UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM THE JUBILEE CENTRE FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

# Bridging the Character Education Gap from Adolescence to Citizenship:

# Rethinking the Role of Teacher-Mentors as Facilitators of Phronesis and Civic Friendship

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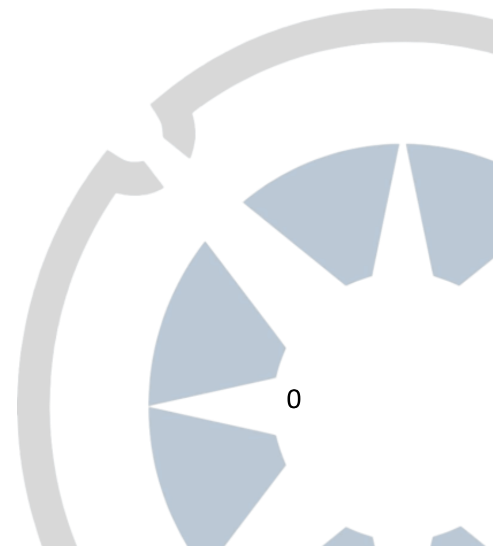

Bridging the Character Education Gap from Adolescence to Citizenship:

Rethinking the Role of Teacher-Mentors as Facilitators of *Phronesis* and Civic Friendship

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**Introduction**

Schools remain the most consistent formative institution for adolescents, and schools whose missions align with character education goals have a unique opportunity to reinvigorate the teaching profession with aims that extend to the broader needs of adolescents in transition to adulthood. One variable consistently correlated to improved adolescent flourishing is the presence of a nonparental caring adult.[1] Adolescence, broadly recognized as age 10-21, is a time of rapid change that is distinguished by individuation from parents and toward peers (AMCHP, 2017), with teen friendships often marked by instability (Kristjánsson, 2019). During this individuation process, a gap can form between teens and formative adult connections. To help fill this gap, the presence of a nonparental, caring adult in an adolescent's life is widely recognized as additive to teen flourishing, yet studies to date limit measures of flourishing to instrumental outcome goals such as school success or performance virtues.

I will argue that an adult mentor, who is more advanced in practical wisdom, can play a formative role beyond such outcome goals to bridge the gap in adolescent moral development and to support growth in practical wisdom while preparing adolescents for a social life marked

[1] A sampling of research studies that identify adult mentors as correlative to youth flourishing: Garmezy & Masten,
1986; Galbo, 1987; Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1995; Scales & Gibbons, 1996; Taylor & Dryfoos, 1998; Ferreoria, 2001; Zimmerman & Bingenheimer, 2002; Parra *et al.,* 2002; Doherty & Mayer, 2003; Brooks, 2006; Larson, 2006; Grossman & Bulle, 2006; Rhodes *et al.,* 2006; Moberg, 2008; Erickson *et al*., 2009; Dubois, *et al*., 2011; Schwartz *et al.,* 2011; Wang & Eccles: 2012; Reagan-porras, 2013; Zimmerman, 2013; Van maele & Van houtte, 2013; Connor *et al*., 2014; Cooper & Miness, 2014; Patton *et al.,* 2014; Previts & Bauer, 2014; Lunsford, 2016; Deutsch *et al*., 2017; Ferguson, 2018; McQuillan, *et al.,* 2018; Taylor & Curtis, 2018; Hagler *et al.,* 2019.

by civic friendship. The keystone for this mentor-mentee relationship involves deliberation in a

trusted relationship over time, providing guided practice in emotional regulation and cognition essential to growth in *phronesis* while cultivating relational skills essential to civic friendship.

The practice of mentoring involves informal conversations, which are sustained over time and foster emotional connection and trust, between a younger person (mentee) and an older person (mentor), with the mentor operating in a helping capacity (Dubois and Karcher, 2013: 4) such as the more informal role of teacher-mentors in schools.[1]

While many studies detail ways *that* mentors can help teens, there remains little study as to *how* caring adult interactions correlate to improved flourishing in teens. This paper explores a less developed field in character education, focused on the essential value of teacher-mentor and student-mentee relationships in schools guided by character education missions. I offer a

theoretical framework to reassess the role of mentorship programs in character education in light of Aristotle's concept of "friendship of inequality." Examining the role of deliberation in mentoring conversations offers insights into the role of friends of inequality *qua* mentors to support cognitive and social-emotional skills essential to *phronesis* and to shepherd adolescents toward civic friendships for community life. I will also draw from qualitative analyses of case studies about authentic moral dilemmas that emerged in mentor-mentee conversations through the mentoring program at a school dedicated to character education, a context that provides clear aims and professional development to guide successful teacher-mentor and student-mentee relationships. I will also offer insights from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* that could inform the development of a mentoring pedagogy as to how a teacher-mentor can facilitate the actualization of student potential to advance in practical wisdom while avoiding the deficits of a guru-pupil exemplar relationship that could squelch the development of authentic critical reflection and free agency in young people

[1] Mentoring relationships are also associated with business settings where an older, more experienced professional supports the professional growth of a newer employee in a company. The term coach in business settings is associated with a highly experienced professional who can support the professional aspirations of a less experienced professional beyond the limits of an individual company.

(Kristjánsson, 2022: 132). I will conclude by reenvisioning the role of a caring adult in an adolescent's life as formative to character growth,[2] and I will encourage school leaders to support one-on-one mentoring programs to enhance adolescent character growth.

