Graduate Experience with Character Education:

A Narrative Study of the Experiences of Graduates from an International High School Infused with Character Education Program with Character during College in the United States

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by

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Abstract

This narrative study examined the lived experience of students with character education. Specifically, it examined how students from an American international school in Taiwan who were infused by a character education program experienced character and described the meaning they ascribed to character after they attended university in the United States. This study sought to answer the following research question: How do recent graduates of a character education infused high school make sense of character experiences in college? Through purposeful sampling, four graduates of the research site who were attending college in the United States were selected to take part in this study. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with each of the participants to gather data on their experiences. Three superordinate themes were identified in the analysis of the data: Developing character identity, Life experiences that reinforced character identity, and Evolving understanding of character identity. Findings from this study supported the ideas that character education programs have a long term impact on students and that they shape students’ understanding of character and their experiences with character after they leave high school and attend college. Additionally, findings suggested that character education programs are beneficial in establishing common character norms across communities and that character culture taught in schools may have more impact on students than the character culture the students learn at home. Recommendations included suggesting that schools develop and implement character education programs that are linked to their curriculum. Although more studies on the long term impact of character education programs are needed, this study made an important contribution to that research.

Keywords: character, character education, ethics, moral education, traits, social constructivist theory, social learning, third culture kids
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Chapter 1: The Research Problem

In May 2013, May and October 2014, and most recently in January 2016, the Educational Testing Services (ETS) and the College Board investigated and subsequently cancelled a significant number of Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SATs) that were to be taken in East Asia: South Korea (March 2013), China, Hong Kong, and South Korea (May and October 2014), and in China and Macao (January 2016). SAT prep centers, tutors, and individual students had obtained copies of the SAT exams prior to the testing date (Chan, 2014; Rivers, 2013). The last cancellation impacted 45 test sites and hundreds of students in China and Macau (Belkin, 2016). The need for students to score well on these standardized exams appeared to have created a culture of cheating. Students, parents, and tutors looked to gain an advantage through dishonesty and cheating because of the importance they placed on gaining admission to colleges and universities in the United States (U.S.). According to a Beijing-based educational consultant and teacher, Jiang Xuequin,

> Chinese people see education as a game to be beaten. If you can beat it, you're a good player. If you can't beat it, then you're just stupid. Cheating is seen as a fair way to play the game. There's absolutely no sense of shame in cheating... it's been going on for years. (Chan, 2014, p. 2)

There is a certain irony to students feeling that dishonesty is acceptable on external exams like the SAT, given that top colleges and universities in the United States and elsewhere, such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), ask teachers to rate a student’s integrity on their online recommendation forms.

These examples of a lack of character, or misstep in making moral choices, are from the world of education, but the researcher could have easily given examples from sports, banking,
and government actions within the last 10 years. Are these just lapses by individuals or do they point to a larger character issue in our world? It appears, to many, that there is a lack of honesty, responsibility, respect, kindness, and the courage to act in moral ways in the world (Lickona, 1993). This perception has led to the rebirth and growth of character education programs (CEPs) in schools during the last 25 years (Lickona, 2012). This growth has not only been seen in the United States, but also in international schools that enroll both local students and students who are considered third cultural kids, students who were raised as an expatriate in another country, or students who were educated in another culture within their own country. For example, a Taiwanese citizen with an American passport, living in Taiwan but going to an international school instead of a local school, would be a third cultural kid. In our more-interconnected 21st century world, individuals are competing for admission to selective colleges and universities all over the world, thus cross-cultural understanding and leadership in character education has become more important (Lewis, French, & Phetmany, 2000). Champions of character education believe that by raising moral students with agreed upon character traits, society will benefit by getting good moral adults (Character Education Partnership, n.d.). Yet despite all this support for character education and honor codes, the idea of what makes good character, what are good CEPs, and the impact of CEPs on individuals, remains open to debate.

The goal of CEPs is to develop adults who have what multiple cultures consider good morals, adults who therefore will act with good character throughout their lives. With this push for character education in schools meeting the limited resources available to support it, questions have arisen about the impact of these programs. Do these programs have long term impacts on the students who take part in them? Do they continue to have an impact once they have left the
schools with CEPs? Are these programs effective in creating moral adults who act with character?

**Problem of Practice**

The goal of CEPs is the development of students’ character traits, including core ethical values like respect, responsibility, honesty, fairness, and compassion. The further goal of CEPs should be to create individuals who act with good character throughout their lives (Lickona, 2002).

The purpose of this narrative study is to understand how recently graduated students from an American international school in Taiwan, which is infused with character education, experienced character and to describe the meaning they ascribed to character after they graduated and attended college or university in the United States.

**Significance of Problem**

Character education has seen a rebirth in America’s schools during the last 30 years (Lickona, 2002). The federal government has increased funding for character education thrice since the 1980s. President Ronald Reagan started federal involvement and support for character education in the mid-1980s. This was followed by more support and funding promoted by President Bill Clinton in the mid-1990s. More recently, President George W. Bush added support to character education in the 2004 No Child Left Behind Act (Watz, 2011). In the 21st century one finds some form of character education being taught in public and independent schools in all the individual states (Prestwich, 2004). A vast amount of money is being spent on character education every year, at the expense of other programs. In the United States alone, over a billion dollars was spent by federal, state, and local (county/parish and city) governments on CEPs in 2010 (Watz, 2011).
Outside of the United States, CEPs are growing as well. Both local schools that cater to a country’s citizens and international schools that support expatriate and local students are adopting CEPs around the world (Katilmisa, Eksi, & Özturk, 2011). Top educators have declared that character education and honor codes are best practices for schools in the 21st century (Benniga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, & Smith, 2003). Proponents of character education have produced significant literature to show how good CEPs help students. Studies of CEPs have shown a positive effect on students’ academic performance, behavior, and understanding of what it means to be a good citizen (Benniga et al., 2003). Champions of character education believe that by raising moral students with a good knowledge of agreed upon character traits, society will benefit by getting good moral adults (Character Education Partnership, n.d.). Yet despite all this research and support for character education and honor code implementation in schools, there has been very little research on how CEPs impact individuals once they have graduated from schools infused with these programs.

**Research Questions**

The topic of this research was the meaning of character to recent graduates of an American international school in Taiwan. The goal of the research was to gain a better understanding of how former students’ experiences of character change once they have moved on from a school with a CEP and are exposed to new ideas and conflicts of character when in college. Does their perception of what it means to be a person who acts with good character change?

The study sought to answer the following question: How do recent graduates from a character education infused high school make sense of character experiences in college?


**Positionality**

**My Background**

Having been born and raised in the United States, specifically in northern New England, by parents who were public school teachers, and having studied history and education at a public university, I have had instilled in me very strong opinions about what I believe are the morals and ethics that make up good character, and what comprises honor. While teaching for the last 20 years, my attitudes towards education, and character education in particular, were further refined. In those 20 years I taught in Maine in the United States and internationally in Honduras, Kuwait, and now Taiwan. I have taught students from diverse cultures around the world: the northeastern United States, Latin America, Western Europe, the Middle East, and South and East Asia. I have taught students with a vast variety of religious beliefs: Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Taoists. I believe I have been exposed to a diverse group of cultures and cultural attitudes during my teaching career, which has shaped my concept of good character and how different cultures view character and honor. My current position is as an advanced studies coordinator and department head at a large American independent school located in a large East Asian city.

**Bias**

My interest in and knowledge of character education has developed over the last six years. My high school started an honor code six years ago because, according to the superintendent, that is what the best public and independent schools in America have. Within two years of creating the honor code, the school created a student committee on honor. Within the last three years the high school honor code has been embraced by the lower and middle schools. Initially, I was very much against the honor code and character education because I did
not think they would create success in students; now, I have been “born again” because of what I see as the success of this program at my current institution. In the last two years I have twice given honor talks to students at my school. Both talks revolved around the importance of honor in the “real world.” To prepare for these talks, I did research that added to my belief that honor and character education were extremely important to the success of students in and out of school. I have become a “believer” and I now have a bias in favor of honor codes and character education. This “rebirth” carries the danger that I may become overzealous in my support for character education and what it can do for students.

**Challenges to My Positionality**

**My Culture**

My cultural history and my understanding of my position in the culture I was raised in, which is different from the culture at my school, create a bias for me when it comes to character education. This is part of understanding positionality: how one perceives his or her place in their greater culture based on their past experience (Parsons, 2008). I will need to continue to evaluate this as I do research. I believe it is impossible for any researcher to remain unbiased because we all bring our personal experiences into our research. To help counter my personal bias it will be important for me to get a wide range of research materials and data from different institutions and cultures to try and maintain some sense of how my bias may be impacting my interpretations of my data.

**Others**

In looking at my culture, and trying to evaluate the impact of character education on different groups, I will need to be conscious of the danger of treating any group that has been the subject of a study as *others* and not understanding their motivations or attitudes (Briscoe, 2005).
Other implies being different or wrong in some fashion, which is a danger when analyzing evidence. Thinking of people as others will make them an anomaly to my research and thus easier to dismiss if they do not conform to my bias, which is that character education creates success. It also means I will need to be very aware of falling into the trap of *deficit thinking* when looking at groups that have not had success with character education (Yosso, 2005). Once again, I will need to stay aware of this so I do not dismiss evidence that does not agree with my bias. One way to combat this is to evaluate the interpretation of data based on the historical, contemporary and cultural experience of the group on which the research was conducted (Parsons, 2008). What I see as important and dominant ethics and morals may not be shared by other groups.

**Multiple Cultures**

One real concern that will need to be continually addressed, in terms of my bias favoring honor codes and character education, is the occasional disconnect between what I was raised to believe are the cultural norms of honor and good character from a northern New England individualistic society and what is considered honorable and good character in other cultures. Again, I want to avoid treating groups as others, but I also need to avoid using my culture as my dominant viewpoint and instead take a more multicultural approach to viewing the success of character education (Olneck, 2000). In the East Asian, mostly Chinese, culture I currently work in, there are norms of behavior and character that are different than my northern New England culture. Attitudes towards collaboration on work offer an example of a difference in culture. In Taiwanese culture, having someone write a paper for you is often considered acceptable, as long as you know what is in the paper. Historically, students have received awards for papers that were written by the local book seller or their tutors (Lin, 2004). I need to be aware of these
cultural differences in viewing CEPs, their perceived impacts, and how my bias may impact my view of their success. If I ignore this bias I would risk lumping entire diverse groups into a category of others, ignoring differences in perceived character, or even dismissing the whole group as not having character. I need to be careful not to objectify and marginalize the group and suggest that their cultural attitudes towards honor and ethics are inferior and subordinate to my American attitudes (Briscoe, 2005).

**Individualism versus Group Thinking**

A similar concern, linked to a multicultural perspective, is that I will be biased regarding different cultural attitudes about individualism versus the role of the family or group. In my culture, showing character includes calling out family and friends and standing up for what is right, but that is not the case in all cultures. Fennel and Arnot (2008) discussed how this can be an issue in studying feminism in East Asian and African cultures, and so it could also be an issue when studying successful CEPs in multi-cultural settings. This is an example of the cultural attitudes I will need to be aware of when judging the success of character education.

My personal experience with culture and character education has made me a strong advocate for it. The fact that I work in a school where my son signs a character pledge every year does have an impact on my bias towards character education. Additionally, the growing literature on character education has also had a positive impact on my view of character education and how it creates successful students and schools. It will be important that I account for my positionality on character education so I can maintain as much neutrality as humanly possible in my analysis of the success of character education.
Theoretical Framework

This study employs social constructivist learning theory (SCLT), as a theoretical framework. This framework emphasizes how individuals learn and construct meaning through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1930/1978). The aim of this study was to understand how recently graduated students from an American international school in Taiwan that was infused with character education experienced character and described the meaning they ascribed to character after they attended college in the United States. SCLT helps explain how social interaction impacts learning, in particular how language and culture impact understanding. This study investigated how an individual’s understanding of character was affected by experiences at a university in the United States.

Historical and Contemporary Foundations of the Framework

Social Constructivist Learning Theory was developed by Lev Vygotsky, a cognitive psychologist, as an extension to the theories of Piaget and Dewey, who saw knowledge as being actively created by individuals based on their interactions with their environment (University College Dublin, 2015). Vygotsky extended these theories to emphasize the important role that social context had on learning. He saw that both language and culture had a significant impact on learning and development (Vygotsky 1930). Cultural and linguistic impacts on learning led Vygotsky to believe that human cognitive structures, like schema, are socially constructed. Therefore, to understand learning one needed to first understand how individuals interpreted external stimuli and incorporated them into their social experience (Vygotsky, 1930). For Vygotsky, learning could not be separated from social context.

From the 1960s through the 1990s, Jerome Bruner built on Vygotsky’s ideas by looking at the importance of cultural influence and language on learning and knowledge, and introduced
Vygotsky’s ideas to the United States. Bruner’s focus was on the importance of social interaction and language on learning during the development of curriculum and the scaffolding of knowledge (McLeod, 2012). Several researchers, including Thomas Kuhn, have added to and used SCLT in educational research during the last 40 years (Hua Liu & Matthews, 2005).

**Social Constructivist Learning Theory (SCLT)**

SCLT shares several underlying assumptions with constructivist learning theory:

- Learning is an active process and knowledge is constructed.
- Knowledge is constructed through personal experience.
- Interpretation and construction of knowledge is based on individual past experience and cultural factors (University College Dublin, 2015).

SCLT goes further to emphasize:

- Learning is participatory.
- Knowledge is social.
- A useful knowledge base emerges through meaningful activity with others.
- Learners develop dispositions relative to the communities in which they practice.
- Knowledge is not simply constructed, it is co-constructed (Bronack, Riedl, & Tashner, 2006).

Vygotsky emphasized the importance of language and culture on the construction of meaning (Vygotsky, 1930). The social could not be separated from the learning (University College Dublin, 2015). For Vygotsky, this meant that learning took place in a zone of proximal development (ZPD). Learning takes place in two zones in this model. The first, the zone of actual knowledge, is what the individual already knows and can do. The second, the zone of potential
development, is where a student can go during interaction with teachers or peers. Learning takes place in this second zone (Vygotsky, 1930).

Researchers who choose to employ a SCLT framework are trying to understand the world in which they live and work, and to develop an understanding of a specific phenomenon in that environment (Creswell, 2013). This leads researchers to gather multiple and varied points of views on a phenomenon in order to develop an understanding of it. Researchers who use a SCLT framework in their research develop theories inductively while researching, collecting, and coding data on a problem of practice. The use of interviews is seen as a key component of this framework (Creswell, 2013).

Critics of the Theory

Although SCLT has been employed by many researchers during the last 40 years, there are still some limitations to it and its application. One criticism raised against both SCLT and constructivism is that they focus on relativism (Hua Liu & Matthews, 2005). Relativism is the idea that there are no truths, just individual experiences. To critics this may lessen the value of a study because it is not generalizable beyond the individuals in the study. A second criticism of this theory is that it focuses too much on societal impacts and not enough on the individual (Hua Liu & Matthews, 2005).

