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Why a special issue on character education? I don’t want to give the epistemological, ontological, or practical reasons why we decided to focus this first special issue on character as these will be explored in detail by various articles in this issue. There is a multitude of reasons why character can and should be explored in schools, whether these are boarding, state, independent, co-ed, primary, secondary, etc.

Evidence suggests that when character skills and virtues are fostered, we can observe increased wellbeing and academic attainment. For example, as Kathy Weston discusses resilience is one of those broad terms that can have a lasting impact on young people for their whole lives. Resilience is a topic that we have a keen interest in; this is why in 2019–2020 we have commissioned a study which will look at the impact of an intervention in resilience across 12 schools. This is one more element of character education which this issue explores: the fact that it can transcend localities and be explored across schools and contexts.

All schools are faced with concerns around the wellbeing of pupils, mental health, safeguarding and ensuring they help young people flourish. Hence, we felt it was important to produce a special issue which looks at character education in its various manifestations and encourage conversations around character to continue (or start).

Dr Iro Konstantinou | Research Associate, Eton College

This issue is divided into 3 sections:

The first section looks at wider theories. Bill Lucas introduces a number of taxonomies which can be utilised in the journey of a school which aims to foster character skills and virtues. The rest of the articles in this section, by Matthew White, Kathy Weston, and Jonathan Beale, are looking at theories and wider implications for implementing and assessing character education within a school. Most importantly, they introduce parental engagement and reflective practice as part of what character education might include.

The second section discusses character education within the Eton context. There are a number of articles which discuss character in the various curricular and co-curricular areas of the school. We also introduce the findings of research projects we have conducted at Eton: identifying our values; assessing the impact of community engagement; or extending our partnership with the London Academy of Excellence to launch a leadership initiative between the two schools. We also look at character through drama, music, sport, and from the perspective of a House Master on the purpose of education.

The last section looks at other contexts and engages with either whole-school approaches or research that has been conducted looking at various aspects of character education. It has been interesting to see how others engage with character education and hopefully, some of the ideas here can help anyone reading start their own research or reflection on what character might look like in their school or environment.

As ever, we are grateful to those who contributed their ideas and reflections for the journal.
Character is ‘plural’, that is to say, most educators think character is not one but many things (Park et al., 2017). But there is little agreement as to how plural it is, which ingredients are essential and which optional. At the extremes of interpretation, character can be either wholly about virtue and goodness or entirely about performing well in school or in life. Somewhere on this continuum of definition there are debates to be had about culture, epistemology and pedagogy as we consider how such a complex thing as character can best be taught or taught or cultivated (or all three) in schools. According to John Dewey, by the middle of the last century it had become ‘a commonplace of educational theory that the establishing of character is a comprehensive aim of school instruction and discipline’ in the USA (Dewey, 1944: 348).

In England, two of the four most recent Secretaries of State for Education have sought to encourage schools to place more value on character education: Nicky Morgan through the character innovation fund1 and Damien Hinds by defining character in terms of five extra-curricular activities – sport, creativity, performing, volunteering and the world of work.2 In England, an advisory group is currently drawing up recommendations for developing ‘character and resilience’ in pupils and new character benchmarks to measure performance of schools.

With multiple interpretations of character, it is difficult to produce high quality evaluations of the different approaches used as character programmes are often at least as much cultural – tacit, informal – as they are about specific, identifiable discrete, formal interventions. Recent meta-analytical research (Jeynes, 2019) has shown a clear positive impact of character education on student achievement and on expressions of love, integrity, compassion, and self-discipline. In the UK, a recent review by the National Foundation for Educational Research describes 14 robust evaluation studies (Taylor, 2017) with less consistent results.

Overall, existing evidence is mixed as to whether specific character education interventions actually improve the character, behaviour or wellbeing. Even if there are significant effects, is whatever the attribute, character is that which is routinely deployed? For many, the word ‘virtue’, much associated with character, is frequently found in Ancient Greek and Christian ‘baggage’. And the concept of ‘trait’ can suggest that it is fixed and potentially inherited.

The five frameworks which follow illustrate these various dilemmas. The criteria for their selection include scrutiny in peer-reviewed literature, recognition via the web sites of academic centres and, to a lesser extent, references on school web sites.

Broadly speaking, the frameworks are listed in chronological order. The first three are frameworks for character education which seek to describe what it is, each organised according to different categories and implying a different definition. The last two are slightly different in their scope and invite thinking about the framing of character within schools more broadly.

FRAMEWORKS FOR CHARACTER EDUCATION

The VIA Institute on Character Inventory of Strengths

The VIA Institute on Character2 draws on the work of Peterson and Seligman (2004) and their identification of 24 character strengths. The character strengths are grouped together under six headings; see Table 1.

A particular feature of the 24 strengths is that while they are personally beneficial in terms of the achievement of, for example, learning goals, they are also morally valuable. So, for example, persistence is both a form of moral courage and an aspect of a growth mindset (Dweck et al., 2014). The six higher order virtues have obvious face validity, albeit with one – transcendence – being an abstract noun less widely used or understood than the other five. Interestingly, factor analysis of the 24 character strengths indicates that they do not actually produce a factor structure consistent with the six virtues (Macdonald et al., 2008).

There are two problems with any framework: the ‘size’ of any concepts or ideas used as descriptors and the language employed.

How ‘big’, for example, is a big idea? Is wisdom too big? Is curiosity too small? Is productivity too instrumental but kindness too morally relative? Is a civic virtue really any different from a moral virtue or is the community just a location for moral virtues to be enacted? Is it better to think of a psychological attribute as the big idea or more helpful to focus on the skills which go to make up the attribute?

Mention of the word ‘attribute’ sets up a related semantic problem. Is character an attribute or set of attributes, something that can be developed? Or is it better captured by words like ‘habit’ or ‘disposition’, with the suggestion that whatever the attribute, character is that which is routinely deployed? For many, the word ‘virtue’, much associated with character, is frequently found in Ancient Greek and Christian ‘baggage’. And the concept of ‘trait’ can suggest that it is fixed and potentially inherited.

Put simply, the six headings are not the only or even the most valid way of organising the character strengths; it is a matter of researcher judgement that they are categorised as they are.

Center for Curriculum Redesign Character Framework

The Center for Curriculum Redesign positions its work on character, alongside the development of knowledge and skills, in terms of the way we behave and engage in the world: see Table 2 (Biabini et al., 2015).

It divides character into two parts, performance – ‘mastery and heart for excellence in life, school and work’ (ibid., p. 27) – and moral – ‘wisdom and how one treats oneself and others, in interpersonal, social and occupational matters’ (ibid., p. 28).

CHARACTER EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS: AN INITIAL OVERVIEW OF SOME FRAMEWORKS AND ASSOCIATED IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

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3 https://www.viacenter.org/

Table 1 – VIA Character Strengths

Table 2 – Center for Curriculum Redesign Performance and Moral Character

Performance
Adaptability Flexibility, dealing with ambiguity, feedback
Resilience Dignity, discipline, perseverance, patience, effort, grit, confidence, tenacity
Curiosity Open-mindedness, inquisitiveness, playfulness, passion, exploration
Initiative Self-direction, self-discipline, self-control, timeliness, motivation
Socialization Cross-cultural, diversity, listening, speaking, decorum, observation, cooperation
Productivity Accountability, conscientiousness, efficiency, project/program management, results-orientation, precision, load management, focus, execution, dependability, reliability
Leadership Engagement, inspiration, responsibility, following, decisiveness, consistency, leading via example, selflessness, altruism, mentorship, goal-orientation, commitment, organization & delegation, patience, accountability, vision, self-reflection, collaboration
Moral
Integrity Honesty, truthfulness, trustworthiness, loyalty, authenticity, genuineness, ethics, virtue, decency
Fairness Justice, civic-mindedness, equity, sportsmanship, citizenship, social perspective, forgiveness, mercy
Respect Self-respect, respect for others, honor, reverence, humility, receptivity
Courage Fortitude, determination, resilience, grit, confidence, stability, bravery, persistence, grace, risk taking, prudence, toughness
Zest Gratitude, optimism, passion, inspiration, enthusiasm, verve, energy, vigor, zeal, cheerfulness, spunk, spontaneity, humor
Empathy Care, kindness, compassion, tolerance, generosity, charity, cheerfulness, helpfulness, devotion, love, inclusiveness, belonging, camaraderie, humaneness, consideration
Self-awareness Consciousness, mindfulness, presence, tranquility, spirituality, balance, self-actualization, existentiality, oneness, beauty, acceptance, appreciation, interconnectedness, insight, patience, sensibility

04
05
In making the distinction between ‘performance’ and ‘moral’ character, the Center is drawing on thinking by Lickona and Davidson (2005). Interestingly the same researchers also explicitly see the interdependence of these aspects of character when they recombine them as 8 Strengths of Character.5 By separating performance from moral character there is an implicit invitation to consider the different ways in which each might be cultivated. Whether the main distinction in character education is between performance and moral is arguable. The performance notion, with its emphasis on mastery rather than on learning or meta-cognition, could be seen as limiting: an alternative pairing might be to contrast ‘epistemic’ with ‘pro-social’ (Claxton and Lucas, 2013). The sub-elements of performance are also of obviously different sizes. Even a concept such as ‘zest’, which might seem relatively bounded is, on closer analysis, complex (Lucas and Spencer, forthcoming), while ‘leadership’ is huge and sprawling in its implications for practice. For some educationalists, the choice of the word ‘performance’ is problematic when performativity in schools (the idea that results in test scores are supremely important) is often seen as a reason why character education does not flourish in schools in some countries. The large number of sub-elements describing each of the seven aspects of performance and moral character is further illustrative of the challenge of the relative size of any ‘big idea’.

The Center for Curriculum Redesign framework has recently been revised6 into three sections, Skills, Character and Meta-learning; see Table 3.

Another way of framing character is to consider the ‘location’ of the expression of character in young people and the behaviours which might be observed. Developed empirically in a number of studies in schools, Park and colleagues (2017) offer an approach which builds on both the VIA and Center for Curriculum Redesign thinking, Table 4, and seeks to recognize both the individual and social dimensions.

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<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Competency</th>
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<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>Gratitude, Social intelligence, Interpersonal self-control</td>
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<tr>
<td>Character – How we behave and engage in the world; aka agency, attitudes, behaviors, dispositions, mindsets, personality, temperament, values, social and emotional skills, non-cognitive skills, and soft skills</td>
<td>Mindfulness, Curiosity, Courage, Resilience, Ethics, Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meta-learning – How we reflect and adapt (and learn how to learn)</td>
<td>Meta-cognition, Growth mindset</td>
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Table 4 – A tripartite taxonomy of character (Park et al., 2017)

Both the intellectual and interpersonal dimensions map on to performance character, while the idea of an interpersonal dimension reminds us of the social context of schools. Jubilee Centre Framework for Character Education in Schools

Each of the previous frameworks has influenced the Jubilee Centre model (Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, no date), along with earlier research conducted by Shields (2011) and by the Jubilee Centre itself; see Table 4. The Jubilee model reaches back to Aristotle, taking his notion of phronesis (practical wisdom) or practical wisdom as a meta-virtue integrating the four types of virtue, intellectual, moral, civic and performance.

According to Aristotle, a person’s character is ‘comprised of her dispositions to act, think, and feel in various ways’ (Baehr, 2017, p. 1153). The Jubilee model would seem to have moved a considerable way from the affective domain of feelings with emphasis largely being placed on thinking. Similarly, the framing of everything to do with character as a virtue, especially the learning/performance dimension, does not sit well with the language which most schools use. Increasingly, schools in England, often influenced by the Education Endowment Foundation, are more likely to use the language of the learning sciences such as meta-cognition, self-regulation, practice and so forth.

Discussion of frameworks for character education inevitably beg wider thinking about the degree to which deliberate attempts to cultivate character fit within school and beyond.

UChicago Framework for Young Adult Success

Nagaoka and colleagues (2015) frame character in a more holistic way; Figure 1. The outer ring describes three key factors – agency, integrated identity and competencies, while the second ring focuses on four foundational components – self-regulation, knowledge and skills, mindsets and values. At the heart of the model is the suggestion that the combination of action and reflection is a core mechanism in young people’s development.

Table 5 – Jubilee Centre Framework for Character Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
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<tr>
<td>2. is structured</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Addresses specific positive psychological attributes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Addresses identity</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Addresses moral growth</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Addresses holistic growth</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Addresses the development of practical wisdom</td>
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Table 6 – A character education prototype

McGrath helpfully forces us to think about the essential active ingredients of a character education framework without offering advice and thereby slipping into the implementation stage of any character education initiative. A possible criticism of the model is that as schools increasingly see themselves as part of a wider learning eco-system, explicitly engaging with parents, to focus on the school as the location seems potentially limiting in scope.

Partial frameworks for character education

In addition to these holistic attempts to frame character education, there are several well-regarded frameworks which deal with aspects of character or even bigger ideas of which character is arguably a sub-set. These are listed in Table 6.

6 These 8 Strengths of Character are: Lifelong learner and critical thinker; Diligent and capable performer; Socially and emotionally skilled person; Ethical thinker; Respectful and responsible citizenship; Engaged and committed learner; Creative and innovative thinker; Effective communicator.


4 These 8 Strengths of Character are: Lifelong learner and critical thinker; Diligent and capable performer; Socially and emotionally skilled person; Ethical thinker; Respectful and responsible citizenship; Engaged and committed learner; Creative and innovative thinker; Effective communicator.


1 https://curriculumredesign.org/framework
4. The school must be a caring community.
5. To develop character students need opportunities for moral action.
6. Effective character education includes a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners and helps them succeed.
7. Character education should strive to develop students’ intrinsic motivation.
8. The school staff must become a learning and moral community; the school’s values/virtues; the character of the school, the school staff’s functioning as full partners in the character-building effort.
9. Character education requires moral leadership from both staff and students.
10. The school must recruit parents and community members as full partners in the character-building effort.
11. Evaluation of character education should assess the character of the school, the staff’s functioning as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character.

The Jubilee Centre Framework (no date) offers advice such as:

- character is largely caught through role-modelling and emotional contiguity: school culture and ethos are therefore central.
- character education provides the rationale, language and tools to use in developing character elsewhere in and out of school.
- character depends on building Virtue Literacy.

Nagoaka and colleagues (2015; p. 39) draw on research to suggest the kinds of developmental experiences which seem to develop character, Figure 3:

Berkowitz and Bier (2017) describe effective practices using the mnemonic PRIME:

- Prioritization of character education;
- strategic and intentional nurturing of healthy Relationships;
- Intrinsic, authentic motivation and promotion of core values/virtues;
- role Models with adults modelling what they want students to be;
- a pedagogy of Empowerment;
- Developmental pedagogy explicitly seeking to meet students’ needs and develop character.

In England, the National Foundation for Educational Research recently undertook an analysis of five schools which had won the Department for Education’s Character Award (Walker et al., 2017). As a result, they conclude that the key features of effective character education can be expressed as a series of instructions:
1. Senior leaders must drive it and all teachers must deliver it.
2. Place at the core of school ethos.
3. Take a long-term approach.
4. Build a collective understanding and language.
5. Maintain focus, momentum and ongoing communication.

Only when we have focused more precisely on what character is can more nuanced exploration take place about how best it can be cultivated in schools. Then we can develop a more finely-grained theory of action to describe the mechanisms in play and evaluate their effectiveness.

