BEYOND CUSTOM: A PRAGMATIC MODEL FOR MORAL EDUCATION

by

Lindsay Rodgers

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Abstract

This thesis concerns the present model of moral education in Ontario public schools: *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12*. I argue that *Finding Common Ground* makes use of an impoverished form of virtue ethics in the construction of its model of moral education, and tacitly encourages assimilation and obedience rather than authentic moral becoming; it is a re-articulation of customary morality. To encourage authentic moral becoming, I propose a pragmatic, Deweyan model for moral education. This model is rooted in developing the capacities that encourage moral agency: imagination, reflection, and deliberation.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis explores moral education in Ontario public schools. I argue that conceptually, moral education must acknowledge the complexity and indefinite nature of the moral domain if it is to succeed in encouraging moral agency. Canadian society is comprised of a “vast array of religious, ethnic, and family traditions, social mores, prized dispositions, conventional norms, and modes of moral reasoning; the questions of how to be good and how one ought to live are debated not only within each particular tradition, but also across traditions.”\(^1\) If moral education is going to be successful, it is critical that it acknowledges the complexity, pluralism, and uncertainty that mark the moral realm, and accounts for the diverse range of perspectives in Canadian schools.

It does not follow from this argument that individuals should not commit to one particular ethical framework, or that conceptual morality is relative, only that the commitment to ethical principles within education should, “recognize moral difference, and be self-critical and open.”\(^2\) In order to develop a sound model for moral education, we must critically engage a diverse range of moral positions, determine their precise meaning, and give thoughtful attention to arguments for and against the acceptance of a standard of behaviour.\(^3\)


\(^2\) Ibid.

Presently in Ontario Public Schools, an initiative called *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12* serves as a deliberate program for moral education. Character development, as a framework for moral education, is derived from virtue ethics, though in a fragmented and limited manner. This fragmentation and haphazard adoption of the principles of virtue ethics diminishes (or eradicates entirely) the ability character development has to facilitate authentic moral becoming. Instead, character education rearticulates and promotes conventional morality, which serves to realize political, rather than ethical, ends. Within the Finding Common Ground document, the authors state that: “Character development in Ontario schools….is not about compliance; does not seek to indoctrinate; is not about a government imposing a set of moral standards.”

Despite this claim, it becomes clear through a critical reading of the document that these ostensibly unintended effects are, in fact, what the initiative precipitates: The initiative endorses a particular brand of morality that serves political ends, and does not provide a space for either critique or dissent. In response to this, I propose a pragmatic approach to moral education based on Dewey’s ethics. A Deweyan pragmatic model emphasizes capacities that enable authentic moral becoming. They are: imagination, reflection, and deliberation. Emphasizing the skills that facilitate moral becoming, rather than conformity to existing and problematic normative standards, means that students are well-equipped to navigate the moral realm.

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1.1 Methodology

Character development, as it is discussed in literature and instantiated in the *Finding Common Ground* initiative, is derived from virtue theory. As such, it falls under the purview of moral philosophy. Philosophy is not an attempt to satiate or calm our anxiety. Heidegger suggests that, “its task is just the opposite: to make us more anxious; not to lift the burden of personal responsibility, but to make it weigh more heavily.”⁵ Likewise, Wittgenstein notes that philosophical problems often have the form, “I do not know my way about.”⁶ Both of these conceptions are in line with my selection of a philosophical method for approaching morality. I intend to disrupt the complacency and passivity that permeates conventional morality: to induce anxiety, to encourage the recognition that collectively, *we do not know our way about* the moral realm, and this uncertainty ought to be embraced.

Empirical research, though valuable and complimentary to philosophical study, does not provide insight into the creation of a framework for moral education. Given the inculcation of morality from innumerable sources, including filial and social relationships, religion, media, one’s sociopolitical context, etc., it is difficult to decipher empirically what elements of moral education contribute to moral understanding. What can be done, however, is to ensure that the philosophical framework that informs moral education is conceptually sound. I will employ

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⁶ Ibid.
moral philosophy to delve into the assumptions and underlying principles that frame character development.

1.1.1 Method

Philosophy of education does not fall within the parameters of either qualitative or quantitative research methods, and therefore cannot be articulated according to the terms derived from those methods. Indeed, “the challenge […] is for philosophers of education to talk about their research methods without submitting to the paradigms and expectations of the social sciences—especially the emphasis on ‘data,’ technique and the tripartite breakdown of method into data gathering, data analysis and data representation.” 7 In writing this thesis, I used a dialectical method based on Vokey’s description of a similar project. I compare two competing ethical frameworks in an effort to demonstrate the advantages of pragmatic ethics over the version of virtue theory that character development employs. This process reveals the ways in which a pragmatic conceptual framework is well suited to moral education in Ontario public schools.

Vokey outlines the dialectical method of analysis, which comprises two argumentative tasks that must be accomplished in order to establish one conceptual framework over another. Vokey states that for this method to be successful, two tasks must be completed; a framework must: “make progress on [a] theoretical problem that … the alternative position recognizes as important, but cannot adequately address given the limitations of their conceptual framework.” It must also point out the flaws that account for...

7 Ibid., 2
the conceptual failure in the alternative plan, provide some explanation for the flaws, and improve upon them in the proposed framework. In order to complete these tasks successfully, I have introduced, in chapter two, the problem I am focusing on: moral education. In order to frame moral education sufficiently, I included a discussion of moral philosophy; this served as a reference point for exploring the moral realm, and subsequently, how moral education can facilitate moral becoming. In chapter three, I discuss character education specifically. Character education serves as the ‘alternative position’ Vokey refers to. I discuss the emergence of character education in Ontario, what it aims to do, and extrapolate the ethical framework it relies upon. Following this, I delineate the ways in which the framework is flawed, and does not, in fact, contribute to authentic moral becoming. I attribute these flaws to a disengagement from moral philosophy, and a strict adherence to custom. In the following chapter, I propose a pragmatic framework. Following Vokey’s course, I elaborate upon the ways in which this framework successfully approaches the problem of moral education. i.e. how this framework facilitates the actual moral becoming of students. Finally, in the last chapter, I revise section of the *Finding Common Ground* document to provide an example of how this pragmatic model might look as a document, and to highlight the contrast between the competing frameworks, thus evoking and contributing to the argument against character education as a sound moral framework. In following this method, I have contributed to the conceptual development of a sound moral education. More specifically, I have identified

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conceptual flaws within character development and establish philosophical inquiry as a necessary endeavor in establishing a conceptually sound theoretical framework for moral education. Furthermore, I hope I have conveyed the idea that philosophy is present in everything, and the philosophical underpinnings of issues in education ought to be understood and engaged.

It is important to note that dialectical argument cannot be employed irrespective of the researcher. This methodology does not present its conclusions as absolute. As Vokey illuminates, a ‘view from nowhere’ is not possible. My subjective frame of reference will influence, and limit, the discursive structure of this paper. Therefore, I emphasize the contribution this discussion will make to a continuing debate concerning the most efficacious form of moral education in Ontario public high schools.
Chapter 2: Moral Education

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the realm of moral philosophy, thus providing a platform from which I will subsequently discuss moral education. I will discuss both moral philosophy and moral education and make some remarks concerning the connection between the two. Moral education is defined here as the deliberate effort to facilitate the development of students’ moral agency. Moral agency is comprised of two parts: First, it is the ability to understand the moral import of a given experience or situation, and second, the capacity to effectively navigate a complex moral dilemma: to determine a course of action that contributes to the general welfare. As I will argue, this relies on one’s capacity to imagine, deliberate, and reflect. It entails the interpretation of conventional moral standards, and the ability to ascertain whether or not the standards are contributing to (or not impeding), to the general welfare; it includes making use of standards as a tool for ascertaining how one will act in a given situation. The aim of moral education is moral agency, and the aim of moral philosophy is to understand the nature of morality. Moral education, in order to be well developed, requires moral philosophy, “without it, it is hard to know what is worth attaining or how to set about seeking to attain it.” Therefore, this chapter will introduce the reader to moral philosophy in an attempt to make clear how a model of moral education requires a sound ethical framework.

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2.2 Moral Philosophy

In order to establish moral philosophy as a legitimate and necessary approach to constructing a sound moral education program, it is wise to begin by thinking about what moral philosophy is and what its limitations are. Moral philosophy seeks to understand, clarify, and analyze the concepts of right, wrong, ought, permissible, good, and evil. The terms ethics and morality will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis.

Most ethical theories are founded on their conception of the right and the good, and how these concepts interact with one another. Often, Western moral philosophy is divided into two schools; teleological and deontological ethics. A teleological theory is one that identifies the good as distinct from the right; the right is then defined as that which maximizes the good. Maximizing happiness, for example, is good, and that which leads to happiness end is right. A deontological theory “either does not specify the good independently from the right, or does not interpret the right as maximizing the good.”

Deontology locates morality in a rule, or duty, rather than consequences or ends. As discussed below, virtue ethics locates morality in the character of the individual, and existentialism emphasizes freedom and authenticity.

For centuries, humans have established codes of conduct, and philosophers have sought to derive absolute principles from these codes of conduct. Determining how one ought to act shifts according to what ethical principles are called upon or articulated. It is reasonable to declare that the discussion of ethics is interminable, or, at least, has no end in sight. Moral philosophy, through its long history, has not established irrefutably that one ethical

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framework supersedes the rest. Philosophers continue to study and develop ethical theories; there is no end in sight. Contemporary social issues, like abortion and assisted suicide, bring the inconclusive nature of moral dilemmas to the forefront of Canadian culture. There is no agreement on how society should regard these issues, and there is no ethical framework one can point to as a final solution. This lack of a verifiable code of ethics absolutely implicates moral education. Ethics is a complicated discipline that must be engaged with the awareness that there are multiple perspectives and arguments for a diverse range of concepts of the good and the right. For this reason, moral education ought to be approached “under conditions of epistemic uncertainty,”¹¹ where truth-seeking is valued higher than truth. Certainty eludes moral knowledge.¹²

Dewey outlines the confines of a moral theory in the following quote:

Moral theory can (i) generalize the types of moral conflicts which arise…it can (ii) state the leading ways in which such problems have been intellectually dealt with…it can (iii) render personal reflection more systematic and enlightened, suggesting alternatives…stimulating greater consistency. But it does not offer a table of commandments in a catechism in which answers are as definite as the questions…The student who expects more from moral theory will be disappointed."¹³


¹³ Christine McCarthy, “Dewey’s Ethics: Philosophy or Science?” Educational Theory 49, no. 3 1999
As this quote makes clear, moral theory cannot provide a detailed or specific account of how one ought to conduct one’s self in every situation; rather, general principles are developed: principles that are provisional and require interpretation in changing contexts. It is the prerogative of a capable moral agent to decipher and enact standards that serve the general welfare. One principle can support a variety of acts in different times and place. For example, the principle, “treat others as an end in themselves, rather than a means to an end” does not lay out a specific course of action, but must be carefully considered and assessed in each novel situation. Dewey argues that normative standards of behaviour are provisional, that they are useful as guides but must be subject to reassessment. Moral philosophy allows individuals to intelligently navigate the moral realm; it cannot offer more.

