Toward the Virtuous Mover: A Review of One Researcher's Efforts at Studying Character Education Through The Field of Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy

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Abstract

I joined the University of Memphis as an Assistant Professor of Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy in August 2021. Thereafter, I have sought to investigate the paradigm of character education through the lens of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics and under the gaze of the virtuous mover (e.g., the notion that people engaged in movement can become virtuous through meaningful engagement and experiences with physical activity and sport). Since then, I have written three conceptual manuscripts, conducted five empirical case studies, and began a series of school- and university-based intervention studies meant to disrupt the character deficiencies of youth and emerging adults with the aim of promoting human flourishing. The purpose of this presentation, therefore, is to summarize this research. A second objective, subsequently, is to acknowledge some possible philosophical, methodological, and pedagogical contributions of this research to the field of character education. To achieve this goal, I will start by reviewing a neo-Aristotelian interpretation of physical education (e.g., the virtuous mover) before outlining The Spectrum Model (e.g., a pedagogical model meant for human flourishing). Afterward, I will describe how five teachers attempted to cultivate character in school-based physical education settings (e.g., via a thematic approach, content-based approach, embedded approach, ethos-oriented approach, and model-based approach) before describing the factors influencing their character-related pedagogies of affect. Pedagogically, this research builds on the Jubilee Centre's notion of caught, taught, and sough character education and highlights how educators can and do, to some extent, create their own narratives surrounding moral education. Methodologically, this research responds to the lack of in-depth, empirical scholarship in the field and highlights the importance of building relationships with teachers and administrators when attempting to promote the moral education of youth and emerging adults. Philosophically, this research indicates that an Aristotelian philosophy of physical education and sport pedagogy can be successful and could potentially be used to disrupt the conceptual and technical minefield surrounding the affective domain of teaching and learning. Finally, suggestions in terms of possible future research linked to character and leadership development will be acknowledged.

Youth, defined generally across the globe as individuals aged 18 and younger, engage with all sorts of movement arenas during their adolescence for all sorts of reasons. While one could argue that informal arenas are the most influential to a person's overall physical literacy during their emerging or established adulthood stage, during the adolescence phase, one's experiences with formalized arenas can be equally (if not more) influential to their enthusiasm for and ability to become a physically literate person (Whitehead, 2017). Informal arenas, defined broadly as environments whereby one's motivation for engaging with movement is natural, not regulated, is not led by an "expert," and is performed without external motivating factors, might include, for example, a home environment where a young child is attempting to walk for the first time, a school playground where a group of children randomly come together to create, play, and regulate a never-before-seen game, or a pensioner partaking in an unfamiliar activity with which they have no prior experiences. Formal areas, defined loosely as spaces whereby one's engagement in movement is mandated or voluntarily chosen, is motivated by a combination of internal and external means and ends, is led by an individual with greater qualifications, is structured (in some way) around socially accepted knowledge about physical activity and sport, and is generally guided by a socially constructed vision, mission, and value system, can consist of, for example, school physical education, before-, during-, and after-school programs, recreation, leisure, and competitive youth sport settings, summer camps, collegiate and professional sport settings, among other environments. Depending on one's background and socialization, then, an individual's relationship with movement, physical activity, and sport, at least in terms of their rationale for participating, enthusiasm for learning, aspirations intended to be achieved, and the behaviors demonstrated on a day-to-day basis can differ significantly and influence how he or she uses (or not) this concept to support their engagement in the grandest game of them all, that is, the playing field of life![1] For brevity, only my formalized research is relevant to this presentation and manuscript.

From a policy perspective, school-based physical education (e.g., the subject whereby children are mandated to learn about, in, and through physical activity by a certified teacher) serves four primary functions in the following order of importance and is commonly (but not always) structured through a multi-activity, sport-as-technique-based approach (Kirk, 2010).[2]

1. First, to contribute to the industrial age of schooling in the hope of developing a strong society (e.g., to produce physically and mentally capable workers; Lawson, 2018).
2. Second, to contribute to academic achievement in areas of significant political importance by focusing on physical and cognitive development and maturation (e.g., STEM; MacPhail & Lawson, 2021).
3. Third, to contribute to the nation's ability to win major sporting events and competitions in the hope of cultivating a superior reputation and prestige (e.g., the Olympics; Grix, 2017).
4. Fourth, to contribute to the health and physical literacy of the nation in the hopes of supporting goals one through three, among other objectives (Kirk, 2010; Lawson, 2018).

Of course, not all goals are complimentary to one another and/or are prioritized equally by teachers, coaches, principals, and policymakers, all of whom read, interpret, and prioritize these objectives differently. Furthermore, not all objectives function in the same way, have been afforded equal histories and opportunities with which to develop, and/or have been developed

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[1] I take the concepts of "play," "movement," "physical activity" and "sport" to be different paradigms of physicalness, and believe formal arenas prioritize the latter ideals and informal arenas are more accommodating for the former (at least during the adolescent stage and until one has been socialized by formal arenas). For the sake of brevity, however, in the current paper, I use these terms interchangeably.

[2] A behavioristic, sport-based model of education whereby the teaching of sport-based technical skills, and cognitive tactics and strategies are of the utmost educational importance.

independently by stakeholders within the field without being molded by external stakeholders and mega-events positioned outside of the field's control (e.g., the World Wars, COVID-19, high-stakes testing).

In terms of moral aspirations, politicians have long argued and envisioned how before-, during-, and after-school sport programs (e.g., defined generally as the extended curriculum whereby children voluntarily choose and/or are required to opt-in to learn about, in, and through physical activity by high-performance coaches) have the potential to contribute to the education of the moral person and the moral functioning of society (Brodie, 2006). Indeed, it was because of such claims in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that private schools such as Rugby School and Eton College, among others, placed a significant emphasis on elite-level sport (and not physical literacy) in the ways they did (and still do) and is likely to have played a significant role in the development and widespread acceptance of the commonly stated phase "sport builds character".[3] Despite this longstanding effort, there appear to be few robust, moral educational policies or policy statutes across the globe intending to guide how movement practitioners based at modern schools (or otherwise) ought to contribute to the moral and ethical development of youth and emerging adults through these settings. [4]Additionally, despite the political left and right showing interest and support (generally) for teaching children morals and values in schools, albeit in divergent ways, policy developers have struggled to create laws and moral teaching standards based on theoretical, psychological, and empirical accounts of moral development and have instead favored the development of a set of rather narrow initiatives grounded in their own socialization and/or their sociological understanding of moral education, only.[5] In congruence with these initiatives, universities and teacher education institutions across the globe have mostly shifted away from being philosophical and ethical-oriented preparation programs toward models favoring teaching effectiveness (only) since the 1980s, which has promoted ethical by standing in schools and stunted the notion that the act of teaching is an inherently moral ideal (Linkona, 2009). This situation, of course, is much more precarious for youth and elite sport coaches, most of whom receive little to no formal educational experiences informing their knowledge of coaching effectiveness and are (mostly) required to rely on their socialization experiences in sport to inform their moral content and pedagogical content knowledge (and despite harboring societal pressures about using the power of sport for moral good). For these reasons, as well as many others, then, the moral domain in physical education and sport coaching is problematic and will remain so until this technical, conceptual, and semantic nightmare is taken more seriously.[6]

In response to such a predicament, since joining the University of Memphis in August 2021, I have endeavored to disrupt this problem by studying movement-oriented policy, theory, and practice through the lens of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics (see, e.g., Aristotle et al., 2009; Hursthouse, 2002; Kristjánsson, 2015) and under the gaze of the virtuous mover (e.g., the notion that people engaged in movement can become virtuous through meaningful engagement and experiences with physical activity and sport; Brunsdon & Walker, 2022; Brunsdon, 2023).

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[3] Types of schooling (e.g., public vs private) remain a significant point of contention in the movement world, with arenas facilitating completely different philosophies and visions for the subject which has strong implications for the development and maintenance of movement cultures across the globe.

[4] In the context of physical activity and sport, this has led to reliance on deontological interpretations of moral education (e.g., following rules and codes of conduct, only) and cookie-cutter approaches to teaching morality, which, when compared to our knowledge of teaching/coaching effectiveness, can be viewed as inadequate.

[5] It should be noted that politicians are likely to come from a private school background, have predominantly been socialized through elite sport models of movement education, and espouse philosophies of sport that are incompatible with the philosophies of and opportunities available to everyday people.

[6] See Brunsdon & Walker (2022) and Brunsdon (2023) where I have discussed this topic at length, but not to the point where I am satisfied with the critique about this paradigm of scholarship.

The purpose of this presentation and manuscript, therefore, is to review this effort, outline the main implications and areas of learning based on two years' worth of scholarship, and provide future directions for research on character and leadership development through an emphasis on movement. Specifically, I will now:

1. Review the aims and rationale of my research program and discuss the potential intended outcomes associated with this agenda,
2. Synthesize my philosophical and conceptual interpretations and understanding of virtue ethical accounts of movement, movement education, and movement culture,
3. Synthesize my empirical research in terms of purpose and rationale, methodological structure, and main findings from August 2021 onwards, and
4. Discuss some possible philosophical, methodological, and pedagogical implications for teaching and research on character and leadership development. [7]

Purpose, Rationale, and Aspirations

The aims and intended learning aspirations of my research program, generally, are as follows. All are linked, act to reinforce and undermine each other, and are tied to my vision about how to best advocate for the promotion of human flourishing as the aim of education.

First, despite there being a significant number of philosophical manuscripts and books describing the "inherent relationship" between movement, physical activity, and sport to the character development of youth, emerging adults, and established adults, be it from the lens of philosophers of sport, current or former elite athletes, managers or coaches, or professors of (sport) pedagogy, there would appear to be a lack of eudaimonist, virtue ethical accounts of sport. Moreover, while Aristotelian, non-Aristotelian, and neo-Aristotelian interpretations of movement are present in the philosophical literature (see, e.g., Jones, 2005, 2008; McNamee, 2008, Theodiulides & Armour, 2001), in my opinion, there has yet to be a scholar that has outlined a complete, accurate, and in-depth account of how movement culture, movement educators, and movement practice, among other movement-related features, can be structured in such a way that it fosters human flourishing. This, of course, is problematic because most modern educational circles promoting the ideal of human flourishing oftentimes ground their arguments in virtue ethical accounts of well-being. Therefore, given the likelihood that youth in schools (or otherwise) are required to engage with all sorts of formalized movement arenas during their upbringing, my first objective has been to create and develop a neo-Aristotelian interpretation of movement education with which to guide the field's agency. For it is essential we develop a robust but flexible account of this topic so that those involved in movement arenas can capture and receive what I believe to be the "true" potential of the subject. Furthermore, by developing a shared technical culture toward this topic (Lortie, 1975), politicians might be better equipped to develop (moral) educational policies, teachers and coaches might be better informed and prepared to employ practices that promote human goodness, and youth might become better situated to tackle (and flourish) within the world in front of them.

Second, again, notwithstanding the amount of philosophical and conceptual literature surrounding this topic, to date, the empirical evidence presently available with which to support many (not all) philosophers' conceptualizations of movement from a holistic perspective, remains underdeveloped and is weak when compared to other paradigms of scholarship.[8] Worse so, there is simply not enough diversity of research in terms of paradigms of scholarship

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[7] I welcome comments, questions, and feedback from the listeners and readers that expand this (brief) review.

[8] While I recognize the importance and value of philosophical manuscripts, and acknowledge that additional conceptualizations are needed, scholars must be willing to distance themselves (temporarily) from the ivory tower to confirm their claims and if we are to develop a more realistic and nuanced account of this paradigm.

and scholarly focus to confirm many philosophical arguments of sport outside of the anecdotal accounts provided by current or former elite athletes, managers, and coaches who are too close to this space and/or philosophers of sport who are too far away from it.[9] Acting to complicate things further, is a lack of consistent, data-based studies employing in-depth methods as informed by a robust ethical theory (e.g., virtue ethics) as opposed to one's prior socialization experiences and/or anecdotal understanding of the world. Whilst I recognize that this is no fault of their own and that people of all kinds are constrained to their positions (e.g., philosophers do conceptual work by remaining in the ivory tower, pedagogues interpret and apply conceptual work by remaining in the classroom, psychologists test their own and others' conceptualization by remaining in the lab, and so on), if we don't talk to each other or develop our work from multiple perspectives, how are we to develop a robust, flourishing-oriented philosophy of movement education?[10] Therefore, my second objective has been to remain a "healthy skeptic" of the claim that "[movement] builds character" (as opposed to a "true believer") despite my closeness to the paradigm as a teacher/coach educator and to develop a research profile that explores this topic (over a sustained period) from the perspectives of philosophy, educational policy, theory, and practice. Furthermore, compared to the empirical research presently available, I have generally aspired to employ non-traditional, emerging, and novel methods to guide my investigations. In this way, I hope to align the various kinds of literature together to enhance the (moral) role and purpose of movement culture and develop a database that informs flourishing-oriented teaching and learning.

Third, if it is true that the act of teaching is an inherently moral ideal and that schools are institutions that can and do promote the human condition, then we must develop a robust, empirical account of what moral education is and looks like within the context of movement education and through the lens of both educators and pupils. Not to be confused with research on human development (e.g., one's nature, identity, or personality) and character development (e.g., the psychological processes by which one's nature, identity, or personality is shaped and later developed), which is stable, at present, there remains a dearth of conceptual and technical clarity and guidance surrounding moral and character pedagogies outside of series of eclectic, deontological approaches that, when compared to our knowledge of teaching effectiveness, could be considered as elementary pedagogy. [11] Therefore, my third objective has been to unpack this pedagogical dilemma and to better frame this paradigm in ways that would be helpful to all kinds of practitioners, be they movement-oriented or not. For if it is true that the physical health and mental well-being of youth and emerging adults are at an all-time low (Kirk, 2020), then we must create a pedagogical database that helps teachers tackle precarity and instead promote human flourishing (Kristjánsson, 2015). This research might also act to raise the standard of moral education in school (generally) and disrupt policymakers' efforts to remove health-related curricular time in favor of topical, short-term initiatives. For one's knowledge of math or science, among other topics, will only go so far as their body will take them!

Fourth, given the importance placed on movement culture across the globe and that millions (if not billions) of people are engaged in some sort of formalized movement practice and community on a daily basis, my fourth objective has been to conduct scholarship that helps equip those who lead, manage, and facilitate movement education opportunities and

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[9] Most people engaged with the socially constructed paradigm and (predominantly westernized) ideal of sport are not "elite." Therefore, can we claim to understand this paradigm if we're predominantly focused on the top 1%?

[10] In my opinion, scholars must be dynamic and pursue scholarship within multiple paradigms and from various perspectives if they are to make a genuine difference.

[11] Not helping this cause, is that there are roughly 400 or so "active" scholars of sport pedagogy, only, and that only a handful of them are interested in the moral domain.

experiences with the knowledge, skills, and tools with which to coach for human flourishing. In conjunction with my previous critiques, the field of coaching, coach education, and sport pedagogy would appear to be in an even greater predicament and sense of precarity than the fields of physical education and teacher education, as it's a smaller profession with even fewer practitioners and researchers, has less access to cutting-edge training and scholarship (at every level), and (typically) receives minimal, evidence-based guidance from politicians with which to guide its collective agency. Making matters worse, sporting institutions are predominantly viewed as private and individualistic entities that are regulated (or not) by national governing bodies (e.g., bigger private institutions), and whereby its primary motivation is to exclusively pursue rudimentary forms of success (e.g., coaching for the pursuit of gold medals and world championships) as opposed to initiatives that would advance the overall human condition (e.g., coaching to promote objective and subjective well-being). Broadly speaking, by conducting scholarship in this area, be it from a philosophical, methodological, or pedagogical perspective, the idea of coaching for human flourishing through sport might become a more practical reality and assist those who place sport at the heart of their existence. More directly, by conducting research that recognizes the potential of coaching for human flourishing in specific sporting communities and across divergent sporting cultures, an emphasis on promoting coaches' knowledge and understanding of how to cultivate character using best practices is more likely to contribute toward the flourishing of youth in more meaningful ways than is currently present. To that end, these four objectives have guided my agency since 2021 and are, in my opinion, the next and most important frontiers for research on character education.

