

Running Head: POSITIVE EDUCATION AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

An Exploration of Teachers' Approaches to Positive Education and Character
Development: Curriculum Implementation, Assessment, and Outcomes

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Abstract

Adolescence is highly influenced by significant physical, biological, and psychological changes, as well as by one's environment; in turn, negative emotions such as depression, anxiety, and violent behaviour can arise if these influences are not constructive.

Additionally, not all children have family support or are raised in an environment that fosters their positive development. In this context, schools may play a vital role, especially through the implementation of positive education and character development programs. Although the current literature presents several studies in this area, there is no consensus in the scholarship regarding the most appropriate practice for implementing positive education and character development initiatives; moreover, there is scarce literature on assessment measurements in this domain. Based on this premise, I explored how an elementary and a secondary teacher at a private boarding school in Southern Ontario implement and assess positive education in the curriculum. Further, I examined the outcomes achieved through positive education by these teachers, as well as the related impact on students' character development. Using a qualitative thematic analysis, I was provided with substantial data through in-depth interviews with the participants. Findings indicate that teachers are the main individuals responsible for the development of positive education initiatives, and their preparedness and motivation to teach promotes positive outcomes. Furthermore, although no formal strategies to measure their outcomes were reported, the study findings reveal that participants' approaches to positive education – either through character strengths or the promotion of positive states, such as positive relationships, engagement, and positive emotions – have constructively influenced the development of students' characters.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The responsibility to develop a child's character starts with the family – inclusive of parents, grandparents, siblings, guardians etc. – which is also responsible for promoting constructive opportunities for their health, safety, and education. However, not all children have such family support or are raised in the environment needed to foster their positive development. Consequently, educational institutions are being increasingly recognized as important agents in promoting positive experiences for young people, considering that they spend a large part of their lives in school (Berkovitz, 2002; Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009).

School-based interventions, including positive education and character development programs, have received increasing recognition in educational institutions across Canada, the United States, England, and Australia. It is important to note that positive education and character development programs, although based on specific theoretical foundations, are interchangeable and complementary. For instance, *character development* programs are based on the nurturing of morality and virtues through education, and include teaching values and citizenship, as well as fostering positive strengths – *virtues* – to promote the development of students' characters. Complimentary to this, *positive education* is based on positive psychology for educational purposes, aiming to cultivate positive states through emotional and cognitive skills to ultimately foster positive emotions (Allis, 2007; Kristjánsson, 2012; Waters, Sun, Rusk, Cotton, & Arch, 2017). These interventions have been performed through different initiatives ranging from stand-alone approaches to comprehensive methods. Further, both types of initiatives have been yielding significant outcomes (Berkovitz & Bier, 2004; Seligman et

al., 2009), as will be presented later in this study. Based on this insight, I sought to investigate the strategies and methods used by educators in a private boarding school in southern Ontario that has an extensive and comprehensive approach to positive education.

Background to the Study

Pre-adolescent and adolescent stages are highly influenced by physical, biological, and psychological changes, as well as by one's environment in which the cognitive representation of the self and one's behaviour continue to develop (Bosacki, 2016). At this time, conflicts caused by physical, social, emotional, and moral transformations can lead to negative emotions, such as depression, anxiety, and violent behavior. Cloninger (2006) argues that medical science has failed to develop the state of happiness and well-being of the population because it emphasizes the disorders instead of enhancing positive emotions, character development, and life satisfaction. Similarly, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) recognize traditional psychology as a science that focuses on healing and repairing – thereby implying something is broken or in need of fixing – instead of building positive experiences that are grounded in a person's qualities. As a result, psychology scholars who seek a different approach to human behaviour – one that could build competency from people's strengths rather than purely correcting their weaknesses – developed the field of *positive psychology*.

Important components of character start to develop during the childhood years and continue through adolescence. According to Peterson and Seligman (2002), an individual may possess and express various character strengths that, when nurtured, may contribute to a fulfilling and meaningful life. Based on this premise, Rae and

MacConville (2014) suggest that, “character strengths can function as a substitute for the social safety net” (p.14). Simply put, countless adolescents do not have the opportunity to develop within a supportive and positive context due to a variety of circumstances, which thereby situates them in vulnerable situations. Hence, the cultivation of character strengths can allow adolescents to balance their life conditions by counteracting the negative influences, and consequently, help them to succeed.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2015), evidenced-based research on the effectiveness of positive education and character development programs in school settings, specifically for academic and social skills development, report a 15% reduction in violent behaviour in students across all school years, and a 29% reduction in violence among students in secondary school. Additionally, Seligman et al. (2009) present significant evidence throughout 15 years of research that resilience, positive emotions, and engagement can be taught in school. Further, they believe that programs grounded in positive psychology can promote skills and strengths, enhance students’ well-being and behaviour, and improve students’ engagement in learning and while fostering their achievement.

Nevertheless, Kohn (1997) argues that some moral and character education initiatives have improperly used strategies to teach rules and have mistaken the concepts of good character and good behaviours; for instance, many character and moral education programs teach by lecturing, rewarding, and punishing, confronting the child repeatedly with examples of good behaviours, “to drill students in specific behaviors rather than to engage them in deep, critical reflection about certain ways of being” (para 2). Furthermore, Berkowitz and Bier (2004) argue that character education initiatives fail to

monitor and assess the strategies they employ. In this respect, Khrantsova (2008) claims that the reason for the shortage of research on teaching character strengths in the classroom is related to its inherent subjectivity, what makes it difficult to assess and evaluate its outcomes; this is coupled with the fact that the subject is not easily integrated into traditional educational methods, as well.

Although the literature in this area provides some context, the absence of rigor and systematization in the current body of scholarship is a concern for researchers. There are numerous and competing definitions of and approaches to positive education and character development initiatives, and consequently, it limits teachers from implementing positive education and character development programs in their classrooms. To illustrate, research indicates positive results in curriculum-based programs and supports that they are effective when systematically implemented. Evidence from a study conducted by Waters (2011) reveals that including character strengths in the curriculum means that, “students are able to further develop their character strengths and social skills, as well as benefit from greater enjoyment, hope, engagement and academic confidence” (p. 83). Conversely, some educational scholars advocate that a cross-curricular and comprehensive approach is the most appropriate for these initiatives, especially, when focusing on teachers’ strategies (Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis, 2003; Waters, n.d., as cited in Pearson, n.d.). However, this places the responsibility for implementing such programs on teachers, who thereby must have the knowledge, motivation, and resources to appropriately design and institute their approaches, and, likewise, assess and evaluate their outcomes. Furthermore, as stated by Berkovitz, Bier and McCauley (2017), it is

challenging to find research on classroom-based, or even on school-wide, strategies that assess the impact of these initiatives on character development.

Purpose of the Study

Building on existing knowledge in the fields of positive education and character development, I sought to investigate methods and strategies employed by one elementary and one secondary teacher to implement and evaluate a positive education initiative in a private boarding school in southern Ontario, as well as to examine the outcomes of these programs, especially regarding their impact on character development.

My reasoning for exploring the methods and strategies employed by these teachers when implementing positive education in their daily teaching practices was underpinned by three motivations. First, there are multiple and conflicting definitions of and approaches to positive education and character development initiatives, as well as a shortage of literature on assessment measurements. Second, I hope to understand the implementation of these practices through teachers' lenses, given that the majority of those initiatives require the educator to be the main person responsible. Third, I am motivated personally and professionally to further understand the field of study of positive psychology, specifically as it is applied to education, and its related impact on students' characters.

Overarching Questions Under Instigation

The current study is guided by the following major research questions:

1. How do selected teachers from a private boarding school in southern Ontario approach positive education in the curriculum?
2. How do these teachers assess the positive education strategies that they

implemented?

3. What are the outcomes of these approaches and their related impact on students' character development?

Scope and Limitations of the Study

Based on the premise that the experiences and perspectives of two educators in a private boarding school in southern Ontario were explored through a qualitative methodology, the findings of this project are specific to this study when considering the participants' lived experiences within this particular context. therefore, although strategies to ensure credibility and transferability of the data were provided, conclusions and recommendations from this study may not be generalized to other educators and/or contexts without considering their particularities. It is relevant to note that despite this study's small sample size, a large amount of information was gathered and analyzed; as a result, teachers' experiences, insights, and opinions provide an array of ideas and suggestions to other educators.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the theoretical foundations of character and moral development and their connection with the field of positive psychology. Specifically, this chapter will discuss the current literature on positive education and their respective programs and initiatives, as well as the models and frameworks employed by educators who practice this approach.

What is Character?

Before examining the literature on character and moral development, it is important to reflect upon the following questions. Firstly, what is character, and how does character develop? And secondly, can character be taught and learned? Berkovitz (2002) argues that character itself is composed of a variety of elements that have their own development paces:

Character is a complex psychological concept. It entails the capacity to think about right and wrong, experience moral emotions (guilt, empathy, compassion), engage in moral behaviours (sharing, donating to charity, telling the truth), believe in moral goods, demonstrate an enduring tendency to act with honesty, altruism, responsibility, and other characteristics that support moral functioning.

(p. 48)

Simply put, character encompasses characteristics that influence an individual to act in either a 'right' or 'wrong' way. Accordingly, the York Region District School Board believes that, "good character forms the basis of healthy relationships and is a cornerstone of a civil, just and democratic society. Character development transcends all

individual differences, including religious, ethno-cultural and other demographic distinctions” (2014, p. 1).

In recent decades, virtues and character, and specifically character strengths, became the focus of a new field of study: positive psychology. *Positive psychology* focuses on investigating positive experiences, positive traits, and positive institutions that can work together to enhance individuals’ quality of life and inhibit pathologies (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In this field, character is plural and encompasses strengths and virtues separately (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Here, certain conditions allow us to either develop or block our strengths; these conditions can include educational opportunities, supportive families, safe neighborhoods, or the respective opposite (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Similarly, Berkovitz (2002) emphasizes that some psychological components can influence and support moral functioning, and consequently, emotions and behaviours.

Peterson and Seligman (2002) assert that good character is composed of six virtues: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. Historically, these virtues have been appreciated as essential characteristics by moral philosophers and religious thinkers. The scholars explain that virtues are expressed by processes or mechanisms that function as psychological elements – known as *character strengths*. Specifically, positive psychology classifies the virtues in 24 strengths, as shown in Table 1. Each of these characteristics may be an instrument or pathway to achieving a virtue. Likewise, there are pathways, called *situational themes*, that lead an individual to exhibit a specific character strength according to the context. These themes might be, for

instance, empathy, respect, or positivity, to name a few, and might manifest differently depending on the setting.

Table 1

Classification of Strengths and Short Descriptions

Wisdom and Knowledge: Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge

- *Creativity:* Thinking of novel and productive ways to do things
- *Curiosity:* Taking an interest in all of ongoing experience
- *Open-Mindedness:* Thinking things through and examining them from all sides
- *Love of Learning:* Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge
- *Perspective:* Being able to provide wise counsel to others

Courage: Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal

- *Authenticity:* Speaking the truth and presenting oneself in a genuine way
- *Bravery:* Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain
- *Persistence:* Finishing what one starts
- *Zest:* Approaching life with excitement and energy

Humanity: Interpersonal strengths that involve “tending and befriending” others

- *Kindness:* Doing favors and good deeds for others
- *Love:* Valuing close relations with others
- *Social Intelligence:* Being aware of the motives and feelings of self and others

Justice: Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life

- *Fairness:* Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice
- *Leadership:* Organizing group activities and seeing that they happen
- *Teamwork:* Working well as member of a group or team

Temperance: Strengths that protect against excess

- *Forgiveness:* Forgiving those who have done wrong
- *Modesty:* Letting one’s accomplishments speak for themselves
- *Prudence:* Being careful about one’s choices; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted
- *Self-Regulation:* Regulating what one feels and does

Transcendence: Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning

- *Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence:* Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life
- *Gratitude:* Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen
- *Hope:* Expecting the best and working to achieve it
- *Humor:* Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people
- *Spirituality:* Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of life

Note. Adapted from Peterson and Seligman (2004).

