ARE AMERICAN PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS VOID OF VALUES? THE TEACHER

PERSPECTIVE ON MORAL EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOL

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Are American Public High Schools Void of Values?
The Teacher Perspective on Moral Education in Public High School

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ABSTRACT

The American public school system's immense influence on culture and politics makes its critical inquiry vital for social awareness and prosperity. There is a wide body of literature that speculates on the presence of moral education in American public high schools. This study addresses the research need for information on the real-life "moral education" situation. The use of the literature term "moral education" was confirmed by research participants. A qualitative study was formed to explore the situation. Two American public high schools with different population sizes and ethnic demographics were used to recruit18 participants. The study determined that moral education is present in American public high schools, because the topic is "organic" or naturally inseparable from the teaching process. A number of methods were used to teach the topic and subjects ranged from controversial to non-controversial in nature.

Keywords: American high schools, moral education, and public education.

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CHAPTER 1: THE MODERN HISTORY OF MORAL EDUCATION

Despite the challenges, if the struggle to teach values, ethics, and morals was to be ignored, it would be tragic. For this reason, Kolstrein (2011) has spent his life promoting moral education and human rights. He can still recall the 1960-1970s in Chile as a time when severe human rights violations occurred. He proposes that moral education can be a means to enlighten upcoming generations to be sensitive, "…to democracy, tolerance, anti-discrimination and acceptance, respect for, and recognition of ideological, social, cultural and political diversity" (Kolstrein, 2011, p. 294). Others believe that moral education is a "positive" for students and society at large (Berkowitz & Bustamante, 2013; Brimi, 2009; Etzioni, n.d.; Garrison, 2009; Koh, 2012; Kolstrein, 2011; Power, Roney, & Power, 2006). The goal of this study is to investigate the current practices of teaching values, ethics and morals in the classroom today.

The backstory of values, ethics, and morals in modern classrooms begins in the 1980s. It was during this time that The Regan Administration's commissioned report, *A Nation at Risk,* determined that schools were failing to prepare the American workforce for international competition. The report determined that American students were alarmingly behind global competition, which amounted to a political fear that American youth were ill-prepared for the economic battle that lay before them. McIntush (2000) wrote, "According to *A Nation at Risk*; schools are a national factory turning out well-trained citizens capable of winning the economic war" (McIntush, 2000, p. 428). Furthermore, it was found that the country was in an economic global war; high monetary and power stakes were to be won or, as feared, lost. As a result of the "war-time" pressure; it was deduced that youth needed to be properly equipped with monetary skills to fight. This resulted in public schools becoming an institution best suited to ensure financial well-being for the nation state. Accordingly, it was further determined that this report

established the groundwork for how Americans think and talk about the role of education to this day (McIntush, 2000).

The next decade, the 1990s, saw an interest in moral education in the classroom. Administrators and teachers alike were engaging students in developing student's character through teaching values. Rosenblatt (1995) and Bates (1995), reporting on the trend, found that teachers were asking students to talk and think about moral issues. Although the purpose for doing this was to incorporate positive material into the classroom, some felt that it could be a negative for the students. For one, non-controversial moral ideals could be hard to come by. For example, simple concepts like "respect for life" became complicated when issues like abortion and euthanasia were brought into discussion. Their facilitation of lessons on even relatively simple matters could be problematic. A parent upset by classroom material could claim that their family's personal belief systems were under attack. Two, religious parents felt that schools were trying to take the place of church. Finally, moral education faced criticism for being ineffective. According to Bates (1995), the US Department of Education conducted a study to measure the effectiveness of moral education. They found that the current trend in the classroom was not making students more moral, as educators had hoped for, or less moral, as some from the political right feared. Ultimately, the students were not receptive to moral education course material. Despite the 1990s zeal for moral education; it faced many adversities.

The new millennium, with the second Bush Administration at the head of political leadership, sank any ambitions that educators from the 1990s may have had toward moral education. The administration's *No Child Left Behind Act* instated bureaucratic standards riddling the schools with test-preparation nearly exclusively (Brimi, 2009; Etzioni, n.d.; Garrison, 2009), yet at this same time some politicians were taking an interest in moral

education. William J. Bennett (2003), a conservative republican, proposed that "values" were not present in the schools and this was having negative effects on society. He illustrated his point with the concerns of a Judge in Detroit. The Judge spoke to Mr. Bennett and explained that time and again he would ask juvenile delinquents the question, "'Didn't anyone ever teach you the difference between right and wrong?' they [the juvenile delinquents] answer, 'No sir.' And you know, Mr. Bennett, I believe them'" (para 3). During the turn of the millennium classrooms were becoming trademarked with testing, while outside of the classroom conservative politicians were sounding the alarm for a generation devoid of values.

Currently, there have been some efforts by educators toward instating values and morals in the classroom. Berkowitz and Bustamante (2013) propose that character education curriculum "can bring out the best in students." They cite how effective it has been in Columbia. Moreover, the publication *Success in the Middle: A Policy Maker's Guide to Achieve Quality Middle Level Education* emphasizes the need for community involvement in creating policy that will foster character development. This publication purposes character development as a way to ignite cooperative learning and can set in motion an inevitable boost to test scores (Power, Roney, and Power 2006). Educators' efforts are valiant for the subjects of values, morals and ethics in the classroom, yet they have not gained federal support. Works in recent years may be making headway for future reform.

Schools could be a place for instilling values, morals and ethics, but they face many challenges; restricted curriculum, controversial topics and a fear of overall ineffectiveness. First, Brimi (2009) expresses, from an educator's standpoint, that the pressure of standardized testing is limiting. He writes:

You are a high school English teacher. The quality of your work is measured by your

students' performance on county and state standardized tests. Do you spend time on

character or moral education? Or do you, in the words of a colleague, 'imagine that your

students all go home after school, read the Bible, drink milk, and go to bed before ten

o'clock (p. 126).

Moral activists fear that many students lack a structure that directly addresses character, values,

and what it means to be moral (Brimi, 2009; Etzioni, n.d.; Koh, 2012; Kolstrein, 2011). Second,

schools also face the difficulty of settling on values to teach (Brimi, 2009; Berrett, 2012; Koh,

2012; McIntush, 2000; Rosenblatt, 1995). Koh (2012) explains that for pluralistic nations, those

that honor many value systems, agreeable concepts to teach are difficult to define. Lastly, the

effectiveness of moral development is highly disputed. Moral awareness is not easily

quantifiable. For instance, unlike a math problem, a clear right and wrong can be hard to

determine for complex ethical issues. These major challenges may have kept moral education at

bay in modern American public schools.

The history of moral education reveals that there is a cultural and political interest in the

topic. This chapter's findings guided the study's research questions as well as interview and

focus group dialogue. Moreover, this history helped in understanding and analyzing participant

attitudes toward moral education. Being able to connect participant data to this chapter's

information confirmed that participants were discussing generalizable concepts.

CHAPTER 2: LITURATURE REVIEW

This section will provide literature relevant to the current project with an emphasis on exhibiting the array of stakeholders who could benefit from this work. Each section and sub-section was chosen to illustrate the wide interest this topic has. The section will begin with an overview of why moral education is important and how government policies affect it. Then examples of on moral development research will demonstrate this study's recognition of the past research and prove it to be forward thinking. Afterward, a theoretical framework made up of moral philosophy is followed by methods on how to teach moral education. The data in this section will help determine richer meanings to data collected in the discussion section. Overall, this section will reveal that there is a sizable gap for exploration into the teacher's real life experiences on if and how they handle the topic of moral education.

Why Moral Education is Important

Many researchers are passionate on why moral education should be taught. They believe that moral education is the platform by which to teach human rights and citizenship. These scholars communally see moral education as a means to create a better democracy by educating students on the values and ethics associated with human rights (Carr, 2006; Hogan 2010; Kolstrein 2011; Splitter, 2011). In terms of human rights, Kolstrein (2011) saw how dictatorships can cause atrocities. He pointed to the 35,000 people who were tortured and disappeared during Salvador Allende's rule in the 1970s in Chile. He also pointed to the Nazi dictatorship in Germany and its "brutal expressions of dehumanization" (p. 292) with the Holocaust. He claimed moral education with an emphasis on human rights was the only answer to secure a safe future. He also believed that this form of education could shape the citizens of a nation. Likewise, Carr (2006) determined that citizenship was a matter of significant values and

virtues, and that it fostered an "ascription of right to others" (p.444), meaning that moral education would positively reinforce citizens to value their fellow man. This area of study helps to generate urgency and relevancy toward exploring the practice of moral education in American public schools.

Political Policies Affecting Moral Education

Many academics agree that moral education should be taught, but in today's bureaucratic school systems, it seems impossible. There are two solutions to the issue; one believes a reduction in policies could let the topic naturally flourish, while the other argues that more policy is needed to push the subject. To begin, some propose that education policies, such as *No Child Left Behind,* hinder students from receiving the full benefits of moral education (Brimi, 2008; Garrison, 2009). The general finding is that politically dictated initiatives shut out material beyond core subject matter. Moreover, political initiatives create a high level of bureaucracy, discrediting teachers' abilities to address student moral developmental needs. In contrast, Berkowitz & Bustamante (2013) do not discredit policies, but rather uphold their strength and argue that the same rudimentary vigor put behind all policies needs to be put behind character development curriculum, a closely related topic to moral education. This position is strikingly different from their counter-parts who feel overwhelmed with policy restrictions. In summary, the two solutions clearly disagree on how moral education should be taught, one pushes teacher intuition while the other touts standardization. This controversy could greatly benefit from research exploring the teacher experience on policies in the classroom.

The Founding Father of Moral Development Research

Kohlberg (1958) is the founding researcher of moral development (Henry, 2001, Koh, 2012; Lickona, 1973; Moroney, 2006; Nather, 2013; Rest, 1980; Seiler, 2011). This is

significant to the study because a primary goal of moral education is to promote moral development. Kohlberg set out in the late 1950s to tackle the problem of determining the effectiveness of moral education. His original participant pool was made of eighty-four male children and adolescents. For his method, he used nine hypothetical stories and asked participants 115 probing questions (Moroney, 2006). Their answers were eventually broken into six stages (see Table 1). He determined that people can morally develop through moral education. His most significant findings were: the identification of stages, placing stages in a hierarchal order, growth is always done in systematic order, and people never regress in development. Most importantly, the creation of quantifiable steps made morals measurable in a new way, giving researchers a tool to test moral judgment, enabling both the field of behavioral science and moral education to prosper. Kohlberg's impact is evident on the scientific community for he is the most quoted and widely used in modern moral development research to this day (Henry, 2001; Nather, 2013). In all, Kohlberg's work has laid a foundation that the scientific community has built upon for the past seventy years, creating both historical and modern relevance for his work.

Table 1:

Kohlberg's Six Stages of Moral Reasoning

Stage 1	The punishment and obidence orientation	The physical consquences of an action determine its goodness or badness regardless of the human meaning or value of these consequences.
Stage 2	The instrumental-relativist orientation	Right action consits of that which instrumentally satisfies one's own needs and occasionally the needs of others.
Stage 3	The interpersonal concordance orientation	Good bevavior is that which pleases or helps others and is approved by them.
Stage 4	The law & order orientation	The orientation is toward authority, fixed rules, and the maintence of the social order.
Stage 5	The social-contract orientation	Right action tends to be defined in terms of general individual rights, and standards that have been critically examined and agreed upon by the whole society.
Stage 6	The universal-ethical principle orientation	Right is defined by the decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen, universal, abstract, ethical principles (not concrete moral rules).