**Contemporary Research**

*Psychological & Educational Research*

Scholars and practitioners across the fields of education and psychology consistently affirm the value of a mentor in the lives of adolescents. While these studies focus predominantly on youth who are at risk (Scales & Gibbons, 1996: 366), the value of mentoring has been affirmed for all youth. However, no studies focus specifically on *how* these interactions in mentoring relationships contribute to adolescent flourishing.

Common wisdom indicates that the process of individuation from parents during adolescence, which places peer relationships of primary importance, leaves adolescents unmoored from formative adult relationships, unless they have an older, caring and trusted, non-parent adult relationship to support them. Most studies on mentoring focus on the value of mentoring to add support for and to promote resilience in at-risk youth, including those with challenging home lives, socio-economic insecurities, and mental or physical health challenges.[3]Another study expands the list of at-risk youth to include high-achieving students in high-performing schools, correlating the role of a mentor to mitigate stress-related mental and physical health symptoms in youth experiencing school performance pressures (Connors & Miles, 2014: 36). While this intervention

[2] See also James Arthur: "Family, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, together with 'significant others', are all seen as providing a form of mentoring in social roles, which are performed, learnt, and internalized -- the focus is on the social context. In the scheme of things we depend on others for our character development (Arthur, J., 2003: p. 88).

[3] Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1995; Brooks, 2006: 73; Grossman & Bulle, 2006: 788; Erickson *et al.*, 2009: 345; Larose, S., *et al.,* 2015; Hamilton, M.A., *et al.,* 2016; DeWit, D.J. *et al.,* 2016a, 2016b; Erdem, *et al.,* 2016;
Peterson, A.C., *et al.,* 2016; McQuillan et al., 2018: Dubois, D.L., 2018; Keller, *et al.,* 2018; Larose, *et al.,* 2019; 218; Sánchez, *et al.,* 2019; Dubois, D.L., 2020a, 2020b; Sánchez, *et al.,* 2020. See also the work of the Evidence-based Mentoring Center at the University of Massachusetts, Boston (est. in 2011): https://cebmentoring.org/

model of adult mentors supporting at-risk teens is a dominant trope in the literature,[4] the claim that such mentors support adolescents is generally recognized as a value to all teens (Grossman & Bulle, 2006: 788).

Yet, these contemporary studies persistently emphasize instrumental or outcome-based effects. Mentoring adolescents has been associated with instrumental support for school success, as measured by higher rates of school attendance, high school graduation and college attendance, along with better attitudes toward school engagement (Grossman & Bulle, 2006: 789-791), higher grades and academic motivation (Cooper & Miness, 2014: 266). The social emotional outcomes for adolescents with mentors include a wide range of skill growth (Komosa-Hawkins, 2012: 394), such as growth in confidence, empathy (Lunsford, 2006: 3-4), feelings of belonging (Cooper & Miness, 2014: 266), success at forming new friendships, and growth in trusting others (Cooper & Miness, 2014: 312). Studies have also identified improvements in self-regulation among youth supported by mentors, including greater self-control over "speech, behaviors, and attitudes as well as setting goals" (Cooper & Miness, 2014: 313). In general, adolescents with mentors, who meet with consistent frequency (Parra, 2002: 469), experience "better overall psychological well-being, including higher levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction" (Grossman & Bulle, 2006: 789).

*Voices in Character Education and Mentoring*

While mentors have been associated with a wide range of positive outcomes in youth, few studies have focused on the value of mentoring for character education. A mentor's value in character education seems largely associated with the value of a role model (Laursen & Birmingham, 2003; Berkowitz & Bier, 2007: 20). Ryan and Bohlin (1999), in contrast, express concern that the term "role model" suggests that an adult is simply "playing a role." Instead, they view the teacher as a wise servant leader, who makes himself fully present and attentive to draw out the fullness of a

[4] A recent report warns that this "deficit model" of mentoring -- one focused on promoting school success -- can miss the mark on supporting the broader needs of youth (Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues and Clough, 2020: 5-6).

student's developing understanding, as that student negotiates the emotional and cognitive terrain of his own questions and reflections about his life. The teacher's motivation in developing a trusting relationship with a student combines both love for the young person and hope for their potentiality as a person of virtue (Ryan & Bohlin, 1999: 176).

In 2020, the Jubilee Centre and Clough published a short tract to guide mentoring programs in schools devoted to character education. The tract provides a wider range of reference points that correlate mentor relationships with character variables. The authors affirm the importance of trust and caring as the foundation for a mentoring relationship. The tract also mentions that a mentor uses "effective questioning" to promote "critical thinking" and to help encourage "different perspectives." The goal for such discussions centers on developing the young person's character. The authors explain:

> Mentoring exposes young people to different ways of thinking, ultimately building their attitude to learning, attendance and punctuality and so on. Mentoring is a collaboration between mentor and mentee. It is structured and underpinned by trust with caring individuals who offer guidance, support and encouragement. The intention is to develop the competence and character of the young person; often facilitated by a skilled individual who provides a young person with support, counsel, friendship, reinforcement and constructive example. (Jubilee Centre & Clough, 2020: 4)

Overall, these important voices in contemporary character education scholarship reinforce the value of mentoring for character development and open a window to the need for more study (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007: 23). While it is clear that adolescents who have an effective adult mentor have improved outcomes in diverse measures of growth and success, *how* such relationships foster such outcomes remains less well developed in the literature. The literature leaves a fragmented list of outcome variables, with a few references to variables that contribute to mentor effectiveness -- all of which begs for more systematic thinking. The chart below is an effort to try to categorize the many variables referenced in contemporary psychological and educational literature *that* correlate

adult mentors to improvements in outcome goals for adolescents. However, rather than rely on fragmented references to outcomes and guidelines, I will suggest that a clearer understanding of the emotional and cognitive elements that promote growth in practical wisdom and Aristotle's concept of friendship of inequality can provide clearer aims to understand *how* mentor relationships can support adolescent flourishing.

