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Values and Character Education for the Future of Learning

CJ Koh Professorial Lecture Series No. 11
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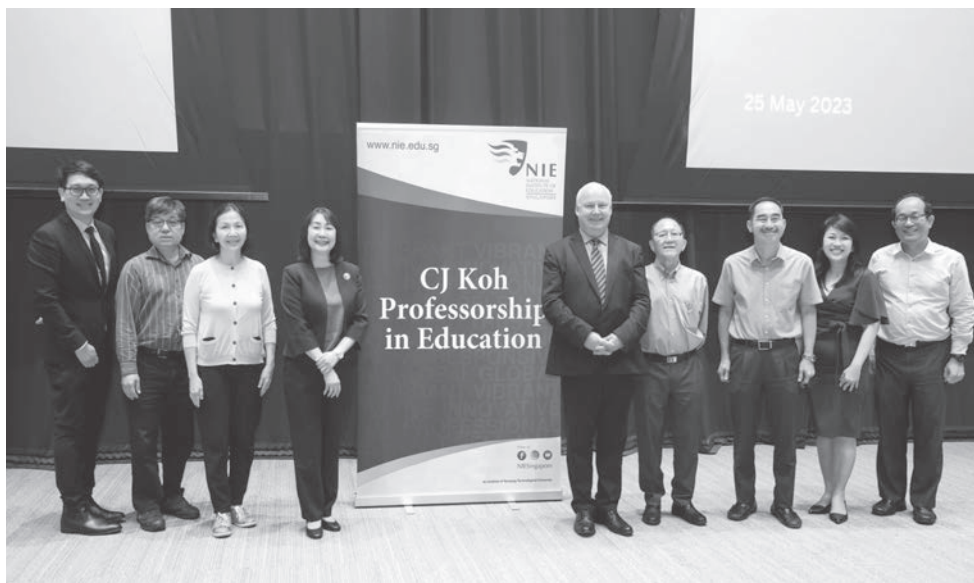


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FOREWORD BY SERIES EDITOR

PROFESSOR CHANG CHEW HUNG



ON BEHALF OF the CJ Koh Professorship secretariat and the publication team, it is my pleasure to present to you the eleventh issue of the CJ Koh Professorial Lecture Series - “Values and Character Education for the Future of Education”. This is a consolidated report of the National Institute of Education (NIE) Faculty and Students Seminar and the Professorial Public Lecture delivered by Professor James Arthur, who was appointed the 15th CJ Koh Professor from 22 May to 1 June 2023. The main objective of this report is to share the rich and insightful discussions with key stakeholders within the NIE, at the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the wider local and global educational fraternity.

The CJ Koh Professorship has been made possible through the generous donation of S\$1.5 million to the

Nanyang Technological University Endowment Fund by the late Mr Ong Tiong Tat, executor of the late lawyer Mr Koh Choon Joo’s (CJ Koh) estate. Mr Tan Hsuan Heng, the nephew of the late Mr and Mrs Ong Tiong Tat, is the current executor of the CJ Koh estate.

In the Seminar entitled “Phronesis (Practical Wisdom) and Character Education” held at NIE, Professor Arthur explored the meaning and use of practical wisdom for education. In the Public Lecture titled “Virtue and Character in the Public Sphere”, held at the Ong Tiong Tat and Irene Tan Liang Kheng Auditorium, Professor Arthur explored how the Jubilee Centre was established and the policies adopted. Professor Arthur also introduced the Jubilee Centre Framework for schools.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all who have contributed to this report in one way or another. Special thanks go to our NIE Director Professor Christine Goh for her support in the CJ Koh Professorial Lecture Series and to Professor James Arthur for sharing valuable insights with us during his appointment as the 15th CJ Koh Professor.

This consolidated report would not have been possible without the excellent secretariat support from Ms Adeline Seow and the publications team which supported the writing from the first drafts to the final product. In this respect, our thanks go to (in alphabetical order) Ms Phoebe Ow and Ms Seeret Kaur.

We present to you the eleventh issue of the CJ Koh Professorial Lecture Series— “Values and Character Education for the Future of Education”.

Professor Chang Chew Hung
Dean, Academic and Strategic Development,
National Institute of Education, Singapore
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
November 2023

PREFACE BY NIE DIRECTOR

PROFESSOR CHRISTINE GOH



NIE is proud to appoint Professor James Arthur as the 15th CJ Koh Professor. Professor James Arthur is the Director of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, specialising in the relationship between theory and practice in education – particularly in character, virtues, citizenship and religion. He has numerous honorary titles and fellowships, including Honorary Professor of the University of Glasgow and Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Oxford while holding leadership positions as Head of the School of Education and Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor. He also chaired the National Society for Educational Studies and served on various government educational committees, including the Step Up to Serve Advisory Council chaired by the then HRH, the Prince of Wales (2013-2020).

Professor Arthur's tenure during the CJ Koh Visiting Professorship included many scholarly activities such as a public lecture, an NIE seminar and numerous discussions about issues in education with NIE Senior Leaders and our stakeholders from MOE, schools and the community.

At the public lecture, Professor Arthur presented the work of the Jubilee Centre and introduced the Jubilee Centre Framework for schools. The establishment of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues involved undertaking rigorous academic research, discovering new insights in research outcomes and effecting change in the impact on policy, practitioners and the academy.

At the NIE Seminar, Professor Arthur explored the purpose of practical wisdom in education and delved into the nature of the flourishing life and development of phronesis in early adulthood.

NIE's programmes have remained relevant and impactful in a rapidly evolving landscape by focusing on the development of current and new capabilities to take advantage of future opportunities and tackle future challenges. To this end, a set of NIE-level key priority areas and initiatives known collectively as Learning Initiatives for the Future of Education at the National Institute of Education, Singapore or LIFE@NIE SG® was introduced in 2020. There are five Strategic Growth Areas under LIFE@NIE SG® — Values and Ethics, Child and Human Development, Science of Learning, Emerging Technologies and Assessment and Evaluation. Professor Arthur's appointment as the CJ Koh Professor and his interactions with faculty, students and educators contributed strongly to 'Values and Ethics', one of these growth areas.

In an increasingly complex and diverse education landscape, learners who are grounded in strong moral character and ethical values will potentially be able to make sound decisions and contribute to the well-being of those around them and the larger society. To further develop Singapore's expertise and capabilities in Character and Citizenship Education (CCE), the Ministry of Education and the National Institute of Education in Singapore jointly established the Singapore Centre for Character and Citizenship Education (SCCCE). This latest NIE-level Centre was launched by Minister for Education, Mr Chan Chun Sing, at the opening of the 11th Teachers' Conference and ExCEL Fest (TCEF) 2023. As NIE's CJ Koh Professor of Education, Professor Arthur gave a keynote at this conference.

In line with the theme in Professor Arthur's CJ Koh Professorial Lectures, NIE's own '4-Life' Learning Framework describes the philosophy behind our programmes. NIE develops teachers to be *life-long* learners to learn and refine their pedagogical craft throughout their productive careers, *life-deep* learners who can wield a range of pedagogical repertoires and orchestrate deftly between practice and expertise, *life-wide* learners who adaptively learn from multiple learning environments and contexts, and most importantly, *life-wise* persons who uphold strong moral values and share practical wisdom that help navigate themselves and their students into the future. It is through these '4-Life' learning dispositions that we can prepare teachers who will transform and inspire future generations of learners. The development of strong values and character is the bedrock for such learning. I thank Professor James Arthur for contributing to this important work in NIE. I hope you will enjoy reading his thoughts and ideas recorded in this publication.

Professor Christine Goh
NIE Director
National Institute of Education, Singapore
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
November 2023

ABOUT THE CJ KOH PROFESSOR

JAMES ARTHUR



Professor James Arthur is Director of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues. James was Head of the School of Education (2010-2015) and Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (2015-2019). He was previously Editor of the British Journal of Educational Studies for ten years and holds numerous honorary titles and Fellowships in the academe, including Honorary Professor of the University of Glasgow and Honorary Research Fellow in the University of Oxford. Professor James was made an Officer of the British Empire by the Queen in 2018. In 2020 he won the internationally prestigious Expanded Reason Award from the Ratzinger Foundation in the Vatican. He has written widely on the relationship between theory and practice in education, particularly

the links between character, virtues, citizenship, religion, and education.

James established the Jubilee Centre with Dr. Jack Templeton, previously President of the John Templeton Foundation, and the Centre has grown in size, scope, and impact since its launch at the House of Lords in May 2012. Professor James continues to chair the national Society for Educational Studies and has served on many government educational committees as well as the Step Up to Serve Advisory Council chaired by HRH the Prince of Wales (2013-2020).

