Character in Education:
Action
Research
Report
2018/19

challenger
multi-academy
trust

Report launched and presented on
Tuesday 9th July 2019

REPORT AUTHORS:

Fitzpatrick, R., Gwenin, L., Pugh, A.,
Sagnia, S., & Vickers, S.

EDITORS & INTRODUCTION:

Roberts, F. & Wright, E.

Contents

Introduction

Frederika Roberts & Elizabeth Wright

Co-Founders, RWS | Resilience Wellbeing Success (www.rws.today)

Co-Authors, "Character Toolkit for Teachers" (2019)

Background to the project

At the start of the 2018/19 academic year, the Challenger Multi-Academy Trust (CMAT) brought us in to work with a number of "Character Champions" - teachers that would conduct action research within the context of Character Education - from across the Trust's schools.

After we introduced the project to potential Character Champions during our joint keynote speech at CMAT's awards evening in October 2018, we began working with the volunteers. We delivered a half-day INSET workshop on character education and the basics of research in November 2018, after which we provided on-going online support - answering questions, helping the Character Champions find pertinent research and questionnaires and anything else they might need to help them with their projects. We then delivered a two-hour follow-up training session in May 2019, during which the Character Champions presented their research to us and to each other and were able to discuss how to best report on their findings. We continued to provide guidance and support via e-mail until the Character Champions were ready to submit their final reports, which form the body of this document.

About action research

Action research is practitioner-led research with the purpose of developing and improving practice. According to Boog (2003), action research has long-established roots in philosophical thinking. From the perspective of Character Education, therefore, this appears to be an ideal approach, as Character Education is founded on philosophical concepts and virtue ethics in addition to positive psychology.

With a focus on change and problem-solving, action research designs are flexible, allowing researchers to critically review and revise their original purpose, hypotheses and practices as their research progresses. With constant reflection and refinement, action research is a continuous research practice that leads to social action through forward movement and growth (Thomas, 2017). Action research therefore lends itself well to an educational setting where teachers wish to investigate the impact of certain practices - in this instance Character Education interventions - with a view to reviewing and improving on those practices on an on-going basis.

Action research, including in an educational context, is certainly nothing new, though according to Nolen and Putten (2007), it began receiving more interest towards the end of the 20th century. In 1954, Corey wrote about action research being undertaken by "the people who actually teach children or supervise teachers or administer school systems" (p.375) with the underlying intention of resolving practical challenges through scientific methods. Corey outlines two alternatives to action research: Educators attempting to improve their practice through trial and error, with no methodology to measure or assess what does and doesn't work, or asking professional researchers to "study our problems and tell us what to do" (p.376). He stresses the

advantage of action research as being research conducted on the ground, and though it may not always be as precise as scientific research carried out by professional researchers under controlled conditions, "the results have meaning for practice because they are a consequence of inquiry under life-like circumstances" (p.377); in other words, action research delivers realistic results in a practical setting.

Action research at CMAT

Five Character Champions, including Sebastian Sagnia who was the project co-ordinator, completed their action research projects, ranging from Early Years to Year 7. Their research addressed the following questions:

- Will five minutes' singing at the beginning of the school day increase a child's mental well-being?
- What is the effect of teaching encouragement on children's effectiveness at carrying out a group problem-solving activity?
- Can regular Character Education activities improve emotional literacy skills and the understanding of character strengths for Early Years children?
- Will teaching Year 7 children about resilience during citizenship lessons increase their resilience levels?
- Can confidence in mathematics be improved by embedding character education in the teaching and learning of the subject?

There was great variety not only in the research topics, but also in the research design and methodology. Of the five research projects, three (encouragement, chapter 2; resilience, chapter 4; mathematics confidence, chapter 5) adopted a between-subjects design to allow for a control group; the other two studies (singing, chapter 1; emotional literacy - chapter 3) followed a repeated measures design. In her study on the impact of Character Education on mathematics confidence (chapter 5), Sue Vickers included both *taught* and *caught* character (The Jubilee Centre for Character & Virtues, n.d.) by introducing explicitly taught character vocabulary and role-modelling of character strengths.

Overall, the results from these initial action research projects are highly encouraging for this Academy Trust's first foray into character-led action research. There is initial evidence to suggest that subjective well-being can be increased by singing at the start of the school day, that character education can improve emotional literacy and confidence in mathematics and that teaching adolescents about resilience may improve their resilience levels. Additionally there is tentative evidence to suggest that teaching children to encourage each other may increase their problem-solving abilities, albeit this may vary depending on their age and emotional maturity.

As we outlined earlier in this introduction, the conditions for action research are rarely perfect research conditions, but this research method does offer the advantage of delivering authentic practice-led findings. Each teacher has carefully examined their own study's limitations as well as - and this is possibly the most exciting aspect of any research - the additional questions the research raises.

Next steps

Perhaps, as a result of the additional questions raised by their research, the Character Champions will wish to pursue further research in the coming academic years; maybe their colleagues will pick up the mantle and delve further into these areas of research. Maybe a new batch of Character Champions will let their curiosity take them in entirely new directions.

From our perspective, being involved in this project since its inception has been an honour and a joy; we are grateful to have been invited to support the Character Champions on their journey. We have deep respect for the teachers who, alongside their busy, committed roles as educators, have taken the time to carry out research to further the field of knowledge and evidence in Character Education. It is uplifting and gives us hope to see that CMAT has so wholeheartedly embraced Character Education and the desire to contribute to its knowledge base. We are looking forward to continuing our partnership with the Trust as their action research expertise and evidence base expands.

References

Boog, B. W. M. (2003). The Emancipatory Character of Action Research, its History and the Present State of the Art. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, *13*(6), 426–438. https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.748

Corey, S. M. (1954). Action Research in Education. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *47*(5), 375–380. Retrieved from http://paperity.org/p/59171555/action-research-in-education

Nolen, A. L., & Putten, J. Vander. (2007). Action Research in Education: Addressing Gaps in Ethical Principles and Practices. *Educational Researcher, 36*(7), 401–407. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X07309629

Roberts, F. and Wright, E. (2018) *Character toolkit for teachers. 100+ Classroom and Whole School Character Education Activities for 5- to 11-Year-Olds*. London and Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

The Jubilee Centre for Character & Virtues. (n.d.). *Schools of character*. Retrieved from https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/character-education/SchoolsOfCharacterPDF.pdf

Thomas, G. (2017). *How to do your research project: a guide for students*. London: Sage.

Chapter 1: Will five minutes' singing at the beginning of the school day increase a child's mental well-being?

Rebecca Fitzpatrick

Class teacher and Head of Music

Lancot Challenger Academy (www.lancotschool.co.uk)

Introduction

Many research studies have looked into the positive impact that music has on mental well-being; this has been seen in studies around music therapy alongside art therapy. Research suggests that music is fundamental to the learning of not only foundation subjects but core subjects as well. The Department of Education (2011) recognises that "When young people make music together, they work toward a common goal that has the potential to change lives profoundly for the better" (p.4). This can be transferred to children singing. Children arrive to school with many different issues. They could have had a bad start to their day; they may not feel like coming to school. They could have their own anxieties about coming to school. Ranging from test nerves, leaving parents or siblings at home, lack of breakfast or of love and care from guardians.

This study looked at the mental well-being of children and whether introducing singing to their day will decrease their anxieties and increase their mental well-being. Music should be accessible to all classes of children; "while music touches the lives of all young people, the disadvantaged can benefit most" (DfE, 2011, p.4). Teachers should be aware that we don't necessarily know the burdens that some children arrive to school with in the mornings. However giving them time to engage in singing can determine their mental well-being for the rest of the day. Bennett (2007) reported that social inclusion, through engagement with art disciplines such as music, can positively influence mental health by increasing self-esteem and confidence.

