The Jubilee Centre Framework for Character Education in Schools

Third Edition

Foreword by
James Arthur and
Kristján Kristjánsson

Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues

The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues is a unique and leading centre for the examination of how character and virtues impact upon individuals and society. The Centre was founded in 2012 by Professor James Arthur. Based at the University of Birmingham, it has a dedicated team of academics from a range of disciplines, including: philosophy, psychology, education, theology, and sociology.

With its focus on excellence, the Centre has a robust, rigorous research and evidence-based approach that is objective and non-political. It offers world class research on the importance of developing good character and virtues and the benefits they bring to individuals and society. In undertaking its own innovative research, the Centre also seeks to partner with leading academics from other universities around the world and to develop strong strategic partnerships.

A key conviction underlying the existence of the Centre is that the virtues that make up good character can be 'caught', 'taught' and 'sought', but that these have been largely neglected in schools and in the professions. It is also a key conviction that the more people exhibit good character and virtues, the healthier our society. As such, the Centre undertakes development projects seeking to promote the practical applications of its research evidence.

The Jubilee Centre Framework for Character Education in Schools

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Foreword

The Jubilee Centre Framework for Character Education in Schools (hereafter: the *Framework*) sets out the Centre's position on character education, what it is, and why it is important. The *Framework* calls for all schools to make explicit how they go about developing pupils' character. It was first published in 2013, revised in 2017, with this latest iteration updated again in 2022.

The *Framework* underpins the approach to all research that the Jubilee Centre engages in, and it has been sent to and downloaded by tens of thousands of schools across the UK and internationally. The *Framework* offers a perspective on character education to consider, rather than providing a blueprint for educating character. Whilst written in the language of schools, for teachers, the *Framework* is flexible and relevant to all individuals, organisations, and institutions seeking to articulate their approach to character education. It has been utilised in higher education institutions, professional bodies, with funders and charities, as part of government policy, and with educationalists around the world. Indeed, the *Framework* has been used more widely, nationally and internationally, than its original authors could possibly have anticipated.

The first iteration of the *Framework* in 2013 was the first major publication of the Jubilee Centre and sought to bring together key ideas, founding principles, and the language of character underlying the work of key Jubilee Centre personnel (and others) up to that point. Terms such as 'virtue literacy', character 'caught', 'taught', and 'sought', and our categorisation of intellectual, moral, civic, and performance virtues that form a 'language of character' play key roles within the *Framework* document, and in the Jubilee Centre's conception of character education. The terms 'intellectual', 'moral', and 'civic' virtues have existed for centuries. The *Framework* brings them together to illustrate how they work in harmony with one another for the greater good of individual and societal flourishing.

The modern preoccupation with instrumentalist 'performance' virtues in educational circles (in practice and in policy) has been given greater credence than may be necessary, at the expense of moral and civic virtues.

The logical model created in the *Framework* about 'The Building Blocks of Character' made sense in giving performance virtues equal standing with the other three types – although they were deliberately depicted to appear fourth in line. The Postscript explains the origin of these categorisations.

The *Framework* was composed with use by a mainstream schooling audience in mind; the addition of *The Character Teaching Inventory* to this third revision aims to further this ambition. The *Framework* and the Jubilee Centre's wider understanding of what character is and its applicability and relevance to everyone regardless of educational circumstances sees character not as a 'fix' for an individual's circumstances, nor that those circumstances may lead to a 'lack' of good character. Instead, educators adopting a character-led approach to working with young people, whether engaging them through mainstream settings or elsewhere, have reported that the Jubilee Centre's approach gives a critical 'voice' to the young people in their care.

In sum, the rationale behind the *Framework* is best encapsulated in Aristotle's famous words:

'The aim of our studies is not to know what virtue is, but to become good.'

Aristotle

James Arthur and Kristján Kristjánsson
2022

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Introduction

The development of children's characters is an obligation we all share, not least parents. Whilst parents are the primary educators of their children's character, empirical research tells us that parents want all adults who have contact with their children to contribute to such education, especially their children's teachers. The development of character is a process that requires the development of individuals, society, and its schools. A society determined to enable its members to live well will treat character education as something to which every child has a right. Schools should consider questions about the kinds of persons their pupils will become, how the development of good character contributes to a flourishing life, and how to balance various virtues and values in this process. The aim of this *Framework* is to provide a rationale and a practical outlet for the interest that schools show in the character development of their pupils.

Belonging to and actively participating in a school community is a deeply formative experience that helps pupils develop, amongst other things, their character. In a broad sense, character education permeates all subjects, wider school activities, and a general school ethos. It cultivates the virtues of character associated with common morality and develops pupils' understanding of what is excellent in diverse spheres of human endeavour. Schools should and do aid pupils in learning to know the good, love the good, and do the good.

Schools should enable pupils to become good persons and citizens, able to lead good lives, and contribute to the common good, as well as become 'successful' persons. Schooling is concerned centrally with the formation of character and benefits from an intentional and planned approach to character development.

Human flourishing is the widely accepted goal of life. To flourish is not only to be happy, but to fulfil one's potential. Flourishing is the ultimate aim of character education. Human flourishing requires the acquisition and development of intellectual, moral, and civic virtues, excellence specific to diverse domains of practice or human endeavour, and generic virtues of self-management (known as enabling or performance virtues). All are necessary to achieve the highest potential in life. Character education teaches the acquisition and strengthening of virtues: the traits that sustain a well-rounded life and a thriving society. Schools should aim to develop confident and compassionate pupils, who are effective contributors to society, successful learners, and responsible citizens. Pupils also need to cultivate their understanding of what is good or valuable and their ability to protect and advance what is good. They need to develop a commitment to serving others, which is an essential manifestation of good character in action. Questions of character formation are inseparable from these educational goals and are fundamental to living well and responsibly. Character development involves caring for and respecting others, as well as caring for and respecting oneself.

Character education is no novelty. If we look at the history of schooling from ancient times to the 20th century, the cultivation of character was typically given pride of place, with the exception of a few decades towards the end of the 20th century when, for a variety of different reasons, this aim disappeared from the curricula of many Western democracies. Contemporary character education, however, is better grounded academically than some of its predecessors, with firm support both from the currently popular virtue ethics in moral philosophy, and recent trends in social science, such as positive psychology, that have revived the concepts of character and virtue. Finally, a growing, general public-policy consensus, across political parties and industry, suggests that the role of moral and civic character is pivotal in sustaining healthy economies and democracies.

What character education is

Character is a set of personal traits or dispositions that produce specific moral emotions, inform motivation, and guide conduct.

Character education includes all explicit and implicit educational activities that help young people to develop positive personal strengths called virtues.

Character education is more than just a subject. It has a place in the culture and functions of families, classrooms, schools, and other institutions. Character education is about helping pupils grasp what is ethically important in situations and how to act for the right reasons so that they become more autonomous and reflective in the practice of virtue. Pupils need to decide wisely about the kind of person they wish to become and need to learn to choose between already existing options or to find new ones. In this process, the ultimate aim of character education is the development of good sense, or practical wisdom; the capacity to choose intelligently between alternatives. This capacity involves knowing how to choose the right course of action in difficult situations; it develops gradually out of the experience of making choices and the growth of ethical insight.