Although character has not been considered of key importance to psychologists for decades, many theorists have contributed to the positive psychology framework, including Edward Thorndike. According to Peterson and Seligman (2002), Thorndike has a behaviourist perspective that emphasizes that character is cultivated based on one's environment. Specifically, a behaviorist psychologist understands that quality of life requires more than simply eliminating problems. Another example is the developmental psychologist Erik Erikson, who believes that different psychosocial virtues and respective strengths are developed in stages, according to the individual's capability to resolve a challenge and move to next level. However, Erikson is very strict in supporting only one appropriate route or pathway through life. Similarly, other theorists, such as Piaget and Kolberg, have had a significant influence on the field of positive psychology, and the work of both psychologists will be discussed further in the next section of this study.

Character and Moral Development

Important elements of character start to develop during the childhood years and persist through adolescence. Early adolescence represents a period of intense transformations including neurobiological, physical, social, and moral developments, to name a few, in which the cognitive representation of the self and one's behaviour continues to develop (Berkovitz, 2002; Bosacki, 2016).

Developmental psychologists, such as Piaget and Kohlberg (Gibbs, 2003), argue that moral development is not only influenced by the environment and social interaction, but also through the different stages of cognitive development, and that mature moral judgement can motivate mature moral behaviour. Likewise, for Duska and Whelan (1975), moral development is, "not a process of imprinting rules and virtues but a process

involving transformation of cognitive structures. It is dependent on cognitive development and the stimulation of the social environment” (p. 7). For Hoffman (2000), the process of moral development is characterized by empathy, sympathy, and moral internalization.

The research into moral development began with Piaget. As highlighted by Ginsburg and Brandt (1988), Piaget believed that the main aspect of morality is a human’s inclination to follow a system of rules created to control individual behaviours. According to the researchers, Piaget’s early study – specifically, in his analysis of game rules – concluded that a child from 4 to 7 years-old does not follow the rules nor are they aware of them, but they claim that they obey them. This age range represents an egocentric stage of moral behaviour. Despite his early study emphasizing *egocentrism* as an inability to distinguish others’ perspectives from one’s own, Piaget’s later research recognizes *egocentrism* as a tendency or a preference instead of an incapability (Gibbs, 2003). Furthermore, Gibbs (2003) argues that children around 6 years-old have a superficial moral judgement, explained by both social and non-social cognition as children of this age have difficulties absorbing and maintaining multiple sources of information; in particular, they usually consider one situation at a time, and what is more relevant for them at that moment. Additionally, as acknowledged by Piaget, young children present egocentric or self-centered judgements, perceptions, and behaviours (e.g.: “I like her because she gives me things”). Subsequently, from 7 to 10 years of age, children start to develop a social character. At this point, the rules receive more attention because the child starts to understand the common sense of cooperation among partners. Children in this moral stage of *insipient cooperation* also begin to compete with each

other. Similarly, Duska and Whelan (1975) argue that this understanding and negotiation happens due to a child's social and intellectual development. Finally, at the *genuine cooperation* stage that starts at 11 or 12 years old, children develop a legitimate desire to create rules.

A child's judgement regarding right and wrong, as described by Ginsburg and Brandt (1988), is also determined by different ages and stages of development, whereby behavior is classified. As described by Ginsburg and Brandt, (1988) leveraging Piaget's studies on the inviolability of a child, at approximately 4 or 5 years-old, children believe that rules are unchangeable (*inviolable*) because they were created by someone with prestige and authority; however, they do not recognize when someone changes the rules. Second, from about 6 to 10 years-old, a child can identify modifications in rules, and they deny accepting them. Third, at 10 or 11 years of age, children start to perceive and understand that rules can be changed since they are fair and agreed-upon mutually

From these examples, it is important to note that a child develops an understanding of the purpose of rules through activities which involve cooperation. For Duska and Whelan (1975), as a child starts to interact with colleagues cooperatively, they develop mutual respect because they recognize their peers as equals. Contrastingly, in a relationship with parents, a child obeys instead of respects because there is no sense of equality.

Kohlberg, similarly to Piaget, does not concentrate on moral behaviour. For Kohlberg, focusing on moral reasoning provides more information about moral maturity than studying the behaviour; his cognitive approach recognizes that it is more meaningful to understand the reasons a person gives to justify an improper behaviour (*moral*

maturity) than the improper behaviour (the *action*) per se (Duska & Whelan, 1975; Peterson & Seligman, 2002).

Gibbs (2003) argues that Kohlberg extended Piaget’s studies beyond the basic age from the childhood years through to adolescence and even into adulthood, using an adaptation of Dewey’s views. In accordance with Duska and Whelan (1975), Kohlberg classifies moral judgement in six stages which are divided into three different levels based on Dewey’s trichotomy: *pre-conventional*, *conventional*, and *post-conventional*, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2.

Kohlberg’s Levels of Development in Relation to Moral Judgement

Pre-Conventional Level (Stages 1 and 2)	A child responds to cultural rules of right and wrong and understands these labels according to the consequences (punishment, reward, exchange of favors).
Conventional Level (Stages 3 and 4)	Children consider right and wrong at the social level. They are loyal to persons or groups they identify themselves (member of society).
Post-Conventional Level (Stages 5 and 6)	Children perceive right and wrong universally considering moral values and principles (justice). This stage reveals the self-chosen principles according to what is recognized by the society (social convention).
Metaphorical Level (Stage 7)	The metacognitive process of reflection and awareness (professional and existential concerns regarding one’s perspective on the moral life).

Some argue that the influence of the Deweyan trichotomy on Kohlberg’s work led to problems of misrepresentation; however, Kohlberg’s connection between metacognitive reflection and the development of moral maturity – which is also influenced by Dewey – is valid (Gibbs, 2003). Moreover, Peterson and Seligman (2004) argue that Kohlberg’s perspective on moral behavior neglects virtues and character strengths as elements of morality. On the other hand, Kohlberg suggests one further stage

of moral judgment and behaviour which goes beyond the standard intellectual development during the childhood years proposed firstly by Piaget. Gibbs proposes that this hypothetical *metacognitive* stage, as shown in Table 2, may emerge in adolescence and, “makes possible not only basic cognitive maturity but also existential awareness and the need for development in a post standard sense” (p. 73).

Similar to Piaget and Kohlberg, Hoffman believes that moral development – specifically, prosocial behavior – is motivated by biological and cognitive foundations, as well as by *socialization* which, for Hoffman, is the process in which moral internalization occurs (Gibbs, 2003; Hoffman, 2000). Furthermore, Hoffman’s perspective on moral development is based on empathy involving biological, cognitive, and social factors. For the psychologist, empathy is, “the vicarious affective response to another person... an affective response appropriate to someone else’s situation rather than one’s own” (Hoffman, 2000, p. 29-30).

From this point, Hoffman defines five stages of moral development, entitled *empathic distress*, that are built on each other. The first two stages include the *newborn reactive cry* (imitation and conditioning) and the *egocentric empathic distress* (triggered in reaction to another infant’s distress). The third stage, *quasi-egocentric empathic distress*, occurs when a child tries to help someone else who is in distress, but with their own perspective in view, they act in a way that would alleviate their own distress. The fourth and fifth stages encompass the *veridical emphatic distress*, when a child develops certain maturity, and the *emphatic distress in response to the situation of another*, when a child includes the other’s point of view and learns to distinguish the other’s inner states from their own. At this point, children present, “the basic elements of mature empathy

and continues to grow and develop throughout life.” (Hoffman, 2000, p. 72). Finally, in the fifth stage, they go beyond the specific situation and start to understand a wider context of one’s life experience. This broader stage is called *empathic distress beyond the situation* (Gibbs, 2003; Hoffman, 2000). Hoffman (2000) states that,

It seems likely that with further cognitive development, especially the ability to form social concepts and classify people into groups, children will eventually be able to comprehend the plight not only of an individual but also of an entire group or class of people. (p. 85)

In this context, Bosacki (2016) explains that as children reach adolescence, their behaviour changes from self-oriented to others-oriented; during this time, individuals develop a higher sense of social responsibility, moral care, justice, and empathy, and they start to take into account individual intentions and the respective consequences of their actions when making a moral judgement.

Although Peterson and Seligman (2004) argue that some studies on moral development, such as those conducted by Kohlberg, usually disregard the emotional and motivational characteristics of morality, it is evident that Hoffman’s theory presents morality through emotional lenses and their influence on moral behaviour. Furthermore, some researchers discovered that the inclination to engage in prosocial behaviour is an important stimulus of positive developmental outcomes such as academic achievement, self-esteem, and civic engagement (Luengo Kanacri et al., 2017).

Bosacki (2016) argues that there was little research in the past on social cognitive abilities considering the social context for emerging adolescents, as it was assumed that these capabilities were already developed and sufficiently mature by middle childhood.

However, recent studies are generating new knowledge and understanding on youth development, suggesting that, “emerging adolescents’ health and well-being are developed in part through interactions between biological factors and social interactions” (Call et al., 2002, as cited in Bosacki, 2016).

Youth Well-Being and Positive Psychology

Thompson and Swartout (2017) evaluate the developmental stage which encompasses the transition from adolescence to young adulthood as a period characterized by changes and choices regarding life goals, professional aspirations, and romantic relationships. Furthermore, research reveals that adolescents become very concerned with peers’ judgement and acceptance, as well as with social rejection, during this time. These factors may have both positive and negative impacts on youth behaviour and well-being (Bosacki, 2016; Thompson & Swartout, 2017).

In 2011, the Mental Health Commission of Canada (2015) estimated that 1 in 4 young people between 9 and 19 years-old was living with a mental health problem. This represents 1 million young people. Additionally, the Commission reported that an average of 10 people die by suicide every day in Canada. This is the second leading cause of death among Canadian youth aged from 15 to 24 years-old. It is important to highlight that mental health problems encompass mental disorders and symptoms of mental disorders that may impact on individual’s well-being. The Mental Health Commission states that, “evidence suggests that positive mental health is associated with a higher likelihood of completing school, enjoying positive social relations and having higher self-confidence, higher income potential, and increased resilience” (p. 1).

Another major issue in adolescence is related to violence. As reported by Statistics Canada (2012), young people are primarily responsible for criminal incidents. For instance, data shows that approximately 153,000 youths were accused of committing a crime in 2010. Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2015) estimates that 200,000 homicides occur annually among youth between 10 to 29 years-old. In addition to these data, millions of young people suffer violence-related injuries, including physical, emotional, sexual, or psychological violence, that may require emergency medical assistance and/or lead to a potential mental health illness. Bullying is another violence-related issue that is very common among young people. For example, surveillance studies conducted in over 100 countries demonstrated that around 42% of boys and 37% of girls aged 13-15 years-old were exposed to bullying at least once during the past 30 days (WHO, 2013, as cited in WHO, 2015). The organization explains that some risk factors may influence violence among adolescents and emerging adults:

Youth violence is influenced by risk factors at different levels and at different life stages of an individual. At the individual level, risk factors can include a history of involvement in crime; delinquency and aggressive behaviour; psychological conditions such as hyperactivity and conduct disorder; and the harmful use of alcohol and illicit drugs. (WHO, 2015, p. ix)

In the 1990s, psychologists started to raise questions about how to prevent young people from experiencing depression, violent conduct, or substance abuse if they are genetically vulnerable or are living in an environment that fosters these issues (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In recent years, it was discovered that humans' strengths – such as courage, future-mindedness, optimism, interpersonal skills, faith, work ethic,

hope, honesty, perseverance, and the capacity for flow and insight – can work to mitigate or protect against mental-illness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Likewise, Rae and MacConville (2014) suggest that, “character strengths can function as a substitute for the social safety net” (p. 14). In other words, adolescents who do not have a supportive and positive familial background, for whatever myriad of potential reasons, places them in vulnerable situations, but they could nurture and take advantage of their character strengths to counteract their negative environment in order to succeed in the face of adversity.