Moral philosophy offers a medium for deciphering, understanding, and contributing to the concepts of right, wrong, good, etc.; it renders explicit the implicit ideas from which our actions stem. This is vital because “where morals are concerned, it is only too easy to take the presuppositions of one’s own evaluative framework for granted, noticing neither that they may be internally inconsistent, nor that they may differ radically from the assumption of others.” Impartiality concerning moral decisions and ideas is elusive, and if it is achieved, it is the result of a conscious and sustained effort. Contemplating moral dilemmas necessitates a structured way of thinking about one’s beliefs concerning right and wrong: a philosophical way. Montefiore explicates the benefits of philosophy in the following quote:

14 Robin Barrow, An Introduction to Moral Philosophy and Moral Education (London: Routledge, 2007), 45
15 Montefiore, 364
Systematization and consistency offer a more thorough-going advocacy of one position rather than another and a corresponding awareness that others may disagree. Thus, even if they think that the views of their opponents are in the end demonstrably mistaken, their systematic expositions of their own views, their attacks on their opponents and their replies to their opponent’s attacks, all help to articulate the nature, and display the characteristic strengths and weaknesses of their respective positions. 16

This is requisite for moral agency: the ability to explicate and justify one’s own position while recognizing the potential merit in another’s; to recognize that existing moral knowledge can, and ought to be, improved upon. The act of deciphering the right or the good in a particular situation is the capability an ideal moral education hopes to develop in individuals. The capacity to interpret and enact an ethical framework within a particular situation requires imagination, deliberation, and reflection; this is addressed in Dewey’s pragmatism, the model I propose for moral education in Ontario public schools. Pragmatism is efficacious as a model for developing moral agency because it emphasizes the process of becoming. Strictly adhering to the established tenets of one fixed moral code leads to dogmatism. Moral agency is partly the ability to understand the dynamic and complex components of an experience, and how proposed or accomplished acts will implicate the general welfare; this is not realized when morality is considered easy alignment with fixed principles. A pragmatic model of morality is marked by an effort to perpetually seek out ways to “widen and deepen” existing moral knowledge. In emphasizing the role of the moral agent within the context of moral education, and the recognition that moral knowledge can, and ought to be expanded, a pragmatic model

16 Montefiore, 365
17 Dewey, 282
of moral education will contribute most efficaciously to the development of moral agency of students.

2.3 Some Problems in Moral Education

Several problems arise when considering moral education; though it has been present since the beginning of education itself, its longevity is not an indication that it has reached an ideal state. Actually, “it is far from clear that we are doing the appropriate things to develop the truly moral individual; in fact, sometimes it is not entirely clear that we are even trying to develop the moral person, as distinct from implanting automatic obedience to social rules.”18 This quote introduces the primary critique I have of character education: rather than encourage authentic moral agency, it promotes obedience and conformity. When considering what form moral education might assume, there are a variety of questions one must answer. Perhaps most significantly, one must determine what a moral person looks like: what it is that moral education is attempting to realize. Alan Montefiore explicates this question in the following quote:

I do not mean this question to be about the detailed provisions of the moral code that you might wish to see [students] adopt: about whether, for example, you are trying to instill in them a [particular virtue] I mean to ask, rather…Do you feel that a man or woman has reached full moral maturity only when he or she has learned to take full responsibility for every decision of principle, for every value by which he or she determines to live? Or do you think that there are certain authorities in matters of morality? Do you think that a central
moral lesson- perhaps the basic one-is that of a certain obedience to someone other than the individual’s own elective will? And if so, obedience to what sort of authority? To the needs of society? If so, those needs as measured by whom or by what standards? Or the teaching of a church? Or to some less personal but still objectively determinate principle, such as that famous utilitarian demand for the greatest happiness for the greatest number?”

As evidenced by the many questions associated with this feat, it is clear that moral education is not a straightforward endeavor. Montefiore, in the preceding quote, is exhorting moral educators to think about what it is to be moral, to consider what their conception of morality entails, and how it is achieved. Failure to engage with such questions when shaping a program of moral education limits the potential for authentic moral becoming. I argue that the Finding Common Ground initiative does not explore these questions, or does not make this exploration clear to the reader, and this interferes with the efficacy of moral education as it stands.

It is difficult to assess how well a program of moral education works; it is nearly impossible to decipher one’s intentions and degree of awareness when they act; ethical outcomes can be wholly accidental, for example. Furthermore, moral understanding, or rationally apprehending what is right or good, does not always compel one to act according to what one understands to be right or good. Humans can, and do, act in opposition to their best interests. An apt analogy is nutrition: sometimes people act according to their desires, rather than their health. It is clear that neither moral education, nor moral knowledge inevitably leads to moral becoming. Moral education can provide the tools for becoming moral, but does not impose upon the freedom of

19 Montefiore, 354
the will. Of course rules dictate behavior within schools, but rule-following does not equate with moral agency.

Not only are we almost wholly unable to discern if a student lacks either the will or the understanding to be moral, we cannot tell how moral an individual is, or how moral they are becoming: “How do we measure, in the strict sense of the word, an increase or decrease in such genuinely moral qualities as honesty, kindness and trust or the extent to which people are truly motivated by concern for fairness and truth?”\(^{20}\) The short answer is that we can not, and moral education needs to be about something else: “what we can do is teach people what morality involves, what the various grounds for being moral are.”\(^{21}\) A program of moral education ought to consider the idea that an initiative can not coerce students into being moral, only equip them with the capacity to thoughtfully navigate the moral realm, to encourage the capacity to imagine, to reflect, and to deliberate.

To this end, this thesis will pay particular attention to the capacities that enable moral becoming: imagination, reflection, and deliberation. This necessitates an ethical theory that is dynamic; one that eagerly seeks to accommodate evolving conceptions of the general welfare. The anemic form virtue ethics assumes in Ontario’s model of moral education (character development) lacks this dynamism and refuses to acknowledge the ambiguity and complexity of the moral realm, and of moral becoming. As character education derives its model from virtue ethics, I will outline this theory below. The discrepancy between virtue ethics as it is presented by philosophers and as it is instantiated in *Finding Common Ground* will elucidate

\(^{20}\) Barrow, 167

\(^{21}\) Barrow, 169
the reductive nature of moral education in its present form, and reinforce the idea that moral philosophy ought to inform the development of a model of moral education.

2.4 Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics locates morality within the character of an individual. To put it simply, a good person is one who acquires and exhibits virtuous character traits. I will discuss Aristotelian ethics below, relying primarily upon Nicomachean Ethics.

2.4.1 Nicomachean Ethics

Aristotle begins his discussion of ethics with delineating the telos, or purpose of a human being: human flourishing (elsewhere translated as happiness.)22 It is the only end that is sought for its own sake, and not as a means to some other end; therefore, Aristotle argues that it is the primary function of humans to fulfill their potential for happiness. Aristotle defines happiness as, “an activity of the soul in conformity with virtue.”23 Virtue renders humans good, and allows them to preform their function (happiness, or flourishing,) well.24 One cannot flourish, or achieve happiness, if they are not virtuous. All human activity is


\[\text{\footnotesize \[\text{\footnotesize 23 \ Ibid., 22} \text{\footnotesize \]]}\]

ideally directed at this end; if happiness is to be achieved, it follows that education too ought
to encourage the development of virtue in its fullest sense, namely, practical wisdom.

Virtues are characteristics that contribute to human flourishing, but they are not a
fixed list ready for adoption. They are “neither one nor the same for everyone.” They are
enacted contextually, and depend upon the particular circumstances of a particular situation.
These virtues can be deficient or excessive, depending on the context in which they are
employed. For example, courage, being a virtue, if practiced in excess will lead to
recklessness, while its deficiency is cowardice.

It is necessary for the individual to determine the mean appropriate to their situation,
for in another situation, the mean will have shifted to suit the complexities of another
dilemma. What it means to enact a virtue in a given context depends upon the parameters of
the experience; the situation itself will determine how one ought to act. Being virtuous, then,
entails a sound understanding of the particularities of a given problem, and an apprehension of
human flourishing. “Virtue is a matter of feeling the right things, at the right times, about the
right things, towards the right people, for the right end, and in the right way.” Virtues are
dynamic and in flux; moral agents must continually decipher where the mean is, and how they
can act to facilitate human flourishing.

25 Ibid., 42

26. Aristotle, 71

Perspectives, ed. Amelie Oksenbers Rorty (New York: Routledge, 1998), 55
The complexity of determining the right course of action; of verifying where the mean, or virtue, is located within a particular moral dilemma, is a difficult task. It requires thoughtful deliberation. Practical wisdom is excellence in deliberation; it allows one to realize virtue in its fullest sense. Practical wisdom is the crux of Aristotle’s ethical framework since, “it is impossible to be good in the full sense of the word without practical wisdom or to be a man of practical wisdom without moral excellence or virtue.” Aristotle’s ethical theory resonates with Dewey’s pragmatism—it is rooted in doing. It is dynamic and requires a moral agent to remain engaged and active when considering how to act.

2.4.2 Contemporary Virtue Theory

Nussbaum writes about virtue theory in contemporary philosophical discourse by rejecting the account of virtue theory that had, prior to her writing, characterized virtue theory as relativistic. She argues that Aristotle was not a relativist, given his objective consideration of “a single objective account of the human good, or human flourishing.” Nussbaum argues that Aristotle does not simply enumerate virtues that his own society deems worth pursuing, but begins with establishing human flourishing as objective and universal and roots his theory in this concept. Therefore, virtues are established and valued in so far as they enable the individual to flourish, or to achieve happiness.

28. Aristotle, 163

29. Aristotle, 172

Alasdair MacIntyre refers to the good life as a unifying conception beyond our particular and individual life projects. The human *telos* grants a unity to virtues and offers an external criterion with which one can evaluate and discern the appropriate virtue. In MacIntyre’s words, “unless there is a *telos* which transcends the limited goods of practises by constituting the good of a whole human life, […] it will both be the case that a certain subversive arbitrariness will invade the moral life and that we shall be unable to specify the context of certain virtues adequately.”