VALUES AND CHARACTER EDUCATION FOR THE FUTURE OF LEARNING: PHRONESIS (PRACTICAL WISDOM) AND CHARACTER EDUCATION

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29 MAY 2023, NIE SEMINAR, LT5, NIE, SINGAPORE



Synopsis

Much of what I have to say today is derived from the work of my esteemed colleague in the Jubilee Centre, Professor Kristjan Kristjansson (2021, 2022a, 2022b) who is the leading scholar in the field of *phronesis*.

Throughout most of the 20th century, utilitarianism was the dominant moral framework justifying the role of professions in society, complemented however with a deontological take on the practical ethics of professionals. The way to keep professional agents on the path of appropriate behaviour – and strengthen their public reputation and acknowledged legitimacy – was seen to lie in an ever-more detailed ethical code, prescribing correct behaviour, as well as procedures and sanctions to secure such behaviour. Repeated scandals

within all the main professions, often exposed by whistle-blowers, have shaken the foundations of this conviction. This perception has gone hand in hand with a growing concern among professionals about the loss of the ideal of professional expertise and its replacement with instrumentalist, managerialist approaches that pander to a mistaken confidence in scientific certainties, supplanting personal responsibility and contextual discernment with formalistic accountability and compliance.

As a consequence, focusing attention on the professional *phronesis* of practitioners is now seen by many as a helpful way to rescue professional ethics from the clutches of a stale rule-and-code-based formalism and a culture of mere compliance. In the last 25 years or so, virtue ethics have gradually equalled or even surpassed

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deontology and utilitarianism as the theory of choice within academic professional ethics in areas such as teacher ethics, business ethics, medical ethics, and nursing ethics, although that scholarly interest has not always percolated down to actual professional practice or even to professional ethics education at universities.

Virtue ethics is now one of the three leading ethical theories competing for allegiance within both ethical theorising in general and professional ethics in particular. *Virtue ethics* defines moral rightness according to the effect it has on the agent, in terms of the extent to which it supports the agent to be virtuous and lead a well-rounded flourishing life within a well-ordered community. *Utilitarianism* considers the moral rightness of an action in terms of the consequences it has for the maximisation of human happiness. In contrast to both these two, moral rightness from a *deontological* perspective is defined in terms of adherence to universal, rationally grounded principles, or the maxims (in the form of rules or codes) derived from them.

Virtue ethics, as derived originally from Aristotle's works on ethics and politics, in the West, and Confucian thinkers in the East, lends itself particularly well to application in professional spheres because of its emphasis on the potential virtuousness of practices and the development of professional expertise – understood as the capacity of *phronesis* or practical wisdom in ethical decision-making – in professional agents such as teachers. Among other advantages of a virtue ethical approach are its focus on virtuous leadership (e.g. by school principals) and the creation of virtuous communities of people, as well as the strong educational strand that runs through it, in which the development of professional expertise is seen as a life-long journey.

According to a virtue ethical understanding, professions such as teaching are deemed inherently *ethical occupations* because, more so than other occupations, they place high moral demands on the conduct of workers. Indeed, these ethical and moral demands which include care, integrity, and fairness are often viewed as the *defining feature* of professions, reminding us that professions are ultimately concerned with morally evaluable human actions and interactions. Such demands and standards may also be expected to engender *trust* between professional practitioners and their clients (parents, pupils, etc), and such trust lies at the heart of professional life. Precisely, the public is entitled to expect professionals to be trustworthy; and trust – which is hard won but easily lost – may be undermined by moral failures and public scandals.

Research undertaken by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues between 2012 and 2022 into virtues in U.K. professions explored the place of virtue in six different professions: law, medicine, teaching, business and finance, nursing, and policing. In each of the profession-specific studies, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were conducted with first-year and final-year trainees, experienced professionals, and educators. Across all six studies, a total of 4,136 professionals participated.

On interviews with teacher trainees and experienced teachers, what stood out was that they complained that the 'moral middle' of the profession gets squeezed out in teacher training, insofar as that training targets ethical issues. What is meant by the term 'moral middle' is that because the emphasis is on very general principles (e.g. 'inclusion', 'diversity' in classes for prospective teachers) or very specific rules (e.g. about teachers' dress code), in addition to formal ethical codes, no time is left to discuss the

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middle sphere: the sphere of actual classroom quandaries and how to deal with those. Consequently, the respondents complained about being torn and pressured, and not being able to 'act out their real character' in classrooms, because they had not been given sufficient training in ethical decision-making about real-life dilemmas. This same complaint is illustrated across all the professions studied when we look at the lack of correspondence between the character strengths and virtues that the participants ascribe to themselves and to the ideal professional.

We found that aspiring and experienced professionals in the U.K. do not consider themselves to have had sufficient training in dealing with the nuances of complex decision-making – much of which is unmodifiable, i.e. not possible to capture by pre-determined rules. Our research, however, presents a relatively positive image of teachers' decision-making skills. Teachers seem to be the ones least reliant on mere formal duties when making difficult decisions. Another finding which shows the teaching profession in the U.K. in a positive light is when we explored experienced professionals' sense of professional purpose, understood as their sense of the worth of their professional activities and their contribution to the greater good. Despite vocal complaints from teachers in the U.K. about being held back professionally by various factors, they scored quite high on professional purpose.

Despite this comparatively high score overall, interviews with individual teachers revealed various reasons that threaten to undermine their sense of purpose, such as:

- Perceived failures to be able to act out one's personal moral character traits in the given professional context.
- A general sense of one's professional context not being conducive to professional development.
- A sense of an overbearing and inflexible managerial

structure that does not allow for individual professional *phronesis*.

- A sense of belonging to a profession that is not experienced as worthy by the general public or by employers.

The concept of *phronesis* (practical wisdom), in general, and professional *phronesis*, in particular, is nothing less than the key concept holding together the approach of virtue-based professional ethics. Indeed, the biggest growth industry in *phronesis* research in the last couple of decades has not been within philosophy, psychology, or even moral/character education, but rather within *professional ethics*: the ethics of medicine, teaching, nursing, business, social work, policing, the military, and so forth. Schwartz and Sharpe's (2010) popular book, *Practical wisdom: The right way to do the right thing* has spurred some of the recent interest in *phronesis* in social science. It highlights particularly the use (or absence) of *phronesis* within professional practice. I strongly recommend this book as a preliminary reading to any aspiring students of *phronesis*, and especially so within the ethics of teaching. It neatly sets the background of the motivation to reclaim *phronesis* as an ideal, in an age of ever tighter and regulated (but essentially fallible) audit cultures, in which professional wisdom has increasingly been de-skilled and replaced with rules, codes, and incentives. The book is a goldmine of examples, many of which are derived from actual professional practice, of why the carrots-and-sticks method does not work and why it is essentially anti-professional.

Generally speaking, *phronesis*, as defined by Aristotle, is the intellectual meta-virtue that helps a moral agent to integrate and adjudicate upon the (sometimes) conflicting messaging coming from the different moral, civic, and performative virtues. In a sense, then, *phronesis*, is the

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conductor of the whole 'virtue orchestra'. Reimagining the ideal of professional *phronesis* in teaching means re-equipping teachers with the capacities and responsibilities to make excellent ethical decisions themselves, building on their moral/civic virtues and their insights into situational complexities – which can never be replaced with codified formulas. *Phronesis* encompasses four different functions:

Constitutive Function. *Phronesis* involves the cognitive ability to perceive the ethically salient aspects of a situation and to appreciate these as calling for specific kinds of responses. This ability can be cultivated in teacher trainees as the capacity to 'read' a situation by seeing what is most important or central.

Blueprint Function. The integrative work of *phronesis* operates in conjunction with the teacher's overall understanding of the kinds of things that matter: the teacher's own ethical identity, aims, and aspirations, her understanding of what it takes to live and act well and her need to live up to the standards that shape and are shaped by her understanding and experience of her professional life. This amounts to a blueprint of professional flourishing.

Emotional Regulative Function. Teachers foster their emotional wellbeing through *phronesis* by bringing their emotional responses into line with their understandings of the ethically salient aspects of their situation, their judgement, and their recognition of what is at stake in the moment. For example, a teacher might recognise that her appraisal of the situation is problematic, giving rise to an emotional response that is inappropriate to the situation. The emotional regulative function can then help her adjust her appraisal and emotion by, for instance, giving herself an inner 'talking to'.

