Teaching Character Through the Primary Curriculum – A cross-curricula approach to developing virtue literacy and practical wisdom in 10-11 year olds

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This paper will look at the practice-orientated perspective of teaching character virtues in a primary school setting. It will describe how the Jubilee Centre programme, *Teaching Character Through the Primary Curriculum*, has been designed and produced to cultivate the virtue literacy and potential practical wisdom (phronesis) of primary school pupils.

As highlighted in the Jubilee Centre's *A Framework for Character Education in Schools:*

> The ultimate aim of character education is the development of good sense or practical wisdom. This capacity involves knowing how to choose the right course of action in difficult situations and it arises gradually out of the experience of making right choices and the growth of ethical insight (Jubilee Centre, 2013).

Though there is truth in the above statement, the ability to teach primary school children these skills has often been questioned by academics. Burnyeat, for example, asks can virtues or phronesis be taught or are they only acquired through practice? He believes these skills are acquired through habituation; for example, you can learn what is just but it is another thing to learn *to do* just things (2012). Indeed, Burnyeat does not envisage phronesis education to be possible until a long period of strict habituation has finished, possibly not until late adolescence or early adulthood. The question therefore is: how can phronesis be developed in 10-11 year olds? This paper will argue that through the use of well planned and produced interventions and resources, the first inklings of phronesis can be 'developed' in 10-11 year olds through an initial increase in their virtue literacy and through debate, discussion and reflection on narratives where right choices need to be made.

Adults battle with decisions each day, deliberating what is right and what is wrong in certain situations. Why must we only believe that it is adults who can make the right decision and therefore show phronesis? Within a school context pupils are forced to constantly make decisions. For example; should I continue with my maths even though I find it difficult; should I play with my friends even though I know what they are doing is wrong; and do I put effort into my art work even though I don't think I'm creative? These examples show that children have to make the same decisions as adults but in different contexts. In such situations, virtues can collide and the pupil must make the right choice at the right time. Do these pupils understand the dilemma they are in? Can they describe the virtues that are in competition with each other? Can they rationally think of a solution? These are all important questions in the development of phronesis in young children. As teachers, we will testify that not all pupils make the right choices but, through their experiences, their choices and actions, they begin to develop; experiences such as these a play vital role in the early development of phronesis.

To attempt to develop phronesis in such young minds is no easy task, as Lunenberg and Korthagen (2009) recognise, it is not easy to teach or make practical wisdom explicit in the classroom and though they are correct, it is not an *impossible* task, but rather, just a difficult one. Teachers must seek opportunities to discuss and reflect on phronesis. In school situations the choice to do the right thing at the right time for pupils is a common occurrence and teachers must not be afraid to discuss this experience openly with pupils. There is no step-by-step guide to present to teachers to help make their pupils become more practically wise but we must accept the challenge and try not to 'water down' complicated concepts too much (Harrison, 2016).

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[1] The development of the *Teaching Character Through the Primary Curriculum* programme of study and the research used within this paper was conducted whilst I was the Teaching Fellow at The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues (Jan 2017-August 2017).

For primary school pupils to begin to develop, or subsequently recognise phronesis, they must initially have an understanding of character virtues and the theory behind them; in this case they must develop their own virtue literacy. Virtue literacy, for this project, is defined as the knowledge, understanding and ability to apply, through writing, virtue terms and concepts. This is one of the first hurdles within the development of phronesis in young children. From experience, primary school pupils can pick out examples where a choice has to be made but what hinders their choice making skills, and therefore their practical wisdom, is often not being able to distinguish what character virtues, or in some situations vices, are in competition. 'Virtue theorists from Aristotle onwards typically claim that the virtues are not only instrumentally related to their ultimate goal – which tends to be assumed to be the individual's happiness, well-being or flourishing – but are actually constitutive of it' (Kristjánsson, 2013, p271). If this is the case it seems the logical approach is to equip young children with the ability to recognise and discuss character virtues and allow the virtues to empower them and unlock their potential (Jubilee Centre, 2013).

