CHARACTER EDUCATION RE-CONCEPTUALIZED
FOR PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION[*]

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In this paper we explored conceptual ambiguities of character education within the present Ontario Ministry of Education initiative. Through the critical lens of moral development theories and theories of mind, social and cognitive domains and their affect on character development were examined. Based on these findings three shortcomings in implementation were identified: a lack of clarity in defining 'character', a lack of recognition of the importance of cognitive and social processes in moral development, and a lack of clarity in effective strategies for character development. The recommendations for future implementation of character education were proposed.

In October 2006, The Ontario Ministry of Education introduced *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools K-12*, a discussion paper designed to guide the implementation of character education in K-12 public schools within the province. The initiative that spawned this paper requires a commitment from all stakeholders in the school and greater community to engage students in developing positive habits and characteristics of a responsible citizenship. The key beliefs and principles in *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools K-12*, hold that the values and attributes of character development are "universal and transcend racial, religious, ethno-cultural, linguistic, and other

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demographic factors" (p. 2). It also states that there is a growing need to find "common ground" on the values and attributes we in Ontario hold in common. By carefully reading the principles within this document, we found that the term "universal" seems to contradict the "need to find common ground on values" in Ontario. If the values and attributes of character development are indeed "universal," what troubles us is why would we need to find "common ground"?

We believe that in order to effectively implement character education in our schools, we need to have a clear definition of character and practical understanding of the theoretical frameworks among all stakeholders in Ontario. This is the reality elsewhere in Canada. For instance, in The *Heart of the Matter Character and Citizenship in Alberta Schools,* the understanding of character is based on Lickona's (1991) definition of character as a reliable inner disposition to respond to situations in a morally good way, involving three interrelated parts: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behaviour. This document also offers three different theoretical approaches (a traditional, a cognitive-developmental, and a caring communities approach) from the research literature to provide guidance for character education implementation. In *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools* K-12 (2006), character development is described as a foundation of our education system but a clear definition of 'character' or theoretical framework guidelines is nowhere to be found. Since writing this paper, a more recent edition of this document has been released. In June 2008, The Ministry of Education issued the new, improved version of the *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools K-12* based on the comments and suggestions received from the schools' stakeholders throughout Ontario. However, while some improvements are evident, a clear definition of 'character' and theoretical framework guidelines are still missing.

Therefore, in this paper we will attempt to define character as it is influenced by social and cognitive differences. Second, through the critical lens of theories of moral development and theory of mind, we intend to provide a clear understanding of the processes associated with character development in order to make recommendations for successful character education implementation.

Defining Character

Due to inconsistent definition of what is meant by 'character', and a failure to align this initiative with a theoretical framework, in the *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools K-12*(2006, 2008), the implementation of character education in schools stands little chance of succeeding. Without clear and concise understanding of what is meant by "character" and without recognizing its ties to the development of moral reasoning, character education seems doomed to flounder. It seems then appropriate to start with the definition of character that will lead to adequate understanding of character education, and will allow proper implementation of such in the future.

DeRoche and Williams (2001) argue that two main purposes for educating children and youth are cognitive development related to their academic achievement and character formation, which includes personal values and civic competencies. Character may be defined as a complex set of psychological characteristics, formed in part by growth in cognition that enables a person to act as a moral agent (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). As such, character is considered as a sociomoral competency that incorporates moral action, moral values, moral personality, moral emotions, moral reasoning, moral identity, and foundational characteristics. Character also must be comprehensively defined to include thinking, feeling, and behavior, and character strengths

should be accepted as a family of positive traits reflected in those thoughts, feelings, and

behaviors (Lickona, 1991; Park, 2004). Hunter (2000) defines character as the amalgamation of

three elements: moral discipline, moral attachment, and moral autonomy. He proposes that

character is constructed with those moral elements and is influenced not only by the individual

differences in knowing and understanding of moral norms but also with different social and

cultural factors that determine individuals' moral behaviour.

Character is, in part, borne out of moral elements, thus both character and morality

should be accepted as interrelated. A person of 'good' character is usually cognizant of the moral

implications of their actions and act in accordance with what is moral (Nucci, 2001). Good

character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good. Nucci suggests

that morality requires that one act in ways that are consistent with his moral judgment, and this in

turn requires that moral understanding be translated into a sense of personal responsibility and

action. Thus, if moral action hinges on personal responsibility, such action can be used as an

evaluation of what it is to be a 'good' person. Recognizing that character formation is dependent

at least in part on moral development, we now turn to theories of moral development as a basis

for critically examining character education.

