Mapping the Domain of Virtues

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When Dorothy landed in Oz, she soon encountered a witch named Glenda who assumed Dorothy was also a witch and promptly queried her, "Are you a good witch or a bad witch?" The question itself would have disturbed John Dewey who, more than a century ago, sought to undermine the pervasive yet corrupting human tendency to sort reality into neat, dualistic categories. Social and personality psychologists have also noted that people tend to interpret others through the use of simple, often dichotomous, categories, and William Perry (1970) described it empirically and theoretically as a relatively developmentally immature epistemology. Conceptions of character and virtue often follow a similar path aligned with Glenda's assumption that people can be divided into the virtuous and the evil.

One can conceive of people as virtuous or not, as having character or not, but this is not overly helpful conceptually or practically. It assumes more uniformity to character than actually exists. One problem is that of overgeneralization, what we call the problem of the Blind Men and the Virtuous Elephant. Like the actors in the Indian fable of similar name, many scholars focus on one aspect of character or virtue and treat it as the entire phenomenon; e.g., moral reasoning, social-emotional competencies, intellectual virtue, compassion.

A related problem is that of homogenization; that is, treating all virtue as one, such as claiming that all virtue reduces to justice or care. When we homogenize, we lose

the conceptual nuances of different aspects of virtue. This, of course, is an ancient insight illustrated, for example, by Aristotle's balancing of identified, discrete virtues and an integrative practical wisdom.

To help address the problems created by overgeneralization and homogenization, a heuristic taxonomy of virtue would be helpful. Recent interest by multiple scholars in different sub-categories of virtue lends support for such a project. The distinction between moral and non-moral virtues, intrapersonal and interpersonal virtues, moral and performance virtues, moral and intellectual virtues, etc. provides fertile territory for the development of such a taxonomy.

In this paper we combine the virtue taxonomies that the two authors have previously proposed (Berkowitz, 2012; Shields, 2011) to generate an integrated map of the virtue terrain. We find particularly useful the distinction and overlap between the moral and non-moral, and the two categories of civic and intellectual character. This taxonomy does not reify these distinctions into mutually exclusive categories, and in fact allows for the mapping of specific virtues onto the interstices between categories. Courage, for example, can be placed at the intersection of multiple categories, allowing for intellectual courage, moral courage, non-moral physical courage, etc. In this paper, we map the terrain of character/virtue, and highlight the importance of such a map for educational efforts.

The Aims of Education

> It is expected that the attention of instructors to the disposition of the minds and morals of the youth under their charge will exceed every other care; well considering that though goodness without knowledge is weak and feeble, yet knowledge without goodness is dangerous, and that both united form the noblest character, and lay the surest foundation of usefulness to mankind.

> **-John Phillips, founder of the Exeter Academy, 1761**

We begin with a foreshadowing of the end. Maps can serve various functions, and the qualities of a map need to match the ends toward which it will be used. To a tourist interested in locating historical landmarks, a climatological map will be less useful than a street map of the same region; similarly, a mapping of the virtues done for philosophers or psychologists will be constructed differently than one for educators, which is our primary aim. Our focal key question is this: Can virtue serve as a guide to educational efforts? If so, how can we map the virtues for such a purpose?

In an influential essay written in 1972, Kohlberg and Mayer proposed *development* as the aim of education. Contrasting the developmental perspective with romanticism and cultural transmission, they offered a progressive alternative to either a naïve laisse-faire approach to education or the more traditional emphasis on transmitting fixed knowledge. The concept of development, they suggested echoing Dewey and Piaget, contains within itself directionality, a trajectory that can be used to identify the aims of education. It also contains systematic differentiation, with an understanding that the nature of the phenomenon under study will change systematically over the course of different developmental periods.

Kohlberg's effort to extract educational ends from an analysis of the latent processes of developmental change stirred considerable attention and controversy. What has become clear in the intervening years is that the concept of development is essential, yet still needs to be further specified to provide sufficient educational guidance. Our own proposal is consistent with the spirit of Kohlberg's project, but shifts the focus toward the specific forms of character that we seek to develop.

