An inquiry into the compatibility of character education and liberal education for Year 9 boys

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A Research & Development Project
Submitted for the
MSc Learning & Teaching 2017

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MSc in Learning and Teaching, Part 3 Research and Design Project

An inquiry into the compatibility of character education and liberal education for Year 9 boys

Abstract

This inquiry tested initial perceptions of Year 9 boys in relationship to character education, in a school that actively espouses a 'liberal' intellectual tradition. A five week teaching block was used as an intervention on these themes as part of their Philosophy and Religion lessons. Students revisited their perceptions and attitudes. A questionnaire was used as the primary research instrument at 'entry' and 'exit' from the project. The questionnaire integrated qualitative and quantitative methods to ascertain if a significant attitudinal shift had taken place.

Eight sub-questions emerged from contention in the academic literature, and these were designed to test specific aspects of the relationship between the character and liberal traditions. The research cohort became more resistant to the compatibility of these themes in their education after the explicit classroom based reflection. The percentage of students attesting a positive appraisal of compatibility fell by 16%, between pre and post interview testing, with that rise attributed to the negative attitudinal response. The most critical students evidenced concern around the authoritarianism of character education, which suppressed opportunity for truly free thought. This inquiry suggests caution is required in considering further advancement of explicit character education models, with specific reference to the public school tradition. In terms of a foundational philosophical perspective, the inquiry considers whether an unwieldy influence on character education in contemporary educational practice, is actually a means of creating a 'hidden curriculum' with questionable motives.

Acknowledgements

With thanks to members of my Department and school community for helping to facilitate this project.

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Introduction

This research and development intervention considers models of contemporary character education in light of the renewed interest in Aristotelian virtue theory (Arthur, 2005; Carr, 2007; Curren, 2010; Jubilee Centre, 2013; Sanderse, 2015) and relates these to the experience of Year 9 boys at the induction stage of their secondary education. The focus of the investigation considers whether the 'liberal education' is compatible with the current formulations of character-based education. Liberal Education is a tradition of education rooted in Hellenic thought and focuses on the formation of an intellectual disposition that 'involves a critical inquiry … not reducible to algorithmic methods' (Jost, 1991, p. 3), whilst remaining true to a tradition of knowledge that embraces the wisdom of previous great thinkers. The liberal tradition is distinct from a 'liberal' philosophical position, which posits neutrality in discussion and evaluation of beliefs and values (Arthur, 2010, p. 63). Instead, it aims at a 'deliberate and intentional initiation of a pupil into the world of human achievement' (Oakeshott, 2001, p. 36) and asserts that a canon of 'the best that has been thought and said in the world' (Arnold, 2006, p. 5) can engender truly free thought through imparting cultural treasure. At many points in the liberal tradition, this learning is seen as enabling character formation (Jost, 1991). In particular for the Athenians and their successors, 'education has always involved…a sense of harmonious action that could support the search for the true' (O'Hear & Sidwell, 2009, p.14). Liberal and character formation have been deeply interwoven, and 'education *for* character is a proper part of liberal education because it identifies freedom with self-mastery' (O'Hear & Sidwell, 2009, p.15).

More recently, however, character education has emerged as an educational movement that seeks a specific focus on the formation of individual character, divorced from reference to the intellectual fabric of the liberal model of learning. A potential conflict has emerged as a contemporary philosophical challenge, which is whether this more recent model of character education, can sit within a framework of the long established, though still evolving concept of liberal learning. Some theorists and practitioners argue that any perceived conflict is erroneous (e.g. Kristjánsson, 2013), whilst others posit a fundamental contradiction between liberal learning and explicit character education. This investigation inquires into how this debate plays out in a historic centre of liberal learning - a leading independent and academically selective London school, considered by many to be an elite academic institute. The school is Anglican in terms of its religious foundation, although from a practitioner's perspective the predominant student affiliation is atheist or agnostic. This inquiry invited the students into critical reflection on the liberal educational tradition and some of the contemporary discourse around character education.

At the crux of this inquiry, is a compelling theoretical debate and its reference to the formation of young people in a liberal contemporary society. If character education is truly incompatible with the liberal tradition from the perspective of learners, then it suggests a model that is not fit for purpose in meeting the needs of its constituents. Equally, if incompatibility is proven in this study, albeit on a small scale, it poses questions as to whether the liberal intellectual tradition offers a more enduring and historically justifiable philosophy of education.

As the inquiry will set out, there is a foundational question that links to social and educational policy, i.e. whether the liberal tradition is viewed as a legitimate possibility for *only* cohorts within the independent sector, whilst character formation is necessary for those less disposed to authentic liberal formation, who are rather in need of 'behavioural formation'. This foundational layer of social policy, necessitates questioning whether a focus on character education as an explicit educational practice more deeply engenders division between the state and independent sectors and risks devaluing the merits of a historic tradition of education. Recent governmental proposals on the re-establishment of a greater number of grammar schools (DfE, 2016; although now retracted upon, in light of the recent General Election and Brexit prioritisation (Adams, 2017)), has brought the question back to light in a new way. The debate as to the potential merits of the grammar model, one that more often mirrors a liberal model, re-emerged with new ferocity. Yet, 'liberal education begins as an extension of an aristocratic, leisured tradition of education to *all* Athenian citizens' (O'Hear & Sidwell, 2009, p.17) and it is contended that the liberal tradition is still more readily identified with the upper societal classes, rather than the majority 'granted the faculty of comprehending what is imparted to them' (Quintilian, 1996, I.1.1). This model presents a considerable challenge to widening access to such liberal learning.

When moving away from social educational policy, the lens is focused on how this relates to my individual teacher practice. Firstly, as an individual classroom practitioner I am firmly aware of the academic discourse that relates to teacher as 'character educator' and the associated controversies (Carr & Landon, 1998 & 1999; Carr, 2005; Cooke & Carr, 2014; Ferkany & Creed, 2014; Kristjánsson, 2007, 2013

& 2014; Lickona, 1996 &1999; Wright, 2015). My teaching (for Year 12, CIE Pre-U (CIE, 2013) and Year 13, OCR A2 (OCR, 2013)) engages with Aristotelian virtue theory, and the subsequent 20th Century reappraisal of these ancient foundations (cf. Anscombe, 1958). Working within an institution that espouses a liberal tradition, expectations exist as to certain character traits that the leadership team would consider preferable in the pupil body, but as teacher-practitioner, one is left unclear as to what these traits might be, as codification of such traits in principle runs contrary to the tenor of the liberal institution.

At a departmental level, this work was targeted at discussions and professional dialogue within the Theology and Philosophy Team, in order to consider the potential place for character formation as part of our Year 9 curriculum. Considering the influence of Lewin (Lewin, 1948) that 'action research was exemplified by the discussion of problems followed by group discussions on how to proceed' (Adelman, 1993, p.9), I proposed as much active dialogue within my department as possible. Given that in 'the context of progressive education, as espoused by John Dewey and George Counts, Lewin [encouraged] …the school to act as the agency of democratic change within its community' (Adelman, 1993, p. 11), I felt it was important for us to consider the extent to which the school was participating in such a mandate, given that this vision echoes that of the Headmaster.

In this independent school environment, Year 9 is the induction year for the students. I planned for the project to excite discourse outside the academic department and thus broader collaborative discussion in the Common Room was predicted, particularly with the lead teacher on Professional Development. At the

institutional setting, I planned for the research findings to be presented to the Senior Leadership Team as a barometer of 'ethos' in the induction year for new pupils. This tool was planned to aid further discussion on identity, purpose and vision, assisting what the Headmaster recently cited as the school's 'prophetic duty to challenge the deafness of the status quo'. He sees this as a hallmark of leading educational providers in relationship to their place in shaping and changing contemporary society through formation of the young people in their midst. Additionally, we have heard a recent challenge from Government for independent schools to justify their charitable status and 'to increase the number of good and outstanding school places in the state system' (DfE, 2016, p. 12) – a call to arms in terms of ethos and purpose.

At the initial stages of collaboration, I sought to understand more of the current approach to student induction. Collaborative discussion with the Head of Year yielded fruit in informing me of a dedicated 'Renaissance Week' designed to 'enhance [your] understanding of the historical context in which the school was founded, investigate some of the socio-political themes at the time of foundation & consider how these themes have changed over the last 450 years' (Walton, 2016). With this sense of the current institutional vision in place, I was well equipped to survey the literature at depth.

Literature Review

For the two key theoretical components of this inquiry (1. character education and 2. liberal education), an appropriate presentation of the history, sources and discourse

in academic and practical sources reveals something of their importance. In what follows, the review of these themes is presented in two overarching sections.

Theme 1: Character Education

Character education begins with the work of Aristotle. Whilst Arthur (2003) contends that 'Plato's *Republic* was the first work on the philosophy of education' (p.29), 'Aristotle gave more attention to the process of education than Plato did' (Arthur, 2003, p. 31). To give Aristotle grounding in educational theory, Boyd & King (1972) encapsulate his original programme as 'training of the body, of the character, and of the intellect' for one's happiness 'depends on the activity of his soul in accordance with the form of virtue or excellence proper to it' (Boyd & King, 1972, p. 40). Aristotle emphasises the role of the social relations which sets man apart from the animal kingdom, as well as equipping the individual for the life of citizenship (p.40). Aristotle defines a virtue as a 'deliberated and permanent disposition, based on a standard applied to ourselves and defined by the reason displayed by the man of good sense' (Aristotle, 2009, II, 6, 29). With virtue comes the desire to form oneself positively, grounded in the tools of practical wisdom (*phronêsis*). Barnes (2000) states that Aristotle refers to his treatises (the *Nichomachean* and *Eudemian*) as the *'êthika'* and the 'transliteration of the Greek word…actually means 'matters to do with character'' (Barnes, 2000, p. 123). Aristotle is interested in the attainment of the excellence of character, both in terms of intellectual virtues but also in those of practical philosophy (p. 124). However, it is important to find clarity in the use of terminology and find an appropriate model for character and virtue in relation to Aristotle's original formulation and in light of contemporary discourse. The

contemporary reflection on Aristotle's definition and on character education more generally, have developed in a plethora of directions.

This broader contemporary landscape around character education became apparent to me via my teaching of Virtue Theory. Virtue Theory is a philosophical school of ethics, rooted in Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, which contrasts normative forms of ethics. Virtue Theory has been a prescribed component of the A2 Ethics syllabus (OCR) and now the Pre-U (CIE) Specification, the latter course recently adopted for A level. As the teacher of both of these syllabi, one identifies the foundational work of Aristotle and moves on to consider the contemporary philosophical discourse that exists around the importance and effectiveness of focusing on character in ethics. My academic interest in Virtue Theory led me to direct my Part 2 inquiry towards student responses to contemporary character education. My Part 2 findings suggested that as a general trend, the Upper School student cohort evidences broad scepticism as to the role of virtue in education. They were concerned as to whether character education, emphasising the role of virtue, should have any place in school. I was interested to extend this inquiry into the newly arrived cohort to see if their perception was consistent with students within the Upper School. This is significant, because if scepticism is not apparent in induction level learners, there is greater latitude for considering the potential place of character formation. For example, could there be a benefit of making *explicit* certain strands of character education in the liberal educational context? Hereafter I nominate the process by which character and liberal education can work successfully together as the *compatibility thesis*, within which the explicit teaching of character education is considered as one of the variables.

Rather than adopting a 'systematic review' (EPPI, 2015) of the literature, described by Fink (2014) as an 'explicit and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating and synthesizing the existing body of completed and recorded work produced by researchers, scholars and practitioners' (Fink, 2014, p. 3), I have adopted a narrative approach. The narrative review highlights the significant areas of research, whilst identifying gaps. I have sought to reproduce a number of elements of a systematic approach, including transparency on conclusions and an exhaustive approach to the literature. One area not allowed for is an *explicit* approach to avoiding ways how reviews can misrepresent the knowledge base, which is the fundamental principle of systematic research synthesis (EPPI, 2015). Nevertheless, *implicit* acknowledgement is incorporated to the review protocol when conducting the literature review. There is a clear interrelationship between these eight strands, and some are identified as more important than others. I present these to provide a theoretical framework for character education, from which a narrative form of the main areas to be studied and their interrelationship emerges (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.18). The theoretical basis of this inquiry, enabled me to assess those themes most vibrantly contested in the literature. In addition, I have sought to relate the themes to some of the most important institutional factors of my school context. These strands are as follows:

1. Literature related to *'Modern virtue ethics and the retrieval of Aristotelian virtue theory'*. This first strand includes some general character education literature.

2. Allowing for cautionary notes and potential misgivings as to the methodology of the character-based approach the next is entitled *'Caution and misgivings around character and virtue education.'*
3. *'Character or virtue in teachers'* allows for consideration of teacher formation and what theorists say about the purpose and embodiment of virtue by the practitioner.
4. *'Institutional structures of virtues'* within which references to 'ethos' are encapsulated.
5. *'Isolating and teaching of particular virtues'* with particular reference to the focus on intellectual virtues.
6. The importance of *'Relationality over professionalism'*.
7. *'Specific character based programmes and curricula'* incorporate some substantive examples of character-based educational models.
8. *'Character education and the Christian faith'*, which provides an important consideration of literature that can help to assess the particular nature of the Anglican foundation.

1. *Modern virtue ethics and the retrieval of Aristotelean virtue theory*

The significance of Aristotle's foundations have already been highlighted but we must emphasise that for Aristotle 'right moral conduct was not a matter for explicit teaching' (Arthur, 2014, p.30). Rather, the moral and intellectual virtues develop over time and specify a kind of excellence for the individual. The retrieval of Aristotelean virtue theory begins with the seminal article of Anscombe (1958) with the powerful critique that 'it is not profitable for us at present to do moral philosophy' (Anscombe, 1958, p. 1) and her assessment that Aristotle's

Nichomachean Ethics is set in radical contrast to the predominant forms of contemporary moral reasoning. Since the publication of Anscombe's *Modern Moral Philosophy*, 'a new and important strand has emerged in moral theory, placing greater emphasis on the nature of moral character and the virtues' (Arthur, 2014, p.32). Whilst the movement towards reclaiming the language of virtue in morality begins here, educational theory based in the language of virtue is spurred on by this discourse. Yet, Sanderse (2015) proposes that the development of virtue has not received much attention in education. Sanderse couples Anscombe's philosophic essay with the empirical psychological work of Kohlberg in moral education, claiming that these domains only converged 'in the early 1990s, when the first virtue ethical approaches to moral development and education saw the light' (Sanderse, 2015, p. 383). He attributes the re-emergence in 'character education' to the writings of scholars such as Lickona, philosophers of education such as Carr and Curren and other philosophers with an Aristotelian thinking on educational issues such as MacIntyre (Sanderse, 2015, p. 383; cf. MacIntyre & Dunne, 2002). Sanderse emphasises a need for much greater coalescence between the social sciences and moral psychology so that conceptual models which more appropriately fit educational development are proposed (Sanderse, 2015, p. 395).

Curren (2010) surveys Aristotle's *Politics* and draws statements on education together with those from *Ethics* to provide an overall plan for the framework of education in close relationship to political science (*hê politikê).* He proposes that the 'general aim of political science is to determine the truth about human happiness' which is encapsulated in the Greek *eudaimonia* (Curren, 2010, p. 543). Curren observes that *Ethics* requires the possession and exercise of intellectual and

moral virtues and that crucially, ‘a central related feature of the *Politics* is its identification of education that cultivates these virtues as the primary tool of statesmanship’ (Curren, 2010, p. 544). Engagement with the *polis* and explicit political aspiration is a direct and evident component of the school and therefore highly relevant. Curren further seeks to identify this strategy with recognition of what he calls ‘conscientious education that prepares everyone to voluntarily accept the reasonable expectations of law on the basis of their independent good judgement’ (Curren, 2010, p. 554). Such an explicit identification of Aristotle’s project with underpinnings of the contemporary *demos* is of real import, particularly when one considers the parallels with recent citizenship agendas of the New Labour administration (cf. Clark, 2005).

Practical wisdom (*phronêsis*), Aristotle contends, is possessed by one who is ‘capable of deliberating’ well, for it is a ‘true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man’ (Aristotle, 2009, VI, 5, p.106). Aristotle believes that this wisdom must accompany the intellectual virtues, to enable attainment of true ethical goodness. Curren explores the model of the *phronêsis praxis* perspective (PPP) (Kristjánsson, 2007, pp. 157-173) through which teaching is considered to be a practice (*praxis)* rather than a productive art, which is engaged in for its own inherent purpose (Curren, 2010, p. 554). Curren surmises educational purpose as ‘formation of students’ and the ‘happiness of citizens’, although he finds this model both ‘un-Aristotelian and philosophically irreparable’ (Curren, 2010, p. 555). Curren expresses an important tension in the concern around protecting education from the process of instrumentalism, (part of the rejection of post-Enlightenment philosophy which MacIntyre believes leads to

fragmented teaching (MacIntyre, 1967, pp. 128-9) whilst ensuring that an appropriate appeal to Aristotle is made when identifying with his philosophy.

Walker et al. (2015) seek to advance the application of character education by tracing the genealogy and themes, and the way in which pupils characters have been constructed through character education (Walker, Roberts & Kristjánsson, 2015). They acknowledge, as advocates of character education, that there is still a long way to go in embodying this at an institutional level in schools, and that greater focus should be placed on teacher training. They assume therefore that teachers should be models of 'good character' and that emulation can have a positive role. They acknowledge the resurgence in the quasi-Aristotelian approaches (Walker, Roberts & Kristjánsson, 2015, p. 80) and deploy the language of 'the flourishing pupil' in their analysis whilst pointing towards the troublesome nature of the term 'character education' for some scholars (2015, pp. 85-86). This concession to the troubled underpinning to character is crucial.

White (2015) echoes this contention and in particular, criticises Dewey for undermining types of education that could develop character and strengthen will. In riposte, there is reference in Dewey to the distinctly Aristotelean idea of '*inclination* – an active preference and choice for the conditions involved in its exercise' (Dewey, 1916, p.64). Never-the-less, White's thesis commences from the paradigm of societal breakdown and accordingly contends that 'violence, bullying and antisocial behaviour seem to have reached epidemic proportions in the schools and on the streets of the United States' (White, 2015, p. 127). This underpinning hypothesis is fundamental to a number of the character education strategies, be

they in the UK or the USA, which sees this form of education and the cultivation of virtue as a means of ensuring social order. This is contestable. Firstly, is the societal breakdown paradigm accurate and secondly, even if it is, does character education offer the most appropriate way through such crisis?

2. Caution and misgivings around character and virtue education

Kristjánsson (2013), seeks to tackle supposed misgivings regarding character education in order to dimiss them as 'myth'. Picking up on the 'social breakdown thesis', Kristjánsson says that whilst greater focus has been given to character education since the riots of 2011, academic uncertainty remains. Amongst his most pertinent observations is that 'the common understanding of "character education" in education circles is unfortunately limited to a certain *type* of character education that blossomed in the USA towards the end of the twentieth century' (Kristjánsson, 2013, p. 272). This concern points to the definitional challenge of character education (Robinson et al., 2000) and Kristjánsson proposes that the best response to the narrow formulation in the American context is to define it as 'any form of moral education that foregrounds the role of virtuous character in the good life' (Kristjánsson, 2013, p. 272). Yet, in seeking to respond to an overly narrow interpretation, one is left with a sense that equal ambiguity will occur with an overly expansive approach to character and virtue. Crucially though, Kristjánsson expresses the need to maintain caution in moving forward with the character education model, although he remains a stauch defender. However, whilst advocating a 'master-apprentice relationship' (Kristjánsson, 2014, p. 66) attributed to Aristotle, he wishes to see neo-Aristotelians engage critically with the founder of the theory through reappraisal and reinterpretation of those features which might

be considered anachronistic. This is a optimistic tone from a position which whilst advocating for foundations in Aristotle, sees the need for continued review.

Others cotinue to echo the definitional concerns, in exploring the interrelationship between moral and character education and their proximity to citizenship education, concluding that there is an inherent compatibility with civic virtue and that synthesis of these ideas is needed (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006). Arthur (2005) says that in regard to citizenship and Labour's 2001 reference to 'education with character', there is a lack of consensus on the notion of moral decline and the role that character education may have to play. Some recognise that there is a danger of citizenship being used as a vehicle for delivery of character education and the looseness of the current discussion is problematic (Davies, Gorard & McGuinn, 2005). A further concern are the very mechanisms that may be used to evaluate the impact of character education programmes and whether virtue itself is a verifiable idea (Curren & Kotzee, 2014). There are limits to testing judgement, motivation and conduct and such facets potentially lie outside traditional psychometric testing and usual measurement methodology (Curren & Kotzee, 2014, pp. 270-272). Arney articulated this more recently expressing worry that there is 'little research on what difference [character education] interventions make in the long-term to educational and societal outcomes' (Arney, 2016). Whilst evaluation of the impact of intervention is a crucial bar for assessment in contemporary education policy, there is ambiguity as to which methods can be used to judge outcomes. Whilst the self-reflection of learners is often considered crucial to a proposed evaluation of intervention, Revell (2010) suggests that the social and political background of learners impacts highly on the way students respond to educational programmes. A

broad based interviewing of 700 students in the USA led to the finding that not unsuprisingly factors outside of school have a a highly significant impact on behaviour and attitude. Those who propose a pluralistic approach to moral development offer acknoweldgement of the impact of external sources and a respect for the limited role for character based intervention (Haydon, 2010). If these concerns are consistent with my research findings, the evidentail basis for character education seems weak.

3. Character or virtue in teachers

Aristotle focuses on virtue's acquisition through habituation (Aristotle, II, I, 2009, p. 23), and the role of critical friendship is also crucial (see Aristotle, XIII & IX). Critical reflection is a key component within Aristotle's virtue theory, and if character is to be taught in line with this model, the role of the teacher or critical friend needs careful consideration. Carr asserts that there has been a misapplication of the traditional Aristotelian notion of *phronêsis* in teaching, with too great an emphasis on technical capability and such development is not necessarily beneficial (Carr, 2007, p. 380). Carr claims that teachers are compared to religious ministers as models of virtue and as a consequence, serious reflection on moral purpose is needed by looking at the complex interplay of professional engagement (2007, pp. 382-385). Teaching needs to be more than 'efficient instruction' (2007, p. 387) and a clear moral purpose is embedded in professional responsibility for Carr, coupled with the interpersonal nature of the teaching profession (Carr, 2006, p. 172). He seeks to acknowledge the mixed economy of teaching as a profession composed of a multifaceted skill set and evidences scepticism as to the challenges of scientific research into pedagogy (2006, pp. 180-182). If Carr is correct, we find

a further challenge to explicit teacher-led character formation, by a practitioner whose role cannot be so narrowly defined. Definitional narrowness is a theme that emerges at a number of points in the literature, suggesting that convenient segmentation occurs when it is beneficial.

Elsewhere Carr, in collaboration, conducts a detailed inquiry into the MacIntyrean formulation of virtue (MacIntyre, 2007). He looks at two predominant forms of practical deliberation; the first being, *phronêsis* as an inherently moral form of wisdom and the second, *phronêsis* concerned with moral cultivation (Cooke & Carr, 2014). Through critical reflection on 'MacIntyrean drift', criticism is levelled at a self-contained teaching profession devoid of broader contact and professional duties and the paper seeks to clarify MacIntyre's 'practice-oriented' notion of wisdom (Cooke & Carr, 2014, p. 92; cf. MacIntyre & Dunne, 2002; MacIntyre, 2007). Observable again is the emphasis placed on teaching as a profession which is about the *complex* interrelationship of technical and virtuous knowledge. In an earlier project, Carr & Landon conducted a two-part enquiry into the broader notion of 'values education' and offered the chance for teachers to reflect on the extreme formulation of moral paternalism and liberalism (Carr & Landon, 1998). They identified religious and independent schools as those evidencing the strongest moral attitudes, and looked at the influence of the 'liberal' tradition and its impact on a fear around transmission of values (1998, pp. 166-167). The second part of their inquiry focused on what they called 'the hidden curriculum' and their thesis was that a troublesome, crude adherence to virtue leads to uncritical absorption of values which leaves teachers ill equipped to steer a pathway through complex moral inquiry as part of the school curriculum. The proposed solution is greater

focus on ‘values education and educational values’ as part of teacher training to prepare teachers much more fully for their professional lives (Carr & Landon, 1999; cf. Zipin, 2009, p. 510). Another deeper concern arises, which is how character formation might be seen as a backdoor for other agendas, something the more critical student might become aware of, compromising trust and transparency in the school context. This insight helped to inform my ethical awareness.

Those who advocate that the role of the teacher is an inherently moral one, propose that the classroom itself is a moral arena and the teacher needs to be equipped to use moral language to help develop moral autonomy and agency (Sockett & LePage, 2002). Revell & Arthur (2007) feel there are explicit weaknesses in teacher education, with a lack of consensus as to how to prepare student teachers for moral development and character education. Bullough (2011) extends his broad review to consider the whole idea of moral matters in teacher education, by conducting a review of journals in the area, crucially concluding that ‘nearly all the authors assume that teaching is essentially and fundamentally a moral enterprise’ (Bullough, 2011, p. 28). Lickona seeks to strengthen the connections between virtue and character so that ‘systemic solutions’ can be found to enable ‘the deliberate effort to cultivate virtue’ (Lickona, 1999, p. 78). Sanderse (2015) is another scholar keen to advocate advancing character education through ensuring that teachers are equipped to enable practical wisdom, and that dialogical research communities can facilitate this process, ‘helping practitioners to understand their values and beliefs through action research’ (Sanderse, 2015, p. 12). Within this sub-section we are left with a complex question – teacher identity and purpose? This is another philosophically contested area which is exposed by the broader

notion of character formation, and a sub-strand that needs implementing in investigation.

4. Institutional structures of virtues

A number of elements of the practical implementation of a character model are influenced by the identity and the purpose of the institution. The interrelationship of institution, ethos and virtue as an essential underpinning theme, is identified here. Kezar (2007) offers a succinct appraisal of ethos as 'the fundamental character of spirit of a culture, connects individuals to a group; it expresses a particular group's values and ideology in a way that creates an emotional connection' (Kezar, 2007, p. 13). The virtue ethicist will be looking to see these features enabled by the institutional structures. McLaughlin (2005) identifies ethos closely with Aristotle because of the 'emphasis on educational influence as involving the shaping of the dispositions, virtues, character and practical judgement of persons' through traditions, habit and emulation, but that ethos itself remains 'underexplored as a form of educative influence' by educational researchers (McLaughlin, 2005, p. 306). Curren (2008) proposes that integrity in university administration is founded on three Aristotelian principles of commitment, judgement and conscientiousness. We again see Curren appealing to Aristotle's political science, informing ideals of human flourishing and living well as appropriate preparation of statesmen and citizens (Curren, 2008, p. 341). Finally, Goldsmith-Conley (1999) proposes that character education should not be about instructive obedience as some models lead to, and rather focus should be placed on school culture to enable caring and thoughtful citizens. This proposal is one that most practitioners are likely to agree with, but the contention is likely to

rest more at the level of practical realisation of such an endeavour. For the proponent of character education, there will need to be sufficient institutional support to enable such student flourishing. We acknowledge that if character education is to be embodied, the institutional structures will need to have been thought through carefully in advance to avoid a tokenistic embrace of a more complex reality.

5. *Isolating and teaching of particular virtues*

Not only is the teaching of character questioned, but if the premise that character can be taught is accepted, we are left with uncertainty as to which virtues should be enabled. Tension exists amongst theorists as to whether the intellectual virtues should be isolated from the practical, through educational programmes. Ferkany & Creed (2014) notice prevalent criticisms of virtue in the late 1990s and defend a practically intelligent virtue, which has psychological harmony. Baehr (2013) defends an explicit focus on the fostering of intellectual virtues and sees that this should be part of a key pedagogical aim, so that intellectual character education is ranked over a general character education. Deakin Crick (2005) draws upon an intellectual basis to formulate 'being a learner' as a modern virtue embodying both character and personhood, though one might question whether a disposition for learning was ever alien to Aristotle. She proposes a model of lifelong learning, founded upon individual agency and responsibility to enable a transformative approach to learning. Arthur & Carr (2013) identify a similar theme of 'learning for life' and seek to place a model of virtue-ethical concept of character at the heart of contemporary research into values education. Sternberg (2004) is concerned about certain narrow definitions of intelligence and proposes that virtue of *wisdom*

can help to overcome the fallacies of intelligence. He goes so far as to suggest that explicit instruction in 'wisdom related skills' (Sternberg, 2004, p. 167) could occur in the school curriculum, coupled with examples of Twentieth Century figures who may have embodied intelligence but failed in traits of wisdom. Finally, in this subsection, we note that Suissa (2015) sees character education as responsible for the decline in the political literacy of students and separate facilitation of political education is needed, rather than sandwiching into citizenship. The political concern again comes to the fore for my school context, and strikes a deeper note as to the scope of the inquiry.

The challenge of mixed-motives and hidden curriculum, is also exposed in this sub-section. It further highlights the need for a consistent articulation of character education across the institution and those in a delivery role, if such a programme is to have any chance of success.

6. Relationality over professionalism

Should teachers be more concerned with how they relate to their students, or with embodiment of their professional characteristics? Concern is expressed by character educationalists that teaching not be narrowed to a technical discipline i.e. that the *techne* precedes the *phronêsis.* Carr (2005) proposes that the normative importance of teaching sets it apart as a discipline (Carr, 2005, p. 256) and that the basic modes of teaching mean that it is closer to pre-theoretical models than purely research based skills (2005, p.267). Carr (2005, p.270) states that:

> teaching is not exclusively susceptible of the more formal contractual or technical analyses that might be provided or other occupations, because it is not at heart a matter of either formal contract and/ or technique.

On face value, this is a bold claim in light of the increasing performative pressure that exists across the education sector, but Carr claims that the virtue ethical framework provides the preferential foundation for teaching practice. Berkowitz & Bier (2004) provide a research based inquiry to provide a substantive and supportive character based approach. Their comprehensive conclusion that 'character education is an effective means of promoting both student social/moral/ emotional development and academic achievement' (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004, p. 82), unequivocally supports the character based approach. Durlak et al. (2011) provide an analytical example of specific intervention to respond to social and emotional learning needs to foster cognitive and emotional development. If this evidential base can be combined with a virtue ethical framework, there may be significant potential for advancing specific virtue based intervention programmes. Nevertheless, a tension will emerge between this seemingly supportive role of teacher as a fuller embodiment of character beyond purely professional standards, and that of the explicit requirements of a fixed character based programme.

7. Specific character based programmes and curricula

This sub-section is rooted in a need to articulate some of the current substantive practice around character education. The Jubilee Centre (the leading centre for character education in the UK), provides a framework for schools and outlines that 'the development of character is a process that requires the efforts of both the developing individual and the society of its schools' (Jubilee Centre, 2013). This

summative document covers the specifics of the goals of character education, school ethos based on character and teachers as character educators. The broader context of the Centre is highly significant, including having convened a series of Conferences at Oriel College, University of Oxford, the fourth of which took place in 2016 on the theme of 'Cultivating Virtues'. The call for papers recognised that Aristotle offers 'no detailed account of the nuts and bolts of [virtue] education' and therefore virtue ethicists and character educationists need to engage in some 'reconstructive work' or, more radically, leave Aristotle behind and making a fresh start*'* (Jubilee Centre, 2015). If Aristotle is to be 'reconstructed', upon which foundations should this take place, and who will be the architect of virtue education's 'nuts and bolts'? If Aristotle's foundations are disregarded then not only is reconstruction abandoned, but a whole new *construction* is required – what might this look like and what will the grounding of the theory be?

Wright's (unpublished, but very insightful paper) from the 2015 Conference makes clear the political context of character education as he proposes the need for 'a Taught Course' (Wright, 2015). Most significantly, Wright highlights how Nicky Morgan, the then Secretary of State for Education, has adopted 'the Jubilee Centre's interpretation of Character Education as definitive for the purposes of current policy' (Wright, 2015, p. 2) with Morgan (Jubilee Centre, 2014) stating:

> character is a set of personal traits that produce specific moral actions, inform motivation and guide conduct. Character education is an umbrella term for all explicit and implicit educational activities that help young people develop positive personal strengths called virtues.

In September 2014, after a roundtable discussion with Professor James Arthur, Director of the Jubilee Centre, Morgan committed £5 million of Government funds to 'help state schools equip pupils with the values and character traits needed to succeed in life in modern Britain' (Jubilee Centre, 2014), specifically identifying that young people should acquire 'resilience and grit'. Thus, Department of Education policy envisaged an increasingly prominent role for *explicit* character education programme, founded on the work of the Jubilee Centre. The significance of this endorsement of character education opens up a plethora of questions and potential challenges. For example, was the Secretary of State's desire to create 'gritty' young people, a convenient means of obfuscating the need to focus on deeper institutional change, which might help ameliorate the economic and social inequality? Within the practical pedagogical circumstances, Wright suggests that a discrete taught course should work alongside other implicit methods of character education but that 'rigorous professional development and pedagogical thinking' is also needed and should be embedded in school leadership structure (Wright, 2015, p. 3). The academic reflection is taking place, and was being funded by Government; the mechanisms of character education had been embedding more deeply within British state education.

Lickona (1996) acknowledges the broader concept of character education in the USA, with moral and citizenship education being captured under the umbrella of character. He commences by outlining how 'society's problems are most visibly reflected in its youth' and listing 'ten troubling youth trends' (Lickona, 1996, p. 94) before providing eleven working principles for effective character education. Hoge (2002) considers the relationship of character education to the social sciences

and draws upon ideas of civic obedience, grounded within the legal tradition to consider what an effective programme might look like, including detailed reference back to Lickona. For Hoge, 'a logical and functional relationship exists between the ends sought by those teaching character, citizenship and social studies' and thus the interrelationship between disciplines is clear for him (Hoge, 2002, p. 107). Stiff-Williams (2010) supports a similar strategy of character education being integrated into other curriculum areas; whilst simultaneously recognising the challenges of a standards based curriculum, she advocates a fusion to offer a strategic response to breakdown in character. Tirri (2009) expresses concern that for high ability learners in particular, emphasis on character and morality have been neglected fields of study. In this guest editorial comment, Tirri introduces the dialogue around cognitive capability and moral development, a useful source when considering the particular demands of the current school environment. Ovearll, the translation of Government protocol and its impact on the independent sector, is the area of deepest concern for the current inquiry.

8. Character education and the Christian faith

Character education has a vast relationship to the Christian tradition, which post-dates, but integrates Aristotelian thinking (see in particular Kreeft, 1992). As a sub-section that touches upon the institutional setting of one closely connected to the Church of England, a further contextual reference emerges here. Wilhelm & Firmin (2008) propose that character education is at the heart of all education. Whilst recognising that in principle no educator is against formation of character, the attempt to 'operationaliz[e] this into practice … proves more challenging than what it might initially seem' (Wilhelm & Firmin, 2008, p. 183). Pike (2010) picks

up on the tension between autonomy and character that exists when reference is made to the acquisition of certain virtues and values, but goes on to claim that 'it is an entirely justifiable aim for young people to learn that they may choose to make wise choices, adopt Christian beliefs and act ethically' (Pike, 2010, p. 312). Pike is successful in acknowledging how highly autonomy is respected in liberal educational traditions whilst advancing the basis of character education rooted in Aristotle and fostered by Christianity. Meidl & Meidl (2013) provide a survey of the history of character education in America and look at the effect of intentional development of character models in three contexts of Catholic, Quaker and public schools. We again see reference to the societal breakdown thesis as the concluding claim that 'if stretched and broken homes are causing depletion in the character of our youth' (Meidl & Meidl, 2013, p. 187), models of successful intervention must be strategized, including 'a coordinated approach infusing character education into the school climate' (p.186).

Theme 2: Liberal Education

The discourse around the 'Liberal Education' occupies a depth and historicity similar to that of the character education. After a brief overview of the liberal tradition, the particular narrative of this theme will relate to the Public School Liberal Tradition, a discreet but well developed area of literature.

Stephen asserts that a liberal education 'seeks to inculcate an awareness of not just why a thing works, but that it can be beautiful in its working', which can run into head on conflict with the need to educate (Stephen, 2009, p. 1). In distinction to the theoretical basis of the Virtue Theory, liberal education 'is the tradition by which

Western civilisation has preserved and enriched its inheritance for two and a half thousand years' (O'Hear & Sidwell, 2009, p.6). This form of education envisages the individual living with intellectual freedom and fully developed rational faculties, by inheriting the knowledge of great minds which have been inserted into the discourse begun in fifth-century Athens with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. In the modern day, it is viewed as a riposte to sytematic or utilitarian education (Corey, 2013, p. 197; Wittnebel, 2012) that 'leads to technically trained people who don't know how to criticize authority' (Nussbaum, 2009, p. 62). We find those like Nussbaum and Mulcahy (2010) who are concerned with the demise of the tradition, those who see it as the main task of school (Crittenden, 2006) and those who seek a rearticulation (Shinn, 2012; Smith-Pangle, 2013). Others feel the whole notion is 'ambiguous and contested' (White, 1986, p. 63). We also hear rare voices who propose a renewed role for liberal education in contemporary Britsh religious education (Kay, 2011). O'Hear & Sidwell (2009, p.6) acknowledge that the tradition is a 'broad church' but that the core beliefs are shaping an individual towards the ideal of:

> personal freedom, guaranteed by self-mastery and the capacity for rational thought together with an educated sensibility in matters of value and the aesthetic.

In essence, these foundational components are very closely aligned with those of classical character education. Aristotle and *Nichomachean Ethics* are a foundational source for the liberal tradition. However, as with theme 1, the crucial concern is the lie of the land in the particularised components of the tradition.

Historical Themes related to the Public School Liberal Tradition

In English public education, the high Victorian age is a most crucial point in identifying specific articulation of the liberal method. Rothblatt (1976) asserts that in eighteenth century England 'the conscious improvements of morals and manners was never very far from the daily thoughts of divines, novelists, philosophers, political economists, poets or painters' (Rothblatt, 1976, p. 23). The trajectory of the liberal tradition was one that aimed to push 'upward out of barbarism' (cf. Arnold, 2006 & Said, 1993) and writing proliferated on the themes and purposes of this form of education 'for above all liberal education was the pathway to civilization' (p. 23). In the Victorian era the tradition incorporated thinkers such as J.H Newman, J.S. Mill, Henry Sidgwick, T.H. Huxley and Matthew Arnold (White, 1986). This expression still saw the liberal as a liberating intellectual formation that was rooted in the Greek ideals, but in the eighteenth century its attachment to the ancient Greek usage is declared at 'highly ambiguous' (p. 24). Rothblatt posits that as the arts of the mind and the body are split from each other, the liberal becomes more concerned with definable ends and principally those of 'visible qualities of character' (p.26), and thus we begin to see an early emergence of the parallels of the liberal and character themes, as separate, rather than interwoven ones. Rothblatt acknowledges Mathew Arnold who offers the 'great mid-century definition of culture' (p.146; Conway, 2010, p. 101), in articulating themes of holistic culture, culture as a restraining force against the proliferation of anarchy and an ideal standard based on commonly accepted taste (p.149). In one of his most eloquent expressions, Rothblatt comments that for the mid-Victorians 'a liberal education was a celebration of intellect itself, the *telos* of evolution' (p.153).

In accessing a contemporaneous source and the language of the day, Huxley (1870) alludes to an earlier era in addressing the mid-Victorian audience. He asserts that the liberally trained is one in 'who passions are trained to come to heel by a vigorous will, the servant of a tender conscience' (Huxley, 1870, p. 39), although Rothblatt (1976) believes this is a radical shift in the articulation. These perspectives are relevant as ones that inform most proximately the chronological development of the current liberal tradition in the public school, the one that my school setting most clearly identifies itself with in terms of ethos.

Much of the discussion in the Georgian and Victorian era relates to the purpose of the English University. This is relevant because the leading public schools of the day, sought close alliance of their educational vision with the leading universities. They were forming scholars who were seeking to embrace the fruits of the liberal university tradition. Whilst Newman's vision of the 'cultivated intellect' (classically explored in his *The Idea of a University* & cf. Tristram, 1952, p. 107; White, 1986, p.41-46) is substantive and clear, Slee (1986) asserts that the lack of clarity in the purpose of the English Universities in the Georgian age (1800-1850), meant that only as a counter cultural thrust emerged did the universities adopt a more holistic vision. If the uncertainty existed in higher education, then it is likely that such uncertainty echoed in the public school sector, rendering redundant a claim that public school was sure and clear in its identity, a trend that may echo into contemporary identity uncertainty. For Slee, 'the broad liberal sympathies and creative, flexible intelligence were at a premium in a society experiencing radical change and deep social division' (Slee, 1986, p. 10). We observe that the liberal thrust in this age is used as a counter to the emergence of the 'accumulative,

acquisitive man' and the looming epoch of 'gross materialism' (p.10). Roth (2015) helps us to further update our reflection in the case of the contemporary liberal university education (although in the US context) as he reads into the *Yale Report* of 1828 and the *Red Book* of Harvard, the 'vehicle for counteracting the centripetal forces of modernization' (Roth, 2015, p. 133). However, in the age of specialization and the singular depth of academic inquiries, Roth concedes the challenge of maintaining common academic goals has 'proved too daunting' (p.134). Indeed, one must question the extent to which having liberal principles in word or on paper, can really mean they are manifest in the current school context.

The mid-nineteenth Cambridge Professor of Moral Philosophy, William Whewell, proposes a vision of the liberal education in the English university, and seeks to elicit the distinction between the *permanent* and *progressive* curriculum foci. Although Whewell speaks principally of Classical and Mathematical studies, he posits that he is 'far from thinking that these two subjects comprise all the studies which belong to the development and discipline of man's mind and character' (Whewell, 1845, p. vi). Strikingly therefore, is the extent to which the proponents of the liberal tradition see the seminal importance of a core curriculum base, which impacts directly on character formation. T.H. Huxley sought to challenge this classical foundation (White, 1986, p. 57) in a progressivist challenge. It is a misnomer to think that character is separate from intellectual formation. Yet, we see in Whewell elements of what we would now designate classism, as he posits that 'the education of the upper classes of the community is still more especially important' (Whewell, 1845, p.1) than that of the lower classes - the former leading the latter.

A further challenge begins to emerge in our reading of the liberal tradition, which concerns the extent access to an elite educational formation (akin to the research school), one not suited to the lower classes of society, seeks to ensure that the *status quo* of political leadership remains enshrined. We will see later how this plays out in a counter narrative that posits how a philosophy of education should exert itself within an emancipatory framework, rather than a maintenance of current order, but we recognise that this is a concerning component of the tradition that may threaten aspects of current day acceptability.

On a more conciliatory reading of Whewell, we see how he believes that 'deep insight into the circumstances, character and tendencies of the nation… [are] influences by which the minds and characters of young men in past times have been, and hereafter are formed' (Whewell, p.2). Crucially, Whewell believes that the *permanent* branches of knowledge help the cotemporary student to learn 'how former generations thought, and felt, and reasoned' (p.6), which cannot be capricious branches of knowledge, but those 'thoughts and expressions of thought which are sympathized in by men in general by successive generations' (p.6). And yet, can we get away from the sense that Whewell is a master of ensuring the place of the ruling elite?

Whewell makes appeal to an intellectual tradition, an idea that is brought to renewal in the work of the contemporary neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethicists such as MacIntyre (1984). With a certain contrived circularity however, the *progressive studies* are described as an activity that 'belongs to man as man' (p.7). At the crux of Whewell's vision is the absolutism of the intellectual containment of the liberal studies, because

the progressive branch 'must be the results, not of individual caprice, or fancy, but of human Reason' with their fundamental telos being that of 'Truth' (p.7). In this classical articulation of the liberal tradition, the search for truth prevails, as the 'progress of the human mind is from Truth to Truth' (p.7). There is a clear depiction of a Platonic enlightened caste leading less enlightened characters through the murky uncertainty of human knowledge, a vision which is very difficult to marry with contemporary neo-liberal emphasis on individuality and subjective belief.

Stepping forward from the permanent and progressive designation, Rothblatt (1976) observes that the huge emergence of new intellectual disciplines and of new research ideals challenges the pre-supposed foundations of the liberal education (Rothblatt, 1976, p. 167), a challenge that continues ever more profoundly in the current academic climate, in the search for a consistent contemporary definition of the liberal method. Mason (1925) echoes this challenge, and the duties that must be adopted by the curriculum designer regarding the 'enormous field of knowledge to which a child ought to be introduced in *right* of his human nature' (Mason, 1925, p. 253). Mason's emphasis also expresses a distinctly Aristotelian tone in an appeal to a wide curriculum base which is 'necessary for the production of an intelligent and magnanimous citizen' (p.263), as for the Englishman, school is looked upon 'as a nursery for the formation of character rather than for the acquisition of knowledge' (p.263). Crucially in this aspect of the literature, an ideological concern with the excesses of emerging individualism is addressed. Mason seeks to assert 'a corrective of the intolerable individualism' (p.273), issuing a striking prefiguration of Anscombe's (1958) concern for a dysfunctional moral philosophy. In the midst of profound Second World War ruptures, Catholic author, Maritain

(1943) expressed hope that new birth pangs in education will yield a maturation, as the thirst for liberal learning 'is one with the thirst for social liberation and the coming of age' (Maritain, 1943. p.90). Arguably, this coming of age is still being sought, and it is hard to envisage many institutions of social liberation that are *de facto* identified with the liberal tradition. Maritain (1943, p. 91) posits a social breakdown thesis and sees that education is asked to remedy all the deficiencies of:

> the present day disintegration of family life, a crisis in morality and the breakdown between religion and life, and finally of a crisis in the political state and civic conscience.

This is the same line of reasoning deployed by certain contemporary character educationalists, who posit a remedial function of the character approach, although this remedial voice harder to identify with the current day liberal educationalists.

McClelland (1979) helps us update the inquiry. Whilst she cites that the urge for autonomy is a 'hallmark of much of the writing on moral education and character formation in the last fifty years' (McClelland, 1979, p. 6), it is a direct legacy of nineteenth century liberalism, rooted in high Victorian ideals of progress and human perfection. McClelland considers the mid-nineteenth century (1859-1871) as one of 'cerebral thromboses' (p.7) in which the publishing of Darwin's *On The Origin of the Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), J.R. Seeley's *Ecce Hommo* (1866), which is at the foundation of the historical-critical method, stripping Jesus of Nazareth of his divinity, and the earlier pessimism of Malthus's *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), all contribute to a 'paralytic shock in the moral well-being of the nation' (p.7). Yet, ironically it is at this epoch that perhaps we can begin to see an emergence of something that more readily resembles contemporary character education. The

belief in the role of the individual's modern governance, which partially grows form the evolutionary account of man is identified by McClelland as Samuel Smile's *Self Help* (Smiles, 1862) manual is published in the same year (1859) as Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species* and Mill's *On Liberty.* For Smiles, 'men of character are not only the conscience of society, but in every well governed state they are its best motive' and exude the force of authority which rule the world (Smiles, 1862, p. 331).

Despite the scorn of educationalist Mathew Arnold, McClelland believes that in Smilesian enthusiasm we see 'the emergence of a powerful and popularly acceptable life ethic upon which individual and collective moral responsibility could be erected' (McClelland, 1979, p. 15). Arguably, it is this sort of ethic that the modern proponents of character education, seek to emphasise. McClelland asserts that the educational reformers (such as Charlotte Mason and Mable Hughes) of the nineteenth century were 'busily rejecting' (p.18) an Aristotelian emphasis on character formation in early infancy, a position which demonstrates a narrow reading of Aristotle and a misaligned emphasis on purely early childhood formation. McClelland's survey suggests that then emphasis on training for citizenship leads to a 'heyday' (p.20) in the period between the two World Wars and cynically becomes the sole purpose of education. These insights suggest the emergence of greater state concern for the democratic mandate of educational formation, a position that echoes more clearly ideas found in Aristotle's conception of the *polis.* In the conclusion of her broad survey, McClelland elides moral formation with the reality of a liberal tradition, in stating that it is incumbent on those who form teachers, to be equipped with 'the knowledge and expertise to

undertake the moral training of generations yet to come' (p.22). For this theorist at least, the liberal tradition is in itself a process of moral formation, but one wonders whether her vision incurs upon the territory of moral formation in the way that other theorists would express profound concern.

We find a similar emphasis in the writing of Warnock (Barrow & Hirst, 1993) who in a more general essay on the role of the teacher-educator believes that the 'first priority in moral teaching is by example' and the willingness to 'expostulate when manifest wrong is done by one child to another' (Barrow & Hirst, 1993, p. 22). In a collection of essays inspired by the work of Paul Hirst, known for 'influential work on the nature of knowledge and the objectives of a liberal education' (Barrow & Hirst, 1993, p. 7), Warnock advocates for teacher authority, derived from moral character – a position more closely aligned with modern character education strands. Martin (2013) argues more explicitly for the formative value of ethical inquiry shaped in the liberal education as a tool of ongoing teacher training and practice.

A note on the two themes – The Character and the Liberal education

These two themes reach to the *heart* and origin of the philosophy of education (O'Hear, 2009). Finding clarity and certainty about the interrelationship of these themes is a difficult task. Much of the tension in the debate is concerned with whether character education can take place in and integrated way, or whether a more explicit focus should occur (see for example, the work of the Jubilee Centre (Jubilee Centre, 2013), in comparison to Rusnak (1998) for an example of the latter). Honesty was needed with the students involved in this action-research inquiry,

acknowledging that they are being asked to reflect on themes that reach to the foundation of the method, purpose and truth of educational theory. Equally, as teacher practitioners we needed to be aware of inserting ourselves into this debate within the parameters of our research method and I, as the projector designer needed to be aware of my role as selector of the sources and materials being used to elicit inquiry. I needed to hold in balance my 'didactic-self' (Casey et al., 2009, p. 420) with my research role, or what has been designated my 'Researcher self' and 'Practitioner Self' (Zeni, 2009, p. 256) – a tension that was difficult to navigate at times. Each of these elements requires deeper analysis in their methodological justification.

Methodology

Ethical Approval and Collaborative Principles

In terms of the ethics applied in this research and design project, access to the student setting was 'negotiated with the relevant gatekeepers' (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p. 231), these being the Headmaster and Head of Department. All appropriate steps in the CUREC (Central University Research Ethics Committee) guidelines were followed with CUREC 2 usually being used for work vulnerable groups, i.e. minors in education. However, for the MLT purposes 'normal good practice' was followed within the *Modus Operandi* application for ethical approval. This ethical standard is important where the notion of protection of a cohort 'presupposes an unequal relationship between the researcher and the people she or he claims to be researching with' (van den Berg, 2001, pp.84-85), a power-

dynamic which is certainly possible in the school setting (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p.39). Permission from the Headmaster for a research intervention was part of the CUREC process.

Once the initial fact finding reflection had taken place and I thought theoretically about the framing of my research. The ERSC Framework for Research Ethics 'Appendix B: Example flowchart of review process' (ERSC, 2016, p. 40) provided a model upon which to scrutinise my research method and ensure that any risk factors to participants were considered. Simultaneously I focused my research lens in accord with Punch & Oancea's (2014) 'hierarchy of concepts' (p.273) in order to particularise the research question. I prioritised themes and the shaping of the specific research questions was in line with the rigour of my literature review. The final stage of data collection occurred in my local environment, once all ethical approval was given. This enabled me to seek 'ideographic knowledge'- highlighting the unique elements of the individual phenomenon (p.273), which is local and case-based (cf. Talbot & Edwards, 1994, p. 47).

It was important to consider the impact on teaching and time given to the relevant participants (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p. 231), to avoid any unnecessary effect on normal curriculum progression. After official CUREC and school permission was granted, a collaborative planning discussion took place at departmental level, in which I put forward my rationale for the project and the steps needed to achieve the expected outcome in terms of a viable data set. This broad planning discussion allowed for voicing of concerns and questions from colleagues, and we considered the exact challenges of timings of the intervention and how the data should be

recorded via the 'Entry' and 'Exit' surveys. We collectively considered the potential value of the project for departmental development. Full use was made of the existing departmental IT infrastructure which occurs via *Firefly* software, so that the planned lessons resources could be easily accessed by colleagues with additional extension resources provided, such as further information provided by the *Jubilee Centre* (cf. Jubilee Centre, 2015). My online forum left open room for collaborative dialogue between colleagues, though what actually occurred was brief clarification in person during the intervention project. On a weekly basis, I provided an e-mail reminder as to the stage of intervention we had reached and a reminder of the next resources to be used.

In collaboration with the Head of Professional Development, observations of two colleagues delivering the material within the intervention lessons occurred. Her interest on the topic enabled her to challenge her Economics A-level students on the educational themes of the project. My observation of these additional lessons on liberal and character themes, helped me to refine my analytic method, as I compared the responses by induction learners and those in the Upper School.

When I came to the data-analysis portion of my work, I planned collaboration with Chemistry and Maths colleagues, who helped me advance data representation and statistical analysis. The final layer of collaboration (although these discussions occurred earlier chronologically), were those held with the Headmaster as I planned this project and sought verbal guidance. The Headmaster directed me to publications on the liberal themes, and whilst these reflections mirrored his verbal espousal on the theme in school contexts, they provided excellent primary sources

for the student led inquiry into the liberal educational themes. In order to protect the anonymity of the school as an important principle of this research method, I have decided to exclude reference to the materials written by the Headmaster. Ideally, these would function as evidence of the school policies on the matter as they are sources of the leadership vision of ethos. This is an omission in terms of disclosure of specific liberal emphasis given by the Head to the internal school forum, but anonymity must be protected as a research principle (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p.51).

The Research Tools

The specific questions on my research instruments are as follows:

Figure 1: 'ENTRY' Survey Questions (see Appendix A for full model of instrument used with students)

1. It is important to be taught about values as part of your education
2. It is important to question values
3. Your character is formed by your education
4. Your character should be formed by your education
5. Character formation can take place in an explicit classroom based way
6. Resilience is a character trait that can be taught in school
7. It is important that your teachers offer a good example of character
8. Do you think that you can both think freely and be part of an education that tries to form your character?

   Yes *No*
9. Why do you hold the opinion you have expressed in response to Question 8?

For the 'Entry' Questionnaire, Questions 1-7 were responded to via a five point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree, with Q.8 allowing for a summary attitudinal perspective and Q.9 allowing room for qualitative justification of the view expressed under Q.8.

The 'Exit' Questionnaire, mirrored the same model as in Figure 1, with the additional component of Q.10;

Figure 2: 'Exit' Survey Questions (see Appendix B for full model of instrument used with students)

1. It is important to be taught about values as part of your education
2. It is important to question values
3. Your character is formed by your education
4. Your character should be formed by your education
5. Character formation can take place in an explicit classroom based way
6. Resilience is a character trait that can be taught in school
7. It is important that your teachers offer a good example of character
8. Do you think that you can both think freely and be part of an education that tries to form your character?

   Yes *No*
9. Why do you hold the opinion you have expressed in response to Question 8?
10. If you have changed your opinions during the study of the Liberal Tradition and Character Education, please state a reason that has led to this change:

The phrasing of Q.1-7 were statements of value judgement on a number of the most important themes arising from the literature review, and particularly those themes that arose under §2 & 3 (cf. P.8) which evidenced the most critical themes relating to the character discourse. Q.1 correlated with the underlying

presumptions that exist in the moral and philosophical foundations of education (cf. Lickona, 1996), within which the discussion of 'values education' frames the character and liberal discussion. Q.2 identifies a particularly emphatic characteristic of the liberal tradition in terms of intellectual inquiry (cf. Whewell, 1845), with Q.3 getting closer to the student's personal reflection on the relationship of education to character. Q.4 pays explicit attention to a foundational assumption of the character educationalists (cf. §.2 of Character Education literature review, p.19, and in particular Kristjánsson, 2013), with Q.5 touching upon the debate around whether such formation should be an implicit or explicit process (cf. §.2 and 7 of Character Education literature review, p.27, and in particular Wright, 2015). Q.6 alludes to the contemporary framing of 'resilience' as a modern-virtue as espoused by the Jubilee Centre and the Department of Education (cf. §.5 of Character Education literature review, p.25, and in particular Ferkany-Creed, 2015). Q.7 relates this to the particular question of exemplification and emulation in the guise of the classroom teacher (Carr & Landon, 1998; Carr & Landon, 1999; Carr, 2005; Cooke & Carr, 2014; Ferkany & Creed, 2014; Kristjánsson, 2007, 2013 & 2014; Lickona, 1996 &1999; Wright, 2015), which is one of the earliest points of contention in the literature. Q.8 is at the heart of testing the *compatibility thesis.* Q.9 in both questionnaires allowed room for qualitative attitudinal reflection with Q.10 offering space in the Exit questionnaire for those who had experienced particular attitudinal change. The questionnaire emerged from a systematic foundation in the literature.

A crucial decision in the planning of my questionnaire was whether to use a quantitative or qualitative approach to my inquiry. My natural tendency as a scholar

trained in legal and theological methods would be inclination towards a qualitative method. Yet I was very keen to approach the inquiry in a way that might allow me to make a firmer empirical observation of student perspectives, and to consider whether such a finding was statistically significant. In deciding to use a quantitative method, I was seeking to explain 'phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics)' (Aliaga & Gunderson, 2002). The phenomena in question for me was the *compatibility thesis*, as I have nominated it from the outset of the inquiry. I was firmly aware of the particular characteristics of my research cohort *and* the tool I was developing, and I did not presume that I would be about to make immediate generalizations about broader school cohorts from my research. Nevertheless, I believed that a number of advantages to this method such as the precision of quantitative research and the ability to study a broad phenomena, would allow me to make some interesting observations about the induction experience of our learners. A crucial challenge when dealing with attitudinal responses is how to represent these values numerically. I overcame this by designing my research instrument, which would allow for attitudes to be converted into quantitative data. I adopted an ordinal measurement scale, which would allow for easy translation into a numerical value. Whilst structuring the substantive core of my inquiry around the quantitative method, I sought to leave room open for deeper attitudinal justification in both my Entry and Exit questionnaire, with the aim of triangulating my numerical data with coded answers. Thus, a mixed methods approach emerged.

Theory of Methods

Whilst having decided to adopt a mixed methods approach, one must concede that quantitative and qualitative research is often seen as a "paradigm war" (Kuhn, 2012), which takes a particular form in educational research and has generated immense literature and debate (e.g. Oancea, 2005, p.174; McNamara, 1979; Thomas, 1998; Hitchcock Hughes, 1995, p.106; Schostak, 2002, p.119). Such a battleground is linked to underlying worldviews (ontologies) and philosophies (epistemologies). Whilst the epistemological debate at the root of character and liberal education is significant enough in its own right, I acknowledge the challenges of my theoretical epistemology. For Godfrey, 'special problems with researching character development arise from the complexities of this much contested field' (Godfrey, 2010, p. 194) and he does not accept that Kuhn's notion of 'normal science' applies in the field of character development. Godfrey believes 'much nonsense is spoken and written about a distinction between quantitative and qualitative research paradigms' (p.196), although ultimately concedes that though imperfect, a robust mixed methods approach is needed. Rather than identify as a strict realist or constructivist, I sought to adopt a pragmatist approach, by using different research methods best suited to answer particular research questions. My intention was that the mixed methods could allow me to survey the meaning and magnitude of the phenomenon, with initial breadth and later depth – both through the same research instrument of the questionnaire.

Whilst character education has its foundations in moral philosophy, it has arguably been re-shaped through psychologists of education (such as Kristjánsson, 2007). There is an important ideal in Aristotle's vision, as virtue is the means of ordering

commitment to the *polis* and the acquisition of full human flourishing. Aristotle's vision of education of the appetites and emotions 'is to produce citizens with the virtues and conception of happiness suited to their constitution' (Rorty Oksenborg, 1998, p. 57). Later sociological and legal inquiry advances analysis (for example, through Durkheim and REDCO (Gearon, 2013, p.132)), and Aristotle provides a philosophical justification for communitarian flourishing and the honing of excellence in habit and character disposition. Some of the contemporary depictions of character education question this Aristotelian foundation.

I suggest a correct re-formulation of character-based models can offer a positive balancing to the 'manipulation of historical analysis for narrowly conceived political aims through education' (Gearon, 2013, p. 134). Attempting to set the correct tone for the research intervention was crucial to enable this *compatibility thesis* to be tested. Aristotle's project was inherently political but he conceived of the political as an extension and summation of human virtue, rather than the superimposition of political ideals on educated individuals. Compatibility implies a synthetic position. Finding a way of presenting the two themes, with intellectual space for critical reflection by the students, whilst leaving open room for genuine student perspectives was a real methodological challenge.

A separate theoretical justification for the inquiry and one that encourages action research, is thinking of the school as a community of research. Black et al. (2006) consider that learning *how* to learn can subsist within a framework of wisdom. They recognise that social and collaborative dimensions to learning (p.125) lead to an internalizing of self-regulatory capacities, including becoming '"meta-

cognitively wise" about group working' (p.125; cf. Schraw, Crippen & Hartley, 2006, p.116). Crucially, 'pupils' learning is more productive if it is reflective, intentional, and collaborative' (Black et al., 2006, p.126). With these principles considered, I decided that a spacing of the five lesson sequence across five weeks (rather than a sequence of five successive lessons), allowed learners time to be reflective about the process and seek points of reflection on their weekly school experience.

I contend it is important to inform the students of the nature of action research project that is occurring, because as a practitioner the author is involved in process of 'lifelong educational investment' of which they are part of the 'systematic practitioner enquiry' (O'Hanlon, 2003, p. 26). This is particularly important in consideration of action research as 'the most neglected mode of reflection in schools' (Elliott, 1978, p. 355). I sought to adhere to an apporach that my judgement would be 'diagnostic rather than prespcriptive for action' (p.355) and would help me adopt 'an exploratory stance towards any initial definitions' (p.356). Action-research tells a story about the particular case in point and is 'a naturalistic theory embodied in a narrative form' (p.356), in which maintaining trust and mutually agreed ethical standards are fundamental. However, I also concede that whilst a full action research method involves multiple cycles of intervention and an upward trajectory of planning, action, observation and reflection (cf. Zuber-Skerrit, 1996; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p.29), my investigation relied upon a single, signficiant intervention. Strictly speaking, I can more accurately describe my small-scale inquiry as 'practitioner research' in my specific context, seeking to inquire into an improvement in my teaching practice

(cf. Fancourt, 2013, p. 83). However, the outcomes of my intervention enable me to move back from the reflective domain into the practical domain of my practice and I am motivated by a search for a 'better understanding of (my) practice situation' via a systematic, critical and public inquiry (Feldman, 2002, p. 242) . I accepted that some of the cohort may themselves be researchers one day, and embedded the principle that 'teachers learn about their teaching through an active process in which they construct knowledge' (O'Hanlon, 2003, p. 34).

Methodology for Data Analysis

In presenting and analysing my data, I was seeking to employ both a descriptive method to look at my sample group and its characteristics, as well as conduct some hypothesis testing, in considering the *compatibility thesis.* I had not planned to generalise to the larger populous, as my analysis is within the specific context of the school cohort I was working with. I did however seek to leave open possible room for further collaboration and inquiry in other independent school environments, aware that 'the skills and aptitudes of the teacher researcher are well suited' to advanced professionalism (Hopkins, 2002, p. 188). I plan to present at a 'cluster group' meeting of Heads of Department in other Theology and Philosophy Departments.

When it came to the analysis of my qualitative response, I created my data set via direct 'keying' of data into analysis software (Robson, 2011, p. 415) which I deemed as appropriate for this small scale research with a data set of

approximately 100. The same framework was used as for the quantitative inquiry. During the planning I kept an appropriate coding in mind, allowing me to categorise and group the responses as required. This was an example of single-transfer coding. There is no really satisfactory way of dealing with missing data, but it is unlikely that the reason I had missing data is due to deliberate withdrawal. This right of exemption was offered to students in the preparatory stage of the inquiry and no students opted for it. This reassured me that as far as I could tell my cohort were actively invested in the process as I tried to come close to a process of Lewinian 'participatory democratic research' (Adelman, 1993, p. 15). Instead, some of the cohort were missing due to customary illness and a sequence of school trips that take place for this year group. In hindsight, knowledge of sequential absence of students due to a rolling school trip would have necessitated an adaption in method, but in reality the timings of the intervention were fixed by the timings of the research process. Such absences are a certain inevitability in the active school environment, but in a small-scale inquiry they can have a considerable impact.

I sought to break my data analysis into exploratory and confirmatory approaches as I was seeking 'to establish whether [my] predictions or hypotheses have been confirmed by the data' (Robson, 2011, p. 419). This *confirmatory data analysis (CDA),* is conventional in mainstream statistical analysis but is reliant on my having given a strong pre-specification focus to my research design. Secondarily, *exploratory data analysis (EDA)* allows for an informal, pictorial approach to data

and seeks to avoid 'the ecological fallacy of making inferences about individuals from the group data provided from summary statistics' (Robson, 2011, p. 420).

In exploring my data set, I was aware of the tension between decreasing the complexity of data display and losing information because of this approach. Thus, my analysis works at a broad level and can be focused on a more specific class-by-class analysis. My prime safeguard against data manipulation is my own researcher honesty and integrity, with a consistent approach to reporting of my methods adopted. I anticipated a number of important variables in my methodological planning. The teaching intervention was my control factor, within which there are many additional sub-variables. For example, why do teachers adopt different pedagogical approaches to the same overarching schema? The answers maybe myriad. I sought to ask if, when a deeper level of information is provided to students by teaching on character and liberal education, there is a change in perspectives by these students. My mechanism for determining this outcome is via 'attitude' at *pre* and *post* intervention.

In my analysis of the questionnaires, I produced two dimensional rows and columns matrix with coding data, related to attitudinal perspectives as recorded on the questionnaires. I needed to scrutinise the nature of the causal relationship of my intervention to determine the validity of the research findings as 'the process of drawing causal inferences from surveys [of which my questionnaire is as an example of a sub-category] is problematic and indirect' (Marsh, 1982, p. 69).

There exists a difficulty from a realist perspective, as the traditional positivist view of causation refers to a constant conjunction of relationship but crucially, correlation does not imply causation. I considered that an element of *Elaboration Strategy* (Robson, 2011, p. 439) would allow me gradually elaborate the model to build a feasible and more complex model, but I did not consider it feasible for the current research purposes, to seek to analyse other relationships quantitatively, other than the underlying *compatibility thesis.* This was certainly not a 'pure' process but I suggest within this practitioner led action-research, 'further development of the model [the *compatibility thesis*] based in part on hunches and insights that occur during analysis is well within the spirit of exploratory data analysis' (Robson, 2011, p. 463). In terms of testing the significance of relationships in my analysis, I aligned with Marsh & Elliott (2008, p.252) in that:

> a statistical effect of one variable on another cannot just be accepted as causal at face value. If we want to show that it is not *spurious*, we have to demonstrate that there are no plausible *prior variables* affecting the variables of interest.

A particular prior variable over which I had no control over, was the amount of exposure that students had previously to the character and liberal themes. This could impact on 'entry' perspectives, engagement with the teaching material and 'exit' responses. I have readily acknowledged that my findings cannot be overly-generalized or translated into a universal law, as one would seek to in a positivist framework. This observation is consistent with real-world educational research when considering the active role of the experimenter in setting up the situation to enable the intervention to be given a chance to work. I consider this approach justifiable due to the 'considerable degree of prior knowledge and experience of

the phenomenon…studied' enabling a conceptual model to be confidently developed (Robson, 2011, p. 464). In addition, the conceptual foundational nature of the phenomenon (character and liberal traditions) necessitates a conceptual marrying of ideas, which, as explored in the literature review, is not a simple task. I acknowledge that even when it comes to my generation of statistical values, they need to be taken with a considerable 'pinch of salt' (Robson, 2011, p. 446), because 'their derivation has been within the positivistic conceptualization of experimental design' (p. 446), and I am ultimately adopting a pragmatic approach with an elaborative strategy. I am influenced by Lewin's 'dialectal process seeking best fit or concordance and an interpretative epistemology' (Adelman, 1993, p.12), in which my formulated hypothesis of the *compatibility thesis* is being tested. In seeking to make judgements on the quality of the evidence, I thought carefully about the relationships that I sought to establish. First at the level of the whole cohort and then, at the level of the questions 1-8, to observe if trends had occurred in movement between agree, neutral and disagree as attitudinal responses. Simple pictorial depiction will be sufficient for the first level of analysis before moving into the categories of questions 1-8. Question 8 is the most significant for considering the overall changes in the *compatibility thesis.*

Statistical Analysis

In order to fit within my practitioner research method, I initially considered a Chi-squared Test, allowing me to test the variables of whether being taught explicitly about character and the liberal tradition leads to more positive 'compatibility' in the cohort, and whether this is statistically significant. I wished to consider if

greater teaching intervention (Variable 1), led to compatibility changes (Variable 2). I placed my data in cross tabulation in a contingency table. However, after a more detailed collaborative discussion with a Mathematics teaching colleague, we reviewed whether Chi-squared was indeed the best method. We instead proposed that within my purposive sample method, whilst being able to consider the broad overarching trends was possible through pictorial depiction, Q.8 should be treated as separate in nature. Due to a single numerical value being distributed it can more safely be assessed from a qualitative perspective. As mentioned earlier, looking at the overall distribution per cohort at entry was the first layer of analysis, followed by considering the other 7 questions as sub standards within the overarching analysis. My null value is the assumption that nothing will change without teacher intervention and this is an underlying hypothetical assumption. With my colleague, we considered how Chi-squared offers a scaled percentage change, but the underlying challenge of low numerical values and a small data set (116 students in the entire year group) indicated that this was not necessarily the best test to apply. The places in the data where there are not necessarily large degrees of variation will give a very high Chi-squared value, which is a skewed valued and therefore not necessarily very useful. A common rule for Chi-squared application is that five or more values are needed and no zero cells should occur – both elements were prohibitive factors in my data. The values provided for by my analysis are larger than those usually expected for Chi-squared. Yet the Q.5 analysis as considered via this test does yield something significant as described in my data analysis discussion. Overall, the numbers involved were still quite low to do much analysis via Chi-squared.

We instead proposed that I use an attitude co-efficient, which offers a score for each individual and his or her category response, providing a means of considering the overall trend distribution. A further discussion with the Head of the Mathematics Department stated that is was necessary to acknowledge that normative and judgemental questions were both included in my questionnaire and it could be useful to group these together. I also became aware of the fact that I had not paired the data from 'Entry' to 'Exit', which I could have done via a coding system on my questionnaires. This would have allowed me to perform a deeper level of analysis from the individual student upwards, yet as it stands the lowest level of abstraction I could make was as a class cohort. This methodological flaw is a considerable omission, but in my planning I considered the evaluation of a whole year cohort and sub-groups within that as individual classes. Certainly, paired data would have allowed for a further level of subtlety to take place in my analysis. It could also have formed another cycle of the research intervention, where specific students were highlighted for interview in light of their particular profiles. Time was not available in this project for such an additional research phase.

As discussion with my colleague resumed we considered whether grouping of the data into agree/ neutral/ disagree categories was going to help assess the attitudinal responses. We instead decided that a better approach is through a meta-analysis of the attitude score and the way of doing this was by providing a score for each candidate on their distribution table to see if there is a frequency shift under each question. This is a stronger form of analysis whilst acknowledging that there are

still limits to the data. In our spreadsheet analysis we provided weighted scores across all the data for Q.1-7 from Entry and Exit. Thus total scores for 7 questions, with 5 categories (strongly agree/ agree/ neutral/ disagree/ strongly disagree) were used to give a satisfaction score. I could then compare Entry and Exit data for Total frequency, with 100 students at Entry and 101 at Exit, part of the cohort size of 116 if all were present. In this analytic method, a large change in attitude corresponds with a large change in score, represented at the level of the individual questions. The results of this process are displayed in the Data Analysis discussion.

Qualitative Method approach for Question 8

I used qualitative analysis for Q.8 so that I could focus on the subjective expression of the individual participants. In particular, I used a discourse analysis approach, in which I sought to code and categorise according to what has arisen from the questions asked. There is 'no clear and universally accepted set of conventions for analysis corresponding to those observed within quantitative data' (Robson, 2011, p. 466) and data is often useful in supplementing the quantitative data. I used a *Thematic Coding Approach (*TCA*),* where all parts of the data were coded (i.e. identified as representing something of potential interest) and labelled. I could then link codes together as a theme. Codes can be determined inductively from reviewing the data**,** particularly as I was the project designer. I utilised the expertise acquired in the literature review stage.

Yet my role as an analyst means there are methodological deficiencies. In particular, a potential tendency to ignore information conflicting with the hypotheses already held can occur. Additionally, co-occurrence, may lead to false assumptions of a strong evidential basis for correlation (Sadler, 1981, pp. 27-30). My decision to limit the qualitative response to a single question in order to keep the content manageable is an analytic choice, forming part of the analytic process. The TCA can be used as a realist method (reporting experiences, meanings and the reality of the participants) or a constructionist method (examining the ways in which events, realities, meanings and experiences are the effect of a range of discourses operating within society). My approach was somewhere in between within my defence of a pragmatist foundation and elaborative strategy**,** although the coding approach is not wedded to any theoretical framework. The stages of the analysis were i. Familiarisation with the data, ii. Generating codes, iii. Identifying themes, iv. Constructing thematic frameworks and v. Integration and Interpretation.

The advantages of TCA are flexibility, easy communication of findings to other practitioners - useful within a participatory research paradigm. The disadvantages of TCA are that a broad range of things can be said about the data, influencing which data to focus on and limiting the process to description rather than interpretation. At the level of identification of themes, I decided to use matrices and networks. The techniques for identifying themes were repetitions, metaphors and analogies, and linguistic connectors. Repetitions suggest that ‘the more the same concept occurs in a text, the more likely it is a theme’ although I needed to

consider how many repetitions were needed to constitute a significant theme (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 87). As always, missing data is significant and if a student has failed to take the opportunity to express himself, this may also be telling.

Once I decided on my themes, I coded data extracts to satisfy that the data reflects the themes. These thematic networks provide a tool in analysis and not the analysis itself. I turned my qualitative data into numbers, providing capacity for some simple numerical analysis. Prior to construction of networks displaying the data in tables with rows and columns was helpful. I remained cognizant of my task to provide 'a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell – within and across themes' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93). I identified particularly vivid extracts, which will capture the essence of the points demonstrated, without unnecessary complexity. The analytic process can then go beyond the descriptive. In considering the role of triangulation I adopted a self-conscious recognition of 'setting out to collect and double-check findings, using multiple sources and modes of evidence [so] the verification process will largely be built into data collection' (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 267). As research designer, I was conscious of integrating qualitative and quantitative data in multi-strategy design as part of my mixed methods approach.

Data Analysis and Critical Evaluation

Overall Cohort Perspectives

The first result to present is the overarching finding of Q.8, upon which the whole *compatibility thesis* rests. Figure 3 depicts how as a cohort, the percentage of students attesting a positive appraisal of compatibility fell by 16%, between pre and post interview testing, with that rise then being attributed to the negative response. In Figure 4, it is evident how the trends in response to Q.7 for the overall cohort remains similar pre and post intervention, with only a slight decline of 4% of those who 'strongly agree' with the importance of teacher character, and a 4% rise in those who 'disagree' with the role modelling factor. From these overarching perspectives therefore, the cohort remain desirous of good examples of character in their teachers, whilst increasing in their scepticism towards the *compatibility thesis* by nearly fifth, after the teaching intervention.

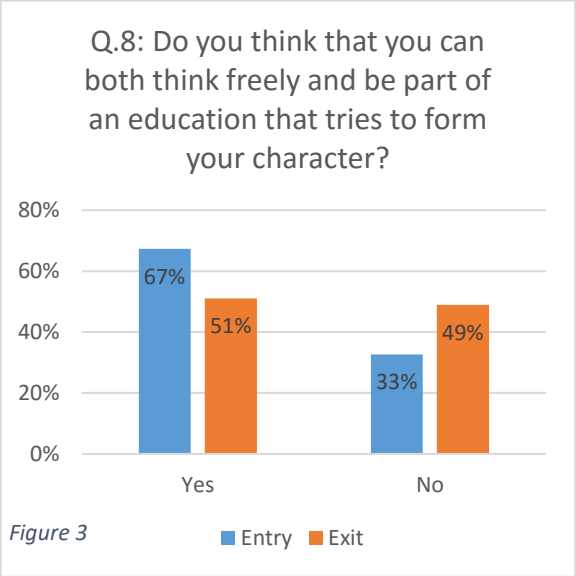


Figure 3

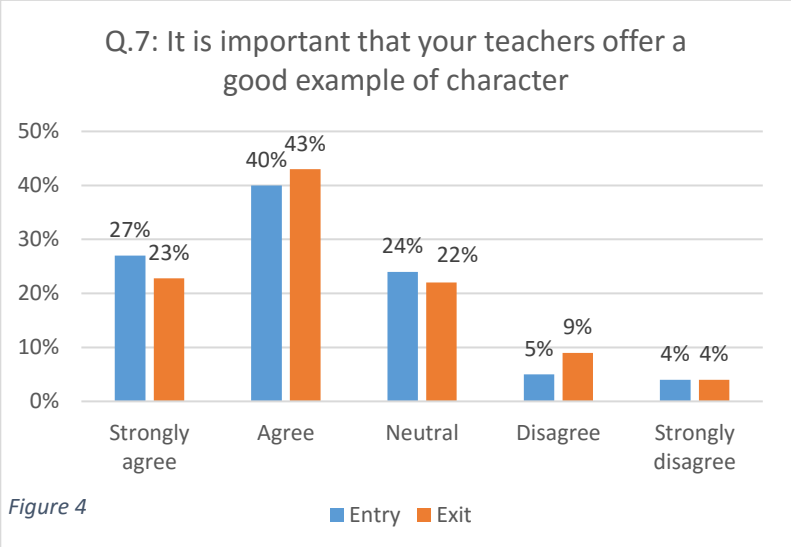


Figure 4

Chi-squared Analysis

To enable the Chi-squared analysis, the spreadsheet data was compiled into a data table according to level of agreement and the question number. Due to the small size of the data set, I also converged the levels of agreement into three strands to help enable a more meaningful statistical analysis. The Chi-squared statistic was then used for the Entry and Exit data.

Entry	**Question Number**						
Level of Agreement	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
Strongly Agree	17	41	7	0	2	13	27
Agree	58	45	29	8	17	43	40
Neutral	12	13	28	35	36	18	24
Disagree	12	0	32	42	31	20	5
Strongly disagree	1	1	4	13	12	4	4
Agree	75	86	36	8	19	56	67
Neutral	12	13	28	35	36	18	24
Disagree	13	1	36	55	43	24	9

Exit	**Question Number**						
Level of Agreement	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
Strongly Agree	18	49	5	2	3	9	23
Agree	50	44	28	10	18	40	43
Neutral	20	5	31	30	23	21	22
Disagree	8	1	30	40	30	23	9
Strongly disagree	5	2	7	13	26	7	4
Agree	68	93	33	12	21	49	66
Neutral	20	5	31	30	23	21	22
Disagree	13	3	37	53	56	30	13

Chi Squared Statistic

$$\chi_c^2 = \sum \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$$

X^2 Contribution

Level of Agreement	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
Strongly Agree	0.058824	1.560976	0.571429	0	0.5	1.230769	0.592593
Agree	1.103448	0.022222	0.034483	0.5	0.058824	0.209302	0.225
Neutral	5.333333	4.923077	0.321429	0.714286	4.694444	0.5	0.166667
Disagree	1.333333	0	0.125	0.095238	0.032258	0.45	3.2
Strongly Disagree	16	1	2.25	0	16.33333	2.25	0
Agree	0.653333	0.569767	0.25	2	0.210526	0.875	0.014925
Neutral	5.333333	4.923077	0.321429	0.714286	4.694444	0.5	0.166667
Disagree	0	4	0.027778	0.072727	3.930233	1.5	1.777778

Those boxes highlighted in yellow show sizable contributions to Chi-squared analysis, with those in green, although giving a high Chi-squared figure, not considered as significant due to their skewed outcome because of such small numerical values. Instead, for Q.5 the higher X^2 suggests a stronger difference between the responses at the different times. Thus, it appears that the shift in opinion for those students supporting explicit classroom based character education is a strong movement towards disagreement. This finding for Q.5 is the most meaningful finding for the Chi-squared analysis, but due to the challenges recognised in the methodological application of this test, much greater emphasis is placed on the following attitudinal survey analysis.

Attitudinal Survey Table

Figure 5 (below) depicts the summary of the Attitudinal Survey analysis, having assigned coded numerical values to the range of responses (from strongly agree to strongly disagree). Each data point represented an individual's total score and their frequency, meaning that a score of 35/35 would represents the highest level of 'disagreeability', and the lowest score of 0/35 would in theory indicate complete 'agreeability' across the range of numerically quantifiable question responses for Q.1-7.

Figure 5: Attitudinal Survey Analysis of overall cohort from Entry to Exit

Entry				Exit			
Total score	**Frequency**		**Total score**	**Frequency**		**Distribution Change**	
14	0		14	2		2	
15	2		15	0		-2	
16	1		16	3		2	
17	2		17	6		4	
18	4		18	4		0	
19	5		19	5		0	
20	9		20	12		3	
21	7		21	11		4	
22	14		22	7		-7	
23	12		23	10		-2	
24	7		24	12		5	
25	12		25	7		-5	
26	8		26	8		0	
27	6		27	4		-2	
28	4		28	3		-1	
29	3		29	1		-2	
30	3		30	3		0	
31	1		31	2		1	
32	0		32	0		0	
33	0		33	0		0	
34	0		34	0		0	
35	0		35	1		1	

Whilst there appears to be relatively marginal distribution changes at the outer ranges of the attitudinal survey, some interesting movement occurs in the mid-ranges. On balance, it appears as though where changes in distribution do occur, they end up being redistributed across a similar range of total scores (between those of 20 and 25). Whilst the number of students with a score of 22 fell by 7, the number with a score of 24 went up by 5. The trend emerging from this form of analysis is that the teaching intervention does not yield significant attitudinal change for those students who already felt strongly in agreement or disagreement with the range of positions asserted in Q.1-7. Whilst there is greater movement in those students who occupied the middle to middle-upper tier of agreeability (20-25), it does not just occur in one direction. This suggests that on balance, those students who approached the themes of character and liberal education with a broadly positive disposition to begin with, continued to re-evaluate their positions and perspectives during the teacher intervention. This finding correlates with my own teacher-researcher experience within the project, where it was apparent that more careful thought and reflection was taking place for those students who were initially open to the themes being explored, but then spent time re-evaluating their epistemological foundations in light of the project. In the tier of students most in agreement with the statements contained in Q.1-7 (Total Scores: 14-17), there was on balance, a shift to an increased distribution. Broadly speaking therefore, the intervention had a marginally positive impact on the *compatibility thesis* for some students, leading a small number to re-evaluate in the positive from entry to exit, when looked at from the perspective of Q.1-7. Yet, this finding must be set alongside the 'Overall Cohort Perspectives' above, where in the summative Q.8 we see an overall decline by approximately a fifth for the *compatibility thesis.*

These forms of analysis suggests that whilst there is movement towards a more supportive disposition for component elements related to the *compatibility thesis* (Q.1-7), the cohort as whole became more entrenched in opposition to the *compatibility thesis* as a result of the intervention.

Qualitative Analysis

Entry Survey

The first reflection to make is on the Q.9 responses at Entry, which allowed students room to express *why* they held their positions in response to Q.8 on the broad *compatibility thesis* point. As discussed in my methodology, I constructed a coding scheme that allowed me to group the themes emerging out of the Q.9 analysis, as part of my exploratory data analysis. These are displayed below in Figure 6, with the colours representing the coding system used in the spreadsheet and the percentage of students corresponding with each categorisation:

Figure 6: Qualitative student response to Q.9 on the Entry Questionnaire

Critical of CE (Character Education)	10%
Cautiously supportive of CE	26%
Very supportive of CE	13%
Interesting consideration of relationship between LE and CE	7%
Highly critical	29%
CE taking place beyond school	2%
Individual resistance to character formation, through individual response	1%
Neutral comment/ or no comment	12%

Next follows a table hierarchy, in line with my methodological justification, offering some of the most interesting student comments according to the thematic

coding. These illustrate how student perceptions are most pertinently revealed by their written reflections.

The spaces outlined on the network (below, Figure 7) are designed to be broadly representative of the balance of comments indicated in the coding process. Within the 'highly critical' bracket there is a particularly worrying comment in support of Hitler's leadership and the student's resistance to the role of education. This comment presented an ethical challenge as researcher, but after a discussion with my Head of Department, it was a comment that ultimately I felt that needed respecting within the parameters of student confidentiality, despite the sentiment conveyed lying firmly outside acceptable perspectives. The 'highly critical' comments convey concerns about 'brainwashing', 'conformist attitude(s)' and 'blanketing of space for free thought', which correlate with those initial oppositional perspectives that I anticipated I would encounter. The positive appraisal is conveyed well by ideas that an underlying educational value might be to 'question everything', with an acknowledgement from one student that an 'explicit' pathway of character formation would not be right for everyone. One student went further to posit that the primary domain of character formation is outside the academic environment through 'parents, friends and political or philosophical figures'.

Figure 7: Table Hierarchy constructed from selected responses to Q.9 on the Entry Questionnaire (page below)

Highly Critical:

'Education does not have that much influence over my thinking - I know that many teachers consider Hitler to be awful and stop right there! But I consider him a great leader, who only succumbed to a fundamental part of human nature - the lust for power - and what is wrong with that?'

'This type of education is the type that would make you be the 'ideal boy' - the 'ideal boy' will certainly not think about things.'

'If somone or something is trying to form your character, the they can often interfere in the way you think and behave, and therefore your thoughts aren't free.'

'No education should take steps to form your character, it should be the child's decision what to be; education simply lays out options for that child. Moreover, a conformist attitude towards education, as far as values are concerened in a place where the state is heavily involved in that education, is effectively brainwashing.'

'If "character" is interpreted as your reflection on social environments, then forming a particular view from a young age through education encourages certain thought trends. These thought trends can create boundaries for free thought as one already has implemented views and prejudices.'

'If an education tries to form who you are, it suffocates the ability to develop yourself as an individual, stopping and blanketing the space for free thought. The only way to be able to think freely is if the ability to form onself and the character, which an education like that cannot allow. '

Cautiously Supportive:

'Your character can be formed at school so that you are more inclined to think freely.'

Very Supportive:

'Schools must try to help better your character by setting good examples.'

'Some of the values one might be taught could be to think freely and to question everything.'

'One of the character traits formed at school could be the understanding of a need for dialogue and debate, which encourages free thinking.'

Critical:

'I think school, education, friends, sport, teamwork etc. shape our character. I also think some character traits can come to the forefront in education such as resilience, learning from mistakes but only for people who experience hardships. Hardships in some way enhance character which is important for life. It is narrow minded to think that character can be taught and that is why it is so special to find someoen of 'good character'. '

Interesting Relationship:

'It (the school) would hopefully not have one explicit way for everyone, allowing you to grow into a man because of your growth also. '

CE taking place beyond school:

'While a school might sway you in a certain direction, there are other factors, such as parents, friends and political or philosophical figures. School should not force a student to think one way or another, and leave a student to think what he likes, and say it.'

Exit Survey

In making a comparison for the same qualitative data responses for Q.9 at Exit, we can begin develop a picture of how and why attitudinal perspectives may have shifted and what the underlying justifications were:

Figure 8: Qualitative student response to Q.9 on the Exit Questionnaire, with comparison to Entry figures

	Entry	*Exit*	*Difference*
Critical of CE (Character Education)	10%	16%	+6%
Interesting and cautiously supportive of CE	26%	16%	-10%
Interesting and very supportive of CE	13%	7%	-6%
Interesting consideration of relationship between LE and CE	7%	13%	+6%
Highly critical	29%	36%	+7%
CE taking place beyond school	2%	2%	-
Individual resistance to character formation, through individual response	1%	2%	+1%
Neutral comment/ or no comment	12%	8%	-4%

It is striking that the most significant variation is the decrease that occurs for those who are 'cautiously supportive' of character education, suggesting a reasonable qualitative shift away from cautious support. At the same time, 7% more of the students became 'highly critical' of character education, and 6% more became 'critical', correlating with the broad movement illustrated above (*cf. Overall Cohort Perspectives,* p.61*)* of the shift away from the *compatibility thesis.* What is encouraging from the possibility of affirming the *compatibility thesis* is the 6% increase in the students offering an interesting comment on the relationship between the liberal and character strands, a point that correlates with the observation of more subtle reflection taking place for those students already

occupying the reasonably supportive/ agreeable position in relation to Q.1-7. An illustrated representation of the Q.9 justification for student responses at the point of Entry (below, Figure 9) is considered next.

Again, this table hierarchy presents some of the most interesting student comments according to the thematic coding. These illustrate how student perceptions are most pertinently revealed by their written reflections. We see the 'highly critical' comments embodied in language such as it being 'wrong to teach character explicitly and deliberately' and an emphatic statement that 'an education that tries to form character is NOT liberal'. The tone of these comments increased in severity from Entry to Exit, as did the 'critical' responses, with reference to 'Soviet Russia' suggesting an authoritarian tone to the character education process, echoing Coe's Liberal Protestant indictment of 'a dangerous method of economic and political totalitarianism' (Setran, 2005, p. 132) in early 20th Century America. These students concerned themselves with 'the crucial question [of] whether authority or habitation are intended to enhance or supress the moral agency of the learner' (Alexander, 2003, p. 383) and the impact of a 'nonexpansive' approach to character education (Alexander, 2003). One student adopted a distinctly Aristotelian tone of emulation in asserting support for 'character development sessions' which could provide 'a good image of an ideal person', a point similarly supported by a student in the cautiously supportive bracket appraising 'character formation relies more on how people around you mould your character'. We can see here the importance of relationality over professionalism, a theme from §6 in the Literature Review (see p.27). For those students most closely advocating a position aligning with the *compatibility thesis*, there was some very interesting

subtlety conveyed as ‘[one] can both form a good character whilst freely thinking', ‘your free thinking builds the structure' after character is put in place, and even though education impacts on character ‘I am also able to think freely and choose my own paths.' The particular tone of these comments suggested a positive and reconciled intellectual position, having participated in the intervention.

Figure 9: Table Hierarchy constructed from selected responses to Q.9 on the Exit Questionnaire (page below)

Highly Critical:

'The freedom to think freely is quashed by attempts to change one's personality and psychology.'

'It is wrong to teach character explicitly and deliberately: a society where everyone is moulded in the same way will not be interesting nor will it prosper. Everyone must have the freedom or personality.'

'They are quite conflicting ideas as the teachers might teach you something you don't believe in.'

'Character is formed by watching the people around us and influence us. An education that tries to form character is NOT liberal, because people must make their own decisions and form their character independently.'

'Your character is formed during a long period and it is hard to accelerate it.'

'Teaching character binds people and forces them to hold set values. However this is not their real character which they must discover themselves and does not let them explore free thinking.'

'You will only have succeeded in thinking freely if your education has not succeded in teaching you how to think.'

'Having completely free thought means that the school only teaches you factual based information.'

Cautiously Supportive:

'I think that character formation relies more on how people around you mould your character.'

'Although it may not work (teaching CE) one can still try; some of these will get through to students.'

Critical:

'One can think freely in Soviet Russia so long as the education is not accepted as Gospel.'

'Because if you are being sculpted, that is not an abstract piece.'

'Critical thinking can allow us to analyse the "supposed values" that are trying to be forced on us.'

'Free thinking requires that you question everything, including values.'

'CE is specific to the person. For me, I think that character is built in teams and on the sport's field rather than in the classroom. I don't want character imposed on me.'

Very supportive:

'With the freedom of this school we can choose to think freely while learning character.'

'It is definitely possible because I believe you would still be able to teach important character traits alongside thinking freely. These character development sessions (for example) could be entered towards not enforcing character, but by giving a good image of an ideal person who people could look up to. Also, it could be more discussion based, allowing children to freely think and talk about ideal character traits.'

Interesting Relationship:

'As even though character formation doesn't need to be done in school, if taught correctly you can both form a good character whilst freely thinking.'

'CE forms the base of a good character, but your free thinking builds the structure.'

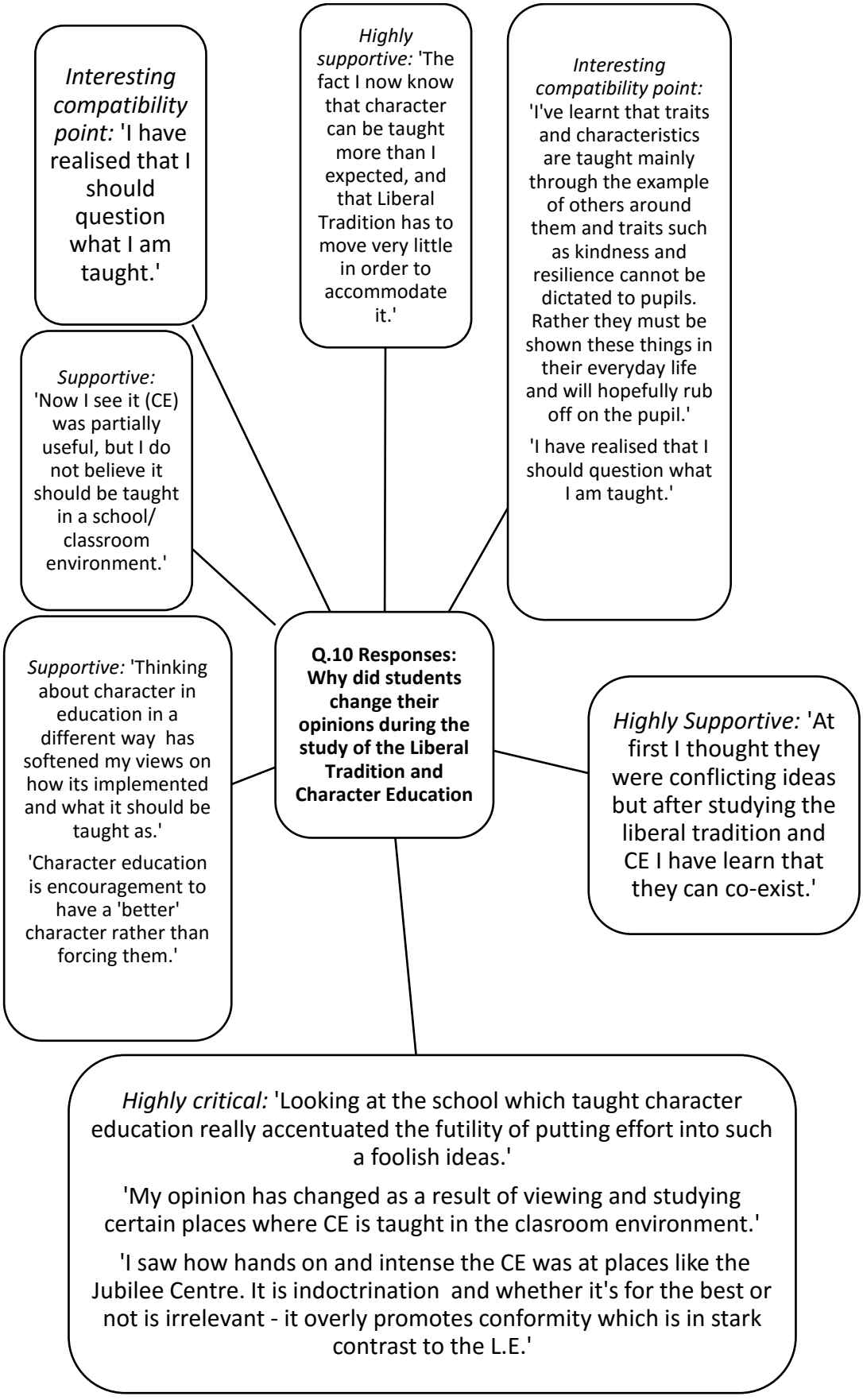
'The education I currently have will obviously have an impact on my personality & character, however I am also able to think freely and choose my own paths so to speak.'

CE taking place beyond school:

'Because it is important that we should form values both inside and outside of school to have different ideas.'

Finally from the data analysis perspective, the Q.10 responses yielded some interesting insight for justifications *why* perspectives changed for some students. Whilst for many students this space was not required, a thematic network for the responses elicited grounds further analysis. We can see from these comments how individual the justification of opinion is for the cohort. The range of reasoning for the changes in perspectives, illustrates the distinctly individual nature of student reflection and the highly capable insights they are expressing as 13 and 14 year old learners.

Figure 10: Thematic network constructed from selected responses to Q.10 on the Exit Questionnaire (page below)


Interesting compatibility point: 'I have realised that I should question what I am taught.'
Highly supportive: 'The fact I now know that character can be taught more than I expected, and that Liberal Tradition has to move very little in order to accommodate it.'
Interesting compatibility point: 'I've learnt that traits and characteristics are taught mainly through the example of others around them and traits such as kindness and resilience cannot be dictated to pupils. Rather they must be shown these things in their everyday life and will hopefully rub off on the pupil.'
'I have realised that I should question what I am taught.'
Supportive: 'Now I see it (CE) was partially useful, but I do not believe it should be taught in a school/ classroom environment.'
Q.10 Responses: Why did students change their opinions during the study of the Liberal Tradition and Character Education
Supportive: 'Thinking about character in education in a different way has softened my views on how its implemented and what it should be taught as.'
'Character education is encouragement to have a 'better' character rather than forcing them.'
Highly Supportive: 'At first I thought they were conflicting ideas but after studying the liberal tradition and CE I have learn that they can co-exist.'
Highly critical: 'Looking at the school which taught character education really accentuated the futility of putting effort into such a foolish ideas.'
'My opinion has changed as a result of viewing and studying certain places where CE is taught in the clasroom environment.'
'I saw how hands on and intense the CE was at places like the Jubilee Centre. It is indoctrination and whether it's for the best or not is irrelevant - it overly promotes conformity which is in stark contrast to the L.E.'

A note on the rigour of the analysis and areas for evaluative improvement

Whilst I sought to be as systematic as possible in adopting a strict methodological foundation, there were certain limits to what I could attain and to my sampling methods. For example, I know that one of the six classes involved in the project only contributed half of their questionnaires at both Entry and Exit. What I am unable to ascertain for sure, is the reason why this occurred, and I received no explanation from my colleague. For the sake of professional trust, I decided to use the data he provided and not challenge him as to why half a cohort's data was missing at each end of the intervention. The project relied on respecting the autonomy of other teacher-practitioners and as a consequence, factors such as this arose. A deeper level of data analysis, of trends at the level of individual class groups would offer an additional layer to the project analysis, and might help to make sense of anomalies such as the missing class data. However, for the sake of a manageable analytic process, I have limited myself to the review conducted above which operates at the level of the Year 9 boys cohort.

Theoretical Analytic Discussion

Gadamer (2013) cautions that 'the end toward which our life as a whole tends and its elaboration in the moral principles of action described in Aristotle's *Ethics* **cannot be the object of a knowledge that can be taught**' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 331; cf. Arney, 2016; Kristjánsson, 2013). For Gadamer ethics cannot be used dogmatically, as Aristotle seeks to describe 'typical forms of the true mean'. For Carr & Kemmis (2009), this is because Aristotle believes that understanding of individual and societal good are given practical expression (cf. Carr, 2009, pp. 76-

77). Moral knowledge needs to be situational and to be able to respond with the demands of the moment rather than through dogmatic presentation. If Gadamer is right and the concerns illustrated in the 'highly critical' student bracket (above) i.e. those who are concerned with authoritarian intervention or 'indoctrination' is real, then the serious challenge remains – can character education can take place at all? (Arney, 2016; Appendix C, Lesson5) The emphasis of Gadamer seems to be much more akin to Aristotelian *phronêsis* (practical wisdom, rather than theoretical), which does not equate with classroom instruction. Rather, the process of 'initiating novice practitioners into a largely unarticulated and usually tacit body of practical knowledge' (Carr, 2009, p. 77) is the task of educational action according to Aristotle. This is a position supported by those student voices who expressed opinions such as 'not believ[ing] it [CE] should be taught in a school/ classroom environment' or that character formation is 'built in teams and on the sport's field rather than in the classroom'. Even those students who evidenced support for the notion of character education, did not see the classroom as a place for *explicit* character formation. Rather, they conceptualised a broader vision of formation that sees character embedded in a range of circumstances. The most critical voices found the explicit virtue based character programmes produced by *The Jubilee Centre* to be highly questionable - at best a suppression of autonomy, at worst an unwieldy form of state intervention. Whilst I did not set out to conduct a process of emancipatory action research, I heard the concern expressed by the student body that character formation contests a 'democratic culture which fosters the process of deliberative reasoning… collectively and self-consciously' (Carr, 2009, p. 78). Whilst Carr and Kemmis are referring to the community of practitioners, I ascertain that the student body were coming close to the deliberation, which

precedes communicative action, proposed by critical theorists such as Habermas (Habermas, 1984 & 2003). Some might consider this an endorsement of their prior liberal training.

Adopting an Illichian critique, the last place for embedding formal curricula of virtue should be the classroom as the liberal education is already unsuccessful in encouraging 'open ended, exploratory use of acquired skills' (Illich, 1970, p. 17). Illich's criticism of modern education includes reference to Chicago professors who are part of the '"Great Books" Club', compared to the strength of Socratic dialogue (p. 20). Illich's (1970, p. 24) concern is that contemporary education:

> could mean that men in the modern city will be increasingly the victims of an effective process of total instruction and manipulation once they are deprived of even the tenuous pretence of critical independence.

When coupled with the role of Government support of specific character education, Illich's concern prevails. In the most critical section of the study body, students conveyed concern about elements of intellectual straight-jacketing. Illich goes further and offers a damning critique of industrial education and advocates the need for the 'deschooling of society' (1970, p.24) because of the divisive social power of schools between those that are pedagogic in their method versus those that are not. The 'progressive underdevelopment of self- and community- reliance' is even greater in the more privileged educational environment than the less so (1970, p.3), but the degree of critical participation by our research cohort might suggest differently. The more explicit exposure to character education pushed a significant part of the student cohort away from associating it successfully within

the liberal tradition. A counter response suggests that an authentic, critical engagement with Aristotelian virtue theory and an authentic 'flourishing paradigm' (Kristjánsson, 2016 & 2016 a) could negate any allegation of manipulation and actually underpin greater academic independence. The extent to which this can take place in most school environments is a moot one and the extent to which character education in its contemporary form is truly Aristotelian is also contested (Curren, 2010).

A further counter response may be offered to those students and staff in a liberal academic environment, who reject character education on the grounds that it inhibits emancipatory, self-discovery through education. This critique posits that the liberal tradition is itself highly constraining. Students are subject to the expectation, internal and external (parental, educational, societal) of the ends to which they should achieve, and the institutions of elite liberal learning (Oxford, Cambridge, American Ivy League colleges) they should aim for. Such a framework creates boundaries in a very particular way. However, within academic formation, perhaps 'outcome' should be separated from method. Just because the fruits of liberal formation condition students in certain directions, does not mean they are intellectually ill equipped to assess these pathways of expectation, and act contrary to such expectation should they wish.

Elsewhere the Illichian critique feels inadequate in these current research circumstances. Whilst Illich expresses concern about the '*teacher-as-moralist* [who] substitutes for parents, God, or the state' (1970, pp.30-31), the research cohort were surprisingly supportive of the role of the teacher as a model of

character. Illich is concerned that the 'distinctions between morality, legality, and personal worth are blurred and eventually eliminated' (p.32). Such a critique raises questions as to whether Government reliance on character education threatens to compromise deeper intellectual formation and flatten moral philosophy into a moderation of personal behaviour – part of the 'hidden curriculum'.

If we return to that most crucial period of discussion on the liberal tradition in the public schools and universities (cf. p. 32), via the cultural treatise of Mathew Arnold, (composed in 1869), we see a central concern expressed for the positive role of the State as a centre of moral authority in relationship to citizenship and civil society. Arnold, in developing his father's work (Thomas Arnold), envisioned an inclusive Church and State, operating as a functioning Athenian *polis* through committed citizenship and the common good. Arnold presents America as a more rampant culture of individualism (Arnold, 2006, p. xiii) and is concerned for social and spiritual anarchy which can occur through inadequate education. Hebraism and Hellenism are paradigmatically proposed, the latter favoured because of an appeal to the clear light of the critical and expansive intellect. Arnold might well propose a positive and self-reflective 'Hellenised' model of character education, one that comes closer to satisfying the *compatibility thesis* and extends 'standard accounts of flourishing' (Kristjansson, 2016, p. 719).

Nevertheless, Arnold's (2006, p.52) vision of the ideal culture is one that ascends to perfection of all in a quasi-transcendent form when:

> we *all* come to a perfect man; it knows that the sweetness and light of the few must be imperfect until the raw and unkindled mass of humanity are touched with sweetness and light.

This vision of human perfection, one that fails to recognise 'that there is no single vision of the 'good society'' (Carr, 2009, p. 77), and one that fails to speak into contemporary societal pluralism, is also a vision distant from the mind of the 13 and 14 year old school boy. Garnett comments that culture for Arnold 'was defined first as an internal condition, but was developed as a principle of action which should inform an enhanced conception of the State' (Arnold, 2006, p. xv). Again, this vision as a foundation of liberal education needs revising in light of the profound social discord about the state of civic society and the *polis*. Whilst Arnold's concern was for 'sensibility for perfection', even those students more disposed to character education, expressed concern about objective standards for cultural perfection. The concern that 'we are in danger of drifting towards anarchy' (p.56) is one that prefigures the rallying cry of Anscombe in the *ressourcement* of virtue theory (Anscombe, 1958, p. 1). This premise is a difficult one to justify for those operating outside the moral objectivity of Anscombe and the virtue theorists. On balance, the student body in question, wanted a positive representation of character in their teacher, but wanted space to engage critically with the idea of character. They were concerned as to the nature of assumed values.