Integrity is an example of a virtue that does not rely upon a specific practice for its value to be recognized, rather, it is the internal cooperation of virtue. Integrity, or for Aristotle, constancy, is a virtue that exists outside of particular circumstances, and thus presents a virtue that is capable of providing a reference point in acquiring and abiding by various other virtues. The task of articulating a *telos* for human life is important for understanding virtue theory. This is in opposition to the idea that virtues have value in isolation or on their own.

Virtue theory is reconfigured as character development within the Ontario public school system, though with a distinct end: citizenship. In the following chapter, I will delineate the ways in which virtue theory is present in the Character Development Initiative, and how the absence of a conception of both a human *telos* and an adequate account of practical wisdom hinder the efficacy of Character Development as a moral enterprise.

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2.5 Dewey’s Pragmatic Ethics

Chapter three will discuss Deweyan pragmatism in greater detail; this section will serve as an introduction to this ethical model. Most importantly, Dewey’s ethics makes a distinction between customary and reflective morality. This distinction implicates moral education (as it takes place in Ontario as Character Development): I argue that character education rearticulates conventional morality, and that it ought to make use of a pragmatic framework so that it can encourage reflective morality, and consequently, foster authentic moral becoming. Conventional morality, derived from custom and tradition, defines the good as that which is praised in society. It lacks the dynamism that would allow normative standards to evolve in line with our expanding conception of the general welfare. Conventional morality does not establish what ought to be praised in society; this is the role of reflective morality. In Dewey’s words:

The problem of reflective morality and hence of theory is to lay bare the standard or criterion implicit in current social approbation and reproach. In general, they agree that what men like and praise are acts and motives that tend to serve others, while those acts and motives which are condemned are those which bring harm instead of benefit to others. Reflective morality makes this principle of popular moral judgment conscious, and one to be rationally adopted and exercised.32

Thus Reflective morality responds to conventional morality and renders explicit the reasons behind social approbation and reproach. Rather than merely accepting that which society

32 Dewey, 183
approves as good, it critically examines normative standards and asks whether or not they should be approved. Dewey posits experience as the root of learning, and argues that within experience, “inherent standards of judgment and value” will emerge. Praise and blame act as the initial indicators of conventional morality, and reveal the parameters of conventional norms. We are alerted to a problem when the course of action we have taken does not have the results or consequences we imagined when deciding what should be done. Reflection occurs organically when an individual begins to question whether or not their act should have been praised or reproached. Critical analysis of conventional morality is required for moral growth, and emerges from lived experiences.33

Reflection is essential to a sound conception of morality because it thwarts mere acceptance of the status quo; reflective morality “tries to reverse the order: it wants to discover what should be esteemed so that approbation will follow what is decided to be worth approving, instead of designating virtues on the basis of what happens to be especially looked up to and rewarded in a particular society.”34 Failure to reflect upon conventional norms serves amounts to thoughtless perpetuation of normative standards that may interfere with the general welfare; that which is approved of, e.g. the marginalization of women, will remain unaltered.


34 Garrison, 225
Deliberation is not intended as a mechanism by which conventional norms are re-established in a novel situation. Deliberation is a function of reflective morality, so the moral agent is evaluating how to incorporate or reimagine conventional morality in a particular moral context. To deliberate is to think about a range of potential course of action, and thoughtfully consider the implications and consequences of following one course over another. This deliberative practice considers how an act will contribute to the general welfare of all; for this reason, it must be impartial, continuous, and enduring.

### 2.6 Practical Wisdom

Practical wisdom, as conceptualized in different, yet similar, ways by both Dewey and Aristotle, is analogous to a navigational tool. It is worth discussing simply to make its absence from *Finding Common Ground* even more prominent. It is a soundness of judgment in practical contexts where one determines how they ought to act, and why. Thus, it is pragmatic and an essential component of a suitable conceptual framework that informs moral education.

Practical wisdom is a manner of thinking and acting in a way that requires more than empirical or conceptual knowledge. When knowledge and understanding of the empirical aspects of a dilemma, as well as conceptual knowledge of the good are present, and enriched by experience, practical wisdom is achieved.\(^{35}\)

Practical wisdom is required to determine how virtue will be enacted within a specific context. Aristotle explains, “It is virtue which makes our choice right. It is [...] a

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different capacity which determines the steps which, in the nature of the case, must be taken to implement this choice.” Aristotle’s notion of practical wisdom speaks to some of the previous critiques made against character education. Simply put; it is not enough to know what the virtues are, or what the good life consists of; both are required, and must be reinterpreted in each novel dilemma. Excellence in deliberation is necessary to realize the conception of virtue, or human flourishing.

Dewey, in his effective argument against foundationalism, rejects the notion of static or fixed rules that govern behavior; furthermore, he rejects virtue ethics as a sound model for morality yet, his account of deliberation brings forth elements of Aristotle’s practical reasoning. For Dewey deliberation is necessary for reflective morality to take place; without deliberation, a moral agent succumbs to either habit, or “immediate appetite and passion.” As deliberation is practiced, ‘goodness’ is achieved; conversely, when one fails to deliberate, they become less good. Deliberation practiced regularly becomes conscientiousness. One can see how Aristotle’s term, practical wisdom, can be substituted for deliberation in this context, underlying the similarities between the two concepts. The idea that deliberation, or practical wisdom, leads to a realization of some existential goodness is present in Aristotle as well as Dewey. Practical wisdom provides a course of action that aligns with moral excellence.

36 Ibid., 114


38 Ibid., 272

39 Ibid., 270
in its fullest sense; “it is impossible to be good in the full sense of the word without practical wisdom, or to be a man of practical wisdom without excellence or virtue.” Practical wisdom will be further explored in this thesis, and through this exploration, the traits of practical wisdom will be sought out, and discussed within the context of education. I will argue that in order for practical wisdom to develop, it requires reflection, deliberation, and imagination.

2.7 Conclusions

While various ethical theories have valuable insights into the nature of morality, they contain inherent limitations. In developing an ethical framework for moral education, I intend to exploit the salient components of each, and integrate them, as Dewey has done, into a framework that offers a sound conceptual and pedagogical platform for moral education.

A cursory reading of the above literature presents transcendent skills required to navigate moral dilemmas. They include: deliberation as a skill that enables foresight into the potential consequences of a proposed course of actions; reflection, which underlies the ability to step outside convention and determine what standard we ought to adopt; and the imaginative capacity required for the freedom to express a divergent and subjective account of morality. Through these skills, conventional norms can be made explicit and discursively engaged within a community of individuals engaged in the process of becoming, providing an authentic and necessary means of developing moral excellence.

Dewey’s pragmatic ethics incorporate reflection, deliberation, and imagination, and thus offer the basis of a sound ethical model for moral education. The body of this thesis will more thoroughly probe into character development, and its relationship with virtue theory.

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40 Aristotle, 172
Following this, a discursive conceptual analysis will dialectically engage character development and Dewey’s pragmatism and argue in favour of the latter for a sound ethical framework to inform the conceptual development of moral education in Ontario public schools.
Chapter 3: Character Development

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will give an account of the emergence of Character Development in Ontario, and the development of *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Schools K-12*. I will probe the initiative to determine how, specifically, the authors of the initiative conceptualize morality, character development, and citizenship, and what the implications of said concepts are. I will argue that character education, as it is articulated in *Finding Common Ground*, serves to maintain conventional norms and standards of behavior that serve political, rather than ethical, ends. Further, I will argue that the present articulation of character education does not enable students to critically pursue authentic moral agency. Rather, the framework encourages assimilation to, and perpetuation of, conventional morality and problematic normative standards of behavior. 

Dewey defined conventional morality as:

> A morality of praise and blame based on the code of valuations that happens to be current at a particular time in a particular social group. Whatever conforms, at least outwardly, to current practices, especially those of an institutional sort, receives commendation or at least passes without censure; whatever deviates exposes one to censure. The practical effect is a negative morality; virtue is identified with “respectability,” and respectability means such conduct as is exempt from overt reproach and censure rather than what is inherently worthy of respect.41

This is the definition of conventional morality that I will use throughout this thesis. It is a conception of morality that is comprised of what society values: the virtuous act is one that is praised and accepted. Conventional morality is acquired through a kind of osmosis; it requires no active or sustained effort on the part of individuals or communities. Society is governed by normative standards, and an individual need only be immersed in a particular society at a particular time to adopt the established standards of behavior. Dewey argues that approbation and blame serve to signify the moral import of an act. If an act is met with praise, it is good. Within the classroom, if a student is “respectful”, they are considered good. Within conventional morality, the moral actor need only be receptive to the judgment of others within conventional morality; they do not need to consider what acts ought to be praised or blamed.

Conventional morality pervades public education, and indeed is present within all institutions. Alfie Kohn uses an apt analogy to describe this phenomenon:

> Just as humans are teeming with microorganisms, so schools are teeming with values. We can’t see the former because they’re too small; we don’t notice the latter because they’re too similar to the values of the culture at large.”

As Kohn points out, moral education is happening whether or not there is an explicit program governing it, and often it is invisible because it is conventional.

Within education, normative standards are enacted and perpetuated implicitly and explicitly. They are infinitesimally present in the interactions between educators and students,

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in the policies that govern educational aims and practices, in the pedagogical structures that inform teaching practice, and in the delivery style and content of lessons—in short, every aspect of educating inculcates conventional standards of morality. This sentiment is part of the impetus for the development of character education. In a presentation given by the Character Education Partnership, presenters discuss the hidden curriculum. Within the presentation, the hidden curriculum is defined as the “attitudes, values, and practices that make up much of the moral life of a school but often go largely unexamined.”

Character education, though it does attempt to render explicit a program of moral education, simply articulates what is already happening within schools. It describes the hidden curriculum, but it does not critique or improve upon it.

It is imperative that we develop a sound and fair method of encouraging authentic moral agency within education. This is not an exhortation to ensure that students abide by established standards. I define authentic moral agency, in opposition to conventional morality, as the state in which one is able to navigate and understand the ethical and moral import of a given experience or situation, and act consciously according to standards that contribute to happiness. This definition is broad in order to include and facilitate the plurality of ethical modes of being present in the public sphere in Ontario. The following chapter on pragmatism will further clarify the ethical model I am proposing for Ontario public schools. If moral education does not move beyond a re-articulation of conventional norms, students may passively absorb and internalize the conventional standards of morality. In a society that can...

reasonably be characterized as materialistic, sexist, and racist, among other things, it is vital that educators nurture the capacities that moral agency requires: imagination, deliberation, and reflection.