We propose *character* as the focal aim of education (Shields, 2011). That is to say, developing qualities and dispositions supportive of virtue should be prioritized over the attainment of more and more bits of knowledge (Berkowitz, 2012). The primary aim of education is not the acquisition of information or skills, but the development of dispositions to seek and use these in good and effective ways. Of course, we must avoid a dualism of knowledge and character. When character is conceived as the goal of education, there is still much content learning that needs to take place. Still, when character takes center stage, the learning of content becomes infused with both social and moral significance.

As the adage goes, form follows function. We have started with a foreshadowing of the end, because the form that our virtue map takes follows from the educational function that it is designed to serve. Our effort to map the domain of virtue is done for the purpose of guiding educational planning and effort. With this end in view, we propose that the domain of virtue can be mapped using a four component model of character: intellectual, moral, civic, and performance character. What these four dimensions of character share in common is a focus on *personal dispositions* and *patterns of interaction*. Together, the four forms of character define what it means to be an enlightened, ethical, engaged, and effective adult member of society. After briefly outlining these dimensions of character, we describe how specific virtues can be placed at intersections of these character dimensions. Finally, we take a sociological turn and use our map of individual character to chart the dimensions of a school culture that can efficaciously support our educational goals.

Intellectual Character

Ritchhart (2002) defines intellectual character as "the overarching conglomeration of habits of mind, patterns of thought, and general dispositions toward thinking that not only direct but also motivate one's thinking-oriented pursuits" (p. xxii). In the language of virtue, a person with well-honed intellectual character exhibits such qualities as open-mindedness, courage, curiosity, truth-seeking, reflectiveness, and skepticism (Baehr, 2012).

Mastering subject matter is often what comes to mind when people discuss the aims of education. Math, science, literacy, and technology: these tend to be the big four. To complete the curricular entrée, the big four may be spiced with a sprinkling of social studies, foreign languages, the arts, and maybe a little physical education. Typically, academic achievement is equated with the amount of content, as measured by performance on standardized exams, that can be stuffed into memory. Of course, mastery of academic content is important. Yet we propose that the academic goal of education has less to do with the accumulation of specific facts, ideas, and theories than with developing our first dimension of character: *intellectual character*.

Recently, one of our doctoral students told the story of being on line and needing to recreate the password to his web server. It is worth noting that he teaches technology, is relatively young, and is very facile with such issues, but he was stymied that this password was one of those unmemorable endless strings of random numbers and letters. Then he recalled that there was an Apple program (keychain) that lets one retrace one's keystrokes, but he did not know the program. So he asked his teen nephew if he knew how to use keychain to solve this problem. His nephew nodded and said "sure." When asked for directions from his uncle, the answer he gave was "Google 'how to use

keychain to retrieve a password.'" The nephew made not have had the specific

knowledge stored in his long-term memory, but he displayed intellectual character

through a general orientation to search for knowledge, and that is part of what we want in

our students.

There are three key advantages to focusing on intellectual character, rather than

the accumulation of more and more bits of information. First, growth in intellectual

character will tend to generalize across domains in ways that specific content learning

may not. Curiosity, open-minded, and intellectual courage, for example, are as valuable

in math class as they are in social studies discussions. Perhaps more important, these

dispositions toward thinking can transfer from the classroom to the home, workplace, and

civic involvements.

Developing the dispositions of intellectual character will also provide a

foundation for a lifetime of intellectual adventure. While content learning can be

accomplished with very little intrinsic motivation, intellectual character cannot be

nurtured apart from a motivated pursuit to apply knowledge to life. Focusing on

intellectual character will promote enthusiasm, commitment, exploration, insight, and

creativity. Such a thirst for knowledge is particularly important now that access to

knowledge is so easy, thanks to the world wide web. You can lead students to

knowledge, but can't make them drink; however, if they have characterological thirst for

knowledge, they will drink.

The third key advantage to focusing on intellectual character, rather than discrete

content learning, is that it makes clear *why* students should be in school. From the

perspective of intellectual character, intelligence isn't primarily an innate ability to master

content; it is a disposition to apply one's ability amid the complexities of life. Intellectual character builds on what Carol Dweck (2008) has called a growth mindset, a belief that human ability and intelligence are not stable and fixed but, instead, grow in response to study and effort. Intelligence is changed as it is practiced. It is intellectual character, more than simple content mastery, that enables and motivates a person to solve new problems rather than to mimic solutions to textbook problems. It is learning to learn. According to Richhart (2002), being smart is far less important than using one's various evolving intelligences (cf., Gardner, 1998; Sternberg, 2010) in constructive, engaged ways. This provides a segue into our next dimension of character.

