

## **CHARACTER EDUCATION – The Formation of Virtues and Dispositions in the 16-19 Age Range**

The main aim of the Templeton Project is to explore the character dispositions of students in the 16-19 age range across three sixth form sites in Bristol.

The project will also examine students Learning Power as effective learners by using ELLI (Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory) profiles and their academic achievement.

The three sites are a state funded LEA school with a sixth form; a Church funded school with a sixth form and the third is a LEA funded sixth form college.

### **1. Investigating students' ways of thinking about character, using personal construct theory**

Nine students from the three sites were interviewed using the findings from the focus group interviews. The aim was to gather data about how these students understand what it means to be a 'good' person in their every day lives.

#### **Key findings**

- Students perceive themselves to be individuals who are actively changing and growing as people and this was strongest when in their future careers and the weakest when with their neighbours.
- Students aspire to become like the ideal loving, caring and kind grandparent
- Students state they are least aware of God in most situations particularly when engaged in politics and with their neighbours
- Students appear disengaged spiritually, politically and from their community
- The second strongest element is students with their friends, saying it is most like them to be trustworthy with their friends.
- Students perceived themselves as growing and maturing individual from being disrespectful younger children.
- The situation of their future career comes out as a fairly strong element and with this, it is like them to be responsible workers.
- The highest rating of the school related elements, is when they are at school – this was the 10<sup>th</sup> element. The lowest rated school related element is at 16 and is when they are with their tutor group.

#### **Differences between sites**

- Church school students perceive themselves to be more aware of God and their religion, take responsibility and be kind, caring and loving.
- State sixth form students perceive themselves to more aware of their neighbours and fair and respectful.
- Sixth form college students more politically engaged but least aware of God.

## **2. Staff interviews**

10 teachers were interviewed at the three sites.

### **Key findings**

- Staff confirmed and evaluated student perceptions of character - appear very positive re: kind and caring, students are kind and caring, not sure about hard work element. Staff would have expected more about negative outlook, low self-confidence. Staff also evaluated whether the student view of what is a good student is them repeating what they have learnt in school.
- Staff perceived staff/student relationships to be crucial and essential with consistency a prime feature
- Staff perceived it to be vital that they lived their values and modelled appropriate behaviour
- Student behaviour is influenced by those closest to them, those around them the most and who they respect
- Values are mainly caught but can be taught to a certain extent – less so are times where character could be developed by Bible stories
- Values are best developed through a whole school approach
- Subjects/debates linked to character development are ‘squeezed out’ by ‘measurement’ agenda
- Different language of values amongst students than historical Judeo-Christian legacy
- Students appear politically disengaged
- Student language appears to refer more to self and friends rather than wider community
- Some students restrict values/behaviour to narrow domains
- Students appear media/A level influenced in terms of famous people
- Knee jerk reactions and little qualification of what is a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ person

## **3. Questionnaire development**

### **Rationale**

The items for the questionnaire have been developed directly out of the data that emerged from the first phase of the research – the focus group interviews with students; repertory grid and personal construct interviews with students, and exploratory interviews with teachers.

The purpose of the questionnaire is to confirm and extend our initial findings and to provide further quantitative data, which can subject to statistical analysis to identify basic characteristics, relationships and key themes. In addition it is expected that this dataset can be compared to further data on student achievement and other demographic variables, and with variables that indicate the quality of the students’ learning power.

The data from the first phase of the research was subjected to detailed thematic coding, repertory grid analysis and qualitative analysis. From a synthesis of these findings the following elements of a model for character formation have emerged.

### **‘A holistic, dynamic and critical vision for character formation.’**

**Holistic** – young people in our study form their values and make decisions as whole people. Their thinking, feeling and behaviour are all important as they form opinions and decide for themselves ‘what really matters’. They are nested in sets of relationships with other people that help to form their identities. These relationships include parents and family, friends, teachers and wider communities and typically get weaker as they reach beyond the home and the school. Holistic thus refers to both **the intra and inter personal aspects of BEING**.

**Dynamic** – young people in our study have a strong sense of history and of hope or aspiration and understand themselves **as being in a trajectory over TIME**. They understand themselves through story. They have a sense of themselves as changing, growing and learning as a person and they are able to look both forwards and backwards.

**Critical** – Young people were conscious of ‘a gap’ between what they, and others, say is important and the way they actually behave. The way in which the individual explores the gap between espoused and practiced values is the terrain for critique and questioning and thus a site for character formation. It can be understood as a **critical conversation between three voices or three stories**:

- a) The student’s own voice/story which answers the questions ‘who am I, where am I going, what do I need? What really matters?’
- b) The voice/story of the student’s family, community and tradition.
- c) The voice/stories of the wider community and society at large, which often produce ‘problems’ or ‘conflicts’ which need to be addressed and responded to.