As stated by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), positive psychology, in contrast to traditional psychology that concentrates on healing and repairing, aims to build positive experiences by focusing on a person’s qualities. In other words, positive psychology is more than fixing what seems to be wrong or not working properly: it is about recognizing and nurturing the individual’s strengths and virtues.

Positive Education and Character Development

Broadly speaking, the literature on positive psychology suggests that *positive education* is the employment of positive psychology in educational settings. From this perspective, Norrish, Williams, O’Connor, and Robinson (2013) argue that *positive education* would be more properly portrayed as the association of, “positive psychology with best-practice teaching to encourage and support schools and individuals within their communities to flourish” (p. 148). For Kristjánsson (2012), *positive education* is the nurturing of positive traits to foster positive emotions for educational purposes. Similarly, Waters, Sun, Rusk, Cotton, and Arch (2017) maintain that *positive education* focuses on promoting positive states – for instance, positive emotions, positive relationships,

engagement, and gratitude – through emotional and cognitive skills to develop positive traits like character strengths and prosocial behaviour.

According to the Character Education Partnership, character development programs must embrace central values such as caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect (for self and others), and must be treated as a requirement in a school which is committed to developing character (Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis, 2003). Specifically, Berkovitz (2002) evaluates some criteria proposed by the Character Education Partnership as important elements to ensure the quality of these programs, including, “an explicit values agenda, schoolwide implementation, promoting positive relationships, and intrinsic motivation, defining character comprehensively, partnering with parents and community, and being data-driven” (p. 45). Additionally, Lickona, Schaps and Lewis (2003) argue that all aspects of schooling must be involved in this process, as well as the whole student:

A holistic approach to character development therefore seeks to develop the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects of moral life. Students grow to understand core values by studying and discussing them, observing behavioural models, and resolving problems involving the values. Students learn to care about core values by developing empathy skills, forming caring relationships, helping to create community, hearing illustrative and inspirational stories, and reflecting on life experiences. And they learn to act upon core values by developing prosocial behaviours (e.g., communicating feelings, active listening, helping skills) and by repeatedly practicing these behaviours, especially in the context of relationships (e.g., through cross-age tutoring, mediating conflicts, community service). As

children grow in character, they develop an increasingly refined understanding of the core values, a deeper commitment to living according to those values, and a stronger capacity and tendency to behave in accordance with them (para. 3).

In 2008, the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) published the *Character Development Initiative from Kindergarten to Grade 12*. This program aims, “to develop school environments where everyone – students and adults alike – treats each other with care and respect (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008a, p. 5). According to the OME, the initiative adopts four key elements: i) learning and academic achievement; ii) respect for diversity; iii) citizenship development; and iv) parent and community partnerships.

Waters et al. (2017) classify positive education and character development “movements” among several other initiatives with intrapersonal and interpersonal foci. For instance, according to the researchers, there are several school-based initiatives, with their particular frameworks focused on students’ positive states and well-being. *Resilience education, contemplative education, and self-regulated learning*, for instance, usually emphasize the cultivation of individual emotional and psychological strengths – the *intrapersonal* – whereas *character education* and *civics education* encompass, “a broader, more interpersonal and values-based perspective towards positive human development” (Waters et al., 2017, p. 247). As an intermediary of both poles of the spectrum, *socioemotional learning (SEL)*, *positive youth development*, and *positive education approaches* each incorporate either intrapersonal or interpersonal elements. It is important to highlight that the aforementioned movements have similar multi-dimensional approaches. For instance, *SEL* focuses on emotional and social competencies, including the development of self-awareness, self-management, as well as

relationship and responsible decision-making skills. Likewise, *positive youth development* aims to build personal strengths that create positive attributes in young people, while *positive education*, as earlier mentioned, focuses on cultivating positive states through emotional and cognitive skills to ultimately foster positive emotions and relationships (Hoffman, 2009; Water et al., 2017).

For Berkovitz (2002), although schools begin to influence a child later in life, they have a crucial role in children's development. Berkovitz believes that, "schools can influence a child's self-concept (including self-esteem), social skills (especially peer social skills), values, moral reasoning maturity, prosocial inclinations and behaviour, knowledge about morality, values, and so on" (p. 54). As reported by Cohen (2006, as cited in Seligman et al., 2009, p. 295), studies reveal that American parents recognize that preparing children to become responsible citizens is the main goal of education. Additionally, the author states that the majority of parents and educators acknowledge that the promotion of well-being and character is a significant feature of schooling. As mentioned earlier, evidenced-based research on the effectiveness of school-based interventions, specifically for academic and social skills development, reported a 15% reduction in violent behaviour in students across all school years, and a 29% reduction in violence among students in secondary school (WHO, 2015). Similarly, an action research project conducted by White and Shin (2016) in five primary schools in England, which involved the implementation of a mediated holistic program to foster prosocial attitudes and behaviour in children within multi-cultural classrooms, presented significant positive outcomes. Here, data were compared between three months prior to the intervention and

six months after it; the researchers observed positive effects on students' behaviour and school climate after the intervention (White & Shin, 2016).

PERMA and Visible Well-Being

Recently, countless positive education and character development initiatives have arisen and have received increasing recognition. Examples include the program Character Matters, developed by York Region District School Board in Ontario, Canada, and the Penn Resiliency Program (PRP), conducted by the Penn Positive Psychology Center of the University of Pennsylvania, United States. As with many other positive education initiatives, the latter is grounded in Martin Seligman's PERMA model of optimal well-being, which was created in 2011 and stands for the following five principles:

1. **P**ositive emotions (hedonic feelings of happiness);
2. **E**ngagement (psychological connections to activities or organizations);
3. **R**elationships (social integration, feeling cared and supported by others);
4. **M**eaning (connection to something greater and valuable for oneself); and
5. **A**ccomplishment (progress toward goals, sense of achievement). (Seligman, 2011, as cited in Kern, Waters, Adler and White, 2015)

In addition to the PERMA model, Values in Action (VIA) and its respective survey, the VIA Survey of Character Strengths, represents another instrument utilized by positive psychology initiatives. The VIA Survey of Character Strengths helps individuals identify their 24 character strengths, which are organized into six virtues. The character strengths and related virtues, detailed earlier in Table 1, were identified and classified by Martin Seligman and Christopher Peterson in 2004.

Human's attributes and behaviours have always been recognized as an important element for academic achievement. To illustrate, the creators of the first valid IQ test stated that academic achievement, "admits of other things than intelligence; to succeed in his studies, one must have qualities which depend especially on attention, will, and character" (Binet & Simon, 1916, as cited in Duckworth & Yeager, 2016, p. 2).

Moreover, in recent years, increased attention has been given to the measurement of personal qualities. Educational policies and practices have incorporated those skills in their goals, relating them to academic achievement. Specifically, Duckworth and Yeager (2016), using data and insights from longitudinal studies, support that self-regulation is indispensable to the achievement of positive results in all aspects of life, including the academic domain.

Yates and Youniss (1996, as cited in Luengo Kanacri et al., 2017) emphasize that schools are places for social interaction that can nurture character strengths. Additionally, schools are considered important spaces to foster positive facets of human functioning (Luengo Kanacri et al., 2017). Accordingly, Waters et al. (2017) acknowledge schools as being, "well-being-enhancing institutions" (p. 245) through positive education. Building on this idea, Rusk and Waters (2015, as cited in Waters et al., 2017) propose an evidence-based framework grounded in aspects of optimal psychological functioning (such as thought processes and emotional understanding) and social functioning (such as empathy and prosocial behaviour), "that lead a person to feel good, function well and do good" (p. 250-51). It can be argued that the underlying concept behind feeling good, functioning well, and doing good is reflected by the construct of *flourishing*, which has been emphasized as an important element in the field of positive education. To *flourish*

encompasses the notion that being psychologically well goes beyond the feelings of happiness because it also requires personal growth, living in accordance with values, and feelings and experiences usually related to the maximization of pleasure – for instance, eudemonism and hedonism). Correspondingly, Norrish et al. (2013) outline that,

Feeling good is consistent with hedonic approaches and includes a wide range of emotions and experiences such as feeling content about the past, happy in the present, hopeful about the future, and able to cope with difficult emotions and experiences in a healthy and adaptive way. *Doing good* is aligned with a eudaimonic approach and focuses on equipping students with the skills and knowledge that help them to thrive when faced with both challenges and opportunities. Doing good embodies functioning effectively across a wide spectrum of human experiences. Also important is a commitment to pro-social behaviours and choices that benefit others and the wider community (p. 149).

Furthermore, well-being has been considered a global educational goal in recent years for international organizations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). For example, the OECD (2018) envisions a commitment to individual and collective well-being for education in 2030: “We are committed to helping every learner develop as a whole person, fulfil his or her potential and help shape a shared future built on the well-being of individuals, communities and the planet” (p. 3). For Waters (2011), 21st century education requires schools to be prepared to develop students’ cognitive, social, and emotional skills in order to prevent mental issues, and

help them thrive socially and professionally. Attempting to address this goal, Waters (2017) recently developed the *Visible Well-Being (VWB)* model, which is, “a flexible approach for integrating student well-being into the learning process in any subject matter and at all year levels” (p. 8). As reported in this article, a pilot study on the VWB implementation showed that students demonstrated higher optimism, self-esteem, and life satisfaction, as well as lower stress. It is worthwhile to mention that despite the focus of this approach being well-being, its foundation is premised on positive education. Therefore, in order to implement this model effectively, it is imperative for teachers to have an extensive body of knowledge on positive education (Waters, 2017).

Implementing and Assessing Positive Education

Researchers support the idea that positive education as well as character development initiatives must be grounded in holistic and comprehensive approaches to learning, involving the entire school (Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis, 2003). The OME (2008b), for example, has recommended that the provincial character development initiative (*Character Development Initiative from Kindergarten to Grade 12*) should integrate a cross-curricular approach to learning, thereby reflecting attributes and values in schools’ policies, programs, and practices as a holistic approach to learning. Nevertheless, curriculum-based program, such as the Pen Resilience Program and the Strathaven Positive Psychology Program, have also demonstrated significant positive outcomes including improved strengths, social skills, and engagement in participating students. From these examples, Waters (2011) concludes that character strengths can be taught, especially when the program that is included in the curriculum promotes a stronger development of students’ character strengths, social skills, engagement, and

academic confidence. In contrast, Waters (n.d.) believes that although curriculum-based positive education programs have demonstrated effective results, they do not necessarily change the school culture because they do not have the same power to reach all the students as a teacher does (Waters, n.d., as cited in Pearson, n.d.). Moreover, Berkovitz, Bier, and McCauley (2017) argue that is a challenging task to find research on classroom-focused or school-wide strategies that assess the effective outcomes on character development. According to the researchers, the majority of studies focus on the review of existing programs rather than on the strategies per se; hence, this field still requires more research. The same is true for assessment strategies for these programs; there is scarce literature on positive education and character development measurement tools. The current literature presented only one recognized self-assessment instrument that is considered as being central to positive education – the VIA Survey of Character Strengths – and that intends to provide individuals with a tool to facilitate the identification of their strengths.