Moral Character

As Thomas Lickona (1989) has written, "down through history, in countries all over the world, education has had two great goals: to help young people become smart and to help them become good" (p. 6). At its core, moral character reflects a disposition to seek the good and right. It is rooted in a basic desire for goodness. In situations of choice and conflict, the person of moral character gives priority to moral over nonmoral considerations.

Just as intellectual character focuses on acting smart rather than being smart, moral character is less concerned with specific virtues than with enacting goodness. The specific circumstances in which people find themselves, both in terms of general life circumstances and immediate situational circumstances, will influence which virtues are developed and enacted. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dedication to justice reflected his immersion in the African American context and the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. While justice is a virtue important to everyone, not everyone will shape their

life around it (cf. Colby & Damon, 1992 for case studies of those who have shaped their lives around a call to justice).

Similarly, the enactment of specific virtues, such as honesty or compassion, invariably reflect complex interactions between person and context. There may be times when a person of moral integrity is dishonest, or breaks a promise, for example. What remains relatively stable across situations is a disposition to perceive and prioritize moral considerations. In the language of cognitive psychology, the person of character has chronically accessible moral schema and scripts that predispose them to recognize and act on moral issues latent in situations.

In reality, no one develops the full range of potential virtues, nor does anyone fully overcome all potential vices. As educators, our job is not to dictate precisely which moral virtues should take priority in a person's life, but we do have a responsibility to help our students become sensitive to moral considerations, to gain the cognitive capacity to think deeply about moral issues and principles, and to develop a disposition to act in accord with whichever legitimate moral principles and values one has prioritized. That's the essence of moral character.

Civic Character

In ancient Greece, according to Parker (2003), the word *idiot* was used to refer to a person who was uninvolved in the community. Idiots were people who sought their own private good rather than the public good; they did not take an active part in the civic institutions of society. Given this original meaning of the word, I think it is safe to say that one of our educational aims is to not graduate *idiots*.

While the meaning of the word *idiot* has taken on new connotations, we maintain that it remains idiotic to ignore the dimension of civic character in our educational agenda. The thriving of any nation, especially any democratic nation, is dependent on a citizenry that participates in governance and civic life. This view has a long and distinguished history.

John Adams, one of the founders of the United States and its second president, wrote: "There must be a positive passion for the public good ... or there can be no republican government, nor any real liberty." Passion for the public good is as good a description as any of what we mean by civic character. And, despite the unfortunate decline of civic education in the U.S. in recent decades, it was precisely the need to develop civic character that was a prime motive for the establishment of the U.S. public school system.

Thomas Jefferson, one of Adams' contemporaries, argued forcefully that a nation could preserve and protect the inalienable rights of all only through the deliberation of virtuous, free, and educated citizens. Despite his own limited view of who was included within the label *citizen*, Jefferson's core insight into the central role of civic character and public education has inspired educational theorists ever since.

Recently, an important consensus about civic character and its role in public education has been reached in the United States by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), the American Association of School Administrators, and the three national associations representing elementary and secondary school principals and state boards of education. These organizations collectively endorsed a "shared vision" for America's schools that reads in part: "In order to sustain and expand

the American experiment in liberty and justice, students must acquire civic character --

the knowledge, skills, virtues and commitments necessary for engaged and responsible

citizenship. Civic character is responsible moral action that serves the common good"

(Boston, 2005, p. 31).

In developing civic character, certainly knowledge is important. Yet knowledge

about government structures and political practices is clearly insufficient. In our own

U.S. context, this has long been recognized. First Horace Mann and later John Dewey

emphasized that democracy could not be sustained by formal structures of government

alone; democracy requires people with civic character who are interested in the common

good. Moreover, to form democratic citizens, schools need to themselves become more

democratic. Dewey stressed that schools are miniature societies and if they are to

cultivate the virtues needed in broader society, then they must become miniature

democratic societies wherein students have a chance to learn how their actions affect the

well-being and success of the group.

Civic character requires both an inclination and a capacity for self-transcendence.

It requires a disposition to consider the common good and to work toward it in

collaboration with others. When the passion for the public good is present, it can

motivate the attainment of the relevant competencies: civic and political knowledge;

such intellectual skills as critical thinking; and social and participatory skills (Torney-

Purta & Vermeer Lopez, 2006).

Society has a right to expect that its public schools will graduate students who can

effectively participate in civic life and shape the common good, guided by principles of

social justice and an ethic of care (Oaks et al., 2004). This will involve the cultivation of

11

respect for freedom, equality and rationality; an appreciation of diversity and due process; an ethic of participation and service; and the skills to build the social capital of trust and community.

Performance Character

One final dimension of character remains to be elaborated, what we and others have called performance character (Lickona & Davidson, 2005; Shields & Bredemeier, 2005). Performance character refers to those dispositions, virtues, or personal qualities that support a person's agency. They facilitate the accomplishment of intentions and goals. They are what Berkowitz (1997), in his elaboration of character, refers to as "foundational characteristics."

Performance character includes such qualities as courage, diligence, perseverance, loyalty, self-control, optimism, resilience, and initiative. Such qualities relate to the exercise of will (Blasi, 2005) and reflect honed skills in self-management. Recently, Tough (2012), as well as Duckworth and colleagues (2007), have used the term *grit* to cover the dimension of performance character that relates to determination and the pursuit of long-term goals.

For analytic purposes, we distinguish performance character from the other three dimensions of character though, in reality, the distinction can be quite artificial. Performance character is not exercised in a vacuum; it takes on meaning in relation to the goal toward which it aims. Persistence in pursuing a political goal is a dimension of civic character. Loyalty to the truth is an essential dimension of intellectual character.

Perhaps the greatest confusion surrounds the relation of performance and moral character. Often, the qualities of performance character are called virtues, but they need

to be distinguished from the moral virtues. Unlike the moral virtues, which are intrinsically good, the performance virtues become good, in a derivative sense, insofar as they serve good ends. It is entirely possible to be courageous in stealing cars, or persistent in hiding the truth. One can be loyal to ignoble people. This indeed has led Berkowitz (2014) to prioritize moral over performance values and for Lickona (2014) to rethink his stance that they are the "yin and yang" of character, two sides of one coin (Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

Though performance character is not inherently good or virtuous, it is necessary to make the other dimensions of character effective. The moral virtue of compassion is ineffective if not combined with resilience and persistence. The disposition to become engaged civically loses its efficacy without dedication and loyalty. Intellectual character, buttressed with grit and self-control enables knowledge pursuits to be enacted in a consistent and effectual way.

The performance virtues lead to high quality effort and work. Those with well-developed performance character take pride in what they do and seek to make it the best that it can be. Ron Berger calls it an *ethic of excellence* in his book of that name (Berger, 2003). This is a full-bodied view of excellence that bears little resemblance to the truncated view that reduces it to quantified knowledge acquisition.

Of course, no one can seek excellence in everything, but those with strong performance character seek minimally to achieve their best in domains of activity that are important to them. They work hard, pay attention to detail, persist through problems, seek to overcome challenges, and maintain a grounded optimism.

Like all the other aspects of character, performance character cannot be developed directly but only through working with content. The disposition to give one's best effort, not just in a moment but sustained through time, evolves only as one goes through the actual process of gaining increasing degrees of expertise in selected areas. The domains in which performance character are best nurtured will vary from one individual to another, and may include music, art, athletics, and other domains outside the so-called core curriculum. What is critical is to nurture the disposition to seek excellence in at least one domain and then seek to broaden it to others. Coaches, for example, can help athletes capitalize on their experience seeking excellence in athletics by encouraging them to draw from similar performance skills in their academic endeavors (Shields & Bredemeier, 2009).

Virtue: One or Many?

In the above sections, we have elaborated on intellectual, moral, civic, and performance character. Theorists differ, however, on the degree of integration or separation among these various dimensions or aspects of character. For example, Lickona and Davidson (2005) do not distinguish between intellectual and performance character, but do separate that constellation from moral character. Baehr (2012) focuses on the distinction between intellectual and moral virtues. Althof and Berkowitz (2006) focus on the distinction between moral and civic character.