This research will be looking into the importance of music within the classroom by introducing singing into a child's daily routine. In 1944 it became compulsory for children to sing daily worship songs during assembly. Ofsted stopped inspecting for compliance with this in 2004 as 76% of secondary schools were seen not to be doing this (Wyatt, 2015). Although schools no longer have to adhere to this act, the importance of singing as a group has also been overlooked. It can be argued that music allows us to accommodate differing degrees of unity, it allows for things to stay separate or to be recombined into new ideas.

Some children find the transition from home to school a difficult one, therefore if the children know that as soon as the school day starts they get to join in communal singing, it will help with a smoother transition. Cremin (2014) states that patterns of activity can be soothing to the child, for example preparing them for the end of the lesson or the beginning of the day.

Music lessons within the focus school are taught as a separate subject once weekly. The National Curriculum (2014) states that music is one of the highest forms of creativity and should engage and inspire pupils. Research shows that there is an underlying negativity through lack of confidence in teaching music. Many teachers do not have the confidence to teach music as they feel they don't have a specialism in the subject.

However, the action research detailed in this report focused on only 5 minutes of singing a day with the teacher delivering this within the classroom. Therefore, the teacher does not need to be able to sing in tune or have any specialist training, just be happy to sing along with the children.

Method

This research took place using a year 2 class (6-7 year olds). During week one, the children continued with their normal daily routine and did not engage in any singing. In the second week, they sang for 5 minutes at the start of their school day. The same children were used for both weeks of the research. Every child used a happiness scale and rated how they felt about being in school for that week. During the first week of the study the children arrived in school and then rated how happy they were about being in school. In the second week, the children engaged by singing three songs and then went on to rate their happiness in the same way they did the previous week.

Results

The introduction of singing in the classroom was well received by the majority of the children in a class of 26. When choosing the songs for the children to partake in it was important that the songs were current, exciting and relevant for the children. Singing was also received better by the children with the introduction of a song with actions. Table 1 shows how children rated their happiness when arriving in school during week one.

Table 1. Children's happiness ratings when no singing took place

How happy are you to be in school today?	😊		🙂		😐		😟		😠	
Monday	11	42%	2	8%	6	23%	5	19%	2	8%
Tuesday	10	38%	3	11%	7	28%	4	15%	2	8%
Wednesday	8	31%	4	15%	10	39%	4	15%	0	0%
Thursday	13	50%	3	11%	8	31%	2	8%	0	0%
Friday	11	42%	3	11%	8	31%	4	15%	0	0%

Table 2. Children's happiness ratings when they participated in 5 minutes of singing at the start of every day

How happy are you to be in school today?	😊		🙂		😐		😟		😠	
Monday	18	69%	3	11%	1	4%	2	8%	2	8%
Tuesday	19	74%	3	11%	3	11%	0	0%	1	4%
Wednesday	17	65%	5	19%	2	8%	1	4%	1	4%
Thursday	19	73%	2	8%	4	15%	1	4%	0	0%
Friday	20	77%	3	11%	2	8%	0	0%	1	4%

As Table 2 shows, the children were happier the second week, after singing at the start of each day, however they weren't overly unhappy the week before. There is an increase in how happy they were feeling the second week.

Discussion

The year two class completed the survey on the first day back after a half term holiday; in hindsight some of the children may have answered differently dependent upon how they felt to be back at school. Some children will be pleased to be back after a week without routine, however some children will not be happy about being back into the daily pattern of school. If the research was to be repeated, timings of the study would be considered to counteract this.

I also found that some children just don't want to sing. They are perfectly happy with or without the singing. Some children find happiness in other arts such as drawing or dancing. Again, if the research was repeated giving the children the opportunity to choose their medium, it would be interesting to see whether the results would be similar. As a teacher it is important to engage children in fun activities. Although sometimes it is a challenge to keep all children engaged, the singing could be adapted to meet the needs of all children. It was evident that not all children wanted to dance and sing to be able to enjoy music. The teacher could, in a future study, show empathy towards the calmer students who were happy to sit and listen and tap their foot, by accepting this as their level of participation. Lastly another drawback of 5 minutes' singing in the morning, especially the songs with the actions, was that children became lively and excitable. Settling them back down to concentrate on Maths work afterwards was challenging.

Conclusions

Young children are easily moulded and naturally want to conform. If singing became part of a daily routine and expectation, they would adhere to it. The question on whether it would increase their mental well-being, based upon this research, shows that they were indeed happier on the second week. However, has this successfully measured their mental state of mind? The limitations are that, firstly, the timing of the survey could potentially impact on the result. If the survey had been filled out at the end of the day, rather than immediately after singing, would we get different results? During a whole day of school, many things can happen to change a child's mental well-being. Therefore the research has raised many more questions. In conclusion "Music has a power of forming a character and should therefore be introduced into the education of the young" (Aristotle).

References

Arthur, J., Wray, D., & Grainger, T. (2006). *Learning to teach in the primary school*. United Kingdom: Routledge.

Cremin, T. & Arthur, J. (2014). *Learning to teach in the primary school (3rd Edition)*. London: Routledge.

Department of Education. (2011). *The importance of music, a National Plan for Music Education*. Retrieved February 22, 2019, from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/180973/DFE-00086-2011.pdf

Department of Education. (2014). *The National Curriculum*. Retrieved April 12, 2019, from https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-curriculum

Federation of Music services. (2018). *Ten things schools should know about learning music*. Retrieved February 15, 2019, from https://www.bradfordmusiconline.co.uk/files/2014/07/10-Things-for-Schools-Final-10-Jan-121.pdf

Richardson, H. (2015, November 13). Schools' religious assemblies "should be scrapped." *BBC News*. Retrieved March 11, 2019, from https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-34802820

Wyatt, C. (2015, December 23). Does daily worship count for anything? *BBC News*. Retrieved July 3, 2019, from https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-35161361

Chapter 2: What is the effect of teaching encouragement on children's effectiveness at carrying out a group problem-solving activity?

Miss L Gwenin
Outside Education Leader / Class Teacher
Lancot Challenger Academy (www.lancotschool.co.uk)

Introduction

Many research studies have investigated collaborative learning. These include investigations that have attempted to determine whether collaborative learning contributes to an increase in academic achievement. Research suggests that the benefits of collaborative teamwork in school include, amongst others, higher academic achievement (Nariman & Chrispeels, 2016). Having spent the past 18 years working in schools, I am personally aware that collaborative teamwork is used as a method for teaching in many primary schools in England.

There is, however, less consensus by researchers regarding why achievement is affected by co-operative learning methods and what conditions are required for the effect to take place (Slavin, 1996). Slavin describes four major theoretical perspectives on co-operative learning and achievement:

- Motivational Perspectives: Co-operative incentive structures create a situation in which the only way group members can attain their own personal goals is if the group is successful.
- Social Cohesion Perspectives: Students will help others learn because they care about them and want one another to succeed.
- Cognitive Perspectives: Interactions among students will in themselves increase student achievement, with discussions assisting mental processing of information rather than other motivations defining their learning.
- Developmental Perspectives: Interaction among children around appropriate tasks increases their mastery of critical concepts.

"A hierarchical model of team member personality, defined by the Big Five trait dimensions" (Driskell, Goodwin, Salas, & O'Shea, 2006, p.250) includes agreeableness. "The trait of agreeableness is defined as kindness, trust, and warmth versus selfishness, distrust, and hostility" (p.255).