3.2 Finding Common Ground

In October of 2006, the ministry of Education in Ontario held a Character Development Symposium that marked the official launch of Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools K-12. This document outlined the initiative to implement character education in all Ontario public schools. The ministry called upon Ontario to become a “province of character” and made it mandatory for public schools to incorporate character education.\(^4^4\) At this point, character education had already been present in many Ontario schools. For example, York Region District School Board enacted Character Matters!, a character education program written by Avis Glaze, who went on to author the province-wide Initiative.\(^4^5\)

The Finding Common Ground document was written by Avis Glaze, George Zegarac, and Dominic Giroux. Establishing character education programs throughout Ontario has for the most part been due to the efforts of Dr. Glaze. Dr. Glaze was instrumental in implementing character education programs with York Region District School Board and Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board, and now holds the position of Secretariat of Literacy and Numeracy for the Ministry of Education.

\(^4^4\)Finding Common Ground, 2

\(^4^5\) Avis Glaze, George Zegarac, and Dominic Giroux, Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12 (Ontario: Ministry of Education 2008), 1
Versions of character education are practiced in Alberta, the United States, and Britain. This approach to moral education is neither original nor new, it has simply been rearticulated in a modern context; consequently, Glaze had a tradition from which to draw the core principles of character education. Glaze refers to Thomas Lickona who had, at that point, studied character education for many years in the United States, and written extensively on the subject. Lickona defined character education as the:

the deliberate effort to cultivate virtue. The school stands for virtues such as respect and responsibility and promotes them explicitly at every turn. Thinking and discussing are important, but the bottom line is behavior, taken to be the ultimate measure of character.

This definition is important because it shapes the Character Development Initiative in Ontario; the importance of respect and responsibility, and the emphasis on behavior are central themes in Finding Common Ground. These elements are problematic when considering moral development. It is rather easy to conflate respect with obedience, especially in an educational context. There is no description of what respect means, or how it is recognized, by whom it is recognized, and so on. It is difficult to discern, then, how each


47 “Introduction” in Character and Moral Education: A Reader, ed. J. DeVitis & Tianlong Yu (New York: Peter Lang Publishing), XI


school will define and acknowledge respectful behavior. This idea will be discussed further on in greater detail; for now, it is important to note from where character development in Ontario is derived. Notably, it is not derived from a philosophical account of ethics.

In Ontario, character education was discussed as early as 1999. In October of that year, the Ontario Government’s Throne Speech stated that:

Parents, students, and teachers want schools to be a safe, secure, respectful environment for learning. Your government wants the education system to teach students the importance of respect for themselves, respect for others, and respect for the responsibilities of citizenship. It has already included mandatory community service in the new high school curriculum, but more must be done to foster principles of tolerance, civility and good citizenship among Ontario’s youth.50

Again, the pervasive theme when discussing character education, from its earliest stages, emphasizes “respect” as a mark of character and good citizenship, and as an ideal to achieve as a moral individual.

In 2003, the Throne Speech made a more explicit commitment to character education after which all government parties in Ontario supported the character development initiative, and in June 2006 a resolution was adopted by all three parties in Legislature, which noted:

That, in the opinion of this House, the Government of Ontario should declare the Province of Ontario to be a Province of Character by encouraging the citizen of Ontario to foster a climate which promotes, supports, and celebrates excellence in character in its schools, businesses,

homes and community-based organizations in order to strengthen Ontario’s families and communities.\textsuperscript{51}

At this point, the Ministry of Education began developing \textit{Finding Common Ground}: an initiative that would serve as a model for all Ontario public schools.

The aim of \textit{Finding Common Ground}, which remains active in Ontario, is ostensibly to achieve excellence in education by promoting the development of good character, and subsequently, good citizenship.\textsuperscript{52} Good character, according to the initiative, entails the acquisition of universally agreed upon character traits, also referred to as universal attributes, which “provide a standard for behavior against which we hold ourselves accountable.”\textsuperscript{53} Good citizenship is connected with character throughout the document. The end of good character is good citizenship. This underlies my argument that political, rather than ethical ends are sought. While the document does not explicitly declare itself a moral enterprise, the language and articulated aims found within assert its role as an ethical guide for school communities.

Character development is defined in the document as:

The deliberate effort to nurture the universal attributes upon which schools and communities find consensus. These attributes provide a standard for behavior against which

\textsuperscript{51}A. Glaze, G. Zegarac, and D. Giroux, \textit{Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12}. Ministry of Education (Mowat Block, Queen’s Park, Toronto, ON. October 2006), 2

\textsuperscript{52}Avis Glaze, George Zegarac, and Dominic Giroux, \textit{Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12} (Ontario: Ministry of Education 2008)

\textsuperscript{53}Avis Glaze, George Zegarac, and Dominic Giroux, \textit{Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12} (Ontario: Ministry of Education 2008)
we hold ourselves accountable. They permeate all that happens in schools. They bind us together across lines that often divide us in society. They form the basis of our relationships and of responsible citizenship. They are a foundation for excellence and equity in education, and for our vision of learning cultures and school communities that are respectful, safe, caring and inclusive. Excellence in education includes character development. Through character, we find common ground.54

There is much to unpack in this definition. In order to understand and assess the initiative, I will explore its purpose: to what end it was created, and how it aims to achieve this end. This will include discursive analysis of concepts of good citizenship, character, universality, and ethics as they pertain to moral education. As I argued in the first chapter, this project can not be undertaken empirically; indeed, arguments that determine how one ought to live, or what it means to have good character “must be examined philosophically… one has to probe such arguments as deeply as one can by pressing for a more detailed account of what precisely is meant by, say, happiness or freedom.”55 These concepts cannot be understood scientifically. Thus, I will first examine the ethical framework that informs character education (though it is not addressed by the authors, nor is it mentioned within *Finding Common Ground.*

54 *Finding Common Ground,* 3

3.3 Aristotelian Roots of Character Development

Character education is indebted to Aristotelian virtue ethics for its model of moral becoming; it falls under the purview of moral philosophy. It has, however, been criticized for its disengagement from this tradition. As Kristjansson argues: “Despite routine appeals to the originator of a character-based take on morality, namely Aristotle, [character education] writings are disturbingly short of critical engagement with past and present philosophers.”56 It is important that a moral education be informed by moral philosophy if it is to be a conceptually sound model, and one that bears resonance to an individual’s actual experiences within the moral realm. Below, I will explore the ways in which character education makes use of virtue ethics in shaping the ethical framework it employs. I argue that character education amounts to an impoverished virtue ethics. While it includes components of virtue theory, it omits aspects that are necessary to the conceptual clarity, complexity, and soundness of a moral framework. As I will argue in the following chapter, virtue ethics is a problematic framework for moral education; an impoverished virtue ethics is even less capable of facilitating a diverse range of routes to and forms of moral agency.

3.3.1 Virtues and Attributes

Both character development and virtue ethics locate morality in the character of the individual. Becoming moral, or virtuous, within these systems entails having a certain kind of character. The affiliation between virtue education and character education is apparent in the

establishment of attributes, a word Aristotle uses to describe virtues\textsuperscript{57}. In this paper, virtues and attributes will refer to the same thing, namely, admirable qualities that are perceived to be good. I argue that the traits espoused in \textit{Finding Common Ground} are anemic when viewed in light of their source, Aristotelian virtues. Discussion of the nature and definition of attributes, and their viability in encouraging authentic moral agency is insufficiently addressed within \textit{Finding Common Ground}. For example, community consensus is the sole criterion for accepting attributes within character education in Ontario; their relation to ethical principles, or how, precisely, they engender good citizenship or moral individuals is not fleshed out.

Within character education, universal attributes are presented as fixed and ready to adopt. They are simplified, and this simplification diminishes both their real world applicability and their resonance with the way moral actors experience the moral realm. Being respectful, for example, an attribute that is referred to as exemplar throughout \textit{Finding Common Ground}, necessarily changes form in various circumstances. For a student in grade one, being respectful might mean waiting for one’s turn to play with a particular toy; for a high school senior, being respectful might mean ceasing to pursue a romantic partner when he or she expresses discomfort. \textit{Finding Common Ground} does not indicate that the act of being respectful can take on many forms. Each individual may define this trait in accordance with their underlying worldview, or assumptions of what it means to be respectful rather than impartially and shaped by the context it must be enacted within. To an educator, being respectful might mean submitting to authority. Without an exploration into why students are supposed to assume respectability and act accordingly, problematic and pernicious

\textsuperscript{57} Aristotle, \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, 107
interpretations of the term can be evoked leading to obedience, or some other trait that serves
the status quo, rather than moral becoming.

The process of acquiring virtues is presented as a simple, straightforward endeavor
within character education; this is not the case within an Aristotelian model. Within most
philosophical models of character-based ethics, it is not easy to calculate how one ought to act
in a moral dilemma. In part, it requires finding the median between deficiency and excess.
This is why Aristotle states that “virtue or excellence is a characteristic involving choice, and
that it consists in observing the mean relative to us, a mean which is defined by a rational
principle, such as a man of practical wisdom would use to determine it.”\(^{58}\) Virtue lies in this
mean, and it is not easily discovered because it changes according to the moral dilemma at
hand; it requires both practical experience in navigating moral dilemmas, and philosophical
apprehension of the ideas and concepts that govern the moral realm. If the virtue, or attribute,
is respect, as the document makes repeated reference to, it is the responsibility of the moral
actor to discern what respect looks like in a particular situation; if practiced in excess or
deficiency, thought it may remain under the heading “respect,” it is not a virtue. Once the
mean between excess and deficiency is found, it must be practiced “at the right time, toward
the right object, toward the right people, for the right reason, and in the right manner.”\(^{59}\)
Determining what the virtue is comprises only part of what it entails to act virtuously, as the
previous quote makes clear. The complexity in determining how to act is bypassed within
character education. It is assumed that a monolithic and easily grasped concept of ‘respect’

\(^{58}\) Aristotle, 43

\(^{59}\) Aristotle, 43
exists, and is understood by all, and that once apprehended, it is a simple matter of course exhibiting this trait. There are many contingencies one must consider before acting. Being respectful to the wrong person is unethical, as is being respectful for the wrong reason(s).

*Finding Common Ground* neither makes reference to the complexity and difficulty in establishing what it means to be respectful in particular examples, nor does it allow for circumstances in which being respectful might be unethical.

Practical wisdom is the tool that enables a moral actor to deliberate and find virtue. With practical wisdom one can act respectfully to the right person at the right time, in the right way, and for the right reason. In Aristotle’s words, practical wisdom is: “The act of deliberating well about what is good and advantageous for oneself…not deliberating well about what is good and advantageous in a partial sense, for example, what contributes to health or strength, but what sort of thing contributes to the good life in general.”60 There is no discussion of the good life within *Finding Common Ground*; what supersedes this concept throughout *Finding Common Ground* is good citizenship. It is clear that political ends are sought in favour of the intrinsic worth in becoming a capable moral agent.

Practical wisdom entails a close examination of the moral dilemma at hand; one’s experience and knowledge are consulted in order to establish how to move forward. This must be done not only in light of the immediate dilemma, but also with an eye toward an overarching good or goal. It is not solely the immediate circumstances that guide the decision making process, but the end one seeks to achieve. For Aristotle, this is human flourishing, or

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60 Aristotle, 152
happiness.\textsuperscript{61} Virtue can be understood, then, as participatory in nature: it is not solely the good of the individual that is sought, but the good of the whole of humanity. Character Education makes reference to excellence in education as an outcome of character education, but does not clarify what is meant by the term. If students are to become moral actors within a character-based ethical model, an articulation of the function and end of this process will facilitate success.

3.4 The Right and The Good

In the preceding chapter, I discussed normative ethical theories as typically offering some conception of the right, or the good, and discussing the way these concepts interact. Dwight Boyd points out that character development fails to make a distinction between these two concepts, and argues that this is either an oversight, or an intentional omission from the document. Boyd frames the right and the good in the following two questions: a) “What kind of ultimate ends should I pursue in my life? and b) How ought I act in regard to other people?”

The former question pertains to the good, and the latter to the right.\textsuperscript{62} Within the context of education, the question might take the form: What are the ultimate ends of education? Further, “How does character education serve to realize these ends? Finding Common Ground certainly aims to set parameters concerning how one ought to act toward others: with

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 18
character. There is a side stepping of the question “why?” Why character education is happening, and why now. Why is it framed and enacted in this manner?

The initiative either does not delve deeply enough into its own purposes and intentions, or it does not make this preliminary work clear to the public. The absence of a conceptual framing of character or morality within the initiative, and a conceptually flawed account of character traits, results in a blocking of the possibility for authentic moral becoming; it interferes with an individual’s capacity to adequately engage with the models (e.g. character development) governing their behavior and system of values.63

David Purpel contends that there has been an intentional separation of big questions from policy development. In determining what the purpose of education is one ought to address questions concerning happiness and freedom. While it may initially seem that these questions are not connected, they are inextricably linked. Consider the argument that an education serves to benefit individuals and society; it is one that many take to be true even if there is disagreement concerning how, precisely, education should benefit the individual or society, and the extent to which this is possible, etc. If human interests are at the root of educational aims, then it follows that consideration of what contributes to the realization of human potential is likewise relevant to educational initiatives. This does not mean that human flourishing needs to be defined monolithically, only that it is considered and acknowledged as important within educational discourse. In an initiative that derives its moral claims from an ethical theory grounded in human flourishing, this absence becomes more pronounced.

63 Boyd, 153
A clear pronouncement of the framework the authors are operating within is absent from the document. David Purpel states how this absence interferes with public discussion of morality “reluctance or inability of the Character Education Movement to elaborate and clarify its larger worldview…[it] weakens the opportunity for a more thorough and comprehensive public discussion.”64 If the public is not aware of the larger world-view that informs character education, they cannot intelligently discuss its strengths and weaknesses. The more thorough justification that is offered for character education, the more capable citizens become of understanding the initiative and determining whether or not it is a model that ought to inform moral education in Ontario public schools, or not.

If the authors of *Finding Common Ground* provided a concise thorough account of what informed their selection of character education as a model for Ontario schools, and what guiding principles they rely upon, it would offer a means by which the public could engage in the discussion and plainly see the advantages and disadvantages of this initiative. It is interesting that this reasoning has been omitted from the presentation of character education in general, and *Finding Common Ground* in particular. A significant portion of moral reasoning is rooted in knowing the difference between explanation and justification. In *Finding Common Ground*, one finds vague explanations and absent justification for character development.

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3.5 Defining Character

The authors of this initiative point out that, “Ontario’s vision of character development must be clearly articulated to ensure that there are common understanding of the key beliefs and principles on which the Character Development Initiative is founded.” The core definition provided in the document of character education is, “the deliberate effort to nurture the universal attributes.” Here, readers are presented with a simple, facile definition: Character development is encouraging the development of certain characteristics associated with good character. This tautology does not reveal much about what it means to employ character education in Ontario public schools, or what, precisely, is entailed in “nurturing” universal attributes. Essentially, character education is insufficiently and confusedly described, and its tautological structure interferes with the potential for sufficient understanding, and subsequently for critique.

The absence of a concrete, declarative definition of either character education or character interferes with potential criticisms of the initiative. It is difficult to argue that character development is a problematic, or a productive, method of moral education when there is no concrete definition of character development to critique. There is no singular, substantive definitive definition of character development, nor is character itself defined. Character is not defined anywhere in the document. If character development is the acquisition of agreed upon attributes or traits, as the document declares, then it follows that character is a conglomerate of ‘universal’ attributes. In other words, the attributes that serve

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65 Ibid.

66 Finding Common Ground, 2
conventional morality are transposed to signify good character and citizenship in *Finding Common Ground*.

There is no measure to determine if the agreed upon attributes are problematic, nor how they might function together in one human resulting in a sufficiently developed “character”. How, for example, might the public critique character development when it is, in one instance, defined as “doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do”? 67 This definition is generic enough to apply to virtually any conception of morality one might have. The banality of the document, the innocuous way it calls upon the reader to do the right thing, renders it almost universally palatable. This too diminishes the potential for critical discourse; if there is nothing in the document to disagree with, it is less likely that it will engender conversation concerning better or other methods of moral education. Conventional, vague claims about morality in general fill the pages of this document; i.e. it is about doing the right thing, it is about empathy and respect, it involves having character. The terms of character development are inadequately defined. 68

The following is a series of excerpts from the document outlining the manner in which character education is defined. I have included the following to emphasize the convoluted approach to defining character education in *Finding Common Ground*. Under the heading “What Character Development Is and What it Is Not…” 69 the authors provide a

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67 *Finding Common Ground*, 7

69 *Finding Common Ground*, 7
bulleted list. Here are a few of the things that character education “is,” or “is about” as the case may be:

- “the development of standards of behavior”;
- “self-management, self-discipline, and the development of interpersonal competencies,”
- “all students and all schools.”\(^{70}\)

These claims about what character education are general enough to apply to a variety of forms of moral education. Several unanswered questions arise after viewing this list. With respect to standards, reasonable queries go unanswered: What is the relationship between standards of behavior and universal attributes? How are these standards developed? Do they emerge from custom? Do they remain fixed? Is a standard established when one has acquired an attribute? Furthermore, what does it mean to do the right thing because it is the right thing to do? How is one supposed to determine what the right thing to do is?

In addition to identifying, in the above terms, what character education \textit{is}, the document provides bullet points for what it \textit{is not}: It is not “about the “few” to the exclusion of some; it is not about compliance.”\(^{71}\) These claims hold the same weight and conceptual clarity as the above statements concerning what character education is. Although the authors note the threat of compliance and government control of morality, they respond by providing bullet points meant to deny this potential charge; they are neither sufficient nor convincing. After an analysis of the framework used by character education, it becomes clear, as I have

\(^{70}\) Finding Common Ground, 7

\(^{71}\) Ibid., 7
argued, that character education does, conceptually and in practice, favour compliance. In fact, students are awarded for their compliance with the attributes their school establishes as universal by such markers as, in one Ontario school, their names written on a star and taped to the wall.

Given the document, it is reasonable to assume that the authors evoke universal attributes as a guide to determining what the right thing to do is. When enough of these attributes are acquired, one simply knows what the right thing to do is, or when enough attributes are acquired, one simply does the right thing. This is a problematic way of thinking about morality. Within the moral realm, as I argued in the previous chapter, answers are not self-evident, opposing attributes can be difficult to choose between, and universal attributes can coexist alongside vicious attributes. Furthermore, the source of character education, virtue ethics, argues that characteristics are found in the mean between excess and deficiency; they are not fixed, and shift according to the context. The right thing to do is not easy to determine.

If there is an objective morality, or a god’s-eye view of right and wrong, we do not have access to such a thing. There is more disagreement than agreement concerning the nature and will of the variety of gods that may or may not exist. A diverse range of cultural norms and values likewise informs the way we relate to one another, and what we perceive to be good and right. Therefore, public institutions must recognize the uncertainty that marks moral claims, and seek sufficient justification for making them.72 It is problematic to present a model of moral becoming as inevitable or universal.

In spite of the problematic definitions of character education, *Finding Common Ground* gives examples of public support by citing studies done in Ontario that highlight parental approval. For example, the document cites a study called *The Schools We Need*, which finds that “one of the highest priority [sic] for parents is for schools to help students develop as responsible citizens and to learn how to make ethical decisions.”\(^73\) The authors then go on to cite similar studies, one noting the efficacy of character traits to prepare students for the work force, and another noting the importance of empathy. They do not cite studies that establish character development as the best approach to enable students to make ethical decisions, nor do they note why character development, rather than arts education, for example, is well suited to the development of empathy. This compliments the lack of a concrete definition of character in presenting this form of moral education as acceptable, inevitable, even. Partial explanation is given with little justification.

Although it seems commonsensical to state that moral development is important to parents, there is no data that says they are partial to character development rather than other forms of moral education. One would be hard-pressed to find a parent who stated that they were not concerned with, or had not considered, their child’s moral development. Citing a study gives the appearance of legitimacy and seriousness to the claim that character education will support authentic moral becoming. The inclusion of studies stating what a reasonable person would assume (i.e. that parents want moral children) diminishes, slightly, the space for critique.

\(^73\) *Finding Common Ground*, 10
Character traits are described within the document as both universal and as having been defined via some consensus. It is inconsistent to equate universality with consensus. Character traits cannot be both universal and established by consensus; consensus is a measure of agreement, not universality. Furthermore, a logical fallacy is committed by appealing to the majority in determining universal character traits: the majority is not always right, and it should not be the sole criterion by which attributes are approved. For example, at one time, almost all people agreed that the world was flat. If character traits were indeed universal, they could be deciphered through some means other than community consensus.

3.6 Assimilation

The process by which the character traits included in Character Matters! were chosen will elucidate what is meant by “community consensus building” one of the “key actions” taken to date for the success of the initiative. This process will also clarify what is meant by universality in this context, and point to the ways in which assimilation, rather than authentic moral becoming, is tacitly encouraged. Boyd, in order to understand the process of discerning which character traits were included in the document, and subsequently declared to be universal, had a conversation with the York Region Superintendent of Education. Boyd relays his findings in the following quote:

74 Finding Common Ground, 26
in turn. If anyone disagreed, it was removed from the list…This was done before the “Work Group” provided definitions of the items on the list.

