

“Invitations” To Character

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Abstract

If we are to help children develop character, we have to go beyond offering a character education class once or twice each month. We actually have to validate character when we see it or hear about it happening. Through the use of a new strategy called “focused invitations,” counselors and teachers can focus on the 36 core components of character. The results from using this technique are profound and children respond as if we were shining a positive spotlight on the inner-most core of their being. In this article, focused invitations will be described and suggestions will be offered for use in one-on-one situations.

Introduction

Educators are being asked to provide more and more emphasis on the social and emotional development of children. Character education is now one of the hot topics in the schools.

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With the hundreds of books that are available which provide character curricula and lesson plans, one would wonder why these programs are not more effective. The truth is that the job of developing character is often relegated to the school counselor presenting a class on character once a month or the school adopting a “character” word of the week or month. It may boil down to passing out the “Word Search” of the month for the students to work on during study hall! We assume that if we talk about a character trait, like responsibility, for example, it will come to pass. Nothing is further from the truth!

Although Alfred Adler, the creator of Individual Psychology, did not focus directly on character education, he did offer one of the more important concepts to be found in the counseling literature. For Adler,

the single criterion for “success” in life was embodied in the extent to which the individual possesses “social interest” (Yang, Milliren, & Blagen, 2009). It is this concept that describes the ideal state of the individual’s mental health or what we might term today as “character.” Adler described social interest as being an aptitude or innate potentiality for living cooperatively and contributing to the good of others. However, according to Adler, social interest or character had to be consciously developed. Therefore, it becomes the function of education (families and schools) and educators (parents and teachers) to convert this potential into an ability or skill. Just like we educate an individual’s potential for music or numbers or artistic productions, we must also take time to develop an individual’s social interest. With the development of one’s social interest comes the development of the capacities for cooperation and contribution which are primary components of character (Milliren, Evans & Newbauer, 2006).

If we are to draw out and help develop social interest and character in others, it is important that we validate it when we see (or hear about) it happening. Our students report their successes to us all the time yet we rarely see these reports as opportunities for developing character. A chance encounter with a student -- “I really did well in Ms. Wilson’s class today!” – presents a tremendous opportunity to draw out traits of character that may already be there. Although we usually respond positively with a “That’s great!” or a “I knew you could do

it!” we can develop it even more. We have an opportunity to reflect the underlying character components and thereby reinforce the life choices that our students are making. Thus, character education can become an everyday opportunity.

These everyday opportunities are part and parcel of the invitational classroom. Over 20 years ago, when John Wilson (1986) was discussing the invitational elementary classroom, he stated that “invitations are the messages and signals used by classroom teachers to communicate about the students’ capabilities, their inherent value, their tendency for responsible behaviors, and these students’ basic dignity as unique human beings” (p. 4). What we are discussing in this article, the “focused invitations,” are specific references to an identifiable trait. We are deliberately pointing out a ‘character’istic belonging to the student that he or she may not even recognize the he or she holds! This is an excellent way to be professionally inviting with others, to invite them to realize their potential and meet the needs of society (Purkey & Novak, 1984; 2008).

Messer (2001) relates character to the concept of self-respect. He quotes Dr. Rudolf Dreikurs, a student of Alfred Adler, as defining self-respect as “the feeling that one is a worthwhile human being in spite of one’s faults and imperfections” (p. 265). This represents the “courage to be imperfect” that Dreikurs talked about on so many occasions (Turner & Pew, 1978) and is the key to the development of character. Self-respect (or character) “is not expressed

in terms of “knowing,” but of “feeling.” It is not based on objective conditions. It is a subjective experience. It is not conditional and does not depend on external indicators of achievement. It cannot be given or taken away by external agencies” (Messer, 2001, p. 265). “. . . If we learn to function – to do our best regardless of what it is – out of the enjoyment of functioning, we can grow just as well, even better than if we drove ourselves to be perfect” (Turner & Pew, 1978, p. 289).

“Character”istics

Table 1 lists 36 “character”istics or components that help to define one’s character. These serve as the traits or qualities that can be directly reflected back to the student in response to his or her “success” report. This process is demonstrated in the examples which follow. Each response is designed to capture a different character component. The various components of character, noted in Table 1, are deliberately reflected back to the student. In the examples, the components are noted in parentheses.

We have discovered that it is best to utilize a five-step response sequence that includes variations of five different components of character. This system seems to provide a broader range of validation and seems to be most reinforcing for the student. At a minimum, a three-step system works pretty well; at a maximum, anything that exceeds five different responses becomes overkill. This first example is from an exchange with a third grade boy that took place in a brief meeting in the hall. The entire conversation

was focused on putting a “shine on his character button.”

Student: “I cleaned the whole house by myself on the weekend.”

Adult: “You must feel really proud to have made that happen.” (Power and Control)

Student: Smiling and beaming.

Adult: “And it makes you feel good to have contributed like that.” (Accomplishment)

Student: “My momma was really happy and all smilin’ when she come home!”

Adult: “There’s a good feeling that comes from seeing her smile like that.” (Success)

Student: “Yeah! She thought I was like one of the big kids.”

Adult: “It makes you feel really grown-up when she thinks that about you – like you are really capable.” (Maturity)

Student: “Yeah!” Beaming.

Adult: “Makes you feel really worthwhile and important.” (Belonging)

Student: “Yeah.”

Table 1
The Thirty-Six Components of Character

Acceptance of Unpleasant Reality – to do the best with what comes one’s way.	Accomplishment – to know that one achieved and that it was good enough.	Approachability – to be available to others who may seek them out.
Appropriate Anger – can express legitimate anger in mature/responsible ways.	Appropriate Responsibility – assumes level of responsibility appropriate to the situation.	Belonging – feeling that one is a member in good standing in the human race.
Confidence – feeling prepared to cope with the positives and negatives that life offers.	Counting One’s Blessings – to recognize and appreciate one’s blessings.	Courage – knows which risks need to be taken and those that do not.
Courage to Succeed – to be able to risk success and tolerate a successful outcome.	Equality – behaving as an equal, feeling neither inferior nor superior to others.	Identity – to be one’s own person and have flexibility in one’s relationships.
In Touch with Reality – to perceive the world objectively and appropriately.	Independence – free from a dependence on others to validate one’s existence.	Intellectual Self-Respect – to feel smart enough in the moment.
Less Vulnerable to Temptation – no need to resort to mischief or self-destructive behavior.	Liberation – neither rebel nor victim but can solve problems constructively.	Living in the Present – to be able to function in the real world right now.
Lovability – able to love and be loved.	Maturity – being at an appropriate stage of development for one’s age.	Positive Regard – free to have a positive regard for fellow human beings.
Power and Control – to be able to make positive things happen.	Power of Choice – can make choices and live with the consequences of the choices.	Relief – from the pressure, tension and stress of having to prove one’s worth.
Relief from Guilt – feeling active remorse and able to make restitution when needed.	Relief from Fear and Anxiety – to have a positive view of the future and take life as it comes.	Security – to be comfortable in one’s ability to cope with the ups and downs of life.
Securing Cooperation – to be able to work in an atmosphere of mutual respect with others.	Self-Acceptance – feeling <i>good enough</i> as one is. “I am a worthwhile human being in spite of	Self Respect – able to live with others as equals and positively contribute to one’s community.
Serenity – at peace with one’s self and free to be at peace with one’s neighbors.	Success – possess the feeling that they are free to succeed and to be successful.	Tolerance of Pain or Disappointment – accepts life as it comes without despairing.
Trust – trusting one’s self while discriminating those worthy of trust.	Trust in One’s Judgment – and open to learning from experience.	Unselfish – having the freedom to give of one’s self to others.

*Adapted from Messer, M. (1995). *The components of our character*. Chicago, IL, Anger Institute. P. 29-40.

This next example, with a fifth grade student, occurred a day or so after her class was shown a strategy for better spelling. She was on the playground and actually sought the adult out to share her success.

Student: “I practiced that spelling thing you showed us and got 100 on the test!”

Adult: “Makes you feel pretty smart to do so well.” (Intellectual Self-Respect)

Student: “They were all really surprised.”

Adult: “But you showed them how capable you are.” (Self-Acceptance)

Student: “Like yeah! It felt really good to know all the words.”

Adult: “Like you were really on top of things – like you’re the master.” (Power and Control)

Student: “Now I know I’m smart! I think I can do better on other stuff too!”

Adult: “So it’s like your ‘smart’ is spreading out to other stuff.” (Courage to Succeed)

Student: “It’s so neat to feel so good about myself.”

Adult: “You’re feeling like a pretty worthwhile person, then.” (Confidence)

Student: “Yup! And getting better!”

The young man in this example went looking for the counselor to share the results of his participation in the Science Fair. Although he didn’t win first place, he discovered that winning first place wasn’t quite as important as putting in the effort just to show!