For educational purposes, we find Althof and Berkowitz's (2006) discussion of the relationship between moral and civic character applicable to all four dimensions of character that we have identified. They suggest that we think of the various aspects of character as a set of Venn diagrams. Depending on which specific dispositions we are

considering, the various dimensions or aspects of character may be minimally or highly overlapping. For example, both moral and civic character are influenced by dispositions toward social justice and social responsibility. All the dimensions of character share a concern for truth and honesty. A disposition to be curious and open-minded may be most directly related to intellectual character, but also support other aspects of character as well.

To this point, we have primarily used the language of character, rather than virtue. Unfortunately, the language of both character and virtue is highly contested and no consensus on meaning is in sight. Nor is our paper designed to contribute to the philosophical debates over the meaning or use of these terms. Still, approximations may be helpful. By character, we mean the set of psychological characteristics that motivate and enable an individual to function as a competent agent. A person of moral character is motivated and enabled to act as a competent moral agent. The person of strong civic character is motivated and enabled to act as a competent citizen, fully engaged in community and society.

Virtue, as we use the term, is a kind of person-in-context excellence. It implies a form of human goodness. The difficulty with listing virtues is that doing so tends to sever the individual from the context. Excellence in honesty is going to look and function differently for a car salesperson and an international spy.

The description that we have offered of the four dimensions of character provides a kind of map upon which we can locate various forms of virtue. Let us use a color chart as a metaphor for how the character map works. Performance character is like the background on which all the colors are printed. There is no virtue without performance

15

character as a background, since virtue inherently implies agency, competence, commitment, and self-regulation.   Moral, civic, and intellectual character are like the colors red, blue, and yellow. From these primary colors, all other colors can be derived. Some virtues may reflect one of these dimensions of character, while most reflect some blending of at least two. Just as when you move around a color wheel you can derive a nearly infinite variety of colors, so there are a nearly infinite number of virtue hues depending on the form of excellence appropriate to the challenges inherent in varying person-context interactions. But despite the large variation, virtues can be mapped back to a relatively stable set of fundamental character dimensions.

If moral and intellectual character are metaphorically rendered as red and blue respectively, for example, the virtue of fair-mindedness in intellectual endeavors will look primarily blue; in resolving conflicting claims of friends, it may look primarily red. In still other contexts, it may look more purple, drawing both on moral and intellectual dimensions of character. To continue our metaphor, when deciding among candidates in an election or whether to support some issue of public policy, the virtue of fair-mindedness may map onto the yellow section of the color wheel, since it picks up on the hues of civic character.

The Character of School Culture

Character is the most essential aim of education. When we graduate students who have strong intellectual, moral, civic, and performance character, we have succeeded. We have left largely undiscussed, however, how to achieve these ambitious goals. Our focus has been on the *what*, not the *how*.

16

There are multiple strategies that are necessary for achieving these aims and an elaboration of them is beyond the scope of the present paper. What is clear is that an emphasis on character needs to be a sustained and ubiquitous emphasis throughout the school day and across the curriculum and co-curriculum.

To support the development of individual character, we need to promote a *culture of character*. We need to improve the character of school culture. More specifically, the character of the school needs to build on and reflect the multiple dimensions of character that we have mapped. What we seek in terms of individual virtues must be developed simultaneously as group norms. Our virtue mapping, consequently, can also provide a mapping for a character-developing school culture.

In the chart below, we identify the four dimensions of personal character and the corresponding dimensions of school culture, or what might be called school character, that will nurture and support them.

Personal Character	School Character
Intellectual Character	Culture of Thinking
Moral Character	Culture of Care and Justice
Civic Character	Culture of Service and Empowerment
Performance Character	Culture of Quality and Excellence

Pursuing the old chicken and egg question of whether individuals shape the collective or whether the culture shapes the individuals is pointless; it is clear that the influence is bidirectional and both levels need to be addressed simultaneously. Thus, we

can summarize the aims of education as promoting the development of intellectual, moral, civic and performance character, along with the character of the school as a place of thinking, care and justice, service and empowerment, and excellence in work.

The ultimate value of developing personal character is found not just in the individuals themselves, but in the quality of the communities and organizations in which they are members. We live our lives in collectives, ranging from families to nations, and we need to be just as concerned with the character of those collectives as we are of the character of the individuals that comprise them. As Dewey recognized, the school is a miniature society and the quality of life reflected in the relationships of the school can become a means of social progress and reform. Character as the aim of education finds its ultimate justification in the quality of our collective life.

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