Integrative/Adjudicative Function. Through *phronesis*, a teacher integrates different components of a good life, through a process of checks and balances, especially in circumstances where different ethically salient considerations, or different kinds of virtues or values, appear to be in conflict. In some cases, integration may call for a 'blended' or 'synchronised' virtuous response, such as being compassionately honest or honestly compassionate. In other cases, a virtue may have to be put on hold completely in a given situation in light of the overriding requirement of a conflicting virtue. Therefore, this function allows the person to engage in the adjudication of moral matters when virtues are in conflict with each other.

Without *phronesis*, the different aspects of a teacher's virtuous make-up will fail to become integrated. A lack of attention to *phronesis* in teaching practice and teacher training thus amounts to an act of de-professionalisation.

How Can We Educate Phronesis?

What seems clear is that *phronesis*-guided ethics education needs to begin with the 'constitutive function' (also known as moral sensitivity): the ability to identify the ethical issues at stake. Teacher trainees need to be presented with workplace dilemmas and asked to analyse them, as well as the available action options. A lot of this initial educative work simply involves *virtue literacy*: the ability to spot virtues and vices, name them, and apply them to one's own domains of experience.

Much of professional ethics will be *caught* from the work environment and organisational culture through 'osmosis'. A non-virtue-friendly ethos in schools, for instance one steeped in rules and regulations but inimical to individual reflection, can thus hinder the development and execution of *phronesis*. Educating the *phronetic*

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teacher is a tall order with many problems attached to it. Here is the first problem. Teaching is – along with professions such as medicine, nursing, and policing – a *burdened profession* in the sense of one in which practitioners are likely to encounter various psychologically charged, and even life-changing, situations that are impossible to explain to students in sufficient depth before they encounter them. These are also professions with a high rate of burn-out, perhaps because of various factors that gradually seem to sap the practitioners' original moral purpose in entering them. However, not only is it impossible to explain many of these sources of burden to students until they experience them themselves in their teaching practice, we do not even know what are going to be the main dilemmas facing teachers in 20–30 years from now.

Even the two most vocal champions of *phronesis* as part of professional ethics education claim that it 'is not something that can be taught' (Schwartz and Sharpe 2010: 271). While I would not go as far as Schwartz and Sharpe, it is worth reminding readers of the well-known Chinese fable of the farmer who impatiently tried to pull up his rice shoots to make them grow faster, as a result of which they lost their rootedness and withered away. Young teacher trainees, for instance, need to be fed a diet that does not exhaust their capacities for digestion – which is not the same as saying that they should not be provided with an intellectual initiation into some of the tough and discretionary choices that await them and with a stark warning that no rule book will relieve them of the responsibility for making those choices themselves.

I want to mention finally one problem that is *institutional* rather than educational in a narrower sense. The strict top-down control of teaching in many countries has seriously limited the scope for phronetic decision-making

in the classroom. Some therefore wonder whether it is fair to expose teacher trainees to the ideal of *phronesis* if they are then debarred from using this mode of thinking when they enter the workplace. If schools are not organised in such a way that teachers' autonomy and critical decision-making is valued and systematically relied upon, why should we foreground this in teacher training? This question shows that decisions about the content of professional ethics education for aspiring teachers cannot be seen solely as decisions about what is to be taught in an individual module or two; these are decisions that have to do with the overall aims of schooling and the role that we want teachers to play in the schools of the future.

Professional ethics in teaching is, therefore, not a siloed subject; it must be pursued in conjunction with much deeper and more far-reaching questions about the aims of education and schooling in general.

Recent empirical literature is full of examples, from all over the world, of how badly teachers deem themselves prepared for tackling life's biggest questions in the classroom. They complain about a lack of attention to normative issues in teacher training, and about their own lack of moral language and moral identity. Before teachers can help students answer adequately the question of what kind of persons they want to become, in order to fulfil their potential, the teachers themselves need more extensive training in how to ask and answer such questions about themselves, both at the professional and personal levels.

A virtue ethical approach to professional ethics, centred around *phronesis*, signifies quite a radical new agenda. In most decent schools, teachers have always acted as character educators. Character education just makes

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those efforts more conscious and systematic. However, in professional domains, the move towards *phronesis*-guided virtue ethics signals a radical turn away from the status quo, which according to most of the professionals whom we in the Jubilee Centre interviewed between 2012 and 2022 – involved no engagement whatsoever with moral character in professional ethics classes. They were all about audits, codes, and compliance. Hence, we are really targeting something new and groundbreaking here. Nevertheless, for Western teachers it establishes a bond back to ancient Greek ideas about virtue-based ethical competence, and for Eastern teachers, it potentially forges links with an ancient Confucian tradition. In today's world, we need teachers who act as ethical stewards, developing their own moral character and the character of their students at the same time through ethical classroom practice. Education for flourishing is meant to permeate the whole curriculum and influence every salient educational decision taken within the school.

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CJ KOH NIE SEMINAR: Q & A SESSION



Dr Dennis Kwek, Centre Director for Research of Pedagogy and Practice served as the moderator in the Question-and-Answer session that followed the seminar. Below is a summary of the session.

Audience member: Children can become overwhelmed with their school tasks and responsibilities, causing them to disconnect. This complicates matters for practical thinking as everything is hypothetical to them. Instructions given to them are theoretical, creating a disconnect from what truly matters to them personally. Any thoughts or comments on this?

Professor James Arthur: Most human beings, to some extent agree, will agree that there is some sort of purpose to life. In a secular setting, it becomes more challenging

to guide children in exploring questions like: Who am I? Why am I here? What's my journey in life? The risk arises that they might lean towards identity politics, which does not truly reflect their deeper selves. Our true identity goes beyond superficial aspects or mere actions and is much deeper than these issues.

Audience member: What comments might you have about the connection between spirituality and the cultivation of phronesis? And to follow-up, what is the role that contemplative pedagogies might play or not play, especially in our context here where we have such a multireligious and multicultural setup?

Professor James Arthur: In a secular education system, the concept of spirituality is included alongside

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moral and social aspects. However, defining spirituality without a religious context proves challenging. In religious schools, spirituality intertwines with your inner world of faith and spirituality can be developed in that sense. In a secular context, without the foundation of faith, spirituality can become ambiguous, subject to various interpretations that might lack substance. It becomes meaningless, erased, or divorced from the spiritual tradition of the faith.

Audience member: With the consideration of an ethics course in NIE, to what extent do students actually need to know other ethical theories? For example, will they need to know utilitarianism, deontology? Secondly, do students also need to think about where values come from? For example, how certain values gain currency? They become popular because of certain global movements, because of certain traditions. Often, in ethics courses, students just apply values to things without thinking about where these values come from or the history behind these values. What part of that is important in parental education?

Professor James Arthur: I will take the second question to begin with. Besides school, students learn their values at home. The parents are the first educators of children, while teachers are secondary to that. If parents do a good job in this, students will have a good sense of who they are and will have a moral compass to make right decisions. Schools have to respect it and should not be contrary to what parents have done. It will cause trouble politically and in many other ways. Schools should build on what they have and through their experience.

What schools can be good at, is providing experiences for children to develop these types of virtues by exploring them in real life. That can be sending them

into a business context for work experience to service learning for providing help to society. They benefit by building their character to become a better type of human being. That is what education is supposed to be about, helping students become the best version of themselves, to go out into the world and make a significant contribution for the common good. Everyone has a role and value and should be treated with complete dignity.

Audience Member: I hope to hear more from you about this collective phronesis in the professional development for teachers, whether they need to be autonomous critical thinkers, but they also need to abide by some kind of common ethics or standards – could you elaborate on that?

Professor James Arthur: When we talk about virtues, we are talking about relationships with each other. You cannot have a virtue by yourself. For example, you have to be honest with someone. Every single virtue has a relationship with other human beings. Phronesis is not simply about you, there is a limit to your own autonomy. From birth, we are in a relationship with someone and on the basis of that, we are in relationships with people for the rest of our lives until we die. All virtues are there to help us live a good life with others and to make sure that they live a good life with us as well.

Phronesis must have a collective dimension where people come together and make a joint decision. But it is not just about them making a decision, it is about the group making a decision. They come to a wiser decision if people come together and make that decision together. A colleague of mine, Kristján Kristjánsson, is actually defining this area of collective phronesis.

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Audience Member: One concern is that many things are done out of good intent even with phronesis. It is a caution against phronesis becoming another technical activity that we do, to solve the problem. At what point does it end up becoming yet another technical thing that we follow? The concern is as we move forward, how can we prevent it from becoming yet another thing that gets co-opted by a paradigm of problem-solving?