The ultimate goal of all proper character education is to equip pupils with the intellectual tools to make wise choices of their own within the framework of a democratic society. Critical thinking is thus a vital facet of a well-rounded character. Character and virtue are not exclusively religious notions; nor are they paternalistic. If being 'paternalistic' means that character education goes against the wishes of pupils and their parents, empirical research shows the opposite. More generally speaking, the character of children cannot simply be put on hold at school until they reach the age where they have become wise enough to decide for themselves. Some form of character education will always be taking place in school. The sensible question to ask about a school's character education strategy is not, therefore, whether such education does occur, but whether it is intentional, planned, organised, and reflective, or assumed, unconscious, reactive, and random. The emphasis on character and virtue is not conservative or individualist – all about 'fixing the kids'. The ultimate aim of character education is not only to make individuals better persons, but to create the social and institutional conditions within which all human beings can flourish. Social and institutional conditions of this kind require that all members of

Why character education is important

- Character is fundamental: it is the basis for human and societal flourishing;

- Character is largely caught through role-modelling and emotional contagion: committed leadership, school culture and ethos are therefore central;

- Character should also be taught: direct teaching of character provides the rationale, language and tools to use in developing character elsewhere in and out of school;

- Character is sought freely to pursue a better life;

- Character is educable: it is not fixed and the virtues can be developed. Its progress can be measured holistically, not only through self-reports but also more objective research methods;

- Character depends on building virtue literacy;

- Good character is the foundation for improved attainment, better behaviour and increased employability, but most importantly, flourishing societies;

- Character should be developed in partnership with parents, families, employers, and other community organisations;

- Each child has a right to character education;

- The development of character empowers pupils and is liberating.

society contribute in ways that collectively provide everyone with opportunities to live well.

The idea that virtue is related to mental health also has a long history in Western thought. Yet virtue has not, for the most part, been commonplace in the language and the practice of mental health care more

broadly, especially within education. Nevertheless, character virtues, the use of character strengths and flourishing should be seen as important dimensions of complete mental health and well-being. The cultivation of individual character is most likely to succeed in conditions of reciprocity and equal opportunity. Fundamental to these conditions is an ethos of cooperation and mutual goodwill. Alongside positive mental health other necessities, such as adequate nutrition and good physical health provision, are also foundational to acquiring the virtues, capabilities, and understanding essential for individual flourishing and constructive membership in society.

Which virtues constitute good character?

Individuals can respond well, or less well, to the challenges they face in everyday life, and virtues are those character traits that enable human beings to respond appropriately to situations in any area of experience. These character traits enable people to live, cooperate, and learn with others in a way that is peaceful, neighbourly, and morally justifiable. Displaying moral and other virtues in admirable activities over the course of a life, and enjoying the inherent satisfaction that ensues, is what it means to live a flourishing life.
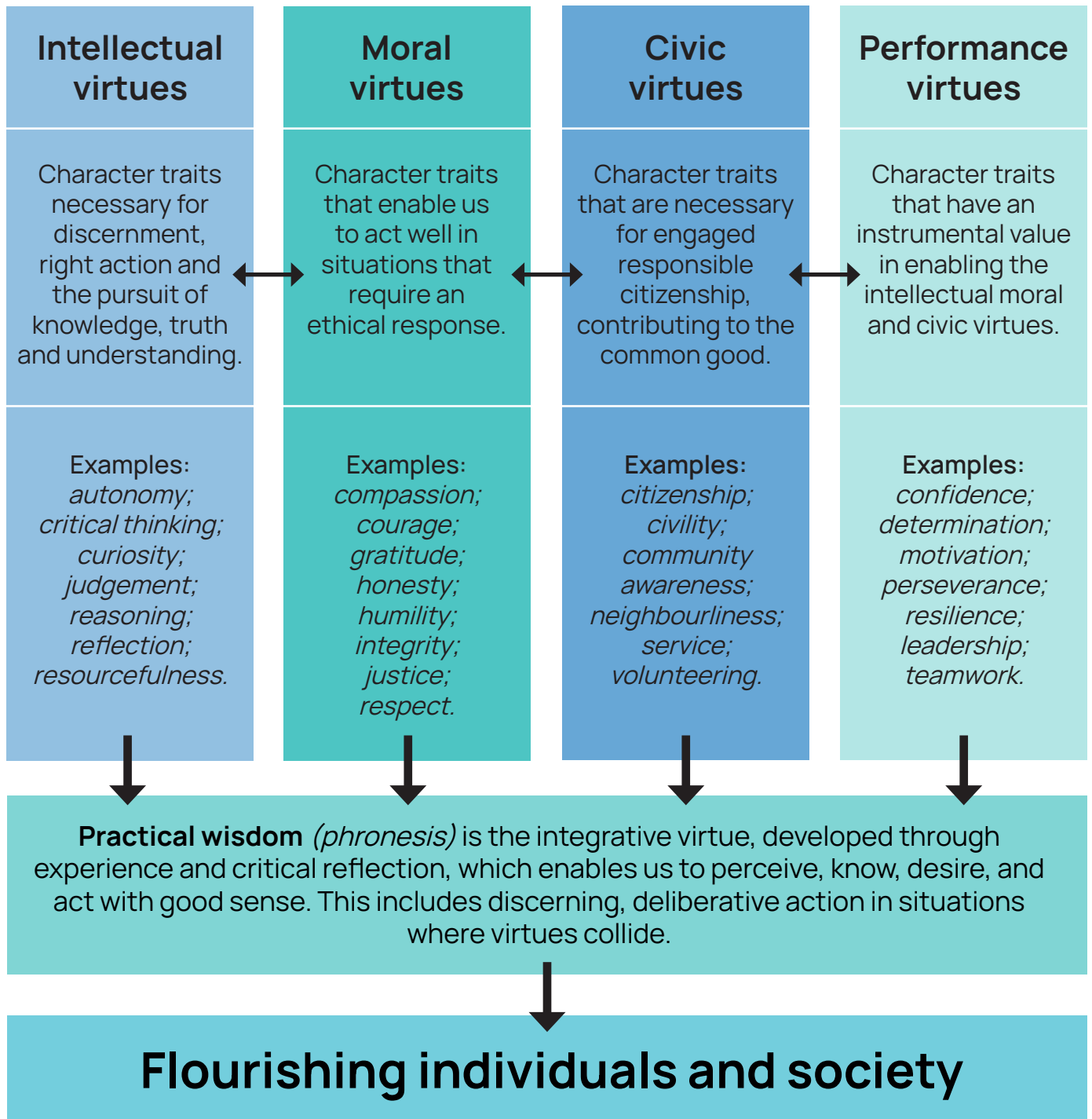
No definitive list of relevant areas of human experience and the respective virtues can be given, as the virtues will, to a certain extent, be relative to individual constitution, developmental stage, and social circumstance. For example, temperance in eating will be different for an Olympic athlete and an office worker; what counts as virtuous behaviour for a teenager may not pass muster for a mature adult; and the virtues needed to survive in a war zone may not be the same as those in a peaceful rural community. There are a great many virtues, each concerned with particular activities and potential spheres of human experience. Additionally, there are cultural variations; such as virtues appearing pronounced in one tradition while not featuring in another. It is, therefore, neither possible nor desirable to provide an exhaustive list of the moral virtues that should be promoted in all schools. Moreover, particular schools may decide to prioritise certain virtues over others in light of the school's history, ethos, location, or specific pupil population. Nevertheless, a list of prototypical virtues – that will be recognised and embraced by representatives of all cultures and religions – can be suggested and drawn upon in character education. Examples of moral virtues may include courage, justice, honesty, compassion, gratitude, humility, integrity, and respect.

In addition to such prototypical moral virtues, schools need to promote specific civic virtues, such as civility, service, citizenship, and volunteering which help pupils understand their ties to society and their responsibilities within it. Furthermore, all developing human beings will need to possess a host of intellectual virtues, such as curiosity and critical thinking, which guide their quest for knowledge and information. Among the intellectual virtues, one deserves a special mention: the virtue which the ancient Greeks called *phronesis*, but can also be called practical wisdom, or 'good sense'. This is the overall quality of knowing what is and what is not desirable when the demands of two or more virtues collide, and being able to integrate such demands into an acceptable course of action. Living with practical wisdom entails: considered deliberation, well-founded judgement, and the vigorous enactment of decisions. It reveals itself in foresight, in being clear-sighted and far sighted about the ways in which actions will lead to desired goals. The ability to learn from experience (and make mistakes) is at its centre. To live with practical wisdom is to be open-minded, and to recognise the true variety of things and situations to be experienced. To live without practical wisdom is to live thoughtlessly and indecisively. Lack of practical wisdom shows itself in irresoluteness, or remissions in carrying out decisions, and in negligence and blindness to our circumstances. A person without practical wisdom can be narrow-minded and closed-minded, with a 'cocksure' attitude – a 'know-it-all' who resists reality. Practical wisdom forms part of all the other virtues; indeed it constitutes the overarching meta-virtue necessary for good character.