*Summary Chart: Mentor practices that correlate to outcome benefits for adolescents with mentors*

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">Effective Mentors Practices<br><br>● Ensure "mentoring schemes" to guide predictable patterns of communication<br>● Practice effective listening and communication skills<br>● Engage in "gestures of care"<br>● Model positive behaviors<br>● Facilitate youth agency as "producers of their own growth"<br>● Ensure mutual respect<br>● Provide "emotion coaching"<br>● Practice empathy<br>● Promote curiosity<br>● Encourage positive self-image for youth</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">● Expose youth to "different ways of thinking"<br>● Use open-ended questioning to promote critical reflection<br>● Provide feedback<br>● Provide support<br>● Provide encouragement</td></tr>
<tr><td>Social-Emotional Outcomes<br><br>-Resilience<br>-Stress management<br>-Self-confidence<br>-Social confidence<br>-Empathy<br>-Self-regulation<br>-Self awareness<br>-Self-esteem<br>-Self-agency<br>-Life satisfaction</td><td>Cognitive Outcomes<br><br>-Perspective-taking<br>-Independent judgments<br>-Critical reflection -Improved school performance</td><td>Relational Outcomes<br><br>-Increased feelings of belonging<br>-Improved trust in others -Increased risk-taking for new roles, including leadership roles<br>-Improved school engagement</td></tr>
</table>

**Case Studies: Authentic Moral Dilemmas & Mentee Reflections**

A principal research measure for assessing growth in practical wisdom -- from Piaget,

Kohlberg and Blasi to more a more recent study by the Jubilee Center for Character & Virtues (2020) -- has been the use of moral dilemmas to assess how a person reasons about moral issues that involve competing goods. Moral dilemmas are scripted "stories that place the protagonist within a situation in which he/she must decide what is the right/just/fair/virtuous course of action" (Kristjánsson *et al.,* 2020: 9). The way an individual reasons about a moral dilemma reveals much about their sense of virtue literacy, their sense of themselves as a morally-responsible agent, and the refinement of their vision for a flourishing life. Those who rely on moral dilemma research, however, have been criticized for overemphasizing reasoning skills at the expense of other valuable measures of practical wisdom, including the role of emotion.

Kristjánsson *et al.* (2020) attempted to improve on moral dilemma research by creating a four-component model which could help mitigate the "gappiness problem" in moral development research to identify measures that might affect the shift in people from "knowing the good to doing the good" (Kristjánsson *et al.,* 2020: 24). Kristjánsson *et al.* identified four testing components in this study:

- "Moral sensitivity" - "the ability to identify and attend to moral issues"
- "Moral judgment" - "the ability to reason about and justify morally ideal courses of action"
- "Moral motivation" - "refers to an agent's prioritising moral over other values and being motivated to pursue it"
- "Character" - "qualities that allow an agent to perform what she intends"

(Kristjánsson *et al.,* 2020: 10).

The study involved two sets of questionnaires that 285 18-50 year old participants responded to through individual assessments, and the researchers discovered a significant correlation between the above measures of *phronesis* and participant responses that indicated "prosocial" tendencies (Kristjánsson *et al.,* 2020: 14, 10). Those who directed the research study called for more research

into how these findings could be incorporated into school and university-based interventions to promote assessment of growth in *phronesis* (Kristjánsson *et al.,* 2020: 10).

While the ambition and scope of such research warrants praise and continued study, two factors raise concerns. These studies rely on a highly cognitive and individualistic model of assessing growth in *phronesis*. I have been so compelled by the research that Kristjánsson and Bohlin have advanced about the value of emotions to the cognition needed for *phronesis* (Kristjánsson, 2007; Bohlin, 2005: 172) that I question how a moral dilemma that is disconnected from the direct emotional experience of the subject can provide a valid measure of growth in *phronesis*.[6] Emotional investment seems essential to assessing moral judgment through a moral dilemma, as Kristjánsson affirms in the emotional regulation variable of his four-element schema for *phronesis* (Kristjánsson, 2015: 96-99).[7] A 2014 study also confirmed that intimacy with a moral dilemma is essential to assessing moral judgment. The researchers stated: "any judgment is also dependent on previous knowledge of the individual about the event or situation he or she is about to judge; this implies that it is dependent on deliberate reasoning as well as on the magnitude of the emotional arousal triggered by the event or situation" (Christensen, *et al.,* 2014). While these researchers affirmed the value of exploring invented moral dilemmas, their insights about the correlation between emotional arousal and moral reasoning raise questions about how a canned moral dilemma can effectively assess growth in *phronesis.*[8] I've come to value the authenticity of moral dilemmas that emerge through mentor-mentee conversations in the case studies I've gathered over the last 10 years, a representative sample of which I include below.