Alignment

The problem of practice -- to understand how recently graduated students from an American international school in Taiwan infused with character education experienced character and to describe the meaning they ascribed to character after they attended college in the United States -- aligns with SCLT because it is an attempt at understanding a phenomenon, character education, that is affected by social and cultural experiences. SCLT also calls on researchers to
take a qualitative approach. This enables a researcher to ask open ended, broad questions of participants so they may construct their own meanings and share these through discussions and interactions (Creswell, 2013). The proposed research question is broad and general so the participants are allowed to construct meaning from their experiences.

**The Purposes of Character Education**

Character education has been a part of education around the world maybe since we first began educating our young (Lickona, 1993). The goal of character education is to produce good, moral, and ethical people who act on those principles throughout their lives (Character Education Partnership, n.d.). In recent years, researchers have focused on the impact of character education on students while they are in those programs. Researchers have stated that CEPs improve students’ academic performance, behaviors, and awareness of what it means to be a person with good character while in schools with these programs (Benniga et al., 2003; Romanowski, 2003). Very little research has addressed the long term impact of these programs on young adult perceptions of character. Considering that the creation of moral and ethical adults has historically been a primary goal of CEPs, and that there has been little research done on it, it would appear that this is an area that would benefit from further study.

**Conclusion**

As the push for CEPs continues to grow in the United States and internationally, the need to understand their effectiveness will continue to grow as well (Lickona, 2012). This study focused on the experience of students who have attended a high school infused with character education and went on to college in the United States. The study was meant to assess how these experiences impact what is perceived as character in order to modify and improve CEPs.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Character education has seen a rebirth in schools during the last 30 years, (Lickona, 1993). Top educators have declared that character education is a best practice for educating students in the 21st century. With a growing number of schools, both within the United States and internationally, adopting character education programs (CEPs) and spending billions of dollars on such programs, it is increasingly important to clarify what character education is and what it does or does not do for education (Katilmisa, Eksi, & Özturk, 2011; Prestwich, 2004; Watz, 2011). Up to now, proponents of character education have focused on how it is defined and the benefits character education has for students in schools with these programs (Benniga et al. 2003). Research has not addressed the long term impact of CEPs. If the true aim of character education is to create moral adults who act with character, than the question needs to be asked: Do students experience character in the same way after they have left institutions infused with these programs?

This literature review is presented in three main parts. The first part focuses on character education. In part two, the researcher reviews the literature on third cultural kids’ (TCKs) transition from international schools to American colleges and universities. In section three, the researcher discusses literature on cultural mismatch and CEPs. Finally, the literature review describes areas for future research.

Character Education

In this section on character education, the researcher first gives a history of character education in schools in the United States to provide background. He then reviews the recent literature to ascertain the agreed upon definition of character education in the 21st century. Once character education has been defined, the researcher evaluates the recent literature for the most
common measurements of success for CEPs in schools. In this section the researcher describes how recent research has defined and measured success of character education. The researcher then discusses what the literature describes as the most successful CEPs in schools and why these programs are seen as successful by researchers. The author then describes the benefits of social education as a tool for social justice. Finally, the author discusses what is missing from recent literature on character education and where future quantitative or qualitative research may be directed in order to develop a deeper understanding of the possible benefits of character education.

**History of Character Education**

Character education has been around for an extremely long time; one of the earliest examples in the West is from the Hebrew Bible. The Ten Commandments may be considered a form of character education. One of the West’s seminal educators in ancient Greece, Socrates, believed it was important that students learn about character as part of their education. Confucius designed his *Analects* as a moral code for the people of ancient China (Eno, 2011). The modern idea that secular schools should be raising good moral individuals as well as intelligent, well-rounded individuals goes back to the enlightenment (Watz, 2011).

Moral education, or what is now considered character education, was a part of education in America since colonial times, before there was a United States (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). In 1776, school textbooks included moral and religious teachings (Mulkey, 1997). In the early years of the American republic, education began to be open to women so that they could teach their children to be good citizens (Remini, 2009). This role, called republican motherhood, was a form of character education, and it established the importance of character as part of U.S. citizenship. Throughout the 19th century, as publicly funded education grew, so did the role of
character in the curriculum. Schools moved away from teaching religious values as they became more secular, but they continued to teach character traits that were deemed important in society (Ellenwood, 2007; Mulkey, 1997).

In the Gilded Age (1865-1900, the role of public school teachers as moral teachers began to change. Educators began to question whether character had a place in public education, especially those morals and values that were supported by specific religions (Mulkey, 1997). This move away from religious education occurred in part because of the high number of Roman Catholic immigrants who arrived between the 1840s and 1920s. Large numbers of Irish, German, and Italian immigrants changed the demographics of many American cities (Brands, 2011; Remini, 2009). This change brought questions about character education. Catholic families argued that public schools used the Bible to teach morals and thus were teaching Protestantism (Mulkey, 1997). This led to a move away from moral education in public schools until the end of the Progressive Era in 1919.

In the 1920s and 1930s, character education once again became an important topic of conversation in education. John Dewey, the leading educational theorist of the first half of the 20th century, supported character education as part of a society’s education of its children (Mulkey, 1997). Character and moral education remained an important part of a child’s education up into the 1960s.

In the late 1960s, Lawrence Kohlberg’s theory of moral development of children sparked a renewed interest in moral and character education in schools. Kohlberg’s theory suggested that moral development occurred through development and discussion, an approach that was difficult to implement and assess in schools. Consequently, the formal teaching of character education in public schools lessened, although character was still being taught in some form (Mulkey, 1997).
In the early 1990s, theorists such as Thomas Lickona and Marvin Berkowitz began looking at the importance of moral education to the character development of children (Lickona, 1993). Supporters of character development argued that moral education of students was something that had been lost since the 1960s and that this loss had a negative impact on children in America. Character education greatly benefited students and society; thus it was returning (Lickona, 1993; Mulkey, 1997).

The 21st century encompasses a world that is more interconnected than ever: a world with an increasing need for cross-cultural understanding and leadership, a world where students from a multitude of cultures compete to attend selective colleges and universities in the United States. In this world, character education has become even more important for students (Lewis et al., 2000). Champions of character education believe that by raising moral students who have a good knowledge of agreed-upon character traits, society will benefit by getting good moral adults (Character Education Partnership, n.d.).

Character education has a long history in schools in the United States (Ellenwood, 2007; Mulkey, 1997), although its popularity and perceived need has vacillated. Since the 1990s, character education has made a comeback in the United States (Lickona, 1993). Additionally, character education has been declared a best practice in education for the 21st century (Benniga et al., 2003). This has helped ensure the growth of character education internationally (Katilmisa et al., 2011). We are now in a time where character education is in fashion once again, and consequently schools are adopting programs and spending large amounts of money on character education (Watz, 2011).
Defining Character Education

The term character is very subjective and can mean different things to different cultures and within different groups in society (Prestwich, 2004). What does it mean to be honest? Is loyalty to family more important than being honest or respectful to non-family members? Is cheating acceptable if it is for the greater good? Comparing Taiwanese school culture to American school culture, one can see that accepted practices differ. For example, Taiwanese students have been known to purchase a research paper from a tutor and present that paper in school as their own. It is seen as a justifiable practice. Historically, students have even been given awards for these papers, whereas in America this practice is seen as cheating (Lin, 2004). The question remains, what are the traits that make up character and honor across cultures?

Moreover, there have traditionally been very wide definitions of CEPs. Educators and scholars have labeled any specific lesson or activity a school promotes or supports that is used to educate its community in some aspect of morals or character as character education (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). Some educators and scholars have labeled almost any type of learning that a school provides to its students outside of normal academic classes that helps students grow into what is considered a good person as character education (Kohn, 1997, p. 429). A further classification for educators and scholars of character education is whatever is done in the classroom to teach morals and values. The teaching of events like Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb along with the moral implications of or justifications for that decision can have a powerful impact on students’ ideas of moral and ethical judgment and thus is part of character education (Sanchez, 2006).

There are many types of CEPs in schools today, even though many are not referred to using that term. Programs like weeklong sessions with alcohol or drug counselors to teach
students about substance abuse, camps students are sent to away from the school setting, service learning projects hosted by schools or organizations, specific programs like the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) that teach students the values of the U.S. military establishment, in-class assignments from individual teachers with a moral story or lesson, or school wide service learning projects that attempt to get students excited about helping others: these are all examples of character education in school. Teachers also use historical events or literature to teach moral or ethics lessons to students and help them understand and think about character. The teaching of events like Abraham Lincoln’s choice to issue the Emancipation Proclamation of Martin Luther King Junior’s march on Selma, both of which contain moral implications, can have a powerful impact on students’ ideas of moral and ethical judgment and are further examples of character education (Sanchez, 2006). Character education has an extremely broad definition. As a result, researchers can claim that any lesson or special event that tries to teach some aspect of character or morals, such as honesty, respect, kindness, or service to the community (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004), would qualify as character education. If all of these programs and lessons are part of character education, then how can character education be defined?

Several researchers and groups have attempted to give a working definition of character education. Davis (2003) defines character education in three ways:

- Simple moral education done in the classroom where the teacher teaches a moral lesson.
- Community education that emphasizes democratic practices and decision making in the classroom.
- Simple attempts at building character both inside and outside the classroom education.
Davis’ short outline of character education demonstrates how individuals and schools see character education, and approaches to it, in very different ways. Based on this list, character education could be almost anything.

The National Character Education Partnership, a commercial enterprise that sells its programs to schools around the United States and advocates for the adoption of CEPs in all schools, has published what they claim are the 11 core values for character education:

- Character education promotes core ethical values.
- “Character” is defined comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, and behavior.
- Character education is intentional, proactive, and comprehensive.
- The school is a caring community.
- Students have opportunities for moral action.
- The academic curriculum challenges all learners and helps them succeed.
- The program develops students’ intrinsic motivation to learn and to do the right thing.
- All school staff shares responsibility for modeling and promoting good character.
- There is leadership from both staff and students.
- Parents and community members are full partners in the character-building effort.
- Evaluation assesses the character of the school, the school staff’s functioning as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character. (Lickona, YEAR, pp if quote)

Berkowitz and Bier (2004), two of the seminal authors on character education, defined character education as the development of character in students. They refine this definition of character into a set of psychological features that enable people to act in what is considered a moral way. Kohn (1997), no fan of current character education, defined it as:
In the broad sense, it refers to almost anything that schools might try to provide outside of academics, especially when the purpose is to help children grow into good people. In the narrow sense, it denotes a particular style of moral training, one that reflects particular values as well as particular assumptions about the nature of children and how they learn (Kohn, 1997, p. 429).

These definitions are exceedingly broad, and do not really focus on the specifics of what it incorporates or what should be taught in a successful CEP in a school. That is understandable because different cultures and groups in society have different ideas of what constitutes good moral and ethical character. A Roman Catholic school will have a different definition of moral and ethical standards than a secular independent or public school (Lickona 2004). In truth, independent and public schools in Maine will have different definitions of morals and character than a public school in Oklahoma. A school may promote tolerance for differences that society has deemed acceptable, like sexual orientation, while a religion may teach this as a character flaw and something that is unacceptable in society. An example of these attitudes towards what is ethical and moral can be seen in the uproar surrounding the 2014 changes brought to the College Board’s Advanced Placement United States History Exam. Many conservatives, including the Republican Party itself, and many states, have asserted that the new exam teaches students poor character traits, such as not honoring America (Klein, 2014). These differences raise questions about what is considered good moral and character development for students, and thus affect judgments about the success of a CEP.

In addition to this, how a culture or group in society feels about certain character traits or morals impacts the definition of character for that culture or group. Some researchers have stated emphatically that we tend to value character traits in our students that keep them under
control while not actually valuing those same traits in ourselves (Kohn, 1997). We may want students to stand up for themselves, or to be independent learners, but only outside of the classroom. Inside the classroom, where educators feel a need for control, they may not promote the same character traits since they may lose that control. This type of independent person, one who rocks the boat of society, is also a very Western or American ideal of character. In some East Asian cultures, the group is more important than the individual, and to draw attention to oneself, or stand up and speak out in a way that disrupts society, is seen as a negative character trait rather than a positive one. There is a cross-cultural dominance that goes with the assumption that one’s own cultural morals and values are correct over another’s (Olneck, 2000).

There is a large and diverse body of literature on what character education has been and what it currently is, but many researchers agree that the main goals of character education are to promote core ethical values shared across cultures and to create moral and ethical individuals (Lickona, 2002).

The major tenets of character education theory may be broken down into two areas: what character education is and what are the environment and conditions for promoting it.

Character education is

- The promotion of core ethical and performance values.
- Core values as shared across cultures.
- Defining character comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, and behavior.
- Intentional, proactive, and comprehensive.
- The development of students’ intrinsic motivation to learn and to do the right thing.

The environment and conditions for promotion of character education are:

- The school is a caring community.
students have opportunities for moral action.

- All school staff shares responsibility for modeling and promoting good character.
- There is leadership from both staff and students.
- Parents and community members are full partners in the character-building effort

(Lickona, 2012).

**Defining Success of Character Education Programs**

Success in character education may be defined in a number of ways. One argument for the need for character education that has been presented and supported with empirical evidence is that CEPs have improved students’ academic achievement in schools. There have been multiple studies that have shown evidence that attending a school with a well defined CEP leads to greater student academic achievement. Benniga et al. (2003) were able to take data from the California Department of Education and conduct a quantitative analysis of scores on state exams to determine a correlation between character education and academic achievement in elementary schools in California. The study was conducted on a large number of schools and students and the researchers went through a rigorous quantitative process to assess the strength of the CEPs in the schools. The researchers found positive correlations between schools with what they determined to be strong, well-defined CEPs and increases in the state exam scores. Further support that character education improves academic performance and student achievement came from a meta-analysis of schools with CEPs. Berkowitz and Bier (2004) looked at 78 studies of CEPs and found that 59%of them showed positive gains in academic achievement by students.

Although these studies supported the idea that character education improved students’ academic performance, they had limitations. The studies did show correlation between schools with strong CEPs and increased test scores by their students, but the researchers could not show
that the character programs caused the increased scores. Additionally, the researchers defined good character education themselves, which may have influenced which schools they chose as they looked at which ones improved their scores. The authors of both studies were advocates of CEPs and have written and been part of several studies and articles supporting the need for character education. The authors’ personal support for character education may have biased their interpretation of the data to some extent. That being acknowledged, there does appear to be evidence, at least within U.S. public schools, that character education has a positive effect on student achievement. This idea is further supported by newer educational entrepreneur enterprises.

Beyond studies in California, there have been whole educational entrepreneur enterprises in low income areas that have developed character education as a part of their programs and purported its benefits for student achievement. One of these enterprises is the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), which has charter schools in cities throughout the United States. KIPP charter schools are normally found in inner-city low-income areas and have a mandate to improve student education and test scores. KIPP claims to have had great success in improving student academics in part because of what they see as their strong CEP attached to high academic expectations (Hess, 2006). A study of students at KIPP schools around the United States found positive and statistically significant impacts on their math achievement (Tuttle et al., 2013). Although studies and claims by the school do show some evidence of success, critics argue that the students who are allowed to join KIPP schools are top students in their own right and that KIPP has not really created the success it reports (Kozol, 2005). Despite this criticism, KIPP is seen as successful, and its CEP is seen as a significant part of that success. Other educational
entrepreneurs, like Geoffrey Canada and his Harlem Children’s Zone, have looked to copy some of that success (Kozol, 2005).