Virtues are empowering and are a key to fulfilling an individual's potential. Because of the foundational role of virtues in human flourishing, schools have a responsibility to cultivate them, define and list those they want to prioritise, and integrate them into all teaching and learning in and out of school. Pupils, therefore, need to learn their meanings and identify appropriate practices in which to apply them in their lives, respecting themselves (as persons of character) and being of service to others.

In addition to the moral virtues, all human beings need personal traits that enable them to manage their lives effectively. These traits are sometimes called performance virtues or enabling virtues, to distinguish them from the specifically moral ones. In contemporary school-policy discourse, they are commonly referred to as 'soft skills'. One of the most significant is resilience – the ability to bounce back from negative experiences. Others include determination, confidence, and teamwork. All good programmes of character education will include the cultivation of performance virtues, but they will

The Building Blocks of Character

Intellectual virtues	Moral virtues	Civic virtues	Performance virtues
Character traits necessary for discernment, right action and the pursuit of knowledge, truth and understanding.	Character traits that enable us to act well in situations that require an ethical response.	Character traits that are necessary for engaged responsible citizenship, contributing to the common good.	Character traits that have an instrumental value in enabling the intellectual moral and civic virtues.
Examples: *autonomy; critical thinking; curiosity; judgement; reasoning; reflection; resourcefulness.*	Examples: *compassion; courage; gratitude; honesty; humility; integrity; justice; respect.*	Examples: *citizenship; civility; community awareness; neighbourliness; service; volunteering.*	Examples: *confidence; determination; motivation; perseverance; resilience; leadership; teamwork.*

Practical wisdom *(phronesis)* is the integrative virtue, developed through experience and critical reflection, which enables us to perceive, know, desire, and act with good sense. This includes discerning, deliberative action in situations where virtues collide.

Flourishing individuals and society

Components of Virtue

A **Virtue Perception**
Noticing situations involving or standing in need of the virtues.

B **Virtue Knowledge and Understanding**
Understanding the meaning of the virtue term and why the virtue is important, individually and as part of a well-rounded, flourishing life of overall virtue, and being able to apply the virtue to episodes of one's own and others' lives.

C **Virtue Emotion**
Feeling the right virtue-relevant emotion in the right situation in the right way.

D **Virtue Identity**
Understanding oneself as strongly committed to the virtues.

E **Virtue Motivation**
Having a strong desire to act on the virtues.

F **Virtue Reasoning**
Discernment and deliberative action about virtues, including handling situations where virtues conflict or collide.

G **Virtue Action and Practice**
Doing the right thing in the right way.

also explain to pupils that those virtues derive their ultimate value from serving morally acceptable ends, in particular from being enablers and vehicles of the intellectual, moral, and civic virtues. One moral virtue can also enable another: for instance, moral courage is needed to facilitate morally just actions. Although virtues can be divided up into different categories, they form a coherent, mutually supportive whole in a well-rounded life. Indeed, the four categories of virtue cannot be taught in isolation from one another. Character education is all about their integration, guided by the overarching intellectual virtue of practical wisdom or 'good sense'.

The Components of Virtue

While perfect unity of the virtues is an admirable aim for the life-long cultivation of character, most of us will never reach that ideal. This is especially true for young moral learners who are on the way to becoming more virtuous. To complicate matters further, each virtue does not constitute a single discrete trait that one either has or has not. Rather, each virtue comprises various components that may not all develop in tandem – one of several important features that demarcates character education from social emotional learning. The major components are listed and defined in the **Components of Virtue**. A pupil can be strong on one (say, with Virtue Emotion (C)), but weaker on another (say, Virtue Action and Practice (G)). Rarely will all of the components align in perfect harmony in a single person.

Different strategies and interventions in the field of character education target different components and require different methods of evaluating effectiveness. The more of those components that have been cultivated successfully, the more likely it is that the pupil can master the whole virtue. Character educators need not, therefore, feel disheartened even if they only see progress in some components of virtue at any particular time in the educational process.

Virtue literacy

Virtue literacy is a helpful term which consists of three inter-related components:

(i) Virtue 'Perception';
(ii) Virtue 'Knowledge and Understanding'; and
(iii) Virtue 'Reasoning'.

The first component is concerned with noticing situations standing in need of virtues. The second component involves acquiring a complex language usage through familiarity with virtue terms. However, knowledge of the virtues themselves will not necessarily change behaviour. The third component concerns making reasoned judgements about how to apply individual virtues, which includes the ability to explain differences in moral situations.

This emphasis on acquiring judgement must be reflective and so allow for the empowerment of the ethical self through autonomous decision-making. A child may acquire some cognitive understanding of what would be the desirable virtue to display in certain circumstances, but be unable to translate this knowledge, understanding, and reasoning into virtuous action. The determination of whether a child is virtue literate should not be reduced to simple outcomes, but should consider all three components. Children need to be persuaded of the moral force of acting virtuously. Schools need to provide opportunities for children to exercise the virtues in practice as well as encourage a rich discourse of virtue language, understanding, and reasoning.

The goals of character education

It is common for a school to outline the goals of education and a school that seeks to strengthen the character of its pupils should affirm its commitment to doing so in its mission statement.

Each school needs to describe the kinds of persons it wants to help develop and should prepare their pupils for their lives beyond school. Schools should pay attention to societal changes brought about by advances in technology, for example by focussing on cultivating cyber-*phronesis*. The philosophy that underlines their approach to character education should involve clear ethical expectations of pupils and teachers, and modelling by teachers to guide the building of individual virtues in pupils. Schools should provide opportunities for pupils to not just think and do, but also to understand what it means to become and behave as a mature, reflective person.

Schools should help prepare pupils for the tests of life, rather than simply a life of tests.

Ways of cultivating virtues of character

The development of character – and how to enhance it through education – must be understood against the backdrop of a theory of moral development. According to a neo-Aristotelian view of the psychology of moral development, in which this *Framework* is grounded, there are a number of pathways to becoming virtuous. These pathways are described, in as simple terms as possible, in the diagram 'A Neo-Aristotelian Model of Moral Development' in Appendix 1.

An instructive way of approaching and making sense of the educational processes and the associated pedagogical and developmental facets involved in stimulating virtue development – one that has been found to hold great resonance and purchase among teachers – is through the typology of: character 'caught', character 'taught', and character 'sought'. *The Character Teaching Inventory*, which follows, provides 70 character education strategies from across character 'caught', 'taught', and 'sought'.

Character development begins through a process of osmosis where pupils gradually pick up and internalise traits of reacting and acting that they witness around them within the ethos of their home/classroom/school/university, and the same occurs for professionals in their workplaces. This process is part of what we might refer to as character 'caught'. It has also been demonstrated how virtues can be taught explicitly as part of classes in moral or character education, PSHE (personal, social, health, and economic education), religious education, and social and emotional learning – or indeed in any standard school subject. Beyond these two methods, however, character 'sought' involves the desire to discern and freely pursue one's own character development. It involves reflection and ultimately planning and setting one's own character commitments: that is, commitments to worthwhile living. Character 'sought' is more likely to become operational as the pupil matures, but it can be introduced and guided by the teacher at an earlier age. Character 'sought' relates directly to the Aristotelian meta-virtue of practical wisdom or *phronesis*. Accordingly, *phronesis* requires pupils to develop an overall blueprint of their conception of flourishing, which imbues their life with purpose; and to autonomously seek outcomes in accordance with this conception. For Aristotle, virtues do not have moral value in an adult unless they have been independently sought and cultivated in this way.