Building on this insight, it can be argued that different approaches to positive education and character development require different accountabilities from who is implementing the programs, especially from teachers. For instance, the informal nature of non-curriculum-based programs accentuates the responsibility of teachers to develop and execute appropriate strategies, as well as evaluate their results. Through this research study, I am thereby intending to contribute to the literature on positive education and character development by investigating methods and strategies employed by one elementary and one secondary teacher to implement and evaluate a positive education initiative in a private boarding school in southern Ontario. I also intend to examine the

outcomes of these programs, especially regarding the impact of their approaches on students' character development.

Literature Review Remarks

Conclusively, the literature on positive education and character development offers a variety of theoretical frameworks, although the two approaches are all significantly correlated to one another and are complementary. The literature review provided me with a better understanding of the whole framework applied in school-based interventions when utilizing either positive education or character development, as well as the relationship between the two approaches.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

This chapter outlines the research methodology and design used in this study, and describes how the data was collected and analyzed, including the recruitment of participants, the selection of instruments, and the processing of data. Ethical considerations and trustworthiness will also be discussed in this chapter.

Research Methodology and Design

The purpose of this study was to explore how selected teachers from a private boarding school in southern Ontario implement and assess positive education tenets in their daily activities, and to identify the results they are achieving, especially regarding the impact of these practices on students' character development. Thus, I chose a qualitative thematic analysis approach, specifically employing in-depth interviews in order to have a broad and deep understanding of the subjects. Johnson and Christensen (2004) assert that *qualitative research* methods are valuable to use to explore a phenomenon in-depth through open-ended inquiries, without prior expectations. Additionally, Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that *thematic analysis*, "provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data" (p. 5). Thus, in this study, the selected method allowed me to thoroughly explore the implementation of positive education from two teachers' experiences and perspectives.

Selection of Site and Participants

Considering that positive education is an emerging topic, I chose to interview two educators at a private boarding school in southern Ontario that has an extensive philosophy on positive education in its curriculum. I opted for *purposeful sampling* to

recruit the participants, which, in accordance with Plano Clark and Creswell (2015) enables the researcher to select the most appropriate subjects for the study. Thus, the criteria to select the participants was to a) identify two teachers from different grades from both the elementary and secondary level who b) had knowledge and experience in implementing positive education into their daily teaching practices, recognizing that they could be meaningful informants for providing significant data about the phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I was interested in interviewing one elementary teacher and one secondary teacher, and was fortunate that I was referred to two such teachers by the school's Positive Education Committee, both of whom were willing to participate. The first participant interviewed, Anne, teaches all subjects, except for French, Physical Education, and Music, to emerging adolescents aged 11-12 years-old at the elementary level. Anne has been studying positive education for approximately four years in order to have a broad understanding of its concepts and models. The second participant, Laura, teaches only Math to adolescents between 14 and 17 years-old at the secondary level of education, and she is a member of the school's Positive Education Committee.

The participants were contacted through email and invited through a formal Letter of Invitation, outlining the details of the study and ethical considerations, such as participants' rights to refuse to answer to any question and to withdraw from the study at any time, as well as information regarding confidentiality and data storage. The site of the interview was chosen according to the participants' preference. Anne chose to be interviewed at the school, while Laura, met me at Brock University, as the academic year was finished at the time of her interview.

Instrumentation

The interview instrument (see Appendix A) was developed based upon the findings from the literature review. The instrument included questions pertaining to strategies, approaches, evaluation, and outcomes in order to collect detailed information from the participants. Furthermore, significant themes that emerged from the current literature were chosen to nurture the participants' reflection around the topic, resulting in enriching answers (see Appendix B).

Three overarching research questions grounded the construction of the interview instrument, as follows:

1. How do selected teachers from a private boarding school in southern Ontario approach positive education in the curriculum?
2. How do these teachers assess the positive education strategies that they implemented?
3. What are the outcomes of these approaches and their related impact on students' character development?

The interviews were conducted based on the teachers' preference and availability and lasted 45 minutes, as expected. The interview with Anne occurred at the school site during her preparation time, while the interview with Laura was conducted at Brock University during her vacation time. Once the interview stage was concluded, the audio-recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim for posterior analysis. The interviews' transcripts were sent to the teacher participants for their revision and acknowledgment as a *member check*. No changes were made by the participants.

Data Analysis

After data collection and processing concluded, I began the data analysis both by-hand and by using NVivo software. The transcripts were reviewed several times for accuracy and familiarity. This stage, according to Plano Clark and Creswell (2015), allows the researcher to have a broad understanding of the data and organize the information based on ideas, strategies, feelings, and perspectives that emerge. The coding process utilized open and predetermined codes. The latter, also called *a priori codes* (Johnson & Christensen, 2004), emerged from the existing literature and were used to foster the participants' reflections during the interview. Regarding the *open coding* process, the researcher created new codes that were generated while examining the data through the lens of the general ideas or the participants' real words, also known as *in vivo codes* (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015). It is important to mention that pseudonyms were created to ensure participants' anonymity.

Questions and answers were explored in a holistic way by analyzing the participants' responses throughout the entire interview, not only focusing on the connection between questions and respective answers – in other words, not following a linear cause-effect relationship (Best & Kahn, 1998). In order to create meaning and recognize patterns, the data was analyzed, ranked, and narrowed into broad themes and transversal themes. I classified the broad themes into categories according to the major research questions, while the others were structured into sub-categories or were transversely analyzed. For example, the themes that emerged from the literature review, which were used to stimulate the participants' answers, were reported across the findings (*transversely*).

Ethics and Trustworthiness

As this study involved human participants, the ethical review application was submitted to the Brock University Research Ethics Board (REB), which granted me clearance to conduct this research (File: 17-225 BLAIKIE) (see Appendix C). The participants received a Letter of Invitation (see Appendix D) and were required to read and sign a Consent Form (see Appendix E) prior to their participation. Both documents outlined the purpose of the study and ethical details such as data storage, implied risks or benefits, anonymity and confidentiality matters, as well as participants' right to withdraw from the study at any time and/or to refuse to answer to any question. Additionally, appropriate provisions were taken to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality. First, a master list was created to link the participants' identifiers to their respective pseudonyms, which was destroyed after the completion of the study. Second, the consent forms were securely stored apart from the transcripts and audio-recordings. Third, only the researcher and the researcher's supervisor had exclusive access to the data and the respective documents.

Acknowledging that qualitative research encompasses an interpretative process in which researchers rely on their own, as well as on others', perspectives and experiences to gather information and to analyze data, some strategies are required to guarantee trustworthiness. In qualitative studies, the researcher builds knowledge from individuals' lived experiences and perspectives, thereby being based on the truth and honesty of the participants. Hence, to ensure that, "the researcher has accurately translated the informants' viewpoints into data" (Krefting, 1991, p. 219), I utilized *thick description*. For Tracy (2010), *thick description* is one of the main strategies to ensure credibility in

qualitative research because it allows the researcher to provide details and meaning in relation to the data through direct quotes from the participants. Consequently, the readers can establish their own meaning and draw their own conclusions, which enhances validity and reliability, as well.

Additionally, although I am not concerned with the generalization of the research findings, the use of *purposeful sampling* in this study, specifically “when the researcher provides a detailed description of the enquiry and participants were selected purposively” (Anney, 2014, p. 278), facilitates the transferability of the data. According to Schutt (2006, as cited in Anney, 2014) purposeful sampling technique “helps the researcher focus on key informants, who are particularly knowledgeable of the issues under investigation. Thus, as the selected participants were referred by the school’s Positive Education Committee due to their knowledge and experience and a detailed description of their answers was provided, the research findings can be transferred to other contexts.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of this study as structured by its three overarching research questions:

1. How do selected teachers from a private boarding school in southern Ontario approach positive education in the curriculum?
2. How do these teachers assess the positive education strategies that they implemented?
3. What are the outcomes of these approaches and their related impact on students' character development?

The research questions will be divided in three sections: i) Curriculum Approach to Positive Education; ii) Assessment of Positive Education; and iii) Outcomes and Impact on Character Development, with respective subsections. Furthermore, themes that emerged from the current literature and from the data will be discussed in relation to these three major research questions. An overview of the study findings will be displayed in a mind-map graphic representation, specifically related to the strategies employed by the teachers.

Curriculum Approach to Positive Education

Regarding the first question of this study, the participants were asked to reveal what approaches to positive education they use in their teaching practices. Likewise, they were requested to explain how they incorporate positive education into the formal curriculum. Attempting to answer these inquiries, related themes will be organized in subsections, as follows: i) Framework; ii) Instructional Methods; iii) Holistic Approach; iv) Activities and Assignments; v) Parent Engagement; and vi) Formal Curriculum. It is

important to note that these categories were not necessarily, or directly, asked for and/or answered by the participants; however, they emerged from the analysis as a way of more meaningfully structuring and organizing the research findings. Figures 1 and 2 outline the research findings, using the first major research question as the mind-map's central point.

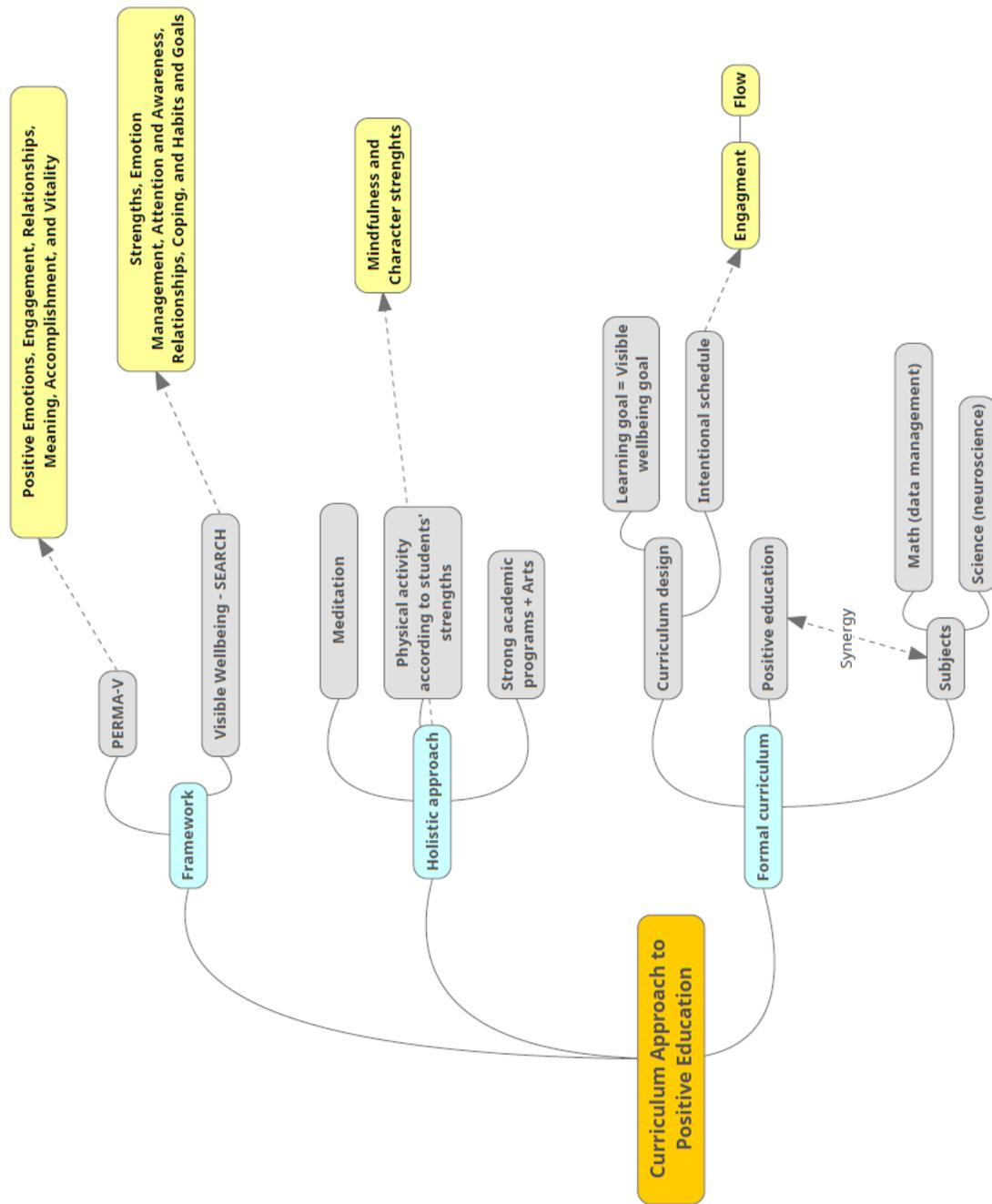


Figure 1. Representation of the Research Findings (Major Research Question 1).