Although studies have shown some academic success, not all agree that character education leads to academic improvement in all students. In a study of five school districts over a four year period, Skaggs and Bodenhorn (2006) found no correlation between CEPs and improvements on state exams (Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006). While this study included a large number of schools and students and took a longitudinal view of character education, it also had limits. The study was based on schools that were implementing or enhancing CEPs, not ones with clearly defined programs. Additionally, the authors pointed out that the CEP training in some of the districts was minimal at best: 30 minutes and a red notebook at the beginning of the school year (Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006). Although there are some questions raised regarding whether CEPs actually lead to academic improvements in students, there is some supporting evidence for this and it seems to be one way of defining success. Yet, it is not the only measure of success of CEPs.

A second measure of the success of CEPs is increased student, teacher, and community awareness of moral and ethical behaviors, and improvement in individual student behavior. Several studies have determined that at schools that have implemented CEPs, there appears to be a correlated improvement in student behavior. Bulach (2002) found that students in schools with CEPs, and students who took part in similar programs like JROTC, scored higher in positive personality traits and their behavior was improved compared to their peers at the same schools who did not participate. Bulach used interviews with teachers and students to score for positive personality traits and monitor behavior. A limit to Bulach’s study is again in the definition of CEPs. Although Bulach defined ROTC as a CEP there is reason to question whether it is truly
character education or rather is a military program that teaches discipline. If we consider it the latter then one would expect to see improvement in behavior.

Teachers at several schools have reported seeing improvements in behavior and a higher awareness of moral behavior. In a qualitative study of high school teachers, Romanowski (2005) found that teachers noticed that students and teachers had a much greater awareness of moral issues and the unequal treatment of students in the school community once a CEP had been implemented. Character education, at the very least, improved students’ and teachers’ awareness of moral issues. The limit to this study is that it only investigated one school and a small number of teachers, and it used only the researcher’s interpretation of behavior and awareness. These findings were supported by Skaggs and Bodenhorn (2006) in their study of five school districts over four years. They found a decrease in dropout rates and suspensions, and an increase in positive character-related behavior in schools after the implementation of CEPs. Skaggs and Bodenhorn (2006) stated that the relationship between these improvements and the CEPs was inconclusive, but that anecdotal evidence appeared to support the conclusion that CEPs did improve student behavior.

Quantifiable data on behavior and test scores have been used by scholars to support the success of CEPs, but the results are difficult to quantify and more study is needed to support the argument that CEPs are successful. Qualitative studies have suggested that character education does improve both academics and behavior, but again this is often anecdotal and more studies are needed as well. The Character Plus program, a commercial enterprise that sells its program to schools, and about whose conclusions one should therefore have healthy skepticism, claimed that “schools become more caring communities; student discipline referrals drop significantly, particularly in areas related to bullying behavior; and test scores in moderately achieving schools
increase nearly 50%” (Marshall, Caldwell, & Foster, 2011). Berkowitz and Bier had a simple approach to whether or not character education creates success in students. They stated that character education works for students; the real question is what are the characteristics of a strong character education program (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004)?

**Character Education, Faith, and Social Justice**

In addition to improving student achievement and behavior, there is also evidence in the literature that character education increases students’ concerns about social justice. In studies of faith-based schools of higher education with character education embedded as part of their programs, young adults gained attentiveness to social justice that led to greater civic action in the future by those students (Kozlowski, Ferrari, & Odahl, 2014; Valadez & Mirci, 2015). Character education was seen as an effective tool for teaching and instilling the virtue of social justice.

Recent literature supports the positive impact of character education on the education of students from lower socio-economic groups in urban areas. Public charter schools that had CEPs embedded in their curriculum were seen to have instilled an ethos of social justice into the communities they served. These schools also had longer tenure by educators than schools without the programs, as well as greater parental support, community involvement, and improved student achievement (Knowledge is Power Program, 2014; Proehl & Starnes, 2015). There have also been case studies that show that the inclusion of faith and religion in the development of CEPs in these areas has significantly contributed to parental and community support of those programs, leading to improved test scores and student behavior (Lickona, 2004).
Best Practices in Implementing Character Education

Much has been written about the best practices for implementing CEPs in schools, and there are many prepackaged programs that schools may adopt. The state of Virginia has adopted the Character Education Partnership program to implement in its schools, many schools have adopted the CHARACTERplus Way® program, and there are other commercial enterprises, including textbook companies, that see a way of making a profit through these programs. These prepackaged programs are often supported by character education experts like Berkowitz and Likona, and these programs have presented some evidence of success. Yet the literature has substantial agreement that the best and most successful CEPs are those that are created or adapted within a school or district through interaction among teachers, students, parents, and administrators. Studies by Kohn (1997), Milson (2000), Bulach (2002), Romanowski (2005), and Sanchez (2006) all support the idea that a homegrown program is more successful. Evidence suggests that programs that are homegrown are more authentic for the students than those that are prepackaged, and thus there is more support for them from teachers, students, and parents when it comes to implementation and learning. These homegrown programs were seen to allow for more teacher creativity than prepackaged programs. These schools also helped foster more buy-in from teachers and students, which has been shown to lead to success in several programs.

Berkowitz and Bier (2004), and Romanowski (2003, 2005) have all presented studies that support the idea that the most successful CEPs are those that are an integral part of the academic curriculum in the school and not just additions to an already crowded curriculum or one-off lessons done once or twice a year. Student and teachers have more commitment and understanding of CEPs when they are seen as valuable and equal to the academic curriculum.
A final area that is seen as a vital to successful implementation of CEPs in a school is the support of the greater school community for character education. It may seem like there would be support when the program is part of the curriculum, or when the administration uses limited financial resources to send teachers to training, but this is only half the support needed. Teachers, the people who work with students most closely, can have some of the greatest impact and success. Studies have shown that teachers who have past experience with honor codes are more apt to support honor codes at their current schools and thus promote a successful program (McCabe, Butterfield, & Trevino, 2003). This indicates that there is a relationship between teacher support for a program and the success of the program. Romanowski (2005) analyzed how the perceived non-support of character education by administrators and the community at large can affect teachers and students. Students and teachers alike felt that the administration treated groups in the school differently, and parents did not support the program. This had undermined the success of the CEP in the school. A limitation to this study, as mentioned above, is that interviews included only a small number of teachers in the program. Those that had an issue with a parent or administrator labeled the action of the administrator or parent as unsupportive of the program. Nonetheless, there is evidence that full community support is one of the main factors in the success of CEPs.

**Third Culture Kids Transition to University**

This research focuses on students who have attended an international school and who now attend university in the United States. These students who are the focus of this study are categorized as third culture kids (TCKs). TCKs have traditionally been defined as children who are raised and schooled outside of their passport home country (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Quick, 2010). They are different than immigrant children in that they plan on someday
repatriating, at least for a time, to their passport home country (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). In terms of TCKs in an international school, this usually means attending college or university in that country (Quick, 2010).

The literature on how TCKs transition into university and the impact that the international school has on these students shows some similarities with students going to university in the country where they attended secondary school (Quick, 2010). The literature notes that all students going to college are making a transition and because of this they will share stages of transition when entering college (Quick, 2010). Part of this transition is in the alignment of expectations about what the first year of college will be like. Smith and Werlieb (2005) found in a study of 31 first-year college students that those with unrealistically high social or academic expectations had lower first-year grade point averages than their counterparts who had average expectations (J. S. Smith & Werlieb, 2005). They also found that student expectations did not align with their first-year experiences overall (J. S. Smith & Werlieb, 2005). This research appears to align with TCKs and their expectations (Quick, 2010).

A second area of similarity supported by the literature between TCKs and their home country counterparts is how university experiences will test the belief systems of almost all students. TCKs tend to make a larger transition when repatriating to attend college in their passport countries, but these students share having their belief systems tested (Quick, 2010). Students who attended both secondary school and college in the United States appear to share this experience as well. The fact that most students’ expectations of university life does not align with reality shows one test to these belief systems (J. S. Smith & Werlieb, 2005; Venezia & Jaeger, 2013). Researchers have cited a number of reasons for this transition issue, ranging from
unrealistic expectations to being unprepared for the challenge of university level work (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Venezia & Jaeger, 2013).

A third similarity among TCKs and students who attend both secondary school and college in their home country is that preparedness for social and academic experiences is crucial to success. A study of Australian TCKs returning to Australia for college found that those who came from programs that prepared them for the rigors of university life were better prepared and transitioned more easily than those who did not come from such programs. These TCK students’ emotional health was negatively impacted by this lack of preparation (Purnell & Hoban, 2014). This phenomenon is shared by students who grew up and attended secondary school and college within the United States (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013).

Although TCKs and students who attend secondary school and college in their home countries share some similarities when it comes to that transition, there are some aspects that are unique to TCKs. One is the search for identity. The literature indicates that many TCKs struggle with their cultural identity because they have lived, gone to school, and traveled in multiple cultures (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). TCKs, even those who feel they are citizens of the home country where they will go to college, find that when they get there their culture is vastly different from their peers at the university (Lin, 2004). TCKs find that they are ignorant about what they once considered their home culture when they attend college (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). In addition, TCKs are often shocked by the discrimination they find in their home cultures after being in multicultural international schools (Quick, 2010). This may be why TCKs tend to identify with a system they have been part of (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009) and may latch onto their former international school’s culture as part of their identity.
International school TCK students also appear to be better prepared for the academic challenges of college, considering that 94% of them go on to university level studies (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, p. 215). Of these, roughly 25 percent are in honors programs in college (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). These numbers align with the international school that is the focus of this study, where over 99 percent of students go on to university studies (internal documentation). This appears to indicate a greater readiness for the academic rigors of college than students from public schools in the United States. Studies have found that students from public schools in the United States are unprepared for university-level coursework (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013).

The literature appears to indicate that although there are similarities between international school TCKs and home country secondary students in their transition to college, there are some key differences in terms of academic preparedness and social experiences. Although both groups share a period of transition, it would appear that TCKs from international schools are more academically prepared upon entering college. On the other hand, the literature seems to indicate that TCKs from international schools may be less socially prepared for the differences in culture they will face, and their international school experience may be their defining culture as they enter college, unlike their home country peers.

Cultural Mismatch

*Cultural mismatch* is defined as when individuals face a conflict between the cultural norms they are taught at home and the cultural norms they are taught or exposed to outside of the home (Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Stephens, Townsend, Markus, & Phillips, 2012). Cultural mismatch in character education occurs when the character norms students are being taught in school conflict with the character norms they were taught at home. One example of a difference
in culture would be attitudes towards collaboration on work. In Taiwanese culture, having someone write a paper for you is often considered acceptable, as long as you know what is in the paper. Historically students have received awards for papers written by the local book seller or their tutors (Lin, 2004) Cultural mismatch may impact students’ learning and experience with character since the norms they have been taught may be challenged by new experiences.

Cultural Mismatch in Education

Cultural mismatch has an impact on both teaching and learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). There is evidence in the literature that cultural mismatch negatively affects student achievement at both the high school and university level (Li, 2003; Stephens et al. 2012) Cultural mismatch has an impact on the way students learn, and this may also affect character education and experiences with character (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Studies comparing students from cultures with independent norms and those with interdependent norms have shown differences in learning styles and ability to express opinions and disagreements (Speece, 2002; Stephens et al., 2012). Many students from cultures with independent norms thrive in environments where they are encouraged to express ideas and opinions. Many students from cultures with interdependent norms focus on getting the right answer and they do not do as well as their peers from cultures with independent norms when learning in settings that require expressing opinions and ideas (Speece, 2002). This may affect character education experiences since presentation and perception of character lessons and ideals may be different based on the cultural norms of the different students.

Character Education as a Bridge

Although there is evidence that cultural mismatch may have a negative impact on education, there is also evidence that character education can be a positive influence on cultural
mismatch by providing a bridge between cultures through establishing mutually shared values. There is evidence that character education has a positive impact on character values shared across multiple cultures like responsibility and equitable treatment (Katilmisa et al., 2011). There is also evidence that many of the norms in modern character education are shared across cultures with independent and interdependent norms (Al-Hibri, Elshtain, & Haynes, 2001). Additionally, character education can lead to discussion of similarities between cultures when it comes to character norms, thus allowing for a celebration of multiculturalism (Feinberg, 2013).

The literature supports that cultural mismatch affects student learning and experiences in both high school and college (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Speece, 2002). This impact is often negative (Stephens, et al. 2012). Yet there is evidence in the literature that character education may also bridge differences in cultures by identifying similarities in cultures (Al-Hibri et al., 2001).

**Implications for Further Study**

Looking at the initial stories the author started this paper with -- students cheating on the SAT -- would it have made a difference for those individuals if, as students, they had taken part in a CEP while in school? This, the author feels, is one of the most important questions to ask, and is an integral part of character education: what is the lasting impact of character education on the way an individual chooses to live his or her life? This requires further study. The vast majority of the research and literature has focused on students and teachers while they were in schools and part of CEPs. One element left out of the literature is the long term success of the programs. Do students feel that CEPs or honor codes have an impact on their actions and lives after they have left secondary school? After leaving school and going on to higher education or to jobs, do individuals who went through CEPs bring the values they were taught with them, and
do they act in a moral and ethical way? It would appear that more qualitative research is needed on graduates of CEPs. Another study on the importance of character education could analyze where and when individuals who are considered to have good character and morals feel they received them. This could confirm or refute the importance of CEPs. These studies could give insight to researchers and educators on how to teach, or not teach, character education in schools (Kohn, 1997). This in turn could lead to better designed and more successful CEPs that have a long lasting impact on individuals. If these programs are worth the extremely limited time and resources that schools have to implement them, then character education should offer more than short term gains, like academic scores and better behavior while in school. They should affect individual actions over a long time.

An additional area in need of more research is where to implement CEPs in a school’s curriculum. Is it better to have an honor code program outside the curriculum or should CEPs be part of a specific subject’s curriculum? There is some evidence that teaching character education through the history and social studies curriculum in a school positively correlates with perceived student success (Katilmisa et al., 2011). Studies on teaching character education as part of a specific curricular area is limited at best, so this is an area where more research should be conducted.

A final significant area that needs more research, especially in the global multicultural societies we live in today, is the impact of CEPs and honor codes on international school students and third cultural kids. We know from studies on cross-cultural leadership that different cultures value different morals and behavior. What one culture emphasizes, such as transformational leadership, may not be supported in another culture (Walumba, Lawler, & Aviolo, 2007). How do these students, many of whom will work cross-culturally throughout
their lives, perceive how character education and honor codes in school impact them after they left secondary school?