Kohlberg's theory has had both praise and criticism over the years. Beginning with praise, researchers validating Kohlberg's stretches across a five decade time period. For example, from 1970 to 2010 research like Lickona (1973), Rest (1980), and Seiler (2010) have confirmed Kohlberg's work to be valid. Moreover, these researchers have used Kohlberg's original work to create further theory, such as the defining issues test created by Rest (1980). This test has been used by moral development researchers to measure moral awareness (Nather, 2013; Park et al., 2012). On the other hand, others have discredited Kohlberg's findings. Namely, Gilligan (Gilligan, 1977) found that Kohlberg had a serious methodological flaw by not including women in his study. She conducted a follow-up study of her own without discriminating against gender. In contrast to Kohlberg's "justice" oriented development, she found moral development to revolve around "care." Others criticized Kohlberg's systematic

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succession of moral development (Koh, 2012; Moroney, 2006). For example, in her own study, Koh (2012) found that participants moved from a (Kohlberg defined) level one to a level three without ever showing evidence of being in level two. Likewise, his stipulation that one can never regress in morality was also disputed. Moroney (2006) points to the Christian faith's premise that believers can "back-slide" and lose once firm moral standing.   It appears that the score is unsettled between whom is most correct, those in support of Kohlberg's work or those against it. Due to the crucial work that Kohlberg has done on moral development research, a study on moral education would be incomplete without recognizing his contribution and his critiques. This subsection gives precedence into how moral education has been studied.

Effectiveness of Moral Education

A major question surrounding moral education today is how effective it is. Research into this problem is important to educators, moral activists, behavioral scientists, and many others because if values, ethics, and/or morals cannot be taught, then the effort to teach them is pointless. In recent years, the following researchers all conducted studies examining this: Jarrar, 2013; Lickona, 1973; Nather, 2013; Park et al, 2012, and Seiler, 2011. The methodological format of these studies was similar. Each measured moral reasoning before and after instructional moral courses to determine effectiveness of the course.   Each researcher positively concluded that moral education courses did develop moral reasoning. This is not to say that all research exploring the topic is as encouraging. The US Department of Education has also conducted research in this area, yet their results found an overall ineffectiveness (Bates, 1995). Moral education's effectiveness is important because it is a critique that moral education faces. Fortunately for stakeholders, many researchers have found a positive correlation between moral education and moral development.

A brief observation of methodologies used for past moral education studies revealed a possible methodological gap. Qualitative research in the field tends to be underrepresented. For instance, the prevalent research topic of moral education's effectiveness is generally examined with quantitative methods (Jarrar, 2012; Nather, 2013; Park , 2012; Koh, 2012). Namely, the use of questionnaires is widespread. This method limits participant responses, thwarting participants from expressing the full spectrum of practices and challenges in a given phenomenon (Kvale, 2011). The possible exclusion of qualitative methods is significant because it reveals further evidence of possible gaps in understanding the practitioner's perspective on moral education.

Theoretical Framework

It is important to have a basic understanding of moral philosophy when investigating moral education. Most relevant to this research study are the debates between relativism and absolutism; as well as the concepts of cultural relativism and universalism. Both are sets of opposing philosophies and will help to explain complex issues within the topic. They are helpful in understanding assumptions in past theory and current research. Moreover, these concepts are used for analysis in the discussion portion of the study.

The principles of absolutism and relativism are basic moral philosophies that are usually described as antonyms to one another. In an abstract way absolutism is characterized by "hard lines", while relativism may not even agree that lines exist. To be clearer, absolutism comes with codes that guide people in moral dilemmas (Etzioni, n.d.). Discipline and duty are used to encourage the use of institutionally established codes of ethics. Etzioni (n.d.) argues that the absolutist approach to moral education has the ability to create strong social structures because choices that are best for the group are predetermined by an institution. In short, absolutism is trademarked with instructions to live by. On the other hand, relativism, as defined by Dewey, is

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more concerned with reflective morality and individual critical thinking (Garrison, 2009; Splitter, 2011). Garrison (2009) summarizes Dewey's philosophy on relativism as follows: "While customary morality states what we should approve, reflective morality states what we should find approvable after we reflect on the consequences for the community and for our individual character" (p. 227). Relativism allows individuals to critique morals and determine if they are suiting to the circumstances. Although often-times absolutism and relativism are secondary elements to a moral education lesson, identifying their presence will shed light on all of the ethical principles being taught.

As discussed previously, Kohlberg added scientific measurement to the predominately philosophical-topic of morals. Yet his theory is not philosophically neutral. He strongly promotes the philosophy of universalism. Universalism argues that common morals exist across cultures. The theory looks past the nuances of cultural customs to find that humans cognitively operate out of the same ethical code. In other words, each individual's critical thinking will generally create the same responses to ethical dilemmas. These commonalities can be found in both East and West wisdom traditions (Mele & Sanchez-Runde, 2013). For example, Confucius and Aristotle both recognize personal accountability, the importance of self-discipline, as well as the existence of the "right thing" and seeking to do it (Koehn, 2013). Additionally, universalism goes on to find similarities in world religions, such as the shared value of caring, the reproaching of violence, and standards for justice and fairness (Rao & Seow Ting 2005). In all, universalism postulates that a single moral message is applicable worldwide, meaning that even the multi-cultural United States of America has common moral ground.

In contrast, cultural relativists believe that while every culture may have common values, how these values translate in action is quite different. This theory pinpoints cultural diversity as

the reason why moral education can be a volatile subject. For example, even simple concepts like fairness can be culturally translated into many different meanings. Another example is the difference between far right and left ideals within American politics. Due to the existence of a wide range of "right and wrong" interpretations, cultural relativists argue that any similarities found in values are irrelevant in comparison to dissimilarities (Mele & Sanchez-Runde 2013; Sachdeva et al. 2011). As a result, cultural relativism calls for honoring cultural diversity and respecting that one thought does not fit all.

How to Teach Moral Education

Research on how to teach moral education is bountiful. This area of study focuses on how to apply moral philosophy in the classroom (Garrison, 2009; Henry, 2001; Koehn, 2013; Moroney, 2006; Sachedeva et al, 2011). In short, there are four ways for educators to teach values, ethics, and morals. One, they can be a discussion facilitator without identifying right or wrong positions. Two, they can lecture on the concept of right and wrong. Three, moral development research has used the story method. Lastly, they can operate covertly. To start, some see the role of the teacher as discussion mediator rather than director. In this case, the teacher would encourage student thoughts and opinions and never identify a good or bad point of view. Donway (2001) believes that teachers should address values in classrooms by only correcting students on fact. Teachers should be nonjudgmental and understand that values have no clear right and wrong answers. Splitter (2011) adds critical thinking and classroom discussions should be at the center of values education. Alternatively, some (Bennett, 2003; Etzioni n.d.; Berkowitz & Bustamante, 2013) propose that teachers should identify values, morals, and ethics for students to adhere to. Lecturing on specific values can provide guidance to the students. Another method to teaching moral education is the use of stories. Researchers

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generally use this method (Nather, 2013; Park et al, 2012). It is uncertain if this is due to

historical practices (Kohlberg used the method in his original work) its ability to teach moral

education quickly (as many research studies have time constraints), or because stories are the

most effective in teaching moral education. The teaching method of stories is significant

because it is historical and widespread in moral development research. Lastly, there is

speculation that a "covert" method to teach moral education exists. Some propose that educators

may be handling the problem of pluralism and political red-tape, by discussing values without

being direct about it (Carr, 2006; Koh, 2012; Garrison, 2009). Garrison (2009) calls teachers

that do this "tricksters" and lauds them as being almost vigilantes in a system corrupted by too

many rules. In summary, these theories and past methods could benefit and inform research on

actual practices.

In conclusion, there is a sizable need for further study on moral education in American

public high school classrooms. For one, most scientific research has addressed only one of

moral education's major issues, which is its effectiveness. Two, both politicians and academics

speculate as to how moral education is being addressed in public schools, but a scientific study is

missing. Exploring the teacher perspective on this topic could give these groups credibility.

Furthermore, this study's findings can act as a means to possibly create policy or practice

changes. Three, qualitative studies are underrepresented in previous research. The lack of this

method may be hindering researchers from exploring the current situation. Thus, without scales

and yes or no questions directing participant responses, exploration into the current situation can

be done. Four, many believe values, ethics, and morals are important subjects for public schools

to cover, yet there is a lack of information on whether or not they are being covered and, if they

are, what is being communicated. A compelling need has sparked the following research

questions.

Research Questions

RQ1:   How do teachers understand the role of moral education in American public high

schools?

RQ2:   What is the content of moral education messages in American public high

schools?

RQ3:   How is moral education being communicated in American public high schools?

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

I have chosen the American public high school as the site of my research because its challenges could most benefit from research. These teachers have the most complex moral education situation, in comparison to lower-grades and non-pluralistic cultures, because choosing moral and ethical material that is non-controversial and age appropriate for the maturity of teenagers is identified as being difficult. The study seeks the teacher perspective on federal educational policies and opposing moral philosophies because high school teachers may be more affected by these matters than lower grades. A qualitative approach was taken to best explore the real experiences and practices of teachers. Both one-to-one interviews and focus groups were utilized. The rationale behind using qualitative methods stems from the belief that it is the superior method for exploration. This method provided first-hand access to the opinions, circumstances, and activities of individual practitioners explained in their own words (Kvale, 2007).

First, data was collected by both interviews and focus groups. Interviews allowed for an intimate setting where practitioners were forthcoming with their personal examples. For instance, interviews produced many examples of what was being communicated and how. Focus groups added depth to the study. They allowed participants to engage with one another and validate each other's responses (Barbour, 2007). Moreover, focus group participants analytically discussed greater issues like why policies are in place and why one moral philosophy is chosen over another. Each interview lasted roughly 30 minutes. The two focus groups lasted approximately 50 minutes. Following is a description of the methods of this study, including sampling procedures, research participants, data collection, and analysis strategies.

Sampling Procedures

Two public American high schools in the southeastern United States were targeted to recruit participants. One high school is located in a rural community, with a population of 758 people (City-data, 2014) within city limits, and with a nearly homogeneous population of mostly Caucasians. This rural school services the county and has a high school student population of 536. The school is reported to be 96.2% white and 2.6% Hispanic; all other races make up the remaining 1.2% (High Schools in the USA, 2014). For privacy purposes this high school will be called "High School A". The other school, which will be referred to as "High School B" is nearly three times larger than high school A. It is centrally located in a city with a population of 36,674 (City-data, 2014). It is among the largest schools in its state, hosting 1,598 students. The school represents a racially diverse population. According to "USA school information" the school is 59.9% black, 32.9% white, and 5.5% Hispanic. This sample was selected to allow for comparison in the analysis.

Qualitative studies do not attempt to generalize to the larger population, but rather to the larger phenomenon (Luker, 2008). As such, the chosen schools can represent the moral education situation in both rural communities and cities, as well as for teaching different ethnic groups. Validity was also enhanced by choosing two different schools, allowing data gathered from one school to be confirmed by the second school. This second point rules out the problem of a single administrator or school board creating a unique atmosphere. Both schools are in close proximity to my home community. This distance is relevant because being established in the area helped me to earn the trust of the local principals at both schools.

High School A was very accommodating. I reached the principal initially by email and followed up with a phone conversation. He granted me access to the staff without any hesitation.

