

Family Ties:  
A case study of a character education program at a local Montreal elementary school

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Family ties: A case study**

This thesis examines a character education program at a local Montreal elementary school. Character education as a necessary component of the classroom, has dominated the field of moral education for many years. The theories of Thomas Lickona, William Damon, and Anne Lockwood, have established different approaches to incorporating character education into the classroom. Although these theories have had a wide influence on the support for character education in today's classroom, the forms these programs have taken has been criticized for being too traditional and not serving the changing needs of today's classroom. Noddings work as an ethicist of care has been critical of these theories for their reliance on an ethic of justice as opposed to an ethic of care. This thesis draws on the model put forth by Lickona for educating for character to demonstrate the practical nature of a character education program. The thesis also incorporates Noddings' ethic of care in determining if the students are engaged in the program and if Lickona's model is being put into action through individual relations between the students.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am committed to a classroom that promotes a student's growth and personal development. The cultivation of the individual student must be done in relation to the others outside of the individual student- their friends, their family, their teacher, and the members of their community. I have come to believe, based on my own experiences as an educator, that learning lessons of A,B,Cs is as equally important as lessons of respect, empathy, and humility.

To my supervisor, Joyce Barakett, for acting as my thesis advisor, my life advisor, and personal pep squad; I would particularly like to thank her for greeting me at every turn with a smile and an encouraging word. She has taught me that the world of academia need not be pretentious and dull.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Chapter 1 Introduction

Introduction.....	1
Significance of the study.....	8

### Chapter 2 Defining Character

The philosophical foundations of character in education .....	10
The sociological interpretations of the philosophy of character education .....	16
Current research on character education.....	22
Character as defined for the purpose of this study.....	26

### Chapter 3 Methodology and Models of Investigation

Background for research models.....	29
Model of investigation.....	35
Additional factors in my investigation.....	41

## **Chapter 4 Presentation of findings**

Teacher as model and mentor.....	44
Practice moral discipline.....	48
Create a democratic classroom.....	51
Use cooperative learning.....	55
Develop conscience of craft.....	60
Encourage moral reflection.....	65
Foster caring beyond the class.....	67
Recruit parents and members of the community.....	71
Family Day.....	74

## **Chapter 5 Conclusion**

Summary of findings.....	76
The present state of the family program.....	77
Future areas of research .....	81
<b>References.....</b>	<b>82</b>

<b>Appendix A</b> .....	89
<b>Appendix B</b> .....	95
<b>Appendix C</b> .....	100
<b>Appendix D</b> .....	108

## TABLES

Table 1.1.....	43
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## **PREFACE**

My first experience with character education took place as an early childhood educator. The group of four-year-olds I had been working with had started to develop aggressive and selfish behaviour with one another. After spending considerable time talking to them about respect in the classroom, I developed the concept of the kindness circle. Twice a week we would sit in a circle in front of a chart and the children would be awarded a sticker for anything they did for someone else. If one child helped another put away their mat, they were acknowledged. If a child assisted another in cleaning up a mess they were not responsible for, they were applauded. After a period of eight weeks our kindness circle was reduced to once a week, and then after a few months it was quietly transitioned out of our schedule. The kind and caring behaviour however continued. This was all the evidence and encouragement I needed to pursue other methods of incorporating social values and morality into the classroom.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Moral education is an aged and familiar area within the field of education that has been associated with religious instruction and moral indoctrination. Despite the decline of moral education in the classroom, this field of study has experienced a rebirth in the educational dialogue. The research, in various forms and using diverse methods, has attempted to answer the question: What role does the school play in helping to cultivate a student's moral consciousness? The answer lies in a directive form of moral education known as character education. The purpose of character education is to provide the skills and judgement needed to cultivate and develop a student's moral reasoning. While character education has often been confused with citizenship education, values clarification, and religious instruction, for the purpose of this study I rely on my own definition that draws on Thomas Lickona's theory of character education and Nel Noddings' ethic of care.

The term character education refers to a form of moral education, which takes place in the school, and which Noddings (2002) identifies as recently dominating the field of practice in moral education. Consequently, the terms 'character' and 'moral' have a tendency to be used interchangeably throughout the literature, as character education is a practical form of moral education. Within the context of this study I have strictly focused on the term character unless otherwise indicated. This definition is further discussed in the next chapter, in which I survey the role of character education as it has evolved from the beginnings of Western scholarly tradition.

The purpose of my research is to examine and analyze a character education program which has been successfully incorporated into a school for a number of years. It is my contention that character education as an issue in the field of education has been stalled at the theoretical level, and what we need is to move forward with practical applications and comprehensive evaluations of character education programs. This movement from the theoretical to the practical is necessary to build an empirical scholarship for teachers, school administrators, and policy makers, to understand the best way to use character education to build moral awareness.

On a similar note, the form character education programs take must be reflective of the technocratic, pluralistic society that it serves. This is perhaps one of the most persuasive arguments for including character education in today's classroom. With the increase of technology and the diverse cultural knowledge that is in the classroom, there needs to be a common foundation laid on which students can relate to each other and learn to make conscientious decisions.

There have been a number of studies that indicate that character education is a valid and necessary component of the curriculum (Antis, 1998; Lickona, 1993; Schaeffer, 2003). Although much is written on the lack of and need for character education, the question remains: How can we most effectively include character education into the curriculum? For today's classroom, this question becomes even more layered since character education programs traditionally take on a formal role of moral instruction. In the next chapter, I clarify what details of traditional character education I incorporate into my analysis of a local character education program in Montreal, Quebec.

Briefly, this study closely examines one school that has taken character education as an imperative part of schooling and made it a top priority in addressing their students (the principal, personal interview, May 20th, 2005). The school has introduced a comprehensive approach to character education which incorporates A.S. Neill's (1969) Summerhill philosophy and which mirrors the model offered by Thomas Lickona (1991). At this local Montreal school, the administration, faculty, and staff have established character education as part of their school by making a very simple and effective change. The school has developed a program of character education built on the concept of family units. I maintain that these families are a functional example of the type of character education that Lickona calls for.

These family units, led by a family teacher, involve creating moral communities where the students are encouraged to use cooperative learning, and to build a democratic class environment (Lickona, 1993). Thus the objective of this study is to demonstrate how this school and its concept of 'family units' can provide an empirical model of a comprehensive character education program in place. I have explained my motivation for pursuing research in character education, but what are the greater implications for this area of education? There are two very distinct answers to this question that form the background and foundation for engaging this area of research. First, with an increase in school violence, bullying, and student asocial behaviour towards teachers, there has been an increased interest into what factors contribute to these events, and what can be done to alter this behaviour.

The second motivating factor for examining this issue is that throughout my research I have come across countless theory-based articles that argue for the inclusion of

morality in the classroom (Benninga, 1991; Damon, 2002; Dewey, 1966; Durkheim, 1973; Kohlberg, 1972; Lickona, 1993; Noddings, 2002; Piaget, 1968, Vardin, 2003). After reading how the child develops a moral self, the importance of nurturing that development, the role of the school in fostering that development, I questioned whether anyone was actually doing this. Could I walk into a local school and be faced with a curriculum that encouraged moral reflection and the development of character? This is how I came to this local Montreal school, an educational institution that recognizes that the classroom can be a place for character development. Under the guidance of their family teacher, students are encouraged to think, question, and get to know each other. In addition they are given the opportunity to develop a meaningful relationship with an adult besides their parents or guardians.

Many people understand character education as a way of teaching kids to be nice to each other, or perhaps to respect their parents and teachers, or even to be strong contributing members to our society. Others believe that character education simply teaches students how to act, think, and behave. While both opinions have merit to a certain degree the emphasis should be placed on the form character education programs take. The intent is to demonstrate how character education is open to fostering the complete growth of the individual student within the context of a shared reality. Specifically, I am preoccupied with the positive social behaviour that can be acquired by using certain principles that are found in the field of character education.

The theoretical foundation for character education goes back to the fundamentals of moral philosophy as seen in Aristotle's writings on ethics. Aristotle saw children as needing clear guidance to become moral beings; thus he offers a model for moral

education wherein the adult must guide the student to live a morally sound life within a just society (as cited in Burnet, 1967). What Aristotle is advocating is an early form of what would come to be known as character education. Aristotle sees the teacher as helping students come into their moral selves, and then helping to guide them in how to apply that moral reasoning to the society they are a part of.

The subject of the cultivation of character as seen in Aristotle provides insight into the long philosophic tradition it has had within the scope of moral education. The current consensus on the subject however, is more preoccupied with the social learning involved in educating for character and what role the school plays in that education. In fact it is Emile Durkheim who places the burden of moral education solely on the shoulders of the classroom. Durkheim exposes the important connection between the state and the school in that whatever the school teaches about morality will eventually impact the moral climate of society (as cited in Wilson, 1973). Durkheim's conception of the role moral education should take falls in line with the present conception of character education. The goal of character education is now moving beyond the scope of the state and rests equally on the shoulders of the parents and the community. As a current educational theorist Anne Lockwood (1997) writes, character education works to reinforce a moral consciousness that sees beyond relativism, and the consequences of living in a community. Lockwood's use of the term relativism addresses its limitations in educating for pro-social behaviour and communal concepts.

The educational tradition that stems from Aristotle and Durkheim highlights the importance of teaching morality in school. Despite the essential component that character

education has had in the history of education it has dropped on the schools' list of priorities since the second half of the twentieth century (Hunter, 2000). The emergence of individuality, the importance of the self, and the focus on student-centered learning in the sixties and into the seventies, rallied against the idea of blanket morality being taught in the classroom (HoffSommers, 2002). As a result moral education, and under the less politicized name of character education, disappeared from the school agenda and was replaced with a focus on the self and individuality. The result was students who developed a sense of moral relativism, which justified their actions without regard to impact those actions might have on others. Situations like the Alberta school shooting (CBC, 1999), and the suicide of a BC teen as a result of school bullying (CBC, 2000) have lead many to think that the inclusion of moral guidance in the form of character education needs to return to being addressed in the curriculum.

Within the field of education there are a number of schools of thought that are concerned with addressing the inequalities and diversity in education. Multicultural and anti-racist education are two fields within education that similar to character education; focus on reconciling the plurality that exists in the classroom today. Although this study is conducted in a multicultural setting, the research project focuses solely on the examination of character education due to time and length restraints.

And so, the question that educational theoretical research must boil down to: What is the most effective way to bring morality into the 21st C multicultural classroom without offending or suppressing any student's cultural beliefs? There have been a number of studies done on the effectiveness of character education programs in the US (Colgan, 2003; Deitter, 2002; Gilnes, 2003, Murphy, 2002). Gilnes' (2003) work was a

case study of how one teacher was incorporating a 'cocktail of character' into the classroom by encouraging manners, respect, and ethical decision making. Deitter (2002) examined how character education was being used as the foundation for one schools' advisory board in implementing school policy and new counseling services.

However, neither of these studies addresses moral development, fostering an attachment to the community outside the classroom, or the significance these programs had for a culturally diverse student body. Other studies have looked at the impact of character education programs on students and provide basic feedback into what works and what does not (Revel, 2002; Romanowski, 2003; Sprung, 2005). Again, while these studies provide insight into what kinds of methods were used and which were most successful they do not specifically explore the impact a character education program has on a multicultural classroom. In the following chapter, I examine in depth the philosophical/sociological foundations of character education including current research in the field.

As noted above, the intent of this study is to put the theory of character education into practice. To do so I rely on a number of sources of data, including the use of audio recording, which will be solely dependent on the setting of the case study and its participants. As mentioned previously, I build on the model provided by Lickona (1993) to evaluate the effectiveness of the character education program at an elementary school. In chapter 3 there is a comprehensive overview of the evaluative properties of the model.

The theoretical background for this study raises a number of questions concerning what form character education takes in the classroom, in terms of the roles taken on by the teacher in opening discussions and the students in responding. In addition to the



general problem statement of how character education has been established at the school there are a number of more specific research questions that are used to guide this study:

1. What basis did the school use in developing the concept of 'families'?
2. What role does the conception of the family unit play in teaching character education?
3. How has the implementation of 'family units' contributed, if at all, to the moral culture of the school?
4. Does classroom practice adhere to the comprehensive approach that Lickona's model proposes to incorporate character education into the school?
5. How does incorporating character education through the use of the concept 'families' benefit / limit the learning process?

The research questions are used as a framework to investigate from a more general overview of the role of character education in the school, to a more specific examination. On the most intimate level of study I investigate how it has affected the people who are directly involved with the family units project. The research questions unfold according to how the concept of family units was developed, how it relates to character education, the effects on the school, and how the program exhibits the guidelines of the model of investigation, as well as the perceptions of the staff, students, and former students.

### **Significance of this study**

As the background information provided in chapter 2 illustrates, there has been an enormous amount of theoretical research done on this subject. However, there remains little in terms of the practical applications based on empirical research for character education. With this study I hope to demonstrate how character education can move

beyond theory and into the classroom. In particular, I hope to demonstrate that morality can be taught in a multicultural environment without suppressing any one particular culture.

The results of this study make a contribution to a body of scholarship on moral education in the form of character education. The implications for this study include implementing similar family units in other Montreal School Board educational facilities. In addition to this, the investigation procedures used are indicative of what means can be used to assess a character education program. The results of the study are analyzed in three different ways. First there is the Lickona model that offers a framework for points of examination. In addition to this, I also use Noddings' ethic of care to investigate the commitment the students and teachers have to the project of educating for character. Following that, I use the interview results anecdotally throughout the discussion section to contextualize the family unit phenomena and how it unfolds.

The following chapter is a review of the literature that articulates my definition of terms that I use throughout this thesis. This includes a brief examination of the historical role character has played in education, in terms of the philosophical/sociological perspectives that have formed the foundation for today's current research in the field of character education. Chapter 3 explores the methods and models that I depend on to establish an evaluation process for the character education program. In chapter 4 I present interviews and observations that have taken place over a period of 8 weeks in which I was a participant observer in one of the school's family classes. This leads into the conclusions, chapter 5, which summarizes my findings, and further areas of research that should be conducted in the field of education based on the results of this study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Defining Character**

In this chapter, I present a review of the literature, which clarifies the epistemological roots and interpretations of the term character, and provides a historical survey of the form character education has taken in the past up to the present time. In addition to clarifying terms, it is equally important to demonstrate what form character education has taken as established in current research. This review is presented in three separate sections. First, an examination of the philosophical foundations of moral education with respect to character; second a review of the influential works that have examined the implications of character education on society are presented; and third I focus on the current research in the field, and my own epistemological stance concerning what character education is and what form it should take in classroom practices and activities.

#### **The philosophical foundations of character in education**

What defines character? More importantly what role does education play in cultivating character? What initially appears to be a question of philosophy is in fact closely tied to the work of education. Outside of our family, the classroom is most often the first social community in which we become a part. Thus, the family and school become the primary socialization agents in the formation of character. The socialization that occurs in the family and school offers a wealth of experience on how to interact, exist, and personally develop with other people outside of ourselves. There are several philosophical contributors that I utilize in establishing my own definition of character. They are Aristotle, Locke, Kant, Mill, Dewey, and Durkheim. Each of these contributors

lends an important component to the field of moral education in the form of character. These thinkers have been chosen based on their influential contribution to the field of moral education, as well as their distinct understanding concerning the purpose and goals of character formation.

To start at the beginning of Western scholarly thought is to begin with the post-Socratic philosopher Aristotle. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle is clear that character is acquired and that moral virtues must be taught (Crisp, 1961). The teaching and modeling of what good character is, becomes necessary to the formation character in Aristotle's understanding. There are important implications for Aristotle's conception of character within the context of education. Zagezebski (1996), commenting on Aristotle's position, writes that the focus of the nurture approach to developing good character places the burden of that development on education. Aristotle places notable responsibility on the educator's role in developing the character of the student. In one section he creates the analogy of the shipbuilder who creates a ship, and as such the educator must work to produce a citizen that will contribute to the happiness of the state (Burnet, 1967).