**Conclusion**

Character education needs more research on the best practices used in schools around the world. To assess best practices the author needed to look at how character education was defined and analyze whether CEPs were deemed to be successful. In looking at the character education literature, there was a very broad definition of CEP: specific teaching of morals and values, service learning projects, honor codes, and teachers’ individual lessons. In the end the author chose the definition that showed up most frequently in the literature, which was the planned teaching of specific ethical, moral, and service values to students. The literature did indicate, mostly through correlation, that CEPs were successful in terms of student achievement and awareness of character and honor in school communities, although not all the literature agreed with this assessment. The programs saw improved student behavior, increased academic scores, and a perceived greater awareness of moral and ethical issues by students, teachers, administrators, and parents in schools with well-defined CEPs. Best practices in the implementation of CEPs are connected to community support, teacher buy-in and, most significantly, the homegrown creation of the CEP (Milson, 2000). The schools that defined and designed their own CEPs, or those that adapted national programs to their school’s specific ideas and needs, appeared to have successful programs. To gain knowledge of the perceived effects of character education beyond secondary school, there needs to be more qualitative research done on students, both in the United States and internationally, of the perceived effect of CEPs and honor codes on students in the years after they have left a secondary school infused with these programs.
Chapter Three: Methodology

This study explored the experience of recent graduates of a large American school in Taiwan infused with a character education program who were in college in the United States with their evolving understanding of character. The study explored the question: How do recent graduates from a character education infused high school make sense of character experiences in college? The researcher chose to take a qualitative approach because the research problem is one that is not easily measured and needs to be explored for an understanding of it (Creswell, 2013, p. 48). Additionally, taking a qualitative approach to inquiry offered the opportunity to gain a richer and more personalized perspective on individual experiences with character education (Creswell, 2013).

The researcher employed a social constructivist (interpretivist) approach as described by Creswell (2013): multiple realities were co-constructed through lived experience and interaction with others. The researcher examined how former students made sense of an educational focus they had been part of while attending high school, character education. He was particularly interested in the significance this lived experience had in their everyday lives while in college. The researcher wanted to explore in detail what meaning the students had for this experience. He also realized he was an active participant in this process and that his access to the participants and his own positionality would have an impact on the research process and findings (J. A. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) and (Creswell, 2013).

Social constructivism acknowledges that multiple realities are co-constructed through lived experiences and interaction with others. In addition the constructivist approach assumes that the meaning of experiences is hidden and that it needs to be brought to the surface through reflection so that it may be interpreted and understood. This reflection may be stimulated by
interviews and research-participant interaction (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129). Finally, social constructivism assumes that individual meanings are a product of an individual’s interaction with others through social and historical norms that operate in individuals’ lives (Creswell, 2013, pp. 24-25). Since the research problem focused on a lived experience, and how interaction with others helps create meaning of that experience, the social constructivist framework aligned well with it.

**Qualitative Research Approach**

The researcher employed a qualitative approach in this study. Qualitative approaches to research are empirical methods designed to analyze and interpret the experiences of individuals in a defined setting (Ponterotto, 2005). Qualitative approaches focus on the exploration of a problem or phenomenon that cannot be easily measured with quantitative techniques because of its complexity. Qualitative approaches are also utilized when researchers want to empower individuals to share lived experiences. Qualitative research focuses on interpretation of a life experience as a research problem in itself, rather than as a solution to that problem (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative methods were best suited to this study. First, the researcher was interested in understanding experiences and the meaning making process graduates had for the lived experienced of character education. One of the tenets of qualitative research is “exploring meaning for individuals or groups of a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2013, pp. 64-65). The researcher also realized that he was an active participant in the research process and that his access to the participants and his own positionality would have an impact on the collection and analysis of data and findings. The positionality of the researcher was an important part of the
qualitative research process in co-construction, making sense of the individuals’ experiences and understandings (Clarke, 2009). This is another tenet of qualitative research.

**Narrative Methodology**

Because the focus of the research was on individual stories of graduate experiences with character education, the researcher decided to utilize a narrative methodology. The purpose of narrative research is to collect stories from individuals about individual lived experiences. Stories may develop from the individual, or may be co-constructed through interaction between the researcher and research participants (Creswell, 2013, p. 71). Narration is a distinct form of discourse in which individuals make meaning of experiences through the shaping and organization of experience through discussion (Chase, 2011). A narrative approach is an appropriate choice of methodology for the research question: How do recent graduates of a character education infused high school make sense of character experiences in college?

Narrative inquiry is a particular subtype of qualitative inquiry that revolves around the study of life experience as told by those who have lived it (Chase, 2011). Narrative inquiry originated in various fields of study including history, anthropology, and education (Creswell, 2013). It is one of the major methods of research in the social sciences and in professional practice research (Willis, Inman, & Valenti, 2010). Narrative inquiry consists of collecting stories, primarily through in-depth interviews, about individual experiences that may help explain how individuals see themselves (Chase, 2011). These stories occur within specific places or situations. The stories are shaped into a chronology by the researcher and analyzed using a variety of methods to derive themes and structure (Creswell, 2013).

Narrative inquiry may take a variety of approaches depending on the interest of the researcher (Chase, 2011). This study used interpretive narrative inquiry (INI). This approach is
based on the importance of the context and multiple perspectives in the search for meaning. Understanding is confined, relative, and socially constructed. In this approach the researcher attempts to understand the experience of individuals who have lived the experience under study (Willis et al., 2010).

**Rationale for Narrative Inquiry**

Humans are story-telling organisms. The study of narrative is the study of how humans experience the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Narrative research is focused on understanding individual experiences through the collection of stories and the interpretation and analysis of those stories (Creswell, 2013; Willis et al., 2010). Thus the outcome of a narrative study is a reconstruction of a person’s experience in connection with her or his social context and relationships (Willis, et al., 2010). Additionally, narrative research allows the story to be co-constructed by the researcher and participants. This allows the story to convey a message or point (Creswell, 2013).

This study, an exploration of the experience of recent graduates of a large American school in Taiwan infused with a character education program who are in college in the United States with their evolving understanding of character aligns well with a narrative approach to research. First, Chase (2005) stated that narrative inquiry revolves around an interest in life experiences as told by those that have experienced them. In this case it is the individual students’ experience with character education that is the focus of the study. Second, narrative inquiry focuses on stories that occur in specific places and situations (Creswell, 2013). This is important to the researcher’s goal of understanding how a shift from high school to college has changed individual views of character. A final aspect of narrative inquiry that makes it appropriate for this research is its connection to social justice. Some narratives are collected and
presented in order to make change happen (Chase, 2011). It was the hope of this researcher that what was learned in this research about experiences with character education may help create public dialogue about character education. The experiences of these multi-cultural individuals with character may be used to inform practice when it comes to character education.

**Participants**

Narrative research focuses on collecting stories of individuals’ lived experiences. It is therefore best suited to capturing in detail the lived experience of a single individual or the lived experiences of a small group of individuals. This requires researchers to spend a considerable amount of time capturing these stories through interviews (Creswell, 2013). This means that generally narrative research samples are small, consisting of one to two individuals, unless a larger group with a shared experience may be found to develop a collective story (Creswell, 2013, p. 157). This study included in-person interviews with four individuals who were recent graduates of a large American international school in Taiwan infused with a character education program and were attending universities in the United States. For the purpose of this study recently graduated was defined as within the last three years.

**Sampling**

Purposeful sampling is a technique often employed in qualitative studies. A benefit of purposeful sampling is that researchers are able to select sites and individuals that enable them to gain an understanding of a phenomenon and a problem of practice (Creswell, 2013). The researcher used purposeful sampling to recruit four individuals who had recently graduated from the research site. Additionally, the researcher looked to employ homogenous sampling. The researcher focused on recent graduates so that their experience in the character education program while attending the American international school in Taiwan was similar. The program
has evolved over time, and individuals who graduated earlier may have had significantly different experiences with the phenomenon. A benefit of a homogenous sample is that it helps focus, reduce, and simplify interviewing (Creswell, 2013).

A limitation created by the size and type of the sample that the researcher employed was non-transferability of the findings. Since the researcher focused on only four individuals from one site with a character education program, generalizability to others at the same site or other sites is questionable. Individuals may have different perceptions of similar experiences even if they have been through the same program.

**Recruitment and Access**

To recruit individuals for this study, the researcher first gained permission from the research site to interview alumni. The researcher contacted the assistant superintendent through email to gain permission. The email explained the purpose and scope of the study as well as the possible risks and benefits to the research site (Appendix A). Once permission was granted by the research site, the researcher emailed (Appendix B) the leaders of the CEP to find individuals they felt would be good typical cases from the research site.

Following approval of the research proposal by Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board, the researcher started recruiting participants. Using the list of alumni agreed upon with the character education leaders, the researcher initially reached out to all of them through email to explain the scope and purpose of the study as well as the possible risks and benefits to them. The researcher also reminded them of the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. He also informed the participants that they would be kept anonymous in the study (Appendix C). The researcher explained to the potential participants that the gathering of data would be through semi-
structured interviews. Participants were offered lunch prior to the interview. Lunch was the only incentive the researcher provided. Once four suitable candidates had agreed to take part in the study, the researcher arranged times and places for interviews and obtained the informed consent form (Appendix D) before starting the research.

**Data Collection**

There were two important aspects of the research site and the participants that may have had an impact on the gathering of data. First, the researcher was an employee at the research site, which may have impacted his perception of the data he collected. Second, the participants were former students who knew the researcher, even if he did not directly interact with them while they were students at the research site. It is important to acknowledge the unequal power relationship between interviewer and participant in any interview situation, and it is even more important in this instance as this relationship may have impacted the stories the participants were willing to share (Creswell, 2013). The researcher worked to incorporate protocols throughout the data collection process to reduce this potential limitation.

The problem of practice of this study revolved around individual meaning making of an experience (character education). Because of this, the researcher chose to use a narrative research design as the methodology for this study. This choice influenced the research question, design, data collection, and analysis procedures of the study. For this study, data was collected by eliciting stories through semi-structured interviews as suggested by Czarniawska (2004) (Creswell, 2013).

**Interviews**

Data was collected from stories elicited through semi-structured interviews with the participants. Prior to these interviews the participants were taken out to lunch by the researcher.
The researcher chose to do this for two reasons that pertain to the research. The first was to thank them for their time, which hopefully strengthened the interviewer-participant relationship. This relationship is seen as one of the single most important aspects of qualitative research (Knox & Burkard, 2009). The second was to help the participants feel comfortable in speaking and to further equalize the researcher and participant. Hopefully, having lunch together and “catching up” lessened the unequal power relationship that existed, to some degree, between the researcher and the participants. This was important because the quality of the interviewer-participant relationship may affect the participants’ self disclosure during the interview (Knox & Burkard, 2009). Interviews took place in a private setting of the participant’s choosing. The setting was one that was convenient for the participants so that they felt comfortable. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes.

Interviews followed a protocol (Appendix E) designed by the researcher and based on Creswell (2013), with open ended unstructured questions. The protocol allowed the researcher to add questions as the participants shared their stories. The interview protocol was approved by Northeastern University’s IRB prior to communication with the participants.

All interviews were recorded on two digital recording devices, one acting as a backup in case of a failure with the primary recording device. The researcher also took notes during the interview. Participants were reminded at the start of the interview that they could stop or withdraw at any point during the interview or the study.

**Data Storage**

To ensure confidentiality throughout the data collection and analysis process, the participants were each given a pseudonym prior to the interview and this pseudonym is how the participant is referred to in all data, including interview notes (Creswell, 2013). After each
interview, the digital recordings of the interview were downloaded onto a password protected computer and deleted from the digital recorders. Transcript notes were stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s office. The notes were shredded once the researcher had typed them up and filed them on a password protected computer. The only individual with access to the file on the password protected computer was the researcher. Additionally, the data from the interview and the transcripts were copied onto a thumb drive as backup for the data. This thumb drive was stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s office.

**Data Analysis**

In a narrative study a researcher needs to look for a chronology of unfolding events and turning points in the story told to him by the participants (Creswell, 2013). The researcher of this study followed the three dimensional space approach of Clandinin and Connelly (1990) for analysis of interviews in narrative studies. This approach looks for three elements: interaction, continuity, and situation (Creswell, 2013). These dimensional elements speak to the problem of practice that was the focus of this research: participant experience with character; the interaction of students with character; the continuity and change of these interactions since moving from high school in Taiwan to college in the United States; and how physical place, their situation, has impacted this experience.

Step 1 of the data analysis process occurred once the interviews were complete and the recordings had been transcribed. The researcher went through the text of each interview to organize the information into a somewhat chronological story. This entailed reading and rereading the transcripts and comparing them to the field notes the researcher had taken. Once the researcher had dissected the content and organized the interviews into chronological order, he moved to Step 2.
Step 2 was broken down into three sub-steps. The researcher located and identified themes that revolved around (a) interaction, (b) continuity, and (c) situation that informed him about the participants’ experiences. Similar to the coding of a transcript, the researcher labeled the themes that emerged through the reading and rereading of the transcript (Creswell, 2012). In this step the researcher first looked for themes of personal and social interaction that have had an effect on the told experience of the participants. Second, the researcher looked for themes related to how the participants’ experience with character are similar or different over time. And finally, the researcher looked for how physical locations impacted the participants’ experiences.

In Step 3 the researcher added additional rigor and insight by interconnecting the different themes that emerged. By interconnecting the themes, the researcher was able to display a chronology or sequence (Creswell, 2012). This step reinforced, supported, and reworked the chronology the researcher developed in Step 1.

The final step of analysis was for the researcher to compare the four participants’ stories for similarities and differences. In this step it was important for the researcher to identity his positionality so as to not overly emphasize information and themes that supported his bias.

**Trustworthiness**

The researcher took several measures to help ensure the trustworthiness of the data collection and analysis. First, the researcher used triangulation. Since the researcher was using four different participants, this gave him four different sources to provide corroborating evidence. This was especially valuable in the labeling of themes. When researchers use multiple sources of data to triangulate information they are providing validity to their findings. (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). A second measure that helped to establish trustworthiness was full disclosure. Not all evidence supported the pattern of the themes established in the analysis process. Full
disclosure of this negative analysis provided a realistic assessment of the experiences (Creswell, 2013). Finally, the researcher clarified his own positionality and bias from the beginning of the study so that the readers had knowledge and understanding of them. By clarifying past experiences with character education that likely shaped the interpretation of the data, the researcher increased the trustworthiness of the analysis and data.

**Conclusion**

This narrative study explored how recent graduates of an American international school in Taiwan, infused with character education, experienced character and described the meaning they ascribed to character after they attended college in the United States. Standard narrative procedures were followed to collect and analyze data. Given that the researcher played an active role in this qualitative research and that he is an active participant in character education, precautions were taken to control for personal bias in interpretation of the data.
Chapter Four: Research Results

The purpose of this study was to understand how recent graduates of an American international school in Taiwan, infused with character education, experienced character and to describe the meaning they ascribed to character after they attended college in the United States. Four individuals from the research site were chosen to participate in the study. Each was selected because he or she met the study criteria, which were having graduated from the school within the last two years and having completed one or two years of college in the United States. This chapter reports the findings from this qualitative narrative study.

This study used social constructivist learning theory as a theoretical framework because knowledge is constructed through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1930). Thus, student understanding of character (learning) was impacted by their experiences with character in their social environment. Social interaction between the individual, her or his environment, and his or her social interactions creates cognitive structures like schema (internal concept of character) (Vygotsky, 1930). So character experiences continue after students graduate and leave high schools infused with CEPs and continue with new social interactions when they attend college.

The goal of this research was to gain a better understanding of how former students’ experiences of character change once they have moved on from a school with a CEP and are exposed to new ideas and conflicts of character when in university.

