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Send out your light and your truth! Let them guide me. Psalm 43:3

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Moral Turbulence and the Infusion of Multimodal Character Education Strategies in American Elementary Schools

Mark A. Lamport, Ph.D.
Liberty University (Virginia) & Evangelische Theologische Faculteit (Belgium) & Instituto Biblico Portuges (Lisbon) & Colorado Christian University, starcarmelsun@yahoo.com

Kristi L. Cobb, M.A.
Instructor/Instructional Mentor, Psychology Department, College of Health Sciences, Liberty University

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Introduction

The Case for Character Education

From 1960–1990 marked a period of increase in gross domestic product in America. Those same years experienced a simultaneous time of decline in the "nation's character" (Ping, 2009, p. 43). Decay in moral character[1] in schools has become particularly troubling, as evidenced by "school shootings, rising incidents of aggression against teachers and students, and increasing occurrences of adolescent criminal activity" (Clayton, 2010, p. 5). The National Center for Education Statistics reports "in 2004, students 12 to 18 years of age were victims of some 1.4 million nonfatal incidents of violence or theft while at school" (Haegerich & Metz, 2009, par. 5). Concurrently, "75% of elementary schools experienced a violent incident in the 2003–2004 school year," and this was "at a rate of 28 violent crimes per 1,000 students enrolled" (Haegerich & Metz, par. 5).

Not only is the crime rate in school disturbing in and of itself, but "disruptive classroom behavior, conduct problems, aggression, delinquency, and substance use are associated with poor academic achievement, as well as a lack of school connectedness and involvement" (Haegerich & Metz, 2009, par. 6). The need for a solution to the growing levels of antisocial behavior in the schools is evident. As Americans identify moral decline among youth as one of the most serious issues facing America, there is "growing support for the return of religion and traditional moral values to America's public schools" (Clayton, 2010, p. 5).

Yet, since the Supreme Court in the 1940's ruled that prayer, Bible reading, and the Ten Commandments be banished from schools, many people clearly discourage "traditional practices and the indoctrination of a set of fixed values" in the public arena (Clayton, 2010, pp. 3–4). Consequently, individuals look to character education programs as a possible means for reducing both the moral decay and numbers of violent incidents among young people (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007). The proposal that "the development of a warm, caring community within a school might reduce student problem behaviors, such as aggression and bullying" (Haegerich & Metz, 2009, par. 6), has given many hope that the outcomes of character education might be beneficial enough to rationalize the time, money and effort such programs might entail.

Consequently, increased federal funding and legislation aimed at bolstering character education have been proposed and promulgated with increased "(b)ipartisan, ecumenical acceptance of character education as a response to the negative social trends" (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007, p. 30). In fact, over the past twenty years, character education has been said to have

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[1] In our study, we understand *character* as "morally relevant conduct or words" or a "set of one's persistent qualities" which "includes cognitive, affective, conative and behavioral components" (Ping, 2009, p. 42) and *character education* as education "intended to promote student development" including aspects that "enable and motivate the individual to be a moral agent (i.e., to engage in systematic, intentional prosocial behavior)" (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007, p. 30).

"experienced a renaissance in the United States," with a number of national character education organizations having been established during that time frame, "including the Character Education Partnership and Character Counts" (Berkowitz & Bier, p. 29).

In this article, we intend to review the ticklish nuances of negotiating character education in American public elementary schools, review cogent proposals which advance multimodal approaches to character education, and investigate insights on character education with respect to computer use, storytelling, and television viewing.

Polemic Issues Surrounding Character Education

While the need seems clear, and the funding, organizations, and legislative actions have been put forth to meet the need accordingly, several thorny issues confound the character education in American elementary schools.

First, the optimal means of implementation of character education are disputed. Character education (also known as moral education) can be defined in several different ways and include several different components; similarly, character education can involve many different targeted (and controversial) outcomes. Ping (2009) states, in fact, that, "(b)ecause it is hard to define morality, the notion of moral growth is vague, almost to the point of unintelligibility" (p. 48).