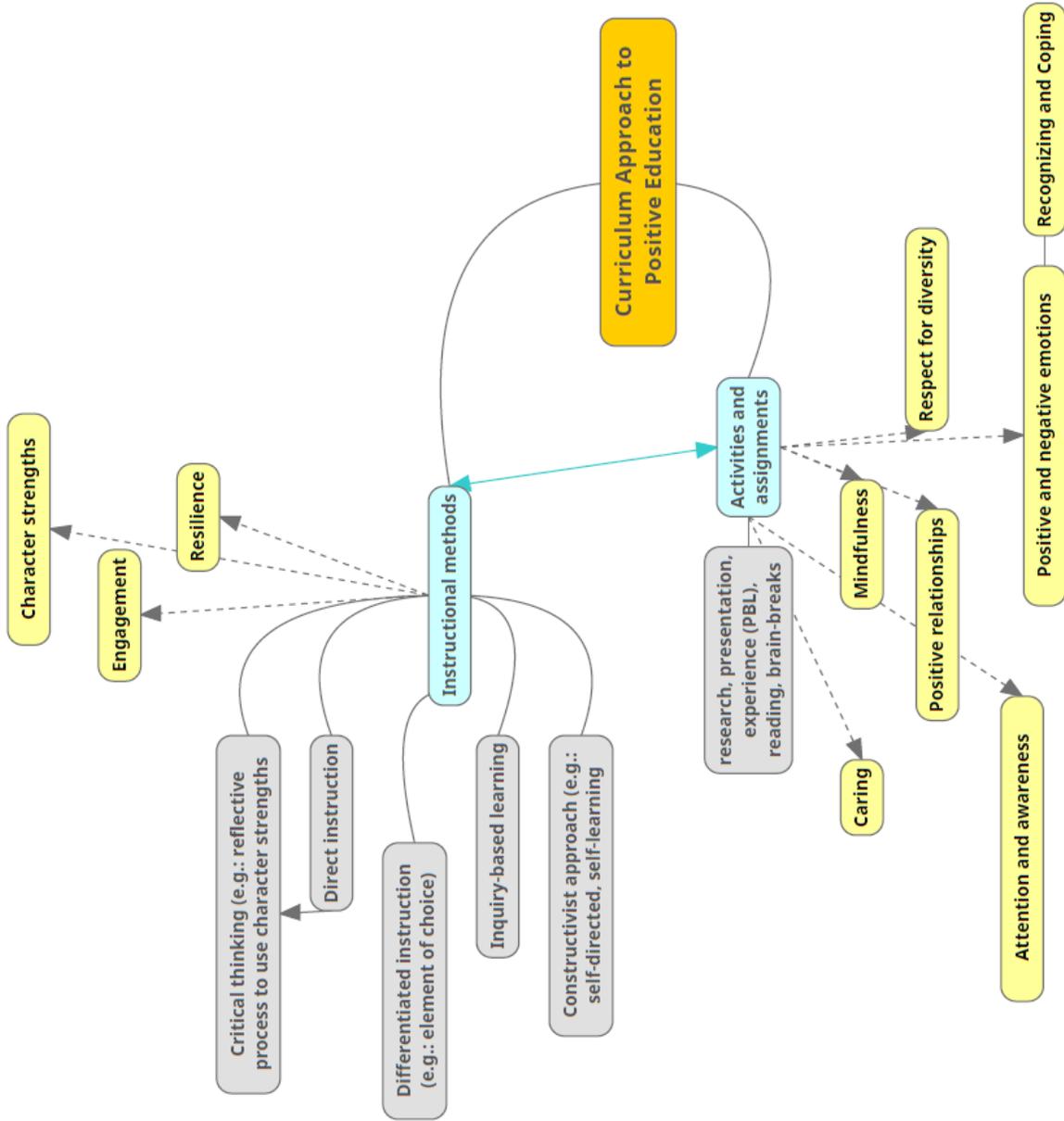


Figure 2. Further Representation of the Research Findings (Major Research Question 1).

Framework

From the interviews with the participants, general ideas emerged related to what model of positive education they base their strategies on. Both participants highlighted that when positive psychology was introduced in the school around three years ago, they mostly relied upon the PERMA-V model from Seligman (2002), which is composed of five core and one peripheral element of psychological well-being: i) positive emotions; ii) engagement; iii) relationships; iv) meaning; v) accomplishment; and vi) vitality. For instance, as a member of the Committee of Positive Education, Laura mentioned the PERMA-V model two times in different contexts: “what we did two years ago, was look at PERMA-V (positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment and vitality)... and what we did was just educate the faculty on how to promote positive relationships” and, “We talked about it 2 years ago, actually, when we started PERMA-V in positive education” – in the second instance, referring to an attempt to create assessment tools. However, in this current academic year, the participants’ teaching is being supported by the VWB framework (Waters, 2017)¹, in which they have received training. In this context, Anne stated,

In the beginning of the school year, last August, we received more training. Dr. Lea Water came from Australia, and we started doing the visible well-being training. We did her module of strengths. The first letter in her framework. Strengths was the first thing we started to incorporate in our practice.

In researching this framework, it was found that the VWB framework includes a sub-framework entitled *SEARCH* (Waters, 2017) – strengths; emotion management;

¹ Accompanying reference is adapted to protect the anonymity of the participating school and its participants.

attention and awareness; relationships; coping; and habits and goals). Although Laura mostly bases her teaching strategies upon the VWB (SEARCH) framework, she is unsure about its direct relationship with positive education when implementing it; this is evident when she states, “I don't know if it directly seems like positive education when you go through it, but we have that connectin with Lea Waters.”

Instructional Methods

Regarding instructional methods, the principles of critical thinking were salient throughout both interviews. For instance, Anne explained that she helps students to identify their character strengths through a reasoning and reflective process, making them recognize, be aware of, and know how to use their strengths in different situations. For example, she instills in her students the ability to think about what it means to have gratitude as a strength, or to have a love of learning as a strength. As an elementary teacher, Anne mentioned that making students reflect on personal experiences is extremely important: “Especially in times of conflict, what strengths did you use? What strength could you have used? That could change the results of the scenario.” Likewise, Laura described that she prompts students to think critically using direct instruction. For example, she teaches them the foundations of positive education and engagement by provoking their reflection and guiding them during the process. Laura illustrated this by asking, “What does an engaged math student look like? What does an engaged math teacher sound like?”

Additionally, the *differentiated instruction* approach – which allows teachers to customize students’ lessons and assessment according to their learning styles, readiness, preferences, and interests (Tomlinson, 2014) – was reported by one of the participants to

have promoted student engagement. Laura emphasized the importance of personalizing the instruction she gives, and providing students with the opportunity to choose:

It is important to find a way of getting students engaged in compulsory subjects that maybe they do not like... like math. Giving them choice, choice in what they are studying, choice in how they represent what they are studying... In Grade 11, they had the opportunity to choose the way of being assessed. We did an oral assessment, which is like crazy in math, but some kids can really explain the math they are doing but not, necessarily, can show the work writing down perfectly. I have kids that are super engaged in having an interview with me and talking about the math rather than sitting down and doing a test.

Additionally, Laura exposed a preference for self-directed instructional techniques because she believes that it promotes engagement and resilience; she stated, “You give the opportunity to the students figure a problem out by themselves, and to fail, to struggle, and, then, to succeed.” Laura also discussed placing herself in the student’s position, noting that, “instead of you stand up and teach me something that I am totally not engaged, I am just soaking and then writing notes... but when you are learning on your own and you are working with your peers it brings engagement as well.”

In contrast, Anne revealed that in order to promote student engagement, she attempts to design meaningful tasks for the students based on their own inquiries: “as much as possible, I try to design lessons that are very engaging... and that are based on their questions when the kids are driving the enquiry.” This resonates with the *inquiry-based learning* method, which, as stated by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013),

“places students’ questions, ideas and observations at the centre of the learning experience... moving students beyond initial curiosity to a path of regular inquiry” (p. 2).

It is worthwhile to consider that engagement is a significant positive construct proposed by Seligman (2011) through the PERMA model. An empirical study conducted by Kern, Waters, Adler, and White (2015), for instance, noted the application of the PERMA framework, which includes measures for school engagement, is associated with absorption, interest, and life engagement; the authors write that, “psychological interest related to greater commitment to and engagement in school. It is also related to a greater sense of hope. Engagement may reflect an active approach to life and should remain a focal area of research” (p. 268).

Holistic Approach

Insights drawn from the scholarly literature were supplemented by the interviewees’ responses regarding the integration between mind, body, and emotion, thus reflecting a holistic approach. Anne affirmed, for instance, that they try to incorporate activities to embrace the whole child when teaching at her school. According to her, the school has strong academic programs and while they hope that students work hard to succeed, at the same time, the institution valorizes their spirituality and well-being: “kids start their day in the chapel, we talk about a variety of religions, and the Chapelmen tries to incorporate positive education where he can.” Regarding her approach, Anne stated that she teaches students to love being physically active, while exploring their own strengths to find the most appropriate activities, “because not everyone is a soccer player.” Additionally, she mentioned that they ensure that students maintain a close relationship to art; for example, the pupils have 50 minutes of music class daily. For

Anne, she stated that, “I think there are a lot of connections between positive psychology and arts” because art allows individuals to express themselves.

Another important element of the holistic approach to positive education is related to mindfulness and breathing. For both participants, the practice of mindfulness is very important because it enhances the students’ capacity to concentrate, normalize, and control their emotions. As Laura explained, “I come into class and some ask to meditate because they have a test and want to meditate before or when they are tired from lunch they ask to meditate.” Nevertheless, to achieve positive results, Laura argued that the teacher must consider students’ interests:

I had one class who chose meditation because they love meditation, but another class loves researching people that inspire them and they like talking about quotes. And it just depends on the group, and I think it is super important just knowing that, then you can reach the whole child holistically if you understand them and their differences.