The overarching question that guided this study was: How do recent graduates of a character education infused high school make sense of character experiences in college? The study findings were analyzed in relation to this question and the framework of social constructivist learning theory (Vygotsky, 1930).
This chapter is broken down into four sections: overview of the findings, participants’ stories, discussion of themes, and summary of the research results. The overview of the findings describes the methodology and the themes that emerged from the analysis. The second section presents the participants’ stories along with the researcher’s interpretation of them. The third section discusses the themes that emerged from these stories. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

**Overview of the Findings**

In-depth interviews with two male and two female graduates of the educational institution who were attending college in the United States were conducted. The collection of stories from the participants about their experiences with character while in high school and in college in the United States were analyzed using an interpretive narrative approach (INA). In an INA, context and multiple perspectives on the search for meaning are important to answering the research question. Analysis using INA yielded three superordinate themes and ten corresponding subordinate themes related to the research question:

- Developing character identity
  - Impact of school character program
  - Defining characteristics of character
  - Family impact on meaning

- Reinforcement
  - Peer interactions
  - Teacher interactions
  - Safety of the environment
  - Support in university
• Maturing understanding of character
  o Artificial nature of program in high school
  o Cultural conflicts
  o Peer interactions at university

Description of the Participants

The following is a brief overview of the participants who took part in this narrative study. This section provides the stories of the participants, providing needed context for the reader. The four participants who took part in this study share some commonalities. The participants were former students at the same large American international school in Taipei, Taiwan, that was infused with a character education program. They all graduated from the American international school within the last two years and attended universities in the United States. Three of the participants had just completed the first year of college while the fourth had just completed her second year. All four are American passport holders, even though three had spent their whole lives in Taiwan. All participant names are pseudonyms.

Shawn

Shawn was a male graduate of the research site. He had been educated at the school in his junior and senior years. At the time of the interview Shawn had completed his first year of college at a public university in Virginia.

Shawn was the only participant who had one parent of Western European descent (United States) and one parent of East Asian descent. He was an American citizen. Shawn was the most internationally educated of the four participants. He came to the research site in Taiwan midway through his high school career, after attending high schools in the United States and another East Asian country. “I was in [East Asian city] my freshman year and a U.S. public school system my
sophomore year and neither of those places had honor codes.” Shawn described feeling that his education had given him a different perspective on character education than that held by his peers when he came to the school. “Everyone was like you know we have an honor code. But I think at least for me it was somewhat reassuring.” In high school, Shawn quickly became an active participant in student activities, sports, and student government. He described taking an active role in promoting the honor code: “We were doing things trying to raise awareness. We put the banner up and stuff like that.”

After graduating from the school in Taiwan, Shawn attended a public university in Virginia. The university he chose to attend was also infused with an honors program. “They [the university] are big on the honor code there, but it’s an actual code not just five words.” Shawn described his interaction with diverse groups of individuals at school, but the majority were from the state the university was in: “It is a state school so there is a lot of local kids and some of them have never left the state before.” Shawn had also remained active playing sports, joining a club team at his school. He shared that some challenges the team was going through, and his active role in helping get through those challenges, had contributed to his experiences with character. “I actually ended up becoming part of the executive board of the … team…. I feel like sometimes I am trying to change the culture from the inside.” Shawn shared perceiving that his experiences in college were evolving his ideas of character. He shared that he felt it was challenging at first to deal with the different viewpoints around school: “It’s interesting there are a lot of people with very different viewpoints… but it’s taken me a little longer to appreciate that.” And dealing with different viewpoints has actually changed his attitude: “It does mean different things to different people and that can be problematic, but you know there are two sides to every story and you have to listen.” Shawn described that continuity among his experiences and character in
high school and college. When asked about his interpretation of character, he said, “I think things have stayed mainly consistent.”

**Joel**

Joel was a female graduate of the research site. She was oldest participant in the research study, having graduated one year before the other three participants. Joel attended the high school for all four years. At the time of the interview she had completed her second year of college in the United States.

Joel was an American citizen with parents who were both of East Asian descent; and she had spent her life in Taiwan. The cultural differences between home and school presented Joel with some challenges when it came to her understanding of character: “The values at home is to be humble and don’t show off … but then … in school… you have to show yourself as an individual.” Joel described how these cultures would clash when it came to experience: “It comes back to the clash between your home values and the school values.”

In high school Joel played sports; in her view the experience of competing in sports had left an impact on her interpretation of character, especially honesty: “My story would be [sport]…. [It was] a huge part of my high school career. Coaches tell me straight up… that type of honesty really helps.” Character education was a lot less significant than sports had been. Joel recalled that the CEP was not something she perceived as having a direct impact on her while she was in school, and this could have been because it came in later in her schooling: “When the honor code came out I didn’t really feel it had an effect on me. But, I think that’s just me because it came out when I was a sophomore or junior.” Although she didn’t feel she gave a significant amount of thought to the character education program, Joel did describe feeling that the school had a significant impact on her and her peers: “I feel like [the school] definitely has
pushed for its students be confident.” Joel described feeling that the school had a significant impact on her character overall: “I feel like the school really did impact the person I grew into.”

After graduating from the school in Taiwan, Joel attended a private university in California. In college, Joel joined an arts program. As part of this program Joel has taken classes that have required her to be, in her words, more outgoing. She described being critiqued on a project by her peers and how that experience brought out a culture clash similar to the one she had in high school: “I feel like what I learned at home by my culture which is very ingrained inside of me it’s hard to say…. I am good at that.” Along with continuity in cultural clashes, she shared that there was also continuity on similar character traits being important to her:

It’s kind of like tryouts again you hone your skills … and it comes back to my personal favorite, perseverance…. I feel like just because you don’t get in or you fail to do something successfully it doesn’t mean you stop at it.

Riley

Riley was a male graduate of the research site. Riley attended the research site for all four years of high school. At the time of the interview Riley had just completed his first year of college at a private university in Massachusetts.

Riley was an American citizen with parents who were both of East Asian descent, from Taiwan. He had spent his life going to school in Taiwan. Riley described how going to an American international school while being in an East Asian household sometimes brought up cultural conflicts with character experiences while in high school, “[My dad] doesn’t want to be the spotlight…. That was one of the cultural values that he was brought up with … n Asia where you are not supposed to stand out.” Riley was an active member of the honor committee in high school, which shaped his experiences with character while in high school: “When I was in
high school I was … [on] the honor committee, … people expected me to act a certain way and so I did…. In some ways that really helped me build my character.”

Upon graduating from high school, Riley went to college at a private university in Massachusetts. His university does have an honor committee, but he shared that it was very different than what he was part of in high school; “[The] honor committee …is made up of professors…. It works much differently than [High school].” Riley shared how university was different from high school in terms of security; “[High school], …people would leave their laptops, their phones, whatever on tables…. Last year [at university] when I was in chemistry lab a MacBook got stolen.” Riley shared that college experiences have evolved his views about acting with character: “I can only impose these values on myself…. It’s very difficult for me to tell someone else …[you] shouldn’t do this or you shouldn’t copy someone else’s homework….I’m just another university student.”

**Mandy**

Mandy was a female graduate of the research site. Mandy went to school at the research site for all four years of high school. At the time of the interview Mandy had just completed her first year of college at a private university in New York.

Mandy was an American citizen with parents who were of East Asian descent, from Taiwan. She went to the American international school that was the site of this research for all four years of high school. Like Joel and Riley, Mandy shared that there were conflicts at times between her home culture and the school culture: “It’s actually like with my parents or my grandparents…. They would just make like very off hand comments that were just very strange.”
Mandy was an active high school student; she played sports and was involved in clubs and school activities. She also saw herself as “like be deriding [the CEP] all the time.” Mandy described feeling the school did instill certain character issues in her, even if she didn’t see herself as a big supporter of the program: “I think that is how I learned … and that stuck with me because it was consistent.”

After graduating from high school, Mandy attended college at a private university in New York. She described herself as having a diverse group of friends, which was very different from her years in high school: “I was getting to know a bunch of people in a very short amount of time … because my friends [in high school] were quite different.” Mandy, similar to the other participants in the study, related how experiences with character had evolved her understanding of character: “I don’t think [it is a] big [change, but it] has changed fairly, … the idea that like it’s kind of altruistic.”

**Summary**

As their brief stories show, the four participants were distinct individuals. Two were much more active in the CEP in high school, one only had the CEP for three of her four years in the program, all four go to different universities in different states, and one only attended the research site during his last two years of high school. Even though these are four individuals with four distinct stories, their stories share many commonalities. They all graduated from an American international high school in Taiwan infused with a character education program. They were all attending college in the United States and having new experiences with character. Common themes have emerged from their individual stories.
Themes

Analysis of the participants’ stories yielded three superordinate themes and ten subordinate themes. This section provides an overview of each superordinate theme, followed by a table that displays quotes from each of the participants and an explanation of the corresponding subordinate themes.

Theme 1: Developing Character Identity

The development of the participants’ character identity was important to their interpretation of their lived experiences with character and the meaning they ascribed to character as they matured. This first superordinate theme directly relates to the experiences and social interactions that the participants perceived as influencing their interpretation of what constitutes good character and what it means to be a person who acts with character. Analysis of the data revealed three subordinate themes that influenced the participants’ development of character identity: Impact of school character program, Defining characteristics of character, and Family impact on meaning.

Table 1 contains a brief overview of participants’ thoughts on experiences that helped shape their meaning of character.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developing Character Identity</th>
<th>Shawn</th>
<th>Joel</th>
<th>Riley</th>
<th>Mandy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact of school character program</td>
<td>I graduated from high school. I felt I had a fairly strong sense of character. In no small part because they really</td>
<td>I feel like the school really did impact the person I grew into.</td>
<td>At the end of high school, I would say that was probably the pinnacle of my character education.</td>
<td>But, what I remember most is having the four values on the walls of the classrooms.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Defining characteristics of character**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It’s more than these five words. It’s more than any specifics. It’s more of sense when I graduated.</td>
<td>I think perseverance and hard work and I think honesty is a big part of an important characteristic. Usually we think of character as doing the right things but character is also how we react to adverse circumstances. So I remember clearly growing up at the school having the four values: honest, respect, reasonability, and kindness, and then we added the whole courage thing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Family impact on meaning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think and certainly I’m sure it’s easier at home an environment that’s conducive to that.</td>
<td>I feel like both home and school played a huge part in my growth. I don’t know if it was like family values or I had that because I saw those four character values on the wall.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The impact of the school’s character program.** One of the most significant experiences the participants shared about the development of their understanding of good character was the CEP they all were part of in high school in Taipei. The participants consistently spoke of the honor code and were able to name the five character traits they were taught in the school’s character program. All four participants shared that their experiences with the school’s program were a significant part of their understanding of character and who they were. Shawn shared that having a character program, and the school’s emphasis on that program, had given him a strong sense of character compared to other schools he had attended. “I graduated from [high school] I felt … I had a fairly strong sense of character. In no small part because they really emphasized character here.” Riley shared that his high school experiences
were the pinnacle of his character education, and how the school’s focus on character traits would not be easy lessons to forget. These lessons, Riley felt, were what had made him prepared for the greater world: “I would say that [high school] was probably the pinnacle of my character education and also where I was as a person.” Joel felt that the school’s character program had a significant impact on her development as a person and on her character: “It has definitely [helped me] understand my own self growing up and just in retrospect I feel like the school really did impact the person I grew into.” Joel felt that the school’s focus on character traits, including having the school character values on the walls of classrooms, had helped shape her understanding of character: “But, what I remember most is having the four values on the walls of the classrooms. The four values of character, I remember being taught about them.”

**Defining characteristics of character.** The participants not only talked about how the school’s character program and its focus on respect, honesty, responsibility, kindness, and courage shaped their understanding of character, but also how their experiences at the school shaped their definition of character. For some participants, experiences in school reinforced the importance of the traits the school focused on. Shawn spoke of the importance of being honest and how his experiences with this in school led him to believe that all the other traits came out of it: “I would say honesty is always one of the big [character traits]….I think a lot of the other ones fall in line if you are honest.” Mandy shared about her experience at school and how the high school’s focus on four character traits had shaped her understanding of what made good character: “At end of high school I was still defining good character as honesty, respect, kindness, and responsibility.”

Joel and Riley shared experiences that led them to believe that there were other traits that were important in creating a person of character. Each talked about how the traits the school
focused on were important, but that other traits like perseverance and grit were an important aspect of character as well. Joel connected her experiences in athletics in high school to how she shaped this definition: “For me personally I think perseverance and hard work … Working towards that goal of making the team and making [the travel team].” Riley shared that his personal challenges led him to rethink the values the school emphasized and add perseverance and reaction to adverse circumstance as important aspects of character: “The two weeks before my surgery … I was basically on pain killers the whole day..., my grades dropped. …Character is also how we react to adverse circumstances.”

**Family impact on meaning.** Most of the participants reported that their family also influenced their understanding of character. The values their family shared were part of the values they felt comprised good character. For the three participants who spoke to this theme, the support their families gave to the school’s character values reinforced these values. All three shared that the connection between home and school was significant to their understanding of character. Shawn felt that although it was subtle, the family support he received helped shaped his definition of character: “You know when you see it every day it becomes very evident and I think it because a lot easier to embrace. I think and certainly I’m sure it’s easier at home, an environment that’s conducive to that.” Joel felt it was a mixture of the experiences she had at home and in school that helped her define what good character was. The mix of home and school led to the personal growth she felt was a part of her character growth: “I feel like both home and school played a huge part in my growth. Home is immediate … my parents cared deeply about me…. I feel that [the school] has given me a lot of opportunities to grow.” Mandy shared feeling that her understanding of what it means to be a person of character couldn’t be strictly defined as coming from what she learned in school or what she learned at home: “I don’t
know if it was family values or I had that because I saw those four character values on the wall … through high school.”

**Summary.** Participants reported three main sub themes to the understanding of how they developed their character identities. These involved the role of the school, the definitions of character they developed, and the impact their families had on them. All the participants reported that the school played a major role in their definition of character and how their experiences helped them to ascribe meaning to character. Most also found that their families, either overtly or subtly, played a role in the creation of their character identity.

**Theme 2: Life Experiences that Reinforced Character Identity**

*Life experiences that reinforced character identity* was a second superordinate theme that emerged from analysis of the participants’ stories of their lived experiences with character. Reinforcement refers to lived experiences the participants perceived had supported the character identity they were developing and that continued to reinforce this identity. Although participants had varied experiences of reinforcement, four main subordinate-themes emerged: *Interactions with teachers, Safety of the environment, Support in university,* and *Peer interactions.*

Table 2 contains a brief overview of the participants’ thoughts on experiences they had that reinforced their understanding of character.