In Aristotle's view education follows from politics, which has authority over what is taught. Consequently, if politics is representative of the communities goals, Aristotle's contention opens the discussion of community's control over education for desired ends (Burnet, 1967). This political agenda used in education to create ideal citizens becomes a major critique for those who oppose character education. This critique will be discussed at length later on in the thesis when I examine Nel Noddings' (2002) objections to character education. Aristotle's practical approach to education of character offers a detailed examination of the importance that was placed on determining the ends of

education at this time in scholarly tradition. The classroom becomes a microcosm of society in which students learn to interact and live together in a shared space. To this end Aristotle's interpretation of character becomes a fundamental element of education, so that future citizens can acculturate the social and moral patterns that will sustain them as adults.

More importantly, as Zagzebski (1996) notes, Aristotle views character as the vehicle in which the self navigates between the extremes of virtue and vice. As such, according to Aristotle, educating for moral virtues is a practical project that takes its mandate from politics in educating the character of its future citizens for the benefit of the state. There are several key points that I would like to highlight that contribute to my own definition of character. First, education serves the goals of the community as interpreted by the political representatives. To achieve a just and good society that works in a state of happiness, education must then incorporate this concept into their project, while being aware of the motivations of those in positions of authority, to avoid abuse of power. Secondly, while human nature might inherently be good, there are as Aristotle notes, a multitude of negative forces that might distract, and so education must work to guide students towards the good life for the sake of themselves and others.

A significant shift in educational thought concerning moral education occurs in the 18th century during the age of reason. The writings of this period show a distinct move away from the theological and an embracing of the rational, objective methods popular at the time. As a result, character becomes a state of grace that should be pursued by following certain rules, principles and theories. Kupperman (1988) notes that this period sees moral rules becoming guidelines to ethical reasoning, and character. This is

clear from the writings of John Locke, Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill who approach the subject of education in an extremely rational manner. Locke demonstrates the connections of the family and the school as chief agents of socialization, while Mill focuses on a utilitarianism approach that defines character as being prepared to sacrifice for the greater good. The role of the student as a person is presented by Kant who allows the individual to act upon their own accord based on a set of rules and principles.

John Locke writes that moral education for character should be guided and taught by the home (Grant & Tarcov, 1996). In other words, education in all forms should be the responsibility of the home although Locke acknowledges the necessity of public education. Locke's emphasis on the role of the family in character education is a shift away from education as society's concern and reasserts the important role that the family plays. Locke's liberal form of moral education would see the family as the principal agent of morality and the school as an agent of communal morality. That being said Locke's main area of concern is the form education for a liberal and tolerant society should take. Character in Locke's estimation is a necessary component to ensure that a liberal society can continue to function generation after generation with respect to religious and cultural differences.

Locke's emphasis on the combined educational efforts of the home and school, highlights the importance of that exchange in educating for character. Another important distinction that I include in my definition of character education is that Locke maintains that it is not only the duty of education to ensure that children (students) want to do the right thing but that they do it for the right reason (Grant & Tarcov, 1996). While Locke's libertarian sensibilities of the time argue for an approach based on reason and justice, the

inclusion of being invested in an ethical decision accentuates the underlying need for the student to be committed to the acquisition of character.

John Stuart Mill was a proponent of utilitarian ethics which presupposed the good of the many over the suffering of the few (Garforth, 1971). In terms of character, the student should be educated to serve the greatest good, above all else in order to achieve a general level of happiness. Garforth notes that Mill approaches character as a lesson on how to conduct oneself to maximize the good for the benefit of society. Thus character is seen as the framework from which an individual conducts themselves for the sole moral purpose of avoiding pain and achieving happiness. Although Mill's definition of character seems broad in terms of practical application, it is in fact an important basis for character education, especially in primary school where my research was conducted. Children often rationalize along the principles of pleasure and pain. My concern with respect to Mill's approach is that the concept of the greatest collective happiness might be difficult to incorporate into lessons on character for the age group of students that I worked with for this study.

Although the utilitarian approach would suggest that all moral reflection and action (judgements dependant on our character) must calculate what decision or action will result in the greatest good, there is one significant contribution that I have managed to incorporate into my own evaluation of character education. The element of collectivity that the utilitarian concept of character entails builds on the moral scholarship of education for the betterment of society. If a student's moral character is educated to take into account the greatest good, then the student's character will be inexorably tied to the impact their decisions will have on others. Character of the student clearly plays an

important role in the scholarly tradition known as moral education. The next position that I have drawn on places the burden not on the teacher, or the community, but on the student as the individual.

Immanuel Kant relies on a metaphysical understanding of what education means for the community, which is made clear by how he refuses to separate the intellectual and moral components of education (Buchner, 1904). Kupperman (1988) notes that Kant's adherence to impersonal principles and maxims creates a systematic manner in which to approach morality. Kant recognizes that to improve the condition of society, education must impart moral education in the form that will develop a strong character for the individual student (Buchner, 1904). Kant's conception of morality as being based on absolute principles of the good, produces a theory of character that is based on learning habits, inhibitions, and patterns of satisfaction (Kupperman, 1988). To acquire good character becomes less about learning through example and experience and more about knowing the rules to play by.

The most significant contribution that Kant's concept of character formation makes to my own project is that Kant relies on the distinction and interaction of the self in relation to others. The image Kant creates is moral education as a framework of right and wrong, which makes character the practical function of the self in terms of moral reasoning and action. While Aristotle, Locke, Mill, and Kant provide the philosophical foundations for the scholarly tradition of character education; it is the work of the 20th century that draws character education away from the abstract, and places it in practical perspective.



## **The sociological interpretations of the philosophy of character education**

At the start of the 20th century moral education shifts away from theoretical writing on what good character should be, and focuses more on how character should be taught by the school. A major contribution to the scholarship of character education occurred when Hartshorne and May (1928) conducted a comprehensive longitudinal study on the effects of character education on students conduct, most specifically cheating. Their findings, while significant in terms of reviewing the methods that were being used, proved most disappointing in terms of demonstrating the impact of character education. The results of the Hartshorne and May study created a new challenge for educators in ensuring that moral education and the methods they were using were not only superficially important, but held some relevance for long term effect on student's moral reasoning and action.

The first half of the 20th century is often referred to as the golden age of character education. The teacher was expected to be a moral agent in the classroom, and values of trust, honesty, and humility were incorporated into classroom practices. It has been noted by some that because of the moral character of society at this time, character formation had a two-fold support system (Lickona, 1991; Lockwood, 1997). First, the students arrived in the classroom with the moral values that their parents living in this morally conscientious society imparted to them. Second, the lessons on morality in the classroom were being reinforced by the home and the community consequently infusing these issues into the classroom posed less of a challenge. No one articulated this important connection between school and society at this time more accurately than John Dewey.

John Dewey's writing on education as it concerns my focus, is an important foundation to the purpose of including character education as part of the school curriculum. Dewey's emphasis in *The school and society*, highlights the importance of recognizing and establishing the end goals of education (Dewey, 1915). The guiding principle of Dewey's concept of the relation between society and education is expressed best in his own words, 'What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children' (Dewey, 1915, p. 3). The next question that must be answered is what values and morals should be taught to ensure that students acquire the best possibility of attaining character traits that will benefit them and those around them.

The answer provided by Dewey (1915) is that education must incorporate lessons to best prepare its future citizens to participate in a democratic society. Although it seems that Dewey is supporting some form of citizenship education, it is just an additional aspect of moral education. Dewey also focuses on other aspects that are not directly labeled as character education but include toleration, an acquaintance with human nature, reading signs of character, interpreting social situations, and the ability to adapt to personalities. Each of these qualities that Dewey feels must be inaugurated into education are reflective of what is commonly referred to now as character education. The emphasis is on human nature, social interactions, and the lessons that are developed to guide and teach students how to live as individuals in a shared community.

While character education is a directive form of moral education, it is understood in Deweyian terms as social education. Dewey's (1938) focus on the importance of connecting education to experience can be used to clarify the distinction between moral

education and character education. The practice of moral action, of cultivating moral judgement and acting on those guiding principles is the goal of character education. Dewey (1960) notes that a well-grounded character is essential in responding appropriately to any given situation. In other words, character is the tool on which a person depends to help evaluate and guide them to a morally good outcome. It ties the theoretical work of morality to the practical task of enacting that morality in lived experience. Dewey is also concerned with indoctrination, or the imposition of adult experience on the student in making education relevant to them. At this point the project of moral training as understood by Dewey is put into question as it places the adult experience as the model from which the student learns and is in danger of suppressing their own development as individuals.

Dewey raises an important concern here in respect to education as a whole, but for my purposes I focus on the project of moral training in the form of character education. Is moral judgement and subsequent action to be taught through example and modeling? Can it be acquired through the natural development of the person? Dewey does provide an answer to how a progressive form of education tied to experience might develop its own standards without suppressing learning through an individual's experience (Dewey, 1938). The educational philosophy based on the freedom of the learner as presented by Dewey, has a significant impact on the form that moral training (character education) should take in the classroom.

The solution that Dewey (1915) provides is tied to his focus on the relation between society and education. The social interactions that exist in a given society will impact the experience of the student and the teacher, and in turn will help shape the form

and goals that education will take in the school. This point has been carried over to become a pivotal concept of character education. MacIntyre (1984) writes that moral virtues are needed for a social role in society; one must learn how to have cooperative human activity that is based on a concept of trying to achieve some level of goodness. The connection between how we learn, and later on how we live, becomes the basis for teaching students how to conduct themselves with others. Dewey is clear, in that he presupposes that to develop a functional democratic society that benefits the members of that community, the educational philosophy must reflect the principles that will enable those students to live and participate in a community together.

Contributing to Dewey's emphasis on school teaching for society is Emile Durkheim whose offering to the scholarship of character education is not explicit although he does write extensively on the form moral education should take. For the purposes of this piece I substitute the term character education for moral education with the understanding that character education is moral education in an active form preoccupied by moral actions, and not just morality as an abstract theory.

Durkheim is clear on what character education should mean within the greater field of education. I focus on Durkheim's separation of morality from religion, and the notion of discipline in regards to character education. These areas, drawn from Durkheim's moral education, I feel lend the greatest amount of clarification and criticism to the project of character education. This separation of morality from religion is precisely what a progressive form of moral education requires if it to service a pluralistic population.

Durkheim (1925) does mention character initially, in that his motivation for focusing on this area of education is the maintenance and improvement of the national character. This statement speaks to the sociological reading of morality, similar to Dewey, that Durkheim is using to tackle the issue of morality in education. The school is responsible for teaching the principles that define national character in Durkheim's understanding (which in his case would be the French character, which later he distinguishes from the character found in other societies). The significance of the national character as understood by Durkheim is its necessary separation from religion, in its reflection of the rational thought that Durkheim feels is a defining characteristic of his society at the time.

Morality in school, whether in the form of character education, or value clarification has begged the question of whose morality is being taught, and whose values are being clarified? This is why Durkheim's separation of morality from religion has a significant impact on my examination of character education and what form it should take in a culturally diverse classroom. More importantly, Durkheim writes for the necessity of a secular morality because the basis of religious morality had no practical benefit for society. The focus of religious morality, according to Durkheim, is the individual's relation to their God, and not to their fellow citizen. The necessity of secular morality based on the scientific and rational thought of the time is in Durkheim's opinion more relevant and beneficial to society's interactions than that of religious morality.

The second aspect of character education that Durkheim (1925) focuses on is the form that it should take in an educational setting. Durkheim bases moral learning on repetition and authority so that moral education must be approached as any other subject,

which includes a measure of discipline to ensure that the proper conduct and moral action is taught to the student. While I understand that Durkheim's focus is for the benefit of society as a whole, and to make it functional there has to be a certain measure of discipline, I disagree with the function that discipline has in this moral dialogue. Durkheim might have focused on the role of the teacher in modeling an example of responsible, and morally just actions without imparting a need for moral authority. The nature and methods that Durkheim supports must be taken with caution, as the project of morality in the classroom can lead to accusations of indoctrination and propagandizing (Schwarz, 2002; Lockwood, 1997). A productive contribution to the project of character education is the emphasis that Durkheim places on the role of the teacher in the classroom as an agent of guidance to the conscientious manner these students should adopt.

However, the connection that Durkheim makes between the role of the teacher in school, authority, and discipline, lacks the element of humanity that I feel should form the basis of character education. In regards to character education, it is clear that Durkheim supports the necessary inclusion of morality in education for the benefit of society. Furthermore, the secular form of moral education which Durkheim supports is an important separation of morality from religion.

The issue that arises from this period of writings is: What happens when the school does take on the role of moral teaching in the form of character education? There is a fine line between capitalizing on the microcosm of society that exists in a classroom, and the abuse of teaching students how to be. What emerges as a challenge to character education is how does one ensure that the school is teaching for the benefit of society's

norms and not the specific norms of a group within society? In the next section, I look at two current contributors to the field of moral education including recent studies that attempt to answer this question in very different ways.

### **Current research on character education**

For a long period of time character education was in a state of cultural paralysis as a result of irreconcilable differences between those who supported it and those who were suspicious and critical (Schwarz, 2002). Now with a clear concept of what character is and what form that character education should take, it has been receiving increasing support in educational circles (Ryan, 1997; HoffSommers, 2002; DeRoche & Williams, 2001). Although there is much support in the field of education, the scholarship of character education programs requires an increase in empirical research and evaluative methods (Lockwood, 1997).

Within the field of character education there seems to be a general lack of proper evaluative methods, and established programs that are effective. Despite this lack of empirical scholarship, character education continues to garner support based on what little research has been done that demonstrates the results of implementing character programs. Studies like Reed Patterson's (2003) found that there was a significant increase in social skills acquisition for a group of elementary students involved in a character program as compared to those who were not. Much of the current research being done is taken as trial and error as educational researchers continue to discover what is effective and ineffective.

Thomas Lickona (1991) has been a proponent of character education for a number of years. Lickona's own definition of character is based on three broad areas of morality

that each encompass several aspects of what character entails. The three main areas are moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. All three of these areas work together to build what Lickona refers to as the components of good character. In the following, I critically examine each of these for their significance according to Lickona and the non-culturally partial and secular form his model takes.

Moral knowing, according to Lickona (1991), is comprised of several goals that the cultivation of good character should strive for. Each of these goals share a common focus which is based on being aware of yourself and others. The importance of perspective-taking, self-knowledge, moral awareness in character seem obvious in their importance. One must know who they are, while being aware of those around them, and then make reasoned decisions based on the interaction of the two. In terms of moral knowing these are the desirable goals that Lickona puts forward that I support for their essential roles and evaluative properties concerning my study.

The second area that Lickona examines is moral feeling, which is concerned with the emotional component found in character education (Lickona, 1991). Although Lickona acknowledges that moral feeling is a crucial part of what makes up good character, it is often neglected. There are several kinds of moral knowing that Lickona elaborates on, and I have chosen to include the three that I feel are most essential to the project of character; conscience, empathy, and humility. These three components clearly emphasize the importance of knowing one self so that one can develop and maintain good character. Being morally aware (conscience) is fundamental in that it embodies the emotional aspect of the self, and helps to process and guide judgement on how to carry oneself with character. Likewise empathy takes that same definition, yet it applies to the



others that we come into contact with. Being able to project oneself into another's situation is crucial in knowing how to understand another person's lived experience.

The last component of character that Lickona puts forth is moral action, which is comprised of competence, will, and habit. Having the capabilities of acting in a morally sound manner (competence), guided by the strength of conviction (will), and incorporated into how you act (habit) are all important to not just having good character, but using that character in one's everyday life. This last component of good character has the strongest influence in terms of evaluating character education programs, as moral action is often the consequence of moral knowing and moral feeling.

Lickona's model of character seems to follow the traditional form of moral education advocated by those like Aristotle and Kant who marked the importance of having moral principles and rules to be guided by (Burnet, 1967; Buchner, 1904). As practical as this form of moral education is it also lacks a certain amount of experience and engagement with the project of being morally responsible. Little (1993) has commented that traditional moral wisdom is dispassionate and lacks the emotion and affection that infuse so much of our lived experience. To examine this issue I have looked at a different approach, and have included an alternative to character education which is based more on experience and the person.