School ethos based on character

The research evidence is clear: schools that are values-driven have high expectations and demonstrate academic, professional, and social success. They are committed and determined to develop the character of their pupils through the articulation, demonstration of and commitment to core ethical virtues, and to the cultivation of meaningful personal relationships. Strong and committed leadership is an essential ingredient in embedding character education in schools. In addition, because the ethos of the school is the expression of the collective character of everyone, it is vital that every member of a school community have an understanding of what character is. Pupils and teachers therefore need to learn not only the names and meanings of character virtues, but display them in the school's thinking, attitudes, and actions.

Character virtues should be reinforced everywhere: on the playing fields, in classrooms, corridors, interactions between teachers and pupils, in assemblies, posters, head teacher messages and communications, staff training, and in relations with parents. Character virtues are critical in extra-curricular activities and should translate into positive feelings and behaviour. The process of being educated in virtue is not only one of acquiring ideas; it is about belonging and living within a community – for schools are, together with the family, one of the principal means by which pupils grow in virtue. A key feature of school communities that nurture good character is that educators understand that pupils' experience of belonging, personal growth, and self-determination is foundational to the development of good character and commitment to learning.
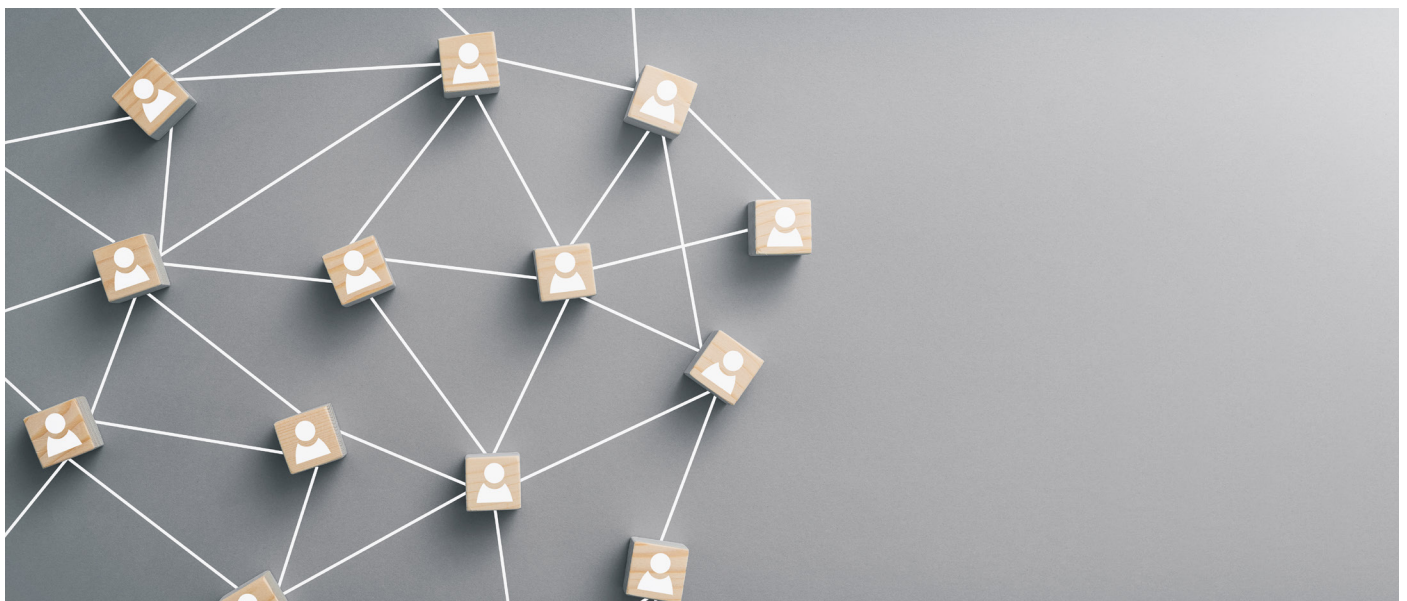
Teachers as character educators

Character education builds on what already happens in schools, and most teachers see character cultivation as a core part of their role. Considerations of character, of the kind of person pupils hope to become, should be at the heart of teaching and education. The virtues acquired through experience by pupils are initially under the guidance of parents and teachers who serve as role models and moral exemplars.

In order to be a good teacher, one needs to be or become a certain kind of person: a person of good character who also exemplifies commitment to the value of what they teach. The character and integrity of the teacher is more fundamental than personality or personal style in class, and it is no less important than mastery of subject content and techniques of instruction. Teaching a subject with integrity involves more than helping pupils to acquire specific knowledge and skills. Good teaching is underpinned by an ethos and language that enables a public discussion of character within the school community, so that good character permeates all subject teaching and learning. It also models commitment to the forms of excellence or goodness inherent in the subject matter: the qualities of craftsmanship, artistry, careful reasoning and investigations, beauty and power of language, and deep understanding made possible by the disciplines. Such commitment is important if pupils are to learn the value of what is taught and learn to do work that is good and personally meaningful.

Although a clear picture is emerging of the inescapability of character education, teachers often complain that they suffer from moral ambivalence and lack of self-confidence in their (inescapable) professional position as role models and character educators. Though their responsibility as teachers is distinctive, it should be noted that other professions including lawyers, judges, health carers, and social workers report a similar ambivalence and lack of confidence in discharging their responsibilities. Repeated empirical studies show that teachers find it difficult to address ethical issues in the classroom. Although many teachers possess a strong interest in moral issues, they are not always adequately trained to reflect critically upon and convey moral views to their pupils in a sophisticated way. Indeed, contemporary policy discourse, with its amoral, instrumentalist, competence-driven vocabulary, often seems to shy away from perspectives that embrace normative visions of persons in the context of their whole lives. The lack of teacher education programmes with a coherent approach to character education is most likely the result of an overly narrow concentration on grade attainment and classroom management.

The Character Teaching Inventory

The Character Teaching Inventory presents a comprehensive overview of 70 character education teaching strategies, from across character 'caught', 'taught', and 'sought', for schools to consider as part of their character education provision.

It is intended both for schools who have already begun their character education journey, and for those about to begin. The aim of the *Inventory* is to make more explicit the implicit aspects of character education, which are often present in schools, whilst also providing suggestions of new strategies.

The strategies listed within *The Character Teaching Inventory* are most effective when initiated and implemented intentionally by school leaders. When carefully planned and organised, character education should purposely foster the development of pupils' character. Taking such an approach allows schools to dedicate time and space for structured character education opportunities.

The aim of the *Inventory* is to illustrate how the *Framework* can be put into practice and, importantly, how character education can become an intentional, meaningful, and reflective part of whole school practice.

Character caught

Character can be caught through a positive school community, formational relationships, and a clear ethos.