With research clearly suggesting that collaborative learning increases academic achievement, the aim of this action research was to investigate a method of teaching collaborative learning. The following hypothesis was therefore investigated: Teaching children to encourage each other will increase the rate of problem-solving in a group activity.

Method

During the study, groups of children undertook an *outdoor education session* each week for a block of five weeks as a part of their regular timetable. Within these sessions, one group of children was taught to

encourage one another throughout the activities of the sessions whilst the other - the control group - was not taught to encourage each other. Besides this difference, both groups of students completed the same activities throughout all sessions.

During the first and last sessions of the block, each group was asked to perform the following problem-solving activity:

Standing in a circle holding a rope whose ends are tied together, the group were asked to form each of the following shapes (all shapes had been previously taught in class) in as short a time as possible: Square, rectangle, triangle, pentagon and five-pointed star. The order of the shapes completed was the same for each of the groups. The time taken to form each shape, from an initial circle to completion, was recorded. They were all given a maximum of five minutes to complete the shape. No help was provided by adults present in order to minimise the potential of varying amounts of support being provided.

The subjects consisted of two groups of approximately 15 Year 4 children (aged 8 and 9 years) from the same class. Each group was from the same class to moderate for the potential of different collaborative teaching methods being taught by their class teacher during the investigation, which could influence the result. There was a similar number of children and a mix of boys and girls in each group in order to minimise the effect of the number of children and gender split having an impact on the performance of each group, though this could not be done with precision without excluding children from the activity. The same children completed the task at the beginning and end of the block of sessions to ensure performance was not affected by individual competencies. This activity was only completed at the beginning and end of the 5 sessions to ensure any increase in rate was more likely due to the increased use of encouragement rather than rehearsal of the activity. The investigation was repeated with another Year 4 class and two Year 5 classes, keeping the above variables the same, to see if the results were similar.

Results

The results show that of the Year 4 class (see tables 1 and 2);

- Class one's encouraged subjects completed the tasks more slowly the second time, as did the control group. However, the depreciation in time of the encouraged subjects was greater than that displayed by the control group.
- Class two's encouraged subjects completed the tasks more slowly the second time, as did the control group. However, overall the encouraged subjects' depreciation in time was less than the control subjects'.

The results show that of the Year 5 class (see tables 3 and 4);

- Class one's encouraged subjects completed the tasks faster the second time. However, the control group completed the tasks more slowly the second time around.
- Class two's encouraged subjects completed the tasks faster the second time, as did the control group. Overall, the encouraged subjects showed a greater improvement in time than the control group.

Table 1. Year 4: Class 1

Shape	Group 1 (encouraged)			Group 2 (control subjects)		
	Start	End	Impact	Start rate	End rate	Impact
square	3min 10sec	4min 55sec	+1min 45sec	3min 55sec	2min 20sec	-1min 35sec
rectangle	1min 30sec	1 min 1 sec	-29sec	2min	3min 30sec	+1min 30sec
triangle	2min 50sec	4min 50sec	+2min	4min 10sec	x	+50sec (max time)
pentagon	3min 25sec	4min 50sec	+1min 25sec	x	x	x
5 cornered star	x (timed out at 5 min)	x	x	x	x	x
Overall Impact			+4min 41sec			+45sec

x = timed out at 5 minutes

Table 2. Year 4: Class 2

Shape	Group 1 (encouraged)			Group 2 (control subjects)		
	Start	End	Impact	Start rate	End rate	Impact
square	x	2min 15sec	-2min 45sec (taken from 5min max time)	2min 50sec	x	+2min 10sec (max time)
rectangle	2min 50sec	2min 48sec	-2sec	2min 30sec	4min 45sec	+2min 15sec
triangle	2min 30sec	4min 50sec	+2min 20sec	2min 10sec	2min 14sec	+14sec
pentagon	2min 55sec	4min 20sec	+1min 25sec	x	3min 42sec	-1min 18sec
5 cornered star	x	4min 51sec	-9sec	x	x	x
Overall Impact			+49sec			+3min 21sec

x = timed out at 5 minutes

Table 3. Year 5: Class 1

Shape	Group 1 (encouraged)			Group 2 (control subjects)		
	Start	End	Impact	Start rate	End rate	Impact
square	1min 30sec	1min 59sec	+29sec	1min 55sec	2min 53sec	+58sec
rectangle	1min 50sec	0min 14sec	-1min 36sec	1min 30sec	2min 58sec	+1min 28sec
triangle	2min 15sec	0 min 44sec	-1min 31sec	1min 45min	1min 52sec	+7sec
pentagon	2min	3min 30sec	+1min 30ec	4min 57sec	x	+3sec
5 cornered star	4min 15sec	2min 0sec	-2min 15sec	x	3min 23sec	-1min 37 sec
Overall Impact			-3min 23sec			+59sec

x = timed out at 5 minutes

Table 4. Year 5: Class 2

Shape	Group 1 (encouraged)			Group 2 (control subjects)		
	Start	End	Impact	Start rate	End rate	Impact
square	4min 50sec	2min 23sec	-2min 27sec	2min 20sec	2min 34sec	+14sec
rectangle	4min 50sec	1min 43sec	-3min 7sec	1min 18sec	1min 2 sec	-16sec
triangle	1min 45sec	x	+3min 15sec	3min	32sec	-2min 28sec
pentagon	3min 10sec	1min 10 sec	-2min	3min 10sec	3min 8sec	-2sec
5 cornered star	2min 48sec	1min 51sec	-57sec	3min 28sec	4min 50sec	+1min 22sec
Overall Impact			-5min 16sec			-1min 10sec

x = timed out at 5 minutes

Discussion

Class One of the Year 4 group were the only group who took longer to complete the task the second time in comparison to the first time, whilst showing greater depreciation in time than the control subjects. It should be noted that during the second attempt of the tasks for the encouraged subjects the weather was windy in comparison to still weather the first time. The control group completed their tasks indoors the second time, due to wind and rain. It could be that completing the tasks in adverse weather conditions resulted in a slower completion time. The strong wind made communication more difficult and may have also impeded concentration.

Both groups in Class Two of the Year 4 group took longer to complete the task the second time. They completed the tasks in strong winds the second time compared to still weather the first time. This could account for the slower times by both groups the second time as it may have made communication more difficult and may have impeded concentration.

Overall, the control group completed the tasks more slowly than the main subjects when compared to the first attempt. This could be because as the encouraged subjects were using words of encouragement to each other (as taught) it lessened the impact of the strong winds with regard to lengthening the time it took them to complete the tasks. During the completion of the tasks, the control subjects had three children withdraw from the tasks (due to interpersonal conflict) thus they had fewer children in the group than the first time they attempted the tasks. This could also account for the differences in rate to complete the tasks.

The encouraged subjects in both the Year 5 classes completed the tasks faster than the control group when compared to the first attempt. This therefore suggests that teaching the encouraged subjects to use words of encouragement improved the rate at which the group were able to solve a group problem-solving activity. However, not exactly the same children were in each group, due to absences. So some of the variation in rate could be due to specific children's competencies being absent.

It could be that the impact of teaching the subjects to use words of encouragement on the rate of a group problem-solving activity was more effective with the children of Year 5 than those of Year 4 due to the difference in their ages. It would be interesting to run this research project again with younger and older children to see if the results differ.

Perhaps the impact of teaching the subjects to use words of encouragement on the rate of a group problem-solving activity had different results with the different groups due to the different groups' emotional intelligence at the start of the project. It would be interesting to complete the project again, taking an assessment of emotional intelligence at the beginning of the project to see if this has an effect on the rate of a group problem-solving activity, in comparison.

