

A NEW PERSPECTIVE

Spontaneous Character Education

Using Positive Causal Attribution Training

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Character education in schools is implemented using different approaches. The current practices related to character education, though, include educators implementing preplanned lessons and activities from published programs. Yet, these current practices have mixed reviews in large- and small-scale studies. The purpose of this article is to provide a new perspective and approach for character education; one that is based on spontaneity using positive causal attribution training (PCAT). Strategies for implementing spontaneous character education using PCAT are also provided.

VIGNETTE

A basketball coach had a time out with his team. He was visibly upset about the previous play and let his team know his frustration with firm corrective feedback. Most interestingly, though, he pulled one player aside before the time out ended and said, “Tyler, you were really persistent out there on defense. You didn’t let your man get around you. Good job.” The type of feedback the coach gave was impressive. The coach labeled his player with a positive causal attribute, was very specific about how his player displayed the attribute, and provided the feedback during a sponta-

neous, unplanned moment. This is a shining example of how schools could provide character education in a spontaneous manner.

INTRODUCTION

Character education can be defined as “intentional implementations that organize behaviors according to main human values and are provided with the aim of training academically successful individuals” (Katmilis, Eksi, & Osturk, 2011, p. 855). This type of programming encourages students to act on values, such as, *respect, civic virtues and citizenship, responsibility for others, self-control, loyalty,*

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courage, perseverance, and honesty, all of which encourages them to enact goodness (Davis, 2006; Huitt, 2004; Lickona, 1991; Niemic, Rashid, & Spinella, 2012; Shields 2011) that can positively impact either or both academic performance and moral character (Haynes & Thomas, 2011).

The terms *values* and *character* are closely related. *Values* involve orientations and guiding principles, such as self-control, responsibility, and perseverance (Huitt, 2004a; Ryan & Bohlin, 1999). *Character*, then, requires action on values, which manifests itself in observable behaviors (Huitt, 2004a). For example, an athlete demonstrates the value of respect when she shakes an opposing athlete's hand, which is "good" character. When values are active and applied, one's character is evident. Therefore, values are one of the foundations of character, and character education involves guidance on how to act on one's values.

Despite noble intentions and a variety of ways character education programs have been implemented, their effectiveness has been weak (Social and Character Development Research Consortium, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Character education using positive causal attribution training (PCAT) in spontaneous moments, which is the focus of this paper, may provide an alternative to typical implementations.

Character education programs in schools across America are implemented using different approaches. For example, character education has been integrated into after school programs (Hill, Milliken, Goff, Clark, & Gagnon, 2015); sports (Power, 2014); discipline specific programming such as art (Hyungsook, 2014), social studies (Katilmis, Eksi, & Ozturk., 2011), cinema (Russell & Waters, 2014), and religious studies (Roso, 2013); and while building caring relationship between teachers and students (Sojourner, 2014). These approaches to character education are usually in the form of preplanned lessons or activities promoted by a particular published program. Empirical studies, however, do not yield data indicating effectiveness of these programs.

What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), an agency of the Institute of Education Sciences, collects evidence on the efficacy of a variety of curricula, including character education programs. The last comprehensive evaluation of such programs occurred in 2007 when WWC examined 93 studies involving 41 programs. WWC found only 13 character education programs that evidence "positive effects to no discernible effects" in the three areas: behavior; knowledge, attitudes & values; and academic achievement. Of these 13 programs, there is only one program in each category that has "strong evidence of a positive effect with no overriding contrary evidence" (U.S. Department of Education, 2007, p. 2).

Then in 2010, the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) and the National Center for Education Research (NCER) found dismal results in their comprehensive study that measured the wide-spread effectiveness of seven character education programs thought to be the most popular in the United States. This study titled, "Efficacy of Schoolwide Programs to Promote Social and Character Development and Reduce Problem Behavior in Elementary School Children" involved following 6,000 students from third through fifth grades and measured 20 possible behavioral and academic outcomes. While the results of the study showed an increase in character-based activities in the classroom and schools receiving social and character development curricula (SACD), it most importantly reported that "there were no differences in students' social and emotional competence, behaviors, academic performance, or perceptions of school climate between students in schools implementing one of the seven SACD programs and those in the control schools" (Social and Character Development Research Consortium, 2010, par. 5). There have been no such studies evaluating the efficacy of character education sponsored by the federal government since 2010.