Professor James Arthur: You are right in that it could become another way for companies and organisations put it into their professional codes and indicate that it is being taught. I am suggesting something more fundamental and deeper than simply people putting it into ethical codes. People should be transformed into something else that they understand and think through ideas. They have to be able to say no when something is not acceptable, even if the company says 'I want you to do this'. This means sacrifice, this means losing your job because you're not prepared to do what the company is suggesting. We want people who have principles, we want people who have beliefs, that challenge the status quo, not people who just follow along.

Someone asked earlier do we need to teach about deontology? Yes, we do need people to understand what these philosophies are, so we would need an ethics course. I will personally go for a virtue ethics approach, which I think is superior, because it has more wisdom in it. I am not the sort of person who is going to follow the rules all the time because sometimes it is not a good idea to follow the rules or exceptions to that. But you have to take personal responsibility, if you make an exception. So, if you don't do something that the rule does, you are going to have to take responsibility as an individual.

Audience Member: To add on to the question, it seems like what is likely to happen here in education is a technologization of phronesis. Is there any practical advice that you have had from your experience in the UK to avoid the downfalls of technological solutionism, from thinking of phronesis as a solution to the problem of now?

Professor James Arthur: The whole point of the talk today was to emphasise the professional judgment of teachers. We must emphasise the professional judgment of teachers; teachers have been trained for this job and teachers have experience. We should respect some of the decisions that teachers would make rather than rely on some scientific measurement and say we will go with that because this is neutral. But there is no measurement that is completely neutral and objective.

We have to ask ourselves if we value the judgment of teachers. I think teachers should be in the same position where they can tell you something that you can rely to be true. Teachers should talk about children so that parents can gather a narrative and understanding of what their child is like in school. Parents want a story about their children, and want the teacher who has been in the classroom of that child for over a year, to be able to give them professional impressions of what their child is like. It is not just about grades, but about how the professional opinions and views of teachers should be recognised as valuable.

Audience Member: A lot of teachers do have the professional judgment and wisdom, but are also caught in this dilemma where the parents think that his or her children has been paired with 'more intelligent' children in the classroom.

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Professor James Arthur: Teachers have a responsibility to help educate the parents to spend time with parents to make them understand what they're trying to do. Particularly, it is crucial to emphasise the common good and working with others. The teacher should have a very strong moral responsibility to include everyone in that classroom. Not to discriminate, but to educate everyone on an equal basis. It is important that children have a more comprehensive view of life than simply being in the group that they think is superior in some way. That would be a dreadful society of people who are educated in that way.

We know that there are pushy parents who push their children perhaps too far and expect too much from them. Teachers can help with that by describing the child as sensitive, that this child is finding it very difficult because they feel that they are being pushed. This is not to absolve the parental role. This is to communicate with parents to offer help.

Parents and teachers must unite and collaborate with each other. The parent needs to understand what the teacher is trying to do. That means the teacher has a duty to describe developments in schools to parents, such as when there is a character program in the school. It is one of the recommendations that the Jubilee Centre made to teachers who are doing this, is to consult with the parents.

Dennis Kwek: I think we should stop the session now as we do not have much time left. We encourage you to look at the Jubilee Centre's website, they are doing really groundbreaking work on phronesis. It is a combination of psychology and philosophy, I think it is really interesting. The work by Barry Schwartz on practical wisdom, there's TED talks of it as well. Let's thank Professor Arthur, for being with us today. Thank you very much.

VALUES AND CHARACTER EDUCATION FOR THE FUTURE OF LEARNING: VIRTUE AND CHARACTER IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

PROFESSOR JAMES ARTHUR

25 MAY 2023, PUBLIC LECTURE, ONG TIONG TAT & IRENE TAN LIANG KHENG AUDITORIUM, SINGAPORE



Synopsis

Professor James Arthur, an esteemed expert in character education, virtues, citizenship, and religion in education, discusses the importance of character education in the public sphere and its role in addressing concerns like political polarisation and the decline of the common good. In this lecture he advocates for character education as a means to address societal challenges and emphasises the role of communities in nurturing civic virtues and the common good. The following is a transcript of the lecture, some edits have been made to allow for better flow.

Introduction

The concept of character education, though universally recognised in its importance, carries with it a tapestry of cultural, political, and pedagogical nuances that shape its manifestation across the globe. Emphasis on virtues

such as honesty and trustworthiness are understood. However, there is a significant variation in how character education is implemented due to its contextual differences among countries. It is important to note that while uncovering the shared ideals that underpin character education, we must not forsake appreciating the diversity of approaches that arise from the rich blend of communities Singapore has. By harnessing these various principles and insights we will be able to address the pressing challenges of our public domain and foster responsible, compassionate and virtuous citizens.

Professor James Arthur delivers the lecture in two parts. He begins by relaying the theory behind Values and Character Education, and then goes on to share the practices and ideas behind them.

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Criteria for Successful Character Education

In order to be truly successful any program of character education needs to satisfy four criteria:

- Alignment with public perceptions and context
 - It must speak to the dominant anxieties of the given context
- Broad political consensus and interest
 - It must meet with a relatively broad political consensus and attract political interest ideally by both the political left and the political right. In the United Kingdom (UK), every effort is made to involve all the political parties in the Jubilee Centre at the University of Birmingham.
- Philosophical theory as a stable basis
 - It must be underpinned by respectable philosophical theory providing it with a stable methodological and also epistemological and moral basis.
- Psychological theory for attainability
 - It must be supported by a plausible psychological theory explaining how the ideals of the educational theory fit into actual human psychology and are generally attainable.

Importance of Character Education in the Public Sphere

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that the civic work of schools and teachers takes place within wider societal and political contexts. In recent years serious concerns have been raised about a number of core elements of democratic life. In the West these include:

- Increased political polarisation
- Uncivil political discussion and debate
- Political apathy
- An overall decline in commitment to or an understanding of the common good

Concerns about political polarisation and decline in common good

Signs of rampant and pernicious individualism in our political communities abound and instead of recognising what we have in common our differences are emphasised. Whether of identity viewpoint or status as citizens, we become increasingly entrenched into hostile camps. Citizens with different political views and communities with different ideals are often regarded as enemies to be defeated rather than as fellow citizens with a legitimate perspective to be deliberated with regard to public interest. In response to these trends some politicians from across the political spectrum as well as a diverse range of academics and public commentators have simultaneously pointed to the decline of a politics of the common good and called for its renewal.

Advocacy for positive forms of social justice and common good

- What they advocate for instead are positive forms of social justice and the common good which seek to emphasise harmony-the pursuit of consensus and the bringing together of communities over antagonism and conflict.
- The common good is not about eroding individuality or suppressing disagreement but rather recognising the importance of social bonds for the flourishing of every citizen, including the value in citizens coming together to deliberate on the meaning of a just society and a good life.

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The role of civic virtues

It is only by encouraging civically minded, active and responsible citizenship in the service of the common good that we can reach our full potential as human beings. An emphasis on the common good can help restore a politics of trust, dignity, respect, mutuality, service to others and even humility. It is important to state that you cannot develop civic virtues independently of intellectual and moral virtues, particularly the moral virtues of honesty, gratitude and compassion. Human beings ought to seek not only the good life for themselves but the good life for others – this sense of mutual flourishing is embedded in the notion of the common good and therefore furthering the common good of all furthers the common good of the individual

Character education and school curriculum

All countries make demands on the school curriculum and schools naturally aim to define policies made by the locally elected politicians. However a general definition of character education for East or West might be the acquisition and strengthening of virtues that sustain a well-rounded life. Character education is an umbrella term for all explicit and implicit educational activities that help young people develop positive personal traits that we call virtues.

Schools should aim to develop confident students who are effective contributors to society, successful learners and responsible citizens. Students should be encouraged to develop a commitment to serving others

which is an essential manifestation of good character in action. If you want to sustain civic virtues we must create strong local communities. If we fail in this, citizens are less likely to look beyond their own families' friends and their own economic interests.

Historical perspective on civic virtues

Underpinning any vision of the common good and often neglected in discussions about its revival or renewal must be a set of civic virtues. Interest in the nature, place and formation of civic virtues can be traced back to Aristotle. For Aristotle the happiness and virtue of individuals is dependent on living as a member of a community and the best communities are those which enable their citizens to attain excellence of character. Some theories hold that a sense of solidarity with other human beings is required for human flourishing and that this cannot be attained if community is not central to their lives. Others argue that participation in communal affairs is necessary because without it, human beings cannot fully develop and exercise their faculties and capacities. Still others make an aristotelian claim that a life devoted to the virtues is central to the practices of human excellence and makes for human flourishing and that this is only possible in a strong community.

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To create such flourishing environments requires the development of a voluntary spirit among the citizens, within civil society and throughout communities. Hence, if we wish to encourage virtue and a sense of community, we must create strong local communities that are devoted to particular practices of excellence and schools are ideal places to start with. The formation of citizens of character has been a consistent aim of education since at least the commencement of state education; this is not new. Character has always been there. Whilst not always a consistent or well implemented endeavour at the level of government policy, schools and other educational settings play a crucial role in supporting children and young people to become responsible and active and informed citizens who are able to engage with others within communities with kindness, criticality, compassion, honesty, integrity and a range of other virtues.

Purpose of character education in schools

The necessity of forming citizens of character has been a long-standing concern of the jubilee centre for character and virtues. As the Jubilee centres framework for character education and school states: *character education teaches the acquisition and strengthening of virtues that sustain a well-rounded life and a thriving society*. The framework also made clear that schools should aim to develop confident and compassionate students as effective contributors to society, successful learners and responsible citizens and that students need to develop a commitment to serving others which is an essential manifestation of good character in action. Remember education is not about information, it is about

transformation. It is not about what a student knows, it is about what a student becomes by the end of the education process.

Most educators and parents seem committed to the view that schools play a role in cultivating citizens of character. Meaningful character development finds more fertile ground in well governed stable communities characterised by shared concern for social justice and with a developed sense of the common good. To have purpose and direction, this concern for social justice and the common good must connect to a cohesive conception of a life well lived. At the Jubilee centre we want our students to have a life well lived in a world worth living in. It is in part for this reason that extreme inequalities corrode stability and harmony, removing the positive social context needed for human flourishing, for the extent to which they render citizens equal partners in a common endeavour. Adverse social conditions never offer a justification for vice however they may explain why virtues failed to develop.

Community's role in building character

Aristotle also offered the concept of civic friendship as a key component - the mutual concern and fellow feeling between citizens needed for healthy, stable and flourishing communities. Crucially civic friendship can only operate where justice is at play and has been compromised by inequalities of wealth. Indeed, Aristotle seems to suggest that where civic friendship is in good supply, justice ensues as who would wish injustices on their friends.

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Community is an invaluable resource for building character and making moral decisions. Formation is what happens to a person living in a community but it is not simply about children in schools nor does it come to an end during our journey in life. Community and the promotion of the common good are key elements and a realisation that we do not flourish through acquiring wealth or through consumerism. It emphasises that these relationships within the community to which we belong are character forming because we have an appropriate dependence on others that leads to our interdependence. We cannot realise our potential in isolation from each other. It cannot be divorced from the community in which we are part. We are not only rational and ethical beings, we are also social and political beings. The possibility of realising oneself as a person depends on participation in the communal life of the community, of which we are a member. Relationships contribute to the common good and our individual good is dependent on the common good.

Modern education

In education today there is an ever-increasing anxiety - an anxiety which emphasises student success as the end all and be all of education. Our educational system has been shaped by the idea that the purpose of human beings is to produce and consume in the marketplace, and that the measure of all things is success in the marketplace - profitability, or in the case of an individual, his or her wealth and status. Some may argue that we should be encouraging this. This would be beyond balance because

if this is the only aim of education and the only way that one gets through the education system, by getting a good degree and good job etcetera then there is a problem.

Five lenses to view character education:

- Seeing character education as religious education based on theology.
- Seeing good education as character education. That children will know the good, want the good and do the good simply by having good examples around who teach by example the meaning of right and wrong through traditional school curriculum.
- Seeing character education as a direct instruction and intervention in the curriculum, explicitly teaching children through a specified curriculum.
- Seeing character education as a character development - the use of classroom behavioural strategies to change behaviour, counselling, classroom management, work with parents and build social skills.
- Seeing character education as service learning outside of the classroom by connecting with the community and engaging actively through service learning.

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Framework set for character education by the Jubilee Centre

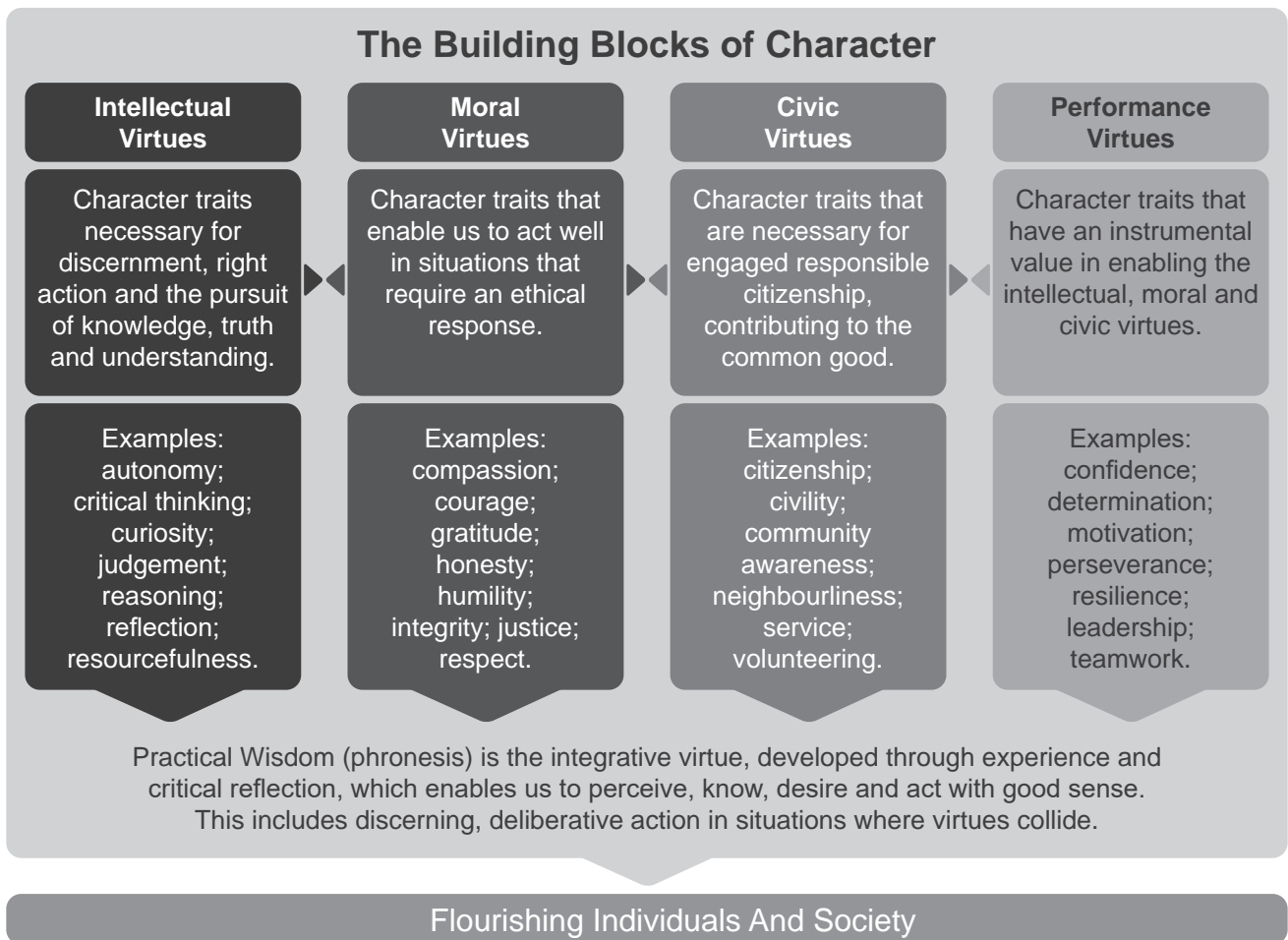


Figure 1 Building Blocks of Character

Figure 1 shows the emphasis on intellectual, moral, civic, and performance virtues and how they lay the foundation for Practical Wisdom. Virtues can collide with each other, call them values if you wish, but they collide with each other and so they need something more and that something more is practical wisdom. The coming together of all the virtues is essentially developed through experience because this cannot be taught;

this is something that is developed through experience and critical reflection on the virtues. This enables us to perceive, to know, to desire and act with good sense, to do the right thing for the right reasons. This is what we have to encourage every citizen to do. They must do the right thing for the right reasons this includes discerning, deliberative action in situations where virtues collide.

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Caught, taught, sought

Character therefore can be caught. We can catch character, it is something that we get. Now you know that children will learn from their parents sometimes too many things that are perhaps not so good, but they also learn from teachers in the classroom as well. This starts from preschool to primary through to secondary and higher education in terms of the universities. And believe it or not they are still learning when they train for their professions when they move into a job afterwards.