I would also like to repeat this project and run it over a longer period of time to see if this intervention would show a more conclusive result.

References

Nariman, N., & Chrispeels, J. (2016). PBL in the era of reform standards: Challenges and benefits perceived by teachers in one elementary school. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-Based Learning*, *10*(1), 5. https://doi.org/10.7771/1541-5015.1521

Slavin, R. E. (1996). Research on cooperative learning and achievement: What we know, what we need to know. *Contemporary educational psychology*, *21*(1), 43-69.

Driskell, J. E., Goodwin, G. F., Salas, E., & O'Shea, P. G. (2006). What makes a good team player? Personality and team effectiveness. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice, 10*(4), 249-271. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/1089-2699.10.4.249

Chapter 3: Can regular Character Education activities improve emotional literacy skills and the understanding of character strengths for Early Years children?

Alex Pugh

Specialist Leader of Education in Early Years Foundation Stage and Phonics, PE Lead, Phonics Lead, Educational Visits Co-ordinator

Springfield Primary School (www.springfieldprimaryschool.org.uk)

Abstract
Following the recent joining of a multi-academy trust that places high importance on Character Education, this study was conducted to explore the links between 10 character strengths and the emotional literacy skills of Early Years children. After 12 weeks of regular Character Education activities, clear links were established between these two areas, leading to improved academic results in *Personal, Social and Emotional Development* as well as *Communication and Language*.

Introduction
The research question was developed after the school became part of a multi-academy trust that places high importance on Character Education. As an Early Years teacher, it has been observed how many children have difficulty describing their emotions beyond "happy" and "sad". This led to an interest in how Character Education and character strengths can fit in to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2017). Therefore, this study has been developed in order to explore the link between emotional literacy and Character Education.

The main purpose of this study is to understand whether Character Education activities improve the emotional literacy skills of Early Years children as well as their understanding of character strengths. There is an opportunity to look at whether improved emotional literacy contributes to an improved classroom atmosphere as well as improved results in the personal, social and emotional development (PSED) and communication and language (C&L) areas of the EYFS. Finally, there is the chance to embed Character Education into the curriculum of this cohort.

This study has been conducted in a recently transitioned primary school based in the Bedfordshire area. They have recently joined a multi-academy trust and become an academy. At the time of the study, the school had 410 children in total; however, this study only focuses on early years and its 46 children that are split over two classes.

Children that are at the age-related expectation at the end of the initial year of school are said to have achieved a good level of development (GLD) (DfE, 2018). According to the Department for Education (2018) the national percentage of children that achieved GLD was at 71.5%. In Bedford Borough this percentage was lower, coming in at 69.9%. Nationally, the percentage of children at the expected level in the PSED area of the EYFS was at 73.3%. Again, Bedford Borough came out lower than this, with 71.3% of children at the expected

level for PSED. Finally, the national percentage of children at the expected level in the C&L area of the EYFS was 82.4%. Once again, Bedford Borough came out lower at 79.2%. As the school in this study is part of Bedford Borough, there is an interest into how the gap between regional and national results can be closed. This study aims to provide ideas and an insight into this.

Literature Review
Current literature has been critically analysed in order to provide more insight into the topics being explored through this research project. The literature investigated supports the proposed hypothesis that regular Character Education activities can improve emotional literacy skills and the understanding of character strengths for Early Years children.

Character Education
The Association for Character Education (2017) defines character as "a set of personal traits that produce specific emotions, inform motivation and guide conduct." They state that "Character Education is an umbrella term for all explicit and implicit educational activities that help young people develop positive personal strengths called virtues." The VIA Institute on Character (2019) claim that "every individual possesses 24 character strengths" that come together to give each person a "unique character profile". They state that "when skilfully applied, character strengths can actually have a significant impact on your life." This theory supports the importance of promoting an understanding of character strengths in schools.

There are links between Character Education and academic learning; Lickona, Schaps and Lewis (2002) discuss how the two "must not be conceived as separate spheres; rather there must be a strong, mutually supportive relationship." This is supported by Benninga et al. (2003) who claim that "over the past five years some evidence of the relationship between Character Education and academic learning has begun to emerge." This developing link maintains the significance of Character Education in the wider school curriculum.

Character Education in the Early Years
Battistich (2008) claims that when Character Education is carried out well at an early stage, it appears to lead children towards success. They discuss how programs should be established in order to put children on positive developmental trajectories early in life and with this recommendation it has been known that investing in resources early in children's development has a broad range of positive effects on developmental outcomes as well as reductions in financial and other societal costs throughout life. This theory stresses the importance of embedding Character Education early on in a child's developmental path in order to have an effect on various outcomes as they grow up. Heckman (2011) supports this theory by stating that cognition and character work together and they "determine future social and economic status".

High quality Character Education in the early years is essential according to Heckman (2011); evidence suggests that focussing mainly on closing discrepancies in cognitive development is not as successful as it could be due to neglecting the need to close gaps in character development. This implies that teachers have a duty to support children in their own character development so that they can progress in cognitive skills.

In a journal article written by Shoshani (2018) the links between children's understanding of the 24 character strengths and their emotional well-being were explored. The study focussed on children aged 3-6 years and found that, based on parental reports, there was evidence of expressions of all the 24 character strengths in early childhood, and that particular strengths relate more strongly to children's mental health and emotional

well-being than others. Roberts & Wright (2019) have refined and simplified the 24 character strengths down to 10 for Early Years children. These 10 strengths will be the focus for this research project.

Emotional Literacy

Sharp (2014) defines emotional literacy "as the ability to recognise, understand, handle, and appropriately express emotions" (p.1). It is discussed how it can be nurtured despite being a journey that does not have a final end point or destination (Sharp, 2014). As professionals that have the ability to nurture these skills, it is essential that teachers keep this capability in mind. Sharp (2014) goes on to argue that it is clear how literacy and numeracy are highly valued within national education but they believe that the promotion of emotional literacy should share the same value.

Sherwood (2008) talks about how the neglect of emotional literacy in primary schools manifests in children as "low self-esteem, resentment, bullying, fear, grief and anxiety, and, by adolescence, this emerges as depression, addiction, aggression, and self-harming" (p.11). This supports the statements made previously by Sharp (2014) emphasising the importance of emotional literacy within national education. Sherwood (2008) also mentions how, if the concept of emotional literacy can be introduced to help identify and process basic human feeling states, then many of today's school behavioural problems will not emerge.

Emotional Literacy in the Early Years

Swale (2006) states that "young children's emotional development is increasingly recognised as vitally important not only to their attainment but also to their well-being and success in all other areas" (p.44). This theory supports the reasoning behind this research study as it is essential to encourage positive emotional development from a young age in order to support children's attainment in all areas. Papatheodorou (2005) agrees with this argument and discusses how it is important that emotional literacy is fitted into existing structures of the early years settings and integrated within the regular play and curriculum activities. Whilst carrying out this research project, this statement has been considered.

Finally, Bruce (2010) mentions how it is the "teacher's role to provide a safe but rich and challenging learning environment where children are free to grow socially and emotionally" (p.2). Once again, this places an emphasis on the practitioner to facilitate the development of emotional literacy.

In conclusion, four key areas have been researched in order to answer the question "Can regular Character Education activities improve emotional literacy skills and the understanding of character strengths for Early Years children?" Current literature has been explored and critically analysed and there is a demonstration of the importance of both Character Education and emotional literacy within the early years. There are also links between how high quality Character Education can support children's emotional development.

Methodology

This study consists of a mixed method approach. Mixed method research is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data.