Philosophical and Conceptual Research

Drawing from a eudaimonist, virtue ethical account of education, my reading and interpretation of this phenomenon have led me to develop four initial position statements (Brunsdon, 2022, 2023; Brunsdon & Walker, 2022). Of course, my perspectives about the topic have changed, shifted, and developed since first encountering this paradigm in 2019, and I acknowledge that additional position statements are needed to broaden this perspective.[12]

Moral Pedagogy (Brunsdon and Walker, 2022)

My first position statement is that moral and character pedagogies come in all shapes and sizes and that in the movement education space, they can be classified (broadly) into either memetic, progressive, or transformative categories. In layman's terms, memetic pedagogies are teacher-centered approaches that share characteristics with direct teaching styles (only), are primarily presented in such a way that helps to promote mastery of subject matter, and are grounded in theories of behavioral psychology. Progressive pedagogies are both teacher- and student-centered approaches that share characteristics with both direct and indirect teaching styles, are structured in ways that promote and rely on a shared community of knowledge generated by the teacher and pupil, and are inspired by a set of behavioral and social constructivist theories of learning. Transformative pedagogies are student-centered approaches that share features and characteristics with indirect teaching styles (only), are presented in such a way that requires the learner to take control of all educational processes, and are motivated by critical and transformative theories of learning.

Furthermore, it can be generally assumed that memetic approaches are theoretically and structurally more inclined to foster performative virtues developing based on the educator's moral compass, while progressive and transformative practices are more likely (but not always)

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[12] Much of my early thinking was shaped by the experience and mentorship I received as a Graduate Teaching Assistant and Graduate Fellow in the Department of Kinesiology and Centre for the Study of Ethical Development at the University of Alabama.

to facilitate a broader education in the virtues because of their theoretical foundation and due to pupil's having an equal or absolute amount of input into their experience. Moreover, an Aristotelian would suggest that habituating learners from being dependent to independent learners is essential for moral and character development and that teachers and coaches ought to be shifting their practice along this spectrum in the hopes of preparing youth to live a full and flourishing life following developmentally appropriate procedures. For a child that engages in transformative, moral educational experiences and opportunities before they are skilled enough and developmentally prepared for such a situation can have disastrous repercussions. Unfortunately, given the current nature and status of the discipline and the significant obstacles faced by movement practitioners across the globe (Lawson, 2018), movement pedagogies and movement education institutions are more likely to be custodial and memetic in nature, aren't likely to be aligned with evidence-based practices, and, in my opinion, are falling short of their aspirations to promote the flourishing of human goodness at the grassroots level.

Major Critiques of Contemporary Practices (Brunsdon, 2022)

My second position statement is that contemporary practices surrounding moral and character education in the fields of physical education and sport coaching remain (broadly) inadequate and anticlimactic. Specifically, I believe there are five significant critiques of practices on the ground that must be addressed if the field is to disrupt and overcome this conceptual, technical, and semantic minefield. First and second, in line with the Jubilee Centre's framework, is the field's overreliance on caught character education practices as opposed to taught and sought practices, as well as a lack of emphasis on moral, civic, and intellectual virtues compared to performance virtues. Third, there is a disproportionate focus on résumé virtues (e.g., occupation-related virtues) as opposed to eulogy virtues (e.g., deeply personal virtues linked to an individual's identity). Fourth, the moral ideas and aspirations of the field are predominantly placed on the periphery of the curriculum, which leads to a lack of direct, intentional, and meaningful teaching of character education in schools. Fifth, there is typically an absence of empirical, theoretical, and philosophical guidance being used to inform moral and character pedagogies in the gym, on the playing field, and in other areas. Subsequently, these critiques have guided my beliefs about effective moral pedagogies in physical education and what to avoid should I find myself developing human flourishing-oriented curricula. For failing to meaningfully address even the most elementary of positions could forever impact the lives of youth and, thus, their aspirations for pursuing a healthy, active, and good life.

From Strategies to Models (Brunsdon, 2023b)

My third position statement is that the fields of moral and character education would be better suited if it shifted from a strategy-based approach (e.g., an approach whereby we rely on very specific methods or activities of teaching) toward a model or models-based approach (e.g., an approach whereby one or multiple thematic-like approaches to teaching are used). Moreover, while I am highly complementary of scholars and practitioners in the general education space who have contributed to the field's pedagogical content knowledge and knowledge of teaching effectiveness (see, e.g., Brant et al., 2022), I believe that moving toward a more fluid, holistic, and structural model of moral education would afford schools, teachers, and coaches with the means to (holistically) move away from musical chair curricula, multi-activity structures, and memetic pedagogies and advance the flourishing of human goodness.[13]

A pedagogical model refers to a theoretical and blueprinted approach to teaching and learning that requires the educator to teach in a particular way and the pupil to learn in a

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[13] I recognize the semantic minefield at play here, so I'm viewing this perspective through the lens and language favored by the pedagogical literature.

particular way (Casey & Kirk, 2021). Exemplary models found in the fields of physical education and youth sport coaching include, for example, the multi-activity approach, the teaching games for understanding approach, cooperative learning, the sport education model, the teaching for personal and social responsibility model, adventure education, and purposeful negotiation, among others (Casey & Kirk, 2021; Metzler & Colquitt, 2022). Collectively, these approaches serve to guide one's agency as a pedagogue and are intended to help the educator and pupil align their agency and actions to suit their specific needs and objectives. Moreover, all models are believed to possess the following:

1. A main idea (e.g., the aim of the model)
2. A series of critical elements (e.g., the defining features of the model)
3. A series of intended learning aspirations (e.g., the aspirations hoped to be achieved)
4. A pedagogical foundation (e.g., aligning teaching, learning, curriculum, and assessment)

Given this reality and that there would appear to be few (if any) pedagogical models dedicated to human flourishing, I aspired to create a model that promotes human flourishing by merging a conceptual pedagogical theory (Spectrum Theory; Mosston & Ashworth, 2008) with the core components of virtue ethics (See Table 1; and Figure 1).[14]

Table 1. The main ideas, critical elements, and learning aspirations of The Spectrum Model