Second, Stephen Prothero points out, it is important to distinguish between character education and religious education. Character and morality in the minds of some are inevitability linked to religious ideals. Confoundingly, as he also observes, much of what is done in teaching religion in public schools in some quarters is to foster allegiance to multiculturalism and religious pluralism – what some might consider more cultural than religious.[2] Specifically, problems arise when thinking of moral instruction with religious overtones: it confuses the agenda of spreading religious knowledge with the agenda of particular virtues, e.g., shifts goal of making Christian citizens to making ethical citizens and reducing the task to "values". Is it agreeable that it matters not what one believes, only how one behaves? This turns "the golden rule" into the water boy for morality.[3] For example, tolerance is critical in a democracy but "an empty virtue" (p. 143) in the absence of firmly-held beliefs.

Third, therefore, (as a result of numbers one and two above) some argue character education (or, moral education) – and especially religious education – has no place in public schools.[4] They assert it is not appropriate for schools "to impose a specific morality" when they

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[2] *Religious literacy: What every American needs to know—and doesn't*, Harper SanFrancisco, 2007.

[3] This is triumphed, for example, in Karen Armstrong, *The great transformation: The beginning of our religious traditions*, New York: Knopf, 2006, p. 392.

[4] We wish to express our profound respect for those who are Christians and teachers in public schools. Further, we acknowledge that modeling of Christian values can be significant for the development of character and moral betterment of Christian and non-Christian students in public schools. However, we contend the goal of American public elementary education is not expressly Christian. As a pluralistic democracy, and certainly not a so-called "Christian country", America is beholden to no state religion. Therefore, we do not endorse the mandated teaching of the Christian religion in public schools; primarily, because it is ineffective – even counter-productive – and incongruent with suitable means of transmitting the faith of the Christian way. Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard thought Christian education was the main *obstacle* to Christian belief (See Howard V. & Edna H. Hong, *The Essential Kierkegaard*, Princeton University Press, 2000). In fact, research demonstrates that Christian values are not best learned/absorbed/incorporated in a formal setting, such as a classroom, but in informal contexts, primarily in Christian homes and communities of faith as people live and work together and character develops slowly over time through observation strengthened by the urgings of the Holy Spirit. Finally, however, the purposes of Christian-oriented schools are unique. Christian schools, as an innate function of their stated goals, is to educate students in ways of God, form character to mimic the image of Jesus, and nurture the mission of God such that vision and desire to serve the world is paramount in students' minds. In Christian schools, where agreement on the authority of scripture is a given, character education, moral education, and religious education is expected, even

are funded and supported by public funds and entities (Ping, 2009, p. 48). Opponents are concerned with the indoctrination of students with set (read: dogmatic) values, morals, and ethical answers. Skeptics raise such questions as:

"Should it be about the transmission of moral ideologies or be about the development of children's abilities to deal with moral issues? What are the differences between 'indoctrination' and 'education'? Is education possible without 'indoctrination'? Must the teacher of moral education have special skills and knowledge? What materials and processes should be used in classrooms for a program's reasonable accessibility?" (Ping, p. 49).

Fourth, a practical matter: DeRoser and Mercer (2007) unveil an additional concern about character education programs when they affirm that "changing actual student social behavior by implementing character education programs is difficult in comparison to increasing knowledge or modifying attitudes" (p. 144). The existing character education programs seem to be "more effective at impacting the understanding and knowledge of character than in impacting student behavior" (DeRoser & Mercer, p. 144). Thus, the benefits of character education appear, at least to opponents, to be overpowered by the questions and potential long-term ineffectiveness of such an endeavor.

One concedes potential problematic features exist for infusing character education strategies in American elementary schools, yet do greater potential benefits outweigh them?

Disposition of Character Education Programs

That troubling moral turbulence exists in our pluralistic, postmodern world not only provides a recipe for anxiety for Christian values but anyone who seeks cohesion in the hodgepodge of values and approaches that compose many character development practices in American elementary schools. While tolerance is a highly-prized American virtue, the marriage of conflicting estimations of how schools might prioritize attempts to construct shared values can be troublesome to navigate.

In spite of these concerns, the rationale for, and the potential benefits of, character education in current American educational systems continue to be established. Furthermore, evidence of the need for character education is surpassing the potential questions surrounding its specific implementation. As research from the Tufts University's Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development reveals, there is an actual "decline in positive behaviors associated with Social-Emotional Character Development from middle childhood through the end of adolescence" (Washburn et al., 2011, p. 315). Therefore, there is a well-founded and widely-understood need to change the trajectory of behaviors of children as they develop morally from middle childhood through adolescence, and thus, the desire for a suitable character education program in our school systems continues to grow.