According to Merriam (2009), qualitative data is gained through studying things in their natural settings and primarily about "understanding the meaning of experience" (p.19). Whereas, Lodico et al. (2010) state that "quantitative research approaches summarise the results numerically" (p.78) and are therefore more statistical. The analysis of end of term EYFS Profile data is quantitative research, while 1:1 surveys of the

children's understanding in relation to character strengths and emotional literacy is qualitative as it relies on child's voice. Venkatesh et al. (2013) state how a mixed method approach is potentially superior to that of a single approach, because this form of research uses quantitative and qualitative research "either concurrently or sequentially, to understand a phenomenon of interest" (p.23). Therefore, this was the preferred method for this study. Teddie and Tashakkori (2011) discuss the problems that can occur when using a mixed method approach. They claim that mixed method studies take longer to conduct than a single method approach, as well as stating that this method can be a "major issue for…researchers operating under stringent timelines" (p.295). This issue was taken into consideration and so there was flexibility around the proposed research dates and time frame.

Triangulation has been used in this research project. According to McMurray et al. (2004) this is "the use of several different research techniques in the same study to confirm and verify data gathered in different ways" (p.263). This view is supported by Flick (2009) who believes that triangulation contributes to improved research quality.

Convenience sampling was used to select the participants for this research project. As an Early Years teacher, the 46 children in Foundation were the most accessible subjects considering the time restraints on this study. Marshall (1996) states that convenience sampling is the least rigorous sampling technique and could result in poor quality data. This method of sampling has still been used and the restrictions of this method were taken into consideration when analysing data.

The Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research put together by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) were followed to ensure any ethical issues were addressed. The research techniques used were discussed with the school's headteacher before any research was carried out as well as a letter addressed to parents of the children involved outlining the purpose of the study. All participants have remained anonymous and storage of data solely used for this study has been kept secure throughout and is GDPR compliant.

Findings and Analysis

All data for this research project was collected over a 12 week period. This will now be analysed in order to answer the question "Can regular Character Education activities improve emotional literacy skills and the understanding of character strengths for Early Years children?"

At the beginning of this study, all Early Years children were asked what each of the 10 revised character strengths meant to them. Prior to this, the children had had no exposure to this language other than what they may have heard during everyday situations. All children were then taught the same structured lesson that outlined the meaning of Character Education and the 10 strengths they would be focussing on. Throughout the 12 weeks, the Early Years team used the language associated with the 10 strengths as often as possible and in familiar and meaningful contexts. Whilst planning activities, staff considered how Character Education would fit in and where appropriate, would refer to this with the children. All children took part in daily circle times that centred around the project and the 10 strengths; they were praised when they used the language correctly. They also took part in a weekly structured "special person" activity, which involved describing what made their peers special. During this time they were expected to refer to the character strengths. In addition, a letter went out to the parents of children involved and this stated the strengths that were being focussed on.

and encouraged parents to use this language at home. At the end of the project, all children were again asked what each of the 10 character strengths meant to them.

The 10 revised character strengths that were introduced over this time are curiosity, humour, excitement, love, kindness, imagination, teamwork, sensibility, perseverance, and gratitude. At the start of the 12 weeks, children had very limited understanding of these. Table 1 shows the percentage of children that showed a good understanding of the 10 chosen strengths and some examples of comments that were made.

Table 1. Children's understanding of the 10 character strengths at the start of the 12 weeks

Curiosity	0%	
Humour	2%	"Like when your dad tells a joke"
Excitement	35%	"When I am excited for my birthday"
Love	44%	"At a wedding there are people that love each other"
Kindness	28%	"Being nice" / "Playing with my friends"
Imagination	9%	"When you dream" / "When you make things up"
Teamwork	52%	"Doing something together" / "Footballers are in a team"
Sensibility	0%	
Perseverance	0%	
Gratitude	0%	

At the end of the 12 weeks, the children repeated the same task. Table 2 shows the percentage of children that showed a good understanding of the 10 chosen strengths and some examples of comments that were made. The figures in red show the rise percentage rise from the beginning of the study to the end.

Table 1. Children's understanding of the 10 character strengths at the end of the 12 weeks

Curiosity	48% (+48%)	"When you want to find things out"
Humour	70% (+68%)	"It's the same as being funny"
Excitement	83% (+48%)	"When you are really really really really happy"
Love	85% (+41%)	"I love my mummy because she cares for me"
Kindness	82% (+54%)	"It's like when we are friendly"
Imagination	61% (+52%)	"We use our imagination in the role play"
Teamwork	83% (+31%)	"Like when we help each other do stuff like building towers"
Sensibility	10% (+10%)	"When you know someone is sad"
Perseverance	10% (+10%)	"We keep trying"
Gratitude	43% (+43%)	"We are grateful for things like food and schools"

This shows that there is an improved understanding of all of the character strengths that were introduced to children. The biggest improvement came in humour and it was apparent during the study that the children found this a very easy concept to understand. The smallest improvements came in sensibility and perseverance; both of these character strengths were difficult for children to grasp and they found it hard to apply this to themselves and others.

This project also focussed on emotional literacy and in order to assess children's understanding of this, at the beginning of the 12 weeks all children were shown 8 "emojis" and were asked to describe the emotion being shown. Following this, the children took part in many activities involving feelings such as social stories, pulling different faces to show emotions, sorting facial expressions, and circle times around how they were feeling and why. The Early Years team encouraged children to delve deeper into their feelings beyond the simple happy and sad. They modelled how to express and verbalise emotions and supported children to do the same. The children were also part of a *restorative justice* approach to behaviour management which allowed them the opportunity to discuss how their actions made others feel as well as the consequences of this.

When exploring the understanding of emotional literacy, the "emojis" shown in Tables 3 and 4 were looked at. During these conversations, it became apparent that the children described more of what the face was doing as opposed to the feeling being shown; for example they may have said "crying" rather than "sad". Table 3 shows the percentage of children that had a good understanding of the emotion and some of the comments that were made.

Table 3. Children's understanding of "emojis" at the start of the study

😀	86%	"Happy"
😢	82%	"Sad"
😴	65%	"Sleepy"
😠	63%	"Angry"
😳	4%	"Nervous"
😜	0%	
😱	12%	"So surprised"
🤔	0%	

At the end of the 12 weeks, the children repeated this activity. Table 4 shows the percentage of children that demonstrated a good understanding of the "emojis" and some examples of comments that were made. The percentage rise from the start to the end of the study is shown in red.

Table 4. Children's understanding of "emojis" at the end of the study

😄	100% (+14%)	"Cheerful"
😢	100% (+18%)	"Upset"
😴	93% (+28%)	"Tired"
😡	100% (+37%)	"Mad" / "Frustrated"
😳	60% (+56%)	"Shocked" / "Confused" / "Scared"
😜	33% (+33%)	"Playful" / "Silly"
😱	65% (+53%)	"Shocked" / "Scared" / "Frightened"
🤔	32% (+32%)	"Confused" / "Thoughtful"

There was an improvement in the understanding of all 8 "emojis". It can also be seen that some of the language used is more in depth and goes beyond the simple terms "happy" and "sad". There was a noticeable difference in the way children described emotions and feelings towards the end of the project. The team commented on the way children were using phrases such as "he is *frustrating* me because he won't share" and so on. This implies that the children have improved levels of emotional literacy as they are able to read the emotions of the "emojis" and describe them using a wider range of vocabulary.

This study also aimed to improve the results of the PSED and C&L aspects of the EYFS. Current results have been compared against the school's results from the academic year 2017/2018. The cohorts were very similar in regards to number of children, girl:boy ratio, children with special educational needs, disadvantaged children and children with English as an additional language. Tables 5 and 6 show the results of children in line with the age related expectations at different points in the year for both the PSED and C&L strands of the EYFS. The percentage rise from the beginning to the end of the study is shown in red.