Student: “Did you see my science project down there in the display case?”

Counselor: “I sure did. It’s a great feeling to have won a ribbon for your efforts.” (Accomplishment)

Student: “I was kind of disappointed with only 3rd place when they announced it.”

Counselor: “Disappointments can happen. You seem to be okay with it now.” (Acceptance of Unpleasant Reality)

Student: “I am – I know I worked hard and did my best. It was a really good project.”

Counselor: “So, you appreciate your own work and effort.” (Counting one’s Blessings)

Student: “I was 3rd place in the whole city! That’s pretty good!”

Counselor: “You bet that’s pretty good. Makes you feel mighty capable and worthwhile.” (Confidence)

Student: “You’re darn right! Just wait ‘til next year!”

Counselor: “Ah! You’re planning to hang in there and go at it again.” (Courage to Succeed)

Student: “Of course – and I’ll work just a little bit harder too!”

In this final example, a Junior girl is reporting what might be termed a “negative” success. However, even in some of the sadness about losing a relationship, there are opportunities to directly reflect the underlying positive elements of character that made it possible for her to end the relationship.

Girl: “I finally broke up with my boyfriend last night. You know, he was pretty abusive to me.”

Adult: “As much as that may hurt right now, you sound pretty confident about what you did.” (Confidence)

Girl: “I was kind of scared for a long time but I made up my mind to do it and now it’s done.”

Adult: “So, you overcame your fear and took a big step.” (Freedom from Fear/Anxiety)

Girl: “It was – especially for me – I don’t like to cause trouble.”

Adult: “You’d rather keep the peace if you can but now you know you can take charge like this yourself!” (Power and Control)

Girl: “I deserve better – he always put me down and told me I was stupid.”

Adult: “And you have more worth and value than that.” (Equality)

Girl: “Duhhhhh! Of course I do!”

Adult: “And now you are feeling really in control of the situation.” (Independence)

Girl: “Yeah. He wants to make up but I’m not interested anymore.”

The Procedure

You will note that all the preceding examples include five different focused invitations. This is important since we want the person to really “hear” what we are saying. In the event one invitation of a character component doesn’t quite take, we increase the odds of being heard by adding

the other four. The general outcome, however, is that each of the focused invitations connects in some way with the core of a person’s being and serves to reinforce some aspect of the individual’s “inner self.”

The intention of a focused invitation is to draw out the elements of character that already exist for the person. The purpose is to “tag” that inner core where belief in self lies. Listen to the responses that follow and “hear” the differences between the three of them.

1. “How did you feel about that?”
2. “You must feel good about how that turned out for you.”
3. “It feels really good inside when *you realize that you are capable of handling things for yourself.*”

The last example is a focused invitation. It is focused on the feeling component of the experience (which is similar to the skill of reflective listening, as in #2 above) and also the character component that is being displayed by the person. It is this latter element that is so critical to identify in and for the person. Note the empowerment of the response. We need to draw that element out in our conversations with young people and demonstrate to them that they are already acting in positive, useful, and constructive ways.

Focused invitations are based on the skill of intelligent or “educated” guessing. We need to hear the trait or quality that is behind the person’s words. Adler (Ansbacher &

Ansbacher, 1964) and Dreikurs (Turner & Pew, 1978) were strong proponents of this guessing process. For Adler, guessing was a means for discovering the private logic of the individual. Dreikurs (Turner & Pew, 1978) developed the “concept of ‘two points on a line.’ If a client reveals two apparently independent and contrary facts, a line of logic can be drawn to delineate a picture of a unified, self-consistent life style. The counselor attempts to find the line of logic through intelligent guessing...” (p. 247). Dreikurs would admonish his students that it was always better to guess and be wrong than to never guess at all. He believed that too many counselors spent too much time just gathering information, a condition he termed “factophilia.” Guessing, whether right or wrong, allows the counselor to arrive at the core of the situation much more quickly than endless fact-gathering and useless questioning.

If a student makes a comment such as, “I did it!” we know there is a reference to Power and Control. Here the person is stating the belief that he or she is able to make positive things happen. If a third grade student “high fives” his teacher after spelling a word backwards correctly, we know that there should be a reference to Accomplishment because the person is “saying” that he or she

achieved something and feels like it is good enough. Or, if a high school student tells you, “She believed me when I told her!” it is fairly clear that we could respond with a Trust in One’s Judgment invitation. All of these examples are just the product of intelligent guesswork.

