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Article 89

Using Bibliotherapy to Promote Multicultural Character Education in School Age Children

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Many theorize that teaching character education enhances students' positive self-esteem, multicultural tolerance, and higher order thinking (Williams, 2000). Counselors in the school setting are in the best position to teach and reinforce social responsibility and positive ethical and cultural values through the delivery of a complete, comprehensive school counseling program (Britzman, 2005). Though many programs promote social responsibility and ethical values, few comprehensive counseling programs that include character education focus on the importance of teaching multicultural aspects of character education to young children (Lee, 2001). Current research literature proposes that the use of character education programming in schools can aid positive student development and student learning. Additionally, researchers propose many counseling interventions are only focused on remediation and psychological damage that can be linked to poor moral and ethical decision-making, thereby hindering a positive academic environment (Britzman, 2005).

Character education can be traced back to Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin and their desire to see schools build not only students with academic skills, but students who would be virtuous citizens. As time passed, the influence of science became prevalent in schools, leading to the rejection of moral obligations within the schools (Cunningham, 2005). This approach raised the question as to whether or not character traits were unchangeable, and if teaching and promoting character was effective. By the 1960s and 1970s, there was an increased fear of schools being indoctrinated with moral teachings that would conflict with held views of citizens. This conflict caused many schools to shy away from an overt character education program until the 1980s. During the 1980s, school violence began to increase, and moral development appeared to decline. There was a renewed emphasis on the ethical and moral part of comprehensive education and there continues to be a great fluctuation in the development of and

commitment to effective character education programming within the public school system. Character education has taken various forms, at times being in vogue and at other times being frowned upon. The one constant in character education and moral education is it continually resurfaces, namely dependent upon the events in our society (Cunningham, 2005).

Current character education research lacks the methodology needed to understand which counseling interventions promote good character and healthy school climates. Many of the research studies are anecdotal in nature and based on soft evidence (Britzman, 2005). In addition, much of the character education programming is state mandated or a part of school district programming. These mandates can lead to programs that are subject to local politics, local culture, and open to school interpretation on how to evaluate and implement the program. Finally, many programs lack program evaluation to ensure processes and outcomes of the implemented program are providing the moral and ethical development of children at the school (DeRoche, 2000).

Ideal character education programs must foster openness of participation, openness to diversity, openness to conflict, openness to reflection, and finally openness to mistakes. The program must also incorporate important stakeholders that have a vested interest in the school, students, faculty, administrators, and the surrounding community. Character education programs should also work in tandem with the school's mission statement and allow for changes to the mission statement as the program is implemented and evaluated (DeRoche, 2000).

Counselors help students deal with affective skills, while teachers help students build cognitive based academic skills; good programs include both a cognitive and an affective component. The integration of these two components is key in executing a holistic character education program (Stone & Dyal, 1997). Collaboration of key stakeholders in the lives of students will enable the character education program to take a deep root in the overall mission of schools. With teachers, counselors, and administration all working together in their respective roles with a common goal of building students of character, students will receive quality character education in every facet of their school day, therefore, consistently reinforcing both directly and indirectly the principles of the character education program, but most importantly the character qualities themselves. (Pearson & Nicholson, 2000). This group effort will help bring an end to the disconnect many schools have between a school vision/ mission statement and a separate character education entity (DeRoche, 2000).

Programs must have leadership that can help guide school faculty, administrators, parents, staff, and the surrounding community to agree on values and other skills that will be taught and reinforced at home, school, and within the community. The leader is knowledgeable about current topics shaping character education such as history and development of the character education implementation, moral development of children, best practice models for current character education programs, curriculum materials used in current programs, and finally the background foundation of character education (DeRoche, 2000).

Review of Literature

Character education programs must have basic components in order to be successful. The program must be comprehensive and guided by standards. The standards are used to guide and ensure the program's maintenance evaluation, implementation, and effectiveness. Those seeking to develop character programming for any school should be guided by these seven questions: (1) what is to be evaluated?; (2) why, how, and when is it to be evaluated?; (3) who will do the evaluation?; (4) how will the data be collected and analyzed?; (5) how will the findings be reported?; (6) who will receive the evaluation report?; and (7) what actions should occur as a result of the evaluation? (DeRoche, 2000).