In *Culture and Imperialism* (Said, 1993) we hear of how the West uses oppressive power structures with a political edge. Said observes that what Arnold says in *Culture and Anarchy* is 'set plumb in the middle of the Hyde Park riots of 1867'

and Arnold speaks as a 'deterrent to rampant disorder' (Said, 1993, pp. 157-8; cf. Conway, 2010, p.105) in the colonies, in Ireland and on the domestic front. Said equates Arnold's reflection on the significance of culture as the 'social authority of patriotism' which enables meeting 'the world defiantly and self-confidently' (Said, 1993, p. 388). Said's concern is that this is a 'drastic delimitation' of culture which is bound up with complicity with 'imperial conquest' (p.388) and an emphasis on a narrow tract of Greek and Enlightenment philosophy which is antithetical to the development of multi-cultural disciplines in modern scholarship. This formulation would suggest there is very little room for compatibility between a narrowly formulated Hellenised philosophy, with a liberal modern educational paradigm. Yet, Corey argues that the true end of the liberal education 'transcend[s] our cultural biases; awakening ourselves to different nuances of human character' (Corey, 2013, p. 199), and Conway (2010, p.105) challenges this shared interpretation of Arnold. Either way, the unharnessing of Aristotle from a cultural patrimony will assist the interpretative form that is given to his work. In my current academic environment, I suggest that it is through direct engagement with the *Nichomachean Ethics* (Aristotle, 2009), that real reflection on the nature of character can take place – by going back to one of the principal intellectual foundations for their inquiry. Equally, for a cohort that is trained in Classics until at least the end of their Year 9 curriculum, there is even more leverage for meaningful engagement with source material.

This interpretative work should be collaborative in order to enable effective student engagement and considering the relationship between the Classics Department and

Theological and Philosophy, both for foundational character *and* liberal sources, is an area for future development. For Friere (1996), 'management and manipulation…cannot be the instruments of …rehumanization' (1996, p.50) and the goal of 'co-intentional education' should lead to an unveiling of reality, 'thereby coming to know it critically' (1996, p.51). According to this reading, students need to be invested in the interpretative task. In the non-independent environment, a difficult question then arises for the State; whether Aristotelian virtue theory, rooted in an Aristotelian vision of the human person is accepted uncritically as the model for authentic flourishing human life? The Freirean critique asks us to question the extent to which the Department of Education have embraced Character Education for the purposes of responding the 'social breakdown thesis'. I am left accepting that the *compatibility thesis* is possible in the liberal, independent environment if a principally implicit process is proposed. However, the 'highly critical' concern that emerged in the post intervention phase causes further questions to be asked about the role of state-sponsored character education models in other educational environments.

Conclusion

This inquiry was designed to test the *compatibility thesis* in one academically selective, elite, independent school which prides itself on a being a centre of liberal learning. Engagement with the entire Year 9 cohort in their induction year tested the impact of a specific teaching intervention on the *compatibility thesis.* My research instruments were shaped by my experience as a teacher-practitioner and my method emerged as practitioner-research within the action research umbrella.

My work touched upon a number of dimensions and exposed how the tentacles of character education reach deep – citizenship, democracy, civic virtues, moral formation, and educational psychology. With the explicit endorsement by the previous DfE administration for the work of the Jubilee Centre, it is likely that the impact of character education in the United Kingdom and the state sector will continue to reverberate. The All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility treat the question of character and resilience as part of the most 'seemingly intractable social policy challenges we face' (APPGSOCMOB, 2014, p. 4). However, it seems we are also seeing a policy shift in the state sector as 'we've heard no more of [character education] from Theresa May or Justine Greening' (Trafford, 2017). The landscape is different in the independent sector, but the broader horizon matters and this research intervention is concerned about the place of explicit character education models in this sector. The practioner-research project galvanised my department in a collaborative way and drew in colleagues from a rage of other departments. I will present the results of my findings to the Senior Leadership Team and then in February 2018, to a cluster group meeting of Departmental Heads of other independent schools. Fruitful conversations took place at the Department of Education Poster Conference. I was further challenged by teaching colleagues to consider the 'conservative tendency [of education] to reproduce existing patterns of social life' (Carr, 2009, p. 75), a theme explored through the bifurcated dimension of incompatibility between character and liberal education. An underlying tension in this inquiry is whether continuation of incompatibility serves to inhibit 'forms of consciousness and modes of social relationships necessary to participate in changed, and hopefully better, forms of social life' (Carr, 2009, p. 75). Within the internal school forum, meaningful

discussion about school ethos, purpose and relationship to social consciousness should continue in light of this research. Additionally, clarification at a leadership level as to the specific traits that the institution seeks to affirm in the student body will assist the teacher-practitioner.

In terms of institutional relationship to other bodies in the sector, we can continue to seek a better understanding of our current purpose in educational formation. Further inquiry around the *compatibility thesis* in the independent sector is needed. Whilst The Wellington School, a partnership school of the Jubilee Centre, places 'great emphasis upon the development of those facets of character that are the essential components of one's integrity' (Wellington, 2017), there is no evidence of how things relates to authentic philosophical foundations. If this represents the current 'best practice' then the foundations are inherently weak. Despite the contestable claim that independent schools create students who are 'mentally tougher' (Trafford, 2017), there is an obfuscated landscape when resilience becomes the pre-eminent character trait espoused by central Government. Whilst 'historically, the inculcation of character for a life administering the empire was the prime function of Eton, Harrow and Haileybury' (Hunt, 2015), centres of liberal learning need to meet the current societal challenges. Interestingly, even the institution following the footsteps of Thomas Arnold, we find no *explicit* mention of character in the *The Statement of Principles for Rugby School* (Rugby, Unknown). One senses that this is deliberate, recognising that character permeates more deeply than might be codified in a single policy document. Whilst character education can have a positive impact on academic standards, a reductionist approach to curriculum purposes is a concern and more astute educational

providers are distinctly aware of this (Robinson, 2013, p. 136). Explicit codification runs this risk.

Wherever the shaping of student worldviews takes place there is likely to be controversy at the academic and practical level. In this study, the areas of greatest concern around character education, related to indoctrination, anti-liberal ideas and ethnocentrism. If character education is to be offered within the liberal tradition, a careful articulation of Aristotle is needed. This is not a straightforward task.

At a macro level, we wonder what place is there for virtue in education, public life and policy matters? Perhaps the current Department of Education administration is taking time to clarify this. Whilst the modern discourse begins with Anscombe (1958) and the 'social breakdown thesis', clarity will be needed in formulating the purpose of moral philosophy in the current age. Anscombe reignited this concern in the virtue theory, but with our young people needing to respond to immediate domestic and global societal concerns, perhaps the liberal tradition will leave them more robustly equipped.

Virtue is on the agenda at the international level. Lord Johnathan Sacks was awarded The Templeton Foundation Prize (to the tune of £1.1 million) for his work on morals and character - a project which is really about the role of virtue in public life (Sacks, 2016). Projects such as The Global Citizens' Initiative (TGCI) envisages building a network of people who see themselves as global citizens and want to build a better world, rooted in principles of global civic discourse. Future research should make use of such projects and the scholarly work of The

Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) to enable cross-cultural and international perspectives on this character education inquiry. This approach will take a classroom exercise far beyond a narrow formulation of character, with a single-track emphasis on resilience.

If character education is not grounded in a coherent articulation of moral philosophy, the teacher practitioner is left in a vulnerable position. Yet, this study is honest about the recognition of how to best define life together in a common civil society and to seek 'conscientious education' (Curren, 2010, p.554) as part of this. The liberal tradition precedes critical method, yet both question presumptions and are concerned with the collective good of the community. Whilst the liberal method looks back to the great minds, the critical looks forward to communicative action and further social emancipation. In ascertaining that explicit character formation programmes are problematic in the liberal tradition for Year 9 boys, the door way is left open for a more authentic articulation of 'deliberative democracy' (Habermas, 2003). When 'all relevant information and explanations … [are] brought up and weighed' (Habermas, 2003, pp. 106-107), including the definition of character itself, a truer rational process will have taken place, one that is more in line with the essence of an evolving liberal tradition, and is closer to a liberal communitarianism. The Frankfurt School may have something to offer the liberal tradition, if the latter is serious about helping rational communities 'to reject gradually the hegemonic dominance of others' (Alexander, 2003, p. 372). If this challenge can be embraced, then a reconciliation between liberal and character education can occur and in so doing the 'prophetic duty to challenge the deafness of the status quo' can be a real fruit of a synthetic liberal tradition.

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Appendices

Appendix A: 'Entry' Survey

An inquiry into the compatibility of character education and liberal education for Year 9 boys

Before you complete this questionnaire you should have read the Participant Information Sheet which your teacher will have given to you. This explains the purposes behind the project. The process of the project will take place in your normal Religion and Philosophy lesson time. You will be asked to complete an 'Entry' survey before a block of lessons on a specific subject area takes place. You will receive a series of five lessons, over a five-week period, i.e. one of your usual lessons will be given to this purpose and at the end of the block of lessons you will be asked to complete an 'Exit' survey. You should carry on with your usual learning and reflection in your lessons. The lessons have been spread out to give you time to think about the subject material as you carry on with your normal school routine. The questionnaires are designed to see whether there are any shifts in perspective by you, as an individual learner during the intervention of the lesson teaching.

'ENTRY' Survey

The following are a set of statements about your opinion on matters related to your education. For each statement please say whether you agree strongly, agree, are neutral, disagree or disagree strongly with it. Tick the appropriate box.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. It is important to be taught about values as part of your education					
2. It is important to question values					
3. Your character *is* formed by your education					
4. Your character *should* be formed by your education					
5. Character formation can take place in an explicit classroom based way					
6. Resilience is a character trait that can be taught in school					

7. It is important that your teachers offer a good example of character					

8. Do you think that you can both think freely and be part of an education that tries to form your character?

Yes		No	

9. Why do you hold the opinion you have expressed in response to Question ?

Thank you for your initial participation in this research project.

Appendix B: 'Exit' Survey

An inquiry into the compatibility of character education and liberal education for Year 9 boys

Having now spent five lessons thinking about, reflecting upon and studying the topics of Liberal Education and Character Education, the time has come to state some concluding opinions. The questionnaire is designed to see whether there are any shifts in perspective as a consequence of studying and discussing these areas. You should answer honestly.

'EXIT' Survey

The following are a set of statements about your opinion on matters related to your education. For each statement please say whether you agree strongly, agree, are neutral, disagree or disagree strongly with it. Tick the appropriate box.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. It is important to be taught about values as part of your education					
2. It is important to question values					
3. Your character *is* formed by your education					
4. Your character *should* be formed by your education					
5. Character formation can take place in an explicit classroom based way					
6. Resilience is a character trait that can be taught in school					
7. It is important that your teachers offer a good example of character					

8. Do you think that you can both think freely and be part of an education that tries to form your character?

Yes		No	

9. Why do you hold the opinion you have expressed in response to Question 8?

10. If you have changed your opinions during the study of the Liberal Tradition and Character Education, please state **a** reason that has led to this change:

Thank you again for your participation in this research project.

Appendix C: Sample of Intervention Lessons (Lessons 3-5 of 5 lesson sequence)

Please note: Lessons 1 & 2 are not included as they include sources particular to the research environment and could compromise anonymity.

Character Education and the Liberal Tradition	***Lesson 3: A historical reflection on character education***
Objectives: *You should be able to:* • Describe some of the historical work that influences contemporary ideas of character education • Identify key scholarship, particularly the work of Aristotle that is an inspirational source for character education • Continue reflecting upon the place of liberal and character education in your own experience	

Starter task: Read the following quotes which should remind you of something of the liberal tradition that you have been exploring.[1] After reading and reflection, write your interpretation of what the quote means in the space below:

1. 'The liberal tradition is one which values openness to a plurality of viewpoints and is committed to the use of reasoned enquiry and dialogue in the context of disagreement.'

2. 'Knowledge of how to live with uncertainty is one of the best lessons that liberal education affords.'

[1]Quotes taken from: Derham P. & Taylor J. (Eds.) (2013) *Cultural Olympians: Rugby School's Intellectual and Spiritual Leaders.* Buckingham: University of Buckingham Press, pp. i-ii.

3. 'Liberal education is a response to a fact about the human condition: the fact that when we engage in the project of reflection on life itself, we find the questions mount up more quickly than answers.'

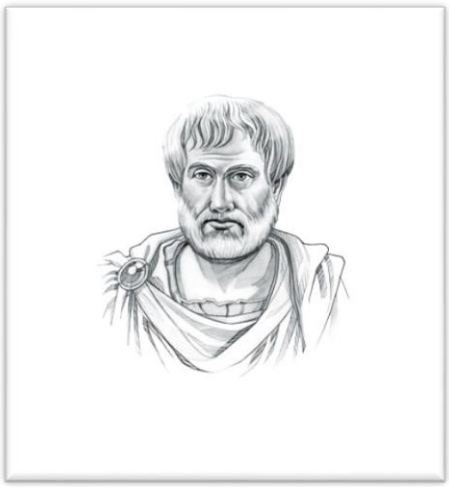
- Choose one of the quotes for discussion and comparison of ideas with your neighbour.

Class Reading: As directed by your class teacher, read this extract together to help you begin some critical reflection on character education.

Source 1: Character Education[2]

This extract is designed to give you an overview of some of the key ideas which currently exist in relationship to Character Education. The extract refers to Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics *which is an important source in this area:*

'It is important to note that two key terms are at use in this inquiry and these are 'character' and 'virtue'. To give Aristotle some educational grounding, Boyd & King (1972) encapsulate his original programme as 'training of the body, of the character, and of the intellect' for one's happiness 'depends on the activity of his soul in accordance with the form of virtue or excellence proper to it' (Boyd W. & King E., 1972, p. 40). Aristotle emphasises the role of the social relations which sets man apart from the animal kingdom, as well as equipping the individual for the life of citizenship (p.40).



The retrieval of Aristotelean virtue theory begins with the seminal article of Anscombe (1958) with the powerful critique that 'it is not profitable for us at present to do moral philosophy' (Anscombe, 1958, p. 1) and her assessment that Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics is set in radical contrast to the

[2] This is an extract from a literature review, which accompanies the Master's work of your teacher. It was produced after reading and surveying the available literature in this field.

predominant forms of contemporary moral reasoning. The movement towards reclaiming the language of virtue in morality begins with Anscombe, and the paradigm of basing educational theory in the language of virtue and character is necessitated by the sparking of this philosophical discourse. Yet, Sanderse (2015) proposes that the development of virtue has not received much attention in education. Sanderse couples Anscombe's philosophic essay with the empirical psychological work of Kohlberg in moral education, claiming that these domains only converged 'in the early 1990s, when the first virtue ethical approaches to moral development and education saw the light' (Sanderse, 2015, p. 383). He attributes the re-emergence in 'character education' to the writings of scholars such as Lickona, philosophers of education such as Carr and Curren and other philosophers with an Aristotelian thinking on educational issues such as MacIntyre (Sanderse, 2015, p. 383).'

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Class Discussion:

What do you think 'character' and 'virtue' mean?

Why are/might these ideas important in education?

Final task: Watch the 'Question of Character' promotional video to see whether you agree with the idea that a 'Broken Britain' might need fixing through character education.[3] The promo is accompanied by the quote below:

"Societies around the globe are rediscovering ancient wisdom: Character matters. In the century ahead, there is no more important human quest than the one the Jubilee Center is undertaking—to generate useful knowledge about how to foster good character in every area of our personal and public lives."

Tom Lickona, Director, Center for the 4th and 5th Rs (Respect and Responsibility), State University of New York at Cortland

[3] Promo available at: http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/355/about

Character Education and the Liberal Tradition	***Lesson 4: An Introduction to contemporary Character Education***
Objectives: *You should be able to:* • Describe your understanding of character education • Explain the ways in which it is significant as a contemporary educational trend • Think critically about the place of character education in your own educational experience	

Starter task: Consider the question, 'can you teach character?' as you watch the opening clip from the Jubilee Centre.[4]

The University of Birmingham School is featured in the clip, where the curriculum and school life is centrally focused around character.



Individual reading:

The following extracts are taken from a document called *Character Education in Schools*, which was commissioned by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtue, University of Birmingham. You will recall the clip that you watched in the last lesson.

THE JUBILEE CENTRE FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

WHAT CHARACTER EDUCATION IS

"Character is a set of personal traits or dispositions that produce specific moral emotions, inform motivation and guide conduct. Character education is an umbrella term for all explicit and implicit educational activities that help young people develop positive personal strengths called virtues. Character education is more than just a subject. It has a place in the culture and functions of families, classrooms, schools and other institutions. Character education is about helping students grasp what is ethically important in situations and to act for the right reasons, such that they become more autonomous and reflective. Students need to decide wisely the kind of

[4] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r9QkaOaUST8

person they wish to become and to learn to choose between already existing alternatives or to find new ones. In this process, the ultimate aim of character education is the development of good sense or practical wisdom: the capacity to choose intelligently between alternatives. This capacity involves knowing how to choose the right course of action in difficult situations and it arises gradually out of the experience of making choices and the growth of ethical insight.