Conversely, four studies emphasize the positive impact of character education programs on academic performance in schools.

Berkowitz and Bier (2005) identified 54 out of 100 character education programs as reputable, 33 of which had scientific evidence supporting their effectiveness. In addition, Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, and Smith (2006) found that character education positively affected academic performance in 120 elementary schools. Finally, Marshall, Caldwell, and Foster (2011) found in two, multi-year studies that character education programs improved overall school climate and academic performance. While the findings in these studies are promising for character education programming, the small number of programs found effective do not indicate national, wide-spread positive outcomes.

Several scholars have provided explanations regarding the mixed results of character education along with possible alternatives. First, teacher preparation programs lack training in character education (DeRoche & Williams, 1998; Milson, 1999; Ryan, 1997). Ryan (1997) specifically suggests these programs instead should train preservice teachers to be persons of good character and morality; see the development of students' moral life and character as professional responsibility; engage students in moral discourse; articulate their own moral principles without seeking to conform students; help students empathize with the concerns of others; establish a positive moral classroom climate; and engage students in activities in school and in the community to develop ethics and altruism (pp. 88–89). As a result, teachers would be better prepared to teach character education programs upon entry into their first teaching position.

Ryan (2013) also contends that human behavior cannot be measured. Behavior is not a tangible skill that can be observed like those associated with reading and math. Due to the abstract nature of one's character, this scholar suggests the states should not be responsible for deciding what "character" means and impose their own positions. Instead, character education is successful when it connects to students' "deepest goals and purposes, when it is directed toward the acquisition of virtues, and

when it has the support and cooperation of those most responsible for their well-being, their parents" (p. 145). Thus, Ryan believes character education should be deeply personal and provided by individuals who know the student the best.

Finally, Chen (2013) suggests character education in the United States lacks uniformity, creating a variety of interpretations and consequent confusion. This scholar alternatively suggests moral virtues provided in character education programs should be individualized according to one's temperament. Individualizing character programs means creating relevant situations to assist students in confronting the adverse affects of their temperament with virtuous outcomes. This alternative would create uniformity in character education programs and minimize the variety of their interpretations.

These scholars who have described possible reasons for the mixed results in character education programming and potential alternatives promote one main theme: character education programs need to be personal to students. If current approaches to character education are not personal to students and they do not yield evidence of wide-spread positive outcomes, other approaches need to be considered. One approach to character education that has the potential to be personal and relevant to students uses positive causal attribution training (PCAT), which includes drawing attention to positive causal attributions, or what many schools label as "good" character. The framework of this type of character education integrates an additional component missing in the various character education programs described in this article: spontaneity.

The spontaneity aspect of PCAT is integrated much like the spontaneity provided by the basketball coach in the vignette. Educators verbally describe their interpretations of students' positive attributes associated with behaviors they witness in unplanned settings. It intertwines even the smallest occurrences in a school day with character education. The consequence is students become more aware

of the connection between their positive causal attributes and the moment-by-moment tasks and decisions in which they engage, potentially training them to think differently about themselves. The end goal of this approach to character education is students' improved self-efficacy. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to describe positive causal attribution training (PCAT) as the crux for spontaneous character education and provide strategies for its implementation.

CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

In order to clarify the direction of this article, two terms need defined. The terms *attributes* and *causal attribution training* are interrelated yet they are distinct. *Attributes* are beliefs about causality, positive or negative (Weiner, 1986); they include reasons "why" one behaved in a certain manner. The reasons or beliefs are related to one's deeply rooted values, such as respect. *Causal attribution training* involves a process of identifying a person's beliefs about the causes of his or her own failures and successes to promote future motivation for achievement (Robertson, 2000). For example, an athlete may need causal attribution training to help identify her attribute of respect for others as a possible reason she shook an opposing athlete's hand. Thus, attributes include values. Causal attribution training, then, can guide students' thinking in order to identify the specific values causing behavior-related decisions.

KEY THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This new perspective on spontaneous character education using PCAT is grounded in three theories.