There is a significant lack of consensus on one agreed upon definition for character education, goals for character education programs, and the program's emphasis or intention. According to Jones and Stoodley (1999), character education should be focused on the development of personal character traits to be used within the specific context of that individual's life. Given this perspective, character education is intended to teach knowing, loving, and doing good (Bebeau, Rest, & Narvaez, 1999). Schaps and Lewis (1999) noted that character education should seek to develop citizens who display responsibility, discipline, care, and concern. According to Lerner (2006), character education is about guiding young lives to build core values that become habits and take root in the life of the child. Richardson, Tolson, Tse-Yang, and Yi-Hsuan (2009) define character education as simply teaching students skills on ways to handle themselves and their emotions in social environments. This indecision and lack of congruence on a set definition for character education contributes to the dilemma as to what is character education, why is it important, and what should it cover. With the changing face of character education, there arises a challenge to move from an ethnocentric program to one that is centered and reflects a colorful combinations of countless cultures. This is a key trait of a culturally responsive school (Lee, 2001). "U.S. schools are becoming a social arena where children who represent truly diverse behavioral styles, attitudinal orientations, and value systems have been brought together with one goal—to prepare them for academic, career, and social success in the 21st Century" (Lee, 2001, p. 257). The American School Counselor Association found this issue so significant that they created a statement reflecting their stance on cross-cultural and multicultural counseling that requires counseling programs to provide opportunities for students to gain an understanding and appreciation for multiculturalism and diversity (ASCA, 1998). Sadly though, when looking at a broad picture of character education throughout the United States, most programs do not reach the diverse populations that now reside in our schools (Manning & Baruth, 2000). Instead, however, the programs continue to be rooted in White middle class culture. This represents a significant portion of our students whose cultures and worldviews not only lack representation in our schools, but are not even alluded to or considered in the delivery of character education programming (Lee, 2001).

The task of carrying out an effective character education program is best achieved when forces join together and do not simply leave this form of education up to schools and their respective faculties and staff. This task is a daunting one, but one that is achievable when the connection is made from the classroom to the community and drawing in schools, parents, family members, and community agencies and organizations.

A strong foundation will exist when this kind of integration occurs between the classroom, the school, and the community (Anderson, 2000).

Positive correlations have been observed between the implementation of character education programs and the number of discipline problems, as well as the rate of academic performance (Richardson et al., 2009). Brannon (2008) interviewed National Board Certified Teachers and found that the teachers believed that character education programs had a positive impact on student achievement and classroom behavior. Interviewed teachers stated when parents are also involved in the planning and implementation of character education, the impact on students is positive. Positive behaviors observed from students included improved perceptions about their competence and improved attitude about homework. When asked about the importance of incorporating character education in the classroom, teachers gave the following: society condones some behaviors that are not accepted in the classroom setting. Character education helps students to understand which behaviors are acceptable and unacceptable in the classroom setting. Another benefit given for character education was regarding children's increased viewing of television programming that is not age or developmentally appropriate. This adult programming can send children mixed messages about good character and character education programming can set clear boundaries about good character (Brannon, 2008).

Strategies commonly used to implement character education include modeling for students characteristics of good character and using teachable moments that occur in the classroom. In addition, teachers often ask students for their input when composing rules for conduct in the classroom. By asking each child for their input, a door is opened for discussion about good character and how they see others applying good character in the classroom. Other ways that character education is implemented include the use of cooperative learning, role-play, songs, and school service learning projects highlighting character education concepts (Brannon, 2008).

Methods

The purpose of this study is to examine how cultured-centered bibliotherapy and multicultural character education can inform how young children develop an understanding about race and ethnicity. In this study researchers want to look at the following: (a) is bibliotherapy an effective intervention in teaching young children about racial and ethnic differences?; (b) can culture-centered bibliotherapy promote multicultural character education?

Researchers used bibliotherapy to discuss issues of culture with young children and to assess their own cultural identity. A total of 24 participants, all in the 2nd grade, participated in the study. Participants were randomly divided into groups of 4 and were read a book after being grouped in developmentally appropriate literature circles. The readings were followed by discussion that inquired about the (a) the theme of the story, (b) any commonalities between the story and the children's lives, (c) if they were a character in the book, would they do something differently. Common themes across literature circles were then extracted from each taped group discussion. The book selected was *Nadia's Hands* by Karen English. The main character, Nadia, has been chosen to be a flower girl in her auntie's traditional Pakistani Wedding. Nadia's hands

are decorated for the wedding and she worries what her classmates will say. She wonders if they will understand that the decoration is apart of her Pakistani heritage.

Discussion

Three overall themes emerged from the analysis of the discussion questions: self-acceptance, resilience, and being embarrassed. These themes represent how the participants processed the feelings of the main character and major events of the story and how they applied those major events and character feelings to their own experiences. These themes also illuminate how participants were able to relate to feelings the character Nadia experienced in the book and relate those feelings to their own personal experiences. These themes also show how participants were able to discuss different ways they handled other personal experiences when they felt different or like Nadia and talk about how they overcame those feelings using resilience. Participants were also able to listen to other group members' experiences regarding situations in which those members felt different; and each participant provided positive ways to help others in the group be resilient and remain resilient in future similar situations.