References
In recent articles Oades and Johnston (2017) contend wellbeing literacy is not a step forward in positive education and O’Brien and Blue (2018) challenge teachers, headteachers and administrators to develop a positive pedagogy, designing pedagogical practices that facilitate positivity within the classroom. While these are important steps forward in the development of positive education theory and practice, a critical stage continues to be overlooked (White, 2016; 2017).

To date, positive education has no agreed conceptual framework or model to guide teachers to theorise and critically reflect on what they do and how they have an impact based on existing theories of professional practice (White and Murray, 2015). Therefore, if Oades and Johnston’s (2017) wellbeing literacy, O’Brien and Blue’s (2018) developments or Waters and Loton’s (2019) SEARCH framework are to achieve deep pedagogical change, I assert that critical teacher self-reflection be an integral starting point. Written from the researcher-practitioner perspective, this article proposes a conceptual model for critical self-reflection for teachers of positive education through two questions:

- Can positive psychology developments enhance the planning, implementation and self-reflection required for effective learning and teaching?
- How can character strengths be integrated into reflective practice to enhance effective learning and teaching?

Trask-Kerr, Quay and Slomps (2019) contend that a significant hurdle for positive education is that it ‘revolves around issues to do with psychology itself and the capacity of teachers to inform the imagined idea of positive education’ (p. 2). As Kristjánsson (2017) notes, positive education’s focus on a flourishing paradigm appears to mean that the flourishing paradigm is just one more attempt to smuggle a Trojan horse of touchy-feeliness into the classroom in order to undermine standard subjects and processes. For example, Kern Waters, Adler and White (2015) outlined the measurement of Seligman’s PERMA theory of well-being in a school. Waters and White (2015) summarised the application of an appreciative enquiry process in education as three strategic phases used to build wellbeing over a two-and-a-half year period: development, implementation, and monitoring. While these articles provided ground-breaking overviews of activity in the field of education, they did not address the professional practice of positive education. Waters and Loton’s (2019) article ‘SEARCH: A Meta-Framework and Review of the Field of Positive Education’ made a significant contribution to the decision-making process for the development of professional education initiatives. It does not explore the process of teacher’s professional practice (Vuorinen, Erkik, & Uusitalo-Malmivaara, 2018).

A missing part of positive education research discourse focuses on teachers’ critical self-reflection on professional practice (Brookfield, 1997, 2017). To be clear, when I discuss professional practice, I do not mean just classroom programmes, worksheets, activities or interventions teachers undertake with their classes. Here, professional practice refers to a teacher’s ability to self-reflect; and the repertoire of effective teaching strategies and use them to implement well-designed teaching programs and lessons’ (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2014). One way to develop this skill and practice in initial teacher education is to invite pre-service teachers to reflect on their professional practices.

On graduation, evidence of the reflective practice is also a requirement for teacher registration and teacher registration requirements throughout Australia and internationally. While many schools will adopt wellbeing or positive education approaches to shift educational practices, the challenging task of shifting professional practice is often overlooked, or self-reflection gives way to a dominant school culture (Oberle, & Schonert-Reichl, 2016).

Brookfield’s (2017) research has much to offer positive education, in particular, where school leaders and teachers can become frustrated after initial training and investment in the field yields limited results.

Four aspects of Brookfield’s definition of reflective practice provide much-needed clarity for teachers of positive education and respond to Trask-Kerr and Kern’s (2016, p. 2) criticism that ‘that the time has come for the discourse on the pedagogy of positive education to become more sophisticated’. Brookfield claims that reflective practice needs to be 1) sustained, 2) intentional, and 3) seek evidence to 4) assess teaching assumptions (Brookfield, 1997, 2017). He asserts that paradigmatic assumptions are widely present in education, but that critical reflection is all about hunting the assumptions that frame our judgements and actions as teachers’ (Brookfield, 2017). Therefore, it is possible that with the rise of positive education and the enthusiasm surrounding it, some teachers have jumped the gun – focusing on implementation without undertaking the significant critical self-reflection demanded in professional practice? There are many synergies in Brookfield’s theory of reflective practice and discussion about the need to shift positive education discourse beyond a positive-negative dichotomy. Classrooms and schools are complex ecosystems. Gaining the whole of educational psychology and in social science research focusing on the teacher, the practice continues to be a surprising omission in the literature (Brookfield, 1997, 2017). While there are pockets of positive education pedagogies that have developed curricula, there is scant evidence of how this has been integrated in professional practice beyond a series of workshops or training based on what works for in-school experience (Waters; Waters & Loton, 2019). Reflective practice in positive education is an overlooked step towards the integration in professional practice.

For example, in the Australian context, there is a plethora of wellbeing frameworks between and across education systems, sectors and individual schools (Brookfield, 1997, 2017). Many of these positive education pedagogies have remained within the domain of educational psychology or the edge of education research.

In education, a widely recognised body of research focuses on the significant role reflective practice plays in transforming teaching. Indeed, teaching is often referred to as a reflective profession in which teachers are continually evaluating their impact on learning and practice. Some of the most recent conceptual advances in the field skirt around the gap in positive education. At the heart of reflective practice research is a teacher’s ability to know, understand, and reflect upon professional decision-making from feedback. Brookfield (2017) argues that ‘critically reflective teaching happens when we identify and scrutinise the assumptions that underlie how we operate. In other words, it’s about being aware of the assumptions that we draw from our practice from different perspectives. Seeing how we think and work through different lenses is the core process of reflective practice’ (pp. xii–xiii).

This focus on a critical approach to reflective practice is the ‘four lenses of critical reflective practice: Lens 1: Our Students’ Eyes, Lens 2: Our Colleagues’ Perceptions, Lens 3: Personal Experience, and Lens 4: Theory. The promise of positive education could be transformative for teacher professional practice. In this article, I have argued that positive education continues to be a pedagogy in search of a practice. I theorised that one of the hurdles for the development of professional practice in the field is that teachers do not fully reflect on their own professional practice to adopt positive education approaches comprehensively. To promote further discussion on how a teacher can engage with Brookfield’s theory of reflective practice for positive education to promote effective professional practice.

This article is an extract from ‘A Strength-based Reflective Practice Model for Teachers’ to be published in Kern and Wehmeyer (in-press) The International Handbook of Positive Education.

References
The expectations on our children and young people to be another ‘glass half full’ mindset can be an effective strategy for doing so. That is why it is important to ensure habits and thinking in young people but the appetite to focus about body image too. Girls’ self-esteem is generally lower the school years. There is an increase in boys’ concerns the line, exams. Girls, in particular, worry about their looks, worried about family life, death, terrorism and further down to have a mental health disorder than boys, with anxiety Health Survey for England (2018) noted that: among the women (ibid).

Data on girls’ mental health is particularly worrying. The NHS is critical to building academic resilience, self-esteem is also this sort of negative self-talk (when constant) can fuel low feelings of winning, the lows of losing, and an array of emotions things, it helps to inoculate them against life’s knocks. Through participation in sport, young people experience the joys of winning, the lows of losing and an array of emotions – and gradually learn how to control them. By participating in tricky, challenging things, they gain a sense of physical competencies that directly feed into their self-esteem, they learn to have faith in themselves and their competencies. What’s more, overcoming physical challenges attracts external praise and validation from others, which can add to the perception of oneself as capable, competent and valued.

At the heart of resilience is resilient thinking

The idea that children and young people should be encouraged to be ‘thinking scientists’ is an extremely useful one. At once, it highlights the role of reflection in helping us evaluate our thinking and usefully highlights the importance of spotting thoughts that may threaten resilience. Younger children might term these ‘goblins’ – the kind of thing that is thought of as ‘mind-reading’, where someone assumes to know what others are thinking, and ‘fortune-telling’, where an individual is absolutely certain they will fail in any given activity; ‘overgeneralizing’, where someone might feel that they ‘always make mistakes’.

Children see young people’s capacity to refine their life’s challenges and difficulties can be influenced and shaped by self-talk, mottos and mantras that they are exposed to in childhood and throughout their schooling. Everyone needs a ‘resilient script’ that they can repeat and use to reassure themselves and others. Phrases such as ‘Onwards and upwards’ and ‘let’s look on the bright-side’ that are used in everyday parlance within families or in the classroom, when repeated, can help instil resilient thinking habits in young people. Adopting a resilience metaphor can be a fruitful way in which a particular approach can be conveyed. A coiled spring that is able to bounce back, a ball that hits the ground and rolls up again, or the concept of wearing a ‘resilience raincoat to weather negative comments, can provide an effective visual means of deflecting harm.

Emotional resilience can grow from physical activities

The link between physical resilience and emotional resilience is often less valued or understood by parents and careers. When students do well in a sports match, play ‘rough and tumble’ with their parents and try new and challenging things, it helps to instil confidence about life’s knock. Participation in sport, young people experience the joys of winning, the lows of losing and an array of emotions – and gradually learn how to control them. By participating in tricky, challenging things, they gain a sense of physical competencies that directly feed into their self-esteem, they learn to have faith in themselves and their competencies. What’s more, overcoming physical challenges attracts external praise and validation from others, which can add to the perception of oneself as capable, competent and valued.

The experience of failure matters

As counter-intuitive as it may seem, the normalisation of mistakes as ‘part and parcel’ of effective learning leads to better academic outcomes. This necessitates helping students understand that within the completion of ‘try again’ or ‘fail’ the process of growth, developing and even evolving. In using effective praise, focused on the process and the persistence required to complete the task, students are more likely to stay motivated (Dweck, 2006). In praising students’ effort, rather than their success, their hard work and attitude are highlighted as the key attributes that are valued. We know that the ability to bounce back from failure to resilience in the face of intellectual challenges are characteristics that are highly valued by employers.

Cultivating resilience in children and young people

Motivational speaker, education researcher and author

Naoumidis, A. (2018). Thinking Traps: 12 Cognitive Distortions that could


provide by the school; the role of boarding; resource
Inspectors assess these by reference to the curriculum; develop character traits such as self-esteem, self-confidence, evaluations of the ways schools develop pupils' personal
Schools Council – has not announced revisions to its are full members of the associations that form the Independent
fundamental British values'; and promoting equality and 'developing and deepening pupils' understanding of…
importance of building confidence and resilience, and the personal development of pupils', which include:
developing pupils' character, which we define as a set of personal traits, dispositions and virtues that informs their motivation and guides their conduct so that they reflect wisely, learn eagerly, behave with integrity and cooperate
and non-association independent schools, will need to explicitly demonstrate the impact they have on pupils' character development.
Ofsted's 2019 School Inspection Handbook for maintained schools and academies and their Non-association Independent School Inspection Handbook contain the following identical information on the assessment of character education. The section under 'personal development' in both handbooks defines character and outlines the aspects of character education Ofsted will assess. Judgements focus on the dimensions of personal development of pupils, which include:
developing pupils' character, which we define as a set of positive personal traits, dispositions and virtues that informs their motivation and guides their conduct so that they reflect wisely, learn eagerly, behave with integrity and cooperate
An important area of research is to look at areas where character is already assessed and how these can be developed pupils' character, which we define as a set of personal traits, dispositions and virtues that informs their motivation and guides their conduct so that they reflect wisely, learn eagerly, behave with integrity and cooperate
of assessing several character traits through an exchange provides pupils with the opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills to community service in a way that complements their academic study. Similarly, Eton recently published a report that assesses the impact of character education on pupil development in year 12 students (see Arbuthnot, this issue). Given how elusive and broad the concept of ‘character’ is and how much more difficult it is to assess the development of character traits by comparison with measuring the many areas we assess in academic subjects, it seems, at least prima facie, that a holistic, hybrid method of assessing character involving multiple means of assessment would be the most suitable, accurate, rigorous and fair method to pursue. This could involve attention to areas such as pupil reports by tutors and teachers; pupil and peer interviews; questionnaires; tests that assess character, such as situational judgement tests; extra-curricular activities where character is assessed, such as established programmes including the Duke of Edinburgh Award and the Cadet Forces, which have methods of assessing character traits such as leadership skills and the ability to engage in effective teamwork; and a study of academic courses that involve an assessment of character traits as part of the assessment criteria, such as the IB.
If character assessment encompassed such a broad range of activities, research would be required into what weightings should be placed on each of the constituent areas of assessment. Moreover, the number of ways in which character is assessed would vary depending on which options a school offers. A framework could be developed that places methods of assessing character into a hierarchy of accuracy and effectiveness, which serves as a means of advising schools upon which areas of character education are most useful for assessing character development in terms of the breadth and depth of assessments that can be made about character. If, for example, a pupil takes the IB, engages in community action projects, and participates in the Duke of Edinburgh Award and the Cadet Forces, a framework would be required that states what proportion each of these should constitute in the overall assessment of the pupil’s character development. If, for reasons such as restrictions on time, a pupil has to choose between participating in the Duke of Edinburgh Award or the Cadet Forces, and the pupil, their school, or even the pupil wishes to have their decision informed by the role and importance that each of these plays in character development, such a framework could offer a reliable means of illustrating the differences between each area in terms of how significant a role each can play in character development.
For areas of education that do not have methods for assessing personal development in place already but can clearly support character development, such as voluntary work or community action, methods of assessing character development relevant to pupils’ experience in these areas could be developed (see, for example, Konstantinou and Harrison 2019). Such methods could include: self-report via pupil questionnaires or interviews; reports from teachers, tutors, or other staff involved in the convening of such extra-curricular activities; and situational judgement tests.
The final of these could be tailored in relation to a specific area of pupil experience (such as community action), and could take place before and after pupils engage in certain activities to assess any differences their experiences made to their judgements relating to character traits and skills, such as empathy, leadership, teamwork and compassion. These could, for instance, be conducted at the start and end of the academic year, as could two sets of questionnaires, to assess possible differences to pupils’ character development over the year.

SCHOOLS INSPECTED BY OFSTED THAT DO NOT ALREADY ASSESS CHARACTER EDUCATION WILL NEED TO FIND AT LEAST SOME MEANS OF ASSESSING THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTER AMONG THEIR PUPILS.

Dr Jonathan Beale | Research-in-Residence, Eton College

The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services, and Skills (Ofsted) published their new Education Inspection Framework in May this year, which was implemented in September. Following the framework’s implementation, Ofsted will monitor how schools develop pupils’ character. Consequently, a range of research is ongoing in institutions throughout England, including maintained schools and academies, and non-association independent schools, will need to explicitly demonstrate the impact they have on pupils’ character development.

Ofsted’s 2019 School Inspection Handbook for maintained schools and academies and their Non-association Independent School Inspection Handbook contain the following identical information on the assessment of character education. The section under ‘personal development’ in both handbooks defines character and outlines the aspects of character education Ofsted will assess. Judgements focus on the dimensions of personal development of pupils, which include:
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References
CHARACTER AND THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

Jonnie Noakes | Director of Teaching & Learning, Eton College

The nineteenth century Eton schoolmaster William Johnson Cory explained the purpose of education in these terms: ‘You go to a great school not so much for knowledge as for habits and arts; for the habit of attention, for the art of expression, for the art of assuming at a moment’s notice a new intellectual position, for the art of entering quickly into another person’s thoughts, for the habit of submitting to censure and refutation, for the art of indicating assent and dissent in graduated terms, for the habit of regarding minute points of accuracy, for the art of working out what is possible in a given time, for taste, for discrimination, for mental courage, and for mental sobriety.’1 This brilliant articulation of the purpose of training the intellect still rings true today. But what of teaching the whole child? It’s not that nineteenth century schools didn’t teach what we now call character: far from it. They prepared young men (mostly) for public duty by inculcating character values, many of which sound familiar to modern ears, such as service, integrity, leadership and perseverance; but these values were largely tacit, part of the warp and weft of school life, especially in the traditional boarding public schools. ‘Character education’ is not new. What is new is that educators have been seeking in the twenty-first century to create conceptual frameworks and taxonomies of non-cognitive skills and character strengths, to evidence why it is important to teach these, and to evidence how we can do so successfully.