It is inconsistent with the aim of the process that the attributes were defined after they were chosen. It is possible that voters agree upon a trait and disagree with the way the trait is defined. There is no way to measure if actual consensus was achieved or not, and this is problematic for an initiative that establishes attributes according to consensus.

The freedom of individuals to express and engage divergent views is not enabled within this process; assimilation is implicitly favored. 75 Silencing dissenting view points through the act of removing a trait from the list serves to discourage fruitful discourse concerning the merit of each of the character traits presented: a singular unqualified “nay” immediately eliminates the trait; mere disagreement invalidates a particular character trait. Assimilation is tacitly encouraged. This does not align with one of the “core principles” of Finding Common Ground: respect for diversity.76 Diversity is actually discouraged. Disagreement, rather than opening up a space for discourse, is subdued. In a diverse space, disagreement is both inevitable and valuable. Individuals have a valuable opportunity to reflect upon their own beliefs and assumptions when they are confronted with opposing views. This may lead to the dissolution of a particular belief, but it may also lead to a strengthening of a particular belief. To value easily acquired consensus over discourse is to commit a great injustice, both to those who harbor diverging points of view and those who

75 “Character Education From the Left Field,” in Character and Moral Education: A Reader, ed. J. DeVitis & Tianlong Yu (New York: Peter Lang Publishing), 151

76 Finding Common Ground
agree. As a result of this silencing of diverse perspectives, character education implicitly supports assimilation.

Traits that exhibit the potential to be divisive are dismissed by the finding common ground initiative. Indeed, the title of the initiative, Finding Common Ground, is indicative of meeting in the middle, of diluting one’s firmly held beliefs enough so that they are compatible with another’s firmly held beliefs. Another approach would be to engage one another in fruitful discourse, earnestly seeking to understand the perspective of one another, and earnestly seeking to recognize the value in one another’s perspective(s). Discussing and defending one’s own position, and earnestly seeking to find potential faults with one’s own reasoning, with one’s own deeply held beliefs is a process that entails respect for diversity because it admits that one might be mistaken. If diverse communities were to engage in this practice, of which the end is decidedly not agreement, but close attention to a diverse range of valuable perspectives, as well as the mutual recognition of the faults and strengths in each, the status quo would evolve.

In addition to perpetuating an assimilationist conception of morality and citizenship, the authentic acquisition of the character traits is interfered with because, as Nancy Luxon illustrates: “confidence in one’s values requires that one be able to articulate and defend these with and against others in a community.” By authentic acquisition I mean that the trait becomes sincerely valued and actively pursued by an individual rather than mimicked to appease authority figures, or appear virtuous. If one is unable to engage in reciprocal sharing,

77 Nancy Luxon, “Ethics and Subjectivity: Practises of Self-Governance in the Later Lectures of Michel Foucault,” in Political Theory 2 (2003), 392
justifying, understanding, and explaining of the moral principles that inform one’s behaviour, the flaws within the principles will not be uncovered, nor the strengths. The less we are able to express our actual understanding of moral principles, the less likely we are to act upon them with any sort of permanence or authenticity. Expression of value is not limited to exposition of one’s values; moral principles are visible in the way one acts, so this argument does not hinge on one’s capacity to eloquently articulate their moral framework. It may be the case that students are acting in ways that conform to the attributes that their district practices because they are supposed to, and doing so provides them with rewards, and not because they are trying to person of character.

Within the pages of *Finding Common Ground*, one finds pages of expectations for students, teachers, principals, school boards, the community, and families. These expectations further limit the space for public critique. The breadth of this initiative is remarkable. Each of these groups is compelled to “model and reinforce positive attributes on a daily basis. [Families] find ways to ensure that the attributes are taught explicitly, making sure that over time, there is continuity in their development.”78 School principals are expected to “ensure that all members of the school community- students, teachers, parents and support staff- are engaged in school-wide implementation and development of the initiative.” And to “monitor and collect data on the effectiveness of the character development initiative.”79 The expectations articulated in the document seem unattainable, and panoptic in their execution. If this initiative were practiced in accordance with this vision, students would be monitored

78 *Finding Common Ground*, 24

79 *Finding Common Ground*, 29
everywhere. The notion that children often learn the most when they encounter failure, and gain valuable insight into human relationships through interacting with their peers in a variety of forms is lost. For example, in being cruel to a friend, one learns, through witnessing the reaction and suffering of their friend, what the implications of cruelty are, and what the benefits of kindness are, and how one’s actions affect one’s peers.

As the sources of one’s morality extend beyond school walls to the media, peer groups, idols, culture, religion, family life, literature, etc., it would be a remarkable feat to accurately gauge how effective character education is in supporting a student’s authentic moral development. How could the efficacy of character education be measured? Would students be evaluated according to their ability to define and describe specific traits, for example? Knowledge of the traits valued by the board does not equate with authentic moral agency; one can know what they are expected to do, and decide not to do it, or not believe in its value. Human will has a role in moral decision-making, and one’s will and intentions are not readily available to be studied by principals, or researchers. Furthermore, what is espoused as morally sound within education may be, in fact, unethical.

These expectations signify that character education is the responsibility of all members of the school community. Even in their homes, parents and guardians are encouraged to enforce the standard of morality articulated by the Ministry of Education. There is no safe space for the outsider, for the revolutionary, or for the savior, or for artists who frequently disengage accepted modes of behavior. If character education is successful in its attempted saturation of one’s entire community, it will be difficult to critique or exist outside of these problematic norms: the trickster figure will be ostracized and disciplined, or ignored, rather
than engaged and understood. Thus, society will maintain its problematic social mores.

3.7 Citizenship

Sue Winton writes about Finding Common Ground as it is instantiated in Character Matters!, and argues that ultimately, it “supports conceptions of citizenship education that aim to promote an assimilationist conception of society to prepare students to fit in to Canadian society rather than change it.” Assimilationist notions of social cohesion emphasize “homogenization through inculcation of unproblematized values and the silencing or marginalization of dissenting viewpoints.” The process undergone in the York district aligns with Winton’s description. The act of immediate dismissal of potentially valuable attributes because a solitary individual, without justification, does not agree with its adoption, reveals the assimilationist approach to character education. It becomes a liability to step outside of the accepted form of character. One’s experience and insight into character development is only acknowledged when it falls in line with what everyone else accepts.

Citizenship is an ideal that is discussed throughout the Finding Common Ground document. Indeed, it is mentioned on virtually every page. The authors link character and citizenship. The following excerpts from the document, of which there are many, make this


82 Ibid.
intention clear: “Character development is about citizenship in action,”83 “Universal attributes form the basis of responsible citizenship,”84 “Civic engagement results from a properly enacted character education.”85 This conception of character education in Canada is political; it has political, rather than ethical, aims. It was created within a particular political context, and calls for a particular kind of citizen. Indeed, it is unreasonable to assume that our current political context does not influence the development and purpose of character education.

As Alfie Kohn astutely asks, “Do you suppose that if Germany had had character education at the time, it would have encouraged children to fight Nazism or to support it?”86 Though this example may appear hyperbolic, it points to the symmetry between models of character education and political systems in power. Character education can be used to perpetuate a particular kind of citizen, one who furthers the agenda of those in power. Winton outlines important aspects of democratic concepts, including: the rule of law, due process, justice, freedom, loyalty, and equality and points out that their absence, or relative absence, within the initiative limit a student’s ability to understand democracy sufficiently to actively participate in it.87

The necessity for social and political change is not acknowledged as a potential means of creating an inclusive and equitable environment. Implicit in the statement that

83 Finding Common Ground, 8
84 Ibid., 12
85 Ibid., 12
86 Ibid.
87 Winton, 106
universal attributes will connect individuals is the notion that those excluded or left behind are excluded because of their own failure to acquire the requisite traits, and not because they face structural barriers to their success, such as those that mark poverty, for example. The responsibility for success shifts from the collective to the individual, a parallel to the political ideology that characterizes our present social and political context.

*Finding Common Ground* states that character development will “bind us together across lines that often divide us in society.”88 This is a claim that diminishes the structural forces that contribute to the divisions in society. Socioeconomic status, for example, places limitations on an individual’s potential to succeed within education that cannot be dissolved by one’s character. In fact, the socioeconomic status of a student’s mother is the strongest indicator of a student’s future academic success.89 It is generally understood that white, middleclass heterosexual males are granted, and make use of (with ease), opportunities that are not available for other, marginalized groups. It is naïve, to put it kindly, to assume that if one is respectful, or good enough, they will inevitably overcome the myriad of ways they are marginalized in our sociopolitical system. Rather than acknowledge the barriers to success that many face, character education tacitly attributes their failure to their inability to sufficiently adopt the appropriate number of universal attributes; to display the right kind of character traits. The social and political conditions that contribute to and perpetuate, structurally and otherwise, lines that divide us in society, including but not limited to: racism, 

88 Ibid., 2

sexism, classism, poverty, religion, are trivialized by character education, and become the fault of the individual.

Winton explores this aspect of character education and describe this model as, “promoting social cohesion through citizenship…has re-emerged as a priority.”

Smagorinsky and Taxel likewise provide an account of character education as a culturally constructed discourse that serves right wing political ends. Although they are speaking in an American context, their critique is relevant to Ontario’s Finding Common Ground, which operates on the same principles as Lickona’s (American model of) character education.

Smagorinsky and Taxel argue that character development maintains the established normative framework that marks society. Within this context, marginalized groups continue to be marginalized; those groups that have cultural capital will continue to do so because the values they hold and represent are rearticulated in character education. Traditional character education serves economic demands: it is marked by an “interest in the production of good workers and belief in the value of competition and a free-market economy. This ethic links individual effort with material success and suggests that individuals who do well in the economy have earned it through their hard work and good character.” As stated above, academic success is divorced from social and economic forces and tied to individual character instead. This suits aims that center around the creation of an individual who will act in accordance with the economic interest of the country, that is, a “rational, utility maximizing, 

90 Winton, 113

91 Quoted in Winton, 104
self-interested, choosing individual.”92 Character education, by perpetuating conventional morality and emphasizing individual responsibility for social conditions, favours those who are more likely to succeed rather than at-risk, marginalized populations.