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demanded. Yet, one of the unfortunate outcomes of Christian education is the production of "educated atheists" (as coined by John Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, Morehouse, 2000, p. 18). In fact, he indicts: "Teaching religion is not very important" (p.18). What is meant by such inflammatory statements? To the degree that Christian schools teach students that the faith is cognitive truth to be conceptually-mastered and merely believed rather than lived, a patently false rendering of the Christian faith is offered. In sum, Christian teachers in public schools have a mighty role, primarily through modeling and, where appropriate, verbal explanation of Christian values. Yet, campaigns to install Christian-explicit programs in public schools are unwarranted. By the same token, simply because schools are established as "Christian" does not mean that biblically-informed means of forming Christian character are navigated. Careful, intentional scrutiny must be engaged in crafting the formal and informal processes of nurturing values.

Simultaneously, as the needs and desires for an effective character education program increase, so have the number of proposed definitions, projected components, and targeted outcomes, though many are similar in nature as well as generally accepted in the wider community. The specific "aspects of student development" targeted to increase for prosocial[5] behavior are moral values, socio-moral reasoning competencies, knowledge of ethical issues and considerations, moral emotional competencies, prosocial self-systems, appropriate behavioral competencies, "and a set of characteristics that support the enactment of such prosocial motives and inclinations" (Berkowitz & Bier, p. 30).

Statistics on overall effectiveness of character education. Fortunately, the proposed potential successes of character education programs have been well supported with significant numbers of research studies of extant endeavors. As noted by DeRoser and Mercer (2007), "character education programs historically have been largely supported by anecdote and personal testimony" (p. 132). In fact, 88% of identified, studied programs studied by Berkowitz and Bier (2007) were found to be effective.

One example is the *Child Development Project*, which is a program intended to improve moral reasoning and community among students (DeRoser & Mercer, 2007). The program has been shown to significantly reduce antisocial behaviors and drug use as well as increase the sense of community and prosocial behaviors in the classroom (DeRoser & Mercer, 2007). The *All Stars Character Education* program is another character education program, and it was also shown to produce significant decreases "in aggressive, antisocial behavior at school" (DeRoser & Mercer, 2007, p. 132). While these are just a couple of specific examples, it is a demonstrated fact that, overall, the research "supports the effectiveness of character education in improving a wide range of outcomes, including prosocial behavior, social skills, moral reasoning, self-esteem, and academic achievement" (DeRoser & Mercer, 2007, p. 132).

Likewise, Social Skills Training (SST) programs, which are similar to Character Education programs in that they address concerns similar to many CE programs, have also received the support of research to rationalize their use in schools. Research demonstrates that SST programs are effective at "improving children's school-based social and behavioral functioning across diverse areas" (DeRoser & Mercer, 2007, p. 132), which lends further substantiation to the effectiveness of programs aimed at improving character and prosocial behaviors in the classroom.

General attitudes of acceptance of character education. Just as important as the documented effectiveness of character education programs in the classroom is the growing awareness of their effectiveness and the acceptance of their inclusion in schools by legislators, educators, and parents. Fortunately, information about the relative effectiveness of character education programs is undoubtedly infiltrating the minds of educators, political figures, and the general public alike. As a result, Washburn et al., (2011) note that there has been a marked increase in "interest in social-emotional and character development programs (SECD) … that focus on a child's social, emotional, and character development" as well as "recognition that optimal development in these areas may provide the best protective factors against health-compromising and high-risk behaviors" (p. 314).

Since social-emotional and character development programs make claims that they can not only increase numbers of positive behaviors but even "change the trajectories of SECD of

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[5] We subscribe to *prosocial behavior* as "altruism, a behavior held for the benefit of another person, without expecting an external reward" (Andronic & Andronic, 2010, p. 135), and behavior "deliberately produced to determine beneficial effects for others, without pursuing other goals" (Andronic & Andronic, 2010, p. 136).

children" (Washburn et al., 2011, p. 314), the popularity of the use of character education programs in schools has been bolstered tremendously. Consequently, even the federal government's "focus on character education continues, as evidenced by the pattern of funding to implement CE programs and the current strategic goal of the U.S. Department of Education to promote strong character and citizenship among our nation's youth" (DeRoser & Mercer, 2007, p. 131).