Self-Efficacy Theory

First, Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1977) posits that an individual's belief in his

or her capacity to execute behaviors influences the ability to produce specific performance attainments. More specifically, Bandura (1995) defines perceived self-efficacy as, "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and perform the courses of action required to manage prospective situations. Efficacy beliefs influence how people think, feel, motivate themselves, and act" (p. 2). Thus, individuals who can influence controllable circumstances can conceptualize desirable outcomes and inhibit undesired ones. Personal control of beliefs about capabilities that cause behaviors are central to self-efficacy. Furthermore, these beliefs that cause behaviors can be developed in four ways: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and enhancing physical status. Bandura's theory has been confirmed as studies show attribution training has been a successful intervention used to address learners' self-efficacy (Margolis & McCabe, 2004; Scott, 1996) and self-concept (Kozminsky & Kozminsky, 2003; Robertson, 2000).

Two aspects related to the social persuasion method of developing self-efficacy are of particular interest to this article. First, one's beliefs about perceived self-efficacy can be altered through social persuasion. This method indicates "To the extent that persuasive boosts in perceived self-efficacy lead people to try hard enough to succeed, self-affirming beliefs promote development of skills and a sense of personal efficacy" (p. 4). This facet of self-efficacy theory suggests that the personal beliefs one has about his or her capacity to execute behaviors are malleable. This conclusion is supported by Graham and Weiner (1996), who indicate personal beliefs about the efficacy to perform well on a task are founded on unstable, causal attributions. The instability of causal attributions is one of the foundational precepts of spontaneous character education using PCAT. This approach to character education includes positively influencing self-efficacy related to demonstrating good character. For example, students' self-efficacy can be influenced by external variables (i.e., positive

teacher feedback) that speak to internal, unstable variables (one's values evidenced in observed character). As PCAT is translated into the school setting, this training could be a catalyst for improving students' self-efficacy and self-concept, both of which may impact achievement.

The second aspect of social persuasion of interest to this article is the inherent need for social interactions (also see Bandura's social learning theory). The need for social interaction speaks directly to the nature of character education through PCAT, which requires educators to relate to students personally and spontaneously. Educators are ripe for this influential role as research indicates their influence can have positive effects on classroom behaviors (Griggs, Gagnon, Huelsman, Kidder-Ashley, & Ballard, 2009), peer relationships (Howes, Hamilton & Metheson, 1994), disruptions in class (Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003) and overall commitment to learning (Doll, Spies, LeClari, Kurien, & Foley, 2010).

Attribution Theory

The second theory in the theoretical framework of this article is attribution theory, upon which Weiner (1985) expands upon Bandura's self-efficacy theory. Weiner posits causal attributions (a) are influenced by outcomes (e.g., passing or failing a test), and (b) have an effect on future behaviors because attributions influence students' choice, intensity, and persistence. There are three dimensions of causality: locus, stability, and controllability. Locus refers to the affect success or failure has on self-esteem and pride. Stability refers to an attribute that is not expected to change (e.g., aptitude). Controllability, then, is related to internally managed variables (e.g., effort) affecting successes or failures. As Chodkiewicz and Boyle (2014) simply state, this theory seeks to understand the thinking process that people use to explain why an event occurred (p. 78).

The attribution theory, according to Graham and Weiner (1996), is most often applied to academic settings. Yet, the premise of attribution theory has the potential to be generalized to spontaneous character education using PCAT. As previously supported by the self-efficacy theory, causal attributions are malleable because they are unstable. Attribution theory extends upon this premise by suggesting causal attributions are malleable because they are unstable *and* controllable. Thus, causal attributions have the potential to not only be influenced by educators but also managed by students. If causal attributions are unstable and controllable, one's attributional thinking (thought process related to deep-seeded beliefs that affect self-efficacy and observed character) can change from negative to positive. Spontaneous character education using PCAT, then, can be a method for influencing students' thinking in such a manner. This approach to character education requires educators to provide feedback to students about their deep-seeded beliefs (i.e., values) in action, which are controllable and unstable. Furthermore, if students then develop a healthy sense of self and feel ownership over positive attributions, their perceived self-efficacy and consequent levels of achievement can increase (Kozminsky & Kozminsky, 2003; Schunk & Ertmer, 1999).