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life Experiences that Reinforced Character Identity</th>
<th>Shawn</th>
<th>Joel</th>
<th>Riley</th>
<th>Mandy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactions with teacher</td>
<td>I spoke to Ms. A about it. And that was changed.</td>
<td>I don’t know if it is like pertaining to the values of the school, but I feel like the school</td>
<td>And these were things I and other people were talking to Dr. Y about.</td>
<td>I found it very effective for me personally, was … having teachers I respected and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety of the environment</td>
<td>You know when you see it every day it becomes very evident and I think it becomes a lot easier to embrace.</td>
<td>High school has more structure.</td>
<td>I think it’s easier in high school because I have known my classmates, my friends, for so long it’s easier to get along.</td>
<td>I was still defining good character as honestly, respect, kindness, and responsibility and courage was a bit of an afterthought.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support in university</td>
<td>[My university] they are big on the honor code there.</td>
<td>[My university] because school here really helped me shaped that too.</td>
<td>We have the board, the honor committee that is made up of professors.</td>
<td>When you make new friends and everything, you see a lot of yourself in a different term, like in a different perspective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer interactions</td>
<td>We were doing things, trying to raise awareness. We put the banner up and stuff like that.</td>
<td>People expected me to act a certain way and so I did act a certain way so I think in some ways that really helped me build my character.</td>
<td>And I just remember that incident really clearly because so [many] people got really angry in response to her actions and they did tell the teacher.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interactions with teachers.** Lived experiences with teachers in high school played a significant role in reinforcing the participants’ character identities. Three of the participants described how interactions with their teachers were an important part of their lived experience with character and the meaning they attributed to character. Interactions with teachers that supported ideals of character were perceived to have reinforced the participants’ understanding of what it meant to be a person of character. Shawn shared the importance of interaction with teachers early in his time at the school and how their support of character ideals reinforced his
perceptions of the importance of character. Shawn shared that, very soon after starting at the school, he felt he could raise issues of cheating with teachers and that the teachers would support him:

I noticed some of the [student government] people score and there was some senior … and he scored the juniors two points and [(the juniors] would walk away and he would cross it off and make it one. … I spoke to Ms. A about it. And that was changed.

Riley described his experience with always having a teacher to talk to about character as significant in reinforcing his understanding of character. One story he shared was about when there were rumors that students on the honor committee were cheating; his ability to speak with a teacher about it and get the teacher’s support was significant in helping him with this character issue: “I always had Mr. Y…. I heard about people on the honor committee who … weren’t following the honor code. And these were things I and other people were talking to Mr. Y about.” Mandy reflected on how effective it was when her teachers talked about their experiences with character, and how this helped reinforce her understanding of what it meant to have good character: “Having those teachers talk, and hearing about their experiences with us, was a lot more powerful to me because they have had so much more experience than fellow students have had.”

Safety of the environment. One of the more significant experiences all the participants shared regarding reinforcement of their character identity was how safe they felt in their environment when discussing character issues. Safety was seen by the participants as enabling discussion of character experiences, and this discussion led the participants to feel they could act on character issues with their peers while in high school. Shawn described this, “[During spirit week] occasionally you would see … one of the seniors doing something [cheating] and I would
walk over and have a word and say you know that is not necessary.” Joel shared how the structure of high school created a safe environment that enabled the discussion of character experiences and a cleaner definition of character: “High school has more structure…. we had close advisors and teachers that guided us … it’s … more black and white … trying to hone in on values that society values or what the school values.” Mandy also shared that, in her experience, the way peers acted and the support from teachers created safety, and this reinforced her character identity: “Generally the way people just treated each other and what a teacher would point to when someone did something rude or mean to another kid like in lower school.” Riley described feeling that the safety of knowing his classmates so well encouraged a discussion of character and this led to experiences with character that reinforced his perceptions of good character: “I have known my classmates, my friends, for so long …I have gotten into so many conversations about the honor committee. And it’s by challenging the values that we actually know that these values are important.”

For most of the participants, as stated by one above, they felt safest while in high school, but Shawn also found that safety in an environment led to being able to discuss character challenges with his peers in college. He found through his experiences that being open minded with others created safety in the university environment, and this led discussions of character and character issues: “the team got in a lot of trouble … I actually ended up becoming part of the executive board of the … team…. It’s easy when you are selling to them as we don’t want to get sanctioned again.” Safety was perceived to be important in having experiences that reinforced the participants’ character identities.

Support in university. Most of the participants shared that they have experienced social interactions in college that have reinforced their character identity. How their social experiences
in university have reinforced their perception of character has varied, but they consistently found these social experiences to be reinforcing. Shawn attended a university with an honor code and honor committee, and he found that, like in high school, the honor code reinforced his perception of good character and led to a series of positive character experiences that reinforced his perception of good character and also helped him in school. One of these was being trusted to take assessments outside the classroom:

Each week we would have … tough grammar quizzes that were take-home. And you know [the teacher] would … don’t go use Google translator…. I was really excited…. If there is this distrust of the teacher for the student body how could she knowingly let these grammar quizzes go on? So I thought that was pretty cool.

Joel found that experiences where she felt that she was being challenged in university reinforced the character identity she had developed and her interpretation of the importance of different character traits:

I rushed … a very highly selective fraternity. …and didn’t get in…. I rushed again…. I got further … ) the second round which I think was like really a great experience…. It comes back to my personal favorite, perseverance.

Mandy described how she found that being thrown into a new environment with new peers in college had a significant impact on her perception of character due to the clashes that challenged her character identity:

Everyone is thrown into this environment where … they want to make new friends. They are … in a completely new environment and so … there were … times where personalities clashed and it was interesting to see how people reacted.
Social experiences with character in college helped reinforce the character identities the participants forged in high school through their lived experiences and social interactions.

**Peer interactions.** One issue that had a major impact on most of the participants’ character identity was their social experiences with their peers. Peers were the group they spent the most time with, so interactions had a significant impact. Most of the participants had interactions that reinforced their perceived character identities. These peer interactions included promoting character while in high school; discussing the need for CEPs with peers; and even seeing students act with poor character, such as cheating on tests, and discussing it. Shawn described experiences working to promote character education in high school that solidified character traits for him:

I guess because I came a part of the process when I joined student government…. So I personally became more invested in it…. Character became more of a thing you can carry with you rather than something told to you by other people.

Riley described his experience of having expectations from his peers, because he was part of the honor committee, and how these reinforced and supported his interpretation of his character identity:

When I was in high school I was seen as [a member] of the honor committee…. So it was easy. People expected me to act a certain way and so I did act a certain way so I think in some ways that really helped me build my character.

Mandy described how an experience in which peers took actions that were seen as poor character, or against the character program, caused an uproar among her peers. This created conversations and experiences that reinforced the character identity she was developing in school:
We were taking a test…. This girl sitting next to me…. she slipped her entire notebook under her shirt … asked to go to the bathroom and it was … a blatant case of cheating…. People got really angry in response to her actions and they did tell the teacher.”

Summary. Participants reported subordinate themes around life experiences that reinforced their beliefs about character. These included interactions with teachers, the perceived safety of the environment they were in while discussing character, university program support for their perception of character, and interactions with their peers that helped reinforce their character identities. Participants felt that experiences that reinforced character beliefs were important to their understanding and actions when it came to character. For example, all the participants reported that support from teachers in high school helped reinforce their interpretation of their character identity.

Theme 3: Evolving Understanding of Character Identity

The participants in this study shared how the character identity they developed while in school through social interaction with teachers and peers evolved while they had lived experiences with character in both high school and in university. This evolving understanding of character was due to a variety of participant experiences, but three subordinate themes emerged from their combined experiences with character: Artificial nature of the program in high school, Cultural conflicts, and Peer interactions at university. They perceived these had an impact on their understanding of character experiences and how they ascribed meaning to character.

Table 3 provides an overview of the participants’ thoughts on their experiences that challenged their concepts of character.
Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evolving Understanding of Character Identity</th>
<th>Shawn</th>
<th>Joel</th>
<th>Riley</th>
<th>Mandy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Artificial nature of program in high school</td>
<td>Or at least my understanding when I was here there was a cut off. A minimum GPA for it.</td>
<td>When the honor code came out … I signed it, but I didn’t really have it in mind all the time.</td>
<td>The honor committee’s actions in high school … felt like it was pushing these traits down ones throat.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural conflicts</td>
<td>A lot of local kids and some of them have never left the state before. And you find a very interesting world view.</td>
<td>Western cultures it’s more normal to be … confident and bold whereas for Asian culture it’s more acceptable to be humble.</td>
<td>So in Asia where you are not supposed to standout.</td>
<td>I have a good friend who grew up in India with …, the culture that is very competitive and it’s very much about ranking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer interactions at university</td>
<td>So he was on the team and he was expressing some very unpopular and not politically correct views.</td>
<td>If you want to be honest with someone it might disrespect them, but I think that is just how complicated things are when you grow up.</td>
<td>I definitely have seen people copying homework, plagiarism, not plagiarism but copying homework etcetera.</td>
<td>They are like in a completely new environment and so like they were like times where personalities clashed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Artificial nature of the program in high school.** Analysis of the data showed that the participants perceived character education as good overall, but not all aspects of the school’s program were deemed good. The participants shared that some aspects of their lived experience with the program felt artificial and imposed. The participants described experiences with what they perceived to be artificial in the character program that evolved their understanding of character, and so continued to impact the way they experience character. Joel described how she
didn’t feel the character program in high school had very much impact on her because of this: “To be honest, when the honor code came out I didn’t really feel it had an effect on me. I signed it, but I didn’t really have it in mind all the time.” She shared that she felt that the program would have had a greater impact if it were different: “If we just make kids sign a piece of paper they don’t really know what the values, what the words on the piece of paper mean.” Mandy shared her perception that the school program was forced on her and her peers, and this caused resistance: “I didn’t love the honor committee’s actions in high school. It felt like it was pushing these traits down one’s throat.” She went on to say that part of the reason she felt this way was because it was outside the curriculum: “I don’t think having these advisor meetings with these discussions that were very forced helped that at all. It was just … like this is ridiculous.” Mandy also described how she felt that the reasons students join the honor committee added to the artificial nature of it: “A lot of the people on that committee I don’t feel like stand for the values at all. They might just be doing it for university [applications].” Mandy went on to describe how people selected to be on the honor committee were not always the most honorable individuals in her perception, which added to the CEP being a bit artificial: “I heard rumors about [members] doing very questionable things.” She also shared that control of the program by one teacher made it feel artificial: “Mr. T was like very in charge of it…. I do admire Mr. T quite a lot, but it felt like it was just Mr. T trying to influence more people to act more honorably, but it just came off as just very disingenuous.” Shawn asserted that the qualifications to be a member of the honor committee were artificial, and this diminished his view of the value of the committee and altered his perception of its effectiveness:
[High school] I know that the honor council has … a minimum GPA for it…. but I think having a different perspective is very important because GPA turns people into numbers … but sometimes the story doesn’t get through in a GPA.

Cultural conflicts. Cultural conflicts played one of the biggest roles in the participants’ evolving understanding of character. Attending an American international school with an American system of education that ascribed to a Western European meaning of character, while also living in East Asian households and being TCKs, created cultural conflicts between ideals of character that evolved the students’ character identity. Every participant shared stories of experiences they had when the character traits they perceived to make up an individual of good character clashed with cultural character norms. Joel articulated how Western European cultural traits of being confident and bold clashed with her East Asian traditional cultural trait of being humble: “Western cultures it’s more normal to be … confident and bold. Whereas for Asian culture it’s more acceptable to be humble.” Joel shared how these differences in character traits between the two cultures created a clash for her and evolved her understanding of character:

As I grew up I [felt] there [was] definitely a clash in myself. The value at home is to be humble and don’t show off, but then like in school, being at tryouts for sports you have to show yourself as an individual.

Riley described how he found a similar clash between the two cultures: “The newer value, courage, that was probably the value that had the most disagreement. I remember talking to my dad…. :) He told me, which surprised me, was, he said he tries to live life under the radar.” The conflict between the two cultures had an impact on the meaning Riley ascribed to character. It made him think about what courage meant as a character trait: “Perhaps more so in Asia…. You’re not supposed to show off…. Instead you’re trying to fit in. You’re trying to be as subtle
as you can … especially when faced [with] conflicts in real life.” Two of the participants said experiences with cultural clashes continued in college. Students who were raised in different cultures did not ascribe the same meaning to experiences with character. Mandy related a story about an experience regarding cheating and how cultural views affected what individuals perceived as acceptable based on their lived experiences and their culture:

I have a good friend who grew up in India, … the culture is very competitive and it’s very much about ranking…. [At the] mid-term and the final, in both … there was a formal testing environment … he would want to check with the person sitting next to him.

In Mandy’s view her friend knew this was cheating, but he saw this as okay because in his culture class rank was more important. This evolved her interpreted meaning of character:

“When you make new friends and everything you see a lot of yourself in a different term. Like in a different perspective”.

Shawn described finding a clash in cultures when it came to respect and world views, which had an impact on him and evolved his understanding of character. He shared that, being educated at an international school, he interpreted respect differently than those in American culture when he attended college.

I would say you find a different culture in play in place [at university] you go to [university in the United States] and it’s not quite the same. And sometimes … you will hear people say things you very much disagree with.

What Shawn found is that these cultural conflicts evolved his understandings: “It’s interesting there are a lot of people with very different viewpoints all over the campus and I think it’s a
strength also, but it’s taken me a little longer to appreciate that.” These social interactions continued to play a role in the participants’ learning.

**Peer interactions at university.** The final subordinate theme that emerged that impacted the evolution of the participants’ character identity was their social interaction with their peers in college. While attending college in the United States, all of the participants had experiences with their peers that challenge their concept of character and evolved their understanding of character and the meaning they ascribed to character. As seen in the previous section, some of these were cultural conflicts, but others had to do with experiences they had with individuals they felt shared their character meanings. Several of the participants described episodes of cheating, or had peers offer to help them on assignments. The amount of cheating and the reasons individuals cheat had an effect on how they viewed this character experience. Joel shared, “Where the line is kind of blurred” in university. It’s wrong but understandable especially when it’s “simple things like copying homework.” Joel observed, “it’s up to them if they get caught they pretty much fail the course.” She put the onus on the individual who chose to cheat and not on the responsibility of others to stand up to the cheating, saying “everyone has a baseline of what [is] good and positive and what’s bad. And there is always a gray area…. When we reach university it’s more about what matters to you.” Riley shared Joel’s understanding of individual responsibility in college: “I notice that the only person I am in charge of is myself.” Again, this showed an evolving understanding of what it means to be a person who acts with character. Shawn described a similar incident at his university in which others saw cheating as just being helpful: “People would say, ‘Oh take home test let me help you with that. I took that last semester.’” Refusing the help became a challenge: “Things can be a little dicey, I would say no. I would try to frame
it as no I don’t need to do that.” These lived experiences challenged the character identity they had developed and the meaning they ascribed to character.

**Summary.** Participants described three main subordinate themes to their evolving understanding of character. These included the artificial nature of the high school program, cultural conflicts, and peer interactions in college. Participants perceived that lived experiences and social interactions around these experiences had evolved the meaning they ascribed to character and how they viewed character experiences as they matured. All of the participants shared that their meaning of character had evolved as they were exposed to more individuals in college.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this narrative research study was to understand how recently graduated students from an American international school in Taiwan, infused with character education, experienced character and to describe the meaning ascribed to character by them after they graduated and attended college in the United States, in order to better understand the longer term impact of CEPs on students. Analysis of the in-depth interview data generated insight into how the participants experienced and made sense of character experiences and the meaning they attributed to character. Analysis of the data also revealed different factors that affected their perceived understanding of character and what it meant to act with good character.