Theories of Moral Development

In cognitive-developmental theories (e.g., Kohlberg, 1984; Piaget 1932; Power, Higgins

& Kohlberg, 1989; Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau & Thoma, 2000; Narvaez, 2002) moral reasoning

concerns a specific aspect of moral judgment. According to Kohlberg (1984) morality should be

described in terms of two fundamentally different aspects: an affective aspect (i.e., the moral

attitudes, values, ideals) and cognitive aspect (i.e., the person's moral competencies). As such,

moral behaviour depends both on the aspired moral ideals or principles and on the ability to judge and act accordingly.

Kohlberg describes moral development through six stages ordered into three levels of moral orientations that reflect children's growing competence in taking a socio-moral perspective: from a pre-moral, primarily egocentric orientation through a conventional, primarily rule-conforming orientation to a self-accepted, principled orientation. He stresses that at the earlier stage ''the center of moral choice and feelings are based on the outcome of personal well being'' (p. 393), while the later stage of moral development is associated with the ability to imagine the perspective of others. At the heart of each stage is the motivation for making the right choice. The earliest motivation is avoidance of punishment, which evolves into serving individual needs while recognizing that others also have their personal interests. By the next stage a child develops a need to be a good person both in the opinion of others and his own. This moves to obligation to maintain the system and eventual recognition that the welfare of all individuals depends on established laws and duties. The final stage is the acceptance of universal moral principles and a desire to abide by them (Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989; Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau & Thoma, 2000; Narvaez, 2002).The unifying premise of the Kohlberg model for moral development is 'justice,' not as a distinct value, but as a process which underlies an individual's capacity for moral judgment (Power et al.).   Children's conceptualization of fairness evolves through each of the six stages and guides choices between right and wrong. Promotion of moral judgment becomes socially accepted behaviour within a structural capacity and once it is developed, although performance is situationally varied, the capacity resides within the individual (Power et al.). Kohlberg anticipates that once the stage structures were correctly identified, not only would moral judgment be unitary in nature, but also each moral development

stage would follow the next in exact same sequence. Kohlberg describes these sequences of development based on children's evaluations of right or wrong behaviours and their consideration of intention in justifying their judgment. The stages emerge from children's own thinking about moral problems. Thus social experiences do promote development, but they do so by stimulating mental processes. In this context, we argue that it is important to define the best teaching approaches in stimulating mental processes of children before the implementation of character education in our schools can begin. It is also important to understand that social and environmental experiences play an important role in the development of moral reasoning.

Rest (1984) and Rest, Narvaez, Thoma, & Bebeau, (2000) substantially refines Kohlberg's stages of moral development theory. While Kohlberg's stage model is based on the insistence that every individual exists in a particular stage, Rest's schemas follow the developmental pattern, but allow a more gradual transition across the range of moral development. The Four-Component Model created by Rest (1984) describes the process of moral action. The model consists of (a) rational decision-making, (b) moral evaluation, (c) moral choice, and (d) moral fortitude. According to Rest, this model was based upon "processes" and not "virtues" or personal "traits" (p. 5). Additionally, the cognitive process involves interplay of the components rather than stage procession. According to Rest, a concept of "fairness" was inherent in the mental paradigms of individuals, although the definition of fairness was relative to the individual's level of cognitive moral development (p. 10). For example, in stage 2, Rest (1984) describes fairness as, "direct exchange of favor for favor" (p. 10). Stage 3 entailed a fairness of "maintaining positive, long-term relationships…that I know I can count on you and that you can count on me…." (p. 10). Fairness in stage 4 was defined in terms of the solidarity of the greater society which relied on the general willingness of people to submit to the law. Rest et

al. (2000) also stress the importance of community involvement in children's moral development. They argue that common morality might be different for different communities (and therefore relative), but the common morality has to be debated and scrutinized by members of the community and therefore, reflects an equilibrium between the ideals and the moral intrusions of the community. Rest also argues that morally productive societies do not merely prescribe law, but debate law and evolve law. Thus the need for discourse among all school stakeholders: students, teachers, administrators and members of wider community.