Action Learning Theory

The third theoretical framework on which this article is based is action learning theory pioneered by Reg Revans. Action learning theory is a form of experiential learning, which proposes that learning by doing and frequent dialogue produce both personal and organizational learning (Dominguez & Hager, 2013, p. 176). As action learning theory relates to PCAT, Huitt (2004b) indicates that the act of valuing is a process of implementation as well as development. That is, it is important to move beyond thinking and feeling to acting. There needs to be specific opportunities for learners to act on their values.

In prior work, Huitt (2004a) suggests as students reflect on their behavior, it adds to the knowledge base, strengthens their thinking skills, and impacts their values. Huitt also purports it is critically important to help students make explicit one's own knowledge base, value system, and the process of committing and planning so as to make particular behaviors more intentional in the future. The precepts of action learning theory support the premise of PCAT, which is for students to learn about character by doing. If students become more aware of the values that cause certain behaviors by seeing them in action, they have the potential to strengthen their knowledge base about personal self-efficacy and be more intentional about enacting positive character.

This triad of theories provides the framework for spontaneous character education using PCAT. In this proposed method of implementing character education, all three theories are manifested. Namely, the educator socially interacts with a student immediately after an observed behavior in order to verbally identify the underlying value in which the behavior is rooted. In such an instance, the student also becomes aware that he or she has acted on an existing positive value. Ultimately, this social interaction is an effort by the educator to positively influence the student's attributional thinking and consequent self-efficacy.

EFFECTIVE PRAISE

Praise is a verbal statement that communicates positive feedback to a student (Simonsen, Myers, & DeLuca, 2010 p. 303). Brophy (1981), though, gives a much more precise definition as he indicates praise is "to commend the worth of or to express approval or admiration" (p. 5). Brophy continues to describe praise as statements that "express positive teacher affect (surprise, delight, excitement) and/or place the student's behavior in context by giving information about its

value or its implications about the student's status" (p. 6).

Praise, according to Brophy, should only be used as a reinforcer if certain criteria are implemented. First, praise must be contingent. When provided, praise must be contingent on performance of the behavior to be reinforced (provided more infrequently than frequently). Second, praise must be specific, meaning praise should specify the particulars of the behavior being reinforced. This means praise must be specifically associated with the behavior that exemplifies the value. And, third, praise must be sincere. The praise must sound sincere and credible, as well as varied according to different situations and preferences of the student.

When considering the description of praise, it can be concluded that PCAT is a form of praise. PCAT requires praise related to unstable and controllable causal attributions. Brophy (1981) suggests that the attribution a teacher includes in praise statements impacts the level of influence the evaluative feedback has on students. For example, a teacher who praises students' achievement and tells them that they are "smart" may teach students to attribute their success to a stable and uncontrollable factor. But, teachers who praise students for working hard enough to achieve a goal will train the students to attribute their success to unstable effort factors (p. 23). It is during the latter context when praise is most effective, according to this same scholar, and it is during this latter context that supports the guiding principles of PCAT.

Notably, Graham and Weiner (1996) emphasize the notion that individuals are biased in their ability to understand causal attributions. These experts use the metaphor that individuals are scientists who desire to understand the world but use "naive statistical techniques" to do so (p. 71). As a result, individuals have the potential to over- or underestimate causal attributions. This notion implies the need for guidance for students as they identify causal attributions. Therefore, in order for PCAT to be effective, educators need to

include specific components in their feedback to students. The feedback needs to include (a) a praise word or phrase (e.g., *well done* or *excellent*); (b) a description of the specific, social or academic behavior exhibited by the student; and (c) the controllable, unstable, positive causal attribution. For example, a teacher might say, “Tony, excellent work on your science project. Despite wanting to focus on basketball, you made time for this project. You were self-disciplined.” From such feedback, a student hears (a) the praise word *excellent*; (b) the specific behavior of prioritizing his science project; and (c) the controllable, unstable, positive causal attribution: *self-disciplined*. By hearing that he is *self-disciplined*, Tony has a chance to hear the possible attribution (i.e., root cause) why he made a good decision. Thus, Tony experienced spontaneous character education that may train him to think positively about his self-efficacy on a routine, school-based task.