Nel Noddings (2002) is well known for her writings on the ethic of care, and in this instance Noddings turns a critical eye on character education. Noddings' concern centers on the dangers of moral indoctrination, and values incalculations. This is an important addition to my focus of character education, as it brings to light some serious criticism about the goals of including lessons on character into the classroom.

Noddings responds with an alternative to character education, because of the principle-based form it tends to take. While character education tends to walk a fine line between making the individual conform, and creating social cohesion, an ethic of care is focused on the relational values that affect our lives. Noddings' alternative would see students learning from models of caring (the teacher), and being encouraged to act towards each other in a model that is based on empathy and not on a list of moral values.

I believe that Noddings' apprehension towards character education really stems from the fact that it articulates certain specific ways of living and interacting that develop a moral character. In Noddings understanding, the goal is to establish those conditions and relations that will promote us to act in good character. While care ethicists and character educators are similarly dedicated to the idea that to better society we need to be better people, they are both clearly distinct on the manner in how to achieve this (Little, 1993; Noddings, 1999; Gilligan, 1988).

I appreciate that Noddings as a care ethicist is critical of the directive form that character education takes, yet there is much more in common between these two schools of thought than not, which is why I include it in my analysis. The subject should not be a caring alternative to character education, but a form of character education based on an ethic of care. Noddings' (1999) has attempted to reconcile these two different approaches in the piece, 'Care, justice, and equity'. In this piece, Noddings focuses on the distinct moral orientations of justice and care that can be compared to the distinction she makes between care ethicists, and character educators. Character education, with its principle-based ethic, leans towards moral obligations and duties, as Noddings (1991) claims, which are obviously based on an ethic of justice. Care ethicists have no inclination

towards rules and regulations so to speak, and direct their moral concerns on how people are with each other when they act out of care (Noddings, 2002). This is an interesting dimension to the moral debate that surrounds the subject of character education. In the last section I summarize how the ethic of care can and should form the basis for character education.

### **Character as defined for the purpose of this study**

After reviewing the evolution of character as understood in education, I ideally would have liked to come to a definite response as to how I define character. Instead of a packaged definition, I find myself renewing my commitment to the inclusion of character and care in the classroom. It is clear from Aristotle on, that the school has the responsibility to not only cultivate the student's intellect, but their social intellect as well. Following that, Locke emphasized the important connection between the home and the school in working together to contribute to the development of character. Mill's utilitarian approach lends an accurate portrayal of the difficulties in educating for character at a young age. The student's faculties of reason and frame of reference make it difficult to calculate the benefit of the greater good, yet they do tend to base much of their moral reflection on avoiding pain and embracing happiness.

Kant's contribution is important for the methodological manner in which he lays out the rules and maxims that students should follow to achieve good character. Taken under Mill's concept of character, abiding to certain rules of conduct seems an important inclusion in evaluating a character education program. Dewey and Durkheim both stress the significance of educating for the improvement of the moral culture of society. With respect to my study, I have taken this as an analytical measure in attempting to make the

connections between the classroom community and the larger community that it exists in, Montreal. Lickona's model and Noddings ethic of care have the greatest level of influence in terms of analyzing the family units program. My research is embedded in the scholarship that precedes me, yet it is their specific takes on character education that lend the most to my project.

Perhaps it is idealistic to believe in the inherent good in people, and moreover that the cultivation of that good should occur within the school setting. However, the body of work that I relied upon for my own definition, is testament that I am not the only one who has confidence in this project. Character is who we are when we are with others. It is the part of the self that we rely on to help us rationalize, empathize and act in a manner in which we would want others to act towards ourselves.

To educate for character based on principles disengages the person from the material that they are learning about. Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1992) acknowledge the importance of connecting experience with morality so that one does not rely solely on a detached critical morality which leaves them separated from the nuances of lived knowledge. That is why the commentary by Little (1993) and the alternative proposed by Noddings has a significant impact on my definition of character.

Noddings (1999) writes that justice and care do not need to be mutually exclusive, that often a person of character will do what they think is right because they care. It is this point that I would really like to focus on, doing what is right because they care. A theory that combines the moral training of reasoning and the relational component of care theory would make a well-established and effective character education program. Moral obligation would become more relevant to the person, not because they act on the right

thing to do, but because they care about the right thing to do. Likewise, moral duties would take the form of responsible acts of caring, that cause the person to want to act in a moral way because they are motivated by the responsibility that comes from caring for others.

Educating for character undoubtedly becomes more relevant when the person being educated has a personal interest in acquiring character. This is my personal definition of character education that I use to guide my exploration of the family units program. In the next chapter, I discuss the details of my case study and the methods that I used to collect the necessary data to examine the family unit program.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Methodology and Models of Investigation**

As discussed in the previous chapter, there are many influences for the model of exploration I have decided to use for this project. Because the field of character education is constantly building on new research, I felt that the best research method was to develop a model that incorporated important elements from the educational dialogue that surrounds character education. In this chapter I present details of my case study, the methods of data collection, and the models used in assessing the efficacy and level of engagement of the family units project.

#### **Background for research models**

The decision to approach this project as a case study was influenced by many different factors. Initially I was drawn to the number of studies that have already been conducted in this field of educational research that utilized case studies to garner empirical research (Swiniarski, 2003; Milson, 2000). What drew me to this program in particular was as a result of my sister's experience in the program. She praises the family program as being influential in building her self-confidence and the social skills she still depends on today (observational notes, May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2005). After witnessing first hand the affectionate way in which she and her friends talked about their family teacher and family class, I decided that there was something significant happening at this school that I thought deserved more detailed attention.

This case study is set in a local school that includes an elementary and high school sector. My focus is with the elementary sector as the high school program has altered significantly in the past 10 years. The original proposal for the school was based

on a curriculum that revolved around the fine arts. Today, you will find students practicing their instruments in the halls, or working on a collaborative art project in an empty classroom. The influence of the fine arts curriculum is felt in all aspects of the school, which is why I decided to focus on an add-on character education program as opposed to a school that infused character education into its entire curriculum. By isolating a certain number of students, with a specific teacher who focuses solely on character education, the school's family program created an ideal environment for an investigation of the effectiveness of the program.

A brief overview of the community in which the school is set, demonstrates why it is an ideal representation of the Greater Montreal population. The school has approximately 1500 students enrolled, from Pre-K to Secondary 5. They hold themselves to be an accurate representation of the Montreal population, with a multicultural student body that comes from a mixed social economic background ranging from extremely high to low. In addition, 30% of their student body comes from a community where the principal language is other than that of French or English.

The school's mission statement outlines the fundamental values that they hope to foster in their student population. These include an openness of spirit, respect for others, autonomy of person, cooperation, and self-esteem. The purpose of their family units is described as:

*Students in [the school's] elementary and secondary are grouped in "Family Units" led by a family teacher. The Family generates enthusiasm and a team spirit among students. They share confidences, tackle new challenges and learn about themselves and the world around them in this atmosphere of mutual trust. Students usually stay in the same "family" for many years.*

([www.emsb.qc.ca](http://www.emsb.qc.ca))

Although the term character is not explicitly mentioned, there are several descriptive terms that indicate that character is a focus of the family program. Specifically, I refer to the section where family is used to allow the students to learn about themselves and the world around them in an environment of trust. This addresses the core values that many character education programs have are based on (DeRoche & Williams, 2001; Murphy, 2002). Not only is inter-age learning present in the program, there is also the development of trust and commitment which also play an important role. With 60% of Canadian students between the ages of 11 and 13 responding that they feel the teacher does not know them as a person, the issue of trust and establishing of relationships within the classroom is clearly an element of education that needs to be explored ([www.statcanada.ca](http://www.statcanada.ca)). The principal of the school reiterated that educating for character and building a sense of community have always been the driving forces behind the family units program (observational notes, May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2005).

I have chosen to focus on one family unit in the elementary school sector even though moral development has been identified by Kohlberg (1981) as being at its most critical stage in adolescence. Unfortunately the program at the high school level plays a less active role then it once did, and so there was not enough material to complete a thorough exploration of the program. In addition to this, much of the current research in the field of character education programs is done at the elementary level, which subsequently facilitated the establishment of context for this case study (DeRoche & Williams, 2001).

The family units in the school incorporate students from different grade levels and are led by a family teacher. In the case of the family group I chose to follow for this



study, the grade span covered first to third grade with the youngest student being 6 and the eldest being 9 years of age. The benefit of focusing on one family group at this level is that I gained an increasing familiarity with the people who participate, their personalities, and patterns of interaction.

To gain a sense of the long-term impact the family units program had on students who had participated in the past, I chose to conduct interviews with former students of the program. Specifically, my intent is researching whether they felt the program had any influence on how they conceive of their character today. The interviews are also practical for examining their recollections of the program and the relationship they had with the family teacher. There are two benefits to a follow up with former students. First it allows for a more complete picture of the program, and secondly it offers insight into the long-term effectiveness of a character education program.

#### *Data Collection*

The family units meet for the first 25 minutes of the school day from Monday to Friday, and once a week for two hours during the school day. Initially I intended to participate in the early morning sessions, but on the suggestion of the family teacher I decided to attend the weekly family classes to achieve a more complete picture of what the program covered. On the few occasions that I did attend the early morning sessions, I concluded that there was a traditional home room atmosphere that was perhaps more intimate based on the personal interactions of the people involved in the program (observational notes, April 28th, 2005).

The weekly 2-hour family group times were the sites of my participant observation for a period of 8 weeks. The study was conducted starting the last week of

April until the end of the school year on June 23rd. The decision to research at this time was based on the assumption that the students have by then adjusted to their family class. Detailed field notes were taken when observing and all family group interactions were recorded and transcribed. The choice to be a participant observer was motivated by the age group of the participants and the nature of the program.

In my first encounter with the family that I would be following for the length of the study the family teacher took time to introduce me to the students as a member of their family for a couple of weeks. I explained my presence by saying that I was curious to see what these 'families' were all about. Due to my role as a participant observer I was actively aware of the potential for researcher bias in presenting my findings. Once I began my research I controlled for any bias in the presentation of my findings by retaining a personal journal that was used as a guideline when transcribing the observations that were taken from the program. The goal of this case study is to explore a program and present findings based on what occurred over the 8-week research period and not to evaluate. With that in consideration, it is clear that researcher bias is less of a threat to the validity of the findings.

There are several interviews I conducted to gather the necessary background information and current perspectives of the program. First, there are the group interviews with the students currently in the program. The group interviews were conducted over the course of the study. I held interviews with two of the teachers that are involved in the family program, the primary family teacher for my case study group, and another family teacher who was in her second year of the program. The teacher who was new to the family program offered insight into how a teacher is introduced to the family concept. I

also had the chance to speak with the principal of the school, who at one point in his career had been a family teacher. He was able to provide information concerning the background and governmental pressures that are being placed on the family units program.

Initially, as mentioned before I had wanted to examine the family program at the high school level. In the presentation of results I discuss the changing role of the program at the high school level in more detail. Due to the age of the participants and the public nature of the study, I have guaranteed all the interviewed parties confidentiality. In cases where people are referred to directly, I have changed their names to ensure confidentiality.

### *Limitations*

With any case study there is the issue that the results that are not applicable to other educational situations (Anderson, 1998). The benefit of doing this case study, in particular, is to use it as a model for other schools and classrooms as a method of incorporating character education into a school with a multicultural student body. As mentioned, before the empirical research done in the field of character education tends to be based on case studies. As noted by Murphy (2002) of the hundreds of schools that incorporated character education programs in the US, none were based on one particular model. Because of this lack of a cohesive model of what a character education program is and what form it should take, the current exploration of the family program is yet another contribution to a growing body of descriptive research that demonstrates an additional program of character education.

## **Model of investigation**

In Chapter 2 I reviewed the history and current research in the field, and established my own definitions based on the work of Lickona (1991, 1993) and Noddings (1999, 2002). My motivation was to establish a model that could, a) recognize which of Lickona's factors were present if at all, and b) to examine the level of commitment and engagement of the people involved with the program. Lickona (1993) makes it clear that the school must aid students in understanding core values that shape our moral decisions and actions. Worzbyt (2004) in *Teaching Kids to Care and to be Careful*, also emphasizes the importance of including the values of our society in the classroom to teach students specifically to care and use those values in their interactions with others.

Lickona's model was chosen based on his clear identification of 12 essential steps to incorporating a comprehensive program of character education into the classroom. Due to time constraints of the study, I focus on what I consider to be the key concepts in Lickona's model. Furthermore, I use Noddings' (1999) ethics of care theory in examining what level of commitment the participating members at this local Montreal elementary school exhibit. These key concepts are:

1. *Teacher as model and mentor*- Lickona is calling for the teacher to set the standard in treating all students with respect, correcting harmful behaviour and supporting positive actions by the students. An supplementary factor that will be examined is the level of commitment the teacher has to acting like a moral agent in the classroom. This ties into the ethic of care, and the fact that to be a model and mentor the teacher as a moral agent must have a certain level of commitment to the project. Another factor that is considered is whether the family teacher feels that they have enough training and support from the

administration to lead the family unit program. This factor of investigation addresses the level of care that the school's administration has towards the character education program.

2. *Practice moral discipline*- the teacher must use the creation and enforcement of rules to encourage moral reasoning. The teacher must also demonstrate that this moral discipline is coming from a sense of justice based on an ethic of care. Is the teacher disciplining in relation to the situation, and are they taking into account the students involved to make discipline decisions based on all these factors. In the case of acknowledging moral discipline, the goal is to not simply acknowledge its presence but to review whether the measures of discipline are influenced by an ethic of care and engagement.

3. *Create a democratic classroom*- the program according to Lickona (1991) should involve the students in decisions regarding themselves and hold them accountable. Noddings (2002) notes that as an alternative to character education, a program based on an ethic of care would encourage student participation based on mutual respect and involvement. This study looks at the support of the family group in the classroom activities as well as their level of emotional investment towards the outcome of classroom discussions. The democratic classroom under the pretext of character education should not only include the student but allow room for the student to develop a desire to take part in the decisions that effect their classroom community (Gaze, Hogarth, & Maclean, 2003; Sprung, 2005). Democratic education is in its own right a field of study in educational research (Gutmann, 1987; Giroux & Giroux, 2004) however in this

assessment it will be examined under the pretext of student involvement to educate for character.

4. *Use cooperative learning*- the program should nourish the student's appreciation of others, and encourage working together toward a common goal (Lickona, 1991). This aspect of Lickona's model is in line with the ethic of care that I attempt to build into my evaluative model. The key terms that I focus on are the students appreciation of others and their social interactions while engaged in activities in the family program. Family time consists of two hours of class time a week and involves a variety of activities. The interactions between the different age groups when engaged in an activity are indicators of co operative learning as well as how the students respond to other's needs. Hunter (2000) understands character in a social form that influences our vision of reality. Keeping that in mind, the goal for this aspect of investigation is to examine how the students relate to each other based in social interactions. Is the interaction consequence of shared space or do the students authentically engage with one another in the shared reality of the family group.

5. *Develop conscience of craft*- one of the goals of an effective character program should be to show students how to appreciate learning and hard work and to also take pride in their accomplishments and how that can effect others (Lickona, 1991). To evaluate this factor including an ethic of care requires research on two separate issues. First, are the students encouraged to be committed to the activities and projects in the family class? On a more intimate level are the students fostering a sense of pride, accomplishment, or fulfillment for the work that they are doing. Second, how does the program nourish the student's level of awareness concerning the effect their work will have on others. For

example, after completing an art project, do the students consider how people will respond to it? Lickona's focus is principally on the student developing a strong work ethic. I have interpreted this component as a commitment to work produced and the reflection on what impact that work will have on others.

6. *Encourage moral reflection*- the students should read, research, discuss, and journal their thoughts, experiences and ideas (Lickona, 1991). While Lickona is specific about the forms of practice reflection should take (journaling, researching, discussing), I am more concerned with what capacity the subject of reflection enters the classroom dialogue. Ryan and Bohlin (1999) urge educators to consider the creative side of moral reflection with what they call moral imagination. For the purpose of this study, my interpretations of moral reflection will be based on this creative aspect that takes instances of play and stories as areas where moral reflection can occur. Questions that guide this section include, did the students initiate a discussion? Does the reading material made available to them instigate moral reflection of any kind?