The social learning theorists (e.g., Bandura, 1989; Nucci, 1997; Turiel, 1983) conceptualize moral development as a social learning process and believe that children learn what is morally acceptable through direct or symbolic stimuli and reward during the learning process. Bandura (1989) argues that two kinds of learning experiences affect moral behaviour: a direct tuition based on rewards and punishment and observational learning based on learning moral behaviours by observing other people. To Bandura (1994), examples and actions observed depend on the outcome of four processes: (a) attention processes that determine whether the child pays attention to the modeled behavior; (b) retention processes that determine what a child remembers of the modeled behavior; (c) behavioral production processes that determine how what was seen is incorporated in one's own behavior; and (d) motivational processes determining the attractiveness of the modeled behavior to the child. Alternatively, observation of behavior may lead to the inference of rules of conduct that can be applied under different circumstances. This extrapolation of rules from exemplary behavior Bandura calls 'abstract modeling.' Through this abstract form of observational learning, children may, for instance, adopt certain values by which they may henceforth judge behaviour of others and later internalize that behaviour as their own. Bandura postulates that observational learning

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does not limit itself only to the adoption of new, presumably good moral values and behaviors; it also may enforce or weaken existing values. As such, a child's moral thinking and development vary according to the content offered within the environment.

Within the context of schools, Noddings (2002) argues that the teacher (and any other caring adults in the school system) must model for children, show care for others, and provide opportunities for discourse among students in order to reach common understandings for others. She calls for the 'confirmation of the good in others' and stresses the importance of the development and sustaining of relationships among children, rather than developing traits of individualism.

In social-domain theories, moral reasoning is developed in accordance with the child's interaction with socializing agents in different social settings (Nucci, 1997; Turiel, 1983). Children's concepts of morality and social convention emerge out of their attempts to mediate differing forms of social experience associated with these two classes of social events (Nucci, 1997). It has been shown that exposure to different moral regulation and norms in family, school, or peer groups can have a profound impact on children's development of moral reasoning (Gerris, Dekovic, & Janssens, 1997). Children construct different forms of social knowledge, including moral knowing as well as other types of social knowledge, through their social experiences with adults, peers, and siblings. Nucci argues that the moral judgments of children do not stem directly from institutional social systems, but from traces inherent in social relationships, including experiences that entail damage to others, the violation of some rights, and conflicts between opposed claims. He defines morals as concepts, reasoning, and actions related to well-being, rights, and the fair treatment of other people. According to Nucci, morals defined in terms of justice, well-being, and rights can be distinguished from social

conventionalities, which are standards for particular behaviours that are determined consensually by a certain social group. Narvaez (2002) suggests that to become people of good character, students need opportunities to develop their intuitions in well-structured environments, and guidance to develop proper ethical skills. Educators need explicit instruction about the theory behind the skills they are teaching, hence the necessity to further their theoretical understanding before implementing character education in practice. We argue that for adequate implementation of character education, the importance of the school and the broader community needs to be recognized and identified as fundamental in fostering positive moral behaviour.

Theory of Mind

Theory of mind are those processes which develop in infants, through childhood and beyond which enable an individual to process and respond to external stimuli (Flavell, 2004). The basis of need to develop theory of mind is quite simply that a child cannot understand the stimuli to which he or she is exposed, without first understanding something about mind. Mind, referring to the 'unobservable,' including desires, beliefs, emotions, and perceptions, must therefore be developed. Only through the development of theory of mind can an individual explain and predict the actions of others (Flavell) and inasmuch respond or act suitably. Theory of mind then becomes the basis for social understanding, and as such will have bearing on the development of an individual's character. According to Hughes and Leekam (2004) social interactions are transformed with the level of skill in 'reading the minds' of others.

Just how theory of mind is developed has been studied using four theoretical perspectives, the first being nativist, which suggests it is essentially a maturational process, yet recent work indicates cultural differences in both rate and pattern of development (see Vinden,

1999; Wellman, Cross, & Watson, 2001). The 'theory theory' suggests that social environments influence the rate of development, and cultural differences will influence how different states of mind are interpreted (Hughes & Leekam, 2004). Simulation theory argues for the importance of "self-awareness and the imaginative capacity for pretence" (Hughes & Leekam, p. 596), suggesting that the degree to which pretend play is part of children's environment will impact theory of mind development. Finally, the executive functioning perspective argues for the interrelatedness of developmental growth with goal-directed behaviour, such that both quality and quantity of social interactions will impact the subsequent development of theory of mind (Hughes & Leekam). The review of theory of mind literature by Hughes and Leekam uncovered that the development of an individual's theory of mind can have positive, negative, or neutral implications for interpersonal relationships, noting that an individual's awareness of the internal states of another are associated with empathy as well as malicious behaviour. A goal for developing character in our young would be to reduce the incidence of malice by increasing the ability to reason and judge the right course of action and to then act on these judgments.