Environment

School settings which contribute to character education

- A cared for, safe, and well-designed **physical environment** promotes a sense of belonging
- A collaborative, supportive, and aspirational **learning environment** strikes a balance between academic progress and character development
- A positive **spiritual, moral, social, and cultural environment** encourages staff and pupils to root their character development in their personal beliefs and world views

Vison, ethos, and culture

Practices and initiatives which enable a school to shape a distinctive approach towards character education

School Leaders
- Invite the school community to select and define **priority virtues** for all to aspire towards
- Develop a **mission statement** which affirms these priority virtues
- Develop a whole-school **shared language of character**, encouraging consistent communication and reflection
- Integrate character education into existing **school policies and strategic plans**
- Create a **character education policy**
- Establish clear, **ethical and moral expectations** for staff and pupils, informed by the priority virtues and mission statement
- Ensure **equality and inclusion,** to demonstrate a commitment to character education for all
- Include character considerations when **recruiting staff**
- **Induct new staff** so that each individual understands their role as a character educator
- **Recognise and celebrate** examples of good character

Relationships

Positive relationships, facilitated by school leaders, which support character education

Pupils
- Form meaningful and respectful relationships with staff
- Develop positive relationships between peers, prioritising compassion, friendship, and trust

Staff
- Develop compassionate and supportive relationships where pupils feel valued
- Form trusting and respectful relationships with colleagues to motivate and support each other
- Form collaborative and supportive relationships with parents through positive communication

Wider School
- Engage families of all pupils to involve them in the life of the school
- Participate in activities alongside the local community, reinforcing a sense of belonging and responsible citizenship
- Establish partnerships with educational institutions, including other schools and universities
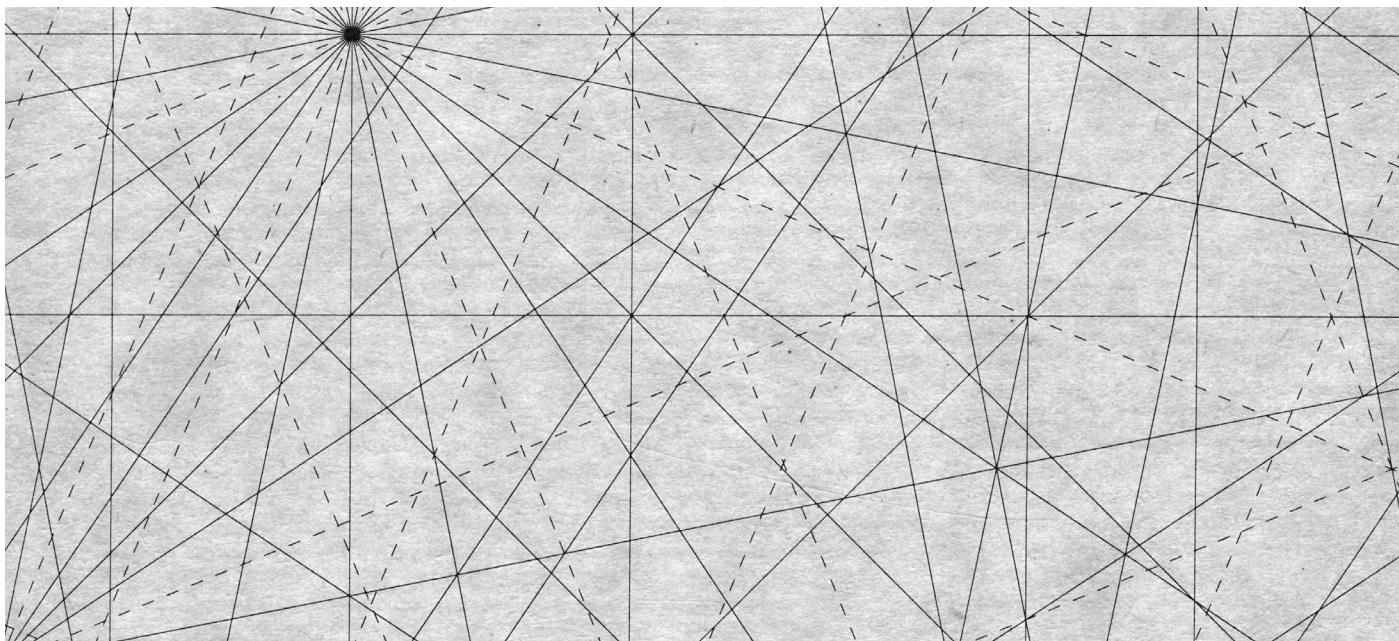
Staff

The roles of staff in supporting character education

All Staff
- Recognise their role as **moral exemplars,** consistently setting a positive example through their own character
- **Understand and support** the school's character education approach

Teachers
- Acknowledge their influence as **character educators**; facilitating character education in their classroom and beyond
- Engage in **internal and external professional development** in character education, identifying improvements for practice
- Support pupils through **pastoral care and mentoring,** offering pupils guidance on their character development
- Utilise **research** in the field to evaluate and improve their practice

Senior Leadership Team
- **Drive and maintain** a whole-school character education approach, providing support for staff and pupils
- Appoint, train, and support a **character lead**
- Co-ordinate **internal and external training,** empowering staff in their role as character educators
- Use appropriate methods to **evaluate provision** of character education

Governors
- **Support and challenge** character education provision

Character taught

Character education can be taught through the curriculum using teaching and learning strategies, activities, and resources.

The Curriculum

Approaches to teach character education through a school's formal curriculum

Character education can be taught through:

- A **discrete and bespoke timetabled subject**, focussing explicitly on the teaching of character and virtue
- **Existing subjects**, identifying opportunities to include character and virtue within the curriculum
- **Personal, social, health, and economic education** (or equivalent), using an issues or topic-based approach to teach character and virtue
- **Citizenship education,** developing the character and virtues needed to be an active and responsible citizen
- **Religious education**, using personal beliefs and world views to explore character and virtue
- **Form time,** providing a daily platform to discuss character and virtue
- **Assemblies,** bringing the whole school community together to explore character and virtue through a shared language

Teaching and learning

Strategies used for teaching character education in and out of the classroom

- **Discussion-based learning** engages pupils with moral and ethical issues through teacher-guided and pupil-led interactions
- **Independent learning** encourages pupils to think critically and take responsibility for their own character development
- **Reflective learning** guides pupils to consider their character through critical reflection
- **Co-operative learning** involves pupils working together, encouraging teamwork and communication
- **Enquiry-based learning** encourages curiosity, challenging pupils to ask and answer open-ended questions
- **Experiential learning** offers pupils opportunities to be active learners through a range of virtue-forming experiences
- **Virtue literacy** develops virtue perception, virtue knowledge and understanding, and virtue reasoning

Activities and resources

Examples of teaching aids which can be used as the focus for character education

Character education can be taught using:

- **Stories**, focussing on moral and ethical complexities
- **Moral dilemmas**, encouraging pupils to discuss and reflect on situations requiring an ethical response
- **Current affairs**, reflecting on the presence or absence of virtue in news stories
- **Moral exemplars**, inspiring pupils to live virtuously
- **Debates**, discussing key moral and ethical issues
- **Literature**, including poetry and historical narratives
- **Themed days or weeks**, focussing explicitly on character and virtues
- **School trips**, encouraging pupils to engage with a range of people and places
- **Sport**, developing character through team and individual activity
- **Creative arts**, including music and the visual arts
- **Drama**, encouraging pupils to understand the perspective of others
- **Reflective journal keeping**, focussed on the personal character development of pupils

Character sought

Character can be sought through chosen experiences that occur within and outside of the formal curriculum.

Enrichment

Experiences during and outside the school day that broaden pupils' passions and interests

School Leaders
- Offer opportunities for **pupil leadership**
- Establish thriving **extra-curricular activities**, enabling all pupils to have access to a wide range of virtue-forming experiences
- Plan **organised school events** that allow pupils to demonstrate their character
- Organise **residential trips** that provide challenging experiences in new environments
- Invite a range of **inspirational speakers** into school to motivate pupils' character development
- Encourage external facilitators to recognise opportunities for character education in their **clubs and activities**
- Encourage pupils to engage with **work experience or apprenticeships** as preparation for future employment

Social action and volunteering

*Community-based experiences which encourage civic engagement in school and beyond*

School Leaders
- Offer **school-led social action** experiences that promote social awareness, enabling pupils to make a positive difference to their community and themselves
- Promote **community-led social action** experiences, encouraging pupils to independently participate
- Encourage pupils to make a commitment to purposeful **voluntary activity** in and out of school
- **Recognise and celebrate** pupils' participation in social action and volunteering
- Enable pupils to explore their role as **active citizens** within their school, the community, and globally

"

'…the aim of the Inventory is to illustrate how character education can become an intentional, meaningful, and reflective part of whole school practice.'
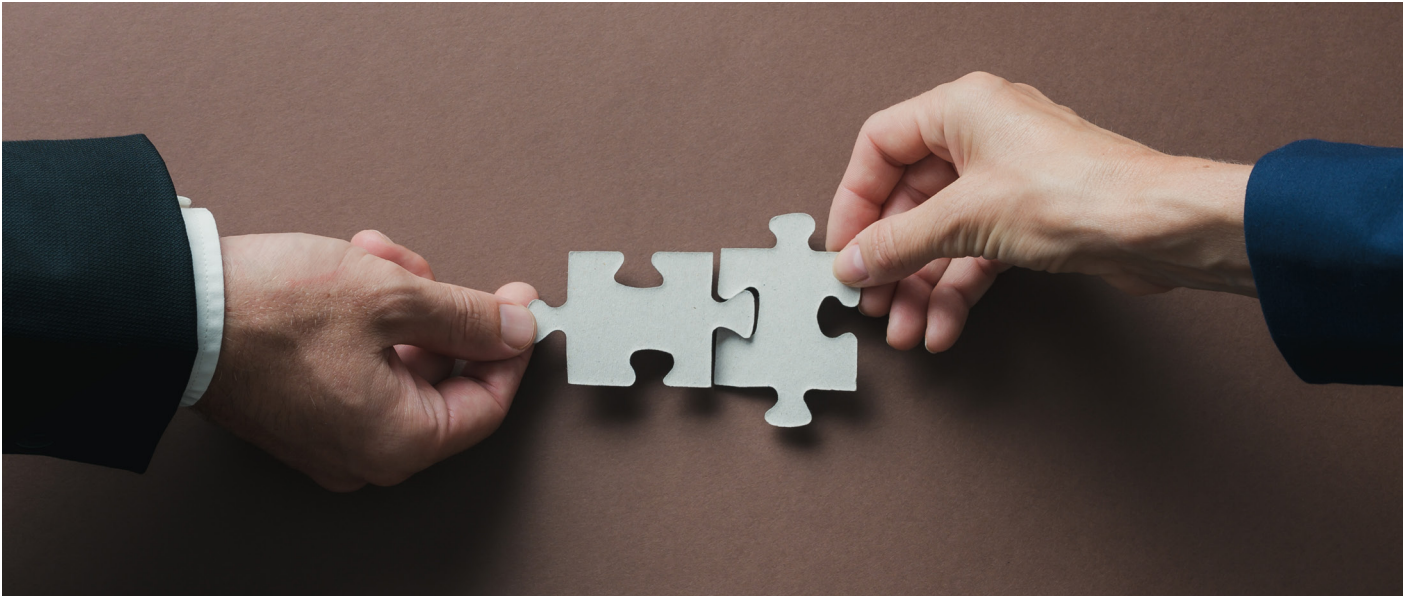
The evaluation of character education

Schools are under increasing pressure to demonstrate their effectiveness, but measuring the character of an individual or the impact of a character education intervention is extremely difficult. Because of the complex nature of character, and the specific difficulties attached to observing virtue in practice, it is not feasible or desirable to aim for the aggregation of individual character and virtue profiles, as the results can become counter-productive, philosophically, psychologically, and educationally. Discretion and circumspection are therefore required in any aspiration to measure virtues holistically; caution in the use of self-report measures is especially advised. While there is no simple and unproblematic way to 'measure character', it is possible to evaluate the development of particular components of virtue, as earlier noted. For example, different methods will apply to evaluating the development of virtue knowledge and understanding, on the one hand, and virtuous emotions, on the other.

A crucial question to address at the outset is what constitutes a valid purpose for evaluating a given character education provision? There are three legitimate purposes of evaluation in the area of character education. The first is to evaluate how a school's culture and ethos contribute to character education; schools can self-audit or be peer-audited against a set of criteria using what is known about best school practice in character education. Such evaluations rest upon teachers' professional knowledge and judgement, and the picture built up by the evaluation provides evidence as to the school's collective strengths and weaknesses; thus, highlighting where more effort, resources, and time should be directed. The second purpose is to evaluate the effectiveness of a character education strategy, activity, or approach. Different methods, including pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys, observations, and interviews with teachers and pupils can be applied with some success to gain evidence about the impact of a new or existing character education strategy or activity.

It is recommended that these are carefully targeted at 'measuring' only one or two components of virtue and it would be preferable to triangulate data by using more than one source of evidence. The third purpose is self-reflection on 'personal' character and virtues undertaken by pupils themselves. This might be recorded at regular intervals during a pupil's educational journey; for example, in a journal. Evidence gained from peers, teachers, and parents would support this process.

In the end, as Aristotle said…

> "
>
> *'…what we are most anxious to produce is a certain moral character in our fellow citizens, namely a disposition to virtue and the performance of virtuous actions.'*

Key principles for character education

- Character is fundamental: it contributes to human and societal flourishing;

- Character is educable and its progress can be assessed holistically;

- Good education is good character education;

- Character is largely caught through role modelling and emotional contagion: school culture and ethos are therefore central;

- A school culture, driven by committed leadership that enables pupils to satisfy their needs for positive relationships, competence, and self-determination facilitates the acquisition of good character;

- Character should also be taught: direct teaching of character provides the rationale, language, and tools to use in developing elsewhere in and out of school;

- Character should be developed in partnership with parents, families, employers, and other community organisations;

- Character education is about fairness and each child has a right to character development;

- Positive character development empowers pupils and is liberating;

- Good character demonstrates a readiness to learn from others;

- Good character promotes democratic citizenship and autonomous decision-making.
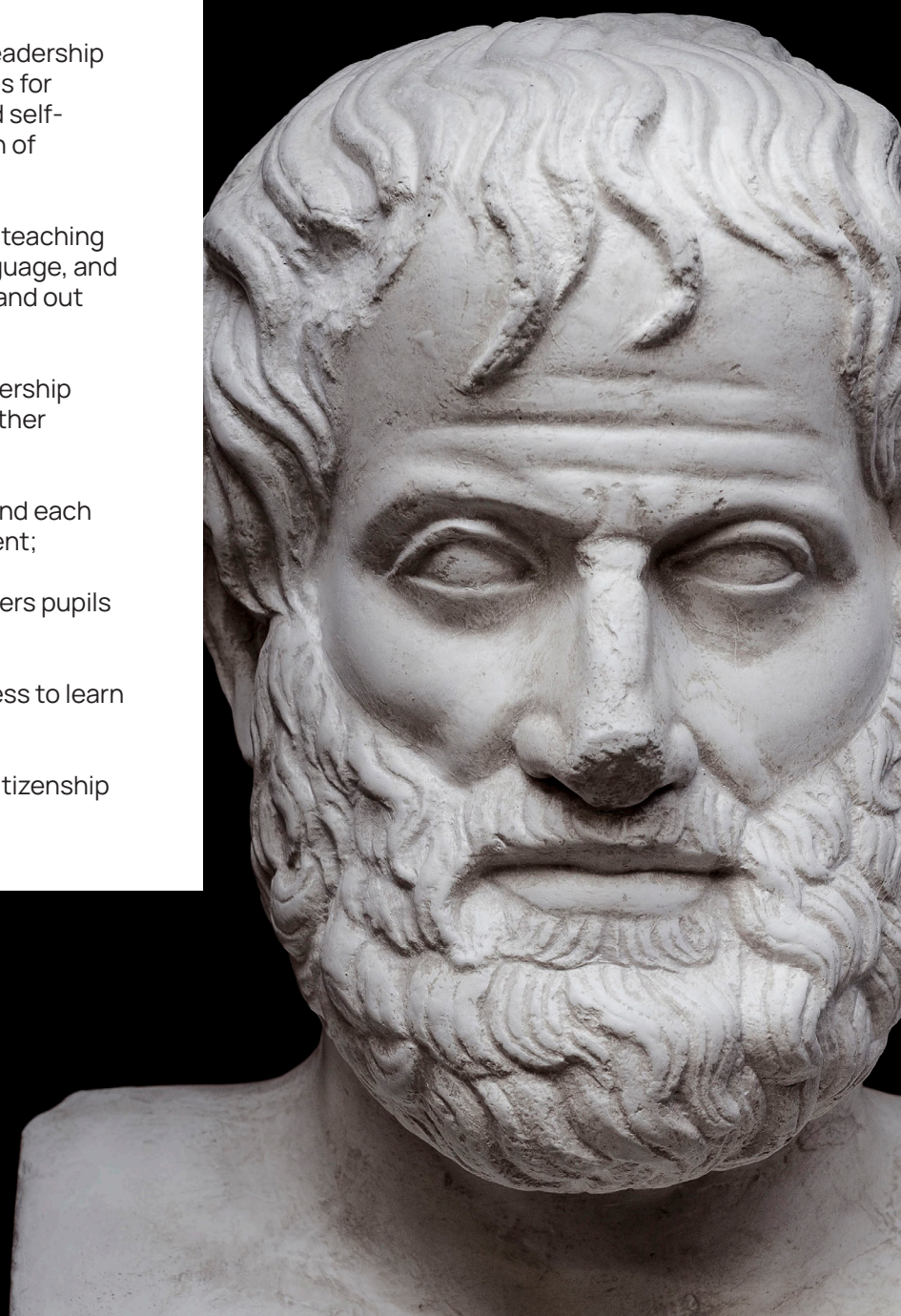
Postscript