To recruit participants I first dropped off letters to the school for the secretary to distribute. I received no response. So I then sent an email to all of the teachers. This yielded only one response. Needing more participants and feeling that a face-to-face invitation would be more persuasive; I arranged with the principal to go to the school and personally recruit teachers for interviews. I interviewed every teacher available during the "free periods" (no classes scheduled) of 2nd period, 3rd period, and 7th period. This approach was truly optimal because I gained access to teachers who were both interested and not interested in the research topic, reducing self-selection bias in the study.

High School B was harder to gain access to. Weekly emails and phone calls over a five month period were delivered with no response. Yet, persistence did pay off and the principal eventually contacted me. He allowed me to meet with his staff on the last day of school. Before I was permitted to meet with the teachers he interviewed me on the purpose of the study. He said that his intention was to select relevant staff for the project. Even though all teaching staff would have been relevant, he selected the teachers to whom I had access. In order to save time for most of his staff he created two focus groups and two interviews. The twist in methods created by the principal worked in my favor as the focus groups proved to be more analytical and frequently addressed broader issues than those discussed in the interviews.

Participants

Defining and selecting participants was important to the operationalization of the study because it required the clarification of study terms (Luker, 2008). Teachers were chosen over other possibilities, like administrators and students, for several reasons. One, there is a body of literature that speculates exclusively on the teacher situation. For example, how they are communicating with students and what obstacles they face with curriculum regulations as well as

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pluralism. Two, teachers were chosen over administrators because details on the classroom situation were of the most interest. Finally, students were not included in the study because it was the teacher's perspective toward moral education that was most relevant to the research questions.

Additionally, it was determined that current experiences were crucial to the study. The study's aim was to discover the present American situation, not the situation ten years ago or even two years ago. Therefore, participants had to be currently employed as teachers in one of the two schools. 18 teachers, 12 female and six male, were interviewed. Participants represented ten different course subjects. The demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C) asked participants to select their years spent in the classroom according to a year range. Time spent in the classroom ranged from those just getting started in their career to others who had retired and then returned to the classroom. The average amount of teaching experience was 16-20 years. There were 15 Caucasian participants and three African American participants, with all of high school A's participants being Caucasian. See Table 2 for participant's names, employer, ethnicity, courses taught, and their years in the classroom. All participants' identities have been protected with the use of pseudonyms.

Table 2: Demographics				
Name	School	Ethnicity	Course Taught	Years Spent Teaching
Alice	B	Caucasian	Choral Instructor	20<
Amanda	A	Caucasian	History	11-15
Brad	A	Caucasian	Math	20<
Brandy	A	Caucasian	English	20<
Claire	A	Caucasian	Spanish	5-10
Derrick	B	African-American	Driver's Education	16-20
Diane	A	Caucasian	English	0-4
Edward	B	Caucasian	History	11-15
Fran	B	African-American	History	16-20
George	B	Caucasian	ROTC	20<
Hazel	A	Caucasian	Science	16-20
Jill	A	Caucasian	Math	5-10
Melissa	A	Caucasian	English	11-15
Natalie	A	Caucasian	Science	5-10
Paige	B	Caucasian	Math	16-20
Ronald	B	African-American	Physical Education	16-20
Sally	A	Caucasian	Art	16-20
Zack	B	Caucasian	ROTC	20<

Data Collection

This study was an extension of a pilot study conducted for a qualitative research methods course. Initially, seven participants from High School A were interviewed using the questions found in Appendix A. After reviewing a theoretical frame for understanding participants with academic peers, known as "peer validation" (Kvale, 2007), a second set of interview questions was devised and used with the remaining 11 participants (see Appendix B). The most significant changes were the addition of member validation and the clarification of research terms. Member

validation is a process where participants validate findings. In this study it was used to validate

themes found in the pilot study. The original themes were: morals are for parents, test scores,

motivation to teach moral education, topics covered in moral education, troublesome topics, and

teaching methods. Also, the term "moral education" could have many meanings, therefore

participants were asked to clarify its meaning.

In total, I conducted 12 semi-structured interviews and two focus groups with three

participants in each group. Open-ended questions covered similar material between all

participants, yet allowed for participant spontaneity. This format optimized participant

involvement by exploring their honest, meaningful, and thought-provoking answers. For

instance, it was through follow-up discussion in a focus group, and not a direct question, that one

participant keenly identified the role of "proper forums" for moral education. Further discussion

revealed what these forums were and what made them "proper." Exchanges like this one

informed my themes.

To provide context for the interviews and an additional source of data on moral education

in high school classes, I asked for lesson plans and noted wall-posted material relevant to moral

education. Significantly, only one participant, Brad a math teacher from school A, had any

lesson plans on the subject. Brad's plans were not formally written. There were three in all

scrawled on small notepad paper. His lessons were comprised of topics on patriotism, anti-

racism, and anti-bullying. Although pre-planned lessons were very uncommon, this may not be

a sign that moral education was uncommon. Data revealed that many participants use student led

questions to discuss moral education material.

Classroom posted material was minimal as well. Less than one quarter *(n=4)* of the

teachers posted something remotely related to moral education. Half of these teachers displayed

classroom rules while the others displayed material on encouraging personal success like "be the best you can be," and values for creating a fulfilling life.

Analysis

Practicing thematic analysis, as defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967), I sought after themes within participant responses. Beginning with open coding, I read the text to identify relevant categories (Gibbs 2008). I then employed axial coding to make connections between categories. To do this, I moved away from my transcripts and made a web diagram based solely on the information that I had absorbed (see Figure 1). This simple process proved to be powerful in helping me to visualize and understand how particular ideas were connected. Categories with multiple connections were chosen as themes. For example, the natural occurrence of moral discussions, the general lack of structure, and the role teachers took in those discussions (facilitator versus moral authoritarian) were all folded into the theme "informal teaching methods." The discussion method was created by comparing data to the theoretical framework, of ideas like universalism and cultural relativism. The results and discussion sections were created by moving through the non-linear process of analyzing, writing, reviewing transcripts, and reading literature constantly. Posted material and lesson plans acted as hard evidence to support what participants had said. For example, the general lack of lesson plans on the topic helped to confirm the theme "the organic nature of moral education." Posted material was physical evidence of message content that was very important to teachers. For example two of the most commonly taught moral concepts were also the only two messages that were posted within classrooms. One message was classroom rules and the other encouraged students to be successful. The selective code (the over-arching theme) "the organic nature of moral education" was identified by its presence in all other themes.
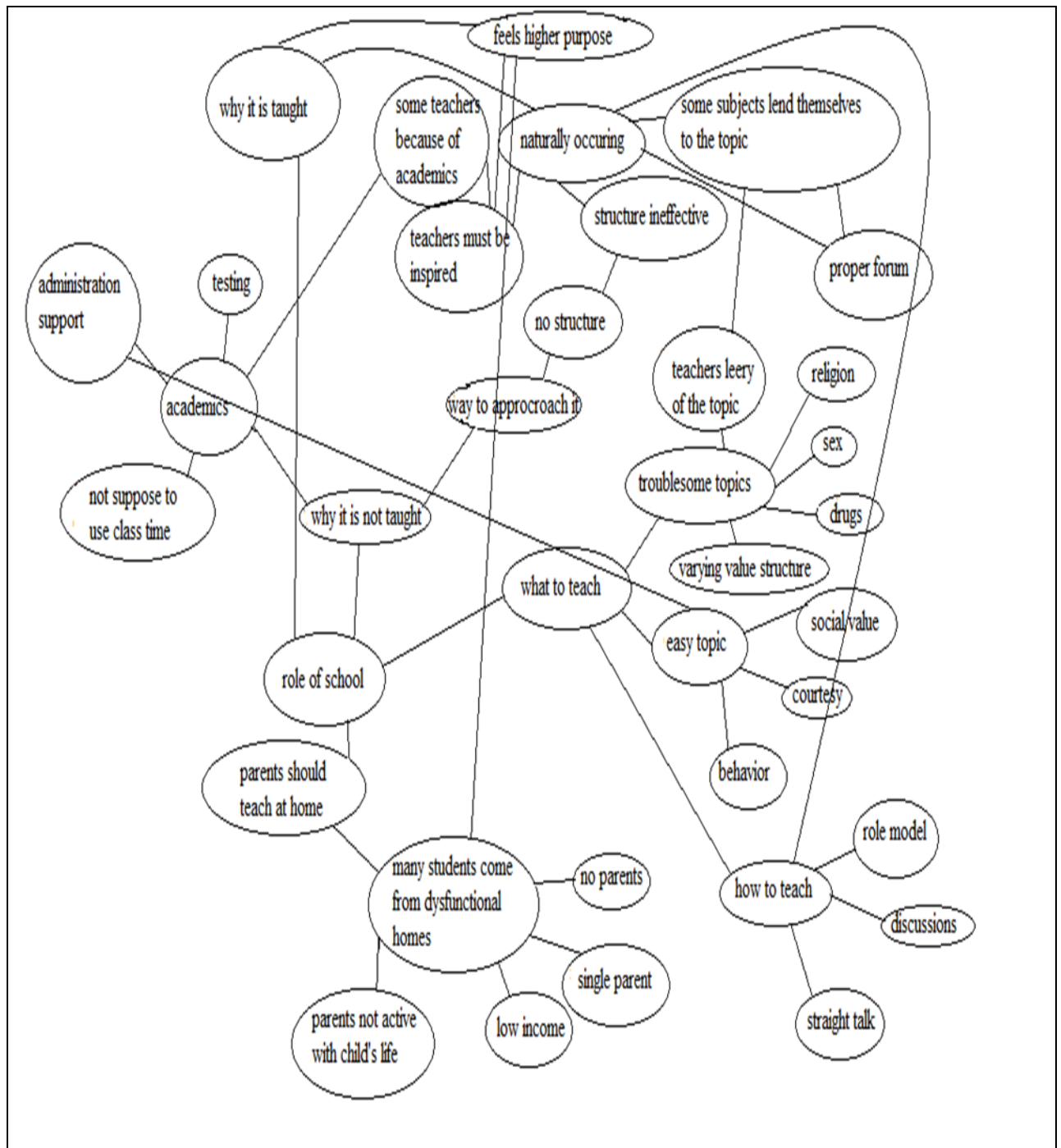
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Figure 1:

Web Diagram of Categories

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Data collected from conducting interviews, focus groups, collecting lesson plans, and documenting wall posted material revealed several different themes. These themes are: definitions of moral education, moral message content, informal teaching methods, the limited role of school, and the organic nature of moral education. Themes act as a frame work to connect sub-themes into relatable phenomena. Interestingly, teachers across both schools and multiple course-subjects relayed the same ideas, implying that their primary methods and concerns were unified.

Theme 1: Definitions of Moral Education

Moral education can translate into many meanings. For this reason participants were asked a control question to clarify the meaning of this statement (Kvale, 2007). They were directly asked what moral education meant to them. A number *(n=10)* of participants associated the topic to the development of good citizens. For example, Alice (choir, B) said, "It [moral education] means trying to teach the students not only how they should behave necessarily, but teaching them right from wrong and how to be a better citizen." George (ROTC, B) put it this way, "Our mission is to make good citizens out of the kids." Teachers viewed moral education as an avenue to develop students for adulthood and namely to help them become contributing citizens.

Throughout the interview process participants frequently used the words "character" and "value" to describe the concepts they were teaching in relation to moral education. Phrases with the word "character" included: character education, character development, and character values. The word "values" was also incorporated into a number of phrases such as: core values, teaching values, and values education. The use of the words "character" and "values", along

with all of their phrases, put into perspective that participants saw these terms as either equal to moral education or very closely related to it. Essentially, the participants defined moral education and all of its related topics as a single subject that moved beyond academic material and fostered beneficial lessons for student's "lives." Ronald (physical education, B, focus group two) said that this material gave students a "chance at life". His comment represented a group consensus *(n=16)* that moral education, in all its derivatives, was essential to help students navigate crucial life decisions.