Table 5. Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Academic Year	Term	Self Confidence and Self Awareness	Managing Feelings and Behaviour	Making Relationships
2018/19	Autumn	16%	19%	16%
	Spring	72% (+56%)	60% (+41%)	72% (+56%)
	Summer	79% (+7%)	80% (+20%)	78% (+6%)
2017/18	Autumn	16%	10%	10%
	Spring	36% (+20%)	40 % (+30%)	60% (+50%)
	Summer	73% (+37%)	73% (+33%)	78% (+18%)

This shows that there is a greater rise in the Spring term for all strands of PSED in comparison to the academic year 2017/2018. This is the time that the research project was carried out and could therefore imply the considerable jump in attainment in this area. The total percentage of children meeting the age related expectations in the Summer term in each area is also greater than the previous year and it is believed that this research has helped to contribute towards this due to the improved levels of emotional literacy.

Table 6. Communication & Language

Academic Year	Term	Listening and Attention	Understanding	Speaking
2018/19	Autumn	21%	19%	12%
	Spring	62% (+41%)	66% (+47%)	66% (+54%)
	Summer	76% (+14%)	77% (+11%)	77% (+11%)
2017/18	Autumn	10%	8%	8%
	Spring	46% (+36%)	32% (+24%)	40% (+32%)
	Summer	69% (+23%)	69% (+37%)	71% (+31%)

These figures again show the biggest rise in attainment happened during the Spring term at the time the research project was conducted suggesting that this study contributed toward children's communication and language skills. The biggest rise came under speaking; this is believed to be due to the amount of activities that encouraged children to expand their vocabulary and gave opportunity for talk. There is also a higher level of children meeting the age related expectations in the Summer term than there was in the academic year 2017/2018 and it is believed that this study has contributed towards these improved results.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As this is a small scale study and has only been conducted in one school with a limited number of participants, the conclusions made cannot be applied generally. However, conclusions drawn from the literature review and data analysis still show clear links between Character Education and emotional literacy.

The activities carried out have allowed all children to gain a deeper understanding of emotions and the way in which we feel. All children are now able to verbalise how they are feeling and how others feel beyond the simple language of happy and sad.

The study has also given children an insight into Character Education and has embedded this into the current cohort. Most children have developed an understanding of character strengths and can now apply this during their independent play. However, not all children have shown an improvement in this area. This may be due to new children joining the school part way through the study which has meant that they have not had the same opportunities as some of the other children. Equally, children with English as an additional language have struggled to use language relating to the character strengths.

This study could be developed further by focussing on some of the strengths that were not as readily understood, such as sensibility and perseverance, with the same cohort as they move up the school. In addition, if this study were to be carried out again, these strengths could be of higher importance and more activities could be completed looking at these strengths specifically.

Clear teaching points have arisen as a result of this study that can be applied without carrying out all elements of the project. For example, staff members should be encouraged to use a wide range of vocabulary and model how to express emotions in order to allow children to do the same. Introducing children to the language associated with character strengths will support them in describing each other and themselves in positive terms. Finally, giving children time to talk will encourage their self-confidence and this in itself leads to endless opportunities.

References

Shoshani, A. (2019). Young children's character strengths and emotional well-being: development of the Character Strengths Inventory for Early Childhood (CSI-EC). *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, *14*(1), 86-102. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2018.1424925

Association for Character Education. (2017). *Character Education.* Retrieved January 13, 2019, from http://www.character-education.org.uk/about-ace/character-education

Battistich, V. A. (2008). Voices: A practitioner's perspective: Character education, prevention, and positive youth development. *Journal of Research in Character Education*, *6*(2), 81-91.

Benninga, J. S., Berkowitz, M. W., Kuehn, P., & Smith, K. (2003). The relationship of character education implementation and academic achievement in elementary schools. *Journal of research in character education*, *1*(1), 19-32.

British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research.* Retrieved February 6, 2019, from https://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-2011.pdf

Bruce, C. (2010). *Emotional literacy in the early years*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Department for Education (DfE, 2017). *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage*. Retrieved November 26, 2018, from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/596629/EYFS_STATUTORY_FRAMEWORK_2017.pdf

Department for Education (DfE, 2018). *Early Years Foundation Stage Profile Results: 2017 to 2018*. Retrieved November 26, 2018, from https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results-2017-to-2018

Flick, U. (2009) *An Introduction to Qualitative Research.* 4th Edition. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Heckman, J. J. (2011). The economics of inequality: The value of early childhood education. *American Educator*, *35*(1), 31.

Lickona, T., Schaps, E., & Lewis, C. (2002). *Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education*. Washington, DC: Character Education Partnership.

Lodico, M.G., Spaulding, D.T. & Voegtle, K.H. (2010). *Methods in Educational Research: From Theory to Practice.* 2nd Edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Marshall, M. (1996) Sampling for Qualitative Research. *Family Practice, 13*(6), 522-526.

Merriam, S.B., (2009) *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

McMurray, A. J., Pace, R. W. & Scott, D. (2004) *Research: A Common Sense Approach.* Southbank Victoria: Thomson Social Science Press.

Papatheodorou, T. (2005). *Behaviour problems in the early years: A guide for understanding and support*. Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge.

Roberts, F. & Wright, L. (2019) 10 revised/ simplified character strengths. *Unpublished document issued to Challenger Multi-Academy Trust Character Champions.*

Sharp, P. (2014). *Nurturing Emotional Literacy: A practical for teachers, parents and those in the caring professions*. Routledge.

Sherwood, P. (2008). *Emotional literacy: The heart of classroom management*. Aust Council for Ed Research.

Swale, J. (2006). *Setting the Scene for Positive Behaviour in the Early Years: A Framework for Good Practice*. Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge.

Teddie, C. & Tashakkori, A. (2011) Mixed Method Research, in Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd pp. 285-300.

VIA Institute on Character (2019). *Why do I need to know my Character Strengths?* Retrieved January 13, 2019, from http://www.viacharacter.org/www/Character-Strengths

Venkatesh, V., Brown, S.A. & Bala, H. (2013) Bridging the Qualitative-Quantitative Divide: Guidelines for Conducting Mixed-Method Research in Information Systems. *MIS Quarterly, 37* (1).

Chapter 4: Will teaching Year 7 children about resilience during citizenship lessons increase their resilience levels?

Sebastian Sagnia

Head of Humanities, Specialist Leader of Education, Spiritual Moral Social and Cultural (SMSC) Development Lead

Kempston Challenger Academy (www.kempstonchallengeracademy.org)

Hypothesis
Resilience being taught to my year 7 Citizenship class will increase resilience levels of those students.

Background research
The 'Teaching Character Through Subjects' report (The Jubilee Centre for Character & Virtues, 2016), which I contributed to, states there is Government funded support for the idea of teaching character within subjects. The document showcases how students can be taught character virtues in a way that develops both their understanding of each subject area and their own sense of virtue. The contributing teachers tested their own methods of instilling character and included their results in the report. This whole process revealed the possibilities of using character within a curriculum.

Seligman (2011), in his research on character and happiness, shows how character virtues can be measured. Despite criticism of this, I was inspired to measure this in my own research on a very small scale. I wanted to explore how I could develop my students' chosen character attributes and measure to what extent they improved these traits. Psychology questionnaires by McGeown, St Clair-Thomson and Putwain (2018) show that there are respected ways of measuring people's resilience levels. I slightly adapted one of these questionnaires and tested this alongside the intervention, in line with action research methodological approaches.