On the academic provenance of the *Framework*

Members of the Jubilee Centre are often asked about the provenance of the *Framework*. Obviously, it did not spring unaided out of an intellectual vacuum. Its creation was the result of a deliberate decision taken within the Jubilee Centre to ground its theoretical foundation in neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. To achieve that aim, the authors drew explicitly and implicitly upon a number of existing sources in ancient and contemporary moral philosophy, as well as current character education and moral psychology. It is impossible to do justice to all the sources in a short postscript or even in an extended list of references. Just a few pointers will have to suffice below.

First, all the original leading members of the Jubilee Centre and others who joined it in the first few years had already conducted research on those topics, such as:

- James Arthur, Tom Harrison, Aidan Thompson: *Learning for Life*, 2005-2010
- James Arthur: *Educating with Character*, 2003
- Kristján Kristjánsson: *Aristotle, Emotions and Education*, 2007
- Andrew Peterson: *Civic Republicanism and Civic Education*, 2011
- David Carr: *Educating the Virtues*, 1991
- Randall Curren: *Aristotle on the Necessity of Public Education*, 2000

Second, three of the four *Building Blocks of Character* (moral, intellectual, and civic virtues) hark directly back to Aristotle. It is interesting to notice how different theorists within character education decided to add 'performance virtues' to their taxonomies, mostly independently of one another and, seemingly, for somewhat different reasons (Lickona and Davidson, 2005; Shields, 2011; with Baehr, 2012 and 2017, providing a helpful overview).

Outside of the area of character education, 'performance virtues' are often referred to through other designators, such as 'résumé virtues' (Brooks, 2016).

Third, the provenance of the Jubilee Centre's ideas about the inseparable relationship between the moral and the civic dates back to Aristotle's own works, especially his *Politics* and the closing sections of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In works that predate the Jubilee Centre, Arthur (1999, 2003) wrote about the role of character in citizenship and Curren (2000) offered a characterological account of the civic virtues. In the last few years, the Jubilee Centre has foregrounded the civic virtues more prominently and addressed explicitly the charge that an Aristotelian character education is somehow individualistic and anti-social (Peterson, 2020; Kristjánsson, 2022). The Jubilee Centre has also brought its unified account of the civic and moral to bear on current debates about social justice in education (Arthur, Kristjánsson and Vogler, 2021).

Fourth, the methodology undergirding the *Framework* and indeed all research activities in the Jubilee Centre is naturalist in the Aristotelian sense of assuming that all ethical theorising is answerable to empirical research. Aristotle's naturalism is typically understood – in the contemporary academic climate – as a clarion call for more interdisciplinary research on morality and for supporting theoretical positions by use of social scientific methods, both quantitative and qualitative. It is also meant to remind us not to rely solely on the understanding and usage of the 'wise' but also of the 'many'. The Jubilee Centre's application of Aristotelian methodology draws most explicitly on the methods that Aristotle himself used in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*.

Fifth, there is good reason for arguing that flourishing (*eudaimonia*) is the grounding concept of character education rather than the concept of (good) character. The value of good character is most adequately justified in terms of its contribution to a flourishing life, rather than vice versa. While the concept of flourishing that is introduced at the beginning of the *Framework* is grounded in this Aristotelian conception, it also incorporates elements from modern conceptions. Recently, there has been a surge of interest in objective accounts of well-being, not least in educational discourse. Flourishing is now widely considered to be the ultimate aim of schooling.

Sixth, what sets Aristotelian character education most apart from all other varieties is its emphasis on *phronesis* as an intellectual meta-virtue that orchestrates the moral and civic virtues. The provenance of the Jubilee Centre's model of *phronesis* is complex. Aristotle obviously says quite a lot about the role of *phronesis* vis-à-vis the moral virtues in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and (to a lesser extent) vis-à-vis the civic virtues in the *Politics*. In recent decades there has evolved in philosophical circles a 'standard Aristotelian view' of what *phronesis* constitutes. Realising that this view does not lend itself readily to practical applications, the Jubilee

Centre has tried to concretise and operationalise it by bringing it into direct association and juxtaposition with the literature in moral psychology, on what bridges the gap between moral knowledge and moral action, and also with the general psychology literature on the (broader) concept of wisdom (Kristjánsson *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, some of the identified components of *phronesis* in the Jubilee Centre's model draw upon the Centre's older conceptual work (and some predating the Centre) on constructs such as virtue reasoning, which are elaborated upon elsewhere in the *Framework*.

Finally, it must be admitted that Aristotle's form of character education, upon which the *Framework* builds, was originally designed well before the advent of any scientific study of how young people develop. Intent on advancing neo-Aristotelian theorising in this respect, the Jubilee Centre produced within its 2017 version of the *Framework* 'A Neo-Aristotelian Model of Moral Development', drawing both on Aristotle's own fragmented observations and contemporary research. With regard to the former, Aristotle's observations allow for radically different interpretations. Turning Aristotle's scattered remarks into the coherent 'A Neo-Aristotelian Model of Moral Development' required some creative readjustments. In that process, the Jubilee Centre was influenced by the work of various contemporary psychologists (see e.g. the overview in Fowers *et al.*, 2021). Yet the *Model* remains tentative and open to debate. The provenance of 'A Neo-Aristotelian Model of Moral Development', introduced in the 2017 version and retained here as an Appendix, was an ambitious attempt to carve out a somewhat speculative version of what an Aristotelian model might look like; yet, with some grounding of each element in the original texts. Although the *Model* has met with some blowback from Aristotelian 'purists' (who worry about any departures from explicit textual sources) the reason for retaining it in the 2022 updated version of the *Framework* is that the *Model* has garnered positive responses from practitioners – especially school teachers and college-level lecturers in professional ethics, who maintain that it resonates strongly with their experience of where pupils are at and what needs to be done to help them advance to the next stage in their moral trajectories. In that sense, the *Model* has proven to be pragmatically valuable.

We hope that the above has provided some enlightenment to readers of the *Framework* on how it was influenced and how it 'stands on the shoulders of giants' predating the Jubilee Centre. However, in the end, this *Framework* is the creation of the Jubilee Centre and we – rather than Aristotle or any other neo-Aristotelians – assume full responsibility for its content and its possible shortcomings.