The first theme, "*self-acceptance*," was garnered from the following responses: "Nadia doesn't care what other people say about your hands and stuff. You can ignore them and you ain't got to worry about them." "It doesn't matter what your hands look like you are always beautiful." "It doesn't matter what people tell you about things. You don't have to care, you always know that you still look beautiful." "I think it doesn't matter how you look or what color your skin is or what color your eyes are, we're all the same." "You are who you are." "You shouldn't be afraid to show something different." The self-acceptance expressed illuminated the participants' ability to understand the feeling of being different and find ways to accept that difference and foster a positive acceptance of themselves and others.

The second theme, "*resilience*," was expressed in the following responses: "Accidents happen all the time and no matter what just keep trying and trying until you get it." "...That girl who paint her hands didn't care she just kept going and other people laughed at her and maybe one day it's going to happen to them too." "...one day I fell off my bike and I had long cuts all over my face and legs and I was scared that people were going to laugh at me, but I just didn't care." "...I was riding my bike and I popped a wheelie and I did a front flip off my bike and my friend was over there trying not to laugh, but then he must have laughed and I didn't care because I knew I was going to do something bad and I didn't care what he said about me." "...one day my cousin came over to my house with a scooter and my big brother wanted to drive it and he didn't know there was a rock and he fell down and hurt his leg and then somebody laughed at him but he didn't care he just laughed too." This theme illuminated the participants' ability to take a concept learned through the story read (i.e., being resilient) and apply the concept of resilient to actual real life situations that happened to each of them.

The final theme "*being embarrassed*," was communicated in the following response: "...one time I was embarrassed when I was jumping rope and I did a flip in the air and I fell down and hurt my head." This theme was a story shared by a participant that illuminated understanding the feeling of being embarrassed and feeling safe enough to share that feeling with the group. In addition the group was able to empathize with this

group member and say emphatically that they understood that feeling and that they appreciated the sharing of that example.

Table 1

Theme	Statements
Self-Acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nadia doesn't care what other people say about your hands and stuff. You can ignore them and you ain't got to worry about them.• It doesn't matter what your hands look like you are always beautiful.• It doesn't matter what people tell you about things. You don't have to care, you always know that you still look beautiful.• I think it doesn't matter how you look or what color your skin is or what color your eyes are, we're all the same.• You are who you are.• You shouldn't be afraid to show something different.
Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accidents happen all the time and no matter what just keep trying and trying until you get it.• That girl who paint her hands didn't care she just kept going and other people laughed at her and maybe one day it's going to happen to them too.• One day I fell off my bike and I had long cuts all over my face and legs and I was scared that people were going to laugh at me, but I just didn't care.• I was riding my bike and I popped a wheelie and I did a front flip off my bike and my friend was over there trying not to laugh, but then he must have laughed and I didn't care because I knew I was going to do something bad and I didn't care what he said about me.• One day my cousin came over to my house with a scooter and my big brother wanted to drive it and he didn't know there was a rock and he fell down and hurt his leg and then somebody laughed at him but he didn't care he just laughed too.
Being Embarrassed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One time I was embarrassed when I was jumping rope and I did a flip in the air and I fell down and hurt my head.

Significance for Counselors

Bibliotherapy, coupled with culture-centered character education, can serve as a primer to aid children in discussing topics that may be difficult. Using the literature circle format of reading the book, discussing the book, and then drawing pictures about the book, was an activity that can be used by counselors and teachers to draw both quiet and outspoken students. Character Education can serve as the venue for counselors to take a leadership role in the school setting while creating a framework to promote good character in students (Britzman, 2005). In understanding the need for a culturally responsive character education program, as well as the implicit role that the school counselor should have in this venture, the cultural realities of children must be considered-- primarily as they relate to a child's academic, career, and personal-social development (Lee, 2001).

Lee (2001) identifies culturally responsive schools as schools that appreciate and celebrate diversity instead of forcing conformity; schools which build the community of the school on its diverse nature instead of allowing diversity to divide the school, and schools which refused to compromise academic standards and maintain high expectations of all students despite their culture. Despite how easy it is to put on blinders and pretend that we can continue on with the current way of implementing character education, cultural differences are real and should not and cannot be ignored any longer. The role of counselors must be to take the knowledge base of cultural awareness, cultural diversity, and the various values held in high regard within each culture, and translate these into constructive action that promotes a culture-centered character education program.

Future Research

Future research needs to focus on the effectiveness of character education programs for students and schools. Researching ways that character education programming can better incorporate all staff and administration input and participation can help educators and helping professionals create better programming. Finally, researching ways to incorporate culture-centered activities and themes to reflect the diversity of the schools and students accessing character education programming can only benefit all stakeholders involved in developing well-rounded students, schools, and administrators.

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