To empower pupils it is the role of the educators, or education in general, to bring together three of the key aspects of character education; experience, theory and practical wisdom (Lunenberg and Korthagen, 2009). To use the analogy of a triangle, where all branches are interconnected the teacher must enable the pupil to have access to all corners of the triangle, as you cannot fully have one without the other. Out of the three corners of the triangle many would argue that practical wisdom is the most difficult to achieve with young children, but one might question whether this is actually the case. If children as young as 10 and 11 are given opportunities to experience things for themselves or given likewise opportunities to put themselves in someone else's shoes, then their ability to develop practical wisdom will increase (Putman, 2006). If these pupils are also taught the theory behind practical wisdom and are encouraged to develop their own virtue literacy and knowledge then they will automatically be developing their own phronesis. This not to say that the child that is exposed to all of the above will immediately possess phronesis but, they will have developed some of the core skills that with more experience and practice can only lead to a positive outcome and ultimately empower them to flourish as individuals.

The above outlines a difficult task, and this paper will not try to argue that the resources produced provide a magical fix; it will, however, highlight that phronesis can be introduced to primary school pupils and that through the use of virtue literacy pupils can begin to develop the early stages of their own practical wisdom. Burnyeat (2012) is correct that true phronesis can only be developed through habituation and that knowing what is just is not the same as doing a just thing; but as adults we can 'aid' children in developing habits (Putman, 2006). It seems then that a rational response to this theory is to help young children by initially explaining *what is just* and allowing children space to debate, discuss and reflect on this so to provide them with the tools they need to make the action part of their everyday life, a habit, and not just classroom based. *Teaching Character Through the Primary Curriculum* is a programme which can, in part, enable these skills to be incorporated into a classroom.

The next part of this paper will focus on the design and production of the Jubilee Centre's programme, *Teaching Character Through the Primary Curriculum*.

Background and research
Previous Jubilee Centre research has shown that there is an increased interest and demand for character education. Research conducted during the *Character Education in UK Schools* report showed that teachers claimed to care much more about children becoming good and happy people who have positive relations with others, than about students' grades and future jobs; it also highlighted that 84% of parents wanted their children to be taught character education at school (Arthur *et al.*, 2015a). This groundswell in interest has not been lost on policy makers and in the summer of 2014, the then Secretary of State for Education Nicky Morgan said, 'that for too long there has been a false choice between academic standards and activities that build character and resilience' and these should go 'hand in hand.'[2]

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[2] http://press.conservatives.com/post/98807929855/nicky-morgan-speech-to-conservative-party

As a result of this increased interest the Jubilee Centre has continued research into what makes successful character education and has developed the programme *Teaching Character Through the Primary Curriculum.* The programme aimed to continue the successful approach of the Jubilee Centre, with such projects as *My Character, Knightly Virtues, Primary and Secondary Programmes of study and Teaching Character Through Subjects*. It is the Centre's belief that:

> all good education should be character as it should help children and young people develop virtues and practical wisdom that will enable them to flourish. Through taught and caught approaches to character education, schools and teachers can, amongst other things, help children and students; learn the language of character; debate, discuss and critically evaluate moral dilemmas; take part in experiences that 'test' character; and, reflect on the afterwards (Harrison *et al*., 2016a p3).

The *Teaching Character Through the Primary Curriculum* programme, designed for Year 6 pupils (aged 10-11 years old) aimed to help pupils to understand the language of character and to provide opportunities for them to debate, discuss and reflect on examples of practical wisdom from a selection of narratives featuring well known exemplars. A series of virtues considered key to a successful transition from primary school to secondary school were chosen for the programme.

Previous research on the transition between primary and secondary schools, and the benefit of a consistency in values, is reflected in the Learning for Life report *Character in Transition*. The report advises that:

> the experience of transition from the familiar, nurturing and supportive ethos of what is very often a small primary school to the more impersonal, larger, and quite possibly intimidating secondary school can be a challenging phase in pupils' lives. Essentially, the period of transition is a time when pupils will be removed from one secure environment: the values, rules, routines and structures of which they are entirely familiar, to a new environment with its own (and often very different) values, rules, routines and structures (Arthur *et al*., 2010 p9).

The *Teaching Character Through the Primary Curriculum* programme endeavours to provide resources to assist in this important period. These resources will help ease the challenge of transition from primary to secondary school by making pupils more aware of their own character strengths and by beginning the development of their ability and understanding of phronesis.