Participants shared several factors that related to the development of their character identities. The *Impact of school character programs* was seen as significant in its impact on the development of their character identities. Development of *Defining characteristics of character* also played a role in how the participants perceived and understood character. And finally the
impact of family interaction and its impact on meaning was an important factor in defining the participants’ character identities.

*Life experiences that reinforced character identity* were seen as an important aspect of how the participants’ experienced character. Lived experiences and social interactions with teachers and peers reinforced the participants’ understanding of character. The ability to discuss and act on character experiences in a safe environment was also seen as significantly contributing to the participants’ understanding of character. Finally, the continued reinforcement the participants described in college further reinforced their character identity.

Participants also shared struggles with character and experiences they felt had helped to evolve their understanding of the meaning of character. The school program was seen as both a positive and a negative in that the program, at times, felt artificial. The combination of East Asian and Western European cultures, and the different character expectations placed on participants based on these, was seen as another significant part of the evolution of the participants’ understanding of character. Finally, interactions with peers in college also had a significant impact on the evolution of the meaning they ascribed to character.
Chapter 5: Findings, Discussion, Limitations, and Implications

The purpose of this research study was to understand how students recently graduated from an international school in Taiwan, infused with character education, experienced character, and to describe the meaning they ascribed to character after they attended college in the United States. Published research focused on the impact of CEPs once students have left schools with such programs is limited and difficult to find. Inquiry into the success of character education has mostly been related to academic success (Benniga et al., 2003; Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006) and improved behavior of students in schools with CEPs (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Bulach, 2002; Romanowski, 2005; Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006).

The researcher used the lens presented by Vygotsky (1930), social constructivist learning theory, to explore former students’ experiences with this phenomenon. The researcher employed a qualitative narrative approach to this study, which allowed him to focus more deeply on former student’s individual stories about experiences with character and how they made sense of those experiences. The narrative approach allowed the researcher to collect stories from individuals about individual lived experiences and then analyze them to uncover meaning from the individual stories and the stories co-constructed through interaction between the researcher and participants. (Creswell, 2013). Narration is a distinct form of discourse in which individuals make meaning of experiences through the shaping and organization of experience through discussion (Chase, 2011). One specific question research question directed this investigation: How do recent graduates of a character education infused high school make sense of character experiences in college?

This chapter begins with a presentation of the findings, followed by a discussion of the three superordinate themes that emerged from the research and how those themes connected to
the theoretical framework and supporting body of literature that informed this study. Limitations of the research are discussed next. The final section of the chapter addresses implications of the findings, including recommendations for the research site, character education programs, and future research opportunities in character education.

**Findings in Relation to Theoretical Frameworks and Research Questions**

Interviews were conducted with four graduates of an American international school in Taipei, Taiwan, infused with a character education program, who were attending college in the United States. The primary focus of this narrative research study was: What is the long term impact of high school CEPs on students after they have left the institution and are challenged by new experiences with character in college? The research question was: How do recent graduates of a character education infused high school make sense of character experiences in college?

Participants shared their lived experiences with character in both high school and in college in the United States, and described three main themes regarding their experiences with character: *Developing character identity, Life experiences that reinforced character identity,* and *Evolving understanding of character identity.* Their main sources of development included the school’s CEP, defining characteristics of character based on their experiences, and family. Their main sources of reinforcement included interaction with teachers, the safety of the environment they were in, support in college, and peer interactions. The main challenges they faced were the artificial nature of the high school character program, conflicts within their home culture, and peer interactions in college.

Participants described how their experiences with character had helped them create a character identity and define good character and what it means to be a person of character. All
four participants felt that the school’s CEP had a significant impact on their understanding of character, referenced the five character traits their high school had promoted as part of the CEP, and stated that these traits were still the ones they used to define good character. A second aspect of developing character identity was experiences in high school that shaped their definition of character. For some of the participants, lived experiences in high school had supported the importance of the traits the school had focused on in its CEP and thus reinforced the meaning of good character. The final source of meaning making for the participants was their families. Most of the participants reported that experience with family had helped shape their definition of good character. The values their families emphasized were also part of what the participants felt comprised good character, especially when their family values supported the school values. One participant shared how, even without explicit discussion of character at home, experiences at home and school crystallized the meaning of good character.

The participants also discussed how their experiences and interactions continued to influence their understanding of good character. All had experiences that reinforced what they perceived as the meaning of good character, spoke about how interactions with teachers reinforced what good character was, and referenced specific teachers who reinforced their understanding of good character. A second aspect of the reinforcement of character was the safety they felt in their environment when it came to experiences when they had to confront what they considered to be character issues. All four referenced the structure of high school and how they felt safe in confronting peers and getting support from teachers when and if a character issue emerged. One participant stated that it was easier to embrace character when you saw evidence of it all around your environment. A third aspect of reinforcement for the participants came from their college programs. All of the participants mentioned having experiences in college that
continued to reinforce their definition of good character. For two of them, these were specific CEPs in college. The final area the participants shared that reinforced their experience with character was peer interactions. Most of the participants had interactions that reinforced their perceived understanding of good character. These peer interactions included promoting character while in high school, discussing the need for CEPs with peers, and even seeing students act with poor character, like cheating on tests, and discussing it.

The participants also observed that their experiences have challenged their perception of good character and evolved their understanding of character identity. One of the main challenges most of the participants faced was the artificial nature of the program in high school. Several said that the high school program felt forced at times, with learning disconnected from education and peer interactions. One of the participants even stated that the forced nature of the program had the negative effect of causing her to resist the program. Three of them also stated that the addition of a fifth character trait late in their high school career had less impact than the original four, because it was seen as an add-on. A second challenge faced by the students was the conflict between their home culture and the culture of the school they attended. Being in Taipei, the population of the school was mostly East Asian, but the school culture was an American one that promoted Western character traits. This cultural conflict was a challenge for the participants. Every participant shared stories of experiences when the character traits they perceived as comprising an individual of good character clashed with cultural character norms. One example of this was how traits like courage are perceived in Western European culture versus East Asian. Is it better to stand up to someone as a form of courage or is it better to turn the other cheek as a form of courage? This created conflict and challenged the participants when it came to their experiences with character. The final challenge the participants shared was their
interactions with peers in college. Peers who attended different high schools or were raised in different cultures than the participants often had different ideas about good character. Participants spoke about cheating by classmates, plagiarism, and sharing of work, which blurred the lines of what was acceptable. These experiences challenged their perception of what makes someone a person of good character.

**Discussion**

Data from this narrative study indicate the role that character education in high school had on the participants’ experience with character and the meaning they ascribed to character once they left high school and attended college. This included how participants ascribed meaning, how they interpreted good character, and what it meant to act with good character. Vygotsky’s social constructivist learning theory (1930) provided a lens to help understand the impact of the CEP on the participants.

The principal focus of this narrative research study was the longer term impact of high school CEPs on former students. The research question focused the study on how the participants made meaning out of character experiences in college and how these lived experiences with character were shaped by past experiences and interactions. It specifically addressed how participants constructed knowledge of character. Former students were chosen because of their lived experiences with character education. Lev Vygotsky, in his book *Mind and Society* (Vygotsky, 1930), outlined a framework for understanding how knowledge construction through social interaction influences individual learning and development. This social interaction between the individual, her or his environment, and his or her social interactions creates cognitive structure like schema. For Vygotsky, the only way to understand how individuals interpret experiences was to understand how individuals incorporate experiences
into their social experience. Learning could not be separated from social context. As a seminal theory of cognitive development, Vygotsky’s social constructivist learning theory (1930) provided the foundation of this narrative study. Based on Vygotsky’s theory that social interaction is an important aspect of knowledge development, the experience of students who had attended an American international school in Taipei, Taiwan, infused with a character education program and were attending college in the United States was explored in terms of how they experienced character through their lived experiences. Within this framework, learning takes place in a zone of proximal development. In this model, there are two stages of learning. The first, the zone of actual knowledge, is what an individual already knows and can do. In the second, the zone of potential development, learning takes place through interaction with peers in the social zone. Vygotsky wrote that most learning took place in this zone (Vygotsky, 1930). It was important to understand how social interaction (lived experiences) while in a school with a CEP created participants’ understanding of character and how social interactions in college affected that understanding. The researcher chose to interview four graduates of an American international school in Taipei, Taiwan, infused with a character education program who were currently attending college in the United States because it was expected that these individuals would have character experiences in both high school and in college that had and were continuing to shape their understanding of good character.

**Defining Character**

Each of the participants expressed how the high school CEP and social interaction with teachers and peers in high school had, and continued in college to have, a significant impact on their understanding of what good character entailed. The participants continually referred to the four traits that were emphasized by the school for the majority of their high school careers as the
four significant aspects of what it meant to have good character. The participants also shared how their interactions with teachers and peers in high school helped shape their understanding of character. This corresponded with Vygotsky’s (1930) zones of proximal development. Social interactions with teachers and peers shaped the participants’ understanding of character. Their experiences also corresponded with studies students in U.S. schools with CEPs. Romanowski (2003) indicated that students in schools with CEPs have greater awareness of character and ethical issues and a shared understanding of what character is. This finding was supported by Skaggs and Bodenhorn (2006), whose study of five school districts found evidence of an increase in positive character related behaviors in schools that had implemented CEPs.

Participants in those studies showed shared character understandings and a greater awareness of character through their social interactions in the school programs. Data from this current study and those by Romanowski (2003) and Skaggs and Bodenhorn (2006) suggest that schools with CEPs appear to have an impact on students’ understanding of character.

**Longer Term Impact**

A key inquiry of this narrative research was the impact of character education programs on students once they leave institutions with CEPs. When speaking of challenges to their perception of good character, the participants continually referred to what they had learned about character in high school and how this shaped their perception of character experiences in college. All of the participants expressed the importance of the character traits that had been the focus of the character program at their high school. In particular, they pointed to the importance of honesty and respect for others. The participants shared how these traits still affected their perception of character experiences in college. This appears to indicate that the CEP has a longer term impact on the participants’ experiences with character and the meaning they still
ascribed to character. This finding was supported by studies of CEPs of college students in the United States. Studies found longer term impacts of CEPs in shaping student experiences and meaning after they had left the schools with the character programs (Kozlowski et al., 2014; Valadez & Mirci, 2015). This study supports those findings. CEPs appear to have a long term impact on students’ experiences with character and the meaning they ascribe to character.

**Reinforcement**

One of the most significant findings of this narrative study was the importance of reinforcement for the participants when it came to their understanding of character. All of the participants stated that interactions with teachers and their peers supported their understanding of character and the meaning they ascribed to it. The participants also said that the safety of the environment reinforced their perception of character. Participants shared that knowing there were adults they could go to with issues helped reinforce their perception of character. Just being in an environment that supported discussion of character also reinforced the meaning they ascribed to character. Social constructivist learning theory supports this; Vygotsky believed the social could not be separated from the learning (University College Dublin, 2015). Social interaction is important to understanding, so the safety of the environment and support from peers and teachers would significantly shape learning. The influence of reinforcement may be inferred from studies of schools in the United States that show students are more apt to be aware of and discuss character issues in schools that have character programs (Romanowski, 2003, 2005). In analyzing the findings from this narrative study along with Romanowski (2003,2005), reinforcement is an important component of understanding character and the meaning students ascribing to it.
Culture

One surprising finding of this narrative study applies to the impact of character education across multiple cultures in one school. The participants in this study were third culture kids (TCKs). The participants explained that being TCKs brought cultural challenges to their experiences with character and the meaning they ascribed to character. These challenges occurred both while in high school in Taiwan and while in college in the United States. In high school, participants who were raised in what they defined as East Asian culture at home shared that there was a mismatch between the character values the school emphasized and what was considered important at home. With character traits like courage, the participants at times felt that their home culture conflicted with the Western European culture of the school. In college the participants saw similar conflicts when working with peers from the United States and other countries. Some of the participants noted that the character traits the school promoted diverged from what their peers had been taught. For some participants this was respect for others. For others this was attitudes towards cheating and stealing. This shock of cultural differences is supported in the literature on TCKs. TCKs are often shocked by attitudes of peers when returning to their home cultures for college, and they feel ignorant about the passport country’s culture (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Quick, 2010). The surprising thing about this for the researcher was that all of the participants continued to define good character and what it meant to be a person of character through what they had learned in the CEP in high school. The four main traits they had in school still influenced their perception of character experiences and the meaning they ascribed to character, even when the character traits mismatched with their home culture. This suggests that CEPs in school have a more significant impact on the long term student understanding of character than home or new character experiences.
Artificial Nature of the Program

The data from this narrative study suggested that CEPs do have a longer term impact on students, even if students are challenged in their understanding by perceived cultural differences or peer interactions in college. As seen above, the participants believed that the CEP had more influence on the meaning they ascribed to character and on their character experiences than did their home culture. The biggest challenge to the impact of character education as perceived by the participants was the artificial nature of the school program. An example of this for the students was the addition of a fifth character trait, courage, at the end of their high school careers. Although the participants all said they understood the importance of courage as part of character, none referred to it as one of the character traits that was important. One on the participants even said it felt added-on at the end, and thus seemed artificial. The two participants who had taken an active role in promoting the CEP at the school were the ones most supportive of it. They felt they were a part of it. The two who did not actively promote it in school still found an impact from the program, but they felt certain parts were artificial, which at times actually turned them away from the traits. Some of the participants also expressed a negative perception about the school’s honor council. They felt that the qualifications to be part of it were artificial and that its members were not always the best representatives of character. This made the program appear artificial to them and lessened its impact. The study suggested the importance of making students an active part of the creation and maintaining of CEPs so that they will endorse the program and it may be more effective and longer lasting. This is supported in the literature on character education as well. Studies by Kohn (1997), Milson (2000), Bulach (2002), Romanowski (2005), and Sanchez (2006) all supported the idea that a homegrown program is more successful. Evidence suggests that programs that are homegrown are more
authentic for the students than those that are prepackaged, and because of this there is more support for them from teachers, students, and parents when it comes to implementation and learning. Additionally, the participants all shared that they felt character education would have been more influential if it were actually part of the curriculum. The one-off meetings, once a year signing of the honor code, and once in a while discussion made the program feel like a supplement that was not as important as the primary curriculum. This is also supported by the literature. Berkowitz and Bier (2004), and Romanowski (2003, 2005) all supported the idea that the most successful CEPs were those that were an integral part of the academic curriculum in the school and not just additions to an already crowded curriculum or one-off lessons done once or twice a year. Students and teachers have more commitment and understanding of CEPs when they are seen as valuable and equal to the academic curriculum. This study, as well as the other literature, suggests that students need to see authenticity for character programs to have maximum benefit.

Limitations

The findings from this study may only be relevant to the research site where it was conducted, an American international school in Taiwan. The site has a unique CEP produced at the school. The findings may also only apply to TCKs and their transition into college. However, when data from the study is compared to data from studies done on character education schools in the United States there are similarities; thus the findings may legitimately apply to other schools as well.

A second limitation of this study is the sample size. Four participants were chosen for this narrative research. Although appropriate for a narrative study, the sample is small compared to the number of students graduating from the research site each year. It makes up less than two
percent of the total graduating population. The findings may be unique to these four participants. The researcher did choose to utilize purposeful sampling and he believes he chose a good cross section of former students to be participants, but the small size of the sample may still be considered a limitation.

A final limitation that needs to be acknowledged is the bias of the researcher. The researcher freely admits that he is a supporter of CEPs and has seen anecdotal value of these programs, specifically at the research site. That being stated, the findings of the research are supported by other research, which adds legitimacy to the findings.

**Implications for Practice**

An important goal of research for the scholar-practitioner is to furnish information and also make suggestions about how to improve practice. Data from this narrative research suggest that character education does have a long term impact on student character experiences and the meaning they ascribe to character. The data also suggest that CEPs that students perceive as artificial appear to be less effective; other research supports this finding. With that being said, schools with CEPs may want to consider the recommendations presented in this section.

The first recommendation is that schools do implement CEPs. Data from this study appears to show the benefit of CEPs in shaping the understanding of character experiences and the meaning students ascribe to character even after they leave the program and enter new environments. As indicated by Vygotsky’s (1930) social constructivist learning theory, learning develops relative to the community in which learners practice. The school community has a profound impact on student learning. Data from this study appears to indicate that this learning within the school culture has a longer term impact than does learning from the students’ home cultures.
Schools should consider developing their own programs rather than just adopting a program from a national character education organization. Data from this study and from the literature on character education support the concept that character programs created by schools are seen as more genuine, and thus more effective, than “bought” programs. It is also recommended that students, teachers, parents, and administrators work together to create the character program, as this will create investment in the CEP by the school community.

A third recommendation for the creation of CEPs is that schools make the CEP an essential part of the curriculum in the school. The language of the program should be used in the classroom with the students. This will help to entrench the character traits into the community.

A final recommendation in the creation of CEPs is that programs have a process of review and renewal. It might be worthwhile for schools to revisit their programs every few years and receive feedback from new groups of students. This will enable new generations of students to continue to feel ownership of the CEP and the character values that are being emphasized. This may prevent the program from becoming artificial to the students, which would limit the effectiveness of the school’s character education program.

Implications for Research

This narrative research study adds to the literature on CEPs and these programs’ impact on student experiences with character and the meaning they ascribe to character, but there are several limitations to the study that could be resolved through further research. These include more research on the long term impact of CEPs on students, identifying the best practices for delivery of CEPs, and how culture impacts CEPs.
Long Term Impacts

One of the goals of character education is the creation of individuals of character who act with what is considered good character throughout their lives. Data from this narrative study suggest that CEPs do have a longer term impact on students. Participants in this study frequently referred to the impact the school’s character program had on their perception of character and how it continued to shape their experiences with character. This was, however, a limited study of four students at one school. Further research on the long term impact of character education from more schools with more former students could assist with understanding the long term impact of CEPs and grow support for these programs.

Best Practices

The data illuminated an interesting aspect of the CEP at the research site, which was the delivery of the program. Three of the participants asserted that the CEP was perceived to be less important in the curriculum that their courses because it was not discussed in classes, only in small meetings and only at certain times of the year. The participants said that they felt the CEP may have had more impact if it had been embedded in the school curriculum. This presents multiple opportunities for future research in character education. Would CEPs be more meaningful if they were embedded in the curriculum? Where in the curriculum should they be embedded?

Culture

Although the focus of this study was on character education and its longer term impact on the participants, the data collected through the interviews brought to light other issues with character education. One of these was culture, which played a significant role in the participants’ experiences with character. The participants spoke frequently about how culture
affected their experiences with character and how the school culture shaped their understanding of character even more so than their home culture. Further research on culture and character education could help develop a better understanding of what works in character education and what its long term impacts are on different cultural groups.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this narrative study was to investigate the character experiences of recent graduates of an American international school in Taiwan, infused with character education, and to describe the meaning they ascribed to character once they attended college in the United States, in order to better understand the long term impact of character education on students. The research found that participation in the research site’s CEP did in fact have a long term impact on how the participants experienced character in college.

The researcher believes that the most significant finding from this study is the evidence that CEPs do have a significant long term impact on students after leaving the school infused with the programs. CEPs do appear to shape and continue to shape individual understanding of character and experiences with character. Additionally, the data from this study suggest that CEPs are beneficial in establishing character norms across communities. Participants felt that the school’s program had the more impact on their understanding of character than their “home” cultures. While there are limitations to this study that must be addressed through additional research, the study does contribute to the literature on character education, its longer term impact, and how schools may develop individuals of character.

**Personal Reflections**

Seven years ago, when my current educational institution introduced an honor code and character education program, I will admit I was not a supporter of it. I personally was not a fan
of honor codes because I felt they were only for New England prep schools where students just gave them lip service and never internalized their real meaning. My bias about this was shaped by my family having worked in public education. I thought this was just another way of making my international educational organization look like an elite New England independent school. However, after seeing the CEP in action for a couple of years, I was converted into a believer. I found the honor code and CEP to be effective for my students. Students at the school become more aware of character issues, like cheating, and were speaking out about them. Yet, even though I was “converted” I still was skeptical about the long term benefits of CEPs. Thankfully, a friend suggested that I apply to Northeastern’s doctoral program in education. This gave me the opportunity and tools to explore character education as a scholar-practitioner. I began to explore the literature on character education and found that although there were many quantitative studies on the benefits of character education while students were in schools with them, there was very little on the long term impact of CEPs.

This narrative study was a starting point in the discussion on character education. Although the focus of the study was on the longer term impact of character education, it brought some other issues to light as well, with two important ones being best practices in the implementation of programs and cultural impacts on character education. After analysis of the data and review of the literature, I truly believe that character education may also become a tool for social justice. Character education may be used as a tool to teach a shared culture of character and justice. This is already being done to some extent in charter schools in the United States. This is a conversation I would like to see continued between educators and the communities they serve.
One may ask what’s next in this journey with character education. I believe I need to continue to work with my current educational institution to evolve and improve our successful CEP. Beyond my institution, I think it is important that other educational institutions take a look at the long term impact of their programs and build evidence for the value of character education. This will require me to reach out to other schools and educational institutions to encourage reflection and study of their programs. It may even encourage me to apply to speak about the importance of this reflection at the National Character Conference in the United States in the coming years.

In closing, I will tell you the reader that I have found this dissertation journey enlightening to say the least. I can truly say I am a better educator after what I have gone through in this program and can only encourage others to take a similar journey.
References


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doi:10.1080/13602380000000005


http://www.athenaeum.edu/pdf/What%20is%20Effective%20Character%20Education.pdf


doi:10.1080/03057240.2011.541770


Appendix A: IRB Approval

Northeastern

Notification of IRB Action

Date: May 24, 2016  IRB #: CPS16-05-01
Principal Investigator(s): Karen Reiss Medved
Brandon Maguire
Department: Doctor of Education
College of Professional Studies
Address: 20 Belvidere
Northeastern University
Title of Project: A Narrative Study of Graduates from an International High School Infused with a Character Education Program
Experiences with Character in University in the United States
Participating Sites: Alumni Associate permission letter in file
Informed Consent: One (1) unsigned consent

As per CFR 45.46.117(c)(2) signed consent is being waived as the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required.

DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7
Monitoring Interval: 12 months
Approval Expiration Date: MAY 23, 2017

Investigator’s Responsibilities:
1. Informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630
Appendix B

Site Permission for Research

Permission Form for Research: Assistant Superintendent

Dear Dr. Moran

I am currently working on my doctorate in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University and I am approaching the final stages of my research work. My research topic is on the impact of character education programs on students’ perception of character once they have left secondary school and attended college. Better understanding of how character education programs impact the perception students have of character experience in college will lead to better understanding of the long-term impact of character education programs and may contribute to the way we teach character at our school.

I would like to ask you permission to contact recent graduates of our school to interview them about their experiences with character in college. These interviews would take place in the late spring at a time and place most convenient to the participants. I plan to share the results of this study with the school to further inform our character education program.

Although no participants in the research will currently be enrolled in our school, they will be recent alumni from our institution. Given that many of our alumni visit school, there may be occasions where the participant would like to be interviewed on our campus in a quiet and visible location. The interviews that will form the bulk of data will be conducted in accordance with acceptable Institutional Review Board protocols, including signed informed consent forms. Participation will be voluntary and will not involve any conflict of interest.

In following acceptable research protocols, I will keep all the data I collect completely confidential and will not use our school’s name nor any former student’s name in any research report. In keeping with confidentiality protocols the school will be referred to as an American-International School in Taipei. If you prefer I refer to our institution in a different way please let me know.

No information that I present will be linked to any personal information that may identify the participants in the investigation. I am confident that I have taken the necessary steps to ensure my research meets ethical standards and will begin research once I have received permission from the Institutional Review Board.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact me at maguire.be@hukey.neu.edu. If you are willing to allow me to contact and interview former students of the school please indicate this by signing below, or you may write a letter granting permission. For your convenience you may either email your response or I can come to your office to have you sign the consent form.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Brandon Maguire

[signature]

give my permission to you to conduct the research as describe above.

I do not give my permission to you to conduct the research as describe above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Assistant Superintendent</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Catriona Moran</td>
<td>4/11/2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Call for Participants

Dear Prospective Participant:

I am currently working on my doctorate in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University and I am approaching the final stages of my dissertation work on character education. As a teacher in a school that has adopted a character education program, and looks to expand it, I am interested in exploring the impact of these programs on students once they have left schools that are infused with them. To do this I plan to interview recent graduates from a school that has a strong character education program to see how their experience with character changes once they have left the school and attend university in the United States.

As a recent graduate from our school who attends university in the United States, I would like to invite you to take part in this study. If you choose to participate, we will meet for approximately one to two hours to talk about your experiences with character in both high school and in university. The interview will be audio-recorded and will take place this spring at a time and place most convenient for you. These interviews will be strictly confidential; you will be assigned a pseudonym for the purpose of the study. I plan to share the results of this study with the school to further inform our character education program.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact me at maguire.br@hukey.neu.edu. If you are willing to take part in this study please indicate this by signing below, or you may write a letter granting permission. For your convenience you may email your response.

If you agree to be a part of this study I will follow up with you to further discuss this study, arrange a time and place to meet, and have you sign an informed consent form. If you choose to take part in this study you may withdraw at any time if you change your mind.

Thank you for your support.

Regards,

Brandon Maguire

I give my permission for Brandon Maguire to contact me for the purpose of this study on the impact of character education.

____________________________________  ____________
Signature                  Date
Appendix D: Informed Consent

Unsigned Informed Consent Document

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies
Investigator Name: Principal Investigator: Dr. Karen Reiss Medwed
          Student Researcher: Brandon Maguire
Title of Project: A Narrative Study of Graduates from a School Infused with a Character Education Program Experiences with Character in University in the United States.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
Individuals who have graduated from an international American school in Taiwan, infused with character education, and who have gone to university in the United States are being asked to take part in this study. The student researcher will gather individual stories on experiences with character while in university to analyze how the character education program the individual went through in high school impacted these experiences. You are being asked because you went through this institution and you are attending college in the United States.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this narrative study is to understand how recently graduated students from an international American school in Taiwan, infused with character education, experienced character, and to describe the meaning ascribed to character by them after they have graduated and attended university in the United States.

What will I be asked to do?
Participants will be asked to relate stories about their experiences with character and character education in both high school and university in the United States through an interview with the student researcher. During the interview your responses will be recorded and the student researcher will take field notes. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

Where will this take place and how much time will it take?
Individual interviews will take approximately 45 minutes to one hour to complete. Interviews will take place at a time and place of the participant’s convenience. This may be face to face or through Skype ® or Google Hangouts ®.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
There are no significant risks involved in being a participant in this study.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
There are no direct benefits to the individuals who take part in this study. However, the information learned in this research may benefit the institution by enabling it to improve its character education program. Your participation may also help other institutions improve their character education programs.
Who will see the information about me?
Your participation in this study will be completely confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for all study participants in the collection of data. Only the student researcher will be aware of the participants’ identities. Participants will not be identified in any reports or publications of the information used in this study.

If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?
You are not required to take part in this study. If you do not want to participate, you do not have to sign this form.

What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?
There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study.

Can I stop my participation in this study?
You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question at any time. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time.

Who can I contact if I have question or problems?
Please feel free to contact Brandon Maguire (Email: maguire.br@husky.neu.edu), the person mainly responsible for the research.

Will I be paid for my participation?
The student teacher will happily take you to lunch as part of the interview process. Other than this there is no pay for taking part in this study.

Will it cost me anything to participate?
There is no cost to the participant in this study.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Brandon Maguire (Email: maguire.br@husky.neu.edu), the person mainly responsible for the research.

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

You may keep this form for yourself.

Thank you.
Brandon Maguire
Appendix E: Interview Protocol Form

Interview Protocol

Institution: Northeastern University; 360 Huntington Avenue; Boston, Massachusetts 02115

Interviewee: 

Interviewer: Brandon Maguire

Date: 

Location of Interview:

The purpose of this narrative study is to understand how recently graduated students from an American international school in Taiwan, infused with character education, experienced character and to describe the meaning ascribed to character by them after they have graduated and attended college or university in the United States. Data will be collected through interviews with individuals who attended the school and are now attending university in the United States. Interviews will last approximately one hour.

Part I: Introductory Question Objectives (5-10 minutes). Build rapport, describe study, and answer any questions participants may have. Review and sign informed consent form.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study about character education and its impact on students. You have been identified as someone who may be willing to share your experiences with character education and how this education has shaped your perception of character experiences while in university in the United States. My research is focused on the impact character education programs have on individuals once they have left the school with the character education program and entered into college. Through this study I hope to gain insight into what the impact of character education is on students as well as insight on how to improve character education programs.

Because your experiences are important to my investigation I would like to record your responses and stories digitally. After I transcribe the interview I will delete it from my computer to ensure your confidentiality. I will also be taking notes during the interview to record reactions, both yours and mine. Do I have your permission to record this interview? (If the participant says yes I will start the digital recorder here.) Thank you, let’s begin.

First, I would like to discuss the informed consent form with you. Please take a minute to read it. Basically the document states that: 1. All information will be kept confidential. 2. Your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time. 3. No harm will be inflicted to you or
anyone else. Do you have any questions about the form, interview process, or how the data will be used?

We have planned this interview to last roughly one hour. During the interview I will be asking you some questions to get the conversation started, but also feel free to add any thoughts or ideas you have in telling me your story. Do you have any questions?

**Part II: Objectives (60 minutes):** Collecting the individual story of the participant’s experiences with character in college in the United States. Since the researcher is trying to get the participant’s story about his or her experiences, these questions will act as prompts for the participants.

I would like to hear about your experiences with character in both high school and now that you are in college in the United States. I am curious about how your perception of character may have been shaped by your experiences.

1. How would you have described character at the end your time in school here at our institution?

2. How was your meaning of character shaped while you were in school at our institution? Please be very specific and share stories of how your meaning of character was shaped through experiences you had while in school.

3. Please describe some incidents in college that you would say character was a part of. How was your perception of character challenged by these experiences?

4. Has your perception of character, and what it means to be an individual of good character, changed since you went to university? Why do you think this is?

**Part II: Wrap-up**

Thank you for sharing your story with me. Before we wrap up, do you have any questions?

Thank you so much for your participation.