MALADAPTIVE ATTRIBUTIONAL THINKING

While the goals of current character education programs is to help students “organize behaviors according to main human values” in order to become academically successful, not all students respond positively to such programs. In fact, many students have developed maladaptive (negative) attributional thinking, a way of thinking that can inhibit the goals of character education programs. The potential exists, though, to offset this type of thinking with intentional PCAT.

Maladaptive attributional thinking is characterized by the belief that failure is due to stable, internal causes such as low ability and success is a result of unstable, external causes such as luck (Robertson, 2000). For example, a student with maladaptive attributional thinking might say, “There is no way I could have passed that test. It was hard and I’m not that smart.” According to Chodkiewicz and Boyle (2014), when students have maladaptive attri-

butional thinking, they feel less motivated and confident than students with positive attributional thinking. These students engage less in positive learning behaviors, such as persisting on difficult questions, and engage more in behaviors that are destructive to their learning process, such as task avoidance. Students with maladaptive attributional thinking may conclude that their efforts are unrelated to achievement outcomes and, therefore, are futile (Fulk & Mastropieri, 1990; Pearl, 1982). These students may ask, “Why try when I’m just going to fail?” In turn, maladaptive attributional thinking negatively impacts future learning and academic performance. It is, therefore, the students’ emotional and behavioral reactions to their perceptions about themselves that influence academic achievement (Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2014). In order to train students to think differently about themselves, educators can provide moment-by-moment character education using PCAT on routine tasks, however short the task and even if the task appears to be a failure. Thus, educators need to look for the positive in the negative.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Knowing character education is often thought of as a separate program in schools, likened to having its own silo, and it has weak empirical evidence for effectiveness, perhaps teachers need to place the protocol for implementing current character education programs aside in order to reimagine implementing the program with a spontaneous paradigm. This new perspective for implementation could train students to consciously associate their behaviors with specific, positive, causal attributes. This article so far has provided the theoretical framework with related literature for the foundation for spontaneous character education using PCAT. Therefore, described below are six strategies for implementing this approach to character education.

Learn It: Attribution Definitions

First, educators need to know what positive causal attributions, or what many schools label “good” character, look like in the everyday school context. Thus, educators need to take initiative to learn the definitions of and be able to distinguish among such character values as *effort*, *initiative*, *diligence*, *self-discipline*, *helpfulness*, *preparedness*, *commitment*, *perseverance*, *responsibility*, *trustworthiness*, and *compassion*. Educators can learn these attributions using resources such as Charactercounts.org that describes the “The Six Pillars of Character” or Charactered.net that describes eleven common, core values for character education programs.

Identify It: Scan Students

Second, educators need to not only learn the values but also identify them when they are demonstrated by students. It means learning to differentiate similar positive causal attributions that have similar constructs, such as *care* and *respect*, as they occur in observable behavior, which goes beyond just reading about them. This skill requires intentional practice while simply scanning students as they interact with each other and engage in the school context. For example, a teacher may witness a student in the hallway who picks up someone’s dropped book, which is evidence of *helpfulness*. Or, an educator may notice a struggling student who works and works to solve a difficult problem, which is evidence of *perseverance*. The values of *helpfulness* and *perseverance* were acted upon by picking up the book and working hard on the difficult problem, respectively. By intentionally scanning students’ behaviors as they occur, educators are more likely to see positive causal attributions as the root cause of the decisions students make and actions they take.

Provide it: Take the Time

Third, educators need to purposefully and intentionally take time to verbally describe to students the positive causal attributions associ-

ated with the specific behaviors students exhibit. It is easy for teachers, principals, aides, and administrative staff to focus on their “to-do” lists throughout the day and not praise students for their positive character. Yet, research indicates that praise, especially when it is behavior specific, provided with authenticity, and focuses on students’ accomplishments, consistently results in improved student academic and social behaviors (Brophy, 1981; Cherne, 2009; Sugai, 2007). Academic literature also indicates teacher-student relationships that emphasize care and encouraging feedback positively impact students’ emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes in school (Boyd, 2012; Delisle, 2012; McConville, 2013; Toste, Heath, & Delleire, 2010). Making time in the day to provide spontaneous character education using PCAT, which facilitates the use of praise and affirmative teacher-student relationships, is clearly worth the effort.