Multimodal Approaches to Character Education

Perhaps at this point, the reader wonders what type of character schools wish to develop. In other words, is not the concept of character rather devoid of specific attributes which guide students in values, beliefs, and behavior? In a democratic society, schools like to emphasize the value-neutral content of their curriculum, not wanting to espouse one brand of rightness over another. Of course, enough has been written on the implausibility of any aspect of curriculum being free of value. How should Christians regard character education then in American public schools? And, how are "positive" developments in character to be defined? While fully definitive positions on these important issues are not the intent of this article limited by space, Christian educators and parents are rightly concerned by the infusion of specific values which enter the curriculum to fill out the content of (espoused) value-free character education.

With regard to the actual implementation of such programs, Ping (2009) writes that six approaches to character education have been proposed. These include adding character education into the "proper curriculum;" offering activities wherein students can "clarify and defend their own values without any recommendations" from the teacher; teaching students "how to analyze their views after making decisions"; implementing "cognitively-oriented" approaches with collaboration with higher-functioning peers; teaching students "a given set of values and corresponding appropriate actions;" and using a combination of approaches, including "inculcation, values education, analysis and action learning or service learning" (Ping, p. 43).

All these approaches involve a systems model of human behavior wherein character education can be seen to involve four different components – a multimodal approach. These include the *cognitive* component, where students first "acquire a knowledge base (of) right and wrong, as well as the rational process to make moral decisions based on that knowledge;" the *affective* component, where students have to make moral or ethical judgments; the *volitional* component, where students show willingness "to set goals and make an effort towards accomplishing them;" and overt behavior, through which students demonstrate outwardly the embodiment of personal and social virtues (Ping, 2009, p. 43). Thus, character education programs rely on and incorporate information from a number of different human capacities, including cognition, emotion, volition, and behavior.

In light of that fact, it seems that no single approach to character education would be sufficient, in and of itself, to address all four human components sufficiently. However, the research is still lacking on which particular approach is most effective. Clayton (2010) notes that despite the numerous "theories, approaches, and programs aimed at carrying out the mission of moral education in the public schools," there are "mixed results" in the research "which offer few definitive conclusions" (p. 4). Therefore, there is a need for continued research into what approach to character education will be the most effective and efficient.

Insights from Studies on Computer Use, Storytelling, and Television Viewing

While there is currently no single exhaustive research study supporting a conclusive case for using one character education program over another, there are multiple research studies that implicate the usefulness of cognitive, social, and sociocultural learning theory components in any

teaching which is aimed at increasing the likelihood of engagement in prosocial behavior. These various studies include research on the effects of computer use, storytelling, and television viewing, specifically as the effects pertain to the antisocial and prosocial behaviors of the users, listeners, and viewers.

Insights from a computer use character education program.

Because children grow up with ready access to various technological devices such as computer and television which are used regularly by the family, American elementary schools should consider the effects of computer use on children's prosocial and antisocial behaviors, especially as it relates to development of one's character education programs. Computer use can have negative effects on children's development, particularly when they are used excessively (and) without awareness. Negative effects are attributed to the fact that long-term, continuous use of the computer affects the socialization process of children by reducing both the amount of time spent playing and the amount of time spent with parents. It similarly negatively affects peer relationships, which causes additional problems, since "interaction with peers contributes significantly to the social, emotional, mental and physical development of children" (Gulay, p. 256).

As Lev Vygotsky established, "social interaction among two or more people is the greatest motivating force in human development" (Eun, 2010, p. 401). When children do not have adequate play time, time with parents, and socialization with peers, they can "become socially passive and experience behavioural problems in their social relationships" (Gulay, 2011, p. 256). This, in turn, can lead to these children feeling rejected by peers as a result of their aggressive or antisocial behavior which causes them to prefer to spend more time alone in front of their computer. Conversely, children who engage in prosocial behavior and have more social skills tend to feel accepted by their peers and thus, they prefer to spend more time with peers than their computers (Gulay, 2011). The effects, then, reinforce the behaviors which lead to more of the same effects, and so on.