We would argue that if an individual cannot perceive a situation from more than one point of view, (understanding that not all perceptions will be accurate), he/she would be less likely to consider the needs of others and thus may be more inclined to make choices which are unjust and motivated by individual gain rather than what is right. According to Chandler, Sokol, and Wainryb (2000), only a handful of studies exist which examine children's emerging understanding of values (see Carpendale, 1995; Carpendale & Chandler, 1996; Flavell, Flavell, Green, & Moses, 1990; Flavell, Mumme, Green, & Flavell, 1992), and virtually none examine the interaction between what is believed to be right and what is believed to be true. Chandler et al. argue that research which does not at least attempt to study the interaction between what is

right and what is believed to be true is at best, only part of the story. By way of an extension, how do persons reconcile what they believe with what they judge to be moral so that they can then determine an appropriate response? This should be of interest to anyone charged with the responsibility of developing character in our most valuable resource, our children.

The Punch and Judy TV show provides a good example for understanding the development of mistaken beliefs in children. In one example the character Punch, in an effort to get rid of Judy once and for all, takes advantage of an opportunity when Judy accidentally falls into a box. While Punch searches for a rope off stage to tie the box shut, Judy is observed by the audience leaving the box. These episodes were studied by philosopher, Daniel Dennett (1978), as an attempt of understanding children's growing beliefs about belief. The children that understand that Punch is operating under a false belief react differently than those who do not understand this reality. Dennett's work formed a foundation for further research by Carpendale and Chandler (1996) and Chandler and Lalonde (1996). Their work resulted in two main findings. First, every child participant who believed that Punch acted out of ignorance rather than intention when he pushed Judy off the cliff in a box judged him less harshly. Second, children who were operating with a more 'interpretive' theory of mind recognized that statements or actions were open to more than one interpretation. These participants judged Punch more harshly for being careless in his actions, suggesting he should have considered alternative interpretations of the information he was given, before he acted. "These and other results from this study sequence make it clear that, like their growing understanding of the moral import of the *content* of people's informational beliefs, children's progress toward a more mature understanding of the interpretive nature of the knowing process itself also works to rewrite the map of their moral understanding" (Chandler et al., 2000, p. 95).

In examining how preadolescents respond in ambiguous social dilemmas, Bosacki and Astington (1999) hypothesized that "preadolescents' ability to understand thoughts and emotions in others would be associated with social competence" (p. 237). The process of understanding may be more than one interpretation of the same information is critical. We argue that as a minimum, initiatives intended to develop the character of children (their ability to judge what is right, fair, or just) ranging from age 4 to 18 roughly, need to be developmentally appropriate to ensure that the messages are interpreted in concert with what they also understand to be truth.

Using a theoretical framework of theory of mind (social understanding), differences in abilities to reason and act morally can be examined. According to Bosacki and Astington (1999) these differences are comprised of four constructs: conceptual role taking, empathic sensitivity, person perception, and ability to generate alternatives. Based on these findings, it is reasonable to conclude that failure to develop any one or a combination of these constructs would result in a diminished ability to accurately interpret social interactions. This element when integrated with Hunter's (2000) definition of character which incorporates moral discipline, moral attachment, and moral autonomy, meaning that individuals must be able to perceive accurately the intent of others' actions/words. They also must be able to demonstrate appropriate self control, they must feel a commitment or sense of belonging to that individual or group, and they must have the ability to make ethical decisions for themselves. Thus, initiatives geared at developing character in individuals must not only be developmentally appropriate, they must also enrich the individuals' ability for self control, their connection to their community, and provide opportunity for meaningful decision making.

If in fact the objective of the character development initiative within the province of Ontario is to enrich the character, including the ability to reason morally and the abilities to think

and act critically as individuals, then educators must become more knowledgeable about the cognitive and social processes which link moral reasoning with moral action so that their actions can be more intentional and less random. According to Blair, Marsh, Finger, Blair, and Luo (2006), there are specific neural systems which mediate reasoning related to both social conventions and care-based morality. Although they argue that theory of mind is not a prerequisite for developing "affect based automatic moral attitudes" (p.13), it is critically involved in moral reasoning and as such bears further investigation and recognition. How theory of mind developed is where we turn next.

