence are linked to the context of influence of the CDI. The *Guide* explains that "Character development enhances employability skills, encourages civic engagement and prepares students to be contributing citizens in our increasingly global society" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008d, p. 7). *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008c) explains that "Character development is an avenue through which students develop respect for self, others, property, the environment, diversity, human rights and other attributes upon which we find common ground as Canadians" (p. 22).

### **Related Practices**

The CDI's supposed impact in its context of practice are purported to affect the contexts of practice and influence of Ontario's school safety, citizenship education, and student achievement policies. For example, *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008c) asserts that character education supports student achievement's context of influence by (a) setting high expectations for behaviour and learning, (b) helping create safe, inclusive, positive, respectful, and caring school environments, and (c) addressing the affective, cognitive, and behavioural domains of learning. The CDI's and student achievement's contexts of practice are linked in the *Guide* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008d) which declares that "improved academic achievement" will result from character education in Ontario schools (p. 5). References to research are made in *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008c) to support these claims.

A relationship between character education's practices and school safety is also proclaimed in the *Guide* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008d). It states that the results of the CDI include "schools that are respectful, caring, **safe** [emphasis added] and inclusive" (p. 5). A report of Ontario's Safe Schools Action Team (2008) asserts that character education must address "gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment, and inappropriate sexual behaviour" in order to create positive and violence-free school climates for students (p. 21).

The CDI also links character education and behaviours in citizenship education's context of practice. The *Summary* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008f) states "Character development creates opportunities for students to develop the skills required for positive and effective participation as citizens in their schools and communities" (p. 5). The CDI Web site lists "responsible citizenship in classrooms, schools and communities" as a goal of the initiative (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009/2011).

### **Contributions of the Policy Web**

While the policy web I propose does not resolve the complexity of policy relationships, it helps identify *how* policies are related to one another and provides a way to map these connections. Examination of Ontario's character education policy cycle's context of influence, for example, shows how the effects of one policy become influences of another. In the case of character education in Ontario, test scores in the student achievement policy cycle serve as both pressure and rationale for character education in its context of influence. Ultimately, changes in character education's context of practice are intended to affect the context of practice in the student

achievement policy cycle through higher test scores. If these changes do not occur, character education as a strategy for raising achievement may be abandoned. The same may result if school safety is not perceived to improve.

The web of policy relationships can help identify (a) individuals, (b) issues, (c) organizations, (d) texts, (e) practices, and (f) ideas that are important across different policy fields. This knowledge may provide information that can be used to support or challenge particular policies. The application described in this paper, for example, suggests that Ontario's government expects that character education will yield improvements in school safety, student achievement, and citizenship. Those who oppose Ontario's CDI could use their knowledge of these expectations to challenge character education policy more successfully if they also propose alternatives to character education that may impact achievement, citizenship, and school safety, rather than limiting their argument to character education itself. Similarly, an analysis might show that a single organization influences multiple policies; thus, that organization might be one reformers choose to work with to affect large scale education policy change. Drawing attention to the complexity of policy relationships makes it easy to see why it can be difficult to change policies, but it also helps identify opportunities for challenging them.

The web also highlights how a particular policy is positioned in relation to other policies. Character education in Ontario has received relatively little financial support from the provincial government, and my interviews with Ontario secondary school teachers suggest that they do not see much evidence of character education in schools. Thus, the CDI could be dismissed as relatively unimportant. However, the web shows that the policy is connected to the government's central education focus, student achievement, as well as to the high profile safe schools policy. Given this positioning, character education is less easily dismissed.

The policy web is also helpful in policy analysis. It can suggest relationships between policies that might otherwise be missed if an analyst focused on texts, practices, or influences alone, or if the relationships were not immediately evident. Even if one considers only two policies, the web suggests nine different possible relationships that may exist between their contexts of influence, texts, and practices. The web of policy relationships helps policy analysts conduct a systematic and detailed examination of how policies may be related.

Mapping the relationships between policies using the web can provide historical understanding of a policy and knowledge about why a policy was adopted at a particular moment. Events in the contexts of practice of safe schools, citizenship, and student achievement gave rise to demands to do something in schools to (a) reduce violent incidents, (b) strengthen civic engagement, and (c) raise test scores. Character education was reintroduced in Ontario as a way to address these concerns.

The web of relationships can also be used to trace policy changes over time. Official texts published since 2006 in the safe schools policy's context of text production identify character education as part of its new approach to promoting safe schools in Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008e). Character education is also now linked to the province's *Student Success/Learning to 18* initiative (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008c). Ontario's character education policy has also changed since it was introduced in 2006. When introduced, *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12. Discussion Paper* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006) contained few references to equity; connections between character education and equity were virtually absent. The 2008 revision, however, is replete with references to connections between character education and equity. This change suggested activity in an emerging equity policy cycle at the provincial level. Indeed, in 2009, Ontario

introduced a new *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009a) and it is explicitly linked to the CDI (p. 25).

The policy web of relationships described in this paper, a web comprised of policy cycles connected in multiple and complex ways, is a useful way to conceptualize and identify dynamic relationships between policies. Rather than eliminating the complexity of policy relationships, the web provides understanding of how policies are positioned relative to one another, how they may be challenged or supported, and how they change over time in response to influences, practices and texts in other policy cycles.

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