Gulay points out, however, that it is not only duration and frequency of computer time that affects children's social behavior, but what the children do while they are on the computer. Educational computer use contributes to children's cognitive development in the area of concept learning[6], and Gulay's study shows that students who spend most time in educational games on the computer have the highest levels of prosocial behavior. Conversely, web surfing and playing computer games that are not age-appropriate can expose children to "negative behavioral examples and role models" (Gulay, p. 256).

Since children are affected both positively and negatively by the models they view, in accordance with Bandura's social learning theory, there are negative behavioral effects on children as a result of their viewing negative role models on various websites on their computers. The opposite effect, then, would also necessarily have to be true, such that if children were exposed to positive role models on prosocial, educational sites, then they would positively identify with, and emulate, those desired models though engagement in prosocial behavior. As expected, those very predictions were supported by the research findings of Geitemeyer and

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[6] We describe *concept* as "the way in which a category or class of objects is represented mentally. Concepts allow individuals to discern class membership or non-membership, relate different classes of objects, and provide context for learning new information about classes and class membership" (Davidson, 2003-2009, par. 1); and *concept learning* as "(t)he way in which concepts are learned" (Davidson, 2003-2009, par. 1).

Osswald (2011), but not as a result of modeling[7]. The findings instead point to cognitive learning as the process through which prosocial behaviors are learned as a result of positively-structured computer use.

Insights from a storytelling character education program.

Of course, studies on the effects of media on antisocial and prosocial behaviors are not limited to those that are focused on the consequences of computer use in children. There are studies on the effects of reading and storytelling as well. As Thomas Licona explains, the art of reading and telling stories has always been a primary teaching tool of educators, and the practice is no less applicable in the area of character education. Storytelling is especially valuable for the teaching of character education, as it "has been supported as an effective strategy for moral education" (DeRoser & Mercer, p. 134). As an example, a program exists that is called *LifeStories for Kids* which uses storytelling to "make complex social skills, character choices, and social dilemmas more concrete and recognizable for children," thus proving to be an effective venue for communicating and clarifying values (DeRoser & Mercer, p. 133).

Part of the successfulness in using storytelling for teaching is due to the fact that the children become both cognitively and emotionally involved, resulting in the learning becoming an active, experiential process as opposed to the learning that occurs during passive, didactic instruction. The specific success of the *LifeStories for Kids* program is further due to the fact that the storytelling is "accompanied by a set of classroom-based activities to extend the lesson for each story" which provides "multiple opportunities to practice new skills in structured social learning and academic exercises" (DeRoser & Mercer, p. 134).

The program designers actually use scientifically proven social skills training methods to plan the lessons, so each lesson incorporates "didactic instruction with group process (e.g., games, directed exercises), active practice (e.g., games, directed exercises), modeling, role playing, positive reinforcement[8], and cognitive reframing" (DeRoser & Mercer, p. 134). In other words, the program incorporates not only the use of cognitive learning, but sociocultural learning (i.e., in the guided participation, scaffolded exercises, and peer collaboration activities) as well as social learning (i.e., modeling and role playing) for a multimodal approach.[9]

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[7] Here we use of *modeling* as it "describes the process of learning or acquiring new information, skills, or behavior through observation, rather than through direct experience or trial-and-error efforts" (Mueller, 2003–2009, para. 4); *real live model* is a real-life person acting as the model, such as a parent, teacher, or peer; *symbolic models* may include characters in movies, television, or DVDs; *verbally-described model* is orally described or described in writing, such as "descriptions of heroes or heroines" (White, 1995, p. 70).

[8] Our use of *reinforcement* herein means an incentive "that increases the probability that a particular behavior will occur" (Gale Encyclopedia of Psychology, 2001, par. 1); *direct reinforcement* is when a "(m)odel's behavior is followed immediately by an external reward, i.e., money, or praise" (White, 1995, p. 70); *vicarious or emotional reinforcement* is when the "observer sits, looks, and listens, and learns" and does not actively do anything to learn; he or she just has "feelings of emotions of hope and fear which determine us" (White, 1995, p. 70); *self-reinforcement* is "centered within the individual," because "as individuals become capable and learn self-criticism and self-rewarding behaviors, these self-rewarding behaviors make the individual free and responsible" (White, 1995, p. 71).