Activities and Assignments

Regarding the assignments and activities included in their practice, Anne discussed a variety of activities that she develops with the students, summarized below:

1. Research on and presentation of parts of the brain and the related emotion connected with each part, in which students were able to learn how to control a particular emotion (*amygdala hijack*), especially using mindfulness and breathing;
2. An experience from which they learned about the brain and emotion in order to foster positive emotions in others (*project-based learning*);

3. Reading assignments, in which she incorporates special topics via literature (for instance, a respect for diversity); and
4. Brain-break interventions to make students refocus when their energy and productivity are dropping.

Additionally, Anne's students created a visual representation of themselves with their top five strengths, which are all displayed on their classroom bulletin board.

Meanwhile, Laura stressed the relevance of three activities, summarized below:

1. An assignment in attention and awareness, based on Water's SEARCH framework (2017), developed in Data Management class, where students had to conduct research by tracking their moments of distraction, collecting data and suggesting solutions on how to eliminate their distractions and enhance their awareness in class;
2. An activity that they named as "Digital Free," in which they could not use any type of technology for five minutes and had to engage in conversations with their classmates in order to promote caring and positive relationships; and
3. A session of videos to provoke different emotions in students who had, afterwards, to identify where they felt each emotion in a map of a human body.

The latter was implemented as a special topic for Positive Education Day, which is the reason why it is not related to Laura's teachable subject (math). For Laura, this was an interesting way to make students identify and recognize positive and negative emotions and how to cope with them; she explained that, "it was cool to see they talking about smiling and their eyes getting smaller because they smiled so big, their cheeks hurting, but some kids recognized a warmness in their heart, which was really cool to feel."

Regarding negative emotions, Laura, as a secondary teacher, noted that, “it is not necessarily bad when we have negative emotions, but just recognizing where they are, what they make you feel like, and how to cope with them. Coping is a big thing to deal with emotions.”

Formal Curriculum

This section intends to complement the previously summarized information regarding the teachers’ approaches to positive education by adding details related to the formal character of teaching based on positive education. Although this program is not curriculum-based, in regard to it being designated as a specific teachable subject, it is evident that both Anne and Laura presented interesting strategies to incorporate positive education into the formal curriculum. As previously mentioned, through the science – for instance, brain-based research – mathematics – for example, data management – Anne and Laura, respectively, utilized their formal curriculum as a springboard for teaching positive education.

Conversely, however, Laura argued that positive education activities might not need to be approached formally:

It's important not making it in the formal curriculum. Like I was saying in that example when they were watching videos and mapping in their body, it was amazing, but I think we lost some of them because we sat them down and we did the activity. There are ways to build this into your everyday life.

Here, the secondary math teacher believes that positive education can be learned in different ways. To illustrate, she explained that teachers can say, “this is how I live my

life, I think it's effective, this is what I do. Do you want to try it? What do you like? What don't you like? How can we build your well-being and help your well-being?"

For Anne's views on curriculum design, she sees that the school intentionally plans the students' schedules in large blocks of time, thus allowing students to remain with their homeroom teachers without interruption (for instance, before switching to another class). For this reason, Anne designs her lessons by providing a sequence of learning opportunities to promote moments of engagement, and consequently, of flow. Moreover, the integration between the formal curriculum and VWB provides an opportunity for VWB to have a learning goal just as lessons do in the classroom.

Parent Engagement

Even though parent engagement is not directly related to the teachers' own approaches in positive education, it impacts their strategies and outcomes. According to the participants, as part of the implementation of positive education through the VWB program, the students' parents participated in the first meeting held by the school, with the participation of Lea Waters. At that moment, the parents had the opportunity to learn about positive psychology when applied to education, and, more specifically, about the program. Anne explained that the parents also participate in morning sessions hosted at school every six weeks in order to keep them informed about and aligned with the teachers' activities. Additionally, they receive a "Parent's Kit" containing short lessons that they might use with their children at home. For Anne, it is essential to ensure that home and school have the same strategies; she stated, "it is important that the message at home support the message at school." Similarly, Laura recognizes the relevance of having parents aligned and engaged; however, the majority of secondary school students

are from other cities or countries, and they live by themselves at the campus residence – and thus, their parents do not, necessarily, participate in those meetings.

Assessment of Positive Education

The participants were asked to explain how they are assessing the positive education approaches they are implementing. The Figure 3 visually represents the research findings for the second major research question.

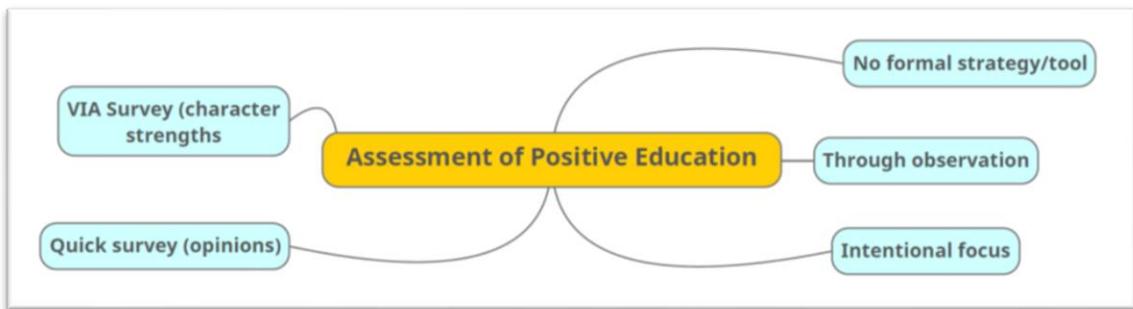


Figure 3. Representation of the Research Findings (Major Research Question 2).

According to Laura, there is no formal strategy to measure what is being developed. Laura explained: “We talked about it 2 years ago, actually, when we started PERMA V in positive education and we couldn't figure out something that would represent it accurately, it's tough, it's really tough.” On the other hand, she revealed that in some occasions, she does a quick survey to gather students’ opinions about an activity. Similarly, Anne declared that they do not possess any tool to assess their results, however, she recognizes the VIA Survey as a significant tool to assess students’ character strengths, which will be applied annually. Furthermore, Anne argued that results are recognized when you change your focus and start to pay attention to different things “it is a matter of paying attention with intentional focus...sometimes you might not recognize but, actually, when you just stop and take the time to them you realize that are lots of good things going on.”

Outcomes and Impact on Character Development

Thirdly, in relation to the last research question of this study, the participants were asked to describe any outcome(s) that they can recognize from the activities executed, as well as if they identify any impact of their positive education approaches on students' character development. Figure 4 depicts the study findings related to the third major research question.

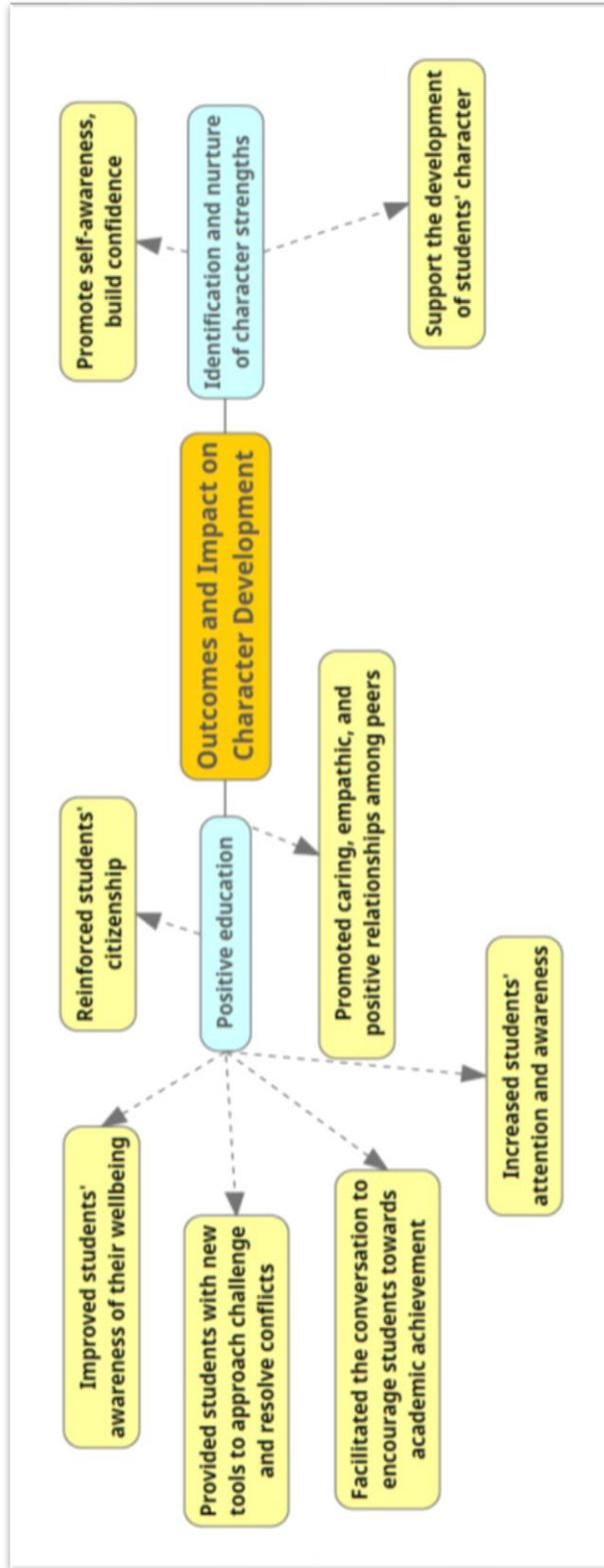


Figure 4. Representation of the Research Findings (Major Research Question 3).

As detailed previously, the participants are not supplied with any formal strategy to evaluate their activities' outcomes; as a result, there is no clear evidence related to character development. Nevertheless, the educators acknowledge that identifying and nurturing the students' character strengths through positive education provides them with a great support towards character development. For Anne, working with students through their character strengths means the following: “[it] helps the child sees their own individuality and their own value in being who they are and valuing what their strengths are, and not trying to be someone else. Building their confidence in who they are.” Furthermore, both teachers rely on their observations of students' behaviours and development. The following excerpts from the transcripts of the interviews reveal significant outcomes recognized by the participants.

Firstly, Anne expressed that while resorting to self-assessment, she recognized some outcomes: “I think that I am more understanding when there is a conflict I am dealing with kids in social situations.” Additionally, the elementary teacher explained that if you do something intentionally and pay attention to it, it may flourish:

If you notice, recognize, name things, they grow, because kids want to get on the action, kids feel good about whatever they are doing that you are noticing... that whole positive cycle makes them feel good and they want to do it again. They have started to approach things differently; their frame references changed. If they experience a challenge they have new tools to approach the challenge.

In regard to students' behaviour, Anne said the following three statements: i) “in a group that it is working together and experiences conflicts... they have more strategies to work through it and afterwards just to resolve that tension;” ii) “I think the kids are more

understanding of each other;” and iii) “they are able to resolve their conflicts better because of this whole positive consciousness.”

Considering academic performance, Anne does not have quantitative data to sustain any results; however, she recognizes positive education as an important support to teaching: “I think that related the kid’s mindset towards learning, especially those kids who have to work a little bit harder, that is an easier conversation when you frame into positive education.”

Laura reported some outcomes more precisely. According to the participant, in terms of caring and positive relationships, something unexpected happened during one of the activities that she usually implements:

One day, I said ok we are going to do 5 minutes of the Digital Free activity, and there was a girl sitting alone and another girl in the class who was so quiet, always keeps herself, she just got up and sat beside the other student and talked to her. That was like, you feel comfortable having a conversation with this girl sitting alone and now she is not and now she is going to go through the 75 minutes class and have that friend beside her who she just built a connection with right now.