Main Ideas	Critical Elements	Intended Learning Aspirations
Eudaimonia	Where appropriate, decision-making is shared between teachers and pupils across the landmark styles	People have developed a more sophisticated sense of and commitment to their moral purpose in life
		People have become to honour, with reliability, a range of educational ideas and human abilities along the cognitive, social, physical, emotional and ethical developmental channels
	Flourishing friendships	Where appropriate, people have meaningfully developed their capacity for creating and maintaining flourishing friendships
Phronesis		Where appropriate, people have meaningfully developed their personal, virtuous and phronetic character
	Virtue and character	Where appropriate, pupils have shifted from being reproductive to productive learners
		Where appropriate, teachers have shifted from using reproductive to productive teaching styles

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[14] Table 1 and Figure 1 come from Brunsdon (2023b).
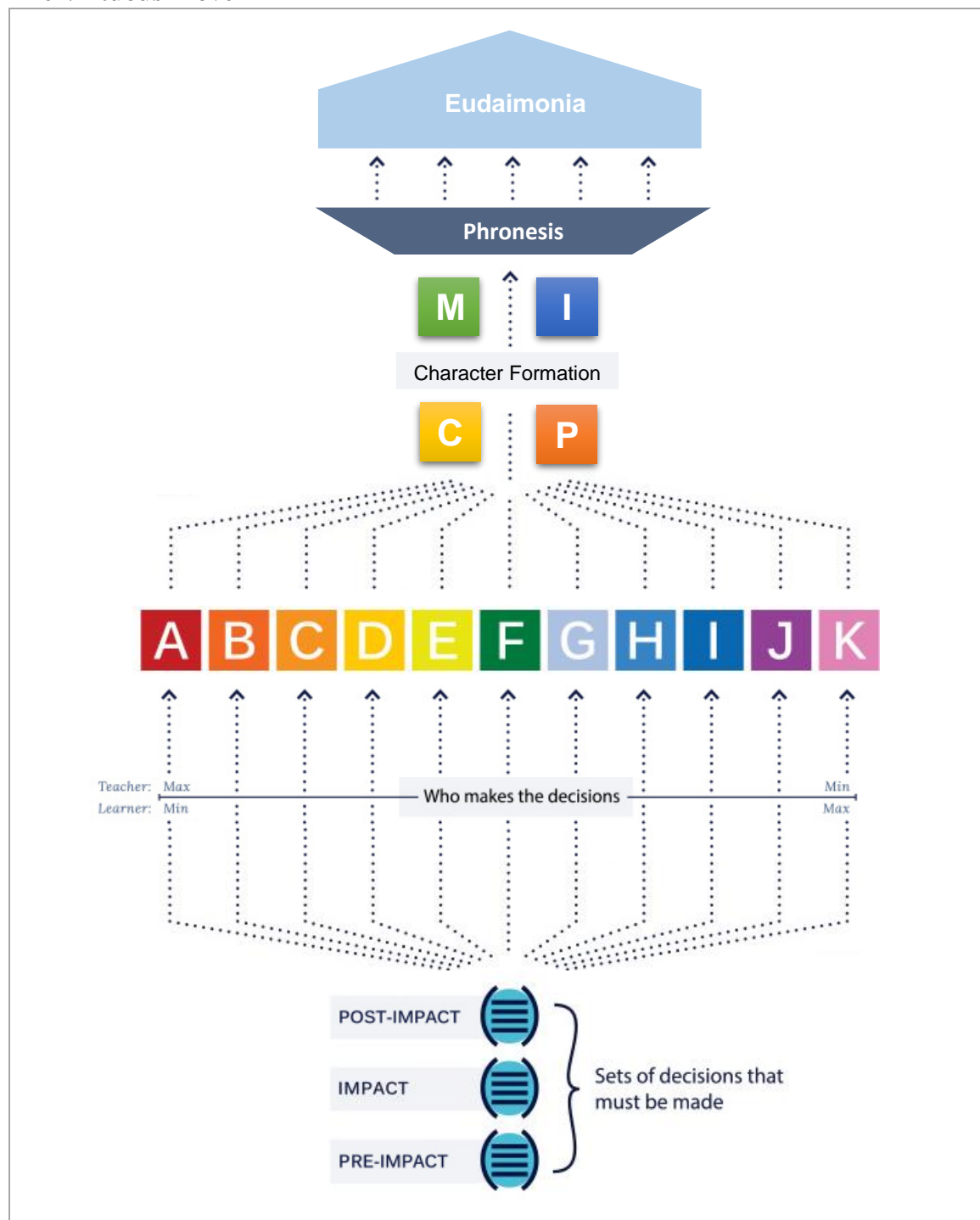
The Virtuous Mover

Figure 1. The Spectrum Model.

Note: The letters A-K in the middle of the figure refer to specific, identifiable and measurable teaching styles ranging from direct to indirect teaching and learning. The letters M, I, P, and C refer to the four domains of virtue. [15]

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[15] See Mosston & Ashworth (2008) to learn more about The Spectrum of Teaching Styles. Moreover, The Spectrum is a conceptual pedagogical framework intended to outline and describe the kinds of "pedagogy" (e.g., teaching, learning, assessment, and curriculum) that ought to occur within a classroom, and to be performed alongside the moral activities and strategies described by other teacher-scholars.