The other dimension missing from the moral dilemma research is the social or relational context of *how* we participate in moral formation. My long experience as a teacher-mentor - involving discussions centered on authentic moral dilemmas that students have brought to our informal mentoring conversations[9] -- offers insights into *how* mentors as "friends of inequality"

[6] B Whitlock, Module 2 (2020)

[7] Kristjánsson has developed a four-part schema to capture the complex processes involved in *phronesis*:

- Constitutive: the power to discern the relevant moral features in a given ethical dilemma.
- Integrative (or Adjudicative): the capacity to apply relevant principles, especially in moral dilemmas.
- Blueprint: the capacity to draw on a vision for a flourishing life which informs and motivates moral action.
- Emotional regulation: the ability to attune the appropriate emotions to motivate moral action in a given situation. (Kristjánsson, 2015: 96-99).

[8] The 2021 study *Character Virtues in Policing* indicates that the moral dilemmas presented to the police in this study referenced incidents closely aligned to the experiences of police offices, suggesting that moral dilemmas that closely approximate lived experience may allow for sufficient emotional arousal to enhance assessment of growth in moral reasoning (Kristjánsson, K. *et al.*, 2021).

[9] Note: All student-mentees remain anonymous and names and details are adjusted to protect privacy.

facilitate student growth in *phronesis,* particularly growth in emotional regulation and some of the cognitive skills essential to moral reasoning, while building relational skills. While these case studies are anecdotal, they offer glimpses that may encourage research attention to the role of formative relationships in character education rather than rely merely on individualized assessments. These case studies also provide insights into the value of one-on-one mentoring programs for schools.

When it comes to developing effective mentoring relationships, context matters (Bohlin, 2022: 158-159). I am not arguing that any random adult can be paired with any random adolescent and character magic can happen. In fact, the intimate nature of a mentor-mentee relationship requires great care as well as boundary-setting (Stewart, H.: 2012: 46-56). The context which grounds the mentor-mentee conversations excerpted here is a school dedicated to character education, with a one-on-one mentoring program that was established since the school's inception over 40 years ago. Identified as "the cornerstone" of the school experience, the aim of the mentoring program is clearly articulated: "The mentoring program ensures that every…student has the personalized attention of a caring adult, who takes the time to know her mentee and develop a relationship with her" (montroseschool.org). The goals of the mentoring program are both student-centered and character-striving. The mentoring program materials

state:

> Meetings with a mentor consist of informal conversations to help each student know herself better, set academic and personal goals, cultivate interests, and foster potential. Mentors help students to reflect, to acquire perspective on life's ups and downs, and to grow in virtues such as honesty, fortitude, sincerity, gratitude, cheerfulness, generosity, industry, modesty and respect (montroseschool.org).

The school provides a schema and structure to the program that ensures predictability and accountability, along with a dedicated administrator who serves as the Director of Mentoring to provide ongoing support and professional development to faculty-mentors. In addition, mentors use a Coaching Conversations protocol document, which is an application of Bohlin's Practical Wisdom Framework (Bohlin, 2022), to help the mentor guide conversations toward aims while respecting mentee agency.[5]

The case studies excerpted below were provided by alumnae, who shared insights about an authentic moral dilemma that they reflected on in a mentoring discussion as well as their later reflections as to *how* these conversations helped them. These case studies capture the subjects "retrospective reflections" as well as recall "reasoned reflection prior to action," the twin faculties noted for character development (Arthur and Kristjánsson, 2014: 9). I have limited the case studies analyzed here to those that reveal insights about components relevant to growth in emotional regulation and cognitive discernment essential to moral development for *phronesis*. In the appendix, I have also included case studies that relate to performance virtues in order to provide a fuller sampling of what students revealed as valuable to their growth through mentoring conversations (See Appendix A).

**Case Studies**

*How mentors help mentees with emotional regulation for phronesis*

[5] The Coaching Conversations protocol is available through *The Courageous Dialogue Toolkit* (Whitlock & Bohlin, 2021).

### Student A

“During my senior year of high school, I was [in an elected role] for my class. I dealt with so many conflicts while holding that role, and [my mentor] was the only person I could count on to have my back. She was always available to lend a listening ear, a level-headed opinion, and a safe space to turn to. I remember one recurring problem I had involved disagreements with the [other elected student leader]. I came to [my mentor’s] office in an emotional state and she helped me talk through the problem until I felt calm enough to head back to class.”

Referencing the summary chart above, the variables referenced by *Subject A* meet such effective mentoring practices as: predictable pattern of communication (“always available”), listening skills (“a listening ear”), communication skills (“helped me talk through the problem”), emotion coaching (shifting from “in an emotional state” to “calm enough to head back to class”), and support (“have my back”). Among the outcomes that the mentor relationship advanced, *Subject A* identified relational outcomes correlated to trust (“person I could count on” and “safe space to turn to”). The bulk of outcome benefits identified by *Subject A* focused on social-emotional outcomes: stress management (“dealt with so many conflicts”), self-regulation (“calm enough”), and resilience (“head back to class”). For *Subject A*, the mentor practiced effective attunement and relational skills in a relationship based on trust to support this subject's social-emotional needs amidst moral dilemmas she faced in her student leadership role.