Regarding attention and awareness, after the conclusion of the assignment where students had to track their distractions and suggest solutions that aimed to increase their attention and awareness in class, one of Laura’s students recognized that the cell phone was her distraction. Laura recalled,

I had one student who stopped bringing her cell phone to the class which I think that was a huge one. That is one out of 40, but I think if I can make a difference with one, it is better than none.

In this context, she added that, “they are having the conversation like ‘stop being distracted, I see you on your phone’, like, ‘bring back your attention’. They are using those key-words. I was super amazed that they actually soaked something in.”

Interestingly, Laura did report that when she used the attention and awareness activity in another class, the result was negative:

I don't know what happened, but I heightened their distraction... I don't know if I should have tweaked by knowing the class, like, this class does this assignment and the other should do something different that hopefully would give the same outcome, but it was really weird.

In order to receive feedback from the students, Laura did a quick survey in her class to collect their opinions about meditation. According to Laura, the majority of the class raised their hands when asked if they were genuinely enjoying the practice:

It was awesome to see, like, even those students who were super difficult for it, they tried it, they put their phones away and they put their laptops away. We are a super tech school, so they always have their laptop and always have their phones.

Furthermore, Laura evaluated that her students are more aware of their well-being and of the relationship between mind and body and the importance of mindfulness as a result of her teaching practice. The high-school teacher mentioned some examples of how it is happening:

They were able to recognize when they needed to take their well-being break. They came into classroom after lunch and they said: ‘I want to meditate right now’, and we did, they were super engaged and super on it for the rest of the class. Or they said: ‘I think we need to meditate at the end of this class because we have a test in our next class and we need to be ready and then we did that, and they were on it for the entire class.

Lastly, another outcome discussed by Laura is related to the reinforcement of students’ citizenship. Despite not being implemented directly through positive education, secondary school students must be engaged in community services for 10 hours every year during the four years of high-school. According to Laura, some students are quite engaged with this mandated policy: “I think some students don't buy it, but we have other students who come up with their own community services activities, which is amazing, and they run it on their own, which is also amazing.”

Additional Findings

It is worthwhile to mention some additional insights that were garnered during the analysis phase of this study. Firstly, the participants spoke about the challenges they have faced throughout the development of the activities. In addition, other themes that emerged from the data are related to the teacher’s role, beliefs, and preparedness.

Challenges

Beginning with challenges, Anne believes that the major challenge she has been facing is related to alignment, noting that, “I think that gets everyone on the same page is a challenge.” In a more detailed description, she explained,

I think we have been at this 3 or 4 years, reading about PERMA, reading about different kind of models, and trying to understand how to fit it in your own life. Because if you don't believe it, the kids will not believe. Finding the strategies that work for you and being genuine in how you will delivery because kids are smart, and they will detect it if you don't believe in what you are telling them. I think this aspect is a challenge because I like to read and to learn, but not all the faculty members are like that.

Anne emphasized, as well, that having students coming from all over the world is a significant challenge to enacting positive education when considering the diverse cultural context, as she said, "we have kids coming from those kinds of environment where it is not safe to share your feelings." Here, she recommended the following:

I think we have to lay our foundation very strongly at the beginning of the school year to make sure that the community feeling is really strong, so, that people feel safe, and can be vulnerable, and grow, and be reflective.

In contrast, Laura found that her major challenge relates to students' particularities. As Laura teaches in different grades and classes, she has had different results for the same strategies implemented across different groups of students. For instance, by developing the attention and awareness activity, whereas one class had positive outcomes, as described earlier, the other group presented the total opposite; Laura explained that, "I heightened their distraction... I was kind of disappointed because my one class was kind of rock stars and I was so proud, look at you guys, and the other one, oh my god, what did I do?"

Teachers' Roles, Beliefs, and Preparedness

A second theme that emerged from the interviews was regarding teachers' roles, beliefs, and preparedness in enacting positive education in the classroom. Firstly, Anne believes that teachers can help students understand that life is full of challenges and to be prepared to deal with those challenges. The participant explained that she tries to build positive relationships with each of her students and to create an open and positive space for them to have conversations and share their feelings. Anne mentioned that she starts the school day, and the year, as well, by building a strong base of positive emotions, a sense of community, and belongingness: "I spend a lot of time at the beginning of the school year establishing the classroom community and making sure that it is a caring environment."

Conversely, Laura acknowledges the teacher as being a role model who expresses positive emotions and behaviours to serve as an example for the students. She explained that, "I like to think of myself as a super positive person, so I think that just bringing that energy to class every day, the students fit on that." Laura also believes in scaffolding students gradually, noting that it is important to, "have a caring relationship with the students and show them that you care, they will be more invested in show that caring to others. I think that modelling it is probably the best for them."

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter presents an overview of the study findings and a discussion of them regarding their correlation to the three research questions which guide this project. Further, the literature reviewed in Chapter Two will be revisited to support the discussion. Finally, conclusions around the analysis and an outline of the study's recommendations will be provided.

As discussed throughout the previous chapters of this study, I sought to investigate the approaches used by two teachers at a private boarding school in southern Ontario, which holds a strong philosophy in positive education. These teachers were considered knowledgeable in the subject area, and were thus deemed experienced, key informants for providing significant data about the phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). As a result, I thoroughly conducted and analyzed the data regarding the participants' views and practices that emerged from the in-depth interviews. The findings are divided into three major categories in order to appropriately answer the major research questions: i) Curriculum Approach to Positive Education; ii) Assessment of Positive Education; and iii) Outcomes and Impact on Character Development.

Discussion

It is important to note that the participants teach students ages 11 to 17 years-old, an age when a child already understands fairness, community, and empathy (Berkovitz, 2002; Bosacki, 2016; Ginsburg and Brandt, 1988; Hoffman, 2001). Additionally, at this time, adolescents start to develop a higher sense of self-awareness and social responsibility, and they begin considering individuals' intentions, and the respective consequences of their actions when making a moral judgement. Thus, this age range

creates an opportunity for teachers to explore a variety of strategies for implementing positive education that can lead to positive outcomes among students.

Curriculum Approach to Positive Education

Regarding the first research question of this study, the participants noted a more intense fervour for using positive education during the current school year in comparison to the last two years it was used. Overall, the participants base their instructional strategies on the PERMA-V and VWB approaches, and more predominantly the latter. A framework guiding a character or positive education program is a conceptual system and an array of ideas that connect to a research base (Berkovitz & Bieer, 2017). This means that there is a theoretical foundation guiding the teachers in their use of strategies; mainly, the VWB approach is a flexible model that seeks to integrate student well-being into the learning process through teachers' practices – though it is not curriculum-based, as clearly stated by Waters (2017). It is important to highlight that within the VWB model, a specific sub-framework – SEARCH, as previously described – was identified during the interviews by the participants; however, no related literature on this sub-framework was found. Another point to be considered is that even though positive education is the foundation of the VWB approach, Laura argues that she does not clearly recognize this connection when developing activities in attention and awareness; more broadly, however, she recognizes VWB as a positive education strategy because it is related to Lea Waters and her respective framework. Therefore, it can be questioned if the VWB framework was properly instructed to the participants considering its alignment with positive psychology.

The findings of this study indicate that both participants have a cross-curricular and comprehensive approach, as recommended by Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis (2003). Both Laura and Anne also presented student-centered approaches to positive education and a combination of different instructional methods, such as encouraging group work, collaborative learning, and peer-learning. Both participants use these approaches to promote students' engagement, positive relationships, as well as to teach them how to identify, recognize, and foster positive emotions in both the individual self and in others. From this example, it can be argued that the participants' educational strategies are aligned with the literature on developmental psychology, which explains that as a child starts to interact with peers cooperatively, they develop mutual respect because they recognize their peers as equals (Duska & Whelan, 1975). Thus, as the participants' students are already in a developed stage of interaction, it facilitates the stimulation of positive states, such as emotions and relationships. Regarding the participants' self-perceptions, Anne recognizes the teacher as a friendly support for students, whereas Laura considers the educator to be a role model.

When analyzing the activities and assignments developed by Anne and Laura, either in the elementary and the secondary levels, it is evident that the teachers integrate positive education into the curriculum through official subjects, such as the sciences and math. This synergy is proposed by Waters (2017), who supports that the VWB allows for the incorporation of well-being education into any curriculum. Moreover, the integration of formal curriculum and positive education through VWB allows for well-being to have a learning goal just as lessons have objectives, as well.

Finally, as suggested by the current literature – specifically, in character education – the participants in this study incorporate holistic strategies of positive education to reach the whole child through the identification and enhancement of students’ character strengths and practices of mindfulness. These practices prepare the students physically, mentally, and spiritually, and impact the school widely (Berkovitz, 2002; Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis, 2003; OME, 2008b).

Assessment of Positive Education

The positive education topic of this study does not involve any formal strategy of measurement, assessment, or evaluation. This assertion was clearly stated by both participants. Nevertheless, I recognized the use of some tools by the participants that have provided them with the identification of outcomes, as follows:

- **Observation and Intentional Focus:** Although not applied systematically, it is an effective way to gather data in a natural environment, allowing for natural behaviours to come to the fore (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). The participants reported some outcomes, which will be discussed in the next section, through intentional observation.
- **Quick Survey:** Similar to above, although not applied systematically, it is an appropriate instrument to collect data. The secondary level teacher, Laura, utilized this tool to measure student engagement with one of her lessons.
- **Values in Action Survey (VIA Survey of Character Strengths):** Scientifically validated by researchers, the VIA Survey is considered a central instrument of positive psychology (VIA Institute on Character, n.d.). As acknowledged by the elementary level teacher, Anne, this is an important self-assessment tool to use

to assess students' character strengths on an ongoing basis, providing teachers with substantial information on their pupils' characters.

Although there is a shortage of literature on positive education and character development assessment tools, the psychology literature presents a variety of measurements strategies that could be used for participants to assess their approaches, including the Children's Social Behavioral Scale – Teacher Form (CSBS-T), EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Well-Being, SRM – Socio-moral Reflection Measure (Crick, 1996; Gibbs et al., 1984, as cited in Peterson & Seligman, 2002; Kern, Waters, Adler, & White, 2015).

Outcomes and Impact on Character Development

Thirdly, as teachers, Anne and Laura are not supplied with any formal strategy to measure, assess, or evaluate their activities' outcomes; consequently, there is no clear evidence related to character development that emerges from their practice. However, both participants identified several positive results through their intentional and constant observation of students' behaviour.

Firstly, Anne, the Grade 6 teacher in the study, was subjective and intuitive while reporting the outcomes, mentioning general perspectives on students' conduct, whereas Laura, the high school teacher in the study, was objective and detail-oriented, citing specific facts related to students' behaviours. Anne revealed that her approach to positive education a) facilitated the conversation with students towards academic achievement, especially with those who need to work harder; b) provided students with new tools to approach challenges and resolve conflicts; and c) promoted empathy and positive relationships among peers. Likewise, Laura reported that her approach to positive

education a) improved students' awareness of their well-being, especially when they need to relax and concentrate; b) promoted caring and positive relationships; c) increased students' attention and awareness in class; and d) reinforced students' citizenship.

On the other hand, challenges were also reported. For Anne, these challenges are related to alignment of strategies among all actors in education including teachers and staff, while for Laura, the challenges were seen with respect to understanding the students' differences, needs, and interests, and in adjusting the activities according to the different groups of students. From both examples, then, it can be argued that the lack of systematization of positive education initiatives in general might be the main challenge for educators in implementing their strategies.