I was most interested in the opportunity to see whether I could successfully measure my students' resilience and whether, as students are taught about resilience and how to apply this, they produce better resilience scores than students who are not explicitly taught about resilience.

Methodology
I was aware, before I conducted the research, that my results may be interpreted subjectively, so a triangulation method was used to capture data, to ensure validity of the results. I adapted the questionnaires, taking into consideration the age levels and abilities of the students. A control group and intervention group were used for robustness of data and to test the validity of the adapted questionnaires. Both groups had similar attributes, with the same age group and similar ability levels, ensuring there was no skewing of results due to different maturation levels. Each group completed a resilience questionnaire in advance of the taught unit and the unit ran in parallel in both groups. Both groups were taught the same unit of work, though group A's unit included resilience activities whereas group B did not. This meant that I could compare the results of

each group to the other to see whether the resilience of group A improved when compared to group B. As part of the triangulation method, I also used informal interviews to try and gain further insight into the students' resilience and establish to what extent they had improved on the chosen character traits.

The research was undertaken with a Citizenship and PSE unit on relationships and personal safety . Colleagues in my school had previously mentioned that if students had better-developed character strengths, particularly resilience, they would be likely to perform better on this unit. "Students can often give up on tasks and need pushing to complete, they often don't see the point even though there may be a reward at the end."[1]

The intervention undertaken by group A to develop resilience was a discussion of the questionnaire, followed by a lesson on resilience from an external speaker[2]. The external speaker raised awareness of body image, the dangers of social media / peer pressure and the importance of self-love to avoid dangerous mental health problems potentially developing. The presentation by the speaker and subsequent discussion with students was filmed by BBC Look East for a feature on body image, so students also developed their resilience by overcoming nerves about not only appearing on television, but doing so while discussing a difficult topic. Through the intervention session students had to identify what was most important to them in making them happy and the activity developed how important self-love is.

Results

Questionnaire

In the responses to the questionnaire (shown in Table 1), group A clearly had more knowledge on the meaning of resilience, self-discipline and courage than group B, as group A had been taught it explicitly by me as well as implicitly by the guest speaker.

Informal interview

I used a method of interviewing that is part of my school policy. It involves posing the question, pausing to allow thinking time, asking a student for a response, and then bouncing this around the room. The interviews were recorded and observations made. The limitations with this method include issues with self-reporting and bias that would have to be addressed in further research. However I found that this method did allow me to probe deeper into the students' thoughts and develop a depth of understanding of their resilience.

Table 1. Questionnaire Results - number of pupil responses by question

Question	Group A prior to taught unit Y	N	Group B prior to taught unit Y	N	Group A post taught unit Y	N	Group B post taught unit Y	N
I am always good at trying challenging things	9	10	10	11	14	5	9	12
I feel confident speaking to other people	8	11	10	11	9	10	8	13
I believe in my own abilities	5	14	9	12	11	8	10	11
I feel in control of what happens in my life	8	11	9	12	9	10	9	12
I am good at getting over disappointment	6	13	10	11	11	8	12	9

Discussion

Preliminary results for this intervention and adapted questionnaire show that a resilience intervention can increase students' levels of resilience. However, there are aspects of the research that would need to be addressed during any replication of the study, to verify its results. The informal interview method could be improved, with better recording of the data considered. The adapted questionnaire will also need more rigorous testing and possible adaptation to ensure that we are getting the clearest data from the students.

Further steps would be to undertake a wider-reaching study, using a broader variety of classes to produce more reliable results and to ensure that the methods used to collect data are rigorous. In line with the philosophical purpose of action research, I do believe teacher judgement should be recognised as a method that extracts how those who work with the children feel they have changed over time.

---

[1] Citizenship teachers 2018-19 KCA/V Rathore
[2] Hannah Brown from "An Ear To Hear" (www.aneartohear.co.uk)

References

McGeown, S., St. Clair-Thompson, H., & Putwain, D. W. (2018). The Development and Validation of a Mental Toughness Scale for Adolescents. Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment, 36(2), 148–161. https://doi.org/10.1177/0734282916673512

Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Authentic Happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realise your potential for lasting fulfilment*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

The Jubilee Centre for Character & Virtues. (2016). *Teaching Character through the Curriculum: A guide to educating the virtues through and within 14 secondary school subjects*. Birmingham.

Chapter 5: Can confidence in mathematics be improved by embedding character education in the teaching and learning of the subject?

Sue Vickers LLB (Hons) PGCE
Character Lead Practitioner
Lancot Challenger Academy (www.lancotschool.co.uk)

Introduction

Character education is the buzz word in education at present, with building character and resilience a priority for the DfE (2016). There is no universally accepted definition of character education; the dictionary definition of character is "the particular combination of qualities in a person or place that makes them different from others" (Cambridge Dictionaries, n.d.). The Jubilee Centre (2017) suggests that "flourishing is the ultimate aim of character education…(and) character education teaches the acquisition and strengthening of virtues: The traits that sustain a well-rounded life and a thriving society" (p.1). The definition of character that I found most relevant to me as a teacher is that of the Education Endowment Foundation (n.d.): "A set of attributes, skills and behaviours…that are thought to underpin success in school and beyond." For the purposes of this research, this definition of character education will be used.

Research

In deciding what area to focus my research on, I considered what character education should look like in my class of five year olds; how it can be introduced into my pedagogy and whether it is possible to measure its impact. Due to time constraints I determined that I would only focus on one area of the curriculum and see if there was any impact on the children from embedding character education.

Recently, there has been a significant amount of research completed in the US by the Center for Character and Citizenship (CCC, 2014) on the transformation of maths teaching through the power of character education. The report's authors suggest that "maths students need to acquire more than knowledge; they need to develop the 'habits and skills' or the character strengths necessary, for higher-order maths learning" (p.4). In the UK the National Numeracy's "Elephant in the Classroom" article (2015) argues that to improve long term outcomes in numeracy we need to be looking at character education and not a focus on the specifics of academic maths. This research argues that central to improving outcomes is "an attitude of mind that involves being willing to preserve, start again, try different approaches…(to) develop confidence in solving problems, reasoning and making decisions" (National Numeracy, 2015, p.2).

As the teaching of mathematics is core in all Primary Schools and forms a significant proportion of my teaching time, I decided that this is the area that my research would focus on. With developing confidence seen as the key to success in mathematics, the hypothesis to be tested through my research was that confidence in mathematics can be improved by embedding character education in the teaching and learning of the subject.

Method

The methodological issue I faced was how to measure children's confidence both before and after the study. A case study on Leading Character Education in Schools (2017) reported that measuring and demonstrating the impact of character education within schools was a challenge and there was a "need for more robust measures

of the impact of character education" (p.6). Barber and Houssart (2011) developed a questionnaire for primary aged children to measure how children perceive school mathematics and determined that children's responses to a questionnaire were a healthier measure than pupil consultations, as these were likely to impact on any findings from the study. This questionnaire listed a number of scenarios related to mathematics and asked children to indicate how they felt in relation to each one by colouring in a smiley face. Due to the age of the children taking part in the research, and with no definitive measure available, I decided to use this questionnaire, which I felt was accessible to all children, to measure the children's confidence both before and after the study.

My chosen methodology was to use an independent variable to test its effect on a dependent variable, using a control group to determine the impact. Two Year One classes would complete the questionnaire at the start and end of the study to record their perceptions of their confidence in mathematics for a five-week period. Each class would be taught the same mathematics content, using the same planning and resources during the study period, however one class would also be taught character education while the control group would not. Each class contained an even mixture of males to females, ability groups and autumn, spring and summer born children.