Table 2 contains samples of focused invitations that were created for each of the specific character components. In some cases there are more examples than there are of others. Many of the examples were derived from real situations so may not be particularly suitable to other situations where the conditions might be quite different. Your own creativity will allow you to develop some new ones of your own. The character reference in each focused invitation is printed in *italics*.

If we do not get reports of successes spontaneously, we might wish to open our individual (and even group) contacts with students with the following statements or questions: “Tell me about one of your ‘wins’ or successes.” “What’s been going well for you lately?” “Tell me what you accomplished lately.” “Have you done something new that you’ve never done before?” “What kind of positive risks have you taken?” “Tell me about some good news.”

Table 2

Components of Character with Examples of Focused Invitations

Character Components	Sample focused invitation
Acceptance of Unpleasant Reality – to do the best with what comes one's way.	<p>"You're feeling good about <i>handling all the stuff that has been coming along.</i>"</p> <p>"<i>Despite all that's come down on you, you must feel really good about how things are going.</i>"</p>
Accomplishment – to know that one achieved and that it was good enough.	<p>"<i>Even though it didn't come out perfectly, it is nice to know that it was good enough as it was.</i>"</p> <p>"It is really energizing for you when <i>you know you've done it and it is good enough as it is!</i>"</p>
Approachability – to be available to others who may seek them out.	<p>"I've noticed how <i>you show a real concern for others. It must make you feel good when others seek you out.</i>"</p> <p>"<i>You have a nice manner that draws people to you. That must really make you feel good about yourself.</i>"</p>
Appropriate Anger – can express legitimate anger in mature/ responsible ways.	<p>"It's really great when you are <i>able to express your anger appropriately.</i>"</p> <p>"It must feel good for you to <i>express your grievance to them without getting all out of sorts.</i>"</p>
Appropriate Responsibility – assumes level of responsibility appropriate to the situation.	<p>"You handled that really nicely <i>and still let them be responsible for themselves.</i>"</p> <p>"How good is that for you? <i>You took responsibility for your part and that was enough for now.</i>"</p>
Belonging – feeling that one is a member in good standing in the human race.	<p>"It's nice to feel that <i>you fit in and belong.</i>"</p> <p>"There's a good feeling in feeling that <i>you are included and that you belong.</i>"</p>
Confidence – feeling prepared to cope with the positives and negatives that life offers.	<p>"It feels good to know <i>you can handle whatever comes your way.</i>"</p> <p>"There's a powerful feeling to <i>knowing that you can succeed.</i>"</p>
Counting One's Blessings – to recognize and appreciate one's blessings.	<p>"It's great knowing that <i>you can focus on what is going right for you.</i>"</p> <p>"You must really feel on top of things knowing <i>you have a knack for appreciating what you have going for you.</i>"</p>
Courage – knows which risks need to be taken and those that do not.	<p>"You took the risk and had <i>the courage to see what would happen.</i>"</p> <p>"<i>You know what risks are worth taking and which ones aren't.</i>"</p>

Courage to Succeed – to be able to risk success and tolerate a successful outcome.	<p>“You must feel pretty courageous when <i>you try something new without knowing how it will turn out.</i>”</p> <p>“You’ve got to be proud of yourself for <i>sticking to it and trying again.</i>”</p>
Equality – behaving as an equal, feeling neither inferior nor superior to others.	<p>“It’s like <i>you are no more or no less than anyone else.</i>”</p> <p>“There’s a good feeling that comes from <i>not having to prove that you are equal to others.</i>”</p>
Identity – to be one’s own person and have flexibility in one’s relationships.	<p>“It’s great when <i>you don’t feel like you have to play a role anymore.</i>”</p> <p>“It’s great being able to <i>operate on your own terms and not someone else’s.</i>”</p>
In Touch with Reality – to perceive the world objectively and appropriately.	<p>“You are right on target <i>with your view of the world and it makes everything have more sense.</i>”</p> <p>“I’m sure it feels pretty good to <i>realize that your plan was impossible but you have put together an even better alternative one.</i>”</p>
Independence – free from a dependence on others to validate their existence.	<p>“You’re feeling good about really <i>being free to make your own decisions.</i>”</p> <p>“Right now you are feeling pretty independent -- <i>you are living life on your own terms.</i>”</p>
Intellectual Self-Respect – to feel smart enough in the moment.	<p>“It’s just really nice to know that <i>you are smart enough to handle the situation.</i>”</p> <p>“You feel confident about <i>your abilities to handle something new.</i>”</p>
Less Vulnerable to Temptation – no need to resort to mischief or self-destructive behavior.	<p>“It’s nice just <i>being yourself for who you are, not for what others want you to be.</i>”</p> <p>“You’ve got to be feeling on top of the world! <i>You’re not needing to create mischief in order to be noticed.</i>”</p>
Liberation – neither rebel nor victim but can solve problems constructively.	<p>“It’s great <i>not being trapped in your old beliefs about people (things).</i>”</p> <p>“You’re feeling pretty energized right now <i>when you are able and capable to solve problems in useful ways.</i>”</p>
Living in the Present – to be able to function in the real world right now.	<p>“There’s a nice feeling when <i>you are able to move ahead and make things happen.</i>”</p> <p>“<i>You didn’t just sit around waiting for the perfect time; you did it right now.</i>”</p>