Academic success, within the document, has been connected to one’s character as well. For example, the document states that a “growing number of boards have also developed curriculum content and expectations across subject areas to character development.”93 This is encouraged by the authors, who state that character development “aligns with curriculum at both the elementary and secondary levels, offering many opportunities for teachers to embed, integrate and include character attributes in the curriculum and in the culture of the school and community.”94 The risk in connecting curriculum to character development is that academic failure of the student can be seen as the result of a character flaw; social inequality, poor teaching, irrelevant or unclear content, learning disabilities, filial circumstances, etc., are less likely to be improved if the failure can be attributed to a character flaw of the student. The emphasis is on the individual as responsible for their own economic success: social and economic conditions can be easily overcome if the individual works hard enough.

3.8 Conclusion

Character education sources virtue ethics for its model of moral becoming, yet in simplifying and excluding central elements of virtue ethics, character education fails to offer a

92 Roberts, 206

93 Finding Common Ground, 12

94 Finding Common Ground, 14
model that resonates with the moral realm, and individuals actual experience of moral becoming. Character education limits authentic moral becoming by tacitly encouraging assimilation and the perpetuation of conventional standards of morality. This serves political, not ethical aims, and renders individual failings within education the fault of flawed character rather than connected to and enforced by structural social and economic forces. The structure and language of *Finding Common Ground* renders it difficult for the public to critique the form and function of character education, and to understand conceptually how it operates. In the following chapter, I will offer an ethical model based on Deweyan ethics that is well-suited to encouraging authentic moral becoming, and that recognizes the value of reflective, rather than conventional morality.
Chapter 4: Deweyan Pragmatism

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I outlined the conceptual elements of character education and identified how they served to tacitly encourage assimilation to conventional norms and perpetuate conventional morality. I also identified character education as derivative from virtue ethics. In this chapter, I will introduce an alternative framework for moral education in Ontario public schools: Deweyan pragmatism. I argue that this framework will encourage authentic moral becoming for a diverse range of students through the development of the following capacities: imagination, reflection, and deliberation. Emphasizing capacities rather than attributes enables a range of moral codes to flourish. I am not advocating for a closed system for the consumption of school communities; rather, I argue that school communities are encouraged to reflect upon their moral codes, consciously deliberate within moral dilemmas, and exercise their imagination.

Deweyan pragmatic ethics is conducive to the development of sound moral judgment. It is important to note that Dewey’s pragmatism is syncretic. Rather than displace or strictly refute alternate ethical theories, it incorporates elements that are conducive to the development of authentic moral agency. Moral philosophy, throughout the centuries, has constructed valuable models for understanding and acting within the moral sphere. In recognition of this, Deweyan pragmatism relies upon the accumulated knowledge and understanding contained within ethical theories. Virtue, deontological, and consequential
ethical frameworks, among others, contribute sound elements to understanding morality; they are not distinct theories, Dewey argues, rather one finds elements in each that serve to enhance moral theory. As Dewey notes:

A genuinely reflective morals will look upon all the codes as possible data; it will consider the conditions under which they arose; the methods which consciously or unconsciously determined their formation and acceptance; it will inquire into their applicability in present conditions. It will neither insist dogmatically upon some of them, nor idly throw them all away as of no significance. It will treat them as a storehouse of information and possible indications of what is now right and good.95

In other words, reflective morality entails the consideration of rules or standards, as a deontologist would; the development of character, or a sustained disposition to choosing what is good, like a virtue ethicist; and attention to the potential outcomes of an act, as in consequentialism. Attention to one of these at the exclusion of the other limits the capacity of a moral theory to adequately address the moral import of a particular, complex dilemma. Dewey’s moral theory draws upon the sources that are available: the ideas that humans have generated throughout history concerning the right and the good are valuable.

4.2 Virtue Ethics: Review and Problems

The moral realm does not operate according to easily determined rules, and sorting out what one ought to do in a given moral dilemma is a complex process that requires thoughtful deliberation, reflection, and imagination. Virtue ethics, in the anemic form it

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assumes in *Finding Common Ground*, is insufficient as a moral framework: it does not make use of the capacities required for authentic moral agency: deliberation, reflection, and imagination. For these reasons, virtue ethics is insufficient.

In its assumption that one’s character, as it is defined by the Ministry of Education in Ontario, is a sufficient marker of one’s moral goodness, character development fails students. The following character sketch will elucidate, in part, the ways in which virtue ethics does not account for the complexity of the moral realm, and of the human condition. A violent student who cruelly and relentlessly torments another, yet completes their homework on time, is punctual, and takes on a responsible leadership role within the classroom is hard to identify, via character education, as being of good or poor character. Individuals cannot be judged by isolated traits.

The coexistence of virtue and vice is inevitable within one human. Humans, even if they are thought to be of good character, experience occasions of vice, and vice versa. These nuances are not addressed by the character development initiative. Furthermore, the emotional or psychological distress that compels a student to bully another is not addressed within this model. The bully is viewed as lacking character, rather than lacking emotional stability, or unconditional love. Positioning cruel students as simply morally bad will not contribute to their moral becoming; it is more likely that their status as morally bad will remain given the underlying source of their behavior has not been addressed.

The separation of virtues, as one finds in the character development initiative, is an artificial representation of character, and does a disservice to moral becoming. Dewey points out: “The mere idea of a catalogue of different virtues commits us to the notion that virtues
may be kept apart, pigeon-holed in water-tight compartments. In fact, virtuous traits interpenetrate one another; this unity is involved in the very idea of integrity of character.”

The separation and isolated focus on particular traits renders each virtue fixed and static. Virtues, in isolation, can no longer perform their function in developing the moral character of an individual; they become lifeless when disconnected from other virtues. A useful analogy is society in general: an individual cannot exist in isolation from all other humans and flourish. The impression that pursuing one virtue or universal character trait at a time, to the exclusion of others dismisses much of the richness of interacting with members of our community and diminishes the moral import of a situation.

This separation becomes increasingly problematic when virtues are decontextualized and not harmonized with one’s interests; virtues then appear to be more like oppressive constraints. In Dewey’s words: “when, for example, an independent thing is made of temperance or self-control it becomes mere inhibition, a sour constraint.” Thus, the purpose of exercising self-control, to use Dewey’s example, when not understood as in line with one’s interests or chosen way of being in the world, diminishes as a virtue and emerges as a constraint. If an individual does not view the trait as something that will meaningfully contribute to their identity or shape their interactions with others, there is little internal incentive to abide by the trait.

External incentives are especially problematic because it is difficult to ascertain whether or not two individuals interpret a virtue in the same way, or enact it in a way that is

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96 Dewey, 257

97 Dewey, 258
recognizable to another. Thus, if a student were to commit an act that they find kind, or honest, or respectful, an educator may not recognize the act as such, and given the effects of acknowledgement (praise and blame) in the classroom, and society in general, the student might cease being kind in that particular way. Receiving praise is often an incentive, especially with young children, to continue acting in a specific manner. Within a school where teachers are monitoring the moral becoming of students, and rewarding acts that appear to reflect the character traits that have been established as universal for a particular school, becoming moral hinges upon recognition and praise.

When characteristics that ought to be esteemed in society are connected to and inform one another, character can become well-developed. Honesty, for example, is connected to empathy, which, in turn, is connected to responsibility. The notion, then, that we can and should pursue individual traits as a marker of good character is, at best, insufficient. It lacks the integrity and harmony of an authentic moral disposition. “Be honest” as an imperative for a student to follow means little if a student does not understand why they ought to be honest, what the consequences of being honest are, and how honesty will shape and inform the person they are, and the society we live in.

Parallel to the separation of character traits, the framework employed by character education separates individuals. Virtue ethics renders the individual’s primary concern that of their own character, rather than the well-being of the collective. Within character development, concern with one’s personal goodness simply takes the place of one’s concern with wealth or power, and is no less egotistical and problematic. Questions one might ask within this model include, “am I honest enough?” “Am I sufficiently respectful?” Questions
concerning the good produced by an act, or the intrinsic worth of a kind deed are dismissed. Who will benefit, who will suffer, what are my intentions, and similar questions become less important.

Dewey reframes virtue and vice so that they are not comprised of a list of decontextualized traits that do not resonate with authentic moral becoming. Within the model used by character education, traits are disengaged from our actual experiences as moral agents and isolated traits do not foster moral wisdom. Dewey formats virtue and vice as integrity and duplicity, respectively. Virtue is not discussed by Dewey as though it were a collection of traits, but characterized as a wholehearted interest that is continuous and persistent, as well as impartial and enduring.98 Within this model, the pursuit of separated traits is inauthentic and does not amount to a moral becoming. One’s interest in achieving some end must be wholehearted (or sincere): Dewey remarks that individuals are not consciously hypocritical, rather, their interest is “divided and inconsistent.”99 In other words, they are pursuing conflicting ends. Part of the problem with pursuing isolated virtues is that they become isolated ends, and a rich, complex character is not possible. I have mentioned above the problems that arise when virtues conflict; it is the same with pursuing conflicting ends. Whole-heartedness, the sincere interest in pursuing ends that contribute to the well-being of all, is not easy to achieve; in fact, it is nearly unattainable. It is made more likely by continuity and persistence; when one continually engages in deliberation, reflection, and the imaginative practice of exploring potential consequences, the perspective of others, and a variety of

98 Dewey, 256

99 Dewey, 255
potential courses of action, sincerity is practiced and becomes a mark of one’s character. The refrain that one’s character is revealed by how they react in a difficult situation speaks to the necessity of continuity and persistence. As Dewey notes, “It demands character to stick it out when conditions are adverse, as they are when there is danger of incurring the ill-will of others, or when it requires more than ordinary energy to overcome obstacles.”

The interest in being ethical must also be impartial and enduring. This serves as a reminder that we are more likely to act in accordance with the well-being of those with whom we are close or bound to in some way. Impartiality must be observed to ensure that “when one has to act in relation to others, no matter whether friends or strangers, fellow citizens or foreigners, one should have an equal and even measure of value as far as the interests of others come in to reckoning.” Morality does not pertain solely to the way we act in relation to those with whom we are closely affiliated. It is not difficult, for most people, to empathize with a dear friend, and to be kind to them, but when someone who we do not recognize, or recognize but don’t particularly care for, is enduring suffering, it can be easy to dismiss their experience as irrelevant to our own, or less profound. To mitigate this indifference, when one deliberates about how they will act in a given situation, there must be a degree of impartiality. Feelings alone cannot determine what one will do in a situation; they are too easily swayed, they are often inconsistent. Dewey contends that intellectual consideration within a moral dilemma is necessary for these reasons—it compels the individual to think about a situation in

100 Dewey, 256
a broader, less partial way, thus making it more likely that the effects of an act upon strangers are sufficiently addressed.