It is important that we teach children about kindness for example you know that we give them some ideas about this, and you can actually teach some of these ideas. You can teach it through literature you can teach it through physical education you can teach it through a number of subjects in the school curriculum through stories etcetera. All of these things come together and children get taught some of these ideas, you can teach them about moral ideas, you can teach them about civic ideas.

This is the important part for adolescents, for young people as they move forward; every child, every student at some stage in their life has to make a decision about who they are, who they want to be and how they want to be perceived as well. Now most adolescents are obsessed about their own perception, how people see them as a person and even on social media as well. This is something that is very close to the heart of many adolescents. Does the adolescent want to be seen as a liar? Somebody who is not you know a good loyal friend probably not and so it is important that they make commitments. This idea of sought character is when a student makes their own personal commitments about the type of person they wish to become and most students do get through this stage.

The virtue orchestra

This is why you have these four domains of character (intellectual, moral, civic, performance). Now I want you to think about these domains of character as part of an orchestra. Look at these as sort of the moral section could be the wind part of the orchestra, the intellectual could be the drums, civic could be the violins and performance could be something else. This idea of phronesis/practical wisdom and judgement, that is the conductor. You need a conductor to bring everything together to have a flourishing life, to have a life worth living, to have a life worth living in a world worth living in. This is why for phronesis, the idea of practical wisdom is actually the integrative virtue that brings everything together. Now why do we need this? We need this so that individuals can flourish but we also need society to flourish as well. Hence, if you have a society that flourishes you have got more chance of individuals flourishing and if individuals flourish, they can contribute to making society flourish more and that is why this is important.

How to practise the framework set for Character Education?

The Jubilee Centre Framework for Character Education in Schools was sent out to 7000 of the 221000 schools in the United Kingdom. Although the response from head teachers was tremendous, the issue that arose was, how do we practise these theories?

Need for practical implementation

Although it was relayed to teachers that they had to develop their own practices within the context of their specific classrooms, practical help was still needed to guide the thought process. Practical strategies were developed through the formation of panels of teachers and teacher fellows. Collaboration with practising educators

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to develop practical strategies with an emphasis on context-specific implementation was carried out.

What do we want our audience to know about the Jubilee Centre?

At the Jubilee Centre, we must begin by asking, who is our audience? What did the Jubilee Centre wish to do? This is a research centre in a research university. It has five professors and about 16 members of staff who are research fellows within that centre, and some administrative staff as well. And we must think about who our audience is.

We wanted to convey that we were a unique, leading centre for the examination of how character impacts society. We were going to conduct research and provide evidence of our approach to the issue of character and virtues. These were our ideas 12 years ago; this is what we set up to do.

What do we want our audiences to think about the Jubilee Centre? Our audiences, who are teachers, politicians, members of the community, parents, even students and schools, so we have multiple audiences. We wanted many of them to think that we were an objective centre, that we were multidisciplinary. Very important; interdisciplinary work is hard to do. It is not an easy thing to do in interdisciplinary studies. I mean, philosophers and psychologists hardly speak to each other, so we have to spend a lot of time coaching them to talk to each other.

We wanted it to be robust and rigorous. We had to be non-political; we could not side with any political party or align our ideas with the Conservatives, the Socialists, or the Liberal Democrats, or whatever. That was not to be, and we would not have done that anyway. We wanted to be seen as a centre of excellence.

The work at the centre, we believed, would help people understand and demonstrate the benefits that good character and virtues bring to the individual and to society. What do we want our audience to do to support the Jubilee Centre? Well, we wanted them, first of all, to recognise that we existed and that we had something to say in the public debate. We wanted them to see that we had a leading voice on this subject. You can see that this was very ambitious; there was no modesty about this. We wanted to get in there and have some influence. We wanted the media to come to the centre for comment, analysis, and information, and they do. They come to us for comments. We also wanted people to use our resources and visit our website.

So, we have a newsletter. If you are interested, you can sign up for the newsletter that goes to tens of thousands of people. Not only that, but we have millions of people downloading our resources. We thought at the beginning that this would only be in the United Kingdom, but they actually download the resources from everywhere. Everyone downloads our resources. So, we were quite surprised that it had interest outside of the Jubilee Centre as well.

Our goal

So, our goal is to promote, through rigorous research, the importance of teaching character in schools and society. So, how are we making this difference? Well, we conducted research; that was our first aim. But we realised that we needed to be involved in the policy debates that were taking place. Now, policy debates are not just with politicians; policy debates involve charities, voluntary organisations, and a whole range of other organisations within society. So, policy is not just about politicians; it involves politicians, but they are just one element in this policy debate.

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We also wanted it to be about practice—what actually happens in schools, what is happening in our professions. So, we did not stop with schools; we wanted to discuss what happens in our universities, what happens in our professions, and how people are trained. Because, obviously, we want professionals to have good character; you do not want dishonest lawyers, corrupt policemen, or these types of people in your society.

So, the important thing is that you have to begin at the age of three. You have to start in preschool; you have to start young with this, and it continues into the area of professional development and professional training for all the professions as well. So, our key message is that good character matters to individuals and to society. The qualities that make up character can be learned and taught, and we need a new emphasis on their importance in schools and in professional education. Our defining argument is that good character has multiple benefits. Character can be taught and learned, and the Jubilee Centre is a world leader in rigorous research. These were our aims.

Good character has multiple benefits

So, good character, in terms of multiple benefits, the virtues that make up character enable us to enjoy rewarding and productive lives. The more people with good character, the healthier our society. People live and learn better with character integrity, as well as knowledge, vital to our professions. Virtues are universal; they are found in all great faiths but are not restricted to the religious. In other words, we can talk about non-religious aspects, etcetera. This is why Aristotle came into play. If I had gone out and said, 'Let's do the Christian virtues' or 'the Islamic lectures' or something like that, people would have been quite suspicious, and we would have turned off many people. We used Aristotle because he

predates all of these religions, and so it is very helpful to do that. We also incorporate Confucius as well. What we are about is because many of the ideas of Confucius you can see echoed in what Aristotle said.

Methods of messaging

What were the methods? While we have written research reports and academic papers, we have also done speaking engagements all over the world. We have earned an MA in character education, conducted consultations with practitioners and charities, engaged with experts in seminars, and participated in academic and professional conferences. We established an Association of Character Education, primarily comprising education leaders, especially head teachers of both primary and secondary schools. This association is expanding rapidly, with over 1,000 members, representing 1,000 schools. It continues to grow, underscoring its significance. Additionally, we make policy statements and engage with politicians and other stakeholders. We collaborate with charities, schools, and government entities, although not extensively discussed at the moment.

Road to success

We build coalitions, identify issues and problems, and develop expert academic knowledge, gaining insights. I have learned a tremendous amount from practitioners, gaining significant insights into how policy is formulated. I have also acquired a great deal of understanding about how politicians often seek evidence. Politicians tend to believe that everything can be measured, but some of life's most crucial aspects cannot be quantified. They sometimes overlook this fact, erroneously thinking that they can find data for everything. They become overly fixated on the science of social science, which is somewhat peculiar.

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Building relationships

We build relationships; relationships of trust are hugely important as well. Again, I would say not much about that either. We talk about flourishing a lot. We work with Harvard University on their flourishing program, spending four months with them to assist in that endeavour. Another colleague of mine, one of my deputies, is writing a paper for OCD on the concept of flourishing. It is crucial that we understand the concepts before moving to measurement. If you do not understand what you are measuring, you will come up with very strange ideas about what you are trying to measure, perhaps measuring something else.

Human flourishing consists of the realisation of virtues of thought and character and the fulfilment of others,

specifically human physical or mental potentialities, over the whole course of a lifetime. This means that character development, character education, is a lifelong journey. It is not set in stone; some people think that by the age of 18, or even 20, it is all set, and you cannot change. This is not true; character is, to some extent, malleable, and people's character can change as they go through life, learning new things. Therefore, we must not overlook the performative role of educational environments, both formal and informal, and the cultivation of mental flourishing.

Well-being doesn't consist simply of removing impediments to human flourishing; instead, it aims to develop positive dispositions of virtues that promote human flourishing.