### Student B

“I would often get frustrated with my classmates about small things. I remember one time in particular someone complaining about being tired which frustrated me because I had severe insomnia, so I thought it was unfair that they complained about it. [The mentor] let me talk myself to the bottom of my emotions, and then asked caring questions about my sleep habits, how I was struggling, what it felt like, etc. She empathized with how hard it was for me to get through the day. After I felt truly heard and understood, she started asking small questions such as: What was the facial expression of the person who said x and what tone did you hear in her voice? She asked if I thought other students might also struggle with sleep. Looking back, I see that these conversations promoted me to develop social skills through modeling healthy interactions in a safe relationship. Through thinking about my classmate’s perspectives, she helped me be curious and discover fair mindedness.”

*Student B* also focused on the social-emotional outcome benefits of the mentor relationship. She identified how the mentor was effective in: listening and emotion coaching ("let me talk to the bottom of my emotions" and "felt truly heard"), communication ("asked caring questions" and "these conversations promoted me to develop social skills"), empathy

("empathized with"), promoting curiosity ("helped me be curious"), asking open-ended questions ("what was the facial expression" and "what tone did you hear in her voice"), exposure to diverse perspectives ("thinking about my classmate's perspective" and "discover fair mindedness"), and providing support ("I felt truly heard and understood"). Clearly, *Subject B* viewed the mentor relationship as helpful to her social-emotional development when she said: "these conversations promoted me to develop social skills through modeling healthy interactions in a safe relationship."

*How mentors help with cognitive skills for phronesis*

### Student C

"One moral dilemma I remember discussing with [my mentor] unfolded during the most nascent period of our mentor-mentee relationship — my dilemma about staying at [the school] or leaving to study at another high school. In retrospect, I think [my mentor] was very considerate of my emotional capacity as a fourteen year old during that dilemma, and I

remember sensing that [she] valued listening to me more than pressing [her] opinion upon me. Perhaps this was rooted in the welcoming nature of the conversation — [she] invited me to chat, and left the door open for me to come to [her], but I was never obligated to come or stay.

Once I initiated the conversation about my dilemma, [she] helped me consider the positive and negative aspects of each side of the dilemma — firstly, the academics and commute times of each school, but most importantly, which community would offer a place to grow and be nurtured. However, the reason our conversations were deeply formative for me was largely because they were not simply discussions about the pros and cons of a decision. I think [my mentor] was especially considerate of the most complex aspect of the dilemma — my [parent's] opinion about the decision, versus my uncertainty about contradicting [them] if I believed something different was best. [My mentor] recognized that this decision revolved around my ability to consider my own autonomy in shaping my future, even at the expense of disagreeing with my [parent], who was my support system.

[My mentor's] ability to verbally recognize the complexities of my decision and my relationship with my [parent] helped me open up further about the emotional aspects of the situation.

Opening up about these emotions allowed me to grow to trust [my mentor] and hear [her] encouragement and support. Eventually, it was this support that prodded me to take the risk and choose what I knew would be best for me — to stay at [the school] — even when it contradicted my [parent].

In the end, I primarily remember [my mentor] telling me early in our conversation that the decision was truly up to me, and no matter what I decided, [my mentor] would still be supportive of me. I think that hearing this reassurance about the fact that I would be supported no matter what I chose allowed me to truly start considering what would be best for me and my own future. [My mentor] affirmed that [her] advice and listening ear were there for me because [she] cared about me as a person."

*Student C* affirmed the value of the mentoring conversations to both her social-emotional and cognitive skills development. Among the guidelines for effective mentoring, *Subject C* identified the mentor's effectiveness in establishing: a predictable pattern of communication ("door open"), empathy ("very considerate of my emotional capacity as a fourteen year old during that dilemma"), active listening ("valued listening to me"), caring gestures ("invited me to chat" and "cared about me as a person"), open-ended questioning ("which community would offer a place to grow and be nurtured" and "considering what was best for me"), support and encouragement ("would still be supportive of me" and "hear her encouragement and support"), as well as youth agency ("valued listening to me more than pressing [her] opinion upon me," "I was never obligated to come or stay," and "the decision was truly up to me").

For *Subject C,* the social-emotional outcomes overlapped with relational outcomes. While the mentor discussions helped her with stress management and self-awareness ("emotional aspects of the situation"), *Subject C* correlated the mentor's unconditional support to both her growth in trust ("Opening up about these emotions allowed me to grow to trust [my mentor] and hear [her] encouragement and support)" and to her resilience ("I think that hearing this reassurance about the fact that I would be supported no matter what I chose allowed me to truly start considering what would be best for me and my own future.").

For cognitive skills, note that *Student C* remembered being led by questions toward critical reflection and perspective taking ("helped me consider the positive and negative aspects of each side of the dilemma" and "especially considerate of the most complex aspect of the dilemma — my [parent's] opinion about the decision, versus my uncertainty about contradicting [them]"). In this respect, the mentor served as a gentle interlocutor to help the mentee discover the goods in conflict in her moral dilemma and form independent judgments ("what was best for me and my own future").

*Summary of case studies*

These case study samples provide practical grounding in authentic mentoring conversations centered on moral dilemmas that demonstrate how conversations with trusted mentors who engage in effective mentoring practices offer potential to support students in the development of skills for emotional regulation and cognitive development essential to growth in *phronesis.* The subjects' emotional investment in the dilemmas they brought to mentoring conversations were important to their reflections on how mentoring conversations helped them.

They specified benefits related to social-emotional, cognitive, and relational outcomes.