The argument most often cited for why schools should teach the whole child is the utilitarian one that young people need character skills to succeed in education, the workplace and beyond. Such ‘life skills’ typically include understanding and persuading others, conscientiousness, sense of purpose, optimism, resilience, persistence, self-awareness and social awareness. Furthermore, it is frequently argued2 that certain skills and dispositions are valued across cultures as aspects of character. A more secular approach is to look at the great spiritual traditions speak directly about the moral virtues or virtues, the question arises, ‘Whose values are we teaching?’ The influential Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues has gone back to an Aristotelian model of intellectual, civic, moral and performance virtues. All of the great spiritual traditions speak directly about the moral aspects of character. A more secular approach is to look for universal values. Heckman and Kautz (ibid) argue that certain skills and dispositions are valued across cultures including perseverance, self-control, trust, self-efficacy, resilience, empathy, tolerance and engaging productively in society.

‘Character’ includes a wide range of virtues, dispositions and attitudes, as the pieces in this journal attest. There are multiple conceptual frameworks for character, and many different terms in currency such as ‘soft skills’, ‘non-cognitive skills’, and ‘socio-emotional skills’. Faced with such a broad field of enquiry, schools need at the very least to make a deliberate decision about which character qualities they wish to give priority to throughout their curriculum and foster in their pupils. Public statements by schools about their values are therefore particularly generic: excellence, teamwork, kindness and so on. Increasingly, schools are working to create an explicit, coherent framework of their own values. An important dimension to reflect upon is which values are actually most influential in the lived experience of the pupils, teachers and staff in a school environment. Character is taught as much as taught, and there is a benefit in making these tacit values explicit.

The UK government has foregrounded the value of character education for some years, in particular identifying resilience as the quality most likely to boost young people’s life chances. A character education committee of experts set up under Dame Hindes continues to advise the government, and in August 2019 the Education Secretary claimed that ‘character and resilience are key to social mobility’. The DfE is currently creating guidance and benchmarks for schools to help them to teach character, and specifically to help them to meet new Ofsted frameworks for teaching ‘personal development’.

The extent to which character qualities are learnable or innate is a moot point. An influential 2013 paper by James Heckman and Tim Kautz concluded that ‘Character is a skill, not a trait... Character is shaped by families, schools, and social environments... Successful interventions [across all stages] emulate the mentoring environments offered by successful families’. A growing body of evidence supports the argument that character is teachable through the academic curriculum, through the co-curriculum, and through collaboration with other schools. It can be taught explicitly and implicitly, cognitively and experientially.

As soon as one starts talking about teaching character values or virtues, the question arises, ‘Whose values are we teaching?’ The influential Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues has gone back to an Aristotelian model of intellectual, civic, moral and performance virtues. All of the great spiritual traditions speak directly about the moral aspects of character. A more secular approach is to look for universal values. Heckman and Kautz (ibid) argue that certain skills and dispositions are valued across cultures including perseverance, self-control, trust, self-efficacy, resilience, empathy, tolerance and engaging productively in society.

1 As adapted by George Lyttleton in writing to Rupert Hart-Davis

References

Use Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is an effective tool for harnessing student motivation and developing perseverance in the learning process (Boaler & Confer, n.d.; Masters, 2013). Formative assessment involves using ongoing evaluations throughout the learning process to shape further instruction (OECF, 2000). This approach provides pupils with assessments for learning rather than assessments of learning. Results from our study show that Eton is currently implementing several forms of formative assessment practices across the year levels including goal-setting, frequent assessments, and effective feedback (Black & Wiliam, 1998; OECD, 2005).

Collaborative goal-setting is an important first step in formative assessment. Here a pupil explains how Eton’s use of goal-setting can deepen motivation. ‘Eton helps provide suitable goals with suitable rewards that help us be more motivated with our studies’. Pupils appreciate the level of support received as they work towards goals, ‘[teachers] keep allowing you to set targets and support them in knowledgeable, friendly, and engaging ways’.

Another formative assessment practice that Eton uses is giving frequent assessments to inform pupils of where they are in the learning process. This pupil eloquently explains, ‘[Eton] often provides goal orientated exercises to allow yourself to check how effectively you have learned a topic. i.e., they give you tests after every section of the syllabus rather than just at the end of term’. Eton pupils are cognizant of the benefits of using ongoing assessments to shape learning, as one pupil puts it, ‘We are reminded that weekly learning (continuous small term assessments) will make the learning process much easier and more effective’.

Finally, pupils remark that teachers offer effective feedback on how they can improve and move forward. For example, this pupil explains, ‘[Eton] gives you [the] freedom to try again and tells you how to do it better’. Another pupil shares that one way he receives support to persevere in the learning process is from ‘good feedback where areas for improvement are clearly highlighted’. Together, emphasizing the role of effort and using formative assessment practices helps students to be motivated and perseverence in the face of challenges.

Happiness and Gratitude

Cultivate Positive Relationships

Research has shown time and time again that positive relationships are fundamental to happiness. In fact, the best predictor of a person’s happiness is the quality of their relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Dermer & Weitenkamp, 2007; Diener & Seligman, 2002; Gilbert et al., 2017; Hoelder & Coleman, 2008; Myers, 2003). Given this, it is essential for schools to create an environment in which positive relationships can thrive and flourish across the school community. Our findings indicate that Eton cultivates positive relationships both between teachers and boys and among boys.

The majority of pupils surveyed agree that teachers ‘quite a bit’ or ‘very much’ build positive relationships with boys. Echoing this finding, most of the teachers, support staff, and dames believe they ‘quite a bit’ or ‘very much’ build positive relationships with boys. As one pupil shares, ‘One of the greatest things about this school is the relationships which may develop between boys and teachers.’ He goes on to mention that these positive relationships can engender feelings of gratitude and encourage boys to express those feelings, noting, ‘[These relationships] are so important for encouraging expression of gratitude.’

Our survey results also demonstrate that Eton is cultivating positive relationships between boys. This perspective appears throughout the open-ended responses across our whole sample. For example, a master notes, ‘Eton provides plenty of time for boys to develop friendships’. The boys also remark on this support noting, ‘Eton is pretty good at fostering good relationships between boys with another sharing, ‘Teachers are always making sure boys are kind to each other’.

Encourage Boys to be Grateful

Intentionally practising gratitude supports students to feel more grateful. Seemingly simple gratitude exercises can increase how grateful one feels in various areas of their life, which also boosts their happiness (Sarfet & Liau, 2013; Dickerson, 2007; Boehm, Lyubomirsky & Sheldon, 2011; Layous, Lee, Choi & Lyubomirsky, 2013; Chancellor, Layous & Lyubomirsky, 2015). Our character study shows that teachers at Eton support boys’ gratitude and happiness by encouraging them to be grateful as well as by modelling gratitude. In addition, Eton provides boys with opportunities to volunteer, which supports gratitude as well.

The open-ended responses suggest gratitude is part of the ethos at the school. For example, a pupil explains, ‘Gratitude is expected at Eton which is great at preparing you for the outside world’. Another pupil shares a similar observation, ‘I think that overall everyone at the school has a great deal of respect for each other and the school encourages students to express gratitude by returning favors or simply saying thank you’. Our collected responses also offer a look into how Eton encourages gratitude more explicitly. For instance, here a pupil explains that teachers model gratitude, noting ‘teachers thank you at the end of the lesson, encouraging you to thank them as well’.

Furthermore, we learn that positive gratitude is developed through volunteering opportunities. One pupil shares, ‘Through the work of charities and various organisations the school supports, we are reminded of the importance of gratitude’.

Respect

Support Boys to Respect Differences in Perspectives, Beliefs, and Backgrounds

Creating a culture of respect begins with engendering a capacity to respect differences between those in the school community (OECF/PISA, 2018). We find that Eton supports a culture of respect across the school specifically by encouraging pupils to respect differences in perspectives, beliefs, and backgrounds. Put simply by one pupil, ‘Eton teaches well about the values of respect, especially for those who are different to you’.

One way that Eton promotes respect is to encourage boys to be open to different points of view in discussions. One pupil describes how respect for different points of view is cultivated through debate, explaining ‘In a debate, during a scenario where there isn’t a right or wrong answer, one is not discouraged to share their view and others are taught to be open to different points of view’. Another pupil shares that this practice of respect is consistent across lessons, stating, ‘We are encouraged to respect each other’s ideas and points in almost every lesson’. A pupil notes that this extends to beliefs as well, ‘[In] divinity [we talk] about respecting beliefs and understanding not everyone thinks like you’.

Another way that Eton fosters a culture of respect is by providing opportunities for pupils to build relationships with people from different backgrounds. Here a pupil explains, ‘In my house there is a scheme where we invite members of the wider Eton community to lunch… it teaches people to respect them’. With this practice, students have the opportunity to get to know members of the community from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, which nurtures mutual respect. By encouraging pupils to consider different points of view and build relationships with people from different backgrounds, Eton builds a community characterized by respect.

Collaborative Goal-Setting is an Important First Step in Formative Assessment.
Conclusion

Through this work with the research team at RSI, Eton is ensuring that they are intentionally nurturing the character strengths most central to their community. By implementing the research-based practices discussed above, educators at Eton are supporting pupils to grow into individuals who are motivated and persevere in the face of challenges, who are grateful and happy, and who are respectful of different perspectives, beliefs and backgrounds.

Citations


The concerts are just an excuse, really – what I love are the rehearsals. Because it is in the dynamic, unpredictable and unique environment of an orchestral rehearsal that the incredible transformation happens. And I don’t mean just a musical process, but an intangible (but at times unmistakable) transformation that takes place when a group of seventy or so young musicians work together, give their best and unite in their common purpose of bringing a masterful piece of music alive. I would argue, it offers us an educational opportunity like no other.

As a senior boy in the orchestra this year, Shaw, points out, the expectation is incumbent on every member to be committed and involved throughout rehearsals – this demands particular discipline, especially when the rehearsal focuses on other players, but the level of concentration needed from the rest of the orchestra is extremely high in order to allow the work to take place. It takes an impressive level of self-control and steel courage to wait patiently and in silence while the conductor decides to check articulation markings in the piccolo part, only to be given 15 seconds’ notice to play an extremely exposed solo in front of your peers – an experienced principal trumpet player once summed it up: he had spent his long orchestral career either bored to death or scared to death, it takes an impressive level of self-control and steely courage to wait patiently and in silence while the conductor decides to check articulation markings in the piccolo part, only to be given 15 seconds’ notice to play an extremely exposed solo in front of your peers – an experienced principal trumpet player once summed it up: he had spent his long orchestral career either bored to death or scared to death, only to be given 15 seconds’ notice to play an extremely exposed solo in front of your peers – an experienced principal trumpet player once summed it up: he had spent his long orchestral career either bored to death or scared to death.

Another instance in which an orchestra can be a mutually supportive environment is when the orchestra finds itself accompanying a concert soloist (which at Elton tends to happen every term). Orchestral players in concerto rehearsals spend the majority of time playing for a peer. The responsibility is therefore not just artistic but personal, integrating the players’ ability to demand the highest standards of themselves as well as the humility needed to support the success of a peer. This list could continue – in my work with young musicians, I am constantly reminded of how working with an orchestra (or a chamber music ensemble) is just an opportunity at our disposal to bring out the best in our students. Oh – and just to be clear – I absolutely love the concerts.

We are all just passing on the torch that someone gave us when we were starting, and that takes kindness, patience and responsibility.

There is a tacit understanding that almost every member has a hand in organising the orchestra’s day-to-day operation: setting up chairs, showing up on time, diplomatically negotiating clashes. Shaw points out that here’s an element of mutual gratitude that develops – even if all you’re doing is carrying chairs downstairs, there’s still a sense of the whole being greater than its parts. Self-reliance and mutual support develop a sense of responsibility to a wider community that is integral in the orchestra itself. Attending rehearsals early on Thursdays, when other boys in the House have a lie-in, on Sunday nights or after a day packed with lessons, sport and other activities, requires an extra layer of dependability. Ultimately it has to be about the orchestra and the music, not about each orchestral musician – you’d be hard-pressed to find a boy who doesn’t understand that, and it requires a remarkable level of altruism.

The other thing is empathy. From the moment young children start mimicking their parents or dressing up for Christmas, drama is very literally stepping into someone else’s shoes. Literally wearing someone else’s clothes. You are figuratively seeing through someone else’s eyes.

Drama has massive potential to develop character. I am wary of making grand statements about how one can teach character, but I am sure that working in drama can reveal character. Character, whatever it means, is about very personal elements within an individual and a lot of those are developed by families before the pupils come into a teaching environment. Within that environment you have realms of exploration. Within the realm of drama I am going to say there is potential, but who knows? When you are working with young actors you have to give them attention, to become unblocked. The whole point of drama is that it is specific to the individual: but this, I think, is the doorway to potential character development.

Drama is based on a very powerful word: ‘IF’. If I were to murder the king with my wife, what then? It simultaneously asks you to discard your current set of beliefs and take upon another. In that way I think drama encourages creative doubt, and this is a hugely important part of one’s armoury before the world. Young people will have grown up among a whole lot of assumptions and they are going to need to create a new culture for their generation. Therefore, the most fundamental aspect of their education that we can encourage is creative doubt: to be able to question what they have been given by the previous generation. Otherwise, there is no progression in culture. I believe all the artists who have written plays believe that you are going to see character revealed. I think this is a powerful realm for young people to explore things.

The whole point of drama is that it is specific to the individual and unique environment of an orchestral rehearsal that powers them to do amazing things. The theatre takes this competitive edge, but they are not competing with other people; they are competing against time. Can you make the show before the time runs out? The only way you can do that is to harness people with uniquely different skills. Each is different and each is the best for their role. They cannot compete, they are a family. And that is a better model for how groups should be working than who came out top of the test. All the people working with different skills, starting at different times, with different rhythms, but finishing together to create something. I don’t think we are going to the theatre to see a play revealed, we are going to see character revealed. I think this is a powerful realm for young people to explore things.

We have a few rules in improvisation:
1. Make your partner look good
2. Accept and build
3. Say the first thing that comes to your head

If you apply these principles in your life, amazing things can happen. My job here is not to produce professional Oscar-winning actors. Drama is great for practising how to see and hear the world without judging it. In practising drama, I hope you come out a more empathetic person, a kinder person, a more resilient person and one that has a huge resource of creative doubt.

Very few of us act for a living, but all of us act to live.