The Jubilee Centre *My Character* study shows that teacher educators believe that the majority of character education teaching resources are 'drop in' or standalone resources (Arthur *et al*., 2014a): this programme of study, therefore, aimed to provide a practical guidance on how character education might be successfully embedded into the curriculum. Berkowitz believes that 'designer' character education models can foster narrow outcomes and that 'character education needs to create schools and classrooms that are optimally likely to foster the development of integrated, holistic human goodness' (2016). These ideals were at the centre of this programme throughout its development.

To ensure that this programme was not just a 'drop in' resource links were made to eight different National Curriculum subjects, giving the programme a cross-curricular approach. The Jubilee Centre's *Teaching Character Through the Curriculum* outlines that 'character education, both implicit and explicit, permeates all subjects as well as the general school ethos (Arthur *et al*., 2015b)' whilst *Teaching Character Through Subjects* highlights the importance of a cross-curricular approach to character education:

> If schools are serious about developing the character of their students then all teachers have a responsibility to seek out opportunities within the curriculum to do so. Educating character through curriculum subjects enables students to develop a personal rationale for why character is important; learn the language of character and become 'virtue literate'; take part

in activities that allow for the positive exploration of character; and facilitate space for students to reflect on personal character strengths and weaknesses (Harrison *et al.,* 2016a p4).

The resources embedded within each National Curriculum subject are based on well-known moral exemplars. Research has shown that the use of moral exemplars can have positive effects. Walker (2016) states that moral exemplars fascinate and inspire us because their behaviour is largely outside of our own lived experience. Whilst Kristjánsson believes 'children must be taught about right and wrong in a more straightforward manner, moral virtue must seep into them from an early age like dye into wool, and they must, inter alia, learn to take their cue from worthy mentors and moral exemplars' (2007, p37). Therefore these narratives are meant to inspire pupils to not only emulate but encourage them to reflect and discuss the character demonstrated. It is vitally important that children understand that virtues can have both positive and negative consequences and that too much of a particular virtue may not always be beneficial. These narratives are seen as the main resource for teachers to encourage debate, discussion and reflection and to help introduce the practice of phronesis.

The key principle behind this programme is its ability to encourage reflective practice. The narratives chosen allow for discussion and reflection on a series of different virtues whilst the Pupil Activity resources provided encourage pupils to translate these discussions into written answers. In this sense the programme follows the same structure as the Jubilee Centre's successful *Knightly Virtues* (Arthur *et al.,* 2014b) resources which have been delivered to over 25,000 primary school pupils. Throughout each Lesson Plan time is given for discussion and at the end of each lesson reflective practice is present in the form of an individual pupil 'I WILL' target, based around the virtues in question; this 'personal reflection is a key ingredient in the process of internalising values and taking ownership of them (Arthur *et al.,* 2014a).' Understanding virtues in their own lives arises from a level of self-awareness which stems from teachers guiding pupils to reflect on stories from their lives. Developing phronesis requires pupils to look backward and learn from past experiences, but to also look forward to predict the best course of action (Harrison *et al.*, 2016b). Establishing reflective practice and making it a common aspect of school based learning will help achieve the basic early developments of phronesis within primary pupils.

Developing the Programme
The *Teaching Character Through the Primary Curriculum* programme was developed in consultation with head teachers and teachers. The eight subjects and narrative exemplars were selected – following external and internal reviews along with piloting of the programme in four primary schools – from a much wider list of proposed possibilities.

The Virtues
The programme aimed to introduce, or in some cases reintroduce, pupils to eight different primary character virtues. The Jubilee Centre's, *A Framework for Character Education*, explains the importance of classifying the virtues into four domains; civic, moral, performance and intellectual. The Framework highlights that 'human flourishing requires moral, intellectual and civic virtues, excellence specific to diverse domains of practice or human endeavour, and generic virtues of self-management (known as enabling and performing virtues)' and that 'virtues form a coherent, mutually supportive whole in a well-rounded life, and character education is all about their integration, guided by the overarching intellectual virtue of good sense (Jubilee Centre, 2013)'. The project team took guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) Education: 2015 grant funding proposal[3], the Learning for Life report *Character in Transition* and the Jubilee Centre's, *Primary Programme of Study* and *Framework for Character Education in Schools* to carefully select two virtues from each domain, which would not only lead to reflection in classroom situations, but which would also help Year 6 pupils with their transition to Year 7.

The eight primary virtues chosen were:
Civic – Service and charity
Moral – Courage and integrity

Performance – Resilience and drive
Intellectual – Focus and curiosity
A further five secondary virtues were chosen to supplement the primary virtues to aid in discussion and reflection within lessons; those being honesty, gratitude, motivation, ambition, confidence.

Moral Exemplars
When choosing the moral exemplars several criteria were taken into consideration;

1. For this to be a practical resource for teachers and schools viable links would have to be present between the exemplars chosen and the new U.K. National Curriculum (2014). When questioned teachers made it clear that they wanted to teach character to their pupils but found it difficult to integrate stand alone resources. Therefore, as previously stated, a goal of this programme was to produce lessons, based on exemplars, which could be smoothly integrated into the National Curriculum. The National Curriculum and other published schemes such as Hamilton Trust, Chris Quigley Curriculum Planner and the International Primary Curriculum were studied and reviewed to find specific learning objectives.
2. The exemplars chosen had to display the character virtues chosen in one or more aspects of their life.
3. The exemplars were looked at closely as observable behaviour was important, but the emotions with which they performed an action, the motivation behind it, and the manner in which it was performed were also vitally important (Kristjansson, 2013). This would be the key to facilitate discussion and reflection and enable the development of phronesis.
4. The exemplars were chosen for their ability to not only elicit admiration but also their capacity to motivate pupils (Croce and Vaccarezza, 2016), especially pupils in Year 6 (aged 10-11 years old).

By examining the National Curriculum, the Jubilee Centre's *My Character* programme and Character Scotland's *Inspire>Aspire*[4] programme, a longlist of thirty exemplars was proposed. A shortlist of seven exemplars was produced in consultation with a group of external practitioners. Below is a comprehensive list of the moral exemplars, virtues and National Curriculum links chosen:

Subject/ Curriculum Link	Narratives	Primary Virtue (virtue narrative focuses on)	Definition	Secondary Virtues (other virtues displayed during narrative)
English Journalistic Writing	Courage Under Fire John Simpson (BBC Foreign Correspondent – Reported during Tiananmen Square massacre, 1991 Gulf War, Kosovo conflict)	Courage (Moral)	Courage is having the strength and will to know what you should do even though you may be afraid.	Resilience, Ambition, Curiosity, Honesty, Integrity
PE - Athletics	Olympic Spirit Luz Long (1936 Olympics German long jumper his main rival was Jesse Owens. Owens won gold, with Long taking silver)	Integrity (Moral)	Integrity is when you adhere to the moral principles of honesty.	Honesty, Courage, Service
Science Animals Including Humans (Medicine and Drugs)	An Ambition to Cure Gertrude Elion (Biochemist and pharmacologist, who won 1988 Nobel Prize)	Curiosity (Intellectual)	Curiosity is when you are eager to know or learn something new.	Resilience, Ambition, Confidence, Focus
Maths Algebra	Numbers in Focus Emmy Noether	Focus (Intellectual)	Focus is when you pay close attention to	Resilience, Drive, Curiosity

	(German Jewish mathematician known for her landmark contributions to algebra)		something and block out possible distractions.	
History A study of a theme in British history.	Inspiring a Nation Winston Churchill (British Prime Minister during WW2)	Resilience (Performance)	Resilience is bouncing back from adversity when attempting a difficult task.	Motivation, Drive, Confidence, Integrity, Focus, Service
Geography Describe and understand key aspects of physical/ human geography	Driven to Make a Change Wangari Maathai (Kenyan environmental activist	Drive (Performance)	Drive is to move or push forward despite obstacles in your path.	Resilience, Motivation, Service
Computing Coding	Codebreaker Alan Turing (Mathematician and computer coder who broke Enigma code during WW2)	Service (Civic)	Service is working hard for a person, organisation or country. It is helping other people.	Resilience, Drive, Curiosity
RPSHE / Citizenship – (Volunteer/ Charity)	Local Hero – examples from the #iwill campaign (freedom for school to pick a local hero appropriate to them)	Charity (Civic)	Charity is the voluntary giving of help to those in need.	

Evaluation Stages in Development

The intention was not only to create resources which had research behind them but to also pilot them to gain evidence for their suitability in primary schools.

Both, internal and external, reviews of the programme were undertaken. Experienced primary practitioners were asked to review the resources produced and give feedback where appropriate. Feedback was largely positive with teachers making positive comments about; the structure of the resources; the viable links to the National Curriculum; its age related expectations; and its teacher friendliness. Teachers did comment that more guidance was needed on the principle of comparing and contrasting virtues and as this was a major component of the programme, and would be influential in the final outcomes, changes were made to the Teacher's Notes and Lesson Plans.

Further reviews established that the exemplars chosen were often extraordinary exemplars of character virtues. It had already been established that the exemplars were picked for their ability to elicit admiration and the capability to motivate pupils but social psychology research argues that, 'attainable exemplars that seemed more imitable and closer to participants' selfhood more effectively motivated moral engagement compared to extraordinary exemplars (Han, 2016)'. In response to this, to ensure pupils were given greater opportunity to develop their virtue literacy and that more opportunities were provided for discussion and reflection, a Virtue Toolkit for each subject was produced providing; definitions of all the subsequent virtues; fictional narratives featuring an 'attainable' exemplar to whom pupils could relate; and a suggested activity to complete before engaging with the main exemplar narratives. These extra resources enabled pupils to talk about experiences in their own lives and discuss phronesis in action.

Lesson Pilots

The four schools involved in piloting the resources were chosen as they had previously shown an interest in the *Teaching Character Through the Primary Curriculum* programme in its earlier development or they had previously worked with the Jubilee Centre on such programmes as the *Knightly Virtues*. The four schools represented different demographics from across Birmingham and meetings took place between head teachers, teachers involved and the Jubilee Centre Teaching Fellow.

To successfully and rigorously evaluate the programme's resources, subject lessons were piloted in five different Year 6 classes using three different methods; lessons taught by teachers from the chosen primary school whilst being observed by the Jubilee Centre Teaching Fellow; lessons taught by teachers from the chosen primary school with no observer present; and lessons taught by the Jubilee Centre's Teaching Fellow whilst being observed by teachers from the chosen primary school. Teachers were provided with feedback forms to complete to aid the evaluation process whilst discussions between the Jubilee Centre Teaching Fellow and the teachers present provided important feedback.

Feedback/Evaluation
Through the methods listed above feedback and evaluations were collected and analysed to evaluate the strengths and areas for development of the programme. A summary of the findings are below.

Areas of strengths:
- The resources are structured in an easy to follow way.
- Strong links are made to the National Curriculum.
- Pupils are motivated and engaged throughout lessons.
- Virtue Toolkit resources gave pupils opportunities to relate virtues to their own experiences whilst enabling reflection on the character virtues or dilemmas in question.
- The Virtue Glossary provided information to help increase the virtue literacy of the pupils whilst also enabling more critical thinking from the pupils in all aspects of the programme.
- All resources provided encouraged pupils to use the correct language which in turn aided discussion and reflection.
- The moral exemplars chosen aided discussion and got pupils to think deeper about phronesis.

Areas for development:
- Timings of lesson needed adjusting to allow more time for discussion and more time for written answers.
- Length of moral exemplar narratives could be shortened.
- Clearer links made in Lesson Plans to the previously used Virtue Glossary.
- PowerPoint resources to be made more classroom friendly.

The programme was developed further based on these recommendations and teachers previously involved in the programme's development were consulted to evaluate the final edition.

Influence of the programme
The influence of the programme in regards to the effectiveness of; the development of virtue literacy; development of phronesis; and the embedding of *Teaching Character Through the Primary Curriculum* into an inclusive school curriculum were evaluated. The evaluation process consisted of teacher and pupil feedback as well as lesson observations from the Jubilee Centre Teaching Fellow. The evaluation of the influence of the programme was conducted over a short period of time in a small number of schools who had trialled the resources; this does present some limitations for building a full picture of the influence/outcomes of the programme, but the initial findings are encouraging. During this period the programme was thoroughly evaluated and improvements were continually made. A substantive trial of the programme would be required to gain a more complete picture of its impact on 10 and 11 year olds.

Throughout the programme it became clear that one of its strengths was its explicit links to the National Curriculum. Teachers commented that these resources were not 'drop in' or stand alone and could be taught throughout the year when the subsequent National Curriculum objectives were being taught. The programme therefore met its early goal of being a cross-curricular approach towards teaching character.

In regards to the development of virtue literacy, the Jubilee Centre Teaching Fellow and teachers involved in the pilot indicated that pupils were beginning to demonstrate an increased knowledge and understanding of virtue terms with one teacher stating, '*children were already beginning to have a deeper*

understanding of the virtue terms in question.' Teachers commented that lessons, particularly within the Virtue Toolkit, encouraged pupils to reflect on the virtues and begin to relate them to their own lives. Head teachers were appreciative of the introduction of virtue language with one head stating, *'it is great that children are able to discuss these terms and begin to reflect on their own character.'* This greater understanding of virtue literacy will in turn contribute towards pupil's abilities to reflect on their experiences by using theory.

To assess if this programme directly contributed towards the development of phronesis is very difficult within a short pilot but some conclusions can be drawn from evidence collected. Teacher and pupil feedback concluded that these resources encouraged and enabled discussion and reflection in areas that may not be commonly discussed in a classroom. A teacher said, '*the resources are a very useful prompt for discussion and exploration.'* It is believed that if this programme was taught to its full, over a sustained period of time, then this continued discussion and reflection, coupled with the increase in virtue literacy skills, would contribute towards the early stages of phronesis development. To fully assess the impact of the programme pupils' choices when faced with real life 'dilemmas' would have to monitored to see if any subsequent changes had occurred, and therefore their ability to deliberate to make the right choice when faced with conflicting demands and pressures had improved.

Once the pilot and evaluation process was complete a series of recommendations were made for teachers and schools. They are summarised below:
1. Opportunities, such as this programme, should be explored so that character education is included in a cross-curricular approach.
2. There is a greater need for teachers to be aware of the development of phronesis. Discussion and reflection can be guided by the teacher to aid pupils' understanding of when virtues complement and clash with each other and when too much of a specific virtue is not a good thing.
3. At the end of each lesson it would be beneficial for each pupil to make a statement of intent, in the form of an 'I WILL' card linked to the primary virtue in question.
4. It is important schools are aware that this programme alone will not make pupils virtuous. It should be embedded into a school ethos which has pupils' character development within it.
5. This programme must, like all teaching resources, be evaluated within an individual school context to ensure it is having a positive impact in that setting.

Conclusions
As previously explained, this paper has not tried to state that the *Teaching Character Through the Primary Curriculum* programme is a perfect solution to teaching primary school pupils phronesis, but that it can contribute to a shift towards more inclusive character education in primary schools. In this current climate there are questions being asked about the roles of schools and teachers; should schools simply prepare their young people for a life of tests or should they be preparing them for the tests of life? (Arthur *et al.,* 2014aa). At the centre of this is the question of what it means to educate, and what the fundamental role of educators is (Arthur *et al.*, 2015c). Research from the Jubilee Centre shows that practitioners want to teach children about character but find it difficult to find time and space in the curriculum (Arthur et al., 2015a). Therefore this programme and its ability to be included in an inclusive school curriculum is already beginning to positively address some of these questions and concerns.

The limitations of the evaluation of the programme mean that sweeping statements about its ability to 'teach' phronesis cannot be made. The principle behind the programme is for pupils to be given opportunities to begin their long journey of developing their own personal phronesis. The positive feedback shows that teachers believe the resources within the programme have aided the development of virtue literacy and have contributed to meaningful discussions and reflections. In regards to the previously mentioned triangle of character education this programme will contribute towards an increase in pupils' theory and their experiences of character in different situations. This combined with 'good' and meaningful discussion and reflection in the classroom will give pupils greater opportunity to think more deeply about situations they are in and the choices presented to them. This will therefore help them to begin their journey of phronesis development. This programme demonstrates that children as young as 10 and 11 can

be exposed to phronesis and that by providing them with the theory and a wider range of experiences, through the use of moral exemplars, they can openly discuss and reflect on this. It has been recognised by the Jubilee Centre and the *Teaching Character Through the Primary Curriculum* programme that character formation is not something a teacher or school can fully do for a pupil; rather that informed pupils can do this for themselves (Arthur *et al.,* 2014a). Phronesis is not something that can explicitly and exclusively be taught in a classroom but programmes such as *Teaching Character Through the Primary Curriculum* can be used to ignite thought provoking discussion and reflection, which all educators will agree is a positive outcome and demonstrates the early steps of phronesis development.

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