Theme 2: Moral Message Content

The interview process produced a number of teacher-to-student communicated moral messages which created a mass amount of data with "moral message content". Data for the theme was created exclusively by consistent participant messages that were communicated by a number of different means. This section provides information on the difficulty that teachers face in selecting messages followed by elicited messages on: empathy for humanity, antiracism, ethical conduct behavior, Southern values, and troublesome topics.

To begin, focus groups one and two *(n=6)* intellectually defined the American situation of pluralism. Pluralism is defined as many different belief systems honored by one nation. Pluralism influenced the selection of moral message content. Edward (history, B, focus group one) pointed out, "We live in a society that is not homogeneous. We live in a heterogeneous society. You are going to have people that walk in a room and the values that they bring in are different." Edward's statement identified that public schools generally have widespread diversity. Derrick (driver's education, B, focus group two) expressed this problem as well. He provided examples of the belief systems that existed: "Public high school is a mixture of everything: Christians, Muslims, even Wiccans. Every home has different values." He named

just a few of the belief systems he had encountered in the school. Fran (history, B, focus group two) supported Derrick and added more belief systems, "For example, I teach Mormons, I teach atheists, and I have different belief systems in my classroom." Both focus groups cited several different belief systems and emphasized religious diversity. The belief system of religion was the most significant to the participants. Religion generally hosts a wide set of deeply rooted paradigms by which followers hold sacred. Therefore many participants were most mindful of selected messages that crossed into religion. In all, participants expressed that their school possessed pluralism.

Empathy for humanity

Teaching the value of empathy for humanity was common amongst participants *(n=11)*. They felt that it was important for classmates to be caring and considerate of one another. Fran (history, B, focus group two) used the word "love" to describe how she taught empathy for humanity. She said that she used empathy for humanity to overcome the diversity in her room:

> When we teach moral education the bottom line is to start first and foremost by teaching love, teaching values, and showing it. For example, I teach Mormons, I teach atheists and I have different belief systems in my classroom, but my focus toward the students is that I am going to teach you love and show you love, regardless of what your values are at home.

Fran used the word "love" to create a humanistic foundation for her entire class to build upon. The word choice of "love" was used by other participants (*n=8*). Another example of teaching empathy for humanity was described by Melissa (English, A). She shared that the school counselor organized an annual assembly called "Rachel's Challenge." Rachel's Challenge was a program created by the parents of a Columbine shooting victim. The purpose of the assembly

was to establish empathy in the students toward each other. After the assembly Melissa along

with a number of other teachers did a follow up activity in their classrooms where the students

all stood in lines facing one another. Each student shared something personal about themselves;

she gave the example of having a parent go to jail. Once something personal had been shared, all

students with a similar experience were to identify themselves by standing together and facing

the other students. Melissa said this activity helped the students to appreciate each other's

differences and helped them to recognize some of the hardships that their fellow classmates have

experienced. The entire idea was to instill a feeling of empathy for humanity.

Antiracism

Teachers communicated to students that racism is a poor moral belief system. Eight

participants communicated with students on the value of antiracism. Ronald (physical education,

B, focus group two) explained, "You have people that are racist. They are racist for different

things. They may be racist for a religion, because of color. They may be racist [toward a]

homosexual or a lesbian person, but you still have to teach people the moral-ethics of respect."

For Ronald, racism extended into discrimination. He chose to approach the subject from the

angle of respecting everyone. Melissa (English, A) and Brad (Math, A) were interviewed

separately, yet they both gave examples of antiracism moral education in their classes. Melissa

provided a scenario of how she responded and educated against racism in her class, "We have a

lot of Hispanics in the school. So we'll have people that make racist remarks sometimes and I'll

always step in and we'll talk about how that is not appropriate and how hurtful that is." Not only

was her message antiracist, it also reinforced empathy in the students by identifying the

painfulness in degrading remarks. Likewise, Brad (math, A) shared that he constructed a

discussion on antiracism that he presented to a number of his classes. He begins the discussion

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by focusing on the Holocaust. He said that a key component to his discussion is that the Holocaust occurred during most of the student's grandparent's life time. He projected that this happened in a modern country, not in ancient or medieval times. He wanted the students to recognize the relevancy of the matter. He let the students share knowledge on the topic and allowed them to soak in the "realness" of the matter. Brad shared that he always finishes the discussion with a connection to the students' situation by communicating that being racist toward Hispanics could build toward the terribleness of the Holocaust. The goal was for students to realize that a racist mindset can develop into atrocities. Participants ($n=10$) from both schools worked to instill antiracist principles in students.

Ethical conduct

Proper ethical conduct was a common communicated message *(n=8)*. It was characterized by moral messages directly tied to actions. Notably, it was one of only two messages that were posted on the walls. Two teachers (one was from each school) had exhibited proper ethical conduct with posted rules for the class. Listed rules were desired behaviors such as, "Be honest" and "Be respectful." These messages were very intentional and deliberate as strong effort went into to selecting and hanging the material. Posted material represented messages that the teachers wanted constantly communicated. The posters also indicated that the messages were firm and non-negotiable. These messages acted to reinforce the equal opportunity of learning for all students and values associated with academic integrity. A respectful class environment allowed students to ask questions without being ridiculed by others. Also, without "honesty," students may be inclined to cheat on assignments and exams. However, posted material was not the only means that teachers used to communicate moral behavior. Jill (math, A) worked to instill the "Golden Rule" (do unto others as you would have

others do unto you) in students. To inspire the students to critically consider actions, she would ask, "Is that how you would want to be treated? Is that the right thing to do?" She wanted students to use the moral framework of the Golden Rule to conduct themselves. Participants did not speak of complex ethical dilemmas, but rather adhered to simple concepts.

Southern values

Participants believed that Southern values were relevant to moral education and they taught it at both high schools. They identified looking people in the eye, chivalry, and using "ma'am" and "sir" as key lessons for the students. First, it was determined that Southern values were trademarked by courtesy. Zack (ROTC, B, focus group one) went so far as to say that courtesy was a part of integrity. Second, both Claire (Spanish, A) and Edward (History, B, focus group one) spoke about eye contact being an important indicator of respect in the South. Edward said, "In the South, it is customary for me to walk up, shake your hand and look you in the eye. That is the kind of value that we hold." Thirdly, chivalry is still an honored practice in the South. A handful *(n=4)* of participants specifically spoke of this. Natalie (science, A) provided a typical scenario, "If they are speaking to me in a bad manner or speaking to another student that way, I may stop them and say, '…That is a lady. You need to respect her.'" Natalie is reinforcing that women are treated with special consideration. To Natalie and the Southern culture at large, it is a given that "ladies" and "gentlemen" have different standards. Finally, the courteous use of "ma'am" and "sir" is a traditional Southern value. A number of participants *(n=8)* said that they correct students if they did not properly address an adult with "ma'am" or "sir." Claire (Spanish, A) shared that the use of "ma'am" and "sir" were basic moral principles. Southern values are reinforced "rights" and "wrongs" that are unique to the Southeast United States.

Troublesome topics

Participants said that some topics were difficult to address in the classroom. This was due to the pluralistic situation that teachers faced. Derrick (driver's education, B, focus group one) expressed that there are topics that could not be covered to mutual agreement. He stated, "We try to have one roof that fits all and sometimes in our system, one roof doesn't fit everybody." Topics like religion and sex were consistent examples of material that did not conform to the "one roof" approach. Consequently, these were deemed problematic and teachers were careful about discussing them.

All participants *(n=18)* were of the Christian faith, and Jill (math, A) claimed that the same held true for the administration at school A. Despite the large Christian population, participants from both schools *(n=7)* speculated that administrators would not endorse Christian beliefs in the classroom. These teachers were frank about this. Sally (Art, A) stated that teachers are not to delve into religion and Edward (history, B, focus group one) shared that there are serious negative side effects for teachers who do. However, there were participants *(n=6)* who were open about religion in their classes. For instance, Hazel (science, A) said that many of the students knew that she was a pastor's wife. So students felt comfortable asking her questions that tied to Christianity. The students in Fran's room also knew that she was Christian. Fran (history, B, focus group two) explained how she handled her personal beliefs in the classroom. She premised that the students try to test her, "They will say 'so and so is homosexual' and I will say 'listen, there is no sin greater than any other sin. We are supposed to love everybody.'" This quote is strong evidence of the controversial nature of faith based comments in the classroom. Derrick spoke of religion being discussed in his room. He said, "We don't have to talk about it directly, but you know if a person is a Muslim, a Buddhist, Christian whatever, I don't have to

say Jesus, but we are talking about Jesus." Derrick was explaining that in his classroom Christianity is spoken about without using direct words specific to the religion. This may be to keep the material less controversial. Or to keep it from being easily identified as religious rhetoric.   Overall, participants who chose to discuss religion in the classroom pulled from their own religious history and personal values.

Sex was identified as troublesome because a number (*n=8*) of participants identified it to be so. Melissa (English, A) represented the general feeling of teachers who did not address sex when she said that it was in an inappropriate topic. These participants expressed that teenage sex is a volatile subject. In contrast to the majority, five participants shared that they did not avoid any student led topic and were willing to answer any questions that they had including sexual ones. Although the response sounded open and inviting to the matter, in actuality either a scientific or conservative Christian stance was taken while other views were excluded. In general, participants were very guarded about their communication on sex. Their answers to research questions were short; requiring me to almost pull information out of them. There was one exception. George (ROTC, B) was forthcoming on his communication about sex to the students. In his classroom, when sex was brought up he addressed the girls in the room and painted a picture of "winding-up" pregnant and alone. Therefore the topic of sex was either not spoken of, discussed with extreme caution, or abstinence was pushed.

Overall, moral message content is very significant to the study as it identified specific values, morals and ethics that were taught. These included: empathy for humanity, antiracism, ethical conduct, and Southern values. This theme also revealed that pluralism did not stop participants from engaging in value based lessons. Identifying moral message content was primary to the research study.

Theme 3: Informal Teaching Methods

Moral education was a unique topic in the school systems because, unlike math or any other core-subject matter, it was taught within other subjects. For instance, moral education was present in all of the courses represented in the study. For most instructors, the manner in which moral education was taught was very informal. Lesson plans on moral education were generally not created. However, informal teaching methods were believed by participants to be effective. These methods included role modeling, discussions, straight-talk, and experience. Most methods arose organically from either a collective classroom or individual student need. Teaching methods were deduced from teachers' examples of topics discussed in their classes. Their presentation of various values has formed the findings in this section.

Discussions

Discussions are an analytical tool where both teacher and student can critically examine morals, ethics and values. The participants themselves defined exactly what a discussion is. As Brad (math, A) put it:

> When we say discussions, [we mean conversations] full of student questions student comments, student stories, student opinions. We really encourage them to voice their opinions, but to be respectful with everybody else's.

Discussions generally arose in an organic manner from student's connecting course material to bigger issues like morality and ethics. There were many examples of this. For instance Alice (Choir, B) used religious hymns as performance materials. The students would connect the words from the songs to religious matters and they would discuss it. Also, Hazel (science, A) shared that in her class students commonly made an ethical connection between what is right and wrong in the matters of cloning, public health, and diseases.