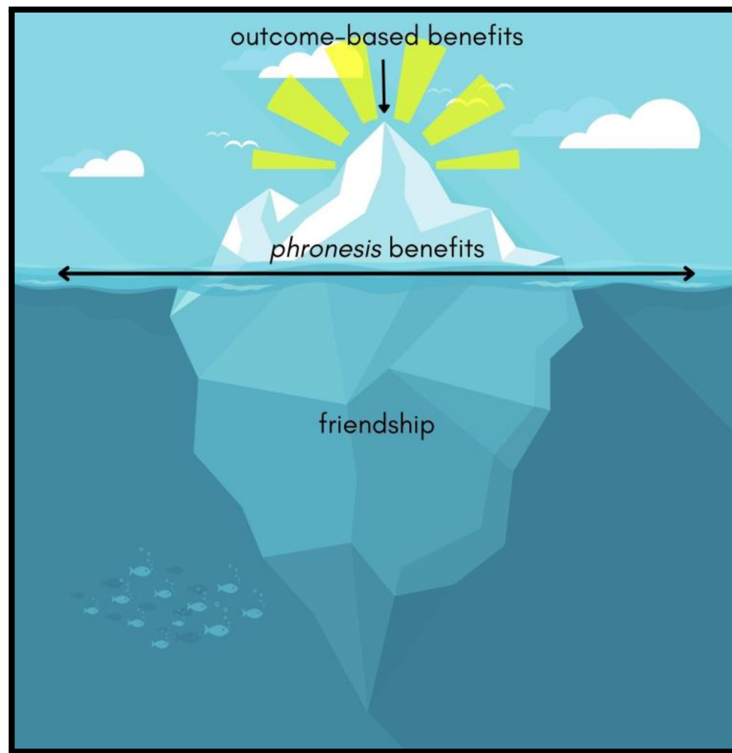
What happens in these mentoring conversations, as these case study excerpts reveal, is one aspect of the effect that such formative relationships, in well-supported contexts, can have for adolescent formation. The conversations that develop trust in mentoring relationships -friendships of inequality -- provide the foundation that facilitates growth in character. In my experience as a teacher-mentor, most mentoring conversations center on moral dilemmas that student-mentees are wrestling with -- both emotionally and cognitively -- in their own lives. The process of reflection and deliberation through conversation that lies at the heart of mentoring conversations -- guided by a trusted adult who is more formed in practical wisdom both through life maturity and through professional development and institutional protocols -- offers opportunities to support the character growth of young people.

Circling back to the key elements of *phronesis* introduced by by Kristjánsson and Bohlin, a trusted friend of inequality *qua* mentoring relationship can help support adolescents in the following elements of *phronesis:*

- Cognitive: Through active listening and open-ended questioning, the mentor helps the mentee identify the goods in conflict in moral dilemmas, consider diverse perspectives, and reflect critically in order to form independent judgments. This process provides support and practice for the young person to discern goods in conflict (Kristjánsson's constitutive element of *phronesis*). Such conversations necessarily involve reflection on one's vision for a flourishing life (Kristjánsson blueprint element of *phronesis*) and "the kind of person a student hopes to become" (Bohlin, 2022: 158). Through the mentor accompanying the youth, as a fellow witness to virtue, whose life and values attract the youth, mentors can elicit a "turn" in the youth that can "catapult" them toward higher aims ((Ryan and Bohlin, 1999: 140).
- Social-emotional: Developing reason-infused emotional awareness as well as emotional self-regulation when emotionally aroused is vital to *phronesis*. And emotion must become "infused with reason" in order for the moral actor to attune himself -- and develop motivation -- to choose flourishing aims (Kristjánsson's emotional regulation element of *phronesis*). Emotions require proper ordering or "schooling" to motivate an individual to choose the good; this "schooling of desire" involves moral agency and can be supported by a mentor (Bohlin, 2005, 2014).

If we use the analogy of an iceberg, the outcome-based instrumental benefits that researchers affirm mentors provide youth are like the shiny refracted surface. The deeper benefits of social-emotional and cognitive gains that support growth in *phronesis* through mentoring help

reveal the visible structure of the iceberg cap. Yet, it is the foundation of friendship that solidifies the overall structure of a mentor-mentee relationship.




**From Friendship of Inequality toward Civic Friendship**

These case study samples demonstrate how deliberation in mentor-mentee conversations support growth in emotional, cognitive and relational skills, and now I want to reflect on *how* this process and context for deliberation between "friends of inequality" also help prepare adolescents for civic friendship. Aristotle's references to communication as the foundation of social life and deliberation as the means for political life among free people position the mentor-mentee relationship as ideally suited for the work of character education for adolescents in transition to adulthood.

Aristotle grounds his political philosophy on the fundamental claim that humans are social creatures (*Eudemian Ethics*: VII.1242a.10; *Politics*: I.1253a25; *N.E.*: VIII.1155a.1), and what draws them together is the ability to communicate and deliberate:

> [M]an alone of the animals is furnished with the faculty of language… [L]anguage serves to declare what is advantageous

and what is the reverse, and it is the peculiarity of man, in comparison with other animals, that he alone possess a perception of good and evil, of the just and the unjust, and other similar qualities; and it is association in these things which make a family and a city."(*Politics*: I.1253a7).[6]

The *telos* that orders man's social and deliberative nature is the ideal of virtue-based friendship, an ideal that may serve to guide Aristotle's aim for all forms of friendship (Bryan, B., 2009:

766-767) rather than a too-hard-to-reach, rare model of friendship (Cooper, J.M., 1977: 648; Healy, 2011: 233).[7] While there is vast scholarship debating what Aristotle means when he associates political life with friendship,[8][9] scholars agree that civic or political friendship is a unique category of friendship in Aristotle. Civic friendship is "is based on utility" (*E.E.*: VII.1242a.10). Because people are interdependent and not self-sufficient (*E.E.*: VII.1242a.10), it is useful to live in association with others who offer us mutual advantages (Irrera, E., 2005: 565). Aristotle identifies a more moral (in contrast to legal or contractual) form of civic friendship that is marked by generosity, friendliness (*N.E.*: VIII.1162b.13) trust (*E.E.*: VII.1243a.10), as well as some degree of affection (Cooper, J.M., 1977: 648; Hoipkemier, M., 2016: 50). The end goal of such political friendship is "concord," the ability to live in unity with others in community (*N.E.*: IX.1167b.6; *E.E.*: VII.1241a.7). The moral form of civic friendship includes most of the variables of virtue friendship, with the following exceptions exclusive to virtue friendship: wishing the good for the friend's sake alone (*N.E.*: IX.1166a.4), loving

[6] B Whitlock, Module 2 (2020)

[7] While most analyses of Aristotle's concept of friendship emphasize the variables that classify different types of friendship, especially how diverse types of friendship lack variables essential to the ideal of virtue friendship, Bryan (2009) has developed a compelling argument: that virtue friendship is the *telos* for all forms of friendship, and thereby provides guidelines for how to strive toward that ideal in all relationships.

[8] Such as: Robb, F.C., 1943; Fortenbaugh, W.W., 1975; Cooper, J.M., 1977; Tracy, T., 1979; Walker, A.D.M., 1979;
Yack, B., 1985; Millgram, E., 1987, Sherman, N., 1997; Collins, 1990; Pakaluk, M., 1992; Swanson, J.A., 1992;
Schroeder, D. N., 1992; Dziob, A.M., 1993; Kelly, R., 1994; Schwarzenbach, S. A. , 1996; Annas, J, 1996; Bickford,

[9] ; Mayhew, R., 1996; Smith, T.W., 1999; Schonsheck, J., 2000; Terchek, R. J., and Moore, D. K., 2000; Irrera, Arthur, J., 2003; E., 2005; Gibbs, P. and Angelites, P., 2008; Bryan, 2009; Tutuska, J., 2010; Biss, 2011; Brudney,

the friend "likened to one's self" (*N.E.*: IX.1166b.4), and the rarity of such friendships (*N.E.*: IX1171a.10). The moral form of civic friendship correlates even more closely to friendship of inequality, with only equality as the exception variable (*N.E.*: VIII.1162b.13).

Adolescence, which aligns with Aristotle's stage of education "from puberty to age 21" (*Politics*: VII.1336b37), is the time period when the youth transition from their last period of education to become active adult citizens. The last three years before age 21 are focused on cognitive skills, which readies them to "shar[e] in offices of the deliberative and judicial kind" (*Politics*: III.1275b22) and ensures that they are "able and willing to rule and be ruled with a view to attaining a way of life in keeping with goodness" (*Politics*: III.1283b27). Childhood habituation combines with adolescent cognitive skills development in a process of education aimed at readying the youth for practical wisdom and civic friendship.[14] As Aristotle advocated

2013; Lombardini, J., 2013; Cocking D., 2014; Cooper, K.S. and Miness, A., 2014; Giammusso, S., 2016; Hoipkemier, M., 2016; Anderson and Fowers, 2020, Kristjánsson, K., 2019, 2020, 2022.

[14] Note also the importance of music education. At the end of *The Politics*, Aristotle lingers on the value of music to help harmonize the soul (*Politics* VIII.5.1340b10). This reference to an education that harmonizes the soul through music correlates to preparing the youth for friendship in civic life, which depends on a spirit of "concord." Aristotle says: Friendship seems to hold states together, and lawgivers to care more for it than for justice; for concord seems

for a system of public education, these adolescents engage with teachers, peers, and older men in the *polis* through schools as they ready themselves for equality in civic life. The end goal of civic life is justice: "for justice is an ordering of the political association, and the virtue of justice consists in the determination of what is just" (*Politics*: I.1253a25). To determine what is just requires skill in deliberation (*Politics*: III.1275b13), and skill in deliberation requires practical wisdom (*N.E.*: VI.1141b.7). Friendship is the mechanism for such deliberation (Terchek, R.J. and Moore, D.K., 2000: 908-909; Bryan, B., 2009: 769). Hence, cultivating the art of deliberation is essential to adolescent growth in *phronesis* and civic friendship, skills which mentoring conversations support. When a youth freely chooses to develop a trusted relationship with a mentor, this older friend of inequality

helps prepare the youth for civic friendship by engaging in the kind of conversation and deliberation that prepares them for civic engagement.