Character education would be taught through explicit and implicit educational activities; explicit activities involved using a variety of six "Character Champion" cards that would be introduced at the start of each lesson and referred to throughout the lesson. Implicit activities involved "teacher speak" and role modelling tasks. Each of the six Character Champion cards used represented a character strength highlighted from Peterson & Seligman's (2004) study. I prioritised covering two of the four "Building Blocks of Character" virtues (The Jubilee Centre for Character & Virtues, 2017, p.5) - intellectual and performance - through the six Character Champions, as these would allow me to see the impact on confidence within mathematics. The cards were visual, depicting a "Mr Men" style person and used "child speak" to ensure that they were accessible to all the children in the study.

Letters were sent out to all parents informing them of the research as the children were themselves too young to consent.

Results

Table 1 shows the summary of children's questionnaire responses. At the start of the study the control class felt substantially more confident in all areas of mathematics lessons, asking questions, completing hard maths and solving problems, compared to the character education class. Results at the end of the research period show a dramatic turnaround in confidence for both classes of children.

In the character education class there was an increase of 25% in feeling confident in mathematics, questioning and solving problems, with a minimal increase in confidence when completing hard maths; by comparison, in the control class, confidence among children had actually fallen at the end of the period in feeling confident in mathematics, questioning and completing hard maths. The only substantial difference between the two classes was the character education being delivered in one class.

The hypothesis was therefore confirmed; the results of the study suggest that confidence in mathematics can be improved by embedding character education in the teaching and learning of mathematics. While confidence levels in the control class remain above the character education class in two of the four areas

tested (being asked questions, and general confidence in mathematics lessons), overall confidence increased in all four areas of the character education class compared to the control class, where confidence fell in all areas with the exception of solving problems (no change).

Table 1. Questionnaire results

	Character Education Class			Control Class		
	Beginning	End	Impact	Beginning	End	Impact
In mathematics lessons I feel confident	32%	57%	+25%	84%	64%	-20%
In mathematics lessons when I am asked questions I feel confident	29%	54%	+25%	68%	56%	-12%
In mathematics when I'm doing hard maths I feel confident	29%	32%	+3%	60%	32%	-28%
In mathematics when I am solving problems I feel confident	36%	61%	+25%	56%	56%	0

Discussion

Although the study produced a positive outcome for those children that received implicit and explicit teaching of character education during their mathematics lessons, there are limitations to this research.

Only 53 children participated in the study across one year group; to validate the results further the number of participants would need to be increased. Further research could include all year groups within the school. To ensure parity of results in each year group you would require the children to be split into a character education class and a control class with carefully managed dependent variables; teaching the same topic from the same planning using the same resources. An additional consideration is that the teacher acts as a further independent variable. In the study while content for both classes was exactly the same, it is likely that the delivery was slightly different as each class was taught by a separate teacher. Each teacher brings with them experience, preconceptions and their own teaching style. One thing this research did not compare was whether this impacted the results. This may go some way to understanding the disparity in confidence in mathematics at the start of the study; the control class were significantly more confident at the start of the study compared to the character education class.

Mathematics covers a variety of topics throughout the year, during the research period the focus of teaching was number and place value. Would the results stay the same if the period of the study was increased to allow a selection of topics to be covered and not just one?

As discussed, this study only used one source of evidence - a questionnaire, and although the use of a questionnaire was considered the best option due to the lack of any definitive measuring tool for the impact of character education and the age of the children, it did not allow the results to be triangulated. However, the use of different methods including observations and interviews with children and teachers and children's test data would be preferable to allow triangulation of the data. Cohen et al (2007) state it "is the one used most

frequently and the one that possibly has the most to offer" (p.143) and is the preferred line of research in social sciences.

Though it is worth considering the finding of Pajares and Schunk (2002), who suggest "students' perceptions of their abilities are often better predictors of academic performance than their actual abilities" (p.4).

Consequently, to develop the work of this research, any limitations need to be addressed and consideration needs to be made to the next steps. The study could be widened to include the thoughts of parents through consultations and questionnaires, implementation of more character strengths, covering all four areas of the four "Building Blocks of Character" virtues (The Jubilee Centre, 2017, p.5) and application of character education throughout the curriculum. The 2017 National Foundation for Educational Research report found that where schools had adopted a whole school approach to developing character education this had lead to strong academic achievement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has shown that teaching character education has a positive outcome on children's confidence in everyday activities in mathematics lessons. Even though there is a lack of strong evidence of the relationship between character education and outcomes, a review by Gutman and Schoon in 2013 showed that "non-cognitive skills are associated with positive outcomes" (p.32) and that these can be taught and developed in a school environment. With the direct teaching of character, we are providing children with the language and tools to use both in and out of school, as stated the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues' 2017 framework: "Each child has a right to character education (and) the development of character empowers students" (p.11).

References

Barber, P., & Houssart, J. (2011). Consulting pupils about mathemtics: A straightforward questionnaire? In *BSRLM Proceedings: Vol 31 No 1 Institute of Education*. London. Retrieved from http://www.bsrlm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/BSRLM-IP-31-1-05.pdf

Cambridge Dictionaries. (n.d.). Retrieved May 25, 2019, from https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/character

Center for Character and Citizenship. (2014). *Revitalizing Math Learning in America*. St Louis, MO. Retrieved April 20, 2019, from https://characterandcitizenship.org/projects/common-core-white-paper

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education (6th Edition).* Routledge. Retrieved May 20, 2019, from https://islmblogblog.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/rme-edu-helpline-blogspot-com.pdf

Department for Education. (2016). *DfE strategy 2015-2020: world-class education and care*. London. Retrieved May 25, 2019, from www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfe-strategy-2015-to-2020-world-class-education-and-care

Education Endowment Foundation. (n.d.). *Character & essential life skills: Building attitudes, skills and behaviours that support children's learning and personal development*. Retrieved June 1, 2019, from http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/school-themes/character/

The Jubilee Centre for Character & Virtues. (2017). *A Framework for Character Education in Schools.* Birmingham: The Jubilee Centre for Character & Virtues, University of Birmingham. Retrieved from http://jubileecentre.ac.uk/ userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/other-centre-papers/ Framework..pdf

Gutman, L. M., & Schoon, I. (2017). The impact of non-cognitive skills on outcomes for young people: A literature review. In N. Morgan, *Taught not Caught*. Woodbridge: John Catt Educational Limited.

National Foundation for Educational Research (2017) *Leading Character Education in Schools: Case Study Report.* Slough. Retrieved April 2, 2019, from https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/2067/pace02.pdf

National Numeracy (2015) *The Elephant in the Classroom*. Lewes. Retrieved April 5, 2019, from www.nationalnumeracy.org.uk/sites/default/files/eitc_character_development_-_updated_branding.pdf

Pajares, F., & Schunk, D. H. (2002). Self and self-belief in psychology and education: A historical perspective. In J. Aronson (Ed.) *Improving academic achievement: Impact of psychological factors on education*, (pp. 3-21). San Diego: Academic Press. Retrieved April 20, 2019, from https://characterandcitizenship.org/projects/common-core-white-paper

Peterson, C. & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004) *Character Strengths and Virtues: A handbook and Classification.* NY: Oxford University Press and Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Challenger Multi-Academy Trust

C/O Kempston Challenger Academy

Hill Rise

Kempston

Bedford

MK42 7EB

Companies house registration number: 09270040

web www.challengermultiacademytrust.org/contact-us

  @ChallengerMAT

RWS | Resilience Wellbeing Success

Unit 8A, Red Lane Mill

Sunny Bank Mills

Farsley

Pudsey

West Yorkshire

LS28 5UJ

email hello@rws.today

  @RWSuccess