Lovability – able to love and be loved.	<p>“What you did just then was like <i>giving yourself a hug for being okay.</i>”</p> <p>“I’m sure that is a really secure feeling <i>to be comfortable enough with yourself to love and be loved.</i>”</p>
Maturity – being at an appropriate stage of development for one’s age.	<p>“You’re feeling pretty grown-up now when <i>you make good decisions for yourself.</i>”</p> <p>“It’s an important part of growing up to <i>feel as capable as you do right now.</i>”</p>
Positive Regard – free to have a positive regard for fellow human beings.	<p>“<i>You are approaching others as equals – no more or less than you see in yourself.</i>”</p> <p>“<i>You seem to understand others’ viewpoints and respect their right to their opinion. That’s got to be a great feeling.</i>”</p>
Power and Control – to be able to make positive things happen.	<p>“You’re feeling proud of yourself. <i>You did well and were in control of the situation at the same time.</i>”</p> <p>“Wow! You must be feeling really in charge of things. <i>You were in control of yourself and could make things better for everyone.</i>”</p>
Power of Choice – can make choices and live with the consequences of the choices.	<p>“<i>You chose to do what you needed to do and live with the outcome. That must make you feel pretty capable.</i>”</p> <p>“That must be a powerful feeling <i>to be aware of the consequences of your actions and to accept the outcomes.</i>”</p>
Relief – from the pressure, tension and stress of having to prove one’s worth.	<p>“It’s nice to know <i>you can just be your own person.</i>”</p> <p>“It’s a great feeling of relief <i>to just know that you are enough.</i>”</p>
Relief from Guilt – feeling active remorse and able to make restitution when needed.	<p>“It feels like a good space to be in – <i>you can fix the situation and then move on without worrying about it any more.</i></p> <p>“You should be feeling pretty guilt-free – <i>you made a mistake, but were able to fix it and then move on.</i>”</p>
Relief from Fear and Anxiety – to have a positive view of the future and take life as it comes.	<p>“That must be pretty good for you. <i>You can make things happen as they come and have a good outlook about it.</i>”</p> <p>“<i>You’re taking life as it comes and handling it.</i>”</p>
Security – to be comfortable in one’s ability to cope with the ups and downs of life.	<p>“You’re feeling pretty okay <i>just within yourself and your ability to handle it.</i>”</p> <p>“That makes you feel pretty secure in yourself; <i>accepting life’s challenges as they come and know you will cope.</i>”</p>
Securing Cooperation – to be able to work in an atmosphere of mutual respect with others.	<p>“That seems to be a positive thing going for you – <i>getting others to pull together to do what needs to be done.</i>”</p> <p>“It must be a great feeling to realize that <i>you’ve participated in helping your team (group) work well together.</i>”</p>