Rehearsals for, ‘As You Like It’.
CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AND OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Mark Fielker  |  Master in Charge of Outdoor Education, Eton College

I have been taking students into the mountains for a long time, and have known for almost as long the state of mind that experience generates. New environments and activities bring new demands and challenges which impel students into awareness of themselves and of those around them, appreciation of their environment, and engagement with new skills which are quickly tested in a real sense. Collaborating as a group is particularly relevant and essential.

The impact on students is striking both during their time in the mountains and, particularly, in the minibuses on the way home. There is a buzz, a sense of achievement, chatter about shared and bonding experiences, and an exhausted elation. All of this sums up the phrase ‘type two fun’ which is so often cited in outdoor education: the feeling of accomplishment that comes with doing something challenging but rewarding.

I knew there was plenty for these students to gain from these experiences, but I became increasingly aware that I was lacking the tools which could convert this rather unfathomed experience into something much more successful in terms of teaching and developing character. In time I found myself talking about this with a friend and colleague whom I had spent time with in the hills but who also had a background in life coaching which allowed him to see the potential provided by immersing students in the outdoors. That conversation evolved over several years into an experiential programme which involved taking a group of 25 D blockers (Year 11) who had just finished their GCSEs and an equal number of boys from Windsor Boys’ School to the Scottish Highlands for a two-week programme of outdoor activities and self-awareness training.

Eton Plus was designed to improve the pupils’ abilities at setting and achieving personal goals and developing their resilience in overcoming setbacks, alongside improving their confidence and developing their self-awareness. The programme was also designed to teach the pupils to make good decisions and take responsibility for the consequences, to help them experience and understand leadership, and to develop a range of skills around improving communication, planning and problem-solving. It was intended that they would also recognise the importance of resilient, self-awareness, and harnessing individual strengths through strong leadership.

The daytime activities were designed so that every boy would come up against something he found personally challenging, whether that was something related to the environment, such as a fear of heights or uncertainty around fast-flowing water, or something related to the group dynamic, such as having to take the lead and make decisions for the group, or having to follow another’s lead. Equipped with the tools for dealing with that challenge and for helping others to do the same, they had powerful opportunities to put those tools to action and learn experimentally.

A range of issues emerged during the evening debrief sessions. Boys learned to recognise and appreciate what was going on for them and for others. One thing quickly became clear: that the boys found it difficult to break out of the one-dimensional and primarily individualistic dynamic of the classroom and adapt to the very different learning environment in which they found themselves. Indeed, it was interesting to note that those boys used to commanding respect and influence at school who assumed the same dynamic in the hills quickly struggled to cope with the programme. Conversely, more considered boys who had the ability to see the needs of the group emerged as natural leaders in unfamiliar situations. This was an excellent lesson to all the boys about what contributes to good and effective leadership and the elements of good teamwork. As one boy described it, ‘we learned through experience how much more we could achieve by working effectively together and harnessing individual strengths through strong leadership.’

Early examples of this came on the first night’s walk and the night after the group went rock climbing. One boy described it as ‘the moment I finally understood what I was capable of and that I had the potential to achieve more than I ever thought possible.’

By the end of the programme, the boys were definitely more self-aware and developed a stronger sense of self and how they related to others. They became more prepared to take risks and try new things. The programme also helped them to develop better communication skills, which they could use both in their personal and professional lives. They were able to work more effectively with others, and to develop a range of skills around improving communication, planning and problem-solving. It was a multifaceted approach that always proved best. But, outdoor activities offer one special opportunity: its realism; the engagement with one’s surroundings which directly impact on one’s experiences; the progressive nature of the activities which allow a skilled instructor to ratchet up challenges until students are tested outside their comfort zone; its group focus which develops an appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses within a team and the best way to utilise those strengths; and the scope for genuine adversity and need to overcome setbacks, but with only positive long-term consequences. The genuine need for collaboration, teamwork and empathy in completing a group task with a joint goal is in stark contrast to many of the demands on pupils as they go about their work at school.

The outdoor aspect of ‘Eton Plus’ was facilitated by Outward Bound, whose Evaluation Department carried out an extensive study of the programme. Demonstrating the benefits from this kind of work is difficult but they are expert in this field and achieved both qualitative and quantitative evidence for the benefits enjoyed by the students. In this evaluation there was clear evidence from all involved that the programme enabled students to develop self-awareness, the ability to persevere, the ability to work effectively with others, and an improved understanding of leadership. These qualitative results were supported by quantitative data collected through pre and post-course surveys, which showed increases in the pupils’ perseverance, self-efficacy, and aspects of their social skills.

This very much confirmed my observations over the years which are based much more on direct experience and feedback. I regularly receive communications from parents about the changes they have noted in their sons having returned from the mountains. A particularly striking experience was spending time trekking in the South African bush with a group of Etonians as part of an excellent trip organised by Eton master Keni Hicks and run by the Wilderness Foundation. We spent five days and nights walking through the bush and sleeping under the stars. We left behind all electronic devices and timepieces so had no communication with the outside world and the passage of time was just a sense of steady changes through the day and the movement of the stars at night. Regular discussion groups (indabas) gave the boys a chance to reflect on their experiences. Detachment from the outside world was a popular theme and most appreciated the time and space it allowed them. I remember one boy explaining how for him the outside world had not disappeared but that he could draw down parts of it and digest them in a way he just could not when it was bombarding him throughout the day (and night).

Of course, there are lots of ways of teaching character and a multifaceted approach will always be best. But, outdoor activities offer some special opportunities: its realism; the engagement with one’s surroundings which directly impact on one’s experiences; the progressive nature of the activities which allow a skilled instructor to ratchet up challenges until students are tested outside their comfort zone; its group focus which develops an appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses within a team and the best way to utilise those strengths; and the scope for genuine adversity and need to overcome setbacks, but with only positive long-term consequences. The genuine need for collaboration, teamwork and empathy in completing a group task with a joint goal is in stark contrast to many of the demands on pupils as they go about their work at school.

At Eton we are looking carefully at ways to create more opportunities whilst minimising the impact on the school routine generally. There are activities that can be woven into the normal routine alongside other curricular activities such as indoor climbing, kayaking and mountain biking. Moreover, training and preparation for trips away from school are valuable activities in themselves. Central camps for all boys at certain points throughout their time at Eton would provide a great focus for regular term-time activities and allow a level of immersion which can produce changes that can continue to be accessed and developed once back in school.

We will continue to offer specialised trips during the holidays such as mountaineering, climbing, kayaking and sailing, which offer boys with particular interests and ambitions the chance to fulfil those. Indeed, the benefits of this sort of progressive and layered approach to outdoor activities extend to opportunities to lead and instruct, to develop a skills base and set of qualifications which provide such a boy with particular opportunities for a gap year and for life-time interests and passions.
When Socrates asks Protagoras, the greatest intellectual of the era, what a student stands to gain from an education with him, he receives the answer: ‘Each day he spends with me he will become a better person’. Protagoras is presenting himself as an expert of character education. True to character (sic), Socrates is not entirely happy with the answer. He and Protagoras spar for a time, refining, perhaps re-defining the Protagorean syllabus: first as becoming successful in private and public life, then as the art of living in a community and finally as human excellence. Socrates is to be excited by Protagoras’ claim, but is troubled by one concern: he does not think that it is something that can be taught.

The Protagoras was the first Plato dialogue I studied and it has stayed with me in various ways over the last thirty years, especially the opening pages, which are an attractive and accessible read for A level Greek students, and which also serve as just about the best introduction to philosophy that I have ever found. But my main educational focus of the last thirteen years, running a boarding house, has made me feel that I would like to give; like him, I feel that a boarding house master and schools as a whole are in the business of character education.

But this presents a few unsettling thoughts. First, as I have already said, Socrates doubts whether it is possible to teach character; he also casts doubt on the qualifications of the likes of Protagoras who claim to be able to teach it. Perhaps most telling of all is the big question: what is human excellence, or in our terms, what constitutes ‘good character’? Until we have answered this question, says Socrates, we cannot hope to answer the question of whether it can be taught, let alone how one can teach it. The dialogue ends, to the frustration of many readers, with a sense that they need to start the discussion again from the beginning.

We may think we have an idea of the character we seek to instil in the young people we teach; although I confess I am rarely convinced by most statements along these lines. For their part, Protagoras and Socrates certainly had some apparent shared ground from their common Greek heritage, the idea that human excellence could be broken down to the possession of five distinct but related qualities: intellectual understanding, morality, emotional control, courage and spirituality. A good list, I would argue, and not all that different from the lists that those in the vanguard of 21st century theorising about character education have compiled. But, as Plato’s dialogues have shown readers for the best part of 2500 years, it is far from simple to answer the next level of questions: what is courage? what is morality? And, if we cannot answer these questions, or if the answers are constantly changing, how can we start teaching these qualities?

To me this question is the clearest example of just how difficult it is for us to deliver character education and how important it is that we try. For their part, Protagoras and Socrates certainly had some apparent shared ground from their common Greek heritage, the idea that human excellence could be broken down to the possession of five distinct but related qualities: intellectual understanding, morality, emotional control, courage and spirituality. A good list, I would argue, and not all that different from the lists that those in the vanguard of 21st century theorising about character education have compiled. But, as Plato’s dialogues have shown readers for the best part of 2500 years, it is far from simple to answer the next level of questions: what is courage? what is morality? And, if we cannot answer these questions, or if the answers are constantly changing, how can we start teaching these qualities?

SOME SUBJECTS, SPORTS OR ACTIVITIES HAVE MORE TO OFFER TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CERTAIN TRAITS THAN OTHERS.
The distinction between PE and Games is rarely even acknowledged, let alone appreciated, by PE sceptics. PE deliberately sets out to be essentially different from Games and to offer a distinct experience of inclusivity as opposed to exclusivity. So it could be said that Games and PE complement each other.

In PE, a boy learns to take responsibility for his own decisions and actions early. By being challenged in an environment in which he can trust those around him, he can experience the benefits of taking risks. This setting is achieved by establishing a culture of ‘can’ and ‘what if’, mutual respect and celebration of (and enjoyment in) the success of others. This is combined with a readiness to seek and offer help through the appreciation of one’s strengths and limitations, and those of others. The ‘zero-sum game mentality’ is challenged whenever it emerges.

At Eton each character plays his part in team sport and we are building each boy a stage so he can choose which part he feels most moved by. Consequently, he learns to respect and appreciate the relative strengths and weaknesses of others. What becomes evident is that there will always be someone better than him as well as someone worse than him in the kaleidoscope of classmates and taking part in the myriad activities taught. Thus with a little timely guidance from the teacher the seeds of humility can be sown! This humility, tolerance and wisdom enables the boy to play an active part in the wellbeing of those around him, now and into the future.

Empathy is one of the focuses as solutions are sought to solve group problems. An appreciation of the relative strengths and weaknesses of group members is critical in any workable solution. One has to learn to bear the responsibility of being relatively strong with an appropriate disposition or skill, and offer to use it in the resolution of the team problem. But more difficult is that one has to learn to accept the responsibility of being challenged by the demands of a problem, admit it and seek help; this takes courage.

Within this PE cultural setting process is often considered more important than outcome. Indeed, some tasks are set which cannot be solved. In this way it is recognised that we often learn more by searching for a solution and sometimes not finding it than by discovering it. This is not to say that a result or competition is absent in what we do. Competition is an integral and important element in the work. The boys are not ‘protected from losing’ but learn to appreciate the value of having achieved personal targets and the satisfaction and enjoyment of that achievement. We play games for the chance of playing well and the thrill of perhaps playing our best ever. This wisdom embraces the prospect of lifelong improvement. In this way boys begin to appreciate the fullness of the single minded and limited focus on winning and recognise that winning is something they rarely have total control over. They and their team can have played their best yet still lose. Winning might best be considered as merely the icing on the cake when one has played well and a crumb of consolation when one has not.

Team activities nurture emotional maturity as they help an individual to recognise that the sum of the parts amounts to less than the whole and that there are greater goals than the win. It matters not that you won or lost, but how you played the game. The unique experiences of shared emotions which characterise team sports offer a landscape in which spiritual richness and emotional maturity can be nurtured. Learning opportunities to recognise, respect and value integrity, honesty, effort, and individuality are experienced in PE.

When self-confidence in a range of settings has started to develop we seek to place the individual in interactive situations, normally partnerwork. Thus it becomes possible to see how their dispositions and skills compare with and complement those of others.

At the moment, leadership/teamwork is formally dished to boys over the three years of PE. Situations are contrived and tasks set to place boys in unfamiliar settings that require imagination, creative solutions and a high level of interdependence, teamwork and/or leadership. During these lessons the teacher stands back from the work after the task has been set up, and observes. The plenary and reflection part of the lesson is guided by carefully worded questions to elicit a thorough evaluation of the decisions and actions made by the boys as individuals as well as those made by the team. They are encouraged to think about and discuss how they behaved towards the situation set and towards each other, and how that reaction affected the outcomes. It is hoped they will come to learn that they can affect outcomes by positive reactions to events experienced throughout their lives and build resilience through this wisdom.

The centre of what is done is to help boys develop their dispositions and skills, contributing to the growth of their self confidence. The intrinsic physical and mental health benefits of a lifetime of activity are made clear, too: men sana in corpore sano. This prepares them for continuing the lifelong development of their character.

Here is an example of the type of lesson which can showcase what is written above.

The Micro scale: a Gymnastics lesson in the first year

For example, in a gymnastics lesson the boys will be responsible for getting there on time, appropriately dressed, and each boy will understand and know the consequences of failure to do so for him as an individual as well as for the group.

The lesson starts with revision of what concepts, facts and physical as well as personal techniques were taken away from the last lesson. For example, a boy might volunteer to his partner or the group, ‘we discovered that tucking into a small ball helps us rotate more quickly’;

‘Phil had the best forward roll because his hands touched the ground only once’;

‘when supporting your partner, encourage him and feedback positively at first and ONLY then suggest a way he might be able to improve’.

The theme of the lesson – rotation, for example – may be kept secret and boys asked to consider the hidden theme as they work. They have to coordinate their actions to set out the equipment safely, swiftly, efficiently and accurately. This exercise in itself involves decision-making, taking responsibility and co-operating unselfishly for the common good, as well as appreciating self-evident consequences if the task is not achieved efficiently and safely.

Once set up, the various working areas represent a calculated and diverse range of both closed and open-ended challenges for each of the boys. Some apparatus will require strength, others balance and courage, for example. Techniques are taught and different levels of difficulty are demonstrated and explained for each working area and the boys are also asked to devise their own ideas for extension work. Boys are encouraged to attempt work in all areas but to work at a ‘level’ they think will challenge them. They set their own targets. At this stage they will be asked to consider and discuss reasonable targets for their work. Then, positioning himself so that the whole class can be seen, the teacher will simply observe the work for a good while. The boys set to work and aim to challenge themselves and use the teacher as a consultant. The teacher resists stepping in unless a boy is in danger. He will also advise boys about how much time is left. He may see an appropriate moment to celebrate the work of a particular boy, in which case all activity stops and the whole group will gather round. This is an integral part of any learning situation: the appreciation of a disposition, skill or technique performed to a high level by a contemporary. The teacher has to seize the moment, and may also intervene to ask a boy who does not seem to be working well what his target is.