My final position statement is that movement practitioners interested in cultivating character in a (neo) Aristotelian sense ought to converge on the umbrella phrase and concept of The Virtuous Mover (e.g., the notion that people engaged in all kinds of movement can become fully virtuous through meaningful engagement in and experiences with physical activity and sport; Brunsdon, 2023; Brunsdon & Walker, 2022). In essence, the virtuous mover is an individual who possesses a firm understanding of what constitutes as (non)moral agency in all movement spaces, demonstrates the physical skill set and ability to perform virtuous action and to disrupt vicious behavior consistently across multiple types of movement cultures, and aspires to engage with others and the arena itself in ways that foster a sense of (human) balance. Not to be confused with the concept of the virtuous sportsperson, which I identify to be a lower-level concept, for it is not or might not be related to all movement areas, but explicitly to one's knowledge, ability, and motivation within one specific sport or type of activity, only. Indeed, the idea is that virtuous sportspeople, irrespective of their level of morality within one sport or type of activity, he/she cannot be considered truly moral if their actions aren't transferable to other arenas (in general), do not relate to other spaces within the same paradigm of human activity (e.g., other invasion games, racket sports), or are not transferable circles outside of this paradigm (e.g., beyond sport). In this way, only through meaningfully habituating themselves in a range of (in)formal movement arenas and movement education opportunities, and pursuing moral growth across the knowledge, skill, and motivational channels in an effort to find balance between their pursuit of pleasure, knowledge, and happiness can one be truly considered as a virtuous mover. Understood in these ways, then, the greater the pursuit of moral agency through movement, physical activity, and sport, the more likely one will be able to develop the kind of character, identity, and knowledge needed to flourish both as a mover, and more importantly, as an established, fully developed, good person.[16]

Empirical Research

This section will begin with a description of my research and a review of its main findings. I will then describe my ongoing research projects and review the rationale behind this work.

Completed Research

Guided by a case study design, five research studies sought to describe how an individual teacher employed character education in school physical education.[17] Specifically, the research questions guiding this work included:

1. What organizational structure, methods, and content did [insert teacher's name] use to teach character education in physical education?
2. What factors influenced their ability to teach character education in schools?

A third research question was also of interest but was not focused on or reported in any of the manuscripts. This is because, at this point, I believed it to be more appropriate and important to outline what character education is from a conceptual, technical, and practical standpoint, as well as how it can be employed (effectively) in movement circles before describing any sort of possible impact it had (or didn't have) on student development.[18]

3. What impact (if any) has the teacher's emphasis on character education in physical education have on student learning and progress across the different domains of learning?

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[16] See Brunsdon (2023a) for a more developed (but incomplete) account of this concept.
[17] I had originally planned to discuss a sixth study, however, I then concluded that "less is more."
[18] Data were measured through the lens of virtue literacy and will be published at another time.

One project was based at the elementary level, while two projects were completed at the middle and all-through school levels, respectively (See Table 2 for a condensed overview). The participants were located in the Mid-South region of the United States, were invited to participate because of their interest in teaching moral and character education, and were given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

Elementary School (K-5)

- o Paris @ Flourishville Elementary: 48 lessons (two 5th grade classes)

Middle School (6-8)

- o Joseph @ Flourishville Middle School: 99 lessons (one 6th, 7[th,] and mixed grade class)
- o Jon @ Ascend Academy: 18 lessons (one 7th grade class)

All-Through School (K-12)

- o Larry & Sarah @ Fort Sophia: 72 lessons (one 4th, 7[th,] and 9th grade class)
- o Freddie @ Fort Philia: 28 lessons (one 5th, 7th, and 9th grade class)

Methodologically, these studies employed an average of eight, interpretive techniques and were analyzed through a general, five-phase thematic analysis:

1. Two formal, semi-structured interviews at the beginning and end of the study,
2. Multiple, open-ended informal interviews throughout the study,
3. Participant observations (all lessons [if possible]),
4. The supplementation of teaching film (all lessons),
5. Field notes (initially during physical observations, and again when reviewing the film),
6. The supplementation of documents and artifacts (polity and pedagogy data),
7. Weekly critical reflection reports (guided by the research questions), and
8. Maintaining a reflective journal (flexible and based on the participant's account).

Collectively, this research yielded three main findings.

Firstly, there is now a "small" amount of ethnographic evidence suggesting that teachers read, interpret, and implement character education differently. Moreover, despite being given the same guiding framework and interpretation of the theory, each teacher created their own narrative of character education that aligned with their philosophy, the needs of their students, and the school context. Indeed, the list and definitions of the approaches employed included:

1. *Paris: Content-Based Approach*
   - o E.g., an approach whereby the teaching of character was grounded in and inspired by the subject matter of the discipline, only.
2. *Joseph: Thematic Approach*
   - o E.g., an approach whereby the content of one or more areas (i.e., physical education and moral education) was grouped in a way that created one or multiple topics of teaching.
3. *Jon: Embedded Approach*
   - o E.g., an approach whereby the teaching of character was integrated into an already established model that was not intentionally designed to promote human flourishing.
4. *Larry & Sarah: Ethos-Oriented Approach*
   - o E.g., an approach whereby the teaching of character was grounded in and inspired by the ethos, mission, and value system of the school.
5. *Freddie: Model-Based Approach*
   - o E.g., an approach whereby the teaching of character was grounded in a model that was intentionally designed to promote human flourishing in the fullest sense of the word.

Table 2.

Overview of Empirical Research

Study ID	Author Information	School Level	Approach	Number of Lessons	Psychomotor Content	Summary of Character Content and Pedagogy
1	Brunsdon (in press)	Elementary (two 5th grade classes)	Content-Based Approach	48	Jump Rope, Parachute Activities, & Rock Climbing	Paris taught 20 virtues that were the most important to the three, elementary content areas.
2	Brunsdon (2023)	Middle School (one 6th, 7th, and mixed grade class)	Thematic Approach	99	Handball & Ultimate Frisbee	Joseph taught 28 virtues through five topics of learning that were essential for his students.
3	Brunsdon (in progress [analysis])	Middle School (one 7th grade class)	Embedded Approach	18	Archery	Jon taught 16 virtues through a season-like format.
4	Brunsdon & Layne (in progress [writing])	All-Through School (one 3rd, 7th, and 8th grade class)	Ethos-Oriented Approach	72	Soccer	Larry and Sarah taught 6 virtues that were significant to their school ethos.
5	Brunsdon et al., (in review)	All-Through School (one 5th, 7th, and 9th grade class)	Model-based Approach	28	Tchoukball	Freddie taught 6 virtues that were foundational to moral education.

Note: Studies 3 and 4 are intended to be submitted to journals in spring 2024.

Secondly, several factors proceeded to influence the teachers' ability to employ character education in the context of physical education. Positive factors included having school and administrative support, teacher and curricular autonomy, high levels of teacher phronesis, and curricular flexibility. Negative and unsupportive factors were generally linked to the level of complexity and demands associated with delivering moral content knowledge and pedagogy, the political climate surrounding education in the teacher's region, teacher isolation, and having limited formal educational experiences related to the moral domain before becoming a qualified teacher. Despite this, however, it appeared that their experiences in promoting moral and character education in schools and physical education settings were largely positive and that more factors supported their efforts as opposed to hindering them.[19] Thirdly, despite all possessing the viewpoint that the act of teaching is an inherently moral practice, none of the participants recalled experiencing any significant, prior educative experiences in the moral domain of teaching and learning. Subsequently, this led them to rely on their socialization experiences before and immediately during their formal careers as teachers, which, in some ways, can be viewed as problematic. Moreover, this also led teachers to employ various coping strategies with which to compensate for this lack of training, including relying on the school's moral framework (only), seeking out support and mentorship from experienced colleagues and administrative staff, and relying significantly on external frameworks for moral education, among other (in)formal methods. Additionally, this finding reinforced the importance of developing conceptual and theoretical frameworks for educators to follow and use at their discretion as best as they are able and in ways that are appropriate for their school community.[20]

On-Going Research

Having completed these projects and relayed the findings and implications to the community and administrative stakeholders, I was asked to continue this work in ways that were (even) more aligned with the goals and aspirations of each school community. More specifically, while I was very clear that by no means did I want to pressure the schools to continue this work if they did not believe in the project, I was overjoyed to hear that these communities wanted to continue this work and espoused a vision that, at present, I hadn't yet developed. Therefore, instead of pursuing this research for the intentions described above, the research described below also became a "true" service project (Katsinas, 1996), meaning that the schools themselves developed and led the implementation of this work more independently, which led me to act in a more informal capacity and like that of an advisor and researcher, only. Subsequently, here are four examples of my current research in terms of service task (e.g., the aim of the project) and my scholarly agency (e.g., my responsibility within this service project).

Project 1: Character & Leadership Extended Learning Program

Service Task: To create a movement-based extended learning program (upper elementary level) intended to help students transition from elementary to middle school.

Scholarly Agency: Design a physical activity-based character & leadership education program for one elementary school and train two part-time teachers on how to implement the program independently and without external support from university stakeholders.

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[19] Despite reading, interpreting, and employing character education differently, the type of approach, itself, didn't appear to impact or change the kinds of barriers and facilitators teachers experienced.

[20] The positive impact of the Jubilee Centre's framework on the participants' understanding of character education in terms of what it is, what it aspires to do, and how it should be understood from a theoretical standpoint cannot be understated. Moreover, for all educational subdisciplines, I encourage teacher-scholars to provide a subject-specific interpretation of the theory/framework to further advance practitioner agency.

Project 2: Elective Course & Intervention Course

Service Task: (1) To create an elective course that focuses on teaching the content of human flourishing through movement-based content. (2) To create an intervention course that specifically disrupts the character deficiencies of a group of hand-selected students who are not presently working toward their potential in school and who need more "hands-on mentorship."

Scholarly Agency: Design, support, and oversee the implementation of two movement-based courses focused on promoting the education for human flourishing, and to prepare and train two educators to implement and take ownership of the courses during one academic year.

Project 3: Coaching with Character Project

Service Task: To help develop a technical culture of coaching education among all the middle and high school sports coaches at one all-through school (which, at present, doesn't exist).

Scholarly Agency: To complete a qualitative case study that investigates the coaches' coaching philosophy and then design a professional development plan meant to develop a robust and shared technical culture toward (moral) coaching education.

Project 4: Student-Athlete Mental Health and Well-Being Course

Service Task: To promote the health and well-being education of school- and university-based student-athletes in the Memphis community.

Scholarly Agency: Design, teach, and evaluate an undergraduate course with a mental health and psychology professor that is intended to promote a virtue ethical account of student-athlete mental health and well-being during one academic semester.

Implications

Multiple implications can be drawn from this research. In acknowledging that this is only the beginning of my scholarly career and that I'm only concerned with the findings of five studies, only a handful of implications will be discussed at this time.