Theory of mind is thought to be developed by activation of what Gallese, Keysers, and Rizzolatti (2004) refer to as mirror neuron systems. According to these authors, there are "neural mechanisms (mirror mechanisms) that allow us to directly understand the meaning of the actions and emotions of others by internally replicating ('simulat-simulating') them without any explicit reflective mediation" (p. 396). Essentially, in observing an action, the same neurons are activated as would be if it were the observer performing the task themselves. This may be linked to the claim by Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, and Smith (2006) that character development initiatives are more effective when teachers and parents model and promote good character and students are able to contribute in meaningful ways to the school community. This would provide that opportunity to 'observe' which in turn develops the neurons needed to act themselves. It is through interaction with others that an individual develops social awareness and understanding. Understanding that there are certain 'high yield' cognitive strategies may help educators and parents alike to refine their interventions for the greatest impact.

According to Levine (2002) the brain is composed of complex neural patterns/pathways. These pathways are largely formed in humans by age 7, after which time there is considerably

less plasticity. The brain is in large part, shaped by experience. Levine further claims that

existing pathways can be strengthened or weakened through adulthood (Levine). If this is in fact

accurate, then educators and parents alike need to help establish constructive environments

which will yield the development of 'healthy' pathways from the outset. This may require a re-

examination of how schools are in fact governed and structured. Including recognition of the

delineation and frequent overlap between what is considered social convention and what is a

moral belief. Where both moral and social conventions appear to collide or overlap is where one

might expect to see the most revealing decision making by individuals. Put another way, the true

test of an individual's character is the ability to distinguish, interpret and respond in ways which

maintain that individual's integrity. Are persons able to discern a social convention and a moral

dilemma and generate an appropriate course of action from the situation in which they find

themselves? According to Arsenio and Lemerise (2004) an individual's ability to reason in

mixed-domain situations results in one of three approaches: domain subordination (one domain

is given priority over the other), domain coordination (where the two domains are integrated), or

a lack of domain resolution. What sets one approach apart from the others, according to Arsenio

and Lemerise is the motivator; an individual is motivated by relational gains, being someone's

friend, or some other objective, including, personal gain and the avoidance of conflict. Where the

objective is something other than relational in nature, one might expect to see 'character flaws.'

Attention to the rights and welfare of others requires the ability to reason morally.

However, Greene and Haidt (2002) have argued that before individuals can reason morally, they

must first be able to make moral judgments, requiring activation of emotion. Put another way,

making individuals care about the welfare of others is fundamental to the reasoning and

following actions of an individual. Greene and Haidt examined PET scans to determine which

areas of the brain are activated within normal and aberrant adults when making moral judgments. Their findings support the argument that making moral judgments requires activation of processes in the brain dedicated to "the representation of others' mental states (ToM)" (p. 522).

According to Blair, Marsh, Finger, Blair and Luo (2006) the presence or absence of a victim determines which of the two domains is activated, social or moral. Social conventions typically do not involve a victim and are seen to be less serious; and more permissible in the absence of rules, where moral transgressions generally involve a victim and are associated with emotion. Smetana (1981) argues that transgressions universally judged to be wrong regardless of the presence or absence of rules are moral in nature and that children as young as age 2 and 1/2 are able to make these judgments. Smetana's 1981 research showed the willingness of pre-school children to judge conventional transgressions as less serious than moral transgressions to be significant and consistent with the responses of older subjects.

To better understand the role theory of mind plays in developing moral reasoning and the ability to distinguish social conventions from moral, consideration of incidents devoid of moral reasoning are examined. Many moral transgressions include either a physical or verbal form of aggression; by default many acts of aggression, either verbal or physical are moral transgressions (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2004; Turiel, 1998). Bringing together the model of social adjustment for social information processing, (Crick & Dodge, 1994) with the domain model of moral development (Nucci, 2001; Smetana, 1995; Turiel, 1983) is useful for examining the concepts of social cognition and behaviour, specifically where 'knowing' does not always translate into 'doing' (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2004). Domain theory is found to be useful in helping a child discern what is moral and what is not, and social information processing impacts on the subsequent actions of the child (Arsenio & Lemerise). In both models, the child's ability to

understand the intentions of another (i.e. Did they mean to hurt me?), have an impact on the subsequent behaviour of the child. Coie and Dodge (1998) found that both aggressive and non-aggressive children perceive *intentional* acts of harm to be wrong. Suggesting a core value of justice exists among these children. If this is accepted as accurate, the principle of justice may well be one of those values considered by the Ministry of Education in Ontario, as 'common.'