WHAT CHARACTER EDUCATION IS NOT

Character education is not about indoctrination and mindless conditioning. The ultimate goal of all proper character education is to equip students with the intellectual tools to make wise choices of their own within the framework of a democratic society. Critical thinking is thus a vital facet of a well-rounded character. Character and virtue are not exclusively religious notions although they do clearly have a place in religious systems. Almost all current theories of virtue and character education happen to be formulated in a post religious language. Character and virtue are not paternalistic notions. If being 'paternalistic' means that character education goes against the wishes of students and their parents, empirical research shows the opposite. More generally speaking, the character of children cannot simply be put on hold at school until they reach the age where they have become wise enough to decide for themselves. Some form of character education will always be taking place in school. The sensible question that can be asked about a school's character education strategy is not, therefore, whether such education does occur, but whether it is intentional, planned, organised and reflective, or assumed, unconscious, reactive and random. The emphasis on character and virtue is not conservative or individualist – all about 'fixing the kids'. The ultimate aim of character education is not only to make individuals better persons but to create the social and institutional conditions within which all human beings can flourish. Character education is not about promoting the moral ideals of a particular moral system. Rather, it aims at the promotion of a core set of universally acknowledged (cosmopolitan) virtues and values.

KEY PRINCIPLES

• Character is educable and its progress can be measured holistically, not only through self-reports but also more objective research methods

• Character is important: it contributes to human and societal flourishing

• Character is largely caught through role modelling and emotional contagion: school culture and ethos are therefore central

• Character should also be taught: direct teaching of character provides the rationale, language

and tools to use in developing character elsewhere in and out of school

• Character is the foundation for improved attainment, better behaviour and increased employability

• Character should be developed in partnership with parents, employers and other community

organisations

• Character results in academic gains for students, such as higher grades

• Character education is about fairness and each child has a right to character development

• Character empowers students and is liberating

• Character demonstrates a readiness to learn from others

• Character promotes democratic citizenship"

Pair Task: Having read through the text individually, discuss the extent to which you agree with the 'Key principles' as outlined by the Jubilee Centre. Think about your own experience of school.

Can you list the potential benefits and potential strengths of character education?

Classroom discussion: if time permits, these ideas can be shared in a whole group context.

Character Education and the Liberal Tradition	***Lesson 5: Critical reflection on the place of character education***
Objectives: *You should be able to:* • Think critically about the idea of character education • Discuss your thoughts with a philosophical justification • Reflect on the place of character education in your own experience	

TASK: *You should work in a group of 4 students* in order to help you break down the following piece of reading into a manageable size. You will then be responsible for collaborating in a small group and reflecting on the number of criticisms of character education that you can find. Each piece of reading is designated by the 'Person' subheading. Gather back together when you have read your section and tell each other about the criticisms you have identified.

The myth of character education by Kat Arney[5], 16th September 2016

This article was published in the Times Educational Supplement (TES).

- **PERSON 1**

Politicians and the education world have been transfixed by the allure of teaching children character for some time now. But Kat Arney questions whether we really know what character education is – and if 'character' is even something that can be taught

Nicky Morgan, the former secretary of state for education, didn't seem to have a lot of confidence in the young people of England. Much like her predecessor, Michael Gove, she demanded rigorous academic tests to push pupils further and harder than ever before, but she feared that a lack of "character" among the country's youth meant those higher expectations would not be met. And so began an obsession with character education in the UK that was led from the top of the policy tree.

"We know that children need certain character traits to excel academically," Morgan said in a 2015 speech. "The kind of traits that should be embedded through a whole-school approach to character education, helping children and young people become decent, happy, well-balanced citizens. Building a strong character and a sense of moral purpose is part of the responsibility we have towards our children, our society and our nation."

She made it pretty clear that she believed the majority of schools were failing to do this for pupils.

"Business leaders – big and small – told us time and time again that they wanted young people to enter the world of work with the character traits that were an essential component to success," Morgan said earlier this year. "So we have encouraged schools to

[5]Dr Kat Arney is a science author, broadcaster and co-presenter of the BBC Radio 5Live Science show.

develop pupils who are confident, motivated and resilient, and who will get on better in both education and employment."

Character education came to define Morgan's legacy – and the education landscape of the past few years – every bit as much as the oft-debated tougher tests and accountability overhauls. The Department for Education threw money at it: millions of pounds was provided in grants for schools to develop character projects. It set up awards for schools which tackled character education particularly well. It touted the work of "character" heavyweights like Carol Dweck and Angela Duckworth, and Morgan spoke about character obsessively.

As might be expected, schools quickly fell in line. A growth mindset embroidered itself on to the fabric of school life, consultants were hired to help schools "do" character education better and countless books, blogs and social media posts have been dedicated to the topic.

For teachers, perhaps, the hazy elixir of character was a way to protect their students from what they perceived to be unfair accountability measures.

What quickly grew was a fragmented approach to character – chaotic and variable. Educators and psychologists disagreed about everything from how character should be taught to what character education really was. No one seemed to stop and ask whether it was even possible to "teach" it at all.

So, belatedly, let's do just that. Let's put character education under the microscope and see how resilient the concept itself is under pressure.

The first thing to recognise about character education is that it is not new. "It's basically been part of education for centuries," says Professor James Arthur, director of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at the University of Birmingham and lead author of a major 2015 report into character education in UK schools. "Character education to me is simply a good education – there isn't anything mysterious about it."

In the foreword to Arthur's character education study, Thomas Lickona, a professor at the State University of New York, seems to agree. "Character education isn't something else on educators' plates; it is the plate," he writes.

But the long history of character-building in schools has been ignored in the gold rush that character education has become. We're talking about it in new ways, with new words and presenting it as a catch-all solution to numerous ills. It has acquired all the hallmarks of a fad, and an entire industry of intervention has been built up.

The driving force behind that industry is a group of academics and journalists who have, perhaps unwillingly, become the stars of the character show.

Stanford University professor Carol Dweck's book Mindset, University of Pennsylvania professor Angela Duckworth's book Grit and journalist Paul Tough's book How Children Succeed have all topped the bestseller lists and become the semi-official canon of character education.

The fact that all three have publicly urged caution around the use of their work as a "manual" has largely not curtailed the books' usage in prescriptive ways in schools. Dweck, in particular, has lamented the misinterpretation of her work.

"A lot of educators think I'll give a lesson on growth mindset and that will be it, rather than embodying it in their teaching and infiltrating it through the whole culture of the classroom," she explains.

"Different concepts are in different stages of development. Some have well-formed curricula but not much research testing it, others have a lot of research testing the concept but no well worked-out curricula for educators."

But it's not just the fact that the calls for caution from the prophets of the character creed have largely fallen on deaf ears, both on the frontline and in political circles, that is worrying.

It's also that what we now have in the UK is a large-scale adoption of the theory of the necessity of character development without much hard evidence to back up any of the preferred routes to making that happen in schools.

Now list the criticisms of character education:

- **PERSON 2**

What does it mean?

The first significant problem about character education is that no one can agree what exactly it is.

Right now the hottest topic is what Duckworth calls "grit" – long-term passion for a particular subject or activity – which is often confused with resilience, the ability to bounce back after criticism or failure.

Dweck's concept of the "growth mindset" is also still widely adhered to by teachers – it is all about recognising that children can grow and change in the way they learn, and that they shouldn't be boxed into thinking, for example, that they're bad at maths or uncreative. Then there are what Arthur describes as the "civic and moral virtues", the glue of respect and honesty that holds society together.

Tough says this variation needs to be more broadly acknowledged and understood. "I do think it's important to realise that when you're talking about character education we're talking about a few different things and I think different educators and different researchers can be using the same words like 'character' or 'grit' or 'self-control' in meaning something very different," he explains.

Another problem is the fact that every child is unique. Research studies are now revealing that at least some aspects of character – such as grit – are influenced by genes as much as by environment, with up to 50 per cent of the variation in the population coming down to differences in genetic make-up (see box, “Grit in the genes?”, below).

So if you are going to teach it, some form of baseline is surely needed to ensure that the right level of character is being taught. That’s assuming, of course, that character is even teachable.

Plenty of people are trying, though. One school that has adopted a character-based curriculum is Green Dragon Primary School in the London borough of Hounslow, led by headteacher Cath Pinkney.

The school is nestled in among tower blocks and housing estates in a deprived area of town, almost within spitting distance of the leafy Kew Gardens across the river.

“We started using the international primary curriculum about eight years ago,” Pinkney says. “Along with it come these eight wonderful personal goals: enquiry, morality, thoughtfulness – things like that. But quite quickly we realised that they didn’t exactly fit with our school. We’re a very challenging and deprived area, and we needed personal goals that fitted our community and gave them a bit more ambition.”

Pinkney and her teaching staff sat down together and came up with nine personal goals that fitted their community, each embodied by a cartoon character. For example, there’s Alex Aimhigh – an ambitious and aspirational female superhero with flowing hair and a cape to match. Dr Global is internationally-minded, the Chameleon is adaptable and open-minded, while Resilient Robin is stalwart in the face of setbacks.

Pinkney and her teaching team have embedded these characters in everything they do, from the language that teachers use and the tasks they set, to the posters in the hallways. And, most importantly in her view, it’s an approach that is personalised to her pupils and their needs.

“I hear about other schools that say they’re doing character education, but have they asked the teachers if these [approaches] are right for their school? Have they asked the parents if they know what ‘resilience’ means? Does the local community believe in this? You have to make [the goals] yourselves, you really do, and you have to believe it. It’s like anything – you’re not going to get involved if you don’t believe in it.”

Further up the country, education consultant Steve Harris has been busy running character education workshops with eight primary schools in Leicestershire. He’s spent a whole year working with staff and parents, funded by Public Health Leicestershire, creating free resources that will be rolled out across all primary schools in the county.

“What we’re saying to teachers is, ‘Here are some core strategies that we have seen work really well.’ For example, if you’ve got a lesson objective then the teacher might say, ‘So what out of our pool of characteristics do we mostly need to bring to the fore in order to achieve this? How am I going to learn?’”

He's trying to help students and their teachers identify the particular character traits they need to draw out of themselves in order to achieve their academic goals. But there's a longer-term plan at work.

"We're aiming to wean children off needing to be told what characteristics they need to use, so they can say to themselves, 'I guess I have to show some curiosity, or really need my imagination or reflecting skills.' Whatever it is, it's orientated towards the task in hand," says Harris.

If you go to any local authority, any academy chain or any individual school, you are likely to find countless other ways of approaching the issue of character education. Even those that adhere to one of the big theories like growth mindset use it in highly variable ways.

Is this evidence of good practice in that schools are tailoring theories to their own context? Possibly, but it is more likely that this is a symptom of the fact that there is little evidence about what makes for a successful curriculum of character education that can be rolled out across the country. Frustratingly, there is no rule book.

Politicians may talk a good game on character, but what's lacking is a solid research base investigating which – if any – of these approaches work specifically in schools (there are several substantial studies, including a major one by the Education Endowment Foundation.

Now list the criticisms of character education:

- **PERSON 3**

More worryingly, there's also little research on what difference such interventions make in the long-term to educational and societal outcomes.

Sure, there's plenty of anecdotal evidence on the frontline, but how that translates to reliable evidence is unclear.

"This is going to be the hardest question for everyone to answer," admits Harris. "I'm at the stage where I have piles of questionnaires and other evaluations that I've not had a chance to analyse yet. What I have got is heaps of positive comments from parents, students and teachers, but they don't add up to data yet."

To prove an impact, these approaches need long-term follow-up, focusing on life outcomes and socio-economic measures, as well as academic achievement.

That's not to say that the big theories underpinning the character education movement have no research basis: there is plenty of hard data backing the work of the likes of Dweck and Duckworth.

For example, Duckworth and colleagues have investigated the effectiveness of teaching 10-year-olds a specific psychological intervention known as "Mental Contrasting with Implementation Intentions" (MCII) – a structured way of thinking about the actions that are needed to achieve a given goal, along with planning ways to overcome any possible obstacles.

Compared with children receiving bland "Believe it and you can achieve it!" messaging, the kids taught the MCII strategy had better academic performance.

Dweck, meanwhile, has tested her programmes with thousands of students. Delivering short workshops encouraging students to believe that they can grow and develop seems to lead to a decrease in aggression, reduced stress and a drop in the number of children showing signs of depression when they make the transition to high school.

Here in the UK, Arthur has carried out a study with 30,000 children in London primary schools, working through a programme called the "Knightly Virtues", which uses allegorical stories to explore different aspects of character.

"We've got kids all over the world using these Knightly Virtues as a resource," he says proudly, "and we discover that kids who use it become much more fluent in speaking about virtues and were able to talk about them with their parents and the teachers."

But the transference of academic data to national or international strategies is notoriously difficult in education.

This is partly due to the variable context of each classroom and kids within it, and also because a lot of academic research happens in relatively contrived situations or is poorly translated when rolled out into real life. As such, we don't really know what works in education when it comes to teaching character.

"As a body of research, I don't think that we're there yet," argues Tough. "I wouldn't feel comfortable pointing to any particular curriculum and saying, 'Yes, we know that this creates self-control in children and we know that it lasts a long time.' Some interventions seem to work in the short term in a moderate sort of way, but as far as I know there is no good evidence that this particular pedagogy or this particular curriculum is going to have a lasting effect on children's character."

The good news is that long-term data is being gathered, particularly about how character interventions affect educational or life outcomes.

"We're doing a longitudinal study at the moment on that," says Arthur. "The early results indicate that it does impact on academic attainment by the kids being more receptive, more precise about doing their homework in an accurate way, and being more rational."

Until we get these results and others, though, there a few things worth considering.

Now list the criticisms of character education:

- **PERSON 4**

Firstly, Arthur's research suggests that at least some aspects of character can be imparted through conventional teaching methods. But he says character needs to be caught as well as taught. And here's where the government could have a problem.

If we really want to improve character, then some argue that we should not be targeting the children for intervention, but the people who teach them. "Teachers are role models and they perform many other roles rather than simply just the transmission of knowledge," says Arthur.

Professor Steve Peters, psychiatrist and author of The Chimp Paradox, agrees and says that the ever-increasing pressure put on teachers is detracting from their ability to fulfil this vital role.

"I'm going to be a bit provocative now," he says. "I think we should start with teachers. As a group they're not in the best place right now, so it might be better if we're looking really broadly at education and asking how we can get the best out of our staff."

The increasing stress levels and challenging working environment in the teaching profession are well known. So is it fair to expect staff to create and model a character-building environment for their pupils when they themselves are being disempowered and demoralised by politicians and purse-holders?

"You can't present the best for yourself if you're put in the wrong environment," says Peters. "I think we have to create environments and cultures that allow teachers and children to discover what's best of themselves. If children are looking to them as role models, then let's get the teachers absolutely on fire. We empower them, we listen to them, we recognise what they do, we support them."

The importance of environment is a conclusion Tough has also come to, detailed in his new book – a follow-up to How Children Succeed.

"In my new book, Helping Children Succeed, I am focused less – because I'm persuaded less – by those explicit attempts to teach specific character strengths," he explains. "Instead I am more persuaded by the evidence that these character capacities are the products of children's environments. So instead of trying to find the perfect pedagogy to try and teach the skills explicitly, it works better to think about the environment in which kids are growing up in, both at home in their early years and at school in the classroom, and think about how to make that environment in school and at home most conducive to these kind of capacities.

“It’s less attractive in some ways to educators because it’s less of a quick fix. It’s much easier to say, ‘Here’s the pedagogy, here’s the two-day professional development programme, here is the textbook, here’s the curriculum, here’s what you say in class.’ Instead, it’s about changing things like the way the parents interact with their kids and their babies, changing things like how we do discipline, the homework we assign, how we teach maths and history – all of those things that are really complicated and difficult to change.

“But what the research suggests to me is that that’s what actually makes kids display what we would normally call character: it makes you motivated to persevere, to stick with tasks for a long time, to bounce back from setbacks and get along with others better.”

The second important point to consider is that we should not be measuring the success of character education purely on academic results. It’s important to remember that there’s more to education (and to life) than just getting good grades – something many of the people I spoke to were keen to stress. Focusing more on character shouldn’t be seen as a means to boost exam results, but as an important investment in the future of our society.

Arthur is near-evangelical about this, referring to the late MP Jo Cox’s famous statement that we have much more in common than we have that divides us.

“What we have in common is our humanity, and humanity consists of these certain virtues – things like moral virtues, civic virtues – and if we can get them right, people will live in peace with each other and society will be better,” he enthuses. “You don’t send your children to school simply to pass examinations, you want them to come out a better person. Parents have some responsibility for this, of course, but schools have a huge responsibility in this area as well.”

These character capacities are the products of children's environments

Of course, just as we don’t know for sure that character education leads to better results in the long-term, we don’t know whether character education can change our non-educational outcomes either. After trawling through the studies and dissecting the rhetoric, it still feels like there are some parts of the puzzle missing when it comes to character education.

Duckworth, Dweck and the rest do have some good evidence that their theories work in practice. But as they say themselves, this doesn’t mean that their books should be used as lesson plans or that they’re the golden solution to teaching character in schools.

We seem to be in the odd situation where schools are racing to adopt new ideas while the researchers who are painstakingly piecing together the evidence to support these trendy interventions are struggling to catch up. This gap is something that greatly concerns Dweck.

“It’s very positive that people are working on this when it’s so needed,” she says. “The one reason we are working so hard is that we don’t want these concepts to be distorted and then found to be ineffective in their distorted form. The ideas I’m putting forward have more evidence behind them than any educational concepts have ever had, but

there's always a danger that they'll be distorted and misused and found to be ineffective, and then they'll be discarded and the next fad will come along."

Duckworth is also cautious of labelling character education as either a fad or a fully fledged fact. "I hope it isn't just a fad," she says, optimistically. "Fads come from false expectations and an impatience for easy, quick solutions. I don't think figuring out how to cultivate character in our children will be easy or quick. On the contrary, it will likely be difficult and progress may be uneven. But will we make progress? If we grown-ups can do this work while exemplifying character, yes, I think we'll make progress."

Now list the criticisms of character education:



PREP TASK:

You should read the whole article yourself and continue to reflect on its contents in advance of next week's lesson.

Article: https://www.tes.com/us/news/breaking-views/myth-character-education

After having digested the full article, take time to reflect on the question, whether in your opinion character education can work within a liberal tradition?