7. *Foster caring beyond the class*- the program should use positive role models and allow the students to develop altruistic natures by working to improve the community outside of school (Lickona, 1991). The focus at this point is to attempt to recognize what the interaction is between the classroom community and the larger community outside the classroom. In terms of the teachers, and the material used in the family units, I am looking for the fostering of an identity with their neighbourhoods where the students live, the city that they all share, the country that they live in, and the world that they inhabit. Nourishing care outside of the classroom forces the students to examine the many different communities that they are a part of (Noddings, 2002). Also, the students should

be self-motivated to a certain degree (based on age, and education level) to inquire about other communities. In addition to this, the students should genuinely demonstrate an interest with regard to what is going on outside of the classroom and how that in turn is affecting their lives. Worzbyt (2004) bases a large portion of his educational project on encouraging caring with students. To do so, Worzbyt outlines a number of activities such as presenting real life situations, newspaper reading at home with the family, and a walk through their neighbourhood. I noted examples of these types of fostering care in the family program as well as any interest or knowledge of environmental issues or community projects involving the city or their neighbourhoods.

8. *Recruit parents and members of the community*- the parents and the community are an untapped resource; the school should use them as models (Lickona, 1991). At the onset of this study I noted the strong connections between the family as the primary agent of socialization. The terminology involved with examining the family program, and the family teacher, leads to an area of research that examines the interplay between the home family and the school family. Along with investigating the positions of those directly involved in the program, I am also interested in the actual participation of the parents in the classroom. Parental involvement has played a significant role in the majority of character education programs (DeRoche & Williams, 2002; Ryan & Bohlin, 1999; Berkowitz, 2002).

Early on in the research process I realized that the family units program was not nearly as encompassing at the high school level as it was at the elementary level. As a result, the population for this case study was exclusively from grades one, two, and three. All family units in the school consist of students from different grade levels and are led



by a family teacher. The family teacher has worked as a teacher and as a family teacher at the school for over twenty years. She invited me into her family class with open arms and an open mind, and made all and any resources I could possibly need to conduct this research available to me. Her family class consists of 23 children ranging in age from 6 to 9 years of age. The benefit of focusing on one family class in particular is that it allowed me to have an increasing familiarity with the students who participate in class activities, their personalities, and patterns of interaction.

I also chose to conduct interviews with former students who had experience with the family unit project. Since my model of investigation is consistent with the family program, as it is conducted at the elementary level, most of the former students had recently graduated from the school. The former students were chosen on the basis of their attendance of elementary and high school at this local Montreal school. My focus is how they remember the program, and what influence if at all it had on their feelings toward school, their classmates, the teachers, and their development. Ideally, these interviews allow for a more complete picture of the program. An effective character education program should impart lessons that become a part of our life long learning (Lickona, 2004). The social skills that these programs teach become the cornerstones to how we as adults relate to one another within our communities. As such, interviewing former students and asking them to reflect on how this program influences them now, I attempt to evaluate the consistency of the program and its efficacy.

At this point I would like to address the 'add on' nature of the family units project. While the current research suggests that character education should be infused into the curriculum, that requires a significant adjustment of the subject material, and manner in

which they are taught. Rita Stein one of the authors of *Connecting Character to Conduct* (2000), is particularly vocal about the failure of add on character programs. Stein et al (2000) and others who oppose add on programs maintain that the isolated nature of add on programs does not treat the entirety that character education is involved in. The benefits of add on programs, is that these issues are directly addressed through actions, modeling, and discussion. As math is a separate discipline from economics, the skills learned in one aid in the understanding and acquiring of skills in the other. And so it should be with character education.

The point is to allow the students to acquire the skills to relate to one another and to develop a sense of identity within their community so that they can carry those lessons with them into other subjects. For example, the character trait of cooperation is addressed in a family class. The students then leave to go on to math class where the students are more likely to help each other based on the skills of co operation taught to them in family class. That being said, I am in complete support of character education programs that work as 'add on' courses to the general curriculum. I feel that it is an important step towards being able to include those lessons inherently into the curriculum with an increase of efficiency.

### **Additional factors in my investigation**

Although I have presented a multitude of factors that I am taking under consideration for my examination, there are some other components that presented themselves over the course of the study that should be noted. There were two occasions when family time was engaged in activity outside of the school. Both of these activities I felt were important contributions to the overall project and so I conducted interviews

following the activities. Also, while I received permission from 15 of the 23 participants in the family group I chose to follow there were other students present that made their opinions known. In the case that I have drawn on this commentary I have done so indirectly, and have not used any of the personal information associated with the child. In the next chapter I present my findings of the case study of character education at work at the school. To summarize I present a model of investigation that I have discussed in this chapter and which I used as a guideline to identify key components that are present in the program.

**Table 1.1**

Components of a character education program	Factors that indicate the level of engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teacher as model and mentor</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Investigate how the teacher acts as, a moral agent, how the students respond to the teacher, any type of mimicking behaviour or moments of mentoring</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Practice moral discipline</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Look at how the teacher handles situations that require discipline, specifically the manner in which they dealt with the students, are decisions made along an ethic of justice or care</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create a democratic classroom</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Surveying for instances where the students participate in classroom discussions, decisions: Is it being encouraged, are students aware of their role in the classroom as part of a community?</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use cooperative learning</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How are the students encouraged to work together, are the activities cooperative? what influence does the intergenerational component have on the activities?</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop conscience of craft</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Examine the investment student make in their activities, instances of work ethic, pride, a sense of accomplishment particularly in group projects</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Encourage moral reflection</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Note the role of reflection in the family class: Is it encouraged? Are the students reflecting on their own without encouragement?</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Foster caring beyond the class</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explore the subject of group identity, classroom, neighbourhood, city, country, internationally. What are the connections and involvement of the family program with communities outside of the classroom?</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recruit parents and members of the community</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is the role of the parents in the family program? What community resources are being brought in and used during family time?</li></ul>

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

When I began my observations of the family class on April 28th, 2005 the unique nature of the program began to make itself evident. It was in the subtle interactions between students, their parents, and the teachers that worked to create a sense of openness, welcome, and connection. I was immediately taken with the comforting atmosphere that the classroom conveyed, which is something other researchers had identified in their own first impressions of schools that have incorporated character education (Murphy, 2002; Stein, 2000). It was my first day in family class and I was starting to observe certain components of my investigation in full effect.

#### **Teacher as model and mentor**

The family teacher that I was working with had been a family teacher for over 20 years. In my first interview with her she spoke at length about how the program is primarily dependant on the teacher to use the time that is put aside productively (personal interview, May 19th 2005). The family teacher is committed to the program and recognizes the teacher's role in the classroom as being one of a moral agent. As she mentioned during our interview:

"There is so much that goes on here during family time. The kids, who stay in this same class with me for a number of years, really feel like part of a family."

(personal interview, May 19th, 2005)

A second year family teacher who expressed the responsibility she felt in modeling certain behaviours for her students, reflected the emphasis that the family teacher places on the teacher's role in the program:

" You know, they pick up on the slightest things, and that's why it's so important that when I'm dealing with a parent, or another student that they [the students] can see how I relate to the them. I think how the teacher acts in the classroom, especially in family determines the atmosphere of the classroom, and sets the tone."

(personal interview, May 19th, 2005)

It was clear at this point that the teachers involved in the program were engaged in their roles as models and mentors.

Over the course of the study, I noticed a series of interactions and moments that echoed the sentiments that both family teachers had towards the program. When one family teacher was talking to a student, another student would respectfully wait to speak until there was a break in the conversation (observational notes, May 5th, 2005). This is exactly how the teacher had handled herself when she approached two boys who were talking about a book. I noticed that even the teacher, who acts as the authority in the classroom, respected and modeled the same behaviour that she expects from the students. In a similar example of modeling and mentoring, I witnessed the second year teacher address a group of third grade girls who were arguing about who was going to take care of their sick classmate. Instead of modeling behaviour, she approached the students and suggested that one person accompany the sick student to get some water, while the other called her mom. After the suggestion was accepted by the students, the teacher also took

a moment to acknowledge what good friends and classmates they were by being so caring towards their sick friend (observational notes, May 19th, 2005).

This was a powerful example of how the family unit dynamic creates an unstructured social environment where the students can interact, and where teachers can take advantage of moments to mentor. The familiar manner in which the family teachers related to the students and the parents, spoke to the presence of care in the family class. Noddings (2002) acknowledges the importance of conversation between the teacher and the student. Conversations, Noddings writes, provide opportunity for the exchange of personal information which forces the student and teacher to interact as people (p.144).

Due to the open concept of family time, there were many instances wherein I observed teachers and students exchanging personal information about themselves. In this respect, the family teachers model, mentor, and engage with their students in a manner that promotes caring. Both the former and current students had very strong feelings about their family teachers and the influence the teachers had on their school experience. When questioned about the differences between their family teacher and other teachers, both the current students and former students replied that they felt more comfortable in approaching and talking with their family teacher (Emily, Fabienne, personal interviews, May 25th 2005 ; Frank, Keisha, Muru, personal interviews, May 12th 2005). The shared sentiment of comfort that was relayed by the first, second, and third grade students I interviewed, and the former students who left the program several years ago, is a testament to the role that that teacher plays in the family units project.

The caveat of having the teacher act as a model and mentor is that they have to be prepared to do so. The second year teacher expressed how she felt on her first year assigned to a family class:

"You know, there was no book, no workshop, just 2 hours of free time and the school's mission statement. If it hadn't been for [the family teacher], I'm not sure how I would have grown into the family teacher that I am today. She [the family teacher], at least at the elementary level, plays a big part in introducing the concept of family to new teachers coming into the school."

(personal interview, May 19th, 2005)

It appears that while the teachers that I observed made concentrated efforts to act as models and mentor during family time, this was not a concrete component of the program. In fact, another teacher who did not want to be named in this study seemed uncomfortable with the concept of free time to be used to explore issues of community and social behaviour. This teacher who was in his first year with the family program had come from a more traditionally structured school and felt that he did not receive enough support or resources concerning how to best use family time. When I questioned the principal about what kind of preparation new teachers are offered when they come into the school, he mentioned that in the past they had compiled a resource book of activities, however it had been misplaced. Now he commented he relies on teachers familiar with the family program to act as mentors to the new teachers.

It is clear that the family program is dependant on its teachers, however this can also be viewed as a drawback. Because the program is essentially free time for the teacher to use with the group, the objectives and purpose of the family program are not



consistent throughout the school. If the teachers are not prepared or familiar with the activities and how to use that time, then the consistency of the family program becomes an issue.

### **Practice moral discipline**

The activities that take place during family time vary widely on subject matter and goals. The family teacher explained that there are family activities that will be completed in a single family class and projects that might take a few family classes to complete. The focus I wanted to draw on was the format of how these activities take place, which tends to remain the same whether the subject is the environment or a community project. The activities and the projects I observed seemed to follow the format of group discussion, small group work, and then group discussion based on the small group work. Because of the different age groups that are working together on a joint project, disagreements do occur. As such, there were ample instances to witness how the matter of discipline was dealt with in the context of the family program.

On one particular occasion a first grade girl complained that the third grade students in her group were not letting her do any of the work on their poster. When the teacher approached the group to settle the disagreement, the conversation that followed was more of a mediation than a rendering of discipline. The teacher first asked the group how the project was going. Once they had all taken turns to reply she then asked them what each one had done to contribute to such a beautiful project. Before the students had the opportunity to reply the teacher went on to say:

"Because I know that to create something this beautiful each and every one of you must be helping out, right?"

(observational notes, May 12th, 2005)

On that note the two third graders who had been implicated in the poster shut out looked warily at each other, and then responded yes. The teacher left the group alone, and watched from across the room as they continued, with the first grader, working on their poster.

This example demonstrates the opportunity to benefit from a teaching moment when students, especially from different grades, are allowed to work together in an unstructured environment. The teacher in the above example not only taught the students about inclusion, but she did so in an indirect manner so that they were drawn to the conclusion themselves. Furthermore, the way in which the teacher practiced moral discipline was taken from the situation, in that she didn't appeal to any rules or guidelines. This is an example of how moral discipline within family time works to engage the students in the process and not just relay information to them. The students in the family class also felt that discipline was managed differently in family then it was in other classes. A girl in third grade noted:

"I'm so comfortable in family, and my family teacher is so nice that I never really get in trouble, except sometimes, and then she talks to me and explains things, she never yells or makes anyone feel bad."

(personal interview, May 12th, 2005)

The relationship that the students have with their family teacher, seems to be an important factor in how moral discipline is practiced during this classroom time.

In my interviews with the former students, Emily who started in the family program at the age of 7 and who is now 19, remembers how the teacher dealt with students in family:

"...because we were like a family, it was all the more personal, you know? Like you could talk to your family teacher about anything, and so if you did something you weren't supposed to do, your family teacher would take the time to talk to you."

(personal interview, May 25th 2005)

Lisa who also joined the family program at the age of 8 and is the same age as Emily, agreed:

"You had that pressure to not disappoint your family teacher in the same way that you don't want to disappoint your parents. Sure other teachers were different, they talked tough, or gave you a hard time, but it wasn't the same kind of discipline that you'd get in family because it was so much like a family."

(personal interview, May 25th, 2005)

In the eight weeks that I observed family class time, I did note instances where the students did cross the boundaries that had been set by the family teacher. Once, when the second year family teacher was talking to the group, a student responded that he wasn't going to listen to her if he didn't want to. The teacher calmly asked him to go sit by himself and think about what he said and why he had said it (observational notes, June 9th, 2005). I noted that this was a good example of the kind of moral discipline that Lickona (2004) emphasizes in his writing on character education programs.

When the class activities had begun, the teacher went over and had a talk about respect with the student, and also took time to listen to his reasoning for making the comment. The time and care that the teacher exhibited when dealing with this one student speaks to the nature of the relationships in the family unit program. Students begin to learn how to relate to others in a manner that is both respectful yet mindful of the fact that they too have the right to voice a position that can be expressed to clarify the situation.

When examining moral discipline, I focused on notable situations that merited disciplinary action. The format and atmosphere in the family class is such that when these situations arise the lessons that are learned speak to the practicality of character education. Many of the examples where moral discipline was practiced occurred in a group setting with more than one student involved or watching. The element of being engaged with others and relating to them, opens the door for applying moral discipline. It is not about if the teachers practiced moral discipline but the fact that the relationships within that environment commanded a different kind of discipline which is based on mutual respect and caring.

### **Create a democratic classroom**

One of the strongest components of any comprehensive character education program is the degree to which the students participate in the classroom. The class time that is set aside every morning and once a week is specifically geared to what the students want to do. Each morning the children enter their family classroom and are given the opportunity to do whatever they want for the first half- hour of every school day. On a number of occasions, I witnessed students playing with blocks, taking books from the reading corner, catching up on homework, or sitting with the teacher and talking about

what happened last night at home (observational notes, May 5th, May 19th, May 26th, 2005).

I think that starting each day in the family classroom, with your family teacher sets a comfortable and familiar atmosphere for the students. From grade 1 to grade 3 they enter the same classroom space, see the same teacher, and for a couple of years interact with the same group of peers. This allows the students to assert themselves as active members in their family space. On one occasion, I witnessed a student suggest to his family teacher that projects that were laid out for display be moved to another area of the classroom. The teacher responded by asking the two other students what their opinion was on moving the display of the family's work (observational notes, May 12th, 2005). I noted this as an example of the teacher creating a democratic classroom for the students. On one hand, the student felt comfortable enough in the classroom space to initiate change, and on the other hand, the teacher opened the decision to other members of the classroom. After some deliberation, a decision was made to move the display and some other students who had been listening came over to assist.

Some of the most remarkable instances of democratic values in the family classroom occurred in the once a week extended family classes. The teacher consistently presented projects and activities as options so that the family could decide together what form the activity should take.

For example, in one family class the students were prepared to have a former parent come in to perform music based on the environment in celebration of Earth Day. When the parent cancelled, the teacher made a point of sitting and explaining the conditions under which the visitor had cancelled and then asked the students what they

would like to do the rest of the afternoon. Many of the students opened a discussion about activities that related to Earth Day or the environment, and when the teacher noted that she had just received a new book on that same topic, the students encouraged her to read it (observational notes, April 28th, 2005). This example demonstrated the democratic element as well as the degree to which the students in the program recognize their place in the classroom. The students engage in what the activities are because they have essentially agreed as a group on what the activity should be.

The students felt a strong sense of agency during family time, which I had already noted. A second grade boy named Frank commented:

"In family class we can talk to the teacher about what we want to, and you know if everyone thinks it's a good idea then most of the time the teacher lets us do it."

(personal interview, May 12th, 2005)

This sentiment was echoed in my interviews with the former students of the program. When questioned as to how their family class was different from their other classes, they all responded that there was more dialogue and freedom of expression in family class. Emily a former student said:

"I think that [family class] had a huge impact on how I developed as a student. I was so comfortable with expressing my ideas and suggestions from such an early age, that I find myself in CEGEP classes doing the same."

(personal interview, May 25th, 2005)

Lisa another former student added:

"I feel the exact same way, other students are always like 'I don't want to go talk to the teacher' like they're scared or something. I never feel that way I just always

saw teachers as people too, and I think that has a lot to do with the equal kind of relationship we had with an adult outside of our family at such an early age."

(personal interview, May 25th, 2005)

This notion of developing a relationship based on equal rapport with an adult outside your family is an element of the family program that I think adds to its democratic nature. In addition to this, the fact that former students carried away the lessons that a student could relate to a teacher because they are people too is another significant advantage to the family program.

There were also instances where the students were not in agreement on which direction a certain activity should take. The family teacher explained:

"You want the kids to participate, but at the same time they need boundaries, family time is a delicate balance between allowing the students to assert themselves as members of the classroom, and them [the students] taking control of the class."

(personal interview, May 19th, 2005)

With that comment the family teacher had brought to light an extremely important factor, classroom management for the democratic classroom. Another family teacher, who had just begun to work in the program, felt that his students would benefit from a more disciplined environment. When I brought the point raised by the first year family teacher to the attention of the family teacher who had been working with the program for a number of years, she mentioned that she sympathized with the new teacher:

"You know there's nothing that prepares you for an open concept classroom like family, and some teachers especially the new ones are intimidated by it. What we

need is more time to discuss resources, plan, and introduce new teachers to what our family program is and what their role in the classroom is during that time. It's a great opportunity if you use it but some teachers don't and that's the problem."

(personal interview, May 25th, 2005)

Family time is seen as the student's time guided by the family teacher. The benefit that the family program has over other classes that are attempting to adopt more democratic styles of classroom management is the familial nature of the relationships that develop within that classroom. The atmosphere is relaxed, the students feel a familiarity with the teachers and each other: As a consequence the students are more at ease with making suggestions and being active members of the classroom.

### **Use cooperative learning**

Cooperative learning in the context of a character education program takes on an added emphasis. It has been noted that character education programs vary in their content and format, but there is a singular goal that is found throughout the programs. The foundational goal of character education is learning how to relate to others in a respectful and caring manner. The students are not learning how to simply work together, and learn together in the family program they are learning to be together. The principal explained:

"Because of the nature of our program, the students are given more time to just co- exist in a given environment outside of the parameters of deadlines and evaluations. Family time is not a place where they [the students] are going to be marked or evaluated, they can just be...as a result they learn how to cooperate on a much larger scale, as people."

(personal interview, May 20th, 2005)



The cooperative element in family is present in all elements of the program- the students witness how parents interact with teachers, teachers relate to students, students to each other. Within the family class I witnessed countless examples of how the family worked together to include and establish a rapport between all of it's members. The principal went on to elaborate:

"We try to make our family class like a real family. In a real family you won't find all the members under 4 years of age grouped together, or the ones between 5 and 6 sitting together, it's all the members of the family eating and living together. That's the atmosphere we want to create with the family program, we cooperate because we care."

(personal interview, May 20th, 2005)

This notion of the family taking on the cooperative nature of an actual family was resonated with all groups that I held interviews with. The family teacher also highlighted this element of the program:

"Cooperative learning in the family class is a natural consequence of what happens when you group many different age groups together. Because we have the little guys in with the bigger guys, you end up creating an environment where the students begin to depend on each other and also develop a sense of responsibility."

(personal interview, May 19th, 2005)

The family units as noted before are comprised of the first three levels of primary school and involve the student's family members so that intergenerational learning becomes a considerable factor in the family units program. On a number of occasions I

noted instances where an older student offered a younger student help, or when an older student offered to read to a younger student (observational notes, May 5th, 19th, 26th, 2005). My impressions are that the students in the family class do not differentiate between ages. To the students, they are all a part of the same family and that is what is most significant to them. When I questioned the students about how they work together despite the age differences, their opinions were mixed. According to Steve a second grader:

"Sometimes the first graders are really annoying, and you always have to help them, and they ask a lot of questions."

(personal interview, May 12th, 2005)

When I noted that they themselves had been in first grade last year Steve interrupted me perhaps sensing the conclusion I was arriving at:

"Exactly, that's what I'm saying, last year we [the current second graders] always asked for help and asked a lot of questions. Now it's their turn to do that and next year they'll have to help the new kids who start grade one."

(personal interview, May 12th, 2005)

This student's position on cooperative learning summarized the important roles that the students adopt in an intergenerational environment, as well as the lessons about patience and tolerance that were being learned as a result.

Although I was impressed with how the students and teachers functioned in this cooperative environment, there were also those who did not feel that they benefited from the experience. There were some like Anne, a first grade girl who complained at length about the controlling nature of the third graders:

"They're really bossy and they think they're in charge all the time, and they're bullies, but mostly it's the boys, not the girls."

(personal interview, May 12th, 2005)

When I questioned the teachers about the first grader's attitude that was mirrored by a number of other first graders, the teachers put it in perspective:

"When we start to near the end of the school year the third graders are getting ready to move on to another stage in their school experience. They tend to get a little more rambunctious, and the first graders feel more comfortable in the classroom, so they are ready to adopt a little more responsibility. But I don't see this as a negative. In fact I see it as positive lessons for the students to disagree."

(observational notes, May 12th, 2005)

I questioned what positive lessons would come from experience with bullies for the young ones and feeling annoyed by the older ones? The teacher responded:

"Well in life we have to live and work, and exist with people that bully and annoy us right? And so where better can we deal with those life lessons than in the classroom, in a socially controlled environment, where the students can learn how to work with others despite their differences."

(observational notes, May 12th, 2005)

It was clear that cooperative learning plays a significant role in the family program. In addition to the intergenerational component, many of the activities that I witnessed were organized as group work with the teachers intentionally mixing up the grades so that they could benefit from each other's strengths and compensate for their weaknesses. In one such example, the students were organized into groups and asked to

draw posters that represented what they had learned on Earth Day. It should be noted that Earth Day was April 22, 2005 and the teachers did comment that the students had really taken an interest in environmental concerns, so a number of the family classes that I observed at this time centered on this subject. Each group was given a piece of poster paper and then asked to illustrate or write any thoughts or feelings they had about the environment. I took this opportunity to circulate amongst the groups so that I could observe what kind of 'cooperative' learning was taking place.

Each group seemed to be led by the older students who were asking them what they all wanted to include, or dividing up the paper so that they could all start working on it. Many times the younger students would ask the older ones for help with spelling or writing out a message that they wanted to include. In all the groups that I observed that day there seemed to be a high level of interaction and cooperation amongst the members of the group (observational notes, April 28th, 2005).

At moments there were disagreements, but I noticed that the group members took it upon themselves to resolve their issues and not a single student escalated the matter to the family teacher. Because of the structure that the family class takes, I agree with the family teacher that cooperative learning is a natural consequence of gathering students from different grades for many years in the same environment. The lessons that are learned are important because they are not explicit. There is no homework for the groups to take home and they will not receive a grade for the work that they did together. When I saw them present their posters together in their groups it was clear that a lesson that could not be readily evaluated had most definitely been learned.

### **Develop conscience of craft**

Since the work produced by family activities is not evaluated with grades, any sense of pride or accomplishment that the students achieve is by merit alone. However, because the family teacher becomes their ombudsperson, so to speak, the students often turn to their family teacher for academic advice and guidance. When I questioned the former students of the program on what their memories of work and family were they responded with interesting recollections, Lisa noted:

"I remember that if I was having a problem in one of my other classes, say I was struggling with my math class for example, then my math teacher would talk to my family teacher who would then approach me with a 'what's up?' attitude. It kind of helped to talk about my problems with the teacher, and she took the extra time since she knew me better than my math teacher did."

(personal interview, May 25th, 2005)

Emily, another former student added:

"I almost was more aware of disappointing my family teacher than my other teachers, if I didn't do my homework, or follow through on something from another class, I was always worried that it would somehow get back to my family teacher."

(personal interview, May 25th, 2005)

I think that this raises an interesting point about the relationship that the students foster with their family teacher. Pride in work and commitment to learning are measured in terms of disappointment and pride from the family teacher. What this signifies to me is

that the former students remember fostering a relationship with their family teacher that would cause them to care about their work.

In discussions with the current family teacher I raised the issue of the activities and projects that are a part of the program, I asked if the students have the opportunity to truly develop a conscience of craft when they know that they are not being evaluated. The family teacher responded:

"Well I think in family class, although there's no grade, the children still want to do their best because they want to make an impression on their family peers, and on their family teachers. In a way family class specifically nurtures a sense of pride in their work because they are committing and completing it based on its merit alone."

(personal interview, May 19th, 2005)

Lickona (1993) includes conscience of craft so that students are encouraged to foster pride in what they do and a certain commitment to their work outside of the reward system of grades. However, not all are supportive of the lack of evaluation procedures that are absent from the family program. In discussions with the principal, he noted that many parents had complained about the purpose of the family program, since their child was not receiving a grade for it, he remarked:

"Some parents think that if there's no grade in a class, then there's no point to having that class. Also, as important as the experiences that these students have in family class are, if someone doesn't see a test or a grade, or a book, they question what's the point."

(personal interview May 20th, 2005)

The principal went on to talk about the frustrations of defending a program like family in the face of government pressures to include more minutes of math, science, and technology. When I noted that there were a number of studies that indicated decreased levels of violence, and an increase in school performance as a result of character education programs (Colgan, 2003; Deitter, 2002; Gilnes, 2003), the principal added in agreement:

"I know that the family program has its value in improving the quality and commitment of the students school work, I'm just telling you that there are those who just don't get it."

(personal interview, May 20th, 2005)

This section of investigation into the purposefulness of the family program, and the sense of pride and engagement the students have to their work, raised many different issues. These issues surrounded whether character education programs like the family program were getting the sufficient support from the administration and the government. When the school, which celebrated its 30th anniversary this June, was established part of its mandate was that the family program should run from grade 1 through to grade 11 (principal, personal interview, May 19th 2005 ).

In 1991, as the principal explained, the family program was reduced at the high school level to make more class time for other subjects. As it stands now, the high school sector continues to meet in the morning as a family, yet the form has taken on more of a homeroom atmosphere. Once a month the high school families meet for 2 hours in the afternoon to engage in activities that are similar to those that continue to take place at the primary levels. Unfortunately, because of the frequency of meetings, family time once a

month has become an optional class period, one the students may or may not take part in. When I questioned the former students about the change in the family program from elementary to high school, several of them acknowledged that the change had been a difficult adjustment:

"When we were in elementary, we were all connected to something more specific than the school," Lisa recollects, "Then all of a sudden we're thrown into high school and it felt very much disjointed."

(personal interview, May 25th, 2005)

Other former students echoed the feeling loss of connection which they had with their family teacher. The lack of guidance from their high school family teacher also caused the few family activities that did take place to lose their focus. Fabienne a former student remarked:

"I remember that we had one family teacher in high school who tried to recreate the same kind of stuff that we did in elementary, but at that point we had been in high school for several years and no one was interested in family anymore."

(personal interview with Fabienne, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2005)

The loss of family time and the opportunity to develop a conscience of craft accordingly could be most beneficial at the high school level. According to Kohlberg's (1981) theory of moral development it is in adolescence that a person starts to create a sense of moral awareness and execute judgements based on their emerging individuality. The current students of the program have in a short time (1-3 years) developed such an attachment to the family program that when I asked them to imagine school without



family many of the responses were quite emotional. "I would cry", was the response from most of the students. "That wouldn't be fair, family is important to school". One third grade student who had transferred in this year from another school remarked:

"I love family, my old school didn't have anything like this, and I think every school should have a family."

(observational notes, May 12th, 2005)

Although the principal had noted that there was resistance from some parents about the efficacy of the family class time, the parents that I interviewed seem to be drawn to the school based on the presence of the family program. One parent commented:

"We had a friend who sent both her kids to [the school], and the family program was one of the biggest attractions for us to do the same. Our child had a difficult time adjusting at her other school, and when I suggested to the teacher to maybe hold class discussions about feelings and relating to one another, I was told that there wasn't time for that in the school day. Here at [the school] it's not an issue because that's precisely what family does."

(observational notes, June 9th 2005).

It is evident that the family program not only works to encourage students to develop pride in their work, it establishes a work ethic that is based on the impact that work will have on others. The students participate in activities that relay an inherent sense of pride separate from the reward system of grades found in other classes. As efficient as the knowledge and skills that are obtained in the program are, demonstrating that to the skeptic has proven difficult for the teachers and principal.

## **Encourage moral reflection**

The focus of Lickona's (1993) model of character education deals with moral knowing, feeling, and acting. As such the presence of moral reflection within the family program was a significant and difficult component to grasp. To do so I relied on observational data, and the interpretation provided by Ryan and Bohlin (1999) based on moral imagination. When I asked the family teacher if they encouraged moral reflection in her class, her response was:

"At this age it's difficult to call it moral reflection. I think what we do in this class is encourage thoughtfulness, and time to think about what was said, or what they [the student] did."

(personal interview, May 19th 2005).

There were many examples where I heard the family teacher suggest to the students that they should take some time to "think about it". I consider this to be an important part of the family program. Because of its unstructured nature, there is more freedom for the students to consider interactions with others, or what they themselves would like to bring into the discussion. In one activity which took place on an annual camping trip up north, the students were asked to think about what they had experienced for the 2 days they spent together, and to journal and illustrate their thoughts. Journaling, according to Lickona (2004), is an important part of moral reflection. The student has time to not only write down and review their thoughts, or actions but in the process of writing reflection inevitably takes place. When I reviewed some of the journals from the camping trip, I noticed that there was clear evidence that the students had taken time to extract what were indeed the most significant moments that they had spent together. Over

the course of two days, I was informed by the family teacher that there were activities like candle making, hay rides, nature walks, and ghost stories. However, most of the journals the students submitted focused on the positive experience of spending time with friends and teachers away from school (observational notes, June 9th, 2005).

I felt that this was an important inclusion since at this young age the expected responses were most likely going to center on the specific activities. The fact that a better part of the students focused on the interaction with others signifies that there is indeed a connection in the family program that is unique from that found in subject classes. Emily a former student remarked:

"One of the best things about family was the opportunity to do nothing, I know that sounds bad, but just being with other people, and getting to know them, and working together, it just gave us a chance to really think about other things then homework and grades."

(personal interview, May 25th 2005).

Moral reflection is perhaps not explicit in the family program. However, I did get the sense that reflection was encouraged and practiced by the students in family. Because of the lack of academic pressure and the familiarity of the environment, the students are given the chance to take a moment to think. At this age it is an important beginning to what will hopefully lead to reflection on moral judgements later on.

There were also very specific moments where the family teachers demonstrated the ability to initiate thoughtful moments. At the start of almost every activity that I observed the teacher would present what they would be discussing that day and then ask the students to think about it. There would be a moment of silence when the students

would keep silent, some staring at the ceiling, while others played with their shoes. The point is that the teacher created a silence, took time to allow the students to do the same, and to gather their thoughts, commentary, and questions, before she continued. Over the course of some of the discussions, a student might forget what they were going to say and I did witness on a number of occasions other students encouraging them to think about it for awhile and then maybe they could share it later on (observational notes, May 19th, June 9th, 2005).