[9] *Guided participation* is to be defined here as the process wherein "(a)dults guide children's participation" in problem-solving activities to help them "adapt their knowledge to a new situation" while "encouraging them to try out their new emerging skills" (Miller, 2011, p. 177); *scaffolding* is the process wherein "more skilled people temporarily support a child's emerging skills" by structuring their interaction and adjusting "their degree of support according to how much help a child needs" (Miller, 2011, p. 177); *peer collaboration* is the process which "involves children working together to complete a single, unified task that represents the shared meaning and conclusions of the group as a unit" (Fawcett & Garton, 2005, p. 157).

Additionally, since the lessons provide multiple activities for teachers to use in their instruction, teachers can "reinforce learning through repeated exposure and step-wise instruction …both of which have been shown to increase learning and memory for instructional material" (DeRoser & Mercer, 2007, p. 134) through sociocultural and cognitive learning techniques. Since established research shows that "students learn through multiple channels…and that educational efforts employing multiple modes of teaching are more effective for learning than ones that do not" (DeRoser & Mercer, p. 134), the program is designed to succeed.

In the end, it is shown to do just that. A study of participants in the program, as compared to students who did not participate, shows that the program was "found to be effective for positively impacting students' social behavior within the school setting" (DeRoser & Mercer, 2007, p. 143–144). More specifically, the program was shown to have a positive impact on "several areas of student social behavior" (DeRoser & Mercer, p. 144), including positive changes "in direct aggression and prosocial behavior" for children in kindergarten through second grade and positive change in direct aggression and immature-impulsive behavior in children in grades three through five. Thus, a study of the *LifeStories for Kids* program demonstrates the effectiveness of storytelling as a viable method for character education (DeRoser & Mercer, 2007).

Contributions from a study on television models and viewers' behaviors.

In addition to both books and computers, resources in the "media" include the television as well, and like studies on the effects of storytelling and computer use on the antisocial and prosocial behaviors of youth, there are also ample studies on the effects of television viewing on the observers' behaviors. In accordance with the tenets of Bandura's social learning theory, many studies have been undertaken with the expectation that television characters who are rewarded or punished for their behaviors will serve as models to influence the viewers (observers) to either engage in, or not engage in, those same modeled behaviors, depending on the positive or negative reinforcement (Nabi & Clark, 2008).

However, such direct and expected results are not always confirmed to be the case. This is because viewers not only observe other individuals' behaviors and then learn through their observations, they come to the point of behaving after learning through the four processes of attention, retention, production, and motivation (Nabi & Clark, 2008). All of these processes are mediated (or moderated) by the "observers' cognitive development and skills" (Nabi & Clark, p. 409). Therefore, although observational learning does occur via symbolic representations, and individuals can be positively affected by watching attractive models who receive positive reinforcement for their positive behaviors, at least one research study on television models seems to indicate that an individual's cognitive schemas[10] can overwhelmingly affect, and sufficiently override, the expected behavioral outcomes of the observers of the models (Nabi & Clark, 2008).

This was determined when Nabi and Clark (2008) found that the observers of television characters who engaged in negative behaviors and received negative consequences were still likely to engage in those same negative behaviors, regardless of observing the characters receiving the negative consequences for those behaviors. Nabi and Clark had to conclude that, while social learning is not entirely wrong in its tenets, when it comes to media and social

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[10] We recognize *schemas* as "hypothetical cognitive structures that contain and organize information related to a concept or object" which "vary in their degree of organization and development across topics," and which "are subject to continual change in response to interactions in the social and mediated worlds" and "influence people's perceptions and responses to their environments" (Nabi & Clark, p. 410). And while they can be shaped by media, schemas can also influence a viewer's perception of what one sees in media.

learning through observation of symbolic models on television, viewers tend to emulate the behaviors of observed "liked" characters "regardless of the valence of the consequences associated with" their negative behaviors (Nabi & Clark, p. 424). This is attributed to the observers' cognitive schema which seems to alter viewers' "perception of and reactions to program events *as they are* viewed" (Nabi & Clark, p. 411).