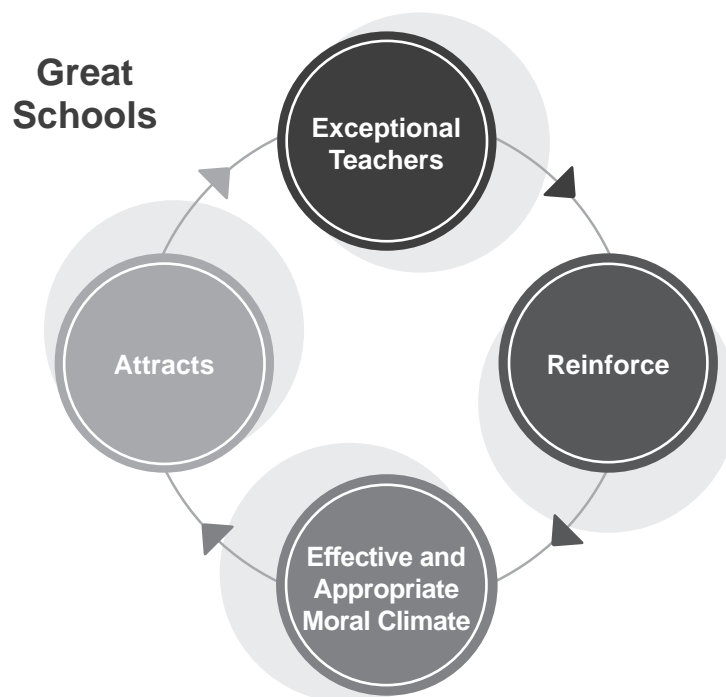


Figure 2 What Makes a Great School

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Great schools

So, what do great schools share? Great schools have exceptional teachers. You would never appoint a teacher who is going to be indifferent to the children in your school. I cannot think of any school leader who would knowingly appoint someone that they knew would not bring anything to the table other than their subject expertise. There has to be more than that. A great teacher is someone who is genuinely interested in the children. A great teacher is someone who is willing to go the extra mile with every student in that classroom, and children can sense it. They can see it in your eyes; they can hear it in your voice. They can also observe it in your body language as you move around the classroom, whether you're truly interested in them or not.

Teachers hold significant power in the classroom. In fact, the best teaching strategy is their own character in the classroom. Exceptional teachers are individuals of strong character themselves, and they contribute to an effective and appropriate moral climate within the school's ethos. Every single teacher in the school plays a role in shaping the overall ethos of the institution. You only need one or two teachers in the school to disrupt that influence and make things difficult. Therefore, it is crucial to maintain harmony within your school. A school that values harmony will naturally attract other teachers of the same calibre, who share similar ideas and values. They would want to teach in such a school because they recognise it as a centre of excellence - a place where they can be themselves, where they can make a difference, and where students feel they truly belong. This sense of belonging is what inclusion is all about. Inclusion is not merely a political idea; it is about fostering a sense of belonging, of being part of something much larger than oneself.

Digital age challenges that educators need to address

So, I just want to say a few words here about the digital age and the problems young people encounter when they are on platforms like Facebook and various other social media sites. Many interactions in the digital age reveal a lack of practical wisdom. We are reaching a point where children sometimes struggle to recognise ethical questions. They often fail to perceive the ethical dimensions of certain actions. But why is this happening? It is because they are communicating in new ways. This constant digital communication is actually detrimental to authentic communication. People who are constantly on their phones engage in ceaseless communication with each other, and this does not foster genuine interaction.

The speed of interactions in terms of how we receive and respond to messages has created a false sense of anonymity. Many young people believe that no one is listening, no one is monitoring their actions, and that there will be no consequences. However, we have seen cases where 16-year-olds engage in questionable online behaviour, only to face repercussions when, for example, they enter medical school. We do not adequately educate them about the potential consequences of their actions.

Furthermore, there is a sense of freedom in the digital realm, where young people feel they can do as they please, as if there are no rules. Additionally, the absence of body language and visual cues hinders communication. It is akin to attending a Zoom meeting where you struggle to sense who you are interacting with.

The digital age has given rise to moral concerns related to virtues. There is a lack of compassion, and many students engage in cyberbullying and online cruelty. There is also a pursuit of online validation in the form of

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'likes.' Some individuals feel compelled to modify their content until they receive likes.

Those who disagree with them are often perceived as wrong, as everyone in their circle shares the same views.

Moreover, there is a lack of tolerance and an inability to engage in civil disagreements on social media. It tends to polarise people and trap them in echo chambers, where they only interact with like-minded individuals. This is detrimental to both democracy and mental well-being.

Additionally, online plagiarism is becoming a growing concern, especially with the advancement of artificial intelligence. This problem is particularly prevalent in universities.

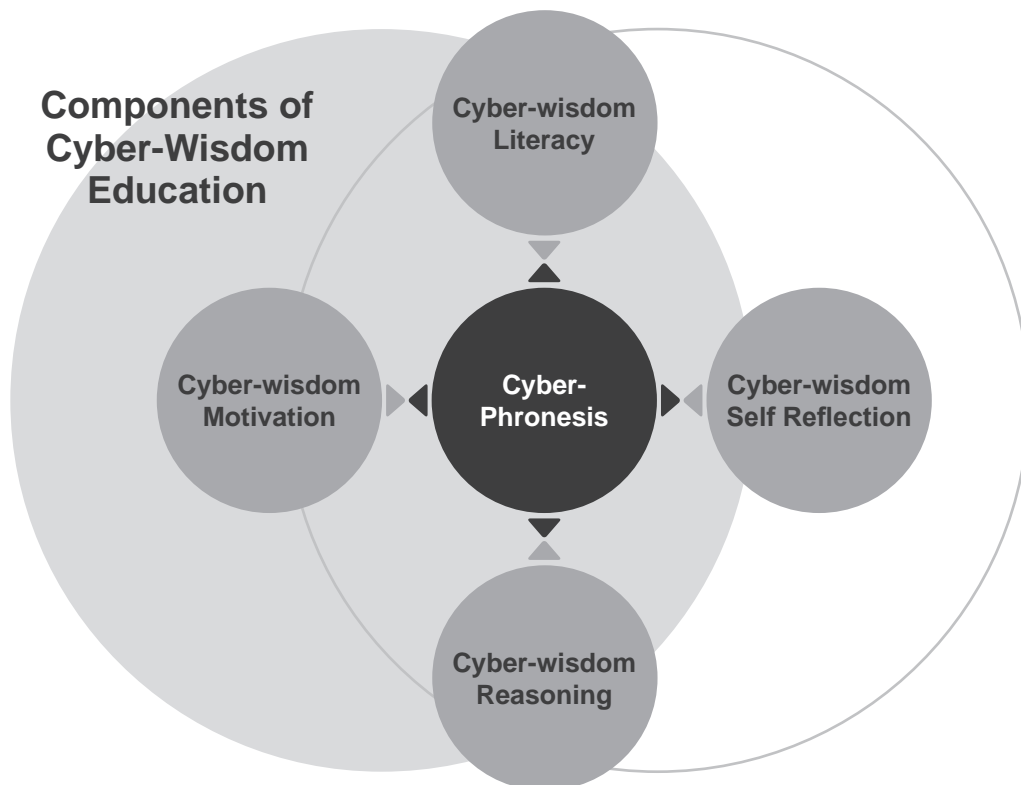


Figure 3 Components of Cyber-Wisdom Education

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I will not delve into the components of cyber wisdom here, but I want to highlight that we have a report on this topic. My deputy director of the centre, Tom Harrison, has also authored a book on this subject called 'Thrive.' It was primarily written for parents, as there is a genuine need to address their concerns. Some parents mistakenly believe that their child is safer sitting alone in their bedroom than being outside. This is a dangerous assumption, as sometimes, the online environment can be more hazardous than the streets.

Accomplishments of the Jubilee Center

So, this is just a sample of the 63 reports we produce. These reports are sent to opinion makers, policymakers, head teachers, and politicians. We cover a wide range of topics related to professionals and school education, among other subjects. These reports have had a significant impact over the years.

In addition to reports, we have produced numerous books, and the centre has flourished in terms of its productivity in this area. We have authored 250 articles in refereed journals in the last 12 years, and I am immensely proud of my staff for their contributions. This effort has opened up a new field, and we have made substantial changes in how character is perceived.

For instance, some individuals view character as a very conservative concept, but we emphasise that it is something that is part of everyday life in schools, often implicitly. We believe it is better to make the implicit explicit, as being conscious of what you are doing in the classroom is crucial.

This year, we are delighted to have won the QS Awards for our framework, which we developed 12 years ago. We received the Global Education Award and the Natural Values and Ethics Gold Award. These are prestigious awards in the field of education and came with substantial financial support, which has greatly benefited us.

Furthermore, we were honoured with the Expanded Reason Award from the Vatican (Ratzinger Foundation) in 2021. We also received a German award, which was quite surprising. Lastly, we earned the highest award for research excellence from the British government, a four-star rating, following their assessment of all universities.

As for me, I received an award five years ago for my work in character education from Her Majesty the Queen. She appointed me as an Officer of the British Empire. During our conversation, Her Majesty asked, 'How does one measure character?' I replied, 'Your Majesty, one does not measure character; one recognises it.' This response led to a friendly laugh from Her Majesty before sending me on my way.