At this young age it is ambitious to think that the students are seriously going to ponder for hours on end the moral questions that will eventually develop in their minds as they mature. What I witnessed though, is an atmosphere that nourished quiet moments, encouraged students to think about what was going on, and a general pace that allowed the students to reflect without the pressures of coming up with the right answer. This is perhaps the most significant consequence of creating time for family class. Whether they were talking about the school year, the environment, or a walkathon, it was clear that family class worked at the pace of the students.

### **Foster caring beyond the class**

This is the original factor in Lickona's model that drew me to examining the program at the local Montreal elementary school. Character education is for the classroom, but its purpose and the objectives it strives for are felt way beyond the classroom. As noted in the definition of terms, character education is used to promote a certain level of interaction and socialization amongst the students. In its most successful form, the lessons of empathy, respect, honesty, and citizenship will be fostered in the classroom and practiced in all aspects of the student's life. In terms of the family

program, there are several key factors that presented themselves as good examples of how the program fosters caring beyond the classroom.

The family teacher commented that community involvement was a large component of the family program:

"At the beginning of the year we tell all the parents that if they would like to come in and volunteer their talents, skills, services whatever, that they should feel more than welcome. As a result we have had parents come in and sing for the kids, do artwork with them, do yoga, it is just a never ending stream of goodness that we benefit from."

(personal interview, May 20th, 2005)

There is also a member of the Montreal clergy who is affectionately referred to as Father Dan, who comes in once every couple of months to talk to the students about issues like kindness and respect. When I questioned the parent's reaction to having a religious figure come into the class, I was told that although there have been issues in the past, as soon as the parents meet Father Dan they realize he is just a good person who is offering up some sound advice. A former family teacher who had stopped by to visit the program one day remarked:

"You really have to see Father Dan, to understand what he does, there's really no religious affiliation with the church other than his name being 'Father'. He's a really kind, generous member of the community who relates really well to the kids."

(observational notes, June 9th, 2005)

In terms of the larger community of Montreal there were several instances, especially in discussions about the environment, when the connection to the larger urban community was made. Many students told stories or anecdotes about their neighbourhoods and what they do to help keep it clean. One second grade student shared this observation:

" There are green boxes outside everyone's house and that is so the city can recycle, and when I'm out and I see something that needs to be recycled in the street sometimes I'll put it in someone else's box, because we were all trying to keep the world clean."

(observational notes, May 26th, 2005)

It was a passing comment, yet it opened the dialogue of what happens outside the classroom, and what ideas they had discussed inside the classroom that they could bring home with them. There was a definite sense of the students discussing the environment in the classroom, and then acting on it outside the classroom. When I asked the teacher if this was an intentional direction she encouraged the program to take she confirmed that it was:

"You know everything we do in the classroom, somehow relates to what these kids do at home or in their lives outside the classroom. It is really interesting to see how students volunteer information about where they live and how they willingly make the connection between what's going on in the larger Montreal area and what is going on in our classroom."

(personal interview, May 19th, 2005)

The caring is also fostered beyond the city limits. One family teacher mentioned how the program dealt with the after effects of the tsunami in December 2004. One family teacher explained:

"You know the world comes into our classroom, the kids had seen it on TV they knew what was going on, so it had to be addressed."

When I inquired how they handled a difficult subject like the tsunami, I was told that the children had raised money and sent it all to Canada Red Cross.

" There were lots of talks about the children affected by the tsunami, the toys they lost, how they wouldn't be able to go to school. Mostly I was touched by how much our students identified with the children of the tsunami. There was a real sense that we have to help those kids out because they could be us."

(personal interview, May 19th, 2005)

When I spoke to the former students about the role of caring outside the classroom all of them agreed that it was a really important part of their family experience.

" We were always organizing walkathons, or raising money for some Montreal organization," Lisa remembers:

"Yeah, and we also spent a lot of time talking about what was going on in the world."

Emily added:

"Which was important at the young age to be aware that there was something bigger than our classroom, our homes, that there was a larger community that we were all apart of."

(personal interviews, May 25th, 2005)

Establishing the sense that the students are a part of a larger international community is a meaningful aspect of the family program. Over the course of 8 weeks, I witnessed many occasions where the students or the teachers brought in issues that were facing the community, whether it was on the local or on the international level.

In a final example of how the family program fosters caring beyond the classroom, my second to last day of observation was spent on a walkathon. The walkathon had been organized by a high school student whose sister had cystic fibrosis. The family I was observing spent some time discussing the illness, how and who it affects, and why they were doing the walk. One third grade student remarked as they were leaving to start their walk:

"You know other people are going to see us walking and then when they ask why we can tell them, so more people will know about this disease and maybe they'll want to give money too."

(observational notes, June 9th, 2005).

It was a final observation of how the family I had been following nourished the qualities of empathy and compassion beyond the walls of their classroom.

### **Recruit parents and members of the community**

Initially I felt that there would be some overlap between the caring beyond the classroom and the recruitment of parent and members of the community. I separated the two in terms of how members of the community work to foster care beyond the classroom and what role the program relied on for them to become involved in family activities.



When I first began to observe the family program I noticed how many parents played an active role in the program. There was one parent in particular who was introduced to me as the family parent. The family teacher explained:

" We try to have at least one parent a semester or school year commit to being our family parent, usually we have many parents who volunteer over the course of the year, but this year we were lucky to have one come in every Thursday for family time."

(observational notes, May 12th, 2005)

The family parent would come in every Thursday and help wherever she could. Sometimes that meant cleaning the desks, other times she divided up birthday cake. In general though the impression I got was that the family parent was there to help anyway that they could. I had the opportunity to talk with the family parent about their role in the program. The family parent expressed her commitment to the program:

"Well you know it' s such a warm and inviting atmosphere for all the parents, I found myself just dropping in early so that I could hang out and talk to the kids and the teachers and before I knew it I was coming in every Thursday."

When I questioned her about what her impressions of the parent presence in the family classroom were, she responded that the parents were always welcomed, and took every opportunity they had to drop in and catch up.

" You know the program is called family for a very good reason. There is a sense of family in this classroom, and the inclusion of actual family members helps to reaffirm the important connection between what happens at school and what happens at home."

(observational notes, May 12th, 2005)

On a number of occasions I had the opportunity to witness parents drop in with younger children, older siblings, and older classmates from the high school sector to take part in activities in the family room. I have to admit that as the students became more accustomed to my presence in the classroom, I myself seemed to be 'recruited' into helping with the family class. I found myself handing out Popsicle's, and applying sunscreen on the children, not because I had been asked, but because much like the inner workings of a family, everyone who shares that space is drawn at some point to help out just by virtue of being a part of it. Students would ask me for assistance and I would find myself catching up week after week with familiar parents who I had met previously in family.

On one occasion I was introduced to a student's grandparents who were visiting from Japan. Upon my return to the classroom to get something I had forgotten, I found the grandparents sweeping the class and rearranging the books. I questioned the student about her grandparents cleaning her class, she responded, "Well because they're my family and this is my school family so of course they're going to help out" (observational notes, May 26th, 2005). This answer more than satisfied me as it demonstrated the overlap of personal family and the classroom family.

The former students that I had the opportunity to interview also noted that they remember their parents playing a large role in their family experience. Fabienne remembered her own mother participating in family:

"My mom was always in family time, and to tell you the truth I think she enjoyed it more than I did, she had the chance to speak to other parents, meet my friends, and it was a really social time for her as well."

(personal interview, May 25th, 2005)

It is clear that the family program does not hesitate to recruit parents and other members of the community into the workings of the classroom. The family teacher noted:

"How can you have a program called family and not include the students family members? There is no question that we have an open door policy and that the students family members should be as comfortable in this environment as their children are."

(personal interview, May 25th, 2005)

### **Family Day**

The last day of my observation took place at Jeanne Mance Park in downtown Montreal. At the end of every school year all the families (both school and home) gather in the park for a picnic and a day of saying goodbye to the school year. I found parents, babies, grandparents, student teachers, volunteers, students, and teachers intermingling and celebrating the end of another school year. I cannot convey the overwhelming sense of togetherness that this event emitted. As I made my rounds talking to parents, teachers, and students it was evident that they felt the same way too. One parent commented:

"Every year we make a point of coming down here and catching up with everyone before the summer swoops in and we lose track. It's a chance for the real families and the school families to really come together and say thank you on both parts."

(observational notes, June 23rd, 2005)

As the parents busied themselves with handing out candy and treats, the children of different age groups played in the field and the local playground. First impressions of this seen might be like any other end of year school picnic. It is only the students, teachers, and parents that know that this is no school picnic, it's a family picnic.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **Summary of findings**

In the previous chapter, I presented the data that I acquired through extensive interviews and observational notes taken at a local elementary school. Over the course of the study, it became clear that the family units program contains all eight of the components that Lickona includes in his comprehensive model of character education (Lickona, 1991, 1993). However it was the inclusion of Noddings' ethic of care that demonstrated the important factors that cannot be left out of a comprehensive character education program. Character education programs, if examined on the basis of whether or not they exhibit certain key parts, relay only a portion of what character education is capable of. In the family program I found that the relationships that were established and cultivated within a set time period were the strongest indicators that in fact the program was encouraging the development of character.

The research on character education involves lessons that can be incorporated, activities that focus on bringing the students together and evaluative procedures for ensuring that the program is being efficacious. What I found in my study of the family program was the lessons that character education programs try to integrate are for the most part learned from the interrelation of the people involved in the program. The interviews with the students, teachers, and former students all echoed the importance of the relationships they maintained in their family groups. I had originally set out to present a more detailed synopsis of the actual projects and activities that the family program used to relay lessons on citizenship, kindness, respect and empathy. In the end the former

students reflected on the unique friendships they formed with older and younger students, and the role of the family teacher in supporting them in their schoolwork and encouraging their personal projects. The recurring theme of interdependency, mutual respect, responsibility, and caring that emerged while conducting this study altered my perception of the genuine purpose of character education.

One of the research questions that guides this study asks, *what role does the family unit play in teaching character education?* The role of the family unit is to establish pro-social behaviour in students by modeling and encouraging them to respect and relate to one another in a positive manner. While the use of activities that encourage this behaviour are necessary, it is in the actions that take place in family time where these lessons are best conveyed to the students. For example, the lesson learned from the teacher who takes time to listen to a student because in family class the teacher has the time. An activity could be a student volunteering to help a visiting grandparent clean the classroom. The model of one student calling a parent because her friend is sick demonstrates to others lessons of empathy and responsibility in action. The lessons and projects that I noted in family class were not mentioned in studies previously cited which are based on existing character education programs. These lessons were borne naturally as a consequence of a group of people just being together.

### **The present state of the family program**

At the onset of the study I was focused on examining not only the family program, but more importantly the impact it has had on the participants and the school. As mentioned previously in an interview with the principal, he made it clear that the

program had been heavily influenced by the work of A.S. Neill at Summerhill. The program has since retained its original structure at the elementary level, but the concept of family changes with every classroom you walk into. The family teacher strictly interprets what the program will be and what they choose to do with the time set-aside for family. This in fact was the most notable element that I concluded about the family program- its dependency on teacher as model and mentor. My observations and interviews concluded that the teacher's role in establishing the activities, and atmosphere of family time was essential to its effectiveness. Interviews with the family teacher relayed a commitment to establishing a relationship with the students and parents involved in the program as being a top priority in relaying the values and lessons that the development of character is based on. The family teacher is the person who brings the elements of parental and community involvement into the classroom. On a number of occasions, I observed the family teacher actively engaging the parents and students in the family program. This was done in the presentation of materials, and one on one communication, which established an authentic atmosphere of family within the classroom.

Due to the open nature of the family program the influence on the culture of the elementary school is significant. I hesitate to qualify the climate of the school in moral terms as Lickona (1991) does in his presentation of his model. The general atmosphere within the school is open and familiar which I have concluded is a direct result of the use of the family programs in integrating students into the school. The open relationships that are developed in the family program encourage the students to relate to other families in the same manner. In addition the activities during family time often incorporate more

than one family. The result is that the students develop familiar relationships to the other family teachers, which in turn makes the culture of the more familial than staunchly academic. The moral climate of the school becomes less important than the overall climate in the school because it is not in upholding a moral code that the students relate to each other but because they are engaged with others in a familiar way.

Consequently, the inclusion of Noddings' (1999, 2002) ethic of care became essential to investigating this character education program. Lickona's model while it provided a framework of attributes to identify did not acknowledge the important impact of the relationships on developing a student's character. Lickona's (2004) focus for character education is centered on the 4th and 5th Rs, meaning respect and responsibility. These factors did play an important role in the family program, and they were conveyed through the interaction of the students, parents, and teachers indirectly. The structure of character education in the family program did present Lickona's factors but were elaborated upon with Noddings' care theory. To summarize, I've concluded that character education programs need to have some structure that is based on care theory to develop pro-social behaviour based on a personal vested interest, not simply based on what is open to interpretation as the moral good. The purpose of character education then becomes to nurture a desire to be respectful and accept responsibility based on the student caring about those values.

For all the positive aspects of the family program, my conclusions read like a cautionary tale of what happens when a good program does not get sufficient support. As noted already the role of the teacher is imperative to continuing the family program. Without the proper resources and preparation, the program becomes a name without



much substance. At one point the family program was involved at all levels of the school. Teachers were supportive and clear about what form the program took because it was exhibited throughout the school. As the importance of the family program declines at the high school level, one has to ask how long before the same is allowed to happen at the elementary level? The principal commented on government pressures to include increasing minutes of core subjects, and so the purpose and function of family time becomes less important.

As committed as the family teachers I interviewed were, much of their commitment was based on the experience of a teacher that had been involved in the program for a number of years. There was no resource book on character education, the family program, or activities. There was just the shared experience of a teacher committed to the program. That commitment must somehow be captured to ensure that a new generation of teachers at this local Montreal elementary school have the same opportunities to foster the kind of relationships and cultivate the same personal growth that I was witness during my eight weeks of observation.

The state of the family program is distressing when considering the wealth of current research being done in the field of education. Current studies show that the inclusion of character programs like the family program reduce bullying, school violence, increase the commitment to schoolwork, and reduce drop out rates (Patterson, 2003, Lickona, 2004). So how is it that a school that has adopted a character education program for 30 years, is not maintaining it in the face of educational research that supports it? The issues raised by this study gives way to future areas of research that can help answer the questions that continue to plague the garnering of support for character education.

### **Future areas of research**

The study of the family program at the local elementary school helped to contribute some insight into the practical nature character education theory can have. However there are areas that need to be explored if character education is to become a stable component in the traditional construct of education. Based on the conclusions of my study there are three separate areas that I feel would benefit from further research. First, in respect to teacher training and preparation for acting as a moral agent in the classroom. Second, a comparative study that examines the effectiveness of add-on programs compared to those that are woven into the curriculum. In addition, there is the matter of responding to the criticisms that character education has faced.

Due to the significant role of the teacher in supporting and maintaining character education programs, there needs to be more research done at the pre-service teacher level. Questions that would potentially guide a study based on this focus include what kind of training and preparation teachers receive to act as moral agents in the classroom. On a more specific level, I would like to examine the cultivation of an education student's teaching philosophy in their pre-service education. This type of training to encourage character development is essential to pre-service teachers as they will have important roles whether they take part in an add-on program or a curriculum infused program.

I approached this case study because I am an advocate of add on programs of character education. The issues that are addressed by character education merit specific time to be dealt with. Also in terms of the nature of the family program, much of the learning that took place in that time was as a result of the structured free time set aside for students to learn how to socially interact. By researching a comparative study of the two

forms these programs can take, I would hope a more concise example of a character education program could emerge.

In response to the criticism facing character education of indoctrination, and conformity, it should be clarified that not once during my observations and interviews did I witness any of these criticisms within the family program. In fact more empirical research in the field should be done so that character education can gain social credibility as a means to better society. The objective of character education is not conformity, but to relay lessons on how we as individuals can co-exist in a shared environment. This was clearly demonstrated in this study where the family program conveyed the sense that they were indeed a family.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**INTERVIEW WITH FAMILY TEACHERS**

**Interview with principal family teacher (F) and a second year family teacher (F2),  
May 20th 2005**

K: Thanks so much for having me in your family class, this is really informal, I just want to start by getting an idea of how long you've been a family teacher.