Towards the end of the lesson the teacher will do a mental audit to ensure that every boy in the class has had a chance to ask him for advice. Before the apparatus is put away a plenary will involve a question and answer session, perhaps using the ‘own up answering’ technique (Macleod, 2019) to visit the theme of the lesson and to celebrate successes and share feedback on sound or not so sound techniques. Each boy will be asked to reflect and perhaps to articulate to another his thoughts on his own work in terms of his personal targets. Show ups (rewards) may be awarded for especially pleasing work, not just to those who performed at a high level, and boys can be involved in this decision.

No one will leave until everything is put away swiftly and safely.
Virtue Windows

The idea of character education is quite literally built into the fabric of schools with a Christian ethos. In Lower Chapel at Eton College, for example, where 525 boys sit most mornings (and where thousands of other boys have sat in the years before them) they look up at a gallery of stained glass windows, each of which is dedicated to a particular virtue. St Francis looks down at us from the ‘Humilitas’ window, King David from the ‘Justitia’ window, St Martin from the ‘Charitas’ window, and so on. The promotion and exaltation of hard-won virtues is very near to the core of what a Christian education looks like.

Not at the core, however, because there is a deep conviction that what really lies at the core is a focus on submission to Jesus Christ as Lord and the reception of the inward transformation that he brings. Indeed, the whole genre of Wisdom Literature was written by the older generation for the young to learn the great virtue that is envisaged by a perfect human life: to meditate on the Gospels is to encounter The Character From whom all the highest human notions of character are derived.

Action

Just as Aristotle taught that habits are essential to the development of virtue, we find the call to practice what is believed shot through Christian teaching: the life of virtue is caught as much as it is taught. To that end, as well as developing the disciplines of prayer and worship in regular Chapel services, Chaplains encourage boys to get involved with charitable activities (such as proposing and giving to the weekly Chapel collections, delivering Harvest Bags to members of the local community), engaging in social action programmes (such as Phab Club, a club for young people with and without disabilities to have fun together), or making humanitarian trips abroad (visiting Zambia with Hands at Work,4 or Rwanda with REACH-Rwanda5).

The Chaplains recognise that we speak and act alongside others to develop who you are. It is a life of self-giving love, driven by faith and inspired by hope; a life of doing the will of God on earth, as it is in heaven.

Heavenly Character

All views of character are set within a worldview that defines what it means to be fully human: there is no such thing as a neutral approach to morality. For the Aristotelian, the virtuous person is a happiness-seeking member of the city-state, for the Stoic, she is a frustration-shunning mind in a law-governed nature. For the Christian, the ideal human life is one lived in the Kingdom of God, and the virtues fit a person living in the world as it will be, even if the present age is troubled, morally ambiguous and full of temptation. It is a life of self-giving love, driven by faith and inspired by hope; a life of doing the will of God on earth, as it is in heaven.

Christian educators have a deep well from which to draw their inspiration. The Thomist tradition is well-known, whether consciously or unconsciously, given that it dominated the Middle Ages and formed the atmosphere in which many of the older schools were founded. Aquinas combined the Aristotelian virtues of courage, temperance, prudence and justice with the virtues of faith, hope and love. The Bible itself provides a constellation of images and ideas to inspire the modern imagination with the vision of a flourishing human life. The New Testament speaks of joy, holiness, purity, tender-heartedness, contentment, peace, compassion, gratitude, kindness, hospitality, gentleness, humility, reverence, meekness, confidence, forgiveness, patience and self-control.6 Earlier texts, such as the Book of Proverbs in the Hebrew Bible give us figures such as the Staggit, the Simpleton and the Drunkard to amuse or shame us out of our laziness, credulity and debauchery.7

Indeed, the whole genre of Wisdom Literature was written by the older generation for the young to learn the great virtue of wisdom: the way to apply knowledge to the manifold complexities of life. Above all, the figure of Jesus Christ as a moral exemplar rises out of the pages of Scripture to embody all that is envisaged by a perfect human life: to meditate on the Gospels is to encounter The Character From whom all the highest human notions of character are derived.

1 See the Church of England publication on Character Education, called The Fruit of the Spirithttps://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/ files/2017-11/Tha%20Fruit%20of%20the%20Spirit_0.pdf
2 Cf Rom. 5:2, 3; 1 Pet. 1:5-16; 2 Cor. 6; Eph. 4:30; Phil 4:11-12; Phil. 4:7; Col 3:12; 1 Thess. 5:18; 2 Cor. 6:6; Rom. 12:13; 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Cor. 11:1; Rom. 12:18; Eph. 4:15, 25; Phil 2:3; 2 Cor. 5:11; 2 Cor. 5:6; Jas. 1:21; Col 3:13; 1 Cor. 13:4; Gal 1:23
4 For example in the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders: Matt 7:24-27.
5 https://www.phab.org.uk/phab-news/eton-college-phab-club-flourishing
6 https://www.handsatwork.org/
7 http://watchtower.org/
What would a school curriculum look like that really did put service experience at the heart of boys’ lives? I asked Haroon Shirwani, the Master in Charge of ECCE, how we can do this. Together, we have established the following:

First, the idea of service would be championed at all levels of the school and woven into the school’s communications strategy, consistently articulated by the Leadership Team and others. Time for volunteering would be considered when planning out the school week. Boarding houses would be hubs of charity work and public service. Tutors would help pupils plan out and reflect upon volunteer placements. Heads of Academic and Co-Curricular departments would encourage outreach work by staff and boys. Individual boys with ideas for community service work would receive the mentoring and guidance needed to develop realistic and worthwhile projects.

Second, it would emphasise volunteering as an educational experience, based on the pillars of virtue ethics articulated in the report. Placements would be planned with the aim of nurturing key virtues, such as respect, patience, empathy, gratitude and openness. This would inform the nature of the volunteer work, the training received by the boys and, most importantly, the process of reflection afterwards, allowing participants to develop an awareness of the progress they have made.

Third, it would maintain a healthy relationship with the individuals and organisations that allow our boys to volunteer with them. (This is the thinking behind our use of the term ‘Community Engagement’.) It would understand that this is a two-way process and that the boys learn at least as much as they give. The guidance, training and supervision provided by placement hosts is a significant part of the boys’ education. We would liaise carefully with the local and broader community, understanding the needs that need to be met and expressing sincere appreciation for the opportunities provided.

Fourth, it would create opportunities for boys to volunteer in different ways throughout their time at school, with a clearly articulated pathway for service work from F Block (Year 9) to B Block (Year 13). It would find active and radical ways of getting Lower Boys involved in meaningful volunteering, with a broader range of options further up the school. The pathway would branch out into holiday-time volunteering, especially as the boys grow older and are able to make independent choices. For example, Etonians could be encouraged to join the National Citizen service, itself run by Michael Lynam, an OE, and develop ways of building strong relationships across social boundaries. It might even extend the pathway into prep school by suggesting that Eton considered service work as important in the admissions process.

I thank Iro Konstantinou and Tom Harrison for their work on the report ‘Community Engagement: mapping its impact on character development in C Block boys’.

The formation of character virtues necessary for students to flourish in their personal lives and fulfilling their responsibilities as citizens has been a foundational aspect of education since the ancient world. Concerns regarding the wellbeing of adolescents and the health of our democratic society have contributed to the renewal of character and leadership development as important emphases in contemporary education.

In both state and private sectors, character is firmly on the agenda. For example, in Ofsted’s 2019 inspection framework, teachers are mandated to attend to ‘developing pupils’ character’, preparing students with ‘the qualities they need to flourish in society’ (Ofsted 2019, p. 58). In an ‘excellent’ school, ‘the way the school goes about developing pupils’ character is exemplary and is worthy of being shared with others’ (p. 62).

The Ofsted framework identifies the societal as well as personal importance of character formation. Virtues like justice, courage, honesty, humility, wisdom, empathy, compassion and service are vital for citizens to contribute to the health of our democratic society. They are particularly important for those who will occupy positions of responsibility and influence. As Van Linden and Fertman (1999) highlight, there is a close relationship between the formation of character and the education of a new generation of leaders who will further the public good. ‘For adolescents, positive leadership behavior is character education in action’.

Building on a methodology tested over several years in the OCP’s Global Leadership Initiative (see Brooks et al., 2018), we are seeking to design an effective and scalable programme that will help Year 12 students to become leaders of character who will use the opportunities, abilities and resources that they possess to further the good of their communities and wider society.

Our aim is that students will grow in three important aspects of character and leadership development:

1. Intellectual understanding: knowledge of what characterizes good leadership in different contexts
2. Practices of leadership: habits of life that support good leadership
3. Moral formation: leadership identity (see Komives et al., 2005) and virtues of character

For this article we asked students to respond to 4 questions which are related to the first objective of this programme. A sample of the responses is given below.

Questions:
1. What did you think makes a good leader before the programme?
2. How has that thinking changed, if it has?
3. What character traits do you associate with good leadership?
4. What examples stuck with you as to what leadership looks like?
I thought that good leaders need to have charisma, determination and a loud voice. I was under the impression that good leaders need to be authoritative and be able to coordinate a large group of people. I now know that what makes a leader much more effective than having a power presence is being able to effectively communicate. The idea of a hierarchical system of power was something that I had just accepted; however, in this programme we discussed how servant leadership can be a possibility. I associate empathy, vision, determination, innovation and honesty with GOOD leadership. However bad leadership I associate with extreme concentrations of particular traits, for example, a leader who refuses to allow other members of a team to collaborate in providing ideas. I really enjoyed looking at Greta Thunberg in one of our sessions, however, and enjoyed researching her further and looking at the idea that she was an accidental leader. This brings up the idea that leadership qualities can be entirely personal to a person and make someone into a leader if they are truly passionate about it.

Before joining the OCP, I thought of a leader as a charismatic, confident person in position of authority who inspires people to believe in their ideas. I now realise that a leader does not need to have authority, nor do they need to be hierarchical. A leader can come from within a group and need not impose their ideas. Instead, I now understand a leader as someone who is able to help a group help itself. A leader should enable the members of a group to contribute as much as possible to the group’s goal. Though a leader need not be a god-like figure descended from the heavens to save their team. Therefore, any individual in a team can lead, and lead specifically in areas they are strong at. Because essentially leadership is using listening and communication skills to help a group of individuals with a shared aim to achieve that goal. And leadership is not on a large scale only.

With many thanks to Tom Arbuthnott and Jonnie Noakes who enabled the programme to take place.

Before the programme, I thought that a good leader is an individual who led in a specific way to drive their team to achieve a specific aim. I saw leadership as having one boss and that they made the final decision on matters, with input of members of the team. Therefore, good leadership must involve delegation in a team, perhaps on a large scale. However, I did think that a good leader had a lot of responsibility, such as in a high place of authority such as a chief executive in the employment sector, or the prime minister for example. Finally, I believed good leadership generally involved no disagreements/conflicting ideas and questions, so there was a clear aim that all agreed on. I have learned a lot from the programme, especially that leadership and the quality of leadership is not relative to one boss in a team. Therefore, any individual in a team can lead, and lead specifically in areas they are strong at. Because essentially leadership is using listening and communication skills to help a group of individuals with a shared aim to achieve that goal. And leadership is not on a large scale only.

Character Education has become a buzz phrase in the lexicon of modern schooling. As individual and school performances have become more subject to measurement, and the readily-measurable parts of the curriculum seen as more important, school experiences have become more constrained as a consequence. The quest for transparency and robust tracking of performance was born of noble intent, but has come at a cost. Those trickier elements to measure like character, have tended to be sidelined – put into the too-difficult box. Yet teachers and parents intuitively feel there is a missing link and that rhetoric about a holistic education is empty without a genuine commitment to the development of character.

One hundred and fifty years ago there was relatively little talk of character education, but that was because it was a given, the evident foundation for schooling, the point of it all. Our recent obsession with the measurement of a particular type of intelligence, is just that – recent.

The best British independent schools, especially those that believe in the continuing relevance of a boarding tradition, have sustained a model that gives ample time outside the classroom for young people to learn a range of skills and habits that give them a more rounded view of the world and their place in it. Yet many of these schools would be hard pressed to articulate the benefits of what they do; team sports in proliferation, for example, are part of a mute legacy of ‘character building’ rather than an integral part of a thoughtful curriculum. Team sports are indeed valuable as part of a mix of opportunities, but if they are seen as the one true path to develop character, even more valuable alternatives for students are missed. Maybe the word ‘character’ in itself is a barrier, fraught as it is with a multiplicity of interpretations.

How refreshing, then, to find some schools thinking creatively about the development of character in a considered, thoughtful way and without the shackles of the ‘c’ word.

The Lagos Trust, a multi-academy trust in the Manchester area, went back to basics in 2012 prompted by the imminent opening of new schools under their banner, and wrote their own framework. They settled on four Cornerstones which described their desired outcomes: academic aspiration (opening the door to the future of their choice); cultural engagement (with a particular stress on the arts and the power of language); competitive, physical endeavours (as a key to physical, social and emotional health); and leadership and service. ‘By the time they leave the school’, the Trust rubric runs, each student should ‘have that true sense of self worth which will enable them to make wise choices, stand up for what is right and what they believe in and, in doing so, be of value to society’. That, at the least, seems a pretty good practical, working definition of ‘character’.

These four cornerstones underpinned the Trust vision which was to enable young people, regardless of background or circumstance, to be inspired, to thrive in all environments, to recognise what it takes to succeed, to set aspirational goals and work hard to achieve them.

The rhetoric of aspiration is perhaps easy enough, but the Trust went further, placing the cornerstones at the heart of all development, planning, and engaging fulsome buy-in from the adults in the school community. This is the key to it. Each department maps their own development plan against the whole school desired outcomes so that opportunities are often considered ‘extra’ curricular and a bolt-on to the mainstream of school life are rooted in the day-to-day work of subjects and are high profile.

An Electives programme builds on this foundation. Students are required to commit to a number of hours for each curriculum cycle. Experience has shown that the most effective routes are chosen when students are strongly encouraged to opt for an Elective that takes them out of their comfort zone. It means that an axiom of the Trust that challenge is the driver of character. This is particularly relevant in the Sixth Form when students are preparing for university or job interviews. Many students find one-to-one sessions with adults other than their teachers intimidating and a substantial block. The very act of encountering adults they have not met before and speaking with them is an alien experience to many young people. The liberation students say they feel, and their resulting sense of achievement as they lose their fears, stays with them well beyond the interview room.

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Before the programme, I thought of a leader as a charismatic, confident person in position of authority who inspires people to believe in their ideas. I now realise that a leader does not need to have authority, nor do they need to be hierarchical. A leader can come from within a group and need not impose their ideas. Instead, I now understand a leader as someone who is able to help a group help itself. A leader should enable the members of a group to contribute as much as possible to the group’s goal. Though a leader need not be a god-like figure descended from the heavens to save their followers, a leader must still have charisma and be confident enough to say what they believe is best for a group even if it may be at times unpalatable for some in the group. This said, a leader should aim to bring all members into alignment with the group’s ideas and goals so as to allow all members to function cohesively within the group. Additionally, the OCP taught me that a leader should guide a group through problems not necessarily by providing answers but by providing a framework through which the group can find the most effective solution. This altered my previous view of leaders as needing to have all the answers and being the most knowledgeable in a group. In fact, a good leader should be able to be humble and admit when someone else may be best placed to assist or contribute.