Identifying characteristics of individuals who tend to act with apparent disregard for moral knowing may provide some insight for educators looking to minimize this type of behaviour. Children who are 'objective oriented, (proactive aggressors) do not tend to rely on values when determining the 'permissibility' of their intended behaviour. These individuals warrant further examination. What enables one to disregard what is 'fair, right, or just' in favour of using aggressive means to obtain desired material objects? In these instances children are not motivated by reaction to a perceived wrong, but by potential personal gain. Examining the behaviour of bullies, long believed to be socially inept, reveals a surprising finding by Sutton, Smith, and Swettenham (1999). From their research studying 7 – 10-year-old bullies they found that the 'bully participants' were able to understand the emotional and mental states of a character in a story better than their classmates. Having the ability to understand another's point of view then, appears to be insufficient for choosing a moral course of action. Gianluca (2006) adds to the findings of Sutton et al. by incorporating stories which called for recognizing and understanding moral emotions (moral cognition) such as guilt and shame by the participant. In this research, findings do not completely confirm that bullies have reduced moral cognitive processes but is consistent in finding children identified as pro-social, have high levels of performance on tasks requiring strong theory of mind, as well as moral cognition. According to Nucci (2001) the bridge linking 'knowing the good' to, 'doing the good' is wanting "to do what

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is moral, rather than engage in actions that lead to other goals" (p. 196). Socially competent children tend to be more focused on relational goals, that is, maintaining relationships and friendships, than more aggressive children, who tend to focus mainly on instrumental gains (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2004). Accepting that acts based in morality require some understanding of the outcome for the victim, as suggested by Turiel (1983), could mean that children who choose more instrumental goals either do not have the capacity of theory of mind to understand the experiences of others (i.e., ability to empathize) or they choose to prioritize their personal gain over the condition of another. Understanding which explanation is more accurate should prove useful in determining appropriate preventative and intervention methods and bears further consideration and is beyond the scope of this paper.

Recommendations

Through exploration of theories of moral development and theory of mind, and in clearly defining social and cognitive influences on character, we concluded that 'common ground' must begin with a clearly articulated definition of character. Without such common understanding, educators, scholars, and practitioners alike will be led in many directions, which may or may not result in development of positive "character."

In order to avoid such miss-direction, we offer the following strategies that may yield positive development of character. First, based on Kohlberg's cognitive development theory, we believe that educators need to engage students in peer group discussions around relevant moral issues anticipating that students who are at the higher level of moral development would influence the moral thinking of those who are at a lower level. Second, we need to use inclusion, meaning engaging all stakeholders and students in meaningful discussion about moral values,

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beliefs, and actions. According to Bandura, the students may adopt certain values by observing behaviours of others, and later they may internalize that behaviour as their own. This is also supported by the work on mirror neuron systems done by Gallese, Keyser and Rizzolatti (2004) which concluded that in observing an act the same neurons are activated as if the observer were the one performing the act itself. Thus, the importance of educators' modeling good sets of values through these discussions may become of essence in developing moral action in students. Nucci (1997) also implies that social experiences are important in forming children's concepts of morality and that different moral norms embraced in family, school, and community may have profound impact on children's development of moral reasoning. In connection to Nucci's social-domain theory, educating parents, school members, and members of the broader community about the theories of moral development as they pertain to character is of great importance. We believe that by gaining the necessary knowledge, they should be able to engage in constructive dialogue about moral issues in order to be able to find 'common ground.'

Based on theory of mind, as a third strategy we propose the initiatives within schools aiming at developing children's ability to value relational gains over instrumental gains and their ability to believe that minimizing self serving or personal gain type behaviour may prove useful. This strategy would include opportunities for children to collaborate and learn co-operatively. In this way children may learn that they need each other and as such would make greater effort to maintain positive relations as a means of securing their own success. Programs such as Roots of Empathy where children learn to care for an infant as it develops over a school year may also assist in this regard. A further benefit to creating supportive learning environments where students feel connected to others would likely be increased student engagement.

To conclude, we believe that without clearly defined research-based strategies for

implementation, educators will be left to trial-and-error attempts, making success regarding

character education implementation random rather than intentional and reproducible. This will

require a collaborative effort between practitioner and researcher; a practice that should be

developed to increase the use of effective practices in schools.

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