F: For as long as I've been teaching at [the school], so I've been a family teacher for twenty something years.

K: Oh really, wow.

F: And when I first got here I didn't really start at the beginning of the year I came in November 1st, and so I replaced someone who had to leave, and I was coming from a very structured school and to come here and suddenly there was 'family', and all I could think was what is 'family'? And there was no one who really told me what it was and everyone has a different conception of what family is, the way it was explained to me was 'do what you want'. But then I sort of developed how I felt about it and it's really, I think that my feeling about family is reflective of the way family should be in this school. There is so much that goes on here during family time. The kids, who stay in this same class with me for a number of years, really feel like part of a family.

(A second year family teacher joins the discussion)

F2: Well you [the family teacher] taught me what family is, I got it all from you, I owe you...

F: You see what is important is that it's not freedom, and people approach it sometime like this is free what are they doing, and those people often question the validity of family. You want the kids to participate, but at the same time they need boundaries, Family time is a delicate balance between allowing the students to assert themselves as members of the classroom, and them [the students] taking control of the class. Then you have parents saying let's put in an academic component, and to me it's an important part of their growth, their development. I think in family class, although there's no grade, the children still want to do their best because they want to make an impression on their family peers, and on their family teachers. In a way family class specifically nurtures a sense of pride in their work because they are committing and completing it based on its merit alone. This is also the chance for some kids who really have trouble with the more structured classes, you know you see a different side to these kids, you see them help each other and you watch them grow. And you have them for 3 years.

F2: Oh yeah, that's the best part, you see them come in as first graders needing help from the third graders, and then you see them develop into the third graders. And you pair them up and see them become responsible, it's just amazing. I mean you really see them change. My first year I had 2 sisters it was great to see the younger sister come into her

own once the older sister had moved on to fourth grade. She came into her own, and developed a leadership role in the class. And the students that you don't see that from in other classes really take on that role in family.

K: Would you say that has a lot to do with their level of comfort here in the family class?

F2: Oh yeah, absolutely. You know they pick up on the slightest things, and that's why it's so important that when I'm dealing with a parent, or another student that they [the students] can see how I relate to the them. I think that how the teacher acts in the classroom, especially in family determines the atmosphere of the classroom, and sets the tone.

K: And what about the disagreements, I find a lot of them are inter grades, like a second grader, and a third grader...

F: Well you see, when we start to near the end of the school year the third graders are getting ready to move on to another stage in their school experience. They tend to get a little more rambunctious, and the first graders feel more comfortable in the classroom, so they are ready to adopt a little more responsibility. But I don't see this as a negative. In fact I see it as positive lessons for the students to disagree

K: What kind of positive feelings come from bullying and being annoyed?

F: Well in life we have to live and work, and exist with people that bully and annoy us right? And so where better can we deal with those life lessons then in the classroom, in a socially controlled environment, where the students can learn how to work with others despite their differences

K: What kind of role do you think moral reflection plays in the program? For instance that example of being bullied I'm sure would encourage some kind of reflection on the part of the student.

F: At this age it's difficult to call it moral reflection, I think what we do in this class is encourage thoughtfulness, and time to think about what was said, or what they [the student] did.

K: Now you've [family teacher] been involved with the program for so long, have you noticed it evolving? For instance it's part of the school's mission statement so I'm aware that family is presented as a cornerstone of the school's philosophy. I was kind of shocked when I heard about what kind of changes had taken place at the high school level.

F: Well you know that there are people who are not comfortable with what to do, there are people who think that teaching is what is in a book and taking what needs to be learnt from that book I feel that working with kids goes beyond the material, and people who think it's a waste of time don't utilize it. Like at home is spending time with your children

a waste of time? Are you not encouraging their growth and development they are in school probably longer then they are at home, and so family is an important part of us getting to spend time with the kids.

K: So are there other family teachers not really use the family time to the best of their ability?

F: One hundred percent, and there are teachers who are passing surveys and trying to get feedback from other teachers about what they are doing in family and what they think is important and I know that there are some who are questioning it, and when you speak to the principle, he so strongly believes in family that he thinks that if they don't like it, they can leave. You know there's nothing that prepares you for an open concept classroom like family, and some teachers especially the new ones are intimidated by it. What we need is more time to discuss, resource, plan, and introduce new teachers to what our family program is and what their role in the classroom is during that time. It's a great opportunity if you use it but, some teachers don't and that's the problem.

K: That's a really frustrating aspect of great programs like this is that it really rests on the teacher. Did your teacher education, or anything in your training prepare you for a component like this?

F: Yeah you do spend a lot of time talking with other teachers about what they are doing, their feelings, the reactions of the kids, how is everyone doing so you learn along the way.

F2: After the tsunami happened we spent a lot of time in family talking about the kids that were affected, we raised money and wrote letters to the children who were in orphanages, and if you could of seen the things these kids were coming up with.

F2: I also love the fact that family is a brainstorming thing for us, and [the family teacher] sets the stage for a lot of the things we do, but there's also a freedom to be creative and spontaneous with family time, having the family teachers contribute ideas and work together makes a difference.

F: And I think for the most part we're on the same page about what we think family should be, and you have to let go a little bit this idea that it has to be totally organized, we have a new family teacher this year who's doing a great job but he needs the activities, he's not comfortable with the open concept of the children choosing the activity which is something that we do. After the holidays I tell the kids to bring in a game from home, and they can play with their family friends, or bring in a toy or something, and that time is relatively unstructured.

K: I can see how it could be really intimidating for a new teacher coming in, like this is your family time now go ahead and use it. Now how has being a family teacher helped you in the other subjects that you are involved in or teach? Has being a family teacher added to that experience?

F: I don't know how much it's affected my actual teaching but I think it helps you get a better feel for the kids and you might go to the family teacher because you know that they have a better perspective on that kid. I don't know if it really affects your teaching, it does impact your approach.

F2: It was a real learning experience when I got here you know, there was no book, no workshop, just 2 hours of free time and the school's mission statement. If it hadn't been for [the family teacher], I'm not sure how I would have grown into the family teacher that

I am today. She [the family teacher], at least at the elementary level, plays such a big part in introducing the concept of family to new teachers coming into the school. Now I look at the new family teacher and I suddenly realize how much it has changed my attitude towards not just the family class but my teaching approach in general.

K: What I'm hearing though is that, you [family teacher] mentioned that you approach the family teacher because they have more insight into that student, and to me that says that you are more aware of teaching the whole person and not just the student. Now how do you feel about character education as a term associated with the family program?

F: I think that we are teaching values like citizenship, respect, compassion, integrity and I think that it's carrying over into the classes, certainly responsibility, compassion, we're always talking about self-discipline. These are things that we work on all the time.

K: So all the activities in one way or another try to emphasize those values?

F: Sometimes we'll do an activity that goes specifically but I think it also comes up in our general discussions a lot.

K: How important do you think character education is to children at this level?

F: It's very important, because I think your growth as an individual begins of course when you're very young and if we can establish some of those components it's just going to get easier. The students work together. Cooperative learning in the family class is a natural consequence of what happens when you group many different age groups together. Because we have the little guys in with the bigger guys, you end up creating an environment where the students begin to depend on each other, and also develop a sense of responsibility

K: Is there anything about the family program that you would like see added or changed?

F: I'm happy with the program, I'm really happy I'm always looking for different activities making sure that they get a broad spectrum of activities and I think that we balance it pretty well, some outings, some field trips and sometimes we focus on things that are a little more serious.

K: What about parental involvement in the program?

F: Oh open door policy at the beginning of the year we meet with all the family parents and we talk about what family is, because for the kids that are coming from kindergarten, they have no clue. And so I tell them that they will spend the first few days of school with their family teacher so that they can adjust, and we spend time doing introductory activities we talk about family and what it is. And I tell the parents that you have to think of family like family away from home, the kinds of values that you teach your children at home are the same ones that we are trying to teach in our families here at school. Also I let them know that it's an open door policy and any time that you want to come and volunteer, or you have something you would like to share with the family class you just let us know and you can come in. The mom that is my family parent this year came in last

year and did a presentation about Japanese culture and she shared customs and traditions with the kids, and so parents know this and know that they are welcome to come on outings or participate anyway they so choose. Over the years, I have had parents come in and do workshops with the kids, like if they've been on a trip or they can come share.

K: Have you had any parents who were resistant to the idea of family or values being taught in school?

F: I have parents who don't understand what it is, especially the first year family parents, they don't understand why they aren't all in the same class with their own grade. But then they get used to it and they are more comfortable with the concept.

K: Is there anything that you would like me to know about the family program?

F: For this program to work well you have to be comfortable you have to be open to the lack of structure and also know that there are important messages being given to the kids.

K: So it must be difficult for a new family teacher to become comfortable with the openness and the lack of boundaries.

F: And it's not freedom, like you can go in the room and do whatever you want for an hour and half, someone walking by might look and think is that all they're doing? But look closely and you'll see them discussing, sharing, they're thinking about what they've done, they're brainstorming a bit, they're working with kids outside of their age group, the grade ones are contributing in a way that they might not be normally contributing.

K: Thank you so much for not only talking to me today, but welcoming me into your family.

F: You're more than welcome.

**APPENDIX B**

**INTERVIEW WITH PRINCIPAL**



**Interview with Principal  
May 20th 2005**

K: So I'd like to start off maybe with the background to the family units program, I've been here for a month?

P: The family program started when they submitted the proposal for the program, it was influenced by Summerhill, ...it has to do with multi age learning and the students belong to the same class, with the same teachers, and the idea that the older students would teach the younger ones. The third graders let the first graders know that it's going to be ok, and the first graders feel more comfortable teasing the older students as well, its like a family. For instance a family is not organized into parts, it's not like the 4 year olds all eat together, then the 5's, and then the adults, or whatever you tell me where there is age restriction in a family structure and that's what we're trying to carry over to the family program here at the school. It also has to do with the wisdom of the old, lots of philosophy, is focused on the concept of learning from each other. The family time is also a place where the students can come in and just 'Ahhh', you know there's no exams, evaluation, there's no stress what you want to do. Parents are involved in what is really just a time for social exchange.

K: Are the parents involved? And if so to what extent does parental involvement effect the program? And how has the program changed over the years?

P: It has changed a lot at the high school level because the ministry put pressure on the minutes are devoted to what, so now it (family time) happens once a month, there is still the sense of belonging to a group but it's not as extensive as at the elementary level.

K: And what about the teachers, for the most part do you find them very supportive of the family program?

P: It depends on what level and if they believe in what it is, if they understand what it is, and the problem now is the new ones that are coming in and if they approach is like a course, then they will never understand family because they feel like they are not accomplishing anything. You're supposed to do more, like exchange with your peers, so there that problem.

K: How would a new teacher learn about family and how to approach it?

P: We put them in with more experienced teachers and it depends, if they are positive or negative about it. Some of them get tired because you know family is not easy, I remember when I was a family teacher I would often ask myself what do I do now? You know how do I find a new activity? Sometimes you ask the students what they want to do. I'll say it again, if you're coming in looking for a book on how to run the family program, there is no book, there is no standard that you can follow family is what you make it.

K: The kids have brought up terms like respect, trust, and kindness.....and

P: Have you been up to the 4th floor? There's a mural that reflects what they think about family you really should go up there with a camera and check it out.

K: But in terms of educating for character, that's where my focus is, what role do you feel the school should play in educating for values, and the themes that family covers, do you think it is appropriate in a multicultural student body?

P: Now with the reform it's everywhere, it's not just in family, it's in every course you have to evaluate competencies, how you relate, how you interact, how you cooperate, experience. The new reform, and it's been around for 7 years and that has been a big change in the teachers' mentality and how they approach teaching. The classroom is a space, where exchanges happen. Because of the nature of our program, the students are given more time to just co-exist in a given environment outside of the parameters of deadlines and evaluations. Family time is not a place where they [the students] are going to be marked or evaluated, they can just be...as a result they learn how to cooperate on a much larger scale, as people.

K: Is it safe to say that family is a cornerstone of the school that it will not be phased out over the years,....would it be the same school without family?

P: Well no of course it wouldn't be the same, it's important but the fine arts core is where you get the other stuff like co-operation, working together, and taking responsibility, there is a communal pressure. Some parents of course see family and they are not completely supportive, they might view it like a waste of time, why is there no mark for family are they wasting time? But they don't see that it's not wasting time, and sometimes what looks like wasting time, is important. You think active and productive as a course then, family is different, I was talking to some teachers and saying that next year we might have to do a refresher course.

K: Some of the teachers have brought up the fact that .....

P: There is a lot of pressure especially at the high school level, to get rid of it. And at the high school level it is not easy for teachers at that level to just have open concept classes. I know that the family program has its merits in improving the quality and commitment of the students' school work, I'm just telling you that there are those who just don't get it

K: Some of the teachers were talking about workshops, and making changes, for meetings

P: Well we're always looking at what we can change what we can adopt to make that time more effective. There are some parents think that if there's no grade in a class, then there's no point to having that class, also, as important as the experiences that these students have in family class are, if someone doesn't see a test or a grade, or a book, they question what's the point.

K: Is there anything that I should know that you would like me to know concerning family...before we wrap up?

P: The teacher is the person that supports the concept of family, if I go into a classroom and I don't feel good about it then there's no way I can convince the students to feel good about it. There's still teachers who are committed to teaching and not just motivating. That's why if they can foster those relationships at the family level then the relationship is better and then when you teach them other subjects you already have a relationship with them as a person. People say what is the use of having family, they never come they don't care, even the parents are a little bit at fault. We used to have family at the end of the day and that's when they would schedule all the Dr. appointments... they figure there's no teaching they're not going to miss any courses so we put it in the middle of the day. What gets exasperating is that the pressure from the government to teach more science and math, and so we had to take away the 2 periods of family during the week. Over time we gained something, but I think we've definitely lost something.

K: When did you phase it out at the high school level?

P: I was VP so it must've been 89 or 90, the school hasn't changed, but you know there were always teachers that just approached it like free time, so the kids run around, and it became a difficult concept.

K: That's why a new teacher who comes in really does need a firm grasp on....

P: But you don't always have control of who comes in, I don't choose the teachers.. you know. The way of teaching has to be different not just in family but in every course. At least to try to... we don't know...

K: Well you know my research has really shown that programs like the family units program, will reduce drop out rates, and increase commitment to school achievement, reducing a lot of those problems you had mentioned.

P: You know what family, does it puts a nice profound feeling of belonging, and they stay in the same group for 3 or 5 years, sometimes we have to change the groups but for the most part, that element is still important, family was a part of the school program. That's the atmosphere we want to create with the family program, we cooperate because we care Especially because the nature of the school, at the elementary level it was

important for them to have a class to go back to. The family teacher can also help intervene when there are issues that arise in other classes, so that happens still. We used to have a book of resource activities that we used for family. You know it's our fault too though because we have to take them under the wing a little bit too and, show the training. You know I wonder how many people read about family and what it means here at the school.

## **APPENDIX C**

### **INTERVIEWS WITH CURRENT STUDENTS IN THE PROGRAM**

**Interview with current students in the family program- May 12th 12:43pm  
(Muru, Amanda, Amelia, Finn, Keisha)**

Muru (grade 3): It's a bit like a class where we don't really have, you don't really get any homework...

K: But is it like a family, like your family at home?

Finn (grade 2): We all have to take care of each other, usually if we have field trips it's on family day too, and it's always fun...

K: And what about your family teacher, is your family teacher different from your other teachers?

Kids: yeah, oh yeah, I think so...

K: Are you as comfortable with your family teacher as you are with your other teachers? Like if you had a problem would you go to your family teacher or your math teacher?

Girl (grade 2): I would go to my family teacher, for sure...

K: Ok so they're a little different, eh?

Finn (grade 2): If there's like bullying then we go to our family teachers.

K: What about the other kids in your family? There's first, second, and third graders right?

Muru (grade 3): The grade three's are the biggest, and the boys are way too loud...