Don’t Plan It: Be Spontaneous

Worthy of note in the aforementioned examples, the educators provided the PCAT in a spontaneous manner. As previously mentioned in this article, so much of character education in schools is derived from a preplanned program implemented in a reserved time slot. Or, students participate in preplanned assemblies or half-time at sporting events that have an emphasis on “good” character. While these tasks may exemplify what good character means and highlight students who exhibit it, these tasks are meant to relate to a whole group; they do not speak to an individual’s sense of self as Chen (2013) and Ryan (2013) suggest is necessary. Instead, educators should capitalize on spontaneous, teachable moments that are impromptu and “not something you put in a lesson plan ... [they are] exquisitely timed” (Neuman & Roskos, 2012, 66). The benefit of teachable moments is they inherently relate to students’ interests due to their unplanned, spontaneous nature often instigated by students. Therefore, educators have the opportunity to provide spontaneous character

education in moments that already have students' attention and interest, which is an opportunity to positively influence students' thinking.

Stick With It: Be Persistent

Fourth, some students may appear unresponsive to educators who provide character education using PCAT, despite repeated efforts. Educators know students' perspectives and beliefs do not change immediately, regardless of the intensity of the effort put forth. Yet, as previously described, educators must continually focus on the positive in the negative of observed behaviors, believing that the social persuasion involved in this type of character education will eventually positively influence students' thinking. Therefore, teachers' consistent and persistent efforts to provide PCAT is at the heart of spontaneous character education.

Monitor It: Self-Reflection

Finally, if educators are committed to character education in any capacity, they need to reflect on how well they provide it. Herrell, Jordan, and Eby (2013) indicate educators must constantly recognize the need to evaluate their own teaching, especially as it relates to students needs and interests" (p. 3). Robert Marzano, a pioneer in the field of reflective practice in education, suggests that teachers should "conduct self-audits ... [which involve] a retrospective examination of one's strengths and weaknesses" (Marzano, 2012, p. 14). Specifically related to this article, educators need to document how and when they provide character education using PCAT over time. By doing so, themes may emerge about the time of day PCAT is most often or least often provided and the most common or least common/nonexistent positive causal attributes provided by the educator, as well as students' immediate or delayed responses. The data from this type of reflective practice can be used to set short-term goals related to how and when to provide PCAT and which positive attributions could be

provided with more or less frequency. For example, an educator can strive to provide two incidences of PCAT per day or 10 per week. Ideally, this simple, self-reflection process is shared with a colleague to provide accountability and spur professional growth. Figure 1 is an example of a table for this self-reflection process.

Cautions and Qualifications

Although spontaneous character education using PCAT is grounded in theoretical frameworks and academic literature, caution must be applied when investigating this approach. First, spontaneous character education using PCAT has no empirical evidence of its effectiveness. Without data to support this approach, it is not considered evidence-based, which is necessary for school-based applications. Yet, researchers are highly encouraged to study its effectiveness in small and varied settings in order to investigate how viability of this approach.

Second, caution should be applied when investigating spontaneous character education using PCAT because this approach is not a "one size fits all" method. Brophy (1981) indicates that individual students respond to praise differently and how they "mediate" its meaning (p. 27). For example, older students have the tendency to interpret praise as indicating low ability, when younger students often interpret praise as true. Thus, the praise statements used within this new approach to character education needs to be age-appropriate and culturally relevant.

Third, this same scholar indicates praise and academic achievement are not cause and effect, especially if praise is implemented ineffectively. Many factors can affect academic achievement; character education is just one of many factors. Finally, Huitt (2004a) in his review of literature and describing his position on character education states the most important factor in developing good character in students is the quality of the relationships among the school's faculty and adults in authority. In

Teacher Name: _____

Bank of Possible Positive Causal Attributions:

Citizenship, commitment, compassion, courage, diligence, effort, ethical, fairness, helpfulness, honesty, initiative, integrity, loyalty, perseverance, preparedness, respect, responsibility, self-control, self-discipline, sportsmanship, trustworthiness

<i>Date</i>	<i>Student</i>	<i>Find It</i> PCA witnessed	<i>Provide It</i> What was said to the student	<i>Don't Plan</i> <i>It</i> Where/How it took place	<i>Notes</i> (e.g., response of student – immediate or delayed; self- reflection)
Example: 10/16	Jayvon	Helpfulness	“You were helpful when you picked up Mason’s book that dropped from his hands. That was cool.”	Hall duty before lunch.	He smiled.
Most common PCA I find & provide:					
Other themes that emerge over time:					

FIGURE 1

Character Education using Positive Causal Attributions Training (PCAT): Teacher Self-Evaluation

essence, investigations of spontaneous character education using PCAT should be implemented with a measured tone.

IMPLICATIONS

Due to the current lack of empirical evidence using spontaneous character education using PCAT, there are several implications for future

investigations. First, implementing such an approach to character education would be no small task for teachers. They would need to develop a highly sensitive “eye” for the general and particulars of human nature. Therefore, as suggested by DeRoche and Williams (1998), Milson (1999), and Ryan (1997), educator preparation programs (EPPs) would be an early and fitting place for such specific training. Many EPPs are under the demands of

accrediting bodies that abide by the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC), which provides standards for teacher effectiveness. The InTASC standards require EPPs to train teacher candidates on critical dispositions (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2011), which are “habits of action and mind emanating from values and beliefs” (Ingles, 2014, p. 1). This mandate for EPPs of teaching “habits of action and mind” aligns with the precepts of spontaneous character education using PCAT where character is defined as acting on values. If teacher candidates become more aware of their own dispositions, they may be better able to identify their future students’ dispositions prior to their first teaching position.

Second, “buy-in” to spontaneous character education using PCAT needs to start with administration, in particular principals. In their joint review of the literature in 2013, the National Association of Secondary Principals (NASSP) and the National Association of Elementary Principals (NAESP) purport that principals affect student learning, teacher retention, and the priorities of the school. And, Habegger (2008) suggests that amidst the varying roles principals play, creating and maintaining a positive school culture is imperative. While NASSP, NAESP, and Habegger indicate the responsibility of school culture and performance does not rest solely on the leadership of the principal, this role is often the most influential. Therefore, if spontaneous character education using PCAT would be implemented in schools, principals would need to embrace it for its impact to trickle down to teachers and students.

Third, teachers who implement spontaneous character education using PCAT would need added support from administration. Teachers today feel immense pressure in the classroom, especially related to improving test scores (Walker, 2014). Therefore, the implementation of this new approach to character education would need to be as seamless as possible and in a manner that does not feel like just “another thing to do.” A seamless implementa-

tion may likely involve training using case study so teachers can develop an efficient “eye” for seeing values in action.

CONCLUSION

Educators play an essential role when implementing character education programs. Yet, the implementation of current character education programs remains in its own silo with weak effectiveness. Spontaneous character education using PCAT, though, offers an alternative to typical implementations. This new perspective and approach to character education draws positive attention to students’ personal values in action. The difference from typical implementation practices and how spontaneous character education using PCAT might be implemented is students see their positive attributes as the cause of positive behaviors they demonstrate during unplanned, routine school-based tasks. In other words, students see at a moment’s notice ways in which they act on controllable, unstable, positive causal attributions.

The large-scale impact of spontaneous character education might positively impact thousands of students’ core values and consequent self-efficacy and achievement in much the same way as it impacted Tyler, the basketball player in the vignette. Immediately after Tyler received the PCAT, he hustled down the court and scored a basket. His contribution helped his team win the game in the final seconds. No doubt, Tyler’s self-efficacy reached a new height during this particular game due to the PCAT he received. Using PCAT within a spontaneous education program could potentially have the same positive effect but on thousands of students. Imagine the effects of verbally and individually labeling each student in a district as *responsible, trustworthy, honest, ethical, persistent, compassionate, respectful, and self-disciplined* instead of *at-risk, below level, trouble maker, and bully*. Spontaneous character education using PCAT has the potential to offset students’ maladapt-

tive thinking perpetuated by in- and out-of-school stressors students experience. Spontaneously training students to think about why they enact goodness is definitely a strategy to score points toward a “win” in the school context and in the game of life.

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