Appendix 1: The psychology of moral development

Explaining the neo–Aristotelian model of moral development

The development of character – and how to enhance it through education – must be understood against the backdrop of a theory of moral development. According to a neo-Aristotelian view of the psychology of moral development, in which this *Framework* is grounded, there are a number of pathways to becoming virtuous. These pathways are described, in as simple terms as possible, in the diagram 'A Neo-Aristotelian Model of Moral Development' shown as Appendix 1. This pathway model foregrounds the importance of early family upbringing, although it does not exclude the adjustment of negative moral traits formed in early childhood.

Depending on the nature of the education that moral learners receive, they may progress rather seamlessly through a trajectory of habituated virtue, developing into autonomously sought and reflectively chosen virtue, which in turn provides them with intrinsic motivation to virtuous action. Or they may need to take a detour through a pathway of good intentions, undermined by a weakness of will, through practical habituation, which provides them with the self-regulation needed to at least be extrinsically motivated to act virtuously.

More precisely, the upper trajectory in the *Model*, which we could name Plan A, is for those fortunate enough to have been brought up by good people (as moral exemplars), exemplifying moral habits, and endowed with sufficient material resources. Those fortunate children are the ones most amenable to moral development. They internalise moral habits by copying what they see being done by their role models and gain virtue knowledge and understanding through both 'caught' and 'taught' methods. Guided by emulated mentors, they become step-by-step, just by doing just actions, brave by doing brave actions, etc. In late adolescence and early adulthood, the young gradually begin to develop critical thinking and
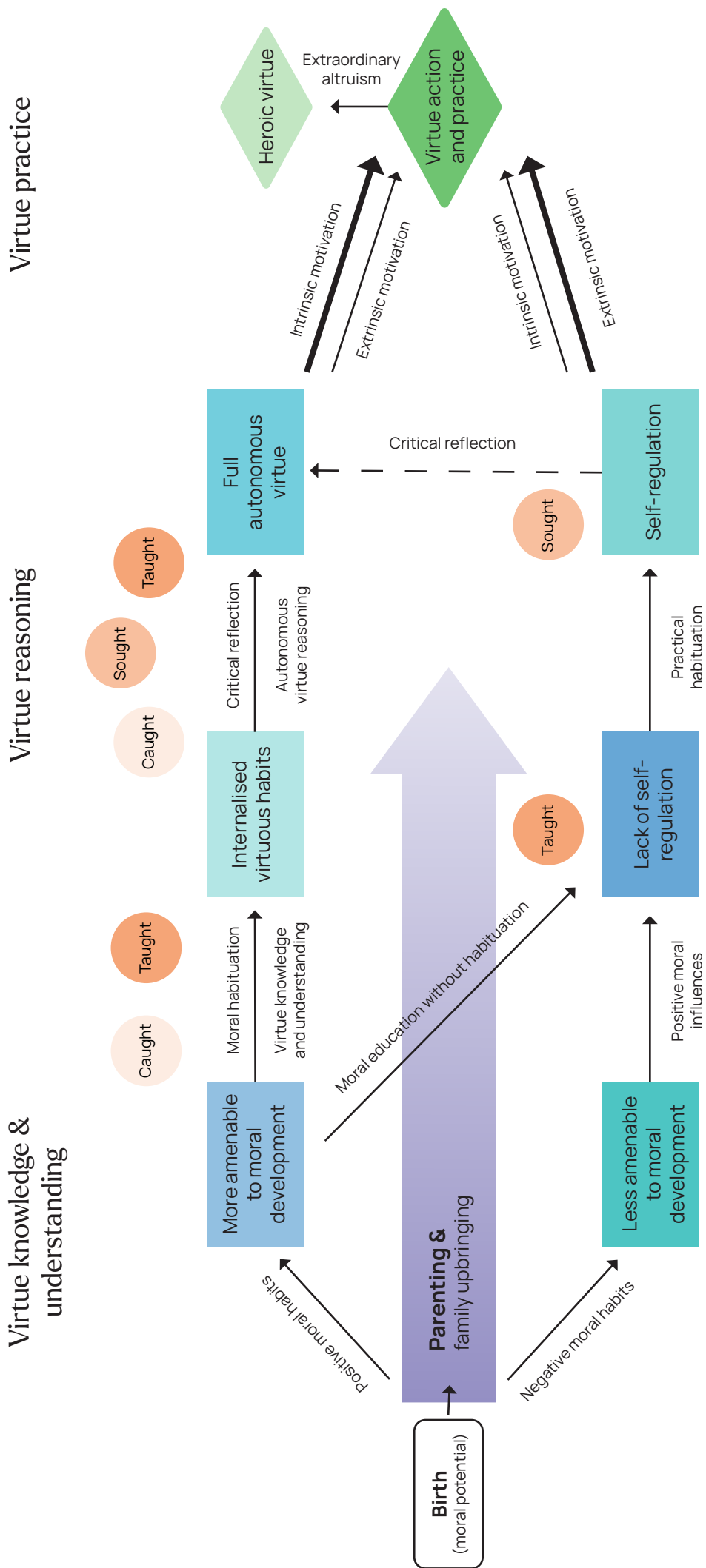
reflection and revisit critically the traits with which they were originally inculcated: subjecting their merely habituated virtues to scrutiny and revision.

They now learn to the value of moral goods that have been 'sought', in addition to simply being 'caught' and 'taught', and advance to the stage of full autonomous virtue, which Aristotle calls '*phronetic*' (i.e. guided by the metacognitive capacity of *phronesis*). Some people – endowed with extraordinary personal strengths and/or caught up in unusual social circumstances – will progress even further towards the level of heroic virtue.

The lower trajectory in the *Model*, which we could name Plan B, is for those slightly less fortunate, brought up under more mixed moral conditions and hence less amenable, originally, to character virtue development. Given that they will still have some moral exemplars in their environment to emulate – even if those happen to be outside of their immediate family – they will develop a conception of the morally good. However, because of the patchy ways in which this conception is strengthened via 'caught' or 'taught' methods, these children will lack self-regulation. Through practical habituation – either motivated by friends/mentors or their own powers of self-reflection – a significant group of people progress towards being morally well self-regulated; and that is a considerable moral achievement. Yet, some of the self-regulated agents may actually succeed in climbing up to the level of full virtue (the upper Plan A pathway), especially if they are fortunate enough to be in the company of close friends occupying that level.

The most important lesson to be drawn from this pathway *Model* is that character educators should never give up the hope that an individual pupil can be helped on the way to full autonomous virtue. No two people will progress towards virtue in exactly the same way, nor at exactly the same speed. All provisions in the field of character education thus need to take account of contextual and individual differences, and seek practical solutions that work for each individual school, class, or pupil.

Appendix 1: A neo-Aristotelian model of moral development

Virtue practice

Virtue reasoning

Virtue knowledge & understanding

Heroic virtue

Extraordinary altruism

Virtue action and practice

Intrinsic motivation

Extrinsic motivation

Intrinsic motivation

Extrinsic motivation

Full autonomous virtue

Self-regulation

Critical reflection

Taught

Sought

Caught

Sought

Critical reflection

Autonomous virtue reasoning

Internalised virtuous habits

Practical habituation

Taught

Caught

Moral habituation

Virtue knowledge and understanding

Taught

Lack of self-regulation

Moral education without habituation

Positive moral influences

More amenable to moral development

Less amenable to moral development

Positive moral habits

Parenting & family upbringing

Negative moral habits

Birth (moral potential)

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The *Framework* and *Inventory* are based on research that was conducted by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, part of the School of Education at the University of Birmingham.

For more information about the *Framework* and *Inventory*, to view published research and resources, or to get involved with the work of the Jubilee Centre, please visit **jubileecentre.ac.uk**

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