While Nabi and Clark (2008) suggest that the observed results may be due to the fact that the consequences of the models' behaviors were not depicted with sufficient severity or as having significant long-term negative ramifications, the findings substantiated the strength with which the cognitive schema seemed to impact the viewers' perceptions, learning and subsequent behaviors. Thus, the findings support that "liked TV characters may be particularly well suited for modeling positive behaviors, such as quitting smoking, eating healthy, or practicing safe sex" (Nabi & Clark, p. 424), but when it comes to modeling negative behaviors, the typical media with its usual form of short-term, relatively-insignificant negative consequences are not enough to deter viewers from participating in the negative, modeled behaviors. As a result, the study shows that cognitive schemas play an overwhelmingly significant role in learning and the subsequent engagement in antisocial or prosocial activity (Nabi & Clark). Therefore, cognitive elements should be strongly considered when developing and implementing a character education program to increase prosocial behaviors.

Rationale for a Multimodal Approach: Social, Sociocultural, and Cognitive Learning

As suggested by the various findings of the research studies on computer use, storytelling, and television viewing as they affect prosocial and antisocial behavior, numerous learning theories contribute to an accurate understanding of the development of moral behaviors in youth. As such, these forms of individual growth are aspects of human development Christians can value. Therefore, a multimodal approach to influencing the learned behaviors of school children would inherently appear to be more likely effective than an approach that relies on strategies from one theory alone. Evidencing the truth of this presumption, Washburn et al. (2011) note that there has been a movement over the past three decades "from single-domain intervention programs focused on individual problem behaviors…to multiple-domain prevention programs that focus on both problem behaviors and…positive youth development" (p. 314).

This is because effective character education programs are ones that are multifaceted. Morality and character development is complex, so "a single implementation strategy is unlikely to have enough power to be a countervailing force against the multitude of other influences in that environment" (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007, p. 42). Additionally, multifaceted, multimodal character education programs are also more inclusive, reaching a broader range of students with different learning styles. The varied developmental levels of students are accommodated through the variety of multimodal activities available (DeRoser & Mercer, 2007). Thus, character education should take a comprehensive approach, relying on "a diverse set of empirically supported implementation strategies" (Berkowitz & Bier, p. 42).

Yet any multimodal approach will not be optimal or equally effective. Specific research suggests, in fact, that certain theoretically oriented strategies and techniques must be included for optimal outcomes, while other learning strategies can be omitted without a significant difference in outcome. For instance, behavioral techniques driven by offers of reward and punishments are not deemed suitable; as White (1995) notes, "(w)e condition dogs and cats by reward, but not thinking children" (p. 73). On the other hand, prevailing evidence shows that educational approaches including cognitive learning, social learning, and sociocultural learning have

significant and successful outcomes. Therefore, a sound multimodal approach to character education will incorporate cognitive learning, social learning, and sociocultural learning.

Support for inclusion of social learning strategies. At the bare minimum, a good character education program should include social learning strategies; because social learning theory techniques and strategies appear have great potential with regard to influencing both negative and positive behavior. As Bandura soundly asserts, aggressive acts can be learned through the imitation of an aggressive model, and social reinforcement provides incentive for further imitation of aggressive behaviors (Puleo, 1978). This seems to be firmly established by the numerous studies of the impact of aggressive and prosocial behaviors modeled on technological devices such as television (e.g., Nabi & Clark, 2008) and computer (e.g., Greitemeyer & Osswald, 2011; Gulay, 2011).

Conversely, prosocial acts can be similarly learned through the imitation of prosocial models with positive reinforcement (e.g., DeRoser & Mercer , 2007; Greitemeyer & Osswald, 2011). Therefore, social learning must be included in a program designed to impact prosocial behavior through character education. As White (1995) concludes, it just may be that social learning is "the best explanation of how children learn" (p. 70); thus, it should not be left out of a comprehensive character education program aimed at increasing positive behaviors in children.

Support for inclusion of cognitive learning strategies. At the same time, social learning in itself is not determined to be sufficient for setting up a comprehensive, successful character education program. As Sanderse (2013) explains, while teachers do indeed act as role models (which are key components in learning according to social learning theory), the question arises as to "what this means in practice" (p. 28). Additionally, students typically identify other influential models in their lives (such as parents, friends, and relatives) before and above teachers on a rating scale, and the use of modeling in education is said to be "implicit" and "hardly called a teaching *method*" (Sanderse, 2013, p. 30). Finally, as noted by Nabi and Clark's (2008) research, there are limitations to learning through social learning theory, because cognitive schemas can override the influences of observed models by altering the observers' perceptions and expectations, thus influencing their ultimate actions and responses.

Consequently, while social learning is deemed to be insufficient in and of itself, cognition is determined to be a relevant enough component to be included as an additional essential factor in a sound comprehensive character education program. Greitemeyer and Osswald's (2011) study supports the truth of that presumption with their research on computer use and its effects on antisocial and prosocial behavior. Specifically, their study reveals that aggressive video game use causes increased aggression in behavior through increasing accessibility to aggressive thoughts, while prosocial video game use causes increased prosocial behaviors by increasing accessibility to prosocial thoughts (Greitemeyer & Osswald, 2011).

Storytelling is similarly shown to positively influence prosocial behaviors through cognition, only it does so via its enhancement of memory and imagination (DeRoser & Mercer, 2007), and Gulay's (2011) study reveals that playing educational programs on the computer can increase prosocial behaviors via the cognitive route through concept learning. While more studies could be cited in support of the influence of cognitive components on learning and subsequent engagement in antisocial and prosocial behaviors, the above noted examples support that cognitive strategies and techniques must be included in any substantive and comprehensive character education program.

Support for inclusion of sociocultural learning strategies. Finally, in addition to both social learning and cognitive learning theory components, a sound comprehensive character

education program is presumed to need to include strategies from sociocultural learning. As White (1995) notes, "(t)eachers don't manipulate the student" or "cause learning directly" but "teachers condition the environment so that learning takes place by the actions of the learners" (p. 72). Conditioning of the environment so that students can learn involves teachers utilizing sociocultural learning techniques, such as structured learning exercises, guided student participation, scaffolding, and collaborative learning exercises. All of these techniques will help students reach higher levels in their zones of proximal development[11] as well as increase the likelihood of students engaging in prosocial behavior when applied to a character education program.

This is supported by the findings of a study of a storytelling program for school children titled *LifeStories for Children* (DeRoser & Mercer, 2007). According to the study, the use of sociocultural learning techniques such as peer interaction, collaborative learning, guided participation, and scaffolding were highly effective and quite successful at increasing prosocial behaviors in students (DeRoser & Mercer, 2007). This is not surprising since according to "socio-cultural perspective, learning is thought to occur through interaction, negotiation, and collaboration" which are the characteristics of "cooperative learning" (Mehrdad, 2011, p. 64). Additionally, the "importance of the mediating role of the teacher in the process of classroom instruction has been noted by many researchers" (Eun, 2010, p. 406), and this is what the teacher does in guiding students through the structured learning activities, further providing evidence of the value of sociocultural learning theory in any development of a character education program.

Studies by Berkowitz and Bier (2007) and Gulay (2011) additionally support the contributions of sociocultural learning to the development of prosocial behavior. Activities such as facilitated peer discussions of moral dilemmas (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007), and peer interaction, collaboration, and reinforcement (Gulay, 2011) are all shown to be conducive to the development of prosocial behavior. Therefore, the instrumental inclusion of sociocultural learning theory in a character education program to increase prosocial behavior is determined to be optimal as well as firmly substantiated.

Conclusion

From the extant literature, evidence supports the usefulness of a multimodal approach to character education to increase prosocial behavior in classroom students. In the absence of specifically agreed-upon content to informed the value-basis for the type of character to be developed, a Christian perspective can endorse multi-dimensional growth in human flourishing (as opposed to spiritual development only). Specifically, strategies founded in social learning, sociocultural learning, and cognitive learning have been shown to increase prosocial or antisocial behaviors in children, and therefore, it seems logical to hypothesize that a structured program utilizing all three theoretical approaches would be an effective approach to improving prosocial character education. More specifically, a multimodal approach incorporating the three aforementioned theoretical approaches would be more effective than a single-theory, cognitive learning approach alone, but both a cognitive learning strategy alone and a multimodal approach incorporating the three learning theories would be more effective than no program implementation at all.

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[11] The *zone of proximal development* is the difference between what a child can accomplish independently and what the child can accomplish in collaboration with a more advanced or skilled partner (Fawcett & Garton, 2005).

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