**Becoming fully human** – This refers to the processes to do with realising one’s full potential, becoming mature, achieving a personal vision and ‘becoming the best person I can’. It provides a **sense of moral direction** and invokes an **ideal set of values**.

### **Mapping of Rationale elements onto questionnaire items**

The questionnaire items map onto the above Rationale and model of character formation that emerged from the findings as follows:

#### **Section 1 – Items 1-62**

This section is divided into the elements of Holistic, Dynamic, Critical and Becoming fully human.

**Holistic/Being** - items 1-36, subdivided into the **intrapersonal** aspects of being a person, items 1-20, and the **interpersonal** aspects of being a person, items 21-36

**Dynamic/Time** - items 37 - 45

**Critical** - items 46-56

**Becoming fully human** – items 56-62

## **Section 2 – Items 63-81**

This section refers to students’ perceptions of themselves whilst at school.

### **Work in progress**

#### **1. Questionnaire Administration**

Items developed for version 1 questionnaire, which was then piloted in a different sixth form school not involved in the study and the analysis was reviewed by the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee reviewed both the version 1 pilot results and questionnaire items. The questionnaire was redrafted with version 2 piloted. The results were analysed, the questionnaire reviewed and Reference Group comments incorporated into the final version.

The Research Assistant liaised with the three sites to draw up a timetable for questionnaire administration at three sites – including student and staff briefing, gaining informed consent, questionnaire administration and a follow up for those who missed the first sweep of data collection.

The first sweep of questionnaire administration is complete of around 500 students in years 12 and 13 across the three sites. We are nearing the end of the follow up for those students who missed the first questionnaire administration.

The next step concerns the loading of the data into the statistical SPSS computer package for statistical analysis. The aim is for the data to be ready to begin analysis in the New Year.

#### **2. ELLI profiles Administration**

We are currently collecting Learning Power profiles (ELLI data) which will give us a measure of how the students perceive themselves to be doing on seven dimensions: *changing and learning; critical curiosity; meaning making; creativity; strategic awareness, learning relationships and resilience*. In addition we have collected achievement data and demographic data from the schools.

We anticipate having a rich quantitative data set with which we can explore the relationships between students’ character formation, their learning profiles and their achievement.

These profiles have commenced and will be completed in early 2006.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Working Definition of Character**

We define character education in the following way:

First, that there is such a thing as character, an interlocked set of personal values and virtues which normally guide conduct. Character is about who we are and who we become and includes the virtues of responsibility, honesty, self-reliance, reliability, generosity, self-discipline, and a sense of identity and purpose.

Second, that this is not a fixed set easily measured or incapable of modification.

Third, choices about conduct are choices about 'right' or 'wrong' actions and thoughts.

Our understanding of character formation does not imply lack of student consent or participation. Our argument is that active character development is not simply about the acquisition of academic and social skills, for it is ultimately about the kind of person a student becomes and wants to become. It is to do with humans having a purpose that is beyond being an instrument or tool in social processes. This is not achieved within a vacuum for in order to become a person, an individual needs to grow up in a culture, and the richer the culture the more of a person he or she has a chance of becoming. This must include the spiritual and religious dimensions of life.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Templeton Questionnaire**

# TEMPLETON PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE

Please complete all sections and items

Name .....

Form .....

Please circle

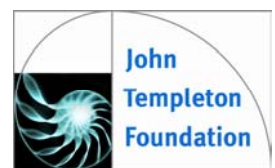
Maths GCSE grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
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English GCSE grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
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Gender	M	F
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Office use only

Site	1	2	3	Date completed:
Identifier number:				



## Section 1

Please read the statements and circle the response which most applies to you

- 1 - very much like me
- 2 - like me
- 3 - somewhat like me
- 4 - not much like me
- 5 - not like me
- 6 - not like me at all

PLEASE CIRCLE

- |     |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.  | <i>I am usually kind, caring and loving</i>                                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 2.  | <i>I allow my feelings to influence how I behave</i>                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 3.  | <i>I am ambitious to do well in life</i>                                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 4.  | <i>I think about and reflect on my values and behaviour</i>                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 5.  | <i>I am usually truthful and honest</i>  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 6.  | <i>Religion plays an important role in my life</i>                             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7.  | <i>I am usually trustworthy</i>  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 8.  | <i>Even though the truth may hurt, I think it is important</i>                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 9.  | <i>I feel able to ask for what I need</i>                                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 10. | <i>I have an inner sense of my moral values</i>                                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 11. | <i>I am often aware of God</i>   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 12. | <i>I am usually cheerful and optimistic</i>                                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 13. | <i>My values are influenced by my faith</i>                                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 14. | <i>I have a lot of respect for myself</i>                                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 15. | <i>I spend time thinking and reflecting on issues that are important to me</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 16. | <i>I stand up for what I believe in</i>  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |



17.	<i>I usually take responsibility</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
18.	<i>I try to maintain my values in all aspects of my life</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
19.	<i>I sometimes pray</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
20.	<i>I like it when people are honest with me</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
21.	<i>I prefer to fit in with the views of others</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
22.	<i>I am usually fair and respectful to others</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
23.	<i>When I struggle with something I persevere with it</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
24.	<i>It is important that my friends approve of me</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
25.	<i>The following people have an influence on my values</i>						
	<i>a. Mother</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<i>b. Father</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<i>c. Sisters or brothers</i>	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
	<i>d. Grandparents</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<i>e. Other family</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<i>f. Friends</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<i>g. People in the community</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<i>h. People in the media</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
26.	<i>I am able to communicate my ideas to others</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
27.	<i>Being able to work in a team is important to me</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
28.	<i>I think and behave in the same way in different situations</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
29.	<i>I know most of my neighbours</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
30.	<i>I help out in my community</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
31.	<i>I am a member of a club or a community organisation, outside of school/college</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
32.	<i>I attend a place of worship</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
33.	<i>I have a good understanding of our political system</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
34.	<i>The Prime Minister has an influence on my values and development</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
35.	<i>I participate in political activities</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
36.	<i>I plan to vote</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6

37. *I know I will have to give up some things to get where I want to go in my career* 1 2 3 4 5 6
38. *I talk with my parents about my life and my future* 1 2 3 4 5 6
39. *I am developing my spiritual life* 1 2 3 4 5 6
40. *I am continually changing and growing as a person* 1 2 3 4 5 6
41. *I have changed a lot as a person in the last five years* 1 2 3 4 5 6
42. *I have a strong sense of what I would like to be doing in ten years time* 1 2 3 4 5 6
43. *I have a strong sense of meaning and purpose in my life* 1 2 3 4 5 6
44. *I am developing my spiritual life through my faith* 1 2 3 4 5 6
45. *My religion is... please specify by ticking*
- a. Christianity
  - b. Judaism
  - c. Islam
  - d. Hinduism
  - e. Sikh
  - f. Buddhism
  - g. Humanism
  - h. None
  - i. Other
  - j. I don't know
- |  |
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- If 'Other' please specify .....*
46. *I can generally draw on my values to help me decide what is good in a situation* 1 2 3 4 5 6
47. *There is sometimes a gap between what I think and feel and my behaviour* 1 2 3 4 5 6
48. *I notice situations which I feel are offensive and socially unjust to someone or to a group of people* 1 2 3 4 5 6
49. *I behave in ways that conserve our environment* 1 2 3 4 5 6
50. *I feel angry when I see people being unjustly treated* 1 2 3 4 5 6
51. *Recent events in London have made me think more deeply about the meaning and purpose of life* 1 2 3 4 5 6

52.	<i>I try to do something about it when I see injustice done to other people</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
53.	<i>I often come across situations which challenge my values</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
54.	<i>I challenge other people's opinions</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
55.	<i>I am open to be challenged myself</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
56.	<i>I am able to take full responsibility for my own learning</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
57.	<i>I often change as a result of my learning</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
58.	<i>I am determined to follow a fulfilling career</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
59.	<i>I believe that each person is entitled to hold any opinion</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
60.	<i>I have overcome lots of difficulties in my own life which have helped to make me the person I am today</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
61.	<i>Earning a good income is my key objective in life</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
62.	<i>I know how to become a better person</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6

## Section 2

Please read the statements and circle the response which most applies to you

- 1 - strongly agree
- 2 - agree
- 3 - slightly agree
- 4 - slightly disagree
- 5 - disagree
- 6 - strongly disagree

63.	<i>My tutor time helps me to develop my values</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
64.	<i>There are teachers/lecturers in my school/college who inspire me to become the best person I can be</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
65.	<i>My school/college does not help me to become a better citizen</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
66.	<i>My teachers/lecturers like me</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
67.	<i>School has made me a more competitive person</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6

68.	<i>I frequently encounter values in my subject lessons</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
69.	<i>Assemblies do not help me to develop my spiritual life</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
70.	<i>My teachers/lecturers help me to think critically about my values</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
71.	<i>My teachers/lecturers value me as an individual</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
72.	<i>My teachers/lecturers respect what I have to say</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
73.	<i>My school/college is a place where we can always engage in dialogue and learning about current affairs and how they affect our lives</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
74.	<i>School/college engages me in political debate</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
75.	<i>I am ambitious to do well in my exams</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6

- |     |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 76. | <i>Subjects that we don't get a qualification in are not taken seriously by students</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 77. | <i>My school/college has helped me to become an effective learner</i>                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 78. | <i>My teachers/lecturers have influenced the person I am today</i>                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 79. | <i>My school/college has prepared me well to go on learning after I have left</i>        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 80. | <i>Passing exams is the most important reason for school/college</i>                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 81. | <i>My school/college has helped me to know how to find my own solutions to problems</i>  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

Please write any comments you may have in the box provided below

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire