



Lead for Life: Cultivating Character Leadership with Undergraduates at a University in Asia

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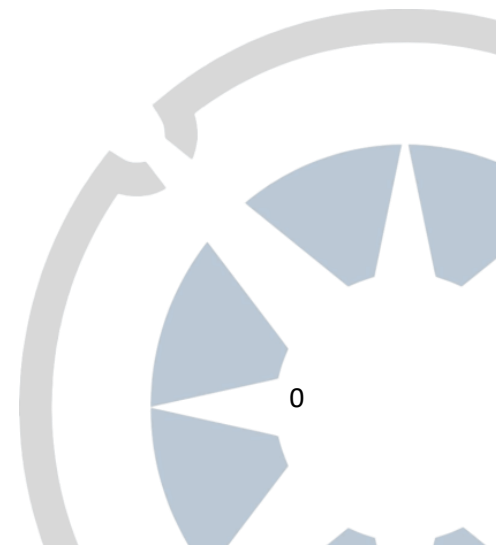
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Lead for Life:

Cultivating Character Leadership with Undergraduates at a University in Asia

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Abstract: *Globally there is a growing interest in how to cultivate character leadership in tertiary education settings. In 2021, the University of Hong Kong (HKU) inaugurated its character leadership program entitled Lead for Life (LAL). Lead for Life is a four-year, transformational journey designed to equip students with the character and skills to build flourishing communities. The program includes over 500 undergraduate students and almost 100 mentors. This paper provides a high-level case study of Lead for Life, while making a case for the viability of large-scale character leadership programs. It discusses LAL's strategic design, distinctive features and introduces its twin aspirations of being replicable and sustainable. The paper also presents some of the lessons learned in a recent review of the program.*

Introduction

Globally there has been increasing interest in character or virtuous leadership as partly evidenced by the choice of theme and the oversubscription of this conference. Harvard, Oxford, Wake Forest, Baylor, Ivey Business school, just to name a few, all have character leadership programs, some of which are represented at this *Virtuous Leadership and Character* conference. These programs vary in scale, duration, content, and composition – some aimed at undergraduates, others at graduate students and still others open to the public at large. In 2021, the University of Hong Kong (HKU) inaugurated its character leadership program entitled Lead for Life (LAL). This paper presents a high-level overview of Lead for Life, first describing what it is, and then discussing its strategic design and the operational distinctives

distinguishing it from some of the other leading programs. Lastly, the paper discusses lessons learned and course corrections over the last three years. While the paper will be presented by its principal author, the work it represents is very much a team effort¹.

Lead for Life operates under the twin objectives of sustainability and replicability. The hopes and stated plans of the L4L design team are to sustain the program for future generations, and that it might be replicated in contextualized versions in universities around the world. L4L is currently in its third year of existence in a four-year program design, so it is very much a work in progress. The following gives a snapshot of the program, which is important in understanding both its aspirations and distinctives.

What is Lead for Life

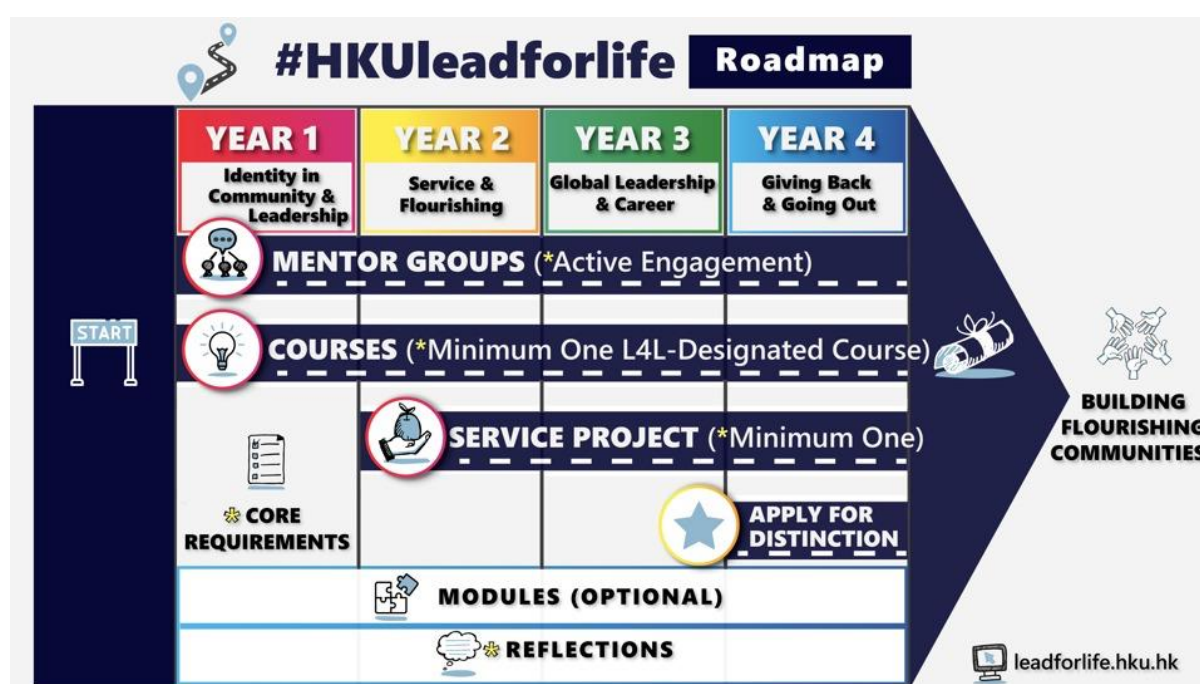
Lead for Life is a four-year, certificate program designed to equip HKU's undergraduates with the character and skills to build flourishing communities. At the time of writing, the program involves 560 undergraduates and 100 mentors. Mentors are industry and community leaders of mixed vocation, gender, ethnicity, and age, all of whom have been nominated to the L4L Team as 'leaders of character'. Mentors voluntarily serve the program. The student cohorts are divided up into groups of 10-12 students with a focus on creating as diverse a group as possible. Two mentors, usually of mixed gender, are then assigned to lead each mentor group with a commitment for one year at a time. Currently there are 50 mentor groups in the program.

Lead for Life receives backing and financial support from the University of Hong Kong. University commitment is key to both a program's sustainability and replicability. HKU's President spoke at its inaugural launch, and the Provost was instrumental in its founding as well as in ongoing strategic guidance

¹ Joining the principal author, Rev. Steven Gaultney, include Prof. Daniel Chua, Prof. Samson Tse, Dr. Francis Tsui, Rev. Dr. Jonathan Johnston, and Dr. Hua Loon Ling.

and has spoken at several L4L events. Lead for Life includes students from all ten university faculties. Students can only join the program in their first year. Now, in its third year, L4L has three cohorts with 240 first-year students, 180 second-year students and 140 third-year students.

L4L runs alongside the students' chosen faculty of study. The following roadmap gives an overview of the program with the requisites and themes for each of the years.



The first year focuses on *identity in community and character leadership*, the second on *service and flourishing*, the third on *career and global leadership* and the fourth on *giving back and going out*. Requisites for students to remain in the program are engagement each semester with their mentor groups, one L4L approved course to be taken over the four years and one service project preferably in the second year. Optional modules, which focus on a particular aspect of character leadership, e.g., quiet leadership, are also available to both the mentors and the students. If the student goes above and beyond the basic requirements of the program, they will be awarded a certificate with distinction. As the students progress through their character leadership journey, the L4L team is engaged in research drawn from the program both for

evaluating programmatic effectiveness and in time for contributing to the global dialogue of published information on character leadership.

Strategic Design

Drawing on existing character education frameworks discussed in the literature (Lamb, Brant, Brooks, 2021; Jubilee Centre, 2017; Crossan et al, 2016), the Lead for Life team developed its strategic design and change theory. Programmatically, L4L evolved from character development weekends at HKU in 2016-2018 led by a visiting team from the Oxford Character Project. These early character cultivation weekends planted the seeds for Lead for Life, connected HKU with the larger global dialogue on character leadership and established a proof of concept that such a program was attractive to HKU's undergraduate students. This historical heritage is significant as one of L4L's aspirations is to encourage character leadership programs in other universities.

What also became apparent through those early forays into character leadership, however, was that while students could be inspired in a weekend, genuine character transformation was a much longer process. It also became clear that what was needed was a flexible and inclusive program that integrated existing, values-based teaching such as the HKU's Common Core Curriculum course, *Life Worth Living*, which originated from Yale University, and which is now one of L4L's designated courses. The decision was made, therefore, to propose a four-year, university-wide character leadership initiative. At the same time, members of the university's management were considering how to enhance HKU students' overall competitiveness in the marketplace and were partly inspired by the writings of David Brooks (Brooks, 2016). With the convergence of these aspirations, Lead for Life was approved by university management

in 2020.² In many ways, this was a return to the aspirations of HKU's founders, who in 1911 chose the motto, *Virtus et Sapiente* or Wisdom and Virtue.

Within these global and local contexts, the L4L team began the task of designing HKU's character leadership program and started with a few strategic decisions. *First*, in the title Character Leadership, the decision was made to focus more on the *character* than on the *leadership* component. This is not to say that L4L is only a character cultivation program, but more that we see character as the leading wheel on the metaphorical bicycle of character and competence³. While these two components are commonly held to constitute leadership, relatively less attention has been paid to the former rather than the latter. For this reason, we focus on cultivating character *within* leadership. Aristotle observed that if there was only one virtuous person in a community, it should be the leader (Pieper, 91). The Confucian tradition also speaks beautifully of the development of virtuous leaders who because of their virtue could lead powerfully without having to resort to force (Ivanhoe, xiii).

It is additionally important that L4L focus not just on character, as the leadership component provides a hard, practical edge to what could become an abstract discussion of character. The leadership connection provides an attractional value to both students and mentors alike. Students genuinely want to become good leaders and the mentors are keen to be a part of developing the next generation of leaders coming through HKU. In the words of Jubilee Centre's *caught, taught, and sought* (Jubilee Centre, 2017, p9) the leadership component provides a powerful *sought*. A *second* strategic decision early on in L4L was that the program needed to reflect HKU's character as being both global and Asian. HKU was ranked as the most international university in the world by *Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2023*. L4L's makeup, therefore, is intentionally international, and its deep communal and pragmatic design is reflective of its Asian origins. The *third* strategic decision made at the beginning was that L4L would not adopt as a

² Lead for Life is led as a partnership between HKU's Centre of Development and Resources for Students (CEDARS) and HKU's Faith and Global Engagement program (FGE).

³ Grateful to Dr. Edward Brooks for suggesting this metaphor in his use of the Penny Farthing bicycle as representing a current cultural over-focus on competence and under-focus on character, in his McDonald Distinguished Lecture, October 5, 2023, at The University of Hong Kong.

whole one single, existing character leadership model, change theory, or seek a particular type of student, but would rather draw on what seemed to work in the HKU context and try to focus on a more holistic and relational approach. This last decision led to L4L designing its three strategic pillars, or program requisites, outlined below and shown earlier on the L4L roadmap: *engaged exemplars, alternative narratives, and service opportunities.*

Engaged Exemplars. The power of exemplars in positively influencing character has been articulated for millenniums from at least the times of Aristotle in the West and Confucius in the East. Linda Zagzebski built a whole moral theory around the notion of exemplarism and the driving ‘impetus to imitate’ motivated by the emotion of admiration. (Zagzebski, 2017). One might disagree as to whether exemplars or virtues are the foundations of moral thought and act (Kim, 2019) but even the existence of Zagzebski’s theory demonstrates the potential power of exemplars in moral development. Recognizing this, many character programs encourage exemplars in some form, but the problem often comes not in theory but in practice. Many professors desire to have mentoring relationships with some of their students, but the realities of day-to-day responsibilities and urgencies get in the way of their good intentions. So, the L4L design team decided to bake mentorship into the process: L4L mentors are not ‘add-ons’ or ‘nice-to-haves’ to the program but are central to its operation. This decision meant, however, that the team needed to identify potential mentors in the broader Hong Kong community and in the process rather serendipitously began to build a *town-gown* bridge between Hong Kong and HKU.

As Zagzebski recognizes, sometime exemplars can be hard to identify (Zagzebski, 30), and so all L4L mentors are nominated to the L4L team by someone who knows both Lead for Life and knows that the mentor candidate is effective in their field and seen to achieve this through good character. These are the 100 current mentors in Lead for Life who serve without stipend in a genuine desire to have a positive impact on developing the next generation of leaders. As mentioned earlier, the *leadership* component of *character leadership* is not only important and attractive to the students, but also equally important and attractive to the mentors, i.e., they want to contribute to raising up good leaders. This is important in

understanding L4L that the community at its core is motivated by the very values it teaches – the scale of the operation is not a factory led curriculum, but a heart led one. Although we are early in the program, L4L’s mentoring component seems to be effective. L4L conducts evaluations after every major program event, and for the first two Year 1 Launches (this year results are still in process) the mentors received the highest marks from our students (L4L Year 2 Launch, 2022). Additionally, 81% of L4L students “strongly agree or agree that they see good examples from their L4L mentors of how character leadership can work in real life”. (L4L Student Responses, 2023).

In recent focus groups with mentors, an experienced mentor shared that one of her students said directly, “yeah, I want to be like you,” to which the mentor replied, “No, don’t be like me. Be yourself, really.” (Author’s research, mentor focus group, 26/10/23).⁴ What has been encouraging, if somewhat unexpected, is that the mentors do not see their role as a duty, but rather enjoy the program. Almost 90% (89.5%) of mentors surveyed responded in the “agree” range to the statement, “I enjoy being a Lead for Life mentor”, while 8.8% were neutral and only 1.8% rated in the disagree range (L4L Mentors Survey, 2023, p12). Additionally, the top-rated analytic code for the qualitative open-ended question in the survey was *Positive learning experience: Reflections of positive experiences as a mentor; enjoyed being a mentor* (L4L Mentors Survey, 2023, p14). The mentors are strategic to the success of Lead for Life, which is why engaging with their mentor group at least once in a semester is a requirement for students to remain in the program. Of course, students are encouraged to engage much more frequently, and most do to benefit fully from the mentoring relationship.

Alternative Narratives. In response to ‘what’s working’ in a focus group with experienced mentors, one of the mentors, an HKU alumna, responded that L4L provides, “an alternative narrative, that usually (students) don’t hear...it touches something that they usually don’t think about...kind of shockingly

⁴ The principal author is currently conducting qualitative research on the role of humility and courage in cultivating character with emerging adult leaders, which includes a series of focus groups with Lead for Life mentors and students as well in individual interviews with character development program founders and designers.

refreshing for them” (Author’s research, mentor focus group, 26/10/23). Examples of this alternative narrative, which L4L students may not have encountered prior to joining the program include L4L messages such as: great leaders can be quiet leaders, failing is important and helpful when handled well, one’s character can be changed and cultivated, and effective leaders can also be nice people. These examples of counter-cultural messaging are not new for all L4L students, but for many it has been a refreshing and eye-opening alternative to a stereotypical imaging of the leader as heroic and outgoing where failure is unacceptable and nice guys finish last. One student in her feedback form said,

The fact that our mentors are so intelligent and tenderhearted at the same time shock me and becomes the most inspirational leadership lesson I have ever had. I used to think that people with great intelligence and social status would care little on the impoverished, only doing things for their own reputations. Meeting my mentors really changed my mind. (L4L Student Responses, 2023)

MacIntyre and Hauerwas among others stressed the important connection between a community narrative and that community’s character cultivation (MacIntyre, 208; Hauerwas, 94ff). The L4L community narrative is largely communicated through the teaching component both at the cohort gatherings and through the L4L approved courses, at least one of which is a requisite for the students to complete the program. This teaching component or narrative, however, is also woven into all aspects of the program from the assigning of two very different mentors to each group to the object lessons of having both apples and oranges at their High Table dinners to illustrate that our leadership styles while equally effective can be as different as ‘apples from oranges’. The Confucian tradition of elevating rituals in character formation (Ivanhoe, 4) is also integrated into the L4L communal narratives. For example, students are the only ones robed at the L4L High Table dinners to show that they are “seen” and at the center of the program. At the Year 1 launch each student receives his or her piece of a puzzle, which eventually is made into the puzzle for that cohort, with each cohort having one. It communicates that students are a vital part of an ongoing narrative that is bigger than them. Reflection is also an ongoing requisite of the program following on from Confucius’ admonition to *si* or ‘reflect’ as captured in his oft quoted, “Study without reflection is a waste. Reflection without study is a danger.” (Ivanhoe, 2). Written reflections from students and mentors are required at the end of each semester.

One of the previously mentioned L4L taught credit-bearing courses is entitled, *A Life Worth Living*, which encourages the students to ask the big questions and not be leaders focused only on the immediate task before them but to become leaders who are literate in life's enduring questions. Over 85% of the L4L students "strongly agree or agree that their participation in L4L provides them opportunities to explore life's big questions beyond the university setting". (L4L Responses from Students, 2023). Ultimately, the aim of the narrative teaching in L4L is not that different from other programs in its desire to immerse the students in a context amenable to transformative 'aha' moments but given L4L's scale and duration there are perhaps more and more varied opportunities to express and experience creative character formation messaging.

Service Opportunities. The *third* strategic component of Lead for Life is found in the requisite that each student completes a service project, which has at least 20 hours of direct interaction with the ultimate beneficiaries. Service learning is common in most universities; however, it is not always connected directly with character leadership. L4L students are given multiple options as to how they might meet this requirement from self-initiated projects to existing opportunities within their faculty and each student is encouraged to pursue a project that is outside their comfort zone recognizing that this is often when our character is both revealed and developed. In the L4L options menu of potential service projects there are programs working with ex-offenders or the mentally or physically challenged with a hope to provide direct interactions for our students, which they might not previously have encountered prior to joining Lead for Life.

The service component has two main aspirations – *one* is to begin to shift students away from a focus on *self* to a focus on *others*, which is especially important given the early emerging adults' natural inclination towards their own "identity exploration" and "self-focus" (Williams, *Cultivating Virtue*, 64ff). The overall Lead for Life goal of 'building flourishing communities' lays out this path that L4L is not purely an individualistic journey, but one of working towards the best version of self to build the best version of

community. In an Ubuntu way of understanding, one cannot truly have the one without the other or even fully know oneself without the other in our lives (Dolamo, 2013). While L4L is still in its infancy, preliminary findings from an ongoing research study suggest that a positive experience with the L4L program has a significant positive effect on students' sense of purpose, on two sub-scales of *awareness* of purpose and *altruistic* purpose. Additionally, findings suggest that students' sense of belonging to the L4L program has significant positive effect on their awareness of purpose, moderated by the duration of their participation in the program (L4L Student Survey, ongoing study). The *second* aspiration of the service component is to begin to establish the habituation of service that would continue in students long after they have left Lead for Life and university. *Service opportunities, alternative narratives* and *engaged exemplars*, are all part of Lead for Life's strategic design.

While early in the program's design, the decision was made to not wholly adopt any one existing model for character leadership or character cultivation, it is evident from the above that Lead for Life does stand on the shoulders of many earlier change theories and pioneer programs in character cultivation. The Jubilee Centre's *caught, taught, and sought* guidelines, for example, can be clearly seen in the *caught* with our focus on exemplary mentors and the *taught* with our focus on intentionally alternative narratives. The "Seven Strategies" for cultivating character development (Lamb, Brant and Brooks, *Cultivating Virtue*, 2022, p115ff) can be seen in numerous aspects of Lead for Life, e.g., *habituation through practice*: the service projects, *reflection on personal experience*: event evaluations and semester reflections, *friendships of mutual accountability*: encouraged both between students and students with their mentors, and *moral reminders*: each mentor group has a virtue name, e.g. Team Courage. A Year 2 student reflected in a focus group that the program itself is a monthly reminder of what is important, and not to get caught up in the small things of life, (Author's research, student focus group, 7 November 2023). So, Lead for Life builds on existing scholarship while curating and sometimes creating distinct program configurations given its scale and Asian context - both of which are addressed in the next section.

Distinctives of the Program

While much of what has been discussed so far, e.g., courses, mentoring and habituation are a part of many global character leadership programs, there are a few twists within Lead for Life, which make it distinctive from many other initiatives.

Scale and Duration. Perhaps Lead for Life's most easily recognizable distinctive is its scale and duration: over five hundred undergraduate students each on a four-year journey. Current plans are to add one more cohort next academic year. When the program is fully operational in late 2024, it is envisioned at any one time to have a total of over 700 students and 120 mentors spread over four academic year cohorts.

Its scale and duration are both integral to Lead for Life's aspiration for transformation. The scale of L4L communicates to the students that they are part of something much bigger, and they can begin to experience alternative cultural norms within the L4L community, e.g., this is how we treat each other, this is how we view leadership, or these are the stories we value in the program. The hope is also that the scale of the program will begin to make an impression on the overall culture of the university such that good and wise leadership (*Virtues et Sapiente*) is not only a founding motto but evidenced more and more in HKU's students and graduates.

In addition to scale, the four-year duration is also central to transformation. The L4L design team wanted as much time as possible with the students. If HKU had been a three-year university, then the program would have been designed over three years. L4L's expectations are not that our students will graduate as *character leaders* (a task of a lifetime) but the aspiration is that they will all graduate with a *conviction* that character matters and a *commitment* to pursuing it in their leadership roles. Thankfully, we are already beginning to see some evidence of this commitment in the 86.7% of students who "strongly agree or

agree that through L4L, they are showing more commitment to be good character leaders in challenging times.” Additionally, 83.4% of “students strongly agree or agree that through L4L, they are developing a greater commitment to make a meaningful contribution to society” (L4L Responses from students, 2023).

An unexpected albeit encouraging consequence of the four-year design, which was not part of its original intent is that four years gives ample opportunity for the students to encounter challenges and difficulties in their lives and to be able to both apply what they are learning as well as have a mentor there to walk alongside them in these crucible moments. These crucible moments could be an academic failure or a sickness or the death of a family member – something beyond the day-to-day level of significance, which challenges their worldview, and becomes a ‘teaching moment’ in both revealing and developing the student’s character, (Byrne, Crossan, Seijts, 2018). In L4L when that something happens, they are in a constructive context with their mentors and peers around them. One of L4L’s community narratives is of a student who lost his mother in his first year at university, the group gathered around him, and he has shared about his growth in empathy and authenticity. Other narratives also emerged from experiences during the “fifth wave”, the height of Covid in Hong Kong. As one mentor said in a focus group, “I think the most important thing is, you know, we are there [during] a specific difficulty they have in their life, or study, or whatever it was...” (Author’s research, Mentor focus group, October 19, 2023). Effectively, four years gives time for life to happen and when it does the students are part of a constructive, caring community.

Communal Design. A *second* major distinctive of L4L is its deep communal nature, which is woven throughout its design from its mentor groups to its service project application to its stated *telos* of “building flourishing communities”. It is a program, which consistently highlights the ‘other’. Whereas it is easy for leadership programs to center around the *individual* as leader, L4L reflects its Asian values and aspires that leadership be ‘from the community and for the community’. This is perhaps most easily seen in the bulk of the mentoring happening in a group setting rather than in the more common one-on-one mentorships. The group mentoring not only keeps the context of community front and center, but it also

allows the students to learn from each other through peer-mentoring, and to develop a communal identity through the group's team name. As a couple of L4L students observed:

“My mentor group has really taught me how powerful, moving, and inspiring a community can be by helping me recognize many of my own strengths while also providing me with unconditional support and love. Strength is not something that only comes from a single person, but also something that derives from a healthy community. I hope to be able to be a healthy community for others out there.” (L4L Student Responses, 2023)

“L4L allowed me to meet excellent peers from different faculties who also strive to become leaders who serve their communities. I was always inspired and humbled every time I listen to their sharing during our gatherings. It stimulates me to become a better individual”. (L4L AY2022-23 Midterm Research & Evaluation Report, p30).

The service project element also provides a direct opportunity for the students to think, act and reflect towards the good of a community. The student is encouraged to work on her or his character not just for their own benefits in fulfilling their individual goals, but also for helping others to meet their needs or aspirations. The service project becomes a practical application of the learning they were introduced to in their first year, and an embodiment of the program's aspiration to *build flourishing communities*.

This communal design is central to the change theory undergirding L4L that positive transformation occurs most readily in a communal context where one is both cared for and challenged. Mentors are encouraged to build their groups as safe spaces for the students, and early reports in this regard are encouraging: 82.3% of “students strongly agree or agree that they have a safe space with the L4L community to learn from mistakes and be better persons.” (L4L Student Responses, 2023). The communal design is also reflective of Lead for Life's Asian context and the high value placed on community in its setting. L4L's communal care change theory is one that is still being worked out and finding articulation but is beginning to shift the traditional interpretation of *phronesis* from an individual

understanding to a more collective one. Students are learning first-hand that in effective problem solving, a group will consistently outperform an individual and highly diverse groups can outperform high-ability groups in problem solving (Hong and Page, 2004).

Lessons Learned and Learning

Two often repeated phrases shared by L4L leaders with both the students and the mentors are, ‘we are building this together’ and ‘we are building this as we are flying it’. The first one hopefully is inspirational while the second might be somewhat troubling for participants and donors alike but is the truth. L4L has yet to reach its full four-year operational cycle much less Year 5 when the team can better determine the impact of the program as the students enter their chosen vocations.

However, L4L is under constant evaluation with student feedback after each of the three to six annual cohort events as well as student and mentor semester-end reflections. A doctoral research project involving focus groups with both mentors and students is also currently underway. Additionally, the Lead for Life design team conducted a structured review in May 2023 with focus groups from students and mentors as well as online meetings with some of the programs’ global partners in both the UK and the US.

These reviews and reflections have resulted in numerous operational adjustments and in some cases course corrections. Operational adjustments included the addition of themes for each year, standardizing our launch, midyear, and end of year cohort events to avoid constant re-inventing of the wheel, utilizing more interactive exercises and less pure discussion in the small group response time and other changes. Overall, however, the major lessons learned have been more at the strategic design level:

Viability of Large-Scale programs. The *first* and foremost overall lesson is that large-scale undergraduate character leadership programs, with the right ingredients, are both feasible and attractive to students and mentors in university settings. While the rigorous, peer-review research is still in process, the preliminary, anecdotal, and evaluative feedback to date regarding the program's effectiveness, some of which has already been shared in this paper, has been largely encouraging. Some of these results were seen as early as after the first semester of the program when 91.4% of students (n = 138) wrote reflections that evidenced transformation, either at the personal level of new learning (31.8%; n = 48) or before-after change in thought and/or behavior (35.8%; n = 54), or at the community level impacting others' lives (23.8%; n = 36). (L4L Mentoring Report, 2022, p1). In 2023, there have been similarly encouraging results as: 76.2% of students "strongly agree or agree that their participation in L4L helps shape their views of character leadership in meaningful ways." (L4L Responses from students, 2023). This is not to say that large-scale programs do not pose considerable challenges all the way from the availability of large enough rooms to hold the cohorts, to the recruitment of sufficient mentors, to ensuring consistent quality across mentor groups as L4L has expanded from zero mentors and students to a combined 660 in two years, to adequate staffing to name a few of the scale challenges.

Transformative character cultivation programs tend to be more small-scale intensive experiences. However, this means that most in a university cannot take part. The hope – the experiment – with L4L is to scale up without losing the personal touch. L4L's large-scale format with its cohort/mentor group structure allows more students to be part of a large community while experiencing most of their program engagement in a small group context. L4L's midterm review in May 2023 showed that while the mentor structure is one of the program's greatest challenges, it is also one of its greatest strengths. L4L recently added a mentor coordinator to continue to oversee and further strengthen the mentor component. Other challenges of scale we are learning how to address include sufficient budgets, quantity and quality staffing, documentation of policies, standardizing individual components and the creation, clarification, and refinement of a curriculum. There is also a need for greater student contact from the central L4L Team to support the mentor communication and help keep our retention rate for both students and mentors at our goal of 85% or above.