In addition to discussions created by student questions, some participants spoke of pre-planned lessons. One teacher spoke of a time when she was required to formally teach moral education. Melissa an English teacher for school A felt that pre-planned lessons on the matter were ineffective. She reminisced about a time when she and other teachers were required to spend five minutes a day on values. Each week a different value trait was assigned. She recalled:

When I first started teaching [about ten years ago] they wanted us to do 5 minutes a day on character education. We don't do that anymore. [When we were doing it] I didn't see the kids trying to exemplify that trait. I didn't see it manifested for the week in any way.

On the other hand, Brad, a math teacher with school A, utilized pre-planned lessons that he "informally" created. He felt that his discussions were impactful. It seems that it may not be a matter of pre-planned versus student instigated, but rather how much time is allotted for the discussion. Five minutes may not have been long enough for the students to become engaged in the subject. In all, this less common method may only be effective if the discussion is not given enough time to blossom.

Within the discussion method, existed the practice of starting a discussion with the use of a story. This was common with the English teachers as all of them said that the ethical dilemmas in course material are discussed as a class. Likewise, Edward (History, B, focus group one) shared that he used the method of storytelling to start a discussion on Southern values. He told a story of General Lee. It went like so: the General entered a full train, not a single seat was available. One of his officers offered his seat to the General, but he refused the offer and insisted that a woman, who was also standing without a seat, take his place in the chair instead. This opened a discussion on the integrity of Southern values. Although the character and value in the story are very controversial, this example illustrated the story method well. It would be

interesting to see how the discussion unfolded with the students. In all, five participants used stories to initiate class discussions.

Initially, I thought that the discussion method (especially in the pre-planned format) would be the most prevalent form of moral education, however it was the least common method. Participants who did use the method (n=7) said to have practiced it maybe two or three times in an entire school year. Other participants *(n=9)* explained why this method is used sparingly, if at all. Their stated reasons include: a lack of time, disinterest of half of the class, students using the discussion to distract the teacher away from course material, the teacher not wanting the responsibility of managing tense topics, and irrelevance to the curriculum of the classroom. Edward (history, B, focus group one) illustrated a typical scenario of a class discussion gone awry:

> You have a hard enough time trying to get them to focus in on the subject matter that you are talking about and then a discussion breaks out into this particular issue and then you are talking about the value of integrity and then a kid brings up how he saw a drug deal go down on the corner this weekend and he thought that was the coolest thing ever. And then the students start laughing because he is being a joker and then it descends into chaos.

Edward is giving an example of a student that is disinterested in the topic, distracting the teacher, and a discussion that has gotten far away from course material.   Participants (n=9) were clear that discussions can be difficult to manage. It may be due to the method's complex and time consuming nature that it is not utilized more often.

Overall, the discussion method is when both teachers and students engage in conversation or debate on ethics, morals, and/or values. This method arose from an organic classroom need.

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The method was initiated either through course material, student questions, pre-planned lessons, or through stories. The practice of "story telling" is organic as the students lead the discussion with their thoughts and questions. Discussions were an engaging means to teach morals, ethics, and values

Straight-talk

Straight-talk was similar to the discussion method in that the teacher orally communicated with students. Unlike the discussion method, students did not share their view points or experiences. These messages were not pre-conceived; rather it came from a (teacher perceived) student need. This was a popular method; fifteen participants spoke of using it.

Teachers and students were most likely comfortable with the method because the structure of class lent itself to it; the teacher speaking and the students listening. Often times, it may be used unintentionally. Edward (history, B, focus group one) explained:

> I don't think that there is an intentional push for character education, but character education comes out. For example, at the beginning of the year I say to them, 'Guys, your intelligence will only carry you so far. You learn more from your failures than from your successes.' And that comes out when you have a test where you didn't do as well as you did before. [In that situation I can then ask] 'Well, how are you going to respond to that?'
>
> So that is part of what I do, day-in and day-out, but it is not an intentional push.

Edward's example was powerful because it explained what so many other participants *(n=15)* were expressing. Their core subject matter could be nearly anything, yet moral education was almost an intrinsic function of the teaching profession. Straight-talk may have been a method that went so seamlessly with educating that teachers engaged in it without even realizing it.

In terms of frequency, some participants *(n=4)* specifically said that this method was used daily. For instance, Jill (math, A) said, "I would say within each class period, I have to correct somebody." Jill (math, A) corrected students on matters of right and wrong. Like showing empathy for humanity to one another and remembering the "Golden Rule." This informal method was a widely used tool for expressing moral message content.

Straight-talk was almost always used for concepts that were noncontroversial, like empathy for humanity, antidiscrimination and ethical conduct. Case in point, Claire (Spanish, A) used the method to quickly educate the students on cultural awareness:

> I try to help them with social aspects on how to act. We have a lot of diverse students here; some are Guatemalan, some are Puerto Rican, some are Mexican… A student may be from Guatemala and another student will assume that they are Mexican and I will say 'You have to stop that right there.' I say, 'You need to say: where are you from? Mexico and Guatemala are two very different countries.' It opens their eyes a little bit to social norms that we come across in the classroom.

Claire's statement was the most holistic because it drew in all three principles: straight-talk, antiracism, and ethical conduct. Although Claire addressed a somewhat complex matter, the method was also used to teach simpler matters. For example, Sally (art, A) likened safety rules for art tools such as knives and scissors to the value of, "Keeping one another from harm." This was an example of empathy for humanity. She shared that "small things" such as her example were important for the students to learn. Similarly, Jill (math, A) recalled having to tell students to stop writing on desks. She connected her lesson to values by asserting that it reminded the students to be thoughtful. Teachers used straight-talk to express the concepts in moral message content.

Straight-talk was the exclusive method used to address troublesome topics. The examples that participants gave of how they addressed troublesome topics all fell within this method. First, a typical example of religion in the classroom was exhibited by George (ROTC, B). George (ROTC, B) was very forward with religion, he recalled:

> The longer I stayed here [High School B] the more that I talked to them about religion. There is a supreme being and you had better recognize that. It helps you with your feelings to accept that. Just going to church don't cleanse or don't do nothing to you. You have got to have it in your mind. That is what is important. I don't know the older you get the more you want kids to do right.

George was presumptuous with his personal stand on religion. He spoke in an absolutist manner on the belief of a single and all powerful God. He additionally expressed that "doing right" meant accepting this God and putting that belief before attending church. Six other participants also said to have discussed religion in their rooms. Sex was also handled with straight-talk. For instance, Paige (Math, B) represented typical feelings and treatment toward the matter when she said that it made her uncomfortable. As a result, when the students brought it up she sped through it by stating, "Just say no." She was as direct as possible with the subject. Straight-talk may have been an "easier" way for teachers to address troublesome topics.

In all, straight-talk was a quick way for educators to bring morals, ethics, and values into their classrooms. It was frequently used, possibly for its ability to be fast and direct. Above all, the method is organic because there was a natural need for teachers to respond to student's actions and questions.

Role modeling

Role modeling was a participant identified method for teaching moral education with the singular use of actions. Participants expressed that role modeling was a needed tool. It showed students what "good citizens" and "empathy for humanity" looked like. Often times in teaching, the best format for learning, is an explanation followed by an example. Because participants were educators, they are aware of this, thus; they used themselves to be a "positive" example of the principles taught by the discussion and straight-talk methods. In this method the teachers were instructing by their personal performances alone. On the other hand, some educators may be unaware of them-self and act as a "negative" example for students. Many participants *(n=8)* believed that this method was effective.

Positive examples of role modeling were when teachers personified noncontroversial values and matched their oral communication to their actions. Noncontroversial values were those that contributed to harmoniousness and functionality within the school and possibly into society at large. To begin, Natalie (science, A) explained that her action of speaking pleasantly to the students reinforced empathy for humanity. She explained that many students do not have positive examples in their lives to show them this simple practice. She said, "You would be so surprised at the kids that do not have that, just the basics, like how to speak to somebody." Natalie (science, A) identified that her actions were "basic" or fundamental in nature. Similarly, Claire (Spanish, A) taught Southern values by consistently addressing students with ma'am and sir. Although as illustrated, this method can teach basic moral concepts, it can also teach powerful ones as well. For instance, four participants shared that when they saw bullying or racism they stepped-in and verbally put a stop to it. By doing this they were, not only using

straight-talk, but also modeling actions that can be taken against racism and bullying. Moreover, Fran (history, B, focus group two) said:

> I tell kids that I teach out of love… and love overcomes anything that may be different from what [they] believe in. So, if I show them love and show them empathy for humanity.

First, Fran's quote proves that teachers are combining oral teaching methods with the role modeling method. Second, she identified that this was a teacher to student communication. The students were being taught by how they *themselves* were treated. This is significant because the students were experiencing the empathy for humanity and love for themselves. This means that the role modeling method not only coexisted in combination with oral methods (discussion and straight-talk), but also with the experience method.

Alternately, role modeling could also exemplify "negative" ethical conduct. When oral methods are not followed through with action a bad example has been displayed. First, some participants *(n=4)* identified that high school students had a greater capacity for critical thinking than any other grade-school students. Therefore they would more easily detect a discrepancy between actions and words. Participants *(n=4)* identified that an educator could easily be labeled a hypocrite if they were not careful. Edward (History, B, focus group one) explained:

> So many times we see teachers that say, 'it is disrespectful for you to have your cellphone out in the middle of class.' Yet, the teacher takes their cellphone out and they text in the middle of class. So they ask the students to honor a value that they themselves are not willing to do. So are the students going to really listen?

Edward's comment was supported by his group members. They *(n=3)* agreed that scenarios like that will cause a teacher to lose their credibility or worse, yet, instill negative values. The

student's intellect helped to determine the importance of role modeling. Zack (ROTC, B, focus group one) added another scenario to Edward's by sharing that teachers have spoken poorly of principals or assistant principals in front of students in the past. This was demonstrating gossip and deceit to the students. Recognizing negative examples could make educators more proactive in avoiding them.

In summary, role modeling was the most subtle approach to teaching moral education because it was found in nearly every practice that a teacher performed. Although, participants said that straight-talk was the most frequent method, participant descriptions of role modeling defined it to be even more frequently used. As an instructional tool role modeling allowed mindful teachers to provide positive examples of morals, ethics and values. The method allows students to see what orally communicated messages "look like."

Experience

Experience is the method of exposing the students to a learning situation involving moral or ethical issues. Half of the participants *(n=9)* spoke highly of it saying that it was superior to all others, even role modeling. George (ROTC, B) said, "You're dumb until you have had experience, and I think that experience is probably the best education you can have." In other words, experience created a superior form of learning. Importantly, this sub-theme is the first to identify a sharp contrast between participants. Participants are broken into state-tested-courses and non-state-tested courses. State-tested courses are subjects that are subject to "state-testing." These courses include math, history, science, and English. All other courses are determined to be non-state-tested.

In this study, examples of the experience method ranged from team involvement to cultural exposure. There were a number of examples, but Sally's (art, A) incorporated a number

of different experiences into a single project. Sally (art, A), described a play produced in collaboration with the art and theater programs in school A. The play itself reinforced citizenship with a story on helping strangers and the benefits of coming together as a community. The money made from ticket sales was donated to the local non-profit hospice organization. Sally said that students learned a lot about how to work with others, the discipline and joy in completing a large project, and charity; not to mention the values taught in the story. Likewise, Hazel (science, A) believed homecoming activities, like preparing floats and hosting school-wide games, was a great way for the students to learn team-work.   Students also learned community involvement as volunteers in the events

The method of experience was not equally available to all teachers. State-tested classrooms generally did not have the time or administrative support to build an experience for the students. For instance, the discussion experience was uncommon in a school year due to administrative enforced time restraints. Moreover, Melissa (English, A) shared feeling unsupported in using the experience method in her class. She said that she normally had students buy pencils from her, to teach them the consequences of not being prepared for class, but if an administrator was in the room she would quickly hand them a pencil to preserve time. This example showed a conflict between what state-tested classrooms are capable of doing and the contrast of what they were encouraged to do. On the other hand, the choir, ROTC, sports programs, and many other non-state-tested courses did not have the same restraints. Focus group one (Zack, Paige, and Edward) identified non-state-tested courses as having "the proper forum" for moral education. They argued that due to their available time the course had more flexibility. Additionally, performing groups (ROTC, choir, theater, sports) in particular offered a unique "pressure" experience that was said to be very effective. Therefore focus group one concluded

that the responsibility of moral education should fall to these subjects. This was an interesting solution to the problem of time restraint that state-tested courses faced.

The experience method uniquely provided students with a means to put into practice what they had learned from the other three methods. It may be for this reason that the method was projected as being the most effective in teaching the students. The availability to "build" an experience was drastically different between state-tested courses and non-state-tested courses. For this reason, a few participants identified non-state-tested courses as having the "proper forum" for moral education.

Theme 4: The Limited Role of School

Politicians limited the role of school with the paradigm that high test scores equate to a higher quality of education. This had resulted in the administrative practice of enforcing strict classroom mandates limiting their ability to address the organic need for moral education. Some participants (*n=6*) justified this by believing that school had an academic purpose to support the workforce. These participants felt that moral education should be taught in churches and homes. This mentality limited the role of school.

The bureaucracy of testing

Beginning with the politics of public school, some participants (*n= 4*) identified that politicians used testing to make themselves look better. Edward (history, B, focus group one) explained, "Testing is important because it allows politicians to say, 'Hey look what we did for education. Look at what happened with the test scores.'" In other words, positive test scores act as "evidence" that the schools were providing a high quality of education. Participants (*n=4*) were critical of this form of evidence; they cited unethical teachers only teaching test problems and the limits of testing "proving knowledge" as reasons as to why they were critical. This is

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important to moral education because a test focus hurts the development of moral education in public schools.

Testing may seem trivial because the administration of a single test is not very much time within an entire school year. Yet, the number of tests and the pressure for students to excel at all of them had made annual curriculum fast paced and test-centered. As Derrick (driver's education, B, focus group two) stated, "They [the students] go from one test to another." Brad (math, A) explained, "In the math classroom, our pacing guides [a curriculum handbook] …it's impossible to keep up." Pacing guides were a mechanism to set the speed by which material was presented. These were implemented by school administrators in response to political pressure from state and federal authorities; five participants spoke of the political purpose and pressure of testing. Administrators from both schools enforced lesson-plan approvals and in-class observations to keep class material focused on test preparation. These policies hindered state-tested classrooms from being able to develop moral education lessons in their classes. In summary, the bureaucracy of testing worked to limit moral education during state-tested classes. The pressure to perform well on state and federal tests seemed to have turned classroom time singularly into "test-prep time."

Moral education is for the home and church

A few participants *(n=4)* saw home and church as the single best places for learning values, morals, and ethics. Brandy (English, A) explicitly said that homes should assume more responsibility for this type of education. When asked if schools played a role in teaching students right and wrong, she responded, "We do more of that than we should have to." Brandy is also stating that the moral education in the school system is burdensome to the teachers. Additionally, this same group of participants believed that moral education was singularly

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grounded in religion. As seen in the "moral message content" section there were examples of some educators engaging in religious rhetoric in an attempt to teach moral education. Zack (ROTC, B, focus group one) felt that moral education easily crossed into religious matters, believing that they were one in the same. He spoke from both a teacher and parent perspective on this matter:

> I am a pretty religious person, [but] I don't believe that teachers should be involved with religion in the classroom. Every teacher that is going to walk in here is going to have a different view point on religion and if I want my child to learn about religion it is going to have to be in my home or in my church.

The assumption was that religion and moral education were synonymous. Limiting the definition of moral education to religion supported the belief that moral education was for the home and church.

Workforce purpose of school

A small number of participants *(n=3)* cited workforce development as the larger purpose that drove the need for testing and encouraged the bulk of moral education to be done outside of public school. This group of participants made a general assumption that academics and moral education were separate. They proposed that high academics, determined by state and federal testing, were sufficient in fueling the workforce purpose of public school. Edward (history, B, focus group one) said, "[Moral education] was never the purpose of school. Schools' purpose was to educate the children to prepare them for the workforce." Overall, this identified purpose is common in the modern history of moral education. Some participants were critical of moral education in the classroom because they felt that public school's mission did not make for its inclusion.

Theme 5: The Organic Nature of Moral Education

Twelve participants comprised of teachers from both schools and state-tested and non-state tested courses spoke of a desire and need to teach moral education. Their reasoning's were complex, thus, the section was broken into four sub-themes: reaction to the limits, making students successful, community centered, rules before reading writing and arithmetic, and enhanced learning environment. These teachers did not express workforce development as the primary role of school. Instead, they focused on the school's function and their role in it as an important part in building "community."

Reaction to the limits

Some teachers reported running their classes on the edges of administrative policies, skirting some of the rules. Only two participants, Brad (math) and Melissa (English) both from school A spoke of this phenomenon. It is included because extraneous literature speculated that teachers may have responded to their circumstances in this manner. First, Brad (math, A) shared that he prepared three lessons a year on values. One lesson was on patriotism. Around Veterans Day he liked to share the story of a prisoner of war's courage and pride in his country despite his circumstances. When I asked if he felt supported by the administration in doing this lesson he stated, "Irrelevant, I do not put it in the lesson plans that I turn in." Brad gave a hypothetical scenario, "If somebody said, 'hey do we need to do this [spend time on moral education]' they would say, 'nope there is no way you could finish your stuff.'" The administration may not disapprove of his lesson, but the material is not tested, therefore it is irrelevant. Similarly, Melissa revealed that she too does not expose all of her normal class activity to the administrative supervisors. She illustrated this point with two examples. One was with an in-class evaluation:

If my supervisor was in here judging me as far as, ya know how they can come in or whatever; I might nip that conversation [one on moral education] in the bud real fast, and then move on with the subject matter. 'Cause I know that, I don't know, I feel like, the emphasis is on the kids' test scores.

This quote is another hypothetical scenario of how participants perceived administrators feelings toward moral education. Although it may have been out of step with an emphasis on testing, Brad saw class discussions as a good use of precious class time:

[The] value of what they [the students] take [has] more worth than that one day's lesson. Most of our class discussions are much more relevant to their lives [compared to] whether or not they can know the slope intercept form or whether they can derive the quadratic formula from the Pythagorean Theorem.

Brad was defending the inclusion of moral education in stated-tested courses; arguing that values are a "life skill" whereas mathematical formulas, for many students, are singularly a "test skill."

Turning back toward the participant definition of moral education, the "life skills" learned in Brad's discussions gave students the ability to navigate crucial life decisions. It would be interesting to know the consequences of incorporating moral education. How bad could it be to explore a student question with an in-class discussion? How would administrators respond to Brad's thoughtfully planned lesson on patriotism? These participants' feelings alluded to an even bigger question: when do policies become a hindrance instead of a help? Scores may be increasing, but some participants questioned if learning was. Overall, they believed that a heavily regulated class was at the expense of the students overall well-being.

Making students successful

All participants (N=18) felt that the profession of teaching came with a responsibility to help students beyond academics; consequently, even those who felt moral education was for home and church gave examples of its presence in their classrooms. A good teacher was defined as one who assumed the job's responsibility of helping students to be successful beyond the classroom into their personal lives and the community at large. Melissa (English, A) expressed the importance of moral education when she said, "My job is more about to teach them to be successful adults. So their character development and their ability to be citizens and good people is part of my job too." Moreover, Claire (Spanish, A) connected the purpose of school to be more than academics, "It's not all academics. We are trying to foster what they will be when they are adults." In support of the participant quotes wall-posted material represented this sentiment. Posters with the phrases "Do what you love" and "be the best you can be" were hung in two classrooms in school A. This is important because of the two wall-posted massages found in the study; student success was one of them. Teachers expressed the responsibility of educating students on all subject matters that could improve their quality of life, thus making them successful

Community centered

The first interview question, "Where do kids get their sense of right and wrong?", was designed to singularly open the interview to the topic of moral education, however it turned out to also be an avenue to discuss why teachers go beyond academics. All participants *(*N=18) responded without hesitation that the home should be the primary place for moral education. On the other hand, almost all participants (*n=16*) were just as quick to add that schools can help supplement parental teachings. Sadly, not every student comes from a good home. Melissa

(English, A) said, "…unfortunately a lot of students don't have a good foundation from their home, which they need. So we have to try to step up as teachers and fill that need." George (ROTC, B) expanded on this idea, saying some parents do not have morals that their children should absorb; and Derrick (driver's education, B) added that the churches do not catch everyone. The participants voiced a concern for guidance in the students' lives.

Participants from both schools indicated that there was a large population of students that came from dysfunctional homes. Frist, the "dysfunctional home" was stereotypically described by participants *(n=7)* with no parents, a single parent, or low income. In contrast, Fran (history, B, focus group two) clarified, "Even the kids that come from well-to-do homes. They dress nice. They make good grades. They live in four story homes. Parents making six figures, but still they are dysfunctional." Ultimately dysfunctional homes were characterized by a student's parents not being active in their life. The identified pool of students who "needed" moral education was widespread, thus proving the topic to be beneficial to many.

Although parents were unanimously (N=18) identified as being the first source of moral education, participants believed that they were not alone in raising their children. As Hazel (Science, A) said, "It takes a village to raise a child." She was expressing the idea that a community cannot only help students from dysfunctional homes, but also act to reinforce positive parenting. Derrick (physical education, B, focus group two) shared a great example:

> I have kids that will listen to me. I have kids that all they want to do is play basketball
> and they don't want to do their chores. So I tell them, 'Hey, when you take out the trash
> dribble the ball with your left hand.' Now they are doing what mom said because we
> reinforced what they are doing at home.

Derrick and Hazel are expressing that as a community they can reinforce values, ethics, and morals to the students. Largely, teachers saw themselves as important members in the community helping to guide the "villages" youth.

Rules before reading, writing and arithmetic

At a minimum, the majority of teachers *(n=16)* were motivated to instill the morals of ethical conduct in students because academic learning could not take place until that foundation was built. Derrick (driver's education, B, focus group two) said, "There is so much that has to happen before you can even begin to teach them the importance of academics." His group members validated his response. Derrick was explaining the need to set rules of conduct in order to make learning possible. Sally (Art, A) explained another added benefit of the rules that go with moral conduct, "You maintain discipline in your classroom; any way to avoid disruption. You teach them that *this is the way we do this*… and I mean it just keeps order in the classroom." Sally was referring to basic conduct like the ethical principles of the Golden Rule. Possibly, instilling moral conduct in students could keep teachers from having to "police" them (monitoring them closely) because the students could be driven by internalized moral standards. Overall, participants did identify an organic need to establish ethical conduct because learning could not occur without it.

Enhanced learning environment

Teaching moral education enhanced the learning environment. Participants (n=6) shared that students responded better in class when they knew that they were cared for, which was a direct result of moral education. Hazel (Science, A) said, "You can't teach a kid anything until they know how much you care about them." Showing students "care" is role modeling empathy for humanity, which is a participant identified moral education lesson. Non-state-tested members

of focus group one, Derrick (driver's education, B, focus group two) and Ronald (physical education, B, focus group two), spoke of reaching out to students to show them that they cared. For example, Ronald (physical education, B, focus group two), explained that in his class, part of the students' grade was to dress in athletic clothing. He shared that he had one particular student who did not have a pair of shorts. So he got him a pair, kept them at the gym and washed them (after the student's use) for two weeks straight. He said that after that point he entrusted the shorts to the student and let him take the responsibility of washing and bring them to class. The group confirmed that showing, and therefore teaching, empathy for humanity helped the students to pass classes, and furthermore, stay interested in school. Additionally, Hazel (science, A) proposed that another way of showing care was by teaching students "right" and "wrong." She said, "I mean you care enough about them to say 'no' or 'you're not doing that'. Or to say 'you can do that' and 'you can do that to the best of your ability.'" These examples illustrate that both state-tested and non-state-tested classrooms incorporated moral education lessons to show students that they cared. Participants tied these lessons to enhancing the learning environment.

Several teachers whose classrooms were state-tested (n=5) reported that they would like to incorporate more moral education lessons for the purpose of enhancing the learning environment, but felt very limited by their curriculum restrictions. Moral education lessons can gain students interest in going to school and participate in class, in contrast a lack of them can lose students interest. This could hurt overall academic performance. Fran (history, B, focus group two) clarified that state-testing is not "all bad," but that an abundance of it is hurtful. She said, "I welcome it [state-testing] if it is done in a manner to where it doesn't put pressure on the kids. It doesn't put overwhelming pressure to teacher toward a test. Cause you are going to lose some kids." It may be that the students are "lost" because they do not feel cared for. Melissa (

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Math, A) said, "I know that they [administrators] care about the students and them as people, but they have pressure from above them to perform and then they put the pressure on us to produce test scores." What Melissa is saying, is that the administrators may care about the students, but it is hard for the teachers and students to see that when there is so much testing pressure in place. Ultimately, too much state-testing hurts the learning environment in state-tested classrooms.

For those teachers who work within the limits of the administrators, they felt that their class environment was incomplete. Each student and collectively each class had different personalities, learning paces, learning styles, and interests. It was said that learning the differences and responding to them can create an optimal environment for education, because course material can be tied to the individuals' and groups' needs. Derrick keenly said,

> They [the students] have a need and you have to identify the need of the student. You go out of your way and help that student. It makes a difference in your classroom. It can change the entire class.

To do this takes time and flexibility within the classroom, two factors that administrative policies crush. Natalie (science, A) said, "When I first began teaching I could actually take the time and have a lesson plan done up or a little activity or something that I wanted to do, but in today's teaching conditions I cannot do that." Natalie (science, A) may be giving a reason for the general lack of lesson plans on moral education amongst teachers. She also went on to explain that ten years ago there was more flexibility. Ten years ago would have been prior to *The No Child Left Behind Act.* Moreover, testing hurts the student to teacher relationship. Hazel added more perspective to the issue of heavy regulations when she said, "It [testing] limits your ability to have more of a rapport with your kids because you're so fast trying to get the material in them that you don't take the time to say, 'you're not smiling today, what is the matter?'" Essentially,

Hazel and several other participants (n=6) believe that building a rapport and getting to know the

students is important in being able to teach moral education.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This qualitative study on moral education in American public schools produced new and interesting insight on the topic of moral education within public high schools. This chapter will use the findings discussed in the previous chapter and relate them to extraneous research and literature. This process will involve answering the research questions presented at the end of the second chapter in this thesis. Concluding this chapter is a discussion on study implications followed by limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

RQ #1: How do teachers understand the role of moral education in American public high schools?

Participants described understanding of the role of school was powerful in defining the presence of moral education in the American public high school. Participants' thoughts and experiences on the purpose of school are one of the true jewels of the study as it created the selective code the "organic nature of moral education." All participants (N=18) included moral education in their classrooms. This may be due to an organic need for the subject. Participants believed that moral education had to be taught before course material could be covered. Although there was agreement on the presence of moral education, there was debate on how prevalent it should be. Two different understandings of the role of education were described. One justified bureaucratic policies and other called for their reduction. The justification of bureaucracy was grounded in a workforce mentality. Yet, most participants (*n=12*) believed a primary purpose of school was to foster (through morality) successful adults.

First and foremost, moral education as defined by a number of scholars (Carr, 2006; Hogan, 2010; Kolstrein, 2011; Splitter, 2011) is to teach students to be better citizens. Participants broadened this definition and added values clarification and character education as

concepts that supported moral education. Many participants *(n=12)* intentionally included moral education and all eighteen participants expressed having one form or another of it in their classrooms. Political concerns that the topic was not addressed at all (Bennett, 2003) were unfounded as research results concluded. Yet, participants' views on the role of school greatly impacted moral education's presence both in the curriculum and how frequently it was addressed.

A small group of participants *(n=6)* believed that moral education should play a secondary role in school. They cited workforce development as being the rightful primary focus. This belief echoed Regan's report *A Nation at Risk,* supporting McIntush's (2000) claim that the report's language is still affecting how American's think and communicate about education to the present day. A workforce centered role of school equates to an academic emphasis. Therefore, an academic focus, justified by workforce development, had spawned relentless testing.

Testing only affected some subjects (math, science, history and English). The presence of state testing in a class was so strong that it divided the participant-pool into state-tested courses and non-state-tested courses. On the whole, state-tested courses struggled to present values. The participants explained that lesson plan approval, classroom checks, and pacing guides were all designed to regulate how teachers spent their class time. Data revealed that administrative techniques caused these teachers to feel pressured to spend all of their time on test preparation. They did not believe that they would have been supported by the administration to incorporate moral education. This confirmed scholars speculation that state and federal bureaucracy created by testing hindered moral education (Brimi, 2009; Etzioni, n.d.; Garrison, 2009). One teacher made a direct connection to the *No Child Left Behind Act* which many

scholars cited as the primary policy in creating a test-centered education system (Brimi, 2009; Etzioni, n.d.; Garrison, 2009). Many others (*n=11*) pointed to the *Act's* main instillation of standardized testing as being the root of their time-constraint problem. As Garrison (2009) predicted, teachers (*n=2*) operated outside of their "administrative regulations" to teach moral education. Only two revealed doing this, but because it was identified in the literature, they may be representing the phenomenon at large. Alternately, those educators who always work within the guidelines may be represented by the participants (*n=2*) who spoke of feeling stifled by restrictions. Clearly, there was a feeling of bureaucratic red tape, as Brimi (2009) identified.

Alternately, very different from state-tested courses, non-state-tested courses did not have the same obstacles as their counterparts. They did not express having the problem of time constraints or having curriculum restrictions. In fact, they felt supported by the administration in hosting moral education lessons and freely covered values, morals, and ethics as they saw fit. This caused some participants to believe that there were proper forums within the school system for moral education. Participants identified non state-tested courses as the place for morals because they had the most time and teaching methods available to them. This was interesting in justifying the existence of music, art, and sports programs being in schools. Non-state tested courses could take on more of a responsibility to include morals, ethics, and values in their courses. Previous research has not differentiated between the two groups making this an important discovery.

In contrast to those who viewed a limited role of school, the majority of participants *(n=12)* viewed values, ethics, and morals as very important and organic to the school system. These participants expressed that student success and developing citizenship were direct results of covering moral education. Therefore they included it as much as possible in their classes.

Beginning with student success, as consistent with previous research (Brimi, 2009; Etzioni, n.d; Koh, 2012; Kolstrein, 2011), teachers spoke on the prevalent problem of students coming from dysfunctional homes and not having a structure in their lives that addressed what it means to have morals, values, and ethics. They felt that school could fill that void and enhance students' quality of life. Moreover, an organic need for moral education existed in the classrooms. Teachers identified that moral education had to be established before learning could take place. They cited that the moral educational components of rules and rapport as improving learning. For example, encouraging students to make ethical connections to material established critical thinking. Role modeling noncontroversial sub-themes in moral message content, built rapport with the students. Participants believed that this resulted in students listening and paying attention more in class. Additionally, classroom rules such as "be honest" established the moral basis behind academic integrity. All this worked to build an environment conducive to learning. This finding supported Berkowitz & Bustamante's (2013) proposal that moral education could enhance academics. The organic nature of moral education may have been why all 18 participants engaged in it, regardless of their view of moral education or the subject they taught.

The data on the role of moral education was eye-opening in understanding how teachers viewed the purpose of the public education system. In answering research question one, it was discovered that teachers are broken into two groups, state-tested subjects and non-state-tested subjects. This was created by politics. State tested courses were very limited on time, while non-state tested courses were not. Some participants supported this, recognizing the function of school to be workforce centered, while most felt that trying to separate moral education from their classes hurt learning. The participants' opposing views reflect a larger debate among politicians and scholars about the role of moral education in public schools. Most importantly,

the presence of moral education in all classes proved it to be necessary or "organic" to the situation.

RQ #2: What is the content of moral education messages in American public high schools?

The study revealed that moral education benefited from universal values. These values made moral education a positive presence in the schools and enhanced the learning environment. These values created a solution for the problem of pluralism. On the other hand, culturally relative values were problematic in that they are surrounded by controversy.

Universal values were the most commonly taught and included messages that were noncontroversial such as: empathy for humanity, antiracism, and ethical conduct. Universal values are noncontroversial and contain a code of basic human ethics that has stood true against time and nation (Rao & Seow Ting 2005). These values helped to make all students feel safe and cared for. Teaching universal values to students taught them their role in contributing toward a harmonious environment. Values can be very controversial and scholars questioned if public schools could find material that was agreeable to everyone involved. Identifying and teaching universal values solved the speculated problem of pluralism within American public schools (Brimi, 2009; Berrett, 2012; Koh, 2012; McIntush, 2000; Rosenblatt, 1995). However, not all non-controversial moral message content was universal. Components of the Southern value of "courtesy" were a reflection of a culturally relative value that was possibly more universal in translation. In other words, although the use of "ma'am" and "sir" were particular to the Southeast, other parts of the nation could "translate" or understand their use as polite. Overall, the noncontroversial nature of universal values was the answer.

In addition to solving the problem of pluralism, universal values also helped to justify moral education as being a "positive" addition to course curriculum. Some scholars (Moroney,

2006) had criticized moral developmental theorists, namely Kohlberg (1958), for assuming that their brand of moral education did not impose upon religious beliefs. For example, theorists believed that being motivated by fear of punishment was a low moral developmental stage, while the Christian belief saw it as a high developmental stage. Christians propose that the fear of God should motivate even the most morally mature of people. Therefore, some pointed to moral education as a "negative" because it went against religious paradigms. Yet, the universal values found in the data were common to any world religion, as moral philosophers had identified (Rao & Seow Ting, 2005). For example, Kolstrein (2011), a moral activist, spoke of the Holocaust as the epitome of dehumanization and went on to state that Catholics and Jews alike worked together during those years to keep people safe. Universal values were an example of empathy for humanity, and prevailed regardless of religious affiliation. Moreover, when Brad (Math, A) spoke of antiracism with the history of the Holocaust, he worked outside of religious parameters and taught about humanity. In all, universal values transcended diverse belief systems and created "positive" material for educators to draw from.

Participants reported that teaching moral education with universal values also enhanced the learning environment. Public school is a diverse setting with varying political, racial, and religious backgrounds. Educating students to recognize and appreciate these differences helps them to feel secure in their environment and focus on the tasks at hand (Etziono, n.d.). It also creates fair treatment and opportunities for all students. Moreover, in learning empathy for humanity and ethical conduct, students are learning the ethics of how to speak, how to argue, and how to be an engaged member of society (Hogan, 2011).