References
They are:  
- **Courage** (facing up to challenge; speaking up for what's right)  
- **Vitality** (approaching life with excitement and energy; feeling alive and activated)  
- **Self-control** (regulating how one feels and how one behaves)  
- **Social Intelligence** (being aware of motives and feelings of other people and oneself)  
- **Optimism** (expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it)  
- **Perseverance** (finishing what one starts; overcoming obstacles with a combination of persistence and resilience)  
- **Curiosity** (taking an interest in things for their own sake; finding things fascinating)  
- **Integrity** (being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen)  
- **Resilience** (approaching life with excitement and energy: feeling alive and activated)  

Individually and collectively, developing these elements throughout the curriculum can be demonstrated significantly to enhance young people's self-confidence, resilience and their ability to successfully chart the path of their choosing.

One commentator described the Laurus Trust approach as harking back to the past. Far from it. The era of Artificial Intelligence is upon us, with the prospect of the machine world becoming more adept than humans at many functions, from analysis to strategic thinking. This will shine a clearer light on uniquely human attributes which will become more significant than ever: compassion, curiosity, integrity, collaboration. The education of 'character' will be firmly and crucially at the centre of the school curriculum of the future.

The United States Military Academy at West Point, commonly referred to as West Point, is both a military academy, similar to the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, and a traditional university. Cadets attending West Point undergo a 47-month experience that culminates with both a commission as an officer in the United States Army, as well as a Bachelor of Science Degree. The cadet's degree can be in a variety of academic disciplines that are offered in universities across, the US, the UK, and Europe.

West Point's mission is 'to educate, train, and inspire the Corps of Cadets so that each graduate is a commissioned leader of character committed to the values of Duty, Honor, Country and prepared for a career of professional excellence and service to the Nation as an officer in the United States Army' (2016a).

From a pedagogical standpoint, it is not only important to learn military tactics and the core of the chosen academic field, but it must be intertwined and integrated through a character development program. The entire curriculum at West Point is infused with the idea of character through the Academy motto of ‘Duty, Honor, Country’ (2016b) and the ideals of the Seven Army Values consisting of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. While we might call them Army ‘Values’, they are in fact virtues that will allow cadets, soldiers, and officers to live honorably and flourish both as soldiers and as human beings. Integrating character education in the curriculum at West Point underpins the ethical standards of the Profession of Arms.

Character education is important because it will allow cadets and army officers to understand what is ethically important both in combat and in their daily lives, and to act not only rightly but for the right reasons. It is more than just rule-following. It is about who you are as a person when no one is watching to see if you are following the rules.

West Point has four developmental programs: Academic, Military, Physical, and Character. While it might seem like the four programs are distinct and unrelated to each other, the Character Development Program is intertwined throughout the other three programs. The Jubilee Centre’s ‘Framework for Character Education’ discusses the ‘Building Blocks of Character’ (2017). The Building Blocks of Character include Intellectual Virtues, Moral Virtues, Civic Virtues, and Performance Virtues. The Building Blocks of Character ultimately help students and soldiers develop practical wisdom which in turn leads individuals, and thus society, to flourish. The Jubilee Centre explains that Intellectual Virtues are character traits that are necessary for discernment and right action, such as critical thinking, judgement, and reasoning. They point out that Moral Virtues are character traits that enable us to act in ethical ways, such as courage, honesty, and integrity. Civic Virtues are character traits that are necessary for engaged responsible citizenship such as neighbourliness, service, and volunteering. The Jubilee Centre further explains that Performance Virtues are character traits that have an instrumental value in enabling the Intellectual, Moral, and Civic Virtues such as confidence, motivation, and resilience. West Point recognizes something similar. In addition to the four developmental programs, West Point focuses on five facets of character: Moral, Civic, Social, Performance, and Leadership, which align with the Jubilee Centre’s Building Blocks of Character.

Because virtues require practice and develop through habituation, West Point infuses character development throughout the 47-month experience using the ‘Jubilee Centre’s notion of ‘Caught, Taught, and Sought’. Each opportunity to practise virtuous behaviour reinforces the idea of habituation. Part of the Character Development Curriculum at West Point includes the ‘Cadet Character Education Program’ also known as CCEP. CCEP provides cadets with three to five non-academic lessons each semester focused on virtuous living. During the cadets’ first two years at West Point, CCEP emphasizes virtues living focused on personal growth and development.

During the cadets’ final two years at West Point, CCEP emphasizes their character growth as leaders and aspiring military officers. One of the programs CCEP offers is ‘Leader’s Challenge’. Leader’s Challenge takes all the cadets in their third and fourth year and has them meet in a small group setting. The cadets engage with a real life military moral dilemma in which an officer had to make a difficult leadership decision. The 15 cadets discuss the moral dilemma with one or two military faculty or staff to discuss the dilemma and decide which the virtuous decision could or should be. This is done to develop the cadet’s understanding of ethical leadership and to develop practical wisdom.

The goal of developing leaders of character does not only lie in specific character programmes; West Point nurtures good character throughout the academic disciplines and courses offered at West Point. Cadets in their second year at the Academy take ‘Philosophy and Ethical Reasoning’. This course introduces the idea of Just War Theory and normative ethics to include Aristotelian Virtue Ethics. The course is intended to help cadets in their moral reasoning. In the cadets’ third year they take a psychology class called ‘Military Leadership’. This course focuses on developing leaders of character through ethical leadership and moral mentorship. Mentorship is critical to the development of junior leaders, so each cadet in the course is required to ask an army officer at the academy to be their mentor for the semester. This mentorship allows cadets to benefit from the army officer’s perspective on virtuous living and assist in the cadets’ leader growth.
As soldiers, each of us will face moments when we will be required to act morally under duress, persevering under adversity, respond to setbacks, or suppress our own human desire to choose an easier path. Sometimes those moments will occur during combat, but most of them will not. During these moments, we will not suddenly flip a switch that enables us to do the right thing. Instead, our automatic response will reflect the habits of honorable living and developing practical wisdom during our time at West Point, becoming people of character. If we fail to develop strong character, fail to strive being moral exemplars, we have a greater chance of failing our soldiers and possibly resulting in the unnecessary loss of life.

As a faculty member at West Point, I have a certain perspective of West Point’s Character Development Program. However, I wanted to see if my perspective was on par with that of the cadets. I spoke with several cadets in their final year at the Academy to get their perspective on West Point’s Character Development Program. The responses are given below:

How has West Point help cadets develop character?

Michael Deegan

‘It’s ingrained in everything we do whether it’s athletics, academics, or military development—character is the cornerstone of each pillar of performance because it is so vital to our development as future leaders and officers.’

Olivia Agee

‘Through difficult conversations and though reflection time, West Point facilitates character growth and moral courage in leading others and setting a positive, healthier organizational culture for future army officers.’

Jacob Wells

‘CCEP provides cadets with an opportunity to discuss what each cadet learned that day within the context of character. In addition to the Honourable Living Day, speakers who discuss character, small group character interactive sessions, and a character lunch where one member of the faculty and staff eat with 10 cadets and discuss what each cadet learned that day within the context of character. In addition to the Honourable Living Day, there is a Living Honourably Luncheon that occurs about two months after the Honourable Living Day where faculty and staff have lunch with a group of cadets to discuss how they have incorporated what they learned since the Honourable Living Day.

Maggie Petersen

‘In the Leader’s Challenge scenarios that we are presented with, we all seem to ask, “How could someone let this happen?” But we, collectively, let it happen through time as we all ride. In being presented with life-altering scenarios in a Leader’s Challenge, or being asked to write a paper prompted with, “Who are you?”, we as cadets are constantly reminded of the importance of our character and the role it plays in the decisions we make. In being mindful of our integrity, we create our character.’

Do you think that character development is central to leadership at West Point and in the army?

Sam Reichenthal

‘West Point understands and teaches us that an officer is more than just the competent soldier that many may think we are; an officer is first and foremost a leader of character as building trust and respect in a team is vital to mission success.’

Maggie Petersen

‘I’m grateful for the opportunities West Point provides for true reflection. While we move at such a quick pace on a day-to-day basis, there are certainly times set aside to slow down, take a step back, and really reflect on our character and how to live a virtuous life. It’s a vital part of growth.’

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And when does individuality become self-absorption? something controlling, discriminatory or judgemental? holding up a set of ‘ideal’ human qualities spill over into two attitudes, which we’re always navigating. When does prized, though there’s an inevitable tension between those two attitudes, which we’re always navigating. Individuality, rather than individualism, has always been prized, though there’s an inevitable tension between those two attitudes, which we’re always navigating. Individuality, rather than individualism, has always been prized, though there’s an inevitable tension between those two attitudes, which we’re always navigating. Bedales has a strong non-conformist heritage, which has influenced its attitude to character. It was founded by John Badley as a reaction against the emphases of traditional English public schools, with their in-built hierarchies and endless appetite for competition, on and off the playing fields. Rather than seek to develop an attitude of getting one over one’s opponents by a show of superiority, Badley aimed to develop in his charges an attitude of positive co-operation. One of the school’s mottos is ‘Work of Each for Weal of All’ – ‘weal’ in the old fashioned sense of wellbeing. Thus there has been a distinct whiff of socialist ideology hanging around Bedales for most of its history. Cohorts of students of different ages have worked the land alongside their teachers, whom they address by their first names as a symbol of the desired mutual respect and non-authoritarian relationships. There are separate boarding houses for girls and boys, but only one of each, no matter how large they grow, lest the evil of inter-house competition should spring up! Boys and girls share a boarding house in their final year.

Bedales grew up with close links to the Fabian Society and the Arts and Crafts movement. These communitarian and aesthetic biases informed the school’s aims for character development as it grew. For most of the school’s history, the only formal aim of the school was ‘the appreciation of the beautiful’. High falutin, one might think, but reflective of the idea that Bedalians should grow up with a directness of engagement with the subject matter of their studies that goes beyond its instrumental use. This was the sort of practical spirituality that Badley sought, finding it eminently compatible with his own non-denominational Christianity. In modern parlance, the aim of the school was to develop learners with ‘intrinsic motivation’, appreciating the value of learning for its own sake, and especially appreciating the joys of nature. The spirit of the Arts and Crafts movement has imbued the school’s attitude to developmentally worthwhile activities: direct contact with the land; use of natural materials; old-fashioned tools and techniques to ensure a direct connection with that which is produced through careful craftsmanship.

Bedales has never been entirely explicit about character. The idea of prescribing certain traits doesn’t sit easily with our ethos. Alongside our communitarian and agrarian tendencies has been a wide tolerance of difference. Individuality, rather than individualism, has always been prized, though there’s an inevitable tension between those two attitudes, which we’re always navigating. When does holding up a set of ‘ideal’ human qualities spill over into something controlling, discriminatory or judgemental? And when does individuality become self-absorption?

In recent times we have watched with interest the development of other evidenced-informed work around character, and this year have taken tentative steps to align ourselves with the language of the Round Square organisation, inspired by Kurt Hahn, a correspondent of John Badley. The Round Square network of 200 schools from around the world has developed a shared framework for talking about character education, which blends what are clearly ‘character traits’ in the traditional sense with desirable ‘skills’. Their ‘Discovery Framework’ encompasses the following: inquisitiveness; tenacity; sense of responsibility; ability to solve problems; commitment to sustainability; courage; self-awareness; compassion; inventiveness; communication skills; appreciation of diversity; teamwork skills. We have found that this list resonates sufficiently with our values and aspirations for young people that we are seeking to join this network of like-minded schools. They also speak in terms of 6 IDEALS in a way that we find helpful: Internationalism; Democracy; Environmentalism; Adventure; Leadership and Service. These are very much about attitudes and dispositions of character, and as a framework for structuring our core activities as a school, we think they will crystallise and enhance the language and clarity of purpose around some of the work that we already do. Taking our relationship further with Round Square is an experiment in character education. We are especially excited about strengthening our emphasis on ‘service’, which we have under-emphasised in recent years. In the words of our founder: ‘We are poor creatures if we are content to live for ourselves and what we can get. It is a great day when we discover the happiness of giving, I do not mean money only, but time, thought, effort, for the welfare of those about us – the happiness of service’.
Building Moral Identity Within An Educational Setting
Jonathan Mace | House Master, Cheltenham College

Over the course of the last academic year I have been trying to build and develop greater ‘moral identity’ within a boarding house. A building block of this thinking was the mission statement of Boston Prep School – ‘An environment structured around scholarship and personal growth which cultivates students’ virtues of courage, compassion, integrity, perseverance and respect’. The intervention to change the culture in the house initially built on a character education leadership day where the primary objective was to build pupil awareness of Aristotelian character virtues, including the Golden Mean, and, in turn, to give them the autonomy as a group to choose the specific virtues that they wanted to harness in the house during the academic year 2018/19. This piece will consider the background to the intervention and evaluate whether these ‘caught’ and ‘taught’ culture features can be enhanced through a conscious and planned intervention within an educational setting and, in turn, identify areas to improve and build upon moving forwards.

Bennett, Ryan and Bolin (1983) talk about the need for schools to become ‘communities of virtues’. They argue that a school ethos based on core values, which are clear and well communicated, can provide purpose, motivation and direction for both teachers and students. Likewise, McLaughlin and Halstead (1989) state that character education is ‘a deliberate effort by schools, families, and communities to help young people understand, care about, and act upon core ethical values’. Therefore, the intervention discussed within this piece hoped to begin the process of changing the culture (the ‘hidden curriculum’) within the house in the following academic year. The objectives were:

- For the pupils to gain an understanding of neo-Aristotelian character virtues and an understanding of the accompanying concept of the Golden Mean
- For the pupils to decide upon a particular ‘set’ of virtues that they wish to underpin the boarding house culture in 2018/19.

Implementation of Character Education Intervention

The ‘Character Education Workshop’ took place in June 2018 and was attended by all of the fourteen Lower Sixth boys in my boarding house. The boys were paired up and worked through the following tasks:

- Defining virtue.
- Discussion of what, in their opinion, constitutes ‘good character’.
- The boys then completed more individualised tasks where they were reflecting upon which character traits they felt would best describe their own character.
- This was then developed into selecting particular qualities that they thought were most important to them as a person and to decide collectively which virtues that they wanted to underpin the moral identity of the boarding house with in 2018/19.
- Boys then researched the question ‘What is meant by the Aristotelian concept of the Golden Mean?’
- This was followed by the task applying their understanding of the Golden Mean to the chosen virtues to create a spectrum for each virtue.

For 2018/19 the boys decided they wanted to underpin the ‘moral identity’ of the boarding house with the following character traits:

- Happiness
- Reflectiveness
- Empathy
- Inclusivity
- Respectfulness
- Honesty
- Ambitionness

Teenagers are often reported as having values rooted in materialism, narcissism and a lack of ambition (Twenge, 2014). However, throughout the discussions observed and the resulting virtues decided upon, these do not appear to be in line with this trend. Furthermore, having been involved in senior boys’ boarding houses since the start of my career, I had expected to see values like bravery, competitiveness, independence and confidence at the fore of their discussions and written responses. The list displayed above is therefore somewhat enlightening and refreshing and not necessarily in line with preconceived ideas. Giving the boys ownership enabled them to become facilitators and empowered them in their own learning. Explaining to the boys that their chosen virtues would be on the fabric of the building (literally painting them on the walls), further embedded the culture, but also through repeatedly seeing them, day in day out, has enabled them to become more common place in their psyche, and hopefully in their moral decision making.