With respect to character development, the findings of this study reveal that, overall, the identification and nurturing of character strengths is considered to be an important element to achieve students' development. Working through character strengths promotes students' self-awareness and confidence, and consequently, influences the development of their character. Furthermore, Berkovitz (2002) asserts that the promotion of positive relationships is one of the requirements to guarantee the quality of character development initiatives. On the other hand, it is worthwhile to reinforce that systematic measurement tools should be incorporated in the approach to evaluate and reveal evidence from the effectiveness of these practices – otherwise, the initiative may not endure or be adopted by other educators.

Conclusion

The fields of positive education and character development, although based on specific theoretical foundations, are interchangeable and complementary, especially when

considering that the central instrument of positive education is the identification and cultivation of character strengths. Analysing the findings of this research study, I conclude that broadly speaking, it is the teacher who are, in fact, the main individuals responsible for the development of this positive education initiative. This is clearly implied by the lack of rigour evident in the current scholarship, combined with the shortage of literature regarding the approach and its relevant assessment tools. The experiences of the participants in this study revealed a connection with the current literature that does, however, exist – as limited as it may be. Thus, it is possible to argue that the participants are equipped with the knowledge and motivation to teach positive education because they are basing their approaches on theoretical frameworks and perspectives. An understated formality was revealed during the analysis with respect to positive education implementation in the curriculum. Simply put, both participants presented interesting strategies to incorporate positive education into the official subject matters of science and math. Additionally, the assessment of positive education through intentional observation was revealed, even though not systematically employed and acknowledged. As a result, evidence of positive outcomes was identified.

With respect to the participants' differences when implementing positive education, although both presented student-centered strategies, they revealed different instructional methods. Anne proved to be subjective and intuitive in her approach, whereas Laura was objective and detail-oriented. Regarding the participants' self-perceptions, their students' age was revealed as a mediating factor: where Anne, who teaches younger students aged 11 and 12 years-old recognizes the teacher as a supportive

friend, Laura, who teaches older students from 14 to 17 years-old, considers the educator as an example to be followed.

Finally, I acknowledge that positive education – either through the cultivation of character strengths or the promotion of positive states (for instance, positive relationships, engagement, and positive emotions) – can constructively influence the development of students' characters. Built on this insight, I believe that the participants are on their way to contribute positively to their development. First, this is due to the age range of the students referenced in this study, which encompasses a period of mature cognitive development and moral judgement that can promote mature moral behaviour, what facilitate the teachers' work. Second, because character is a psychological concept that involves strengths and virtues, the more an individual enhances his/her strengths through positive education, the more virtues are achieved, and, consequently, the stronger his/her character develops.

Recommendation and Implications for Future Research

The results of this study suggest certain insights and recommendations for the field of positive education, particularly in relation to these participants and others at their school and beyond who may be in similar scenarios, since their contexts are carefully analysed by the methodology chosen for this study. Based on the literature review, the age range of 11 to 17 years-old creates an opportunity for teachers to explore a variety of strategies for positive education that can lead to positive outcomes. Therefore, in order to generate an advance in the field of positive education and character development, it is imperative that the systematization of implementation and assessment for this approach is improved. The implementation of systematic measures can help provide a relevant

amount of data that can be used to improve the development of these initiatives, thereby generating positive and sustainable results for practitioners. Additionally, the employment of appropriate measurements tools would allow for the execution of longitudinal studies in order to have a valid, comprehensive understanding of the effects of positive education on students' character in the long-term.

Finally, although this research was comprised of a small sample of participants, both participants' experiences, strategies, and insights provide an enriching array of ideas and suggestions to other educators. Based on this premise, it would be meaningful to replicate this study in other contexts – for example, in public and catholic institutions – in order to develop broader and deeper comparisons in relation to policies, values, theories, and practices.

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Appendix A: Teacher Interview Instrument

An Exploration of Teachers' Approaches to Positive Education and Character Development: Curriculum Implementation, Assessment and Outcomes

Date:

Interviewer:

Institution:

Teacher participant:

Grade:

- How many students do you teach? What subjects?
- What approaches to positive education do you use in your teacher daily practices?

How do you incorporate them into the formal curriculum?

• (Give the cards to the participant) These cards have a variety of themes related to positive education and character development. Could you identify any of these themes in your activities? Could you illustrate how you are approaching them (short answer)? Ex: I relate spirituality to well-being.

Cards

Positive Emotions

Character strengths

Engagement

Respect for diversity

Positive relationships

Citizenship

Resilience

Caring

Mindfulness

Empathy

- I understand that positive education has a holistic approach to learning. Could you exemplify how do you work with these three dimensions (intellectual, physical, and emotional / mind, body and emotions)?
- Could you identify any outcomes of positive education?
 - Behavioral problems/ Bullying,
 - Academic achievement
- How do you assess the positive education strategies?
- Do you recognize any impact on children's character development?
- What challenges do you identify in the implementation of positive education in your classroom?

Appendix B: Themes Emerged from the Literature

Positive Emotions

State of recognizing, promoting, extending, and/or building positive emotional experiences, as well as “accept and develop healthy responses to negative emotions” (Norrish et al., 2013, p. 152).

Character Strengths

Character strengths are psychological elements that can be cultivated to express a virtue towards a happy, meaningful and fulfilling life (Peterson & Seligman, 2002)

Engagement

Engagement refers to psychological connection to activities or organizations involving high interest, curiosity, and absorption. The positive education aims to cultivate one’s intrinsic motivation to pursue goals with determination. It is also related to flow, state of deep concentration and optimal experience. (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, as cited in Kern, Waters, Adler & White, 2015; Norrish et al., 2013).

Respect for Diversity

Capability of not discriminate and shows respect to all people regardless gender, culture, ethnicity, race, religion, or opinions (United Nations, n.d)

Positive Relationships

This relates to “strong social and emotional skills that help create and promote strong and nourishing relationships with self and others” (Norrish et al., 2013, p. 154).

Citizenship

Act of being an active member of the society and demonstrate co-responsibility in different levels (Allis, 2007)

Resilience

Capacity to positively deal with and recover from challenges (Masten as cited in Norrish et al., 2013).

Caring

Prosocial behavior of feeling or demonstrating interest for or kindness to others (Merriam-Webster, n.d.),

Mindfulness

“Mindfulness is a state of present-moment, non-judgmental attention to one’s thoughts, feelings and body sensations and can thus be understood as a type of self-observation (Kabat-Zinn, Sedlmeier et al., as cited in Waters et al., 2017, p. 255).

Empathy

It is the ability of understand, be aware, and have feelings that are compatible to the others situation (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Appendix C: Certificate of Ethics Clearance



Brock University
 Research Ethics Office
 Tel: 905-688-5550 ext. 3035
 Email: reb@brocku.ca

Social Science Research Ethics Board

Certificate of Ethics Clearance for Human Participant Research

DATE: 3/5/2018
 PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: BLAIKIE, Fiona - Graduate and Undergraduate Studies in Education
 FILE: 17-225 - BLAIKIE
 TYPE: Masters Thesis/Project STUDENT: Flavia Pissoto Moreira
 SUPERVISOR: Fiona Blaikie
 TITLE: Teachers' Approaches to Character Education

ETHICS CLEARANCE GRANTED

Type of Clearance: NEW Expiry Date: 3/1/2019

The Brock University Social Science Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above named research proposal and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement. Clearance granted from 3/5/2018 to 3/1/2019.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored by, at a minimum, an annual report. Should your project extend beyond the expiry date, you are required to submit a Renewal form before 3/1/2019. Continued clearance is contingent on timely submission of reports.

To comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, you must also submit a final report upon completion of your project. All report forms can be found on the Research Ethics web page at <http://www.brocku.ca/research/policies-and-forms/research-forms>.

In addition, throughout your research, you must report promptly to the REB:

- a) Changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) All adverse and/or unanticipated experiences or events that may have real or potential unfavourable implications for participants;
- c) New information that may adversely affect the safety of the participants or the conduct of the study;
- d) Any changes in your source of funding or new funding to a previously unfunded project.

We wish you success with your research.

Approved: 

Ann-Marie DiBiase, Chair
 Social Science Research Ethics Board

Note: Brock University is accountable for the research carried out in its own jurisdiction or under its auspices and may refuse certain research even though the REB has found it ethically acceptable.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of research at that site.

Appendix D: Letter of Invitation

Date

Title of Study: An Exploration of Teachers' Approaches to Positive Education and Character Development: Curriculum Implementation, Assessment and Outcomes

Principal Student Investigator: Flavia Pissoto Moreira, Master of Education student, Department of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies in Education

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Fiona Blaikie, Professor (PhD), Department of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies in Education

Dear teacher,

I, Flavia Pissoto Moreira, Master of Education student, from the Department of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies in Education, Brock University, invite you to participate in a research project entitled Teachers' Approaches to Positive Education.

The purpose of this research project is to explore how positive education is implemented and evaluated in the Lower School of Ridley College. Should you choose to participate, you will be asked during an audio-recorded interview to describe educational strategies of implementation and evaluation used to incorporate positive education into the formal and informal curriculum, and in your daily teaching practices.

The expected duration of the interview is 45 minutes.

This research may benefit you as an educator, as well as the Ridley College's Committee of Positive Education to improve the design, implementation, and assessment of positive education strategies.

If you have any pertinent questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Brock University Research Ethics Officer (905 688-5550 ext 3035, reb@brocku.ca)

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me (see below for contact information).

Sincerely,

Flavia Pissoto Moreira
Student, Master of Education
905 353 4670
fm17uh@brocku.ca

Dr. Fiona Blaikie
Supervisor, Professor (PhD)
905 688 5550 x 4631
fblaikie@brocku.ca

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University (17-225 - BLAIKIE).

Appendix E: Informed Consent

Date

Project Title: An Exploration of Teachers' Approaches to Positive Education and Character Development: Curriculum Implementation, Assessment and Outcomes

Principal Student Investigator (PI): Flavia Pissoto Moreira, Master of Education student

Department of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies in Education

Brock University

905 353 4670

fm17uh@brocku.ca

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Fiona Blaikie, Professor (PhD)

Department of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies in Education

Brock University

(905) 688 5550 Ext 4631

fblaikie@brocku.ca

INVITATION

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore how positive education is implemented and evaluated in the Upper School of Ridley College.

WHAT'S INVOLVED

As a participant, you will be asked, during an audio-recorded interview, to describe educational strategies of implementation and evaluation used to incorporate positive education into the formal and informal curriculum and your daily teaching practices. Participation will take approximately 45 minutes.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS

This research may benefit you as an educator, as well as the school Committee of Positive Education to improve the design, implementation, and assessment of positive education strategies.

There are no known or anticipated risks associated with participation in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information you provide will be kept confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, as well as the school's name; however, with your permission, anonymous quotations will be used.

Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish.

Data collected during this study will be stored in a digital database protected with password and in a physical database secured locked at Brock University. Data will be kept for seven years, after which time it will be discarded appropriately.

Access to this data will be restricted to the principal investigator Flavia Pissoto Moreira and the supervisor Dr. Fiona Blaikie.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer certain questions or participate in any component of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time before submission of the completed project and may do so without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

PUBLICATION OF RESULTS

Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences. Feedback about this study will be reported to the Committee of Positive Education of Ridley College.

CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact Flavia Pissoto Moreira and Dr. Fiona Blaikie using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University (17-225 - BLAIKIE). If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca.

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time prior to the submission of the final report.

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____