Dewey’s reframing of virtue and vice retains the idea that ones’ character is the locus of morality, yet character takes on a different form than it assumes in character education. It is marked by conduct: ones’ tendency to pursue a kind of end that serves the general well-being of all, or does not interfere with the happiness of others. This tendency is initially formed by habit, and developed through reflection, deliberation, and imagination. This provides students with the opportunity to consciously and intelligently pursue a diverse range of moral avenues.

4.3 Standards: Defining the Good

In the preceding chapter, I pointed out that moral theories are typically developed according to their concept of the right and the good and how these concepts interact with one another. Dewey takes a different route and establishes standards that subsume the right and the good. Standards are the rational principles “upon which the assignment of praise and blame relationally rests.”101 We evaluate or judge an act according to a standard. Within Dewey’s pragmatism, the morally good is that which is praised, and the right is standard by which we praise or blame.

The good, for Dewey is not connected to something objective: it is simply what is praised. Value is derived from what citizens perceive to be valuable in society. If Dewey’s conception of what is good were to end here, it would be problematic. Indeed, it would simply

101 Dewey, 250
be conventional morality: what is praised is good. This would not serve as a critique to character education, but a re-articulation of the same principles. Instead, Dewey argues that standards, and what society deems to be good, must be provisional. That is, they must be continually reassessed, or they become dogmatic, and those that adhere to dogmatic principles are fanatics.

The standard emerges from the development of the social state. The social state is “at once so natural, so necessary, and so habitual to man, that except in some unusual circumstances or by an effort of voluntary abstraction, he never conceives himself otherwise than as a member of a body.” An individual cannot wholly extract their self from society, and it is for the benefit of all that we do not interfere with the well-being of any. The social welfare of all, for Dewey, is the standard by which we judge something to be right. How we conceive of the welfare of all is not static; it undergoes revision too. Humanity has come to see, over the course of history, how some practices have had a negative effect on human welfare. Upon this recognition, the standard shifted to incorporate a practice that benefits all. Standards that are provisional have the capacity to perpetually improve the conditions of society and contribute to the welfare of all. Standards are problematic when they become fixed, when they are not revised in line with the thoughtful, intellectual, deliberative, and reflective process that society undergoes. The essential evil of fixed standards and rules is that it tends to render individuals satisfied with the existing state of affairs and to take the ideas and judgments they already possess as adequate and final.

102 Dewey, 244
Society has, to some extent, embodied the notion of provisional standards. We often revise our standards or measures of what we deem to be good and right. For example, previously within education it was considered morally sound to employ corporeal punishment when a student spoke out of turn, or did not complete an assignment, or acted against the established rules of the classroom in some other way. That standard, that it is right to discipline students with physical force when they step out of line, has seen been revised according to what we know will contribute to the welfare of all. Students are disciplined in other ways, and in some cases, encouraged rather than disciplined. Our collective understanding of what is right shifts as the years pass; we must remain vigilant. Female educators can now wear pants when they teach. What is conventional must not be perpetuated simply because it is currently accepted and valued. Likewise, it must not be discarded just because time has passed; it must be reflected upon. Moral concepts change as society changes: “moral concepts are embodied in, and partly constitutive of forms of social life.”

They lose their weight and relevance when removed from the complexity of every-day living.

Dewey’s pragmatism is syncretic: it cleverly incorporates components of deontology, of consequentialism, and as outlined above, virtue ethics. This is why it resonates so well with the way thoughtful moral agents actually experience moral decision-making. Drawing on utilitarianism, Dewey refers to the greatest good and reframes it as the welfare of all. He argues that when humans recognize that contribution to universal happiness or welfare is the only ground for admiration and esteem, they eliminate the limitations that characterize utilitarianism. It is important for individual happiness to synchronize with that of the whole;

103 MacIntyre, 15
the happiness of the group becomes the happiness of the individual, and vice versa. If we harmonize our happiness with the happiness of the whole, we do not have to abide by external constraints, instead, we sincerely pursue ends that we find desirable. Dewey argues that the “kind of happiness that is approvable at the same time brings satisfaction to others, or at least harmonizes the well-being in that it does not inflict suffering upon them”\textsuperscript{104} This does not mean that one’s pleasures are identical in content to the pleasures of the whole, only that our pleasure, or happiness, does not inflict suffering upon others. This is a formal trait as the content of desires vary: “No two concrete cases of happiness are just like each other in actual stuff and make-up. A miser finds satisfaction in storing up money, and a liberal person in spending it to give happiness to others.”\textsuperscript{105} Dewey is not arguing that we ought to experience happiness in the same way as others, nor that we pursue the same goals, only that our pursuit of happiness does not interfere with the well-being of others, and that once our pursuits are harmonized with the well-being of all, all will be happier.

When considering the welfare of all, the consequences of an act are important: acts are deemed moral when they affect other individuals. Morality does not apply to an individual who does not engage with other humans; so, the consequences of our actions must be considered when determining the moral worth of an act. The intentions with which we act are also important to consider; accidental consequences do not a morally sound act make. Neither of these considerations, taken alone, merits the designation of moral or not moral, yet,

\textsuperscript{104} Dewey, 247
\textsuperscript{105} Dewey, 248
together they inform the moral value of an act. The reason that an individual performed an act, and the consequences of the act are both relevant.

Moral principles, too, have a place in Dewey’s pragmatic ethics. Though moral principles are often associated with fixed rules such as: do not lie, Dewey contends that the actual function of principles within the moral realm is analogous to a tool. He uses the golden rule as an example, and points to the frequency with which people colloquially note that the world would be a better place if we were all to follow this rule. Dewey complicates this notion by explaining that the value of a principle is its ability to facilitate a thoughtful approach to a moral dilemma, rather than outline, like a recipe, how, specifically, one should act. The context determines how the principle will be enacted. Dewey makes this clear with the rather comedic point that “because I am fond of classical music it does not follow that I should thrust as much of it as possible upon my neighbours.”¹⁰⁶ That would be a naïve interpretation of the principle, do unto others as you would have them do unto you. A moral principle, then, is best understood as a guide to be interpreted according to a particular moral context. A principle, like the golden rule, is valuable in the following way: the "Golden Rule" does furnish us a point of view from which to consider acts; it suggests the necessity of considering how our acts affect the interests of others as well as our own; it tends to prevent partiality of regard; it warns against setting an undue estimate upon a particular consequence of pain or pleasure, simply because it happens to affect us. In

¹⁰⁶ Dewey, 280
short, the Golden Rule does not issue special orders or commands; but it does clarify and illuminate the situations requiring intelligent deliberation.\textsuperscript{107}

Intelligent deliberation is an end at which to aim in the development of moral agency. This is especially important in a pluralistic society.

4.4 Pluralism

The discussion of a sound ethical framework within the context of public education demands an account of the individuals for whom this framework is designed. One of the central components informing my selection of a pragmatic framework is the pluralistic nature of public education. Pluralism, or the consideration of diverse perspectives, is also a necessary component of ethics, and one that is acknowledged in the \textit{Finding Common Ground} document, but does not effect practical appreciation of diversity. The document acknowledges that Ontario is comprised of a diverse range of citizens. The multitude of cultures, ethnicities, religions, economic and social positions, political affiliations, genders, sexual orientations, and more that mark the public school system is heterogeneous and fluid. A new mix of students is continually passing through the system, perpetually entering and leaving. Policy governing education, therefore, and moral education in particular, to be fair and inclusive, must acknowledge and accept a vast spectrum of worldviews. It is not prudent, then, to pursue universality in the manner outlined in \textit{Finding Common Ground} and practiced in Ontario. It requires much effort to discern the dominant and customary standards of morality from the standards of morality that aim, and in practice do, facilitate a diverse range of moral codes. That which is conventional often appears, to the unreflective eye, to be inevitable. We must

\textsuperscript{107}Dewey, 282
be vigilant in our adoption of a code that oversees the way we interact with one another lest the marginalized and least powerful members of society remain marginalized.

Character education refers to character traits as “universal attributes.” One has to consider what universal means in this context. Does it refer to unchanging forms that are unanimously accepted? This has yet to be established by moral philosophy: philosophers put forth theories, and there is no single, irrefutable conception of what is right or good or how the two interact. *Finding Common Ground* does neither acknowledge the myriad of potential moral frameworks it might employ or engage, nor does it provide any justification for the selection of a framework derived from virtue ethics. Upon what grounds ought the public accept this model, and upon what grounds can the model be described as “universal?”

Universal agreement is both unrealistic and, I argue, undesirable within the moral realm, especially in an educational context. It leads to dogmatism. The impetus then, is to observe a moral framework that facilitates the moral becoming of a vast array of moral actors, including those who appear to be subversive. In order for moral progress to take place we must recognize the (potential) validity of plural conceptions of the good, and consider how they might improve conventional morality. Of course, they may not, and the only consequence of their failure is the strengthening of the conventional view since it has sustained critique and remains intact.

If a moral actor has conceptions of morality that exist outside of the accepted standards, typically, they face some form of social resistance. Within *Finding Common Ground* there is no discernable space in which one can be nonconforming; instead, one must

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108 *Finding Common Ground*, 3
assume character, as it is set forth within the document. This does a disservice to the educational community because the potential for nonconformity, I argue, is imperative for moral becoming, and for authentic moral agency. Nonconformance, in a moral context, means rejecting some small part of customary morality. Conforming to an established code lacks the conscientiousness that becoming authentically moral requires; it can be done with ease, it is settled into, it is vacuous. Moral becoming requires deliberate, close attention to the consequences of our actions, the motives that compel action, the constraints that we, as a society, develop and abide by, and the well-being of humanity in general. These facets are disengaged when mimicry is established as the sole means by which one becomes moral.

What of the spirited individuals and groups for whom mimicry is absurd, for those who prefer to step outside of convention, for those catalysts of change whose world-view stands in opposition to that of the majority? They are invaluable to society, and to the moral sphere. Their voices must be heard. This is not to say that we accept alternative perspectives simply because they are alternative, but it is to say that there is merit to stepping outside of conventional norms, and this stepping outside acts as a catalyst for change in society.

4.5 Customary Morality

This is a suitable time to revisit what conventional morality is, and why it is problematic when it informs a moral framework ostensibly developed to nurture the moral development of students. The following lengthy quote plainly summarizes what is meant by the term customary morality, and a keen reader will note that it could be used to summarize character education as well. Dewey writes:
Conventional morality is precisely a morality of praise and blame based on the code
of valuations which happens to be current at a particular time in a particular social group.
[Here I call the readers’ attention to the aforementioned process of selecting traits that
members of