Giving the Boys Ownership Enabled Them to Become Facilitators and Empowered Them in Their Own Learning.

A School Ethos Based on Core Values, Which Are Clear and Well Communicated, Can Provide Purpose, Motivation and Direction for Both Teachers and Students.
Summary and Recommendations
The intervention allowed the boys to:
- Gain an embedded understanding of character virtues, traits of ‘good’ character and the Golden Mean.
- Establish the core virtues that will underpin the boarding house culture.
- Put in place a ‘Reflective Families System’ in house for 2018/19 – a system which allowed the boys to regularly reflect upon how the chosen virtues underpin their school, house, family and wider social life.

There is potentially plenty of material from this ongoing pilot study for future projects but caution must be taken in terms of branching out into much larger scale settings, unless of course there are effective and meaningful ways for the pupils involved to take ownership of their learning and the virtues that they wish to develop in a specific culture.

I was fortunate to be able to reflect upon the model outlined above with Christian Miller, author of The Character Gap, and to consider some of the wider lessons with regards to strategies that could be used to foster virtue within an educational setting:

1. It is vital that students build their understanding, from the outset, of the concepts of virtue, character and an awareness of what might constitute a virtuous life. It is important that students undertake their own research – this research could be where they seek out virtuous role models and reflect about virtues that they find particularly appealing from the individual in question.

2. It is important that students have ownership in the decision-making process as to which virtues they are going to place most prominence on. It is unrealistic to consider a large list of virtues and assume that they will be able to meaningfully engage with them, from both an understanding and behavioural perspective. Consideration should also be given to the wider school community and values i.e. how do the virtues fit within the context of a Christian community?

3. Ensure that students have visual reminders of their ‘chosen’ virtues – are there ways to display on the fabric of the building? Are there ways to display ‘moral reminders’ within the school setting.

4. Encourage students to actually practice virtuous behaviour – habit is important in building and instilling more permanence of the virtue.

The importance of regular reflective sessions to enable students to develop greater understanding of their own character flaws. These sessions also provide the opportunity for students to reflect and learn from particular situations that may have arisen and to consider cognitive biases that may have encouraged, or contributed to, non-virtuous behaviour (the difference between A Virtuous Character and Our Actual Character – The Character Gap).

6. The importance of role models – i.e. there has to be buy-in from staff, themselves, to have an understanding and reflective approach to ‘character’ and character education. For the culture to fully permeate, rather than exist in discrete pockets, the Headteacher and senior teachers have to be fully invested in the process.

7. Short term focus on virtues is not necessarily effective and, therefore, moving from one academic year to the next does not require a wholesale change in the list of virtues but more a more nuanced approach which will still allow the next set of students to feel they have equal ownership of the virtues.

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As a result, from 2019 we will be articulating and extending our culture and ethos to strengthen character (Ex Cultu Robur) we are redefining our aspirations for the character we wish to encourage: we want Cranleighans to be thinking, being, giving people.

- Cranleigh Thinking is thinking beyond the test;
- Cranleigh Being is who we are and how we are in the communities in which we find ourselves;
- Cranleigh Giving is thinking beyond ourselves.

Each acts as a strategic intent giving direction to the operational actions which are set annually; as such they operate separately. Broadly speaking, Cranleigh Thinking is associated with ‘academic’ initiatives, and Being with pastoral, boarding, co-education, co-curricular, and spiritual aspects. This enables us to curate what we do more effectively and in time to evaluate what really works. However, they are clearly all interconnected, as exemplified by Cranleigh Giving. Acting as a strategic intent, it articulates strategic actions to further enhance existing partnerships with local schools and the community and to raise funds for Foundation bursaries, increase the number of Royal Springboard children etc. We need thinking, being, giving individuals. As Thomas Carlyle writes in ‘Signs of the Times’:

‘To reform a world, to reform a nation, no wise man will undertake and all but foolish men know, that the only solid, though a far slower reformation, is what each begins and perfects on himself.

Sometimes innovation is not discovering something new, but a new way of looking at things in a moment in time, Lindblom’s paper, The Science of Muddling Through (1959), though now sixty years old, still resonates. When writing about the future of planning, he claims that a ‘new order’ of planning is required within an environment unsuited to linear plans:

Thus plans will not be made and implemented. Rather they will be made and remade endlessly as the school proceeds through a process of successive approximations to agreed objectives derived from policy, both of which may change before being achieved (quoted in Bell, 1986, p.458).

I think most school innovation demonstrates how we ‘muddle through’ with an ‘intended plan’. The character of leadership for change is no different: it just requires research, a little imagination, an identified purpose, and the willingness to try something that may or may not work.

References


Let me ask you a question: how many happy people do you know? I am not talking about skipping through the daisies happy, or the ‘happy shiny people’ kind of happy. I am talking about the really solid kind of happy. The happy that comes from feeling comfortable in your own skin, being in relationships that are kind and respectful, studying what you are passionate about, doing work you love and feeling valued while you do it.

In my opinion, fostering happiness is the principal purpose of character education, underpinned by a belief that confident, collaborative and curious people will have happier and more successful lives.

Yet what I find fascinating about the need for character education is that it is closely linked to the human condition. Anyone that has spent time with toddlers will testify to their innate confidence. We are born confident, curious and collaborative. We are also born with the ability to communicate and commit to what we are interested in. I recently watched a 5-year-old, Katie, building a dam in a stream… nothing would get in her way. She was oblivious to her mum calling her in for tea and nor did she care that she was knee-deep in cold and muddy water for hours because she was in ‘her element’. She was in ‘the zone’. Until that dam could withstand a minor tsunami, she wasn’t shifting, and, in that moment, she was an engineer and a craftsman.

The fact is, these skills and ways of thinking make a cognitive, emotional, and material difference to how people’s lives turn out. The question is how do we help people access them? For me, having worked as a senior leader, how do we help people access them? For me, having worked as a senior executive coach for twenty-five years, there are three things that make a standout difference.

First, we need to recognise that, instead of these attributes being found outside of us, they are already within every one of us. Our job as educators, as facilitators of human potential, is to help people to reconnect and build from what already exists. What this means is that instead of starting with a position of ‘lacking’, e.g. ‘I am just not a confident person’ we start from a place of abundance, e.g. ‘I was born confident; all I need to do is choose the thinking and behaviour that accesses it’.

Just a few months ago, I was working with Jon, a senior leader who told me in no uncertain terms that his problem was that he had always been shy. He therefore absolutely couldn’t do the kind of public addresses required of him. After working with him, however, I saw him stand up in front of over 5,000 people, speak for 30 minutes with a single mind-map as a guide and, at the end, get a standing ovation. What happened? First, he had understood that ‘shy’, like so many things, was actually just set of feelings and behaviours generated from the thought he was choosing to focus on.

And, if he wanted, he could change the focus of his thinking at any moment and produce a different result.

This brings me to the second key thing which makes all the difference. The learning needs to be relevant. Jon was able to learn how to change his thinking around being shy because it mattered to him. He was interested in being able to present well so could perform in his job. Therefore, curiosity in new things, ideas, and behaviours is usually seen about the things that interest us.

And finally, if we want to support people to live their best lives, we need to show them how to live from a place of ‘core strength’. Core strength is a set of personal identifiers that make up our unique blueprint. So, when we talk about giving students’ ‘character’ in order that they can go on and live their best lives, we have to help them find their character, their values, their beliefs, their vision and discover what puts them in their element. Like curiosity, character is not a one size fits all thing. It is something we need to discover within us and then bolster by learning a set of skills that matter to us. When people understand how to live from their core strength they show up as their best selves, they are grounded and able to reignite easily when things get out of balance.

So, here’s the good news. Teenagers love it when they discover this. The moment they realise that all these great attributes are already inside them AND they can access them at any point, they sit up and listen. In my experience character is something that must be discovered, supported and above all facilitated. When we take the time to do this, we create more happy people and, in doing that, we begin to change the world.

HAPPINESS STARTS FROM WITHIN. HOW DO WE GET MORE HAPPY PEOPLE?

Elke Edwards | Founder and Creative Director, Ivy House

GET MORE HAPPY PEOPLE?

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As schools look to develop resilience, grit, and personal flourishing, they should also look to do the same with regards to digital intelligence and character; encouraging digital resilience, principled interdependence and personal flourishing using digital tools. Therefore, inspired by the notion that ideal character traits need nurture in order to become established the #digitalcharacter project aimed to develop student moral character in an online setting.

Emphasising the school’s values, education in digital ethics, and effective role modelling the project was designed with a focus upon practical action and intervention with both online and offline strategies being implemented. The project had a multidisciplinary approach, with staff to staff education, student to student teaching and learning, as well as staff and student collaborative learning. The article will focus upon one aspect of this taken from the ‘Student/ Staff shared Space’ depicted in the diagram above – a student led Instagram used as a vehicle to develop character school wide.

‘TO EDUCATE A PERSON IN MIND AND NOT IN MORALS IS TO EDUCATE A MENACE TO SOCIETY’

Instagram Pilot Project

The Instagram pilot was designed to reach the pupils in a range of ways in order to highlight and educate the community regarding desirable online values and character traits, thereby improving their digital ethic and ability to make informed moral decisions when necessary in light of the digital risks they face.

The character values that were championed through Instagram were identified by the house collectively through a process of Values Clarification (Superka & Ahrens, 1976) and these were overtly shared, reiterated throughout and posted on both virtual and real-life walls. They were the values the students believed to be worthwhile, as opposed to staff or the school, and they were not considered to be relativistic but believed to be achievable and relevant to all. Having established these character traits/values the boys then looked to influence their wider audience to uphold/endorse the same behaviours and those impacted via the feed were involved in a further process of inoculation (ibid.).

Having started some really interesting conversations the project took a new turn when the influencers decided it would be good to set up a second account; there is a fairly established global culture for young people to have at least two parallel accounts on Instagram. These are often referred to as a R-insta (Real Instagram) and a F-insta (Fake Instagram). Ironically the F-instagram is the one on which they are more likely to post the sillier, less curated, (Fake Instagram). Interestingly the content on the Rinsta held up people who others, and in line with agent-based theory, the project sought to highlight positive values, guiding students towards those who were acting in line with this were held up as role models within their online community. Although some of it was clearly a parody, the values they were promoting still came through strongly.

Finstagram

The Finstagram has 445 followers (and rising), mostly current students, a handful of parents, some prep school boys (siblings/boys due to join etc), and some old boys. Given the size of College means that roughly half of the people in the school will have seen the content first hand. The F-insta is meant to provide a more ‘real’, less curated ‘warts and all’ version of house life, but as is the case with all social media, this has more to do with a genre of editing than a reality. ‘Happy’ and ‘Inclusive’ are the virtues that continually run through this account.

Evaluation

By changing the conversation from one that focused upon the quantity of screen-time, to one which considered quality, the #digitalcharacter project built upon elements from three strands of Character Education:

1) Seeking to develop Eudaimonism, students were asked to consider the use of social media to improve flourishing. The boys considered a range of media and decided upon the one which they felt had the most reach in their social ecology. They then looked to curate content that would be useful for others to access and followed these accounts. This meant that all those who in turn followed their account would have a ready-made list of curated content on mental health, eating disorders, body image, men’s health and so on. It also enabled anyone who follows the account to help their friends more easily as they have a resource bank that is easily accessible, informal and non-threatening. They felt that by publicising these messages it would improve the community life of the school, thereby facilitating flourishing. This had a positive effect as people were able to use the content to inform upon real-life discussions, some of which started from stimulus content shared online and some began offline but then moved online with people pointing one another to the suggested resources in both instances.

2) Social media naturally lends itself to the observation of others, and in line with agent-based theory, the project sought to highlight positive values, guiding students towards those who are judged to have admirable traits. The curated content on the Rinsta account pointed people towards those who were well known to have admirable traits, celebrities, sports and television personalities the boys admired and so on, but more interestingly the content on the Rinsta held up people from within the school and a variety of year groups and social groupings as well. This had a positive effect with people feeling able to follow certain positive trends of behaviour as they were coming from within their own peer group.

Students from all year groups, house matrons, and teaching staff were all involved and people who were not the obvious choices for promotion developed a media presence by virtue of their behaviour. The smaller boys, or ones from the less cool social groupings, those who had anxiety issues, or struggled to get it right on occasion, were all brought to the fore for a positive reason at one point or another. The nature of the media form enabled participation in a way they felt comfortable with, as they were able to re-shoot, edit, choose whether it was static photo or video content. The values that were highlighted through the interviews or activities highlighted the importance of charitable activity, inclusivity, respect, and ambition, failure also being a point of learning; grit, social awareness and empathy were all demonstrated to be good character traits within the online community they developed. Although some of it was clearly a parody, the values they were promoting still came through strongly.

THE PROJECT HAD A MULTIMODAL APPROACH, WITH STAFF TO STAFF EDUCATION, STUDENT TO STUDENT TEACHING AND LEARNING, AS WELL AS STAFF AND STUDENT COLLABORATIVE LEARNING.

Rebecca Mace | Head of Digital Character, Cheltenham College

#DIGITALCHARACTER @CHELTCOLL: A STUDY ON DIGITAL CHARACTER
Involving an ethics of care allowed for increased reflectivity as the influence students had on one another online was placed under greater scrutiny. ‘The curaturion of information to tell a story creates a sense of responsibility for the curator’ (Mihailidis & Cohen, 2013) and the reflectivity involved in deciding what to post and on which page (or not at all) was a version of practising moral decisions in low stakes settings in preparation for a larger moral issues. Virtues of character and good conduct arise from habits that in turn can only be acquired by repeated action and correction. This moment of reflectivity before posting was a really important act to embed, so in the background of both accounts, was a ‘sleeper’/member of staff whose role was to facilitate quality reflection. The ‘Sleeper’ introduced suggestions for postings/topics that the Influencers may want to focus upon, facilitated education with regards to digital risk/ethics, and ensured that there was a safety net with regards to child protection.

On top of this, the Influencers met weekly with the Sleeper to talk through the successes and failures of the previous week and decide upon the next few postings. Reflecting upon whom they had influenced and speculating upon why certain posts had more of an effect than others provoked many interesting conversations, both with the staff and students directly involved, but also the wider school community. Initially the Influencers were interested in simple numbers but soon they started looking at who acted and how, comparing the value of one post against another. They were able to reflect upon why fewer people were liking the content on the Rinsta, rather than the Finsta, although the reach was often the same given they were liking the content on the Rinsta, rather than the Finsta, although the reach was often the same given they were re-posting from one account to another. The Sleeper would have a weekly meeting with an email containing links and hashtags to highlight certain things that would be coming up as part of the wider world/ community that they may want to bring into their posts, but the Influencers were free to ignore the suggestions if they wanted. Emailing these items to the Influencers, rather than use social media to share them, ensured a sense of digital distance was maintained as moving from one media form to another requires a more deliberate process than a ‘re-share’, thereby re-enforcing the moment of reflectivity before posting.

Conclusion
To present the internet as a merely dangerous place, putting the potential harms at the forefront of learning about its potential, is as inappropriate as it is ineffective. Research has repeatedly shown that young people are more likely to listen to one another than adults and if schools promote the dangers and risks in isolation from the benefits the response is one of three things: students will ignore everything that is said; they will become fearful and reluctant users of the internet; or they will actively seek out the risks as an exciting challenge.