Self-Acceptance – feeling <i>good enough</i> as one is. “I am a worthwhile human being in spite of my faults and imperfections!”	<p>“<i>As good as you are right now – that’s good enough.</i>”</p> <p>“<i>You feel just okay as you are and that is good enough.</i>”</p>
Self Respect – able to live with others as equals and positively contribute to one’s community.	<p>“<i>You got a good thing going for you right now, a give and take respect for others and what you can contribute.</i>”</p> <p>“<i>That’s got to make you pretty comfortable – to see your value and worth as well as everyone else’s.</i>”</p>
Serenity – at peace with one’s self and free to be at peace with one’s neighbors.	<p>“<i>It is a really comfortable feeling when you don’t have to keep up your guard.</i>”</p> <p>“<i>It’s a nice feeling of peace of mind.</i>”</p>
Success – possess the feeling that one is free to succeed and to be successful.	<p>“<i>You accomplished what you set out to do!</i>”</p> <p>“<i>You feel free to succeed in your own way without having to prove yourself.</i>”</p>
Tolerance of Pain or Disappointment – accepts life as it comes without despairing.	<p>“<i>Even when you were having a bad day (time), your optimism seems to come shining through.</i>”</p> <p>“<i>Even though you are feeling sad right now, it is good to know you tried your best and you can do it again if you wish.</i>”</p>
Trust – trusting one’s self while discriminating those worth of trust.	<p>“<i>It’s an okay feeling to be able to trust other people.</i>”</p> <p>“<i>You feel disappointed but even when they let you down, you can make other decisions.</i>”</p>
Trust in One’s Judgment – and open to learning from experience.	<p>“<i>So you decided to do the homework and it turned out to be a good decision.</i>”</p> <p>“<i>You now know that it is okay to trust your judgment.</i>”</p>
Unselfish – having the freedom to give of one’s self to others.	<p>“<i>Your compassion for others must give you a great feeling of being okay in yourself.</i>”</p> <p>“<i>It feels good to give without expecting anything in return.</i>”</p>

Then, get set to listen and focus on the character component. If the person's first response doesn't seem to lead anywhere, then an appropriate response might be: "And how was that for you?"

In classroom groups, we can select a story with a theme or character issue. Stories like the following work well with children in grades 3 through 6. They are fairly reasonable in cost and a decent library of character development books can be built by tapping the used book market.

Couric, K. (2000). *The Brand New Kid*. New York: Doubleday. ISBN: 0385599300.

Curtis, J. L., & Cornell, L. (2006). *Is There Really a Human Race?* New York: HarperCollins Children's Books. ISBN: 0060753463.

Deacon, A. (2003). *Beegu*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. ISBN: 0374306672.

dePaola, T. (1979). *Oliver Button Is a Sissy*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich. ISBN: 0152578528.

Greenfield, E. (1980). *Grandmama's Joy*. New York: Philomel Books. ISBN: 0399210644.

Hest, A. (2004). *Mr. George Baker*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press. ISBN: 0763612332.

Holabird, K. (1986). *Angelina on Stage*. New York: Viking. ISBN: 0670060585.

Isaak, C. T., Cooper, K. A., & Nutt, D. (2002). *Unique Monique*. Hartline, WA: Moki Time. ISBN: 0972272909.

Kann, V., & Kann, E. (2007). *Purplicious*. New York: HarperCollins Children's Books. ISBN: 9780061244056.

Kann, V., & Kann, E. (2006). *Pinkalicious*. New York: HarperCollins Children's Books. ISBN: 0060776390.

Keats, E. J. (1980). *Louie's Search*. New York: Puffin Books. ISBN: 0140567615.

Keats, E. J. (1971). *Apt. 3*. New York: Aladdin Books. ISBN: 0689710593.

Keats, E. J. (1964). *Whistle for Willie*. New York: Puffin Books. ISBN: 0140502025.

Munsch, R. (1996). *Stephanie's Ponytail*. Toronto: Annick Press. ISBN: 1550374842.

Viorst, J. (1995). *Alexander, Who's Not (Do you hear me? I mean it!) Going to Move*. New York: Simon & Schuster. ISBN: 0590899821.

These stories can all serve as a stimulus for discussions and focused invitations. As the student(s) relate their stories, respond to their telling with appropriate focused invitations from the thirty-six components of character.

Focused invitations are a strategy that should *only* be used to "catch" character when it is occurring. We cannot force the issue of character development. We can only reinforce the appropriate components of character when we have an opportunity to "observe" them in action. The observations can be in "real" time or in the success stories others tell us – but they must exist. This is not a technique that serves as a subtle means of imparting values when they are not there, even though such action may be tempting. And, it is not intended as a technique for influencing behavior change although this is also a tempting alternative.

When used inappropriately, all elements of genuineness disappear and the words sound hollow and mechanical. When used with appropriate timing and sincerity, we have an opportunity to catch just a little piece of the individual's core values. And it is at that core where character and social interest reside.

End Note

“It has been really fascinating to experiment with the focused invitations as my students have experimented in their learning of new skills and techniques.”

“So, you find it to be really freeing to be able to work on your own skill development while at the same time teaching and reinforcing the skill development of your own students.”

“Absolutely!”

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