C J KOH PUBLIC LECTURE: Q & A SESSION



Question-and-Answer Session

Professor Chang Chew Hung served as the moderator in the Question-and-Answer session that followed the lecture. Below is a summary of the session.

Professor Chang Chew Hung: You mentioned exploring the facets of virtues and connecting them with practical wisdom. You delved into the idea of individual and societal flourishing. I am curious if we can apply the concept of phronesis, practical wisdom, to contemplate the flourishing of planets. Typically, discussions about character and values focus on individuals and society, but considering broader environmental issues is crucial. With the ongoing discourse about environmental challenges, how do you perceive this aspect in the context of virtues

and practical wisdom?

Professor Arthur: Since joining NIE, I have come to realise the significance of the global environment, particularly in terms of climate. Although we have not incorporated this aspect into our work previously, it is a key takeaway for me now. When discussing the flourishing of society, it is imperative to extend our consideration to the environment where individuals reside. The well-being of individuals is closely tied to their concern for the planet.

While I have assumed this concern to be present, it is necessary to explicitly emphasise that it is a crucial aspect for young people and, indeed, for everyone to contemplate. A flourishing society depends on our

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collective commitment to avoiding pollution, protecting rivers, and preserving our broader environment. Reflecting on these concerns is essential.

Audience Member: I am intrigued by the idea of implementing character education for teachers. Given the ongoing and continuous changes in society, I am curious about the approach to the professional development of teachers in light of evolving values. Character, while adaptable, seems to have a greater degree of flexibility when addressed in students rather than adults. Adults are shaped by their life experiences and the world they have encountered. Convincing teachers to adopt specific behaviours and beliefs presents a unique challenge, considering their established perspectives. I would love to hear your thoughts on how to navigate this particular challenge.

Professor Arthur: The University of Birmingham pioneered character education as an integral part of teacher training a dozen years ago. Subsequently, 16 other universities adopted this approach. In shaping the government's advice on character education, I was part of the committee, advocating against a top-down approach. Instead, I proposed a framework that provides broad guidelines, allowing each school the freedom to develop its unique approach to character education. This advice, emphasising school autonomy, has been disseminated to all schools across the country.

We also influenced Ofsted, the inspection agency in England, to incorporate character assessment for newly inspected schools. We stressed the importance of letting schools define character within their contexts. While there are common elements, a one-size-fits-all approach is not suitable. The more challenging domain was teacher education, where government control is more

pronounced. Despite this, we have urged institutions to include some character education in their training programs. However, many teacher educators lack knowledge in this area, leading to varied interpretations based on our categorisations (intellectual, moral, civic, performance). Some emphasise the moral dimension, especially religious institutions, while others focus on the intellectual aspect. The prevailing approach centers on performance, aiming to help teachers persevere.

Notably, almost 50% of trained teachers leave the profession within five years, highlighting the challenges they face. Teachers experience significant pressures. However, it is crucial to persevere, considering the impact on future generations. Teachers play a vital role in guiding children toward a better path, emphasising connectedness, responsibility, and good citizenship. While many teachers excel in this regard, others seek additional training after their initial preparation, striving to improve and contribute to shaping the next generation.

Professor Chang Chew Hung: Absolutely, the role of parents is indeed crucial in the educational process. Within the center's work, have you encountered any programs or initiatives designed to engage with parents effectively? While teachers can foster a positive character development environment in schools, children often face different contexts at home. How has the center addressed the challenge of bridging the gap between school and home environments in the realm of character education?

Professor Arthur: Teachers sometimes fall into the trap of perceiving parents as dysfunctional, but it is essential to recognise that even those facing challenges often want the best for their children. Most parents, dysfunctional or not, genuinely care about their children's well-being and future. They typically do

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not desire a dysfunctional life for their kids and expect teachers to contribute positively, compensating for any lacking elements in the home environment.

To actively engage parents, our schools have implemented practices that go beyond the classroom. For instance, in the University of Birmingham School, we teach students how to cook three-course meals, referred to as “gratitude meals,” to instill a sense of gratitude. Students are encouraged to invite someone, often their grandparents, to share the meal they have prepared, fostering not only gratitude but also care and compassion. This initiative has received positive feedback from parents, especially when grandparents are involved.

We also use reflective journals where students document experiences related to character virtues, such as compassion or respect. Parents are invited to sign or provide comments on these journals, leading to positive changes in both students and parents. By incorporating these values into children’s vocabulary, we contribute to creating a more positive and respectful atmosphere, not only in schools but also in their homes.

My recommendation for all schools is to involve parents in the design and implementation of character education programs. While schools may not need explicit permission, consulting with parents is crucial to ensure understanding and support for the purpose and benefits of these initiatives. When parents are informed and supportive, character education becomes more effective and well-received.

Audience Member: This question arose during a course I was facilitating at our local junior college for 17 and 18-year-olds. A teacher with several years of experience

asked whether she might be doing her students a disservice by emphasising character education. Her concern was that after teaching them virtues and values, the students might find themselves in a world where these virtues are not commonly practiced. She wondered whether Phronesis, or practical wisdom, might hold the answer to this dilemma. What are your thoughts on this?

Professor Arthur: I hold the belief that our goal in education is to empower students to make a positive impact on the world. This is why we focus on teaching them the concept of transformation, which essentially embodies the idea of change. We aspire for students to go out and actively contribute to making the world a better place than they found it. The emphasis is on viewing them as change-makers who are committed to creating a positive societal transformation. The aim is for every student, regardless of their future profession, to make a meaningful contribution to the common good. In essence, every child, through their work, becomes a contributor to the betterment of society, playing a role in positive societal change. It is essentially about fostering the mindset that they are agents of change.

Audience Member: Earlier, you brought up the need for political consensus in character education programs. I am interested in exploring a concern tied to the accusation that virtue-based character education tends to align inherently with political conservatism. Detractors contend that these programs often lean on conventional and archetypal notions of virtue, raising the possibility of sidelining historically underrepresented perspectives. How would you address this criticism?

Professor Arthur: I don’t believe historical evidence supports that claim. In Britain, character education traces back to the 19th century as a movement initiated

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by individuals who were quite liberal. They aimed to replace religious education with a secular form focused on character development. When we consider recent history, it was surprising that the Democrats, particularly under President Clinton, took the lead in advocating for character education. In contrast, the Republicans were sceptical, fearing it might involve social engineering and turn everyone into social justice warriors.

In the British context, Tony Blair initiated the movement towards character education under the umbrella of citizenship, emphasizing the need for citizens of character. Despite initial resistance, we spent four years convincing the Conservative government of the merits of character education. Initially suspicious, figures like Nikki Morgan and Damian Hinds eventually took the matter seriously after I had the opportunity to engage with them. Throughout this process, I ensured regular updates with the shadow Secretary of State for education, seeking bipartisan support to avoid turning character education into a political football.

The efforts have been successful so far; character education is not perceived as a conservative or socialist agenda. Instead, it is seen as a common-sense approach that every educator should adopt. It is not a political response but a human one, acknowledging that character education is a natural and unavoidable aspect that demands a thoughtful human response.

Audience Member: Doesn't your response highlight a more significant issue? When you enumerate these virtues individually, it is undeniable that no one would argue against them. There is unanimous support for teaching children these virtues. However, isn't there a more profound disagreement about the very essence and placement of these virtues? Even Aristotle,

the originator, doesn't provide extremely explicit or accurate definitions for these virtues. So, this remains a contentious matter within society.

Professor Arthur: I might refrain from using the term "tension." Academics tend to stir up debates in an echo chamber, often complicating issues more than necessary. When we are dealing with the lives of young children, students, and professionals, it is crucial to establish a consensus on the meanings of these terms. While some meanings are clear, it necessitates a discussion within the cultural and contextual framework of a school. An open and free discussion is essential for understanding these concepts. Most of the time, people will arrive at a common understanding, with differences mainly lying in application and emphasis on certain virtues. It is not a rigid blueprint; it is about exploration, discovering what works within your specific context. This bottom-up approach aligns with Aristotle's emphasis on practice rather than theory.

Aristotle, in his pursuit, prioritised the practical aspect over theoretical intricacies. Understanding these terms is vital for effective practice. Interestingly, children's literature reflects a decline in the use of virtues. Consider the names of perfumes at duty-free shops – often enticing with names like "vices" and "poison." We seem drawn to vice, and this inclination is reflected in children's literature. School teachers play a critical role in maintaining balance by teaching virtues from older stories and traditional ideas. This is not a conservative approach but an indispensable one for the well-being and continuity of society.



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