K: What about your friends in family...Are they different from your other friends?

Muru (grade 3): Well she's not in my family and she's my best friend, and she's in my family and she's my friend..

K: So what about the little ones, you guys are all in grade 3, what about them?

Girl (grade 3): I have a best friend and she is in grade one and her name is Lily.

K: And what's it like to have friends in first and second grade?

Amanda (grade 3): They can get annoying, because they always need help...

Amelia (grade 3): Well sometimes they feel uncomfortable doing certain things so, they might need help, like once a little girl she's one of her friends she took her lock because she didn't know where her's was so we had to help her.

K: Why is it sometimes nice to have the little ones around?

Amanda (grade 3): Because they can be really, really cute...

Muru (grade 3): And they can be really funny too....

My (grade 3): The little ones well look at this....

(3 girls begin to do a role play about how sometimes the first graders can be really annoying, it depicts one first grader taking something from the third grader and running in circles around her, is there a lesson about patience to be had here?)

K: Ok what if I came in and I said there wasn't going to be anymore family?

Muru: That would be terrible, I would start to cry...

Amanda: That would be so bad because it 's such a cool class and we get no homework and it's special, and we wouldn't be treating any of out friends with respect.

K: That's a big important word respect../..What other words do you learn about in family?

Amanda: Be fair, polite, respect, be honest

Muru: be nice, and generous, you know family class is a bit like my church we learn stuff like treat your neighbor as you treat yourself and stuff like that, you should always respect others.

K: Now if I came in off the street and I asked you what family was, how would you explain it to me?

Keisha (grade 3): I'd say that it's like when everyone in the class gets together and respects each other, and has fun. Um,....

K: What do you like about family?

Keisha: I like, I don't know....

K: What are the types of things you do in family?

Keisha: We make things, play on the computer, we do art, we work in groups....

K: We talked about that a little bit what's it like to work with the really little guys?

Keisha: Well sometimes they really get on my nerves, and they annoy me.... last year though we [the current second graders] always asked for help and asked a lot of

questions. Now it's their turn to do that and next year they'll have to help the new kids who start grade one.

K: But don't you think it's important that you re there to work with them? Why is that?

Keisha: Because they need help because they re little and so they need a lot more help....and sometimes the teacher's not able so it's up to the third graders to do it.

K: How is your family teacher different from your other teachers?

Muru: Well she let's us do what we want in family class and she doesn't teach us stuff like the other teachers do.

K: Guys do you think you learn anything from family class? I know that you get to do what you want but do you think the teachers are trying to teach you something?

Amanda: They teach about respect and stuff.....

Keisha: And also how to be in a group and about Earth day, how to treat the Earth and other people.

K: Are your family friends different from your other friends?

Amanda: Well your family friends are.....what do you mean family friends?

K: Well you know how your family mixes up all the grades and there's different people and you do different stuff, I was wondering maybe if the friends you had in family were different then your other friends?

Amanda: Well family is all mixed up so it's really different from my other classes, and we're together a lot, and do stuff with each other.

K: What if I came in and I said there was no more family? You come to school and you go to your classes and then you go home.

Amanda: Because family gives us time to have free time with friends...and we learn respect and kind things and it's a part of school. If I have a problem I would go see my family teacher.

K: Do your moms and dads ever come to family class with you?

Amanda: No, not really, but Seamus' mom comes, and Muru's mom comes too.



Keisha: Last year I remember that someone's mom would come and volunteer to sing songs with us and she brought in her guitar. She would write songs with us, and we could all sing, and that was a really fun thing one of the moms did.

K: How do you help your community?

Finn: What's a community?

Amanda: I know what a community is...it's like the NDG community center where people go to be together, they can work out, it's a people place where they do things together.

K: That's great Amanda, and a community is really just people right? People who maybe all live together in the same area like NDG, or they might all be in the same class like your family....A community is a group of people who all have something in common that they are working for.

Keisha: There's this one day, where we talked about Earth day, and we talked about how we can pick up garbage, and gross stuff.

**Interview with 5 current students, June 2nd 1:25pm  
(Louis, Davina, Nigel , Sara, Amy)**

K: So you guys are having a really fun family day where you get to choose where you want to go and what you want to do right? Now let's chat if I didn't know what family was what words would you use to describe what family is?

Louis: There's lots of kids they get a chance to talk and play,

Davina: Family, is like when all these people get together and they do activities.

K: What kind of activities though? How are the activities here different from your other class?

Girl (gr. 2 ): Family sticks together and they do all sorts of things,

K: How is family at school different from family at home?

Davina: Well at school there're more people and family is about when you get together and you work together.

K: Interesting, so how's your family teacher different from you other teachers?

Amy: Your family teacher likes to do fun stuff, like it s always a party and we re with them for the afternoon, and we see them every morning.

Louis: Also I'm related to my real family, but the family at school we're just friends. It's not the same as my home family, it's really only like my family at school.

K: And what if I didn't know what family was, how would you explain it to me?

Nigel: It's when like all the kids get together and it's really fun and it's not like a serious class, and we learn stuff because you can practice your drawing and practice stuff you like to do.

Sara: And you know our family teacher, teaches us more stuff than other teachers like basic stuff, and she knows us really well, and so you can hug her and stuff.

K: And what if I told you that family program wasn't going to happen anymore, what would you say?

Nigel: I don't really like it a lot, well now I do, but I used to feel kind of bored, and it's good now, but sometimes I feel a little bored.

Sara: And you know that at the beginning of family, not in the middle of the day, but at the start of the day there's a short time for us to be in family and if I bring a book, I can read and take my time.

K: So you like family, like it's nice that you have some time to do what you want like read books which is what you love right? So would you be upset if family time was cancelled?

Sara: Yeah I think I would be a little upset not very upset but a little upset, I do like family time, because I get to do what I want.

Amelia: And you know I'm from Nova Scotia, and at my old school they didn't have family so, and there was just one teacher. Here you get to do more independently, you don't have to stay with the teacher, you can walk around, it's just really different. It feels more comfortable like my old school was serious all the time and the teachers would get mad at us but here I can talk to the teachers and it's just really different.

K: Wow it sounds like you guys really love family, do you think that every school should have family?

Sara, Amelia: Oh yeah, for sure, I think so

Amelia: I wish that family could come to Nova Scotia, like this whole school could be in Nova Scotia.

Sara: So you want to go to your old school so that you can see your old friends, and then during family time you could come over here and hang out with us right (giggling).

**Interview with current students in the family program- May 12th 12:43pm  
(Muru, Anne, Steve, Chris, Frank)**

Muru (grade 3): It's a bit like a class where we don't really have, you don't really get any homework...

K: But is it like a family, like your family at home?

Frank (grade 2): We all have to take care of each other, usually if we have field trips it's on family day too, and it's always fun...

K: And what about your family teacher, is your family teacher different from your other teachers?

Kids: yeah, oh yeah, I think so...

K: Are you as comfortable with your family teacher as you are with your other teachers? Like if you had a problem would you go to your family teacher or your math teacher?

Frank: I would go to my family teacher, for sure... In family class we can talk to the teacher about what we want to do and if you know if everyone thinks it's a good idea then most of the time the teacher let's us do it."

K: Ok so they're a little different, eh?

Anna (grade 2): If there's like bullying then we go to our family teachers. Like the third grades they're really bossy and they think they're in charge all the time, and they're bullies, but mostly it's the boys, not the girls

K: What about the other kids in your family? There's first, second, and third graders right?

Muru (grade 3): The grade three's are the biggest, and the boys are way too loud...

K: What about your friends in family...Are they different from your other friends?

Muru (grade 3): Well she's not in my family and she's my best friend, and she's in my family and she's my friend..

K: So what about the little ones, you guys are all in grade 3, what about them?

Girl (grade 3): I have a best friend and she is in grade one and her name is Lily.

K: And what's it like to have friends in first and second grade?

Amanda (grade 3): They can get annoying, because they always need help...

Amelia (grade 3): Well sometimes they feel uncomfortable doing certain things so, they might need help, like once a little girl she s one of her friends she took her lock because she didn't know where her s was so we had to help her.

K: Why is it sometimes nice to have the little ones around?

Amanda (grade 3): Because they can be really, really cute...

Muru (grade 3): And they can be really funny too....

(3 girls begin to do a role play about how sometimes the first graders can be really annoying, it depicts one first grader taking something from the third grader and running in circles around her, is there a lesson about patience to be had here?)

K: Ok what if I came in and I said there wasn't going to be anymore family?

Muru: That would be terrible, I would start to cry...

Amanda: That would be so bad because it 's such a cool class and we get no homework and it's special, and we wouldn't' be treating any of out friends with respect.

K: That's a big important word respect./..What other words do you learn about in family?

Amanda: Be fair, polite, respect, be honest

Muru: Be nice, and generous, you know family class is a bit like my church we learn stuff like treat your neighbor as you treat yourself and stuff like that, You should always respect others.

**APPENDIX D**

**INTERVIEW WITH FORMER STUDENTS**

**Interview with 3 former students  
(Emily, Lisa, and Fabienne) May 25th 2005**

K: Tell me about the family units program, if someone walked in off the street and had no idea, about family, how would you describe the family units program?

L: If we were talking about in elementary it was fun, like you know we do all our fun activities and chill with your friends. And how you were with your family teacher was a lot different too. You had that pressure to not disappoint your family teacher in the same way that you don't want to disappoint your parents. Sure other teachers were different, they talked tough, or gave you a hard time, but it wasn't the same kind of discipline that you'd get in family because it was so much like a family."

E: It was a big priority in your week there was a lot of class time you had to go

L: It was like you had your other classes and then there was family time. It wasn't a question, it's just the way it was.

F: For me it wasn't even, well occurred to me that it was a program, I thought every other school had family class.

K: You remember it as being fun, do you remember any of the activities? Like what would you say you learned in family? Think about the people you met in family the conversations that you had, your teacher relationships...

L: I remember in grade 1, in family we were all together, and I remember hanging out with older kids, and then when I was in grade 3 I would help out the younger kids, I used to like that. In grade 1 I liked it because I was hanging out with older kids, and then in gr. 3 I liked it because I was helping people. That's one of the main things that I really took away from family.

E: I remember that it was a fun time to hang out with your friends, and do fun activities, it was a time to just not stress, it was a comfortable place. One of the best things about family was the opportunity to do nothing, I know that sounds bad, but just being with other people, and getting to know them, and working together it just gave us a chance to really think about other things then homework and grades.

K: What about the relationship you had with your family teachers? How did it differ from your other teachers?

(discussion about all the teachers that they had)

L: Gr. 6 was the only time that we were separated from other grades, and it was really different, I remember that it wasn't the same.

K: Can you tell me about how your family teachers were different from other teachers if at all?

E: I just loved my family teacher, she was also my English teacher, but in general she helped me get into the groove of the school, and made me feel apart of things. Because we were like a family, it was all the more personal, you know? Like you could talk to your family teacher about anything, and so if you did something you weren't supposed to do, your family teacher would take the time to talk to you

K: So none of you had a special affinity for your family teacher? Because the program really is dependant on the teacher...

F: Yeah I really feel that, I loved Mrs. [the family teacher that is being followed for the study], she was great, she made me feel so comfortable...

E: And what was great about her is that she was concerned about you as an individual student, like I found this book I thought you would like, or ask about your other classes, and knew a lot about what was going on with you.

F: She was a great family teacher, she like made sure that you answered her questions, like if you were having a bad day, then she would make you talk and get it off your chest. We had a lot of intense family time. The class was important but she made you feel like you had a friend.

E: And if you just had her for English then she was just like any other teacher, but if you were in her family then you could tell that she really cared about you.

L: I remember that if I was having a problem in one of my other classes, say I was struggling with my math class for example, then my math teacher would talk to my family teacher who would then approach me with a 'what's up?' attitude. It kind of helped to talk about my problems understanding or with the teacher, and she took the extra time since she knew me better than my math teacher did.

E: I almost was more aware of disappointing my family teacher then my other teachers, if I didn't do my homework, or follow through on something from another class I was always worried that it would somehow get back to my family teacher.

K: It's tough to think about all those years ago, but can you think about what your elementary experience would've been like if you didn't have that family time?

L: We wouldn't have had any interaction with any older kids and I learned so much from them, just watching them sometimes, I remember hand games, and songs, and we had to hang around with them, and without family we would've never had that experience.

E: At the elementary level it is a big part of your week. I think that [family class] had a huge impact on how I developed as a student. I was so comfortable with expressing my ideas and suggestions from such an early age, that I find myself in CEGEP classes doing the same.

L: I feel the exact same way. Other students are always like 'I don't want to go talk to the teacher' like they're scared or something. I never feel that way I just always saw teachers

as people too, and I think that has a lot to do with the equal kind of relationship we had with an adult outside of our family at such an early age

F: And you got to know people who otherwise you wouldn't have had then chance to get to know.

L: It was a great idea, because then at high school there's no interaction, and it would've been so much more beneficial at that level. When we were in elementary, we were all connected to something more specific than the school then all of a sudden we're thrown into high school and it felt very much disjointed.

E: Family is really different in high school, so you meet people in band, and choir, and drama, but you were always with your class it just felt a lot more segregated.

K: You guys talked a lot about, the intergenerational learning, because you were helped by older students and then were in the position to help younger students do you feel like it had any impact on who you were as you went into high school?

L: I think yes, in terms of talking to people, when we were in high school we were much more open to talking to older or young students.

E: And even when we were in grade 10 we used to go visit the younger students, and hang out with them, I feel like it makes it more of an opportunity to socialize and be open to them.

L: You are less likely to ignore others because of I don't know maybe family...I never really thought about it, but yeah you met people, you were more likely to interact with them...

K: Now if you can think back to the family program and changes that could've been made to benefit you more, included or how that time could have been used.

L: I think it would have been really helpful if the family teachers could interact more, I remember...

(Interruption)



L:...so that it would really be different depending on who's family class you were in so if there was more communication. I think it would have been a lot better.

K: Do you remember parents being involved

F: My mom would come in a lot, and hang out, I liked it when my mom came and she made friends with other people's parents.

L: My mom really liked getting to know the other parents too, and once after apple picking, all the parents came and we all helped out and got messy and it was one of my best memories of family.

K: Now do you remember having any group discussions in family about issues like values, trust, community.

L: There was no direct discussion of that, but because you had all these kids together that became our community.

E: It wasn't activities to learn about those things it was practicing those things during family time. It wasn't disciplined in that way I think we covered respect, trust, community, but it was done in a way that we weren't aware of, it was just the way we worked in family together taught us that.

F: It wasn't education, it was a life, to do this and that we would do it with the teachers, not just lessons.

E: It was so much better that way instead of someone teaching it directly, we learned by doing which was so much more effective.

F: I don't think we would of cared if it was taught like a math class, it wouldn't have stuck out as much or maybe had as much of an impact.

E: It also encourages kids to get their own definitions of each of those things by doing it themselves and not having it taught...

K: What was the adjustment like when you left for high school and there wasn't that constant touchstone of family?

F: John Sayesh was the family teacher and he really tried to keep it going, I remember thinking that family time was getting less and less. And then it got to the point where it was gone. And then it became this thing that was like oh damn family I guess I'd just skip it.

L: I became like oh we have to think of something to do, like uh

F: And the family teachers, not Jim, but the others they would be like what do you want to do and we'll do it, and we just wanted to leave.

E: I felt that it turned into chaos, and there were new students, and that's' probably a great time to have a structured family program, you know for those kids.

K: So the first day was just in your family even in high school?

F: Yeah and they would be like here are your agendas have a nice day, and that was it...

E: Yeah there were no set activities, you just hang out....

L: I remembered hearing about how family class you used to be, like in a year book, it looked so great, and I was jealous, because our teachers don't care.

E: By gr. 11 there was no family you would just show up and hang out...and it gives your class a sense of being together so in gr. 11 we could have really used that.

F: Yeah you just wish that they would force you to be together and made it more structured....

K: Is there anything else that I should know...

F: The teachers are not trained to do it they just don't know how to approach it, and that's part of the problem...

E: It's really a great time for the teachers to get to know their students too as people, and it has to be structured or else it's just wasted.