A few years ago the main digital risks were cyber-bullying, pornography, and violent content, whereas nowadays they are things like fake news, datafication of children, profiling, sexting/revenge porn, and radicalisation (Livingstone, 2019). Young people are often ‘tech savvy’ but digitally naïve, able to use the technologies available to them but unaware of what the risks are or how they might specifically apply to them. Therefore, it is important they understand the benefits but are also able to use online tools and apps responsibly, not only being made aware of the impact it has on them, but also the way their behaviour can influence others. The Instagram Pilot Project has made it clear that online social spaces have the opportunity to be at the heart of character development, providing an augmented social climate which is foundational for moral development. After all, online spaces are simply the new playground.

References

THE ETONX APPROACH TO CHARACTER EDUCATION
Catherine Whitaker | CEO and Head of Learning at EtonX

ONE REASON WE BELIEVE THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO TEACH SOFT SKILLS IS THAT FOR ANY GIVEN SKILL THERE ARE PROVEN TECHNIQUES WHICH STUDENTS NEED TO BE INTRODUCED TO, INTERNALISE AND THEN APPLY TO THEIR EVERYDAY LIVES.

ETONX is an education technology business wholly owned by Eton College. Our remit is to cohort technology and courses to develop the skills that teenagers need in order to reach their full potential. Our Future Skills Programme is a portfolio of short online courses in skills which could be seen as part of character education: Resilience, Verbal Communication, Making an Impact, Creative Problem Solving, and also more career or employment focused courses such as Interview Skills, Public Speaking and Entrepreneurship. Since we tend to use the term ‘soft skills’ as an umbrella term for the skills we cover, I will use it here too. We are usually working with students overseas aged 14-20, and even though we have been particularly active in South East Asia and the Arabian Gulf, we have had students from over 30 countries and from six continents take an EtonX course.

One question that we are frequently asked is whether it is possible to teach soft skills. In schools such as Eton, these skills are developed through a broad-based education and the opportunities for leadership and personal growth afforded by the house system and the very rich co-cumulur life of the school. Courses which explicitly focus on a specific soft skill are a rarity.

When we began work on the Future Skills programme, the first challenge we met was that there was no agreement on what we should call these skills (‘soft skills’, ‘twenty-first century skills’, ‘non-cognitive skills’, ‘social and emotional skills’) nor to what extent various social skills undertaken fit these umbrella terms. There are also multiple different frameworks and no agreement on standards (see Lucas). As Whitehurst (2016) concludes ‘The embrace of soft skills by education reformers is well in advance of the development of conceptual, instructional, measurement, and accountability models’.

One reason we believe that it is possible to teach soft skills is that for any given skill there are proven techniques which students need to be introduced to, internalise and then apply to their everyday lives. In our Verbal Communication course, for example, we introduce the ‘Baseball’ method, which is a communication technique to help students to verify their own interpretation of a disagreement and to share responsibility to find a solution. The four steps to follow are: (1) First Base: open the discussion; (2) Second Base: listen carefully without judgement and then establish if you’ve understood correctly; (3) Third Base: verify your interpretation or offer your own version; (4) Fourth Base: share responsibility for finding a solution and be prepared to compromise. We present the concept in an animated video using instructional graphics and realistic examples. Students then consolidate their learning in an interactive activity in which they identify the different steps (or ‘bases’)

in an example. Next, they are asked to try applying the method by deciding what they would do in various scenarios and share their answers with their peers on the discussion forum. In the group class students engage in several role-plays in which they practise applying the technique and finally they personalise the topic by discussing examples of confrontations from their own lives.

The pedagogy we employ is also conducive to the development of soft skills. Our courses are delivered through a virtual classroom we have created expressly for the purpose of helping students communicate, work collaboratively and learn from one another. Our students meet once a week for a live group class with up to eight students and an EtonX tutor. Between classes, they follow the course through self-study and peer learning activities. We employ a flipped online learning model where students come to class to practise the techniques they have been introduced to through the self-study sections. The lessons in the virtual classroom involve role plays, discussions, debates and presentations with the tutor as facilitator rather than teacher. Students study in the same group through the course but those students can come from anywhere. Students are therefore developing intercultural awareness while learning to navigate online technologies which are used in workplaces across the world with distributed teams. We also regard every team as multi-ability, recognising that not all students come from the same “ground floor”.

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE OFTEN ‘TECH SAVVY’ BUT DIGITALLY NAIVE, ABLE TO USE THE TECHNOLOGIES AVAILABLE TO THEM BUT UNAWARE OF WHAT THE RISKS ARE OR HOW THEY MIGHT SPECIFICALLY APPLY TO THEM.
When you tell a parent or colleague you’re interested in the beneficial effects of trauma, reactions are (unsurprisingly) not always positive. Only few might associate this with resilience or character building. Pain can be an austere but excellent teacher. On the playing fields, being dropped to a lower team; in the classroom, failing a test; in life, loss: these events are where we learn most about ourselves, principally because we begin to turn our gaze inward.

As an English teacher conducting a study, my main interest was in literature. My focus was on emotional development, a fundamental aspect of character. And my main tool became a curriculum containing the genre that has come to dominate the book market in 21st century but with many antecedents – trauma literature - a genre centring on themes of loss and suffering, its content often shocking and violent (Luckhurst, 2013).

Since the work of Arnold (1864/1964) literature has been a core subject based on the presumption that reading helps build values, meaning and autobiographical certainties through offering narrative structures through which readers can, in Bakhtin’s words, ‘author the self’ (Holquist, 1990, p. 84). Government policy echoes the Arnoldian concept that through reading students, ‘develop… emotionally… Literature, especially, plays a key role in such development’ (‘National curriculum in England: secondary curriculum’, 2019, p.11).

Trauma literature may well lead to the outcomes government policy expects but through an unexpected route. Reading trauma literature does not lead to Arnoldian edification but instead to autobiographical, epistemological and emotional rupture. My study explores the premise that emotional development does not occur only through building identity, on seemingly stable categories (of values, meaning, and narrative), but by recognising such categories are unstable, and limited in their ability to represent an individual, a life, or the nuanced and complex nature of experience. Acknowledging the role of ‘rupture’ in experience is a breakthrough in emotional development. What trauma literature leads to is a sort of negative capability, an inability to sit comfortably with complexity, with life events which do not make sense, that normal narrative cannot treat (Onega, 2011).

Method

My intervention involved 8 sixth-form students (4 in Year 12; 4 in Year 13) reading a trauma literature curriculum1 over a period of 13 weeks in Spring 2019. Before reading the trauma curriculum, I interviewed each student one-to-one to explore their understanding of identity. The trauma curriculum was devised by using prevalidated trauma curriculums derived from previous studies of this kind, and in conversation with colleagues and participants.

After reading the trauma curriculum, I then re-interviewed students one-to-one exploring if, and how, their perceptions of identity may have changed.

Using traumatic experience filtered through narrative has been explored previously in education as a potential avenue for developing students’ empathy and resilience (Farrell, 1998; Felman, 1991; Tribunella, 2014), but no study had focused exclusively on students’ emotional development.

Summary of findings

Summary of pre-intervention interviews

In my first interviews, my sixth form participants appeared to be reflexively aware about how their identities are shaped and maintained. What emerged from the interview was that participants seemed to use common tools for constructing their identity and mastering experience. One of the main tools for constructing identity was reading literature. Students took literary techniques like narratives and characterisation, even interpretative strategies derived from looking closely at texts, and applied them confidently to their lives’ shape and meaning. Because of literature's importance in shaping, and thereby mastering, experiences in participants’ lives, comparisons between its effects on identity and trauma literature’s were possible. Two other tools emerged from interviews as being used by participants for identity construction – language and role models.

Summary of post-intervention interviews

The second interview which took part after participants had read the trauma literature curriculum found that reading trauma literature led to realising previous tools for identity formation derived from conventional literature were imprecise. In order to compensate for the insufficiency of previous tools for identity construction, participants improvised – enhancing previous tools and creating new ones. For example, reading more conventional literature had been indicated in the first interview as offering participants ways to shape their experiences along straightforward narratological lines. However, the interventions’ heavy traumatic content, challenged previous strategies of reading and interpretation which participants had had such confidence in previously. As a result of the intervention, participants enhanced former strategies of interpretation by not just reading trauma texts once, but by rereading traumatic texts, sometimes even going further, reading them aloud to others to gain their analytical support. This engagement with the traumatic content, allowed participants to also see the limitations of their previous tools for identity construction and maintenance. They were, as a result of reading the trauma curriculum, much more aware of the potential unstable and uncertain categories they had built their identity on and were therefore able to temper their identity, in some cases becoming more comfortable with aporia, or a state of negative capability (Onega, 2011).

DEVELOPMENT THROUGH RUPTURE: TRAUMA LITERATURE AS AN EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL TOOL

David Gibbons | English teacher, Eton College

1 Fox's The Book of Martyrs (1563); Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet (1596), and King Lear (1508); Milton's Samson Agonistes (1671); Marvell's 'An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's return from Ireland' (1650, pub. 1681); Melville's Moby Dick (1851)
Concluding why emotional development as identity is important to learning and teaching is a good ending point. Shulman (2002) has been used by other theorists working in the trauma-education field to explain why identity formation and emotional development is the bedrock of learning. (Murphy, Muckerheide & Roen, 2006). For Shulman (2002), without identity learning cannot occur because information must find a place within an autobiographical schema we call identity.

That learning is inextricably part of an ability to narratize, to represent and order, has frequency been claimed (Bruner, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1995). And this same ability to order knowledge into narrative, is the same ability required to order experience into identity. Reading trauma literature can demonstrate how students will be better able to cope with the challenges of all types of abstraction, traumatic, mathematic, scientific or literary put in their way as they go through life. Trauma narratives may be the most useful of narratives for demonstrating how to make new narrative (Bruner, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1995). And this same ability to represent and order, has frequently been claimed (Murphy, Muckerheide & Roen, 2006). For Shulman (2002), learning is inextricably part of an ability to narrativise, to call identity.

Character education has always been at the heart of Saint Ronan’s mission. In his book ‘The Master and his Boys’ (published in 1924) Stanley S. Harris, headmaster at the time, dedicated a chapter specifically to the development of his charges’ character. The challenge in 2019 is to apply this vision – in the context of a modern co-educational prep school – to a rapidly changing world and decide which types of character skills will make our children successful and happy 21st century adults, with the capacity to innovate, lead and make significant contributions.

Our journey of enquiry at Saint Ronan’s began five years ago. As a whole staff, we identified the ‘Ronian’ values that we thought represented our school and our vision for the children; namely Perseverance, Imagination, Co-operation, Awareness, Empathy, Curiosity. We were assisted by Jane Simister, author of ‘The Future Smart school’. Having identified our core values, we presented them to the children using school and year group assemblies, posters, school literature etc. These strategies will be, in all likelihood, familiar to any teacher and school leader. However, despite our best efforts, we were forced to acknowledge that the values did not seem to be becoming embedded in a way that was sufficiently meaningful for the children. They were simply not part of the school’s vernacular to the extent that we had hoped.

So, the question remained: how could we make the values an integral feature of the children’s day-to-day experience? We were mindful not to overburden teachers with yet another initiative during the already busy days! We had hoped. As a whole staff, we identified the ‘Ronian’ values that we thought represented our school and our vision for the children; namely Perseverance, Imagination, Co-operation, Awareness, Empathy, Curiosity.

We considered whether we needed to introduce an ‘of-the-peg’ solution such as the ‘7 Cs of Communication’. The 7 Cs has a degree of commonality with our ‘Ronian’ values and is a model that has been successfully applied in other schools in the south-east. However, we decided that we are proud of our school’s particular values – the challenge was to how to make it more relevant to the children. In addition, we wanted to reflect the pedagogic journey that we have been on over the last three years. In that time, we have introduced graduated success criteria (to provide additional academic stretch for all pupils), focused on higher-order thinking skills, and continued to foster Growth Mindset and mindfulness. How could our values best support these important initiatives?

Having gone back to the drawing board, we decided that our solution needed to be: a) bespoke; b) manageable; c) delivered according to the framework for character teaching in school (as set out by the Jubilee Centre); d) above all, relevant to the children.

We decided that in addition to the usual strategies (such as assemblies) we needed a ‘delivery system’ to give the values a sense of currency. Each child in the school has a planner in which they record their prep and achievements. In the centre of this year’s planners, we reproduced a beautiful pen and ink illustration of the school site. Various locations in the school and grounds were ascribed a value (from the now expanded list). Stickers were created; these showed the location as well as having one of values written on it. The system now works thus:

i. Teachers and school prefects award stickers that relate to a particular value when they see evidence of it in practice, e.g. kindness.

ii. Pupils affix the sticker to their jumper (so as not to interrupt lessons locating planners). They then stick it into the planner in the correct location.

iii. Once a certain number of stickers have been collected, the children can present their planners to the headmaster. A ‘full house’ – quite an achievement – results in a letter home from the Head.

To further support this initiative, bespoke metal signs (in the school’s colours) were placed in the relevant locations. The pupils have also been encouraged to colour the pen and ink illustration in their planners. To support this, the Art department created a large, beautifully coloured poster of the illustration. This has been framed and placed in the school’s foyer, so it is seen every day by the whole school community.

Character education has always been at the heart of Saint Ronan’s mission. In his book ‘The Master and his Boys’ (published in 1924) Stanley S. Harris, headmaster at the time, dedicated a chapter specifically to the development of his charges’ character. The challenge in 2019 is to apply this vision – in the context of a modern co-educational prep school – to a rapidly changing world and decide which types of character skills will make our children successful and happy 21st century adults, with the capacity to innovate, lead and make significant contributions.

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So, the question remained: how could we make the values an integral feature of the children’s day-to-day experience? We were mindful not to overburden teachers with yet another initiative during the already busy days!

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As anyone involved in education knows, no strategy retains its currency for ever! Therefore, we planned to introduce some changes in order to keep the children focused. The Music department is in the process of producing its own stickers in order to complement the approach. Other changes are more thematic. Creative thinking – due to be assessed by PISA in 2021 – is a hot topic in schools. As creativity is one of our core values, we are having a focus on it at the start of the next academic year. To support this, stickers associated with the Centre for Real-World Learning’s five dimensional model of creativity have been created. Collecting all five of these will be worthy of a special reward. This will allow us to encourage creative endeavour, which brings with it benefits such as increasing pupil achievement and the positive association with social and emotional factors without launching a totally new programme, or any additional burden on teachers.

An award based on the ‘knightsly virtues’ is being considered, using resources from ‘Knightsly Virtues: Enhancing virtue literacy through stories’ by Arthur, et al. (2014). Other research-based ideas, such as Yale University’s RULER system, are also being considered.

One of the things we pride ourselves on is pastoral care. A key feature of the sticker rewards system is the positive interaction between the child receiving the sticker and the prefect, teacher, form tutor, and headmaster. We have noticed that children have started to comments on their peers’ behaviour and even recommend awards. There was evidence of this in an end-of-term survey. 44% of pupils were able to say why an award should be made to another child.

In conclusion, it is possible to design a bespoke system using evidence-based research to help foster and develop positive character traits. As a school, we are still working on assessing and improving the impact of the programme, as well as ways to keep it relevant and exciting for the most important consumers, the pupils.

References