Fine-Tuning across Character Program Spectrums. A *second* major lesson has been learning to fine-tune L4L across a set of spectrums. Character Leadership programs can be analyzed as running across a variety of spectrums with some more transcendental (focusing on life’s big questions) while others are more transactional (what works in the workplace); some highly structured, others more relational; some focusing more on the individual, others more communal, some focus more on the doing, others on the *undoing*. In some ways this is much like virtues themselves running between the extremes of excess and deficiency. In the experience of L4L, it has not been one or the other ends of the extreme but learning to fine tune the program experience at the right spectrum point for the HKU context. In a program of its scale, structure is needed, but also in a program where character leadership is ‘caught’, relational flexibility is needed. Focusing on ‘doing’ is important as habituation is a tried-and-true path, but our students do not enter the program as blank slates, and there is also a need for *undoing* – communicating alternative narratives. To fully develop their character, students need to ask the big questions, and they also need to know how to apply L4L to their weekly faculty assignments and ultimately to the unique challenges of their chosen vocation. L4L’s learning in this area has largely been trial and error, but over time, the recognition of what spectrums we are working with and where on that spectrum is optimal, is emerging.

Whole Person Change Theory. Ultimately, underpinning every character leadership program is a theory or theories of change, such as the Neo-Aristotelian “Seven Strategies” (Lamb, Brant, and Brooks), which has provided a useful guide for the L4L program. Additionally, for various contextual and also simply practical reasons such as limited time with students, some programs focus on a limited set of virtues, say 7-11 virtues, considered to be important in developing character leadership (Lamb et al., *Commencing Character’s 7 virtues* and Crossan et al.’s 11 dimensions of character leadership). While the principal author of this paper is exploring a combination of the virtues of humility and courage as a possible compound virtue for facilitating character leadership, L4L has not focused on certain virtues over others or embraced one existing theory of change other than what might be termed a whole person change theory. In L4L, students are exposed to a variety of virtues in the cohort but encouraged to

develop virtue literacy through identifying with the one virtue in their team names, e.g., Team Hospitality, and exploring what that virtue has to do with leadership. The whole-person approach values communal care and focuses simultaneously on the mind (the teaching, narrative, reflection) the heart (the communal relationships with mentors and peers) and the hands (the service project in doing character as opposed to merely thinking about it). Articulating our change theory is more of a lesson the L4L team is learning rather than a lesson learned and will require considerably more research and refinement especially in the exploration of and reflection on the program's Asian context and contribution. L4L describes itself as a four-year *transformational* journey, so identifying what best facilitates change is obviously crucial to the program.

Going Forward

Lead for Life is a character leadership development program work in progress. At the writing of this paper, the program is a little over half-way through its first four-year cycle. Early indications are promising and there is potential to both broaden the program through L4L 'open weekends' open to all undergraduates, and to deepen the program through tailoring the program to individual faculties much like is being done in other universities. There is also the possibility of shorter, smaller programs for graduate students again as has been highly effective in other programs.

For the moment, however, the focus is to continue to build the core four-year program to be both *sustainable* and *replicable* while reflecting more deeply its Asian values. Key to L4L's *sustainability* is peer-reviewed research to substantiate the program's effectiveness and to help build the core funding and team required to further develop and enhance the program. Specifically, some of this research could be focused on the early indications of the program's potential to develop altruism, the power of caring communal structures in facilitating positive change in character leadership development and measuring

growth in the students' commitment to ongoing character leadership development the longer they are in the program. Research will also be key to L4L's *replicability* along with a refined program curriculum, packaging and suggested entry points for other universities or potentially other contexts such as businesses or non-governmental organizations to initiate their own programs. For now, however, the focus is to continue to develop L4L for both our students and mentors as we learn from and hopefully contribute to the global conversation on cultivating character leadership.

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