To visualize the context for Aristotle's vision for educating the youth, look up any painting featuring the Lyceum, and you will see older and younger men clustered in diverse pairings or small groupings deep in conversation; this image is consistent with accounts of how Aristotle tutored the young Alexander the Great as well (Ladikos, A., 2010: 79). As one scholar notes, Aristotle emphasized "the ideal of informal education," which "epitomized that

'camaraderie' of pupil and teacher which lends itself best to the fellowship of keen minds" (Robb, F.C., 1943: 206). When we think of contemporary schools, we think of a more structured learning environment with a higher ratio of students to teachers in a classroom setting. But, again, context matters. Aristotle viewed education, particularly in the adolescent years, as a vital time period to ready young men to become citizens capable of deliberating well to promote a just society marked by civic friendship. Such one-on-one conversations in mentoring seem more

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to be something like friendship, and this they aim at most of all, and expel faction as their worst enemy (*N.E.* VIII.1.1155a).

ideally suited for the goals of character education, where young people experience ongoing conversations which help them reflect on their experiences and deliberate about what choices will foster flourishing and justice.[10]

The very nature of conversations between teacher-mentors and student-mentees, particularly in schools dedicated to character education missions, place the work of reflection and deliberation at the centerpiece of character formation. No doubt, in all friendships, even among peers, adolescents practice deliberation by offering opportunities for dialogue that promotes

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[10] See also how teacher-mentors can use discussion practices to promote courageous dialogue in youth, a skill vital to civility and community flourishing (Whitlock, B and Bohlin, K.E., 2021: Courageous Dialogue Toolkit; B Whitlock, Module 4).

reflection on emotions, choices, and visions of flourishing.[11][12] Yet those more advanced in practical wisdom -- friends of inequality -- have much to offer during this interval when teens are individuating from parents and preparing to claim their place in adult society.

The fact that an adolescent chooses a mentor, or chooses to engage in reflective conversations with a mentor, approximates civic friendship, by providing preliminary practice through a more mature dialogue partner to promote reflection and deliberation essential to civic life. If the origin of "Aristotle's pedagogical system of education and particularly moral education [was] largely to be attained through personal associations (Ladikos, A., 2010: 79), then a shift in character education research to an "informal" model through mentorship programs seems plausible.

**Toward a mentoring pedagogy for freedom: Aristotle's concept of potentiality**

I close by exploring the potential for a pedagogy for mentoring rooted in Aristotle's principle of potentiality. For Aristotle, inherent in the process of realizing one's potential is the *telos* to which that potentiality aims, drawing forth that potentiality into its actuality through actions that advance one toward the *telos* (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*: Theta.1050a). What is important to understand, for Aristotle, is that we have within us the potential to realize the fullness of our *telos*. Likewise, in *The Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle establishes that "by nature we first acquire the potentiality and later exhibit the activity." In close proximity to these statements, he references the role of experience or "we learn by doing" alongside the role of legislators, who "make citizens good by forming habits in them" and the "need of a teacher." (*N.E.*: II.1103b.1). Aristotle did not fixate on a contrast between a self-actualizing individual versus a person molded by the influence of legislators or teachers; in

[11] (Dziob, A.M., 1993: 782; Gibbs, P. and Angelites, P., 2008: 215; Bryan, 2009: 767; Bliss, 2011: 138; Cocking,
[12] : 86; Giammuso, S., 2016: 9; Hoipkemier, M., 2016: 49; Kristjánsson, 2019: 44, 2020: 136, 2022: 112)

fact, both actors, united toward the same worthwhile ends, cooperate in the actualization of a moral good that draws each toward the *telos* of a good and virtuous life (Collins, P.M., 1990: 76).

If a mentor views her work as drawing out student potential, she facilitates student reflection by practicing active listening skills to draw out a mentee's own developing insights about emotions and ideas and by using open-ended questions to prompt critical reflection and self-discovery. Moreover, by practicing care in developing a relationship of trust with a mentee, the mentor establishes a friendly foundation to support ongoing conversations. Such conversations about moral dilemmas provide ongoing practice to refine skills for *phronesis*. Moveover, the pattern of conversation which a mentee freely chooses to engage in with an experienced and trusted interlocutor -- *qua* friend of inequality -- provides practice for civic engagement as the adolescent advances toward equal citizenship in adult society mediated through free deliberation aimed at justice.

I am hopeful that this research encourages schools dedicated to character education to reexamine the value of one-on-one mentoring programs as essential to adolescent character education for growth in wisdom and civic friendship.

## Appendix A

*Case study that reveals benefits of mentor that related to performance virtues**

| *Student D* |
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| "I used to have a very fixed mindset in the belief that hard work equals success. [My mentor] helped me adopt a growth mindset by prioritizing learning over measured academic success (i.e. grades and GPA). This helped alleviate my performance anxiety towards test-taking. Additionally, my parents used to always tell me to simply "try my best." However, "best" is always a word that I have struggled with because to "high school" me, it seemed that one could always try harder. [My mentor] encouraged me to work smarter instead of harder. I learned to manage my time and schedule my work to complete tasks more efficiently.<br><br>In college, I have seen how hard work does not always translate into academic success, but I know when to stop studying because I know when I am just spinning my wheels/becoming burnt out. [My high school mentor] introduced me to a study that I think about often when I experience academic "unsuccess." There is a study where students in law school do poorly on the first exam, and the boys blame their poor grades on the fact that the test was hard and the girls question whether or not they are smart enough to be in law school. Now, when I perform badly, I remember this study, and I remember that I am still smart just because I get a few problems wrong. I also know that studying harder probably would not have changed my outcome on the test. [My mentor] helped me gain the self-awareness in my academic life to know when to quit studying and begin prioritizing sleeping, eating healthy, going outside, etc. These other acts of self-care and basic, good hygiene actually influence your performance on a test just as much as studying as hard as you can for as long as you can because if you are not taking care of yourself, how can you expect yourself to perform well? |
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*"personal traits that enable [people] to manage their lives effectively" (Jubilee Centre for Character Education & Virtues, 2017: 4).

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