Philosophy

The most important implication, from a philosophical standpoint, is that a eudaimonist, virtue ethical account of physical education is promising and could, if structured conscientiously, provide a better direction for sport development for youth and emerging adults when compared to either the elite sport model or the health/physical literacy model of physical education, only. This, in part, could be due to the broadness of this philosophy, and based on the perspective that performative goals such as winning competitions and/or developing one's physical and healthy prowess can be encapsulated within this philosophy (albeit in more coordinated ways than is currently present). Secondly, if movement circles and movement practitioners are to capture the "inherent" power of physical activity and sport and to achieve its longstanding vision for educating the next generation of (moral) leaders, then it is essential that we develop a robust, conceptual account of what a leader is, looks like, does, and does not do within and across movement cultures from a neo-Aristotelian perspective if we are to promote this moral ideal (effectively) in schools. This is important because at present, and to the best of my knowledge, there has yet to be a philosophical or professional consensus about what that is and what it ought to look like within the movement space without being compared to ablest and elite sport models, only. Furthermore, it is especially important that we study this paradigm critically because even though a person might be engaged in elite-level sport and/or be based

in an elite and competitive sporting culture, this doesn't necessarily mean they are flourishing and/or demonstrating leadership qualities that are becoming of moral ideals. For there are countless instances where performance-enhancing vices dominate one's identity during their professional career and are oftentimes used to take advantage on the playfield but act to disrupt their performance at the personal level. Additionally, there are also too many instances whereby former professional athletes indicate objective and subjective accounts of human floundering and thus, reinforce the importance of developing a critical perspective toward what character and leadership qualities student-athletes and professional athletes ought to cultivate to flourish both during and beyond their athletic careers.

Methodology

From a methodological standpoint, this research provides evidence that conducting in-depth, interpretive research can be an effective way to disrupt the conceptual and technical challenges surrounding movement-oriented character education. [21]Moreover, although this research is, and remains very challenging to conduct and complete, especially for a single and isolated scholar, I believe it is nevertheless necessary for the fields of character and leadership education to work with all kinds of practitioners as meaningfully as possible with the aim of yielding a more nuanced insight into the topic. Furthermore, by gradually shifting away from positivist-like methodologies employing only a single set of techniques, such as surveys and questionnaires, only, we might better equip teachers with the knowledge of how to become ethical agents (as opposed to ethical bystanders), develop a more comprehensive scholarly account about what this looks like from a theoretical perspective, and ultimately benefit young people's experiences in schools. Moreover, through conducting this kind of research with developing and established leaders in sport, and with a (neo) Aristotelian interpretation of leadership development in mind, we might be able to identify the kinds of leadership presently being developed (or not) in movement arenas, the kinds of participation styles that emerging leaders embody (or don't) within or outside of movement areas, and how one's desire to become a leader (or not) influences their ability to achieve the various goals set forth by themselves, their teachers or coaches, as well as schooling or sporting institutions. Additionally, given that prior research on leadership in movement, physical activity, and sport has oftentimes relied on the accounts of elite sport performers, coaches, and managers and not those who engage with movement for various other purposes, a more developed and nuanced account of leadership education at the grassroots level would be helpful to our understanding of how (in)formal movement arenas contribute and/or inhibit the development of a flourishing society. In this way, the idea about the moral educator and leader being a precarious reality might be reduced, and the idea about developing a eudaimonist, virtue ethical account of character and leadership education through movement, physical activity, and sport might be better realized.

Pedagogy

From a pedagogical standpoint, a main implication of this research program is that while multiple readings and interpretations of character education existed, the main features of virtues ethics (e.g., virtue, character, phronesis, and flourishing) acted as a central thread that united them together, which, to me, could be used to form a foundation of knowledge. Moreover, when viewed from a thousand-foot perspective (as opposed to a focused, hundred-foot perspective), the approaches share many similarities and can, if read together, be used to guide

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[21] I employed an average of seven more qualitative techniques than the average study in the field. Moreover, and based on the published research presently available, I am the first scholar since the 1930s to have complete one or multiple, ethnography-like studies within the field of physical education and with a robust theory in hand.

pre-service teacher development. Additionally, there are now five in-depth accounts of "taught" character education pedagogies that could guide in-service teachers from employing "caught" and "sought" practices to embodying a set of "taught" practices, more commonly. Furthermore, when considering how to assess moral growth, in addition to evaluating general learning and progress in schools, a second implication is that moral learning might be better collected by using assessment tools and strategies that are congruent with the four domains of learning (e.g., psychomotor, cognitive, affective, and social learning) as opposed to an elective set of assessments that are specifically aligned to the theory of virtue ethics and/or high-stakes testing requirements. Moreover, given that all subjects contribute to learning within and across these domains of learning, albeit in various ways and at different intensities, teachers, teacher educators, and scholars might be able to develop a more straightforward technical language and culture about how to best measure their teaching of character and leadership traits and subsequently direct students toward pursuing a flourishing life. Furthermore, if we are to obtain a genuine and authentic database that depicts the "true" moral status of youth and adults in terms of their virtue literacy, then academics cannot (and should not) solely rely on their scholarly understanding and interpretation of assessment measures and instead seek to collaborate with as many different stakeholders as possible, and especially those located in the trenches and with which to support the development of measures. For I have had much difficulty with various lab-tested measures that bear little to no fruit when employed by everyday teachers and with real-world children. A straightforward solution to this problem, therefore, might consist of creating, facilitating, and supporting initiative-driven communities of practice that provide a space for various types of stakeholders, be they teachers, psychologists, philosophers, and politicians, and whereby various educational initiatives acting to influence the flourishing of the community are discussed and addressed. In this way, the approaches, documents, and resources being promoted employed by schools or otherwise, as well as developed and promoted by university and/or non-university-based establishments might become more useful and impactful to those interested in using them.

Final Comments

As a pedagogue and social scientist who has received relatively little "formal training" in the philosophical and psychological sciences when compared to the pedagogical sciences, it should be stated that I am generally happy with the aims and purpose I set out to achieve since 2021 and look at the implications of this philosophical, methodological, and pedagogical research positively. Of course, much more work is still to be done if I am to achieve my four overarching objectives, which, I've no doubt will consume much of my time as an educator and aspiring scholar of human flourishing. To that end, I hope this research is informative, helps to guide future practice and research on character and leadership education through the complicated paradigms of movement, physical activity, and sport, among other arenas, and contributes to our knowledge of what it means to be a virtuous mover and person in the modern era.

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