On the other hand, culturally relative values were more problematic. These values were not agreeable to all parties involved. First, at times culturally relative values can be confused as

universal. Moral philosophers identified that cultures may share values yet their application of them are very different (Mele & Sanchez-Runde, 2013; Sachedva et al 2011). This is the case with courtesy. Courtesy may be universal, but what courtesy looks like, rather what makes an action courteous, can be very different to different cultures. For instance, Southern values identify courtesy as including chivalry, but this practice can be problematic in terms of gender issues. Point in case, Jill from school A, said that she corrected a female student's use of poor language explaining to the female student that a "lady" did not need speak like that. The reasoning behind the teachers "correction" was not that the words were poor, but that men can speak in a way that women cannot. This rationalization projects that men and women have different guidelines for ethical conduct, which is a very controversial matter. Additionally, the culturally relative value of Christian conservatism was extremely problematic. The use of personal religious beliefs confirmed many scholars' and some participants' fears of religion being pushed upon students (Bates, 1995; Mele & Sanchez-Runde 2013; Sachedva et al 2011). Some participants spoke against teachers expressing their religious views in school, saying that discourse belonged in church and/or in the home. Edward (history, B, focus group one) represented a number of participants when he said, "We are a relative culture that honors that there may be more than one correct solution to an ethical dilemma." Likewise, relativists (Garrison, 2009; Splitter, 2011) would argue that an educator should not bring up religion unless it was for its critical inquiry. They propose that a dogmatic approach to religion in the public school classrooms hurts students' critical thinking. Similarly, moral activists (Kolstrein, 2011; Carr, 2006; Etzioni, n.d.) would argue that an educator speaking solely from a particular religion would hurt students ability to accept and appreciate diversity. On the other hand, it could be argued that these participants were following in their local cultural tradition, as many participants

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identified the larger community to be of Christian faith. Yet, public school, as defined by the legal system, is not the place for this. Overall, culturally relative values can be more problematic because they may infringe upon belief systems.

Most moral messages were made up of non-controversial universal values. This was significant because it provided non-offensive material for educators to incorporate. However, controversial culturally relative values were present as well. Educators used their local scripting to teach controversial values, a practice that other participants, moral philosophers and activist would not approve of. Overall, an emphasis of universal values benefited the development of moral education.

RQ #3: How is moral education being communicated in American public high schools?

Data in this area can truly inform literature on how the American moral education situation is being addressed by practitioners. Interestingly, "how" moral education was taught most often influenced by its organic nature. Because moral education was intrinsic to the classroom environment, the methods to teach it were very informal.

Formal moral education has generally been done with the use of stories that have an ethical dilemma. The story is used to set the stage for a discussion on the exhibited ethical dilemma (Nather, 2013; Park et al, 2012). Kohlberg (1958) started the practice with his initial experiment in 1958. Without direct intention of formally including moral education, the formal method was present naturally. The English and history teachers in particular gave examples of works of literature and historical figures that sparked discussions in their classes. Moral education was generally not the aim of these stories, but morals, values, and ethics were a key part of understanding course work.

In terms of moral philosophy, by and large most messages were absolutists in nature. This method treated many values, ethics, and morals as non-negotiable. The values of empathy for humanity and antiracism may not have been negotiable because they enhanced the environment. Yet, controversial values were also not "up for discussion." These included troublesome topics like religion and sex. For instance, when students inquired into Fran's personal religious beliefs she told the students that homosexuals were "sinners." This message is an example of how absolutism used for controversial issues negatively impacts society. An alternate approach is the discussion method, yet teachers reported very few discussions, hosting at most one or two in an entire school year. This relativist approach was determined to be too much trouble. A shame since there are many benefits to presenting values, ethics, and morals in a relativist manner (Garrison, 2009). For instance, relativism allows students to critically analyze morals, ethics, and values. As Dewey is quoted as saying, it helps students in understanding criteria for figuring out what is approvable (Garrison, 2009). Also, the relativist approach of discussions could be an opportunity for the "experience" method of teaching to be incorporated in state-tested courses. Students could practice ethical discourse on controversial matters. Largely, the lack of relativism was a disservice to the students.

The major finding in here was the identified subthemes under informal teaching methods: discussions, straight-talk, experience, and role modeling. Three out of the four methods were absolutist in nature. Students could benefit from the inclusion of more relativism with an increase in the discussion method. Additionally, all four methods were informal in nature, as they were not pre-planned, structured or (as identified by participants) sometimes unintentional. Overall, the "informal-ness" seemed to work for the teachers.

Future Research and Limitations

There are four major limitations to the generalizability of this study's findings. The first is that the study was conducted in the Southeastern United States. Therefore, findings on the content, frequency, and purpose of moral education may be particular to this part of the country. Additionally, if findings on noncontroversial "moral message content" were the same in other regions, universalism would be strengthened. The second limitation is that the regional area affected culturally relative values. Another region could display a different set of culturally relative values. This would also confirm the existence of these values and make for some interesting comparisons. Limitations 1 and 2 could be addressed by conducting future research in a different geographic area. The third limitation arose from the sample in school B being limited to teachers selected by the principal. This could have affected the diversity of the viewpoints on moral education because he chose teachers that he felt were relevant to the topic; when in fact all teachers are relevant to the topic. Also, the principal created focus groups. It would have been better for both schools to have had the same interview format. In the future, a mixed methods approach of both focus groups and interviews should be employed as the different methods retain equally valuable, but different types of information (interviews yielded excellent personal examples and focus groups tended to discuss issues at large). The fourth limitation involves all participants being of the Christian faith. This factor may have been the single source of the sub-theme "troublesome topics," which were sex and religion. Future research should recruit non-Christian participants in order to gain a more holistic understanding of values that educators are sharing with students and it should also explore these troublesome topics more thoroughly with more probing questions for clarification.

Conclusion

The organic nature of moral education was the selective code (the overarching theme) of the study. It influenced moral education in the schools the most by determining how frequently it was taught, who taught it, and how it was taught. For teachers of state-tested-courses, the identified problem of defining values to teach (Koh, 2012; Bates, 1995; Rosenblatt, 1995) was secondary to finding time to teach them. For this reason, teachers of state-tested courses struggled to include moral education, while their counterparts did not. Also, moral education was a much needed part of every class. Therefore, even teachers who saw a workforce purpose of school still taught it.

For all teachers there was an organic necessity for moral education growing from classroom and student needs. In the classroom the daily activity of students' actions, questions, and comments drove the organic need for rules and enhanced the learning environment. For the teachers, providing guidance to help students to be successful was an essential function of the profession. Moral education also helped to promote "community" as the different needs of students from "dysfunction homes" and "non-dysfunctional homes" were met. The organic nature of moral education drives its presence in the school.

Recommendations

Moral education can influence a person, committee, organization, or society to enact revolutionary changes with deeply beneficial results. Therefore, its presence in the public school system benefits all stakeholders involved. Moral education can be encouraged by a reduction in government policies and administrative regulations. A political shift away from workforce development, toward one of citizenship will build community. Although, moral education is important I do not encourage policies that mandate it, as some politicians and scholars do

(Bennett, 2003; Berkowitz & Bustamante, 2013). I do argue that a cultural shift within public schools should take place. This cultural shift would start with the administrator's support of teacher's intuition. Allowing the teachers to respond to the student's questions and course connections to moral education is a must! Secondly, administrators should also educate their teachers on the practices of being a discussion mediator. Educating the teachers on how to manage a volatile discussion could help them feel more at ease and capable of successfully hosting a powerful educational experience for the students. Furthermore, this may help teachers to learn the importance of allowing and encouraging the students to speak. More discussions within the classroom would be the first step toward "community building" because students could practice speaking and listening to one another. Indeed, a less bureaucratic public education system, allowing the organic nature of moral education to flourish, will work to build generations (to use a participant term) "of successful citizens."

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR PILOT STUDY

When interviewing the teachers I would begin reviewing the purpose of the study and defining terms that I will be using, such as values, ethics, morals and character development. Saying something to this effect:

I am going to ask you a few questions about your opinions and practices on moral education. If you ever feel you want to stop the interview simply tell me that you have answered all that you can. I am now going to define a few terms that I will use: I will use the word value, by this I mean principles or standards of behavior. I will also use the word ethics, by this I mean codes of conduct. And finally, I will use the word morals, by this I mean belief system to make decisions.

Then I will move into the interview:

Are you ready to begin?

1.) Where do kids get their sense of right and wrong?

2.) What role do you think that schools play in this process?

3.) Is your classroom a place where students can develop right and wrong?

4.) Would it be acceptable to teach values, ethics, and/or morals in your class? Tell me more, why do you think this is? (If so) How often does the topic arise? Can you give me an example of some class topics, in your subject matter, that lend themselves to morals, values or ethics?

5.) Would you feel comfortable having class discussions around making difficult decisions and what the consequences might be? (If not) Why is this? Tell me more. (If yes) Can you give me an example?

6.) Do you or would you feel supported by taking time in class to cover morals, ethics, or values?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCAL FOR THESIS

When interviewing the teachers I would begin reviewing the purpose of the study and

defining terms that I will be using, such as values, ethics, morals and character development.

Saying something to this effect:

I am going to ask you a few questions about your opinions and practices on moral education. If

you ever feel you want to stop the interview simply tell me that you have answered all that you

can. I am now going to define a few terms that I will use: I will use the word value, by this I

mean principles or standards of behavior. I will also use the word ethics, by this I mean codes of

conduct. And finally, I will use the word morals, by this I mean belief system to make decisions.

Then I will move into the interview:

Are you ready to begin?

1.) Moral education has many meanings to different people. What does that term mean to

you?

2.) Does it exist in your classroom?

3.) Can you give me an example of topics or methods on how you do this?

4.) Do you or would you feel supported by taking time in class to cover morals, ethics, or

values?

5.) What role do you think that schools play in the process of developing students beyond

academics?

6.) I am going to list some themes related to moral education. I want your opinion on these

statements and topics: morals are for parents, test scores, motivation to teach moral

education, topics covered in moral education, troublesome topics, teaching methods.

7.) Do you think that other teachers could relate to these themes too?

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONAIRE

Your answers to the following questions will help in understanding if there are any demographic

factors that influence the teaching of moral, value, and ethical education in the classroom. To

protect the confidentiality of this information, please do not write your name on this survey.

1. What is your gender?
    - o   Man
    - o   Woman

2. What is your race or ethnicity?
    - o   African American/Black
    - o   African
    - o   American Indian
    - o   Asian/Pacific Islander
    - o   Latino(a)/Hispanic/Chicano(a)
    - o   Middle Eastern
    - o   White/Caucasian
    - o   Other (Please specify)_____

3. How long have you been teaching?
    - o   0-4 years
    - o   5-10 years
    - o   11-15 years
    - o   16-20 years
    - o   Over 20 years

4. What primary subject do you teach?
    - o   Math
    - o   Science
    - o   History
    - o   English
    - o   Physical Education
    - o   Administration (not a teacher)
    - o   Other (please describe)_____

5. How old are you?
   - o 18-25
   - o 26-35
   - o 36-45
   - o 46-55
   - o 56-65
   - o 65<

6. What region are you originally from?
   - o Southeast
   - o Northeast
   - o New England
   - o Midwest
   - o Southwest
   - o Northwest

7. What is your religion?
   - o Christian
   - o Buddhist
   - o Muslim
   - o Hindu
   - o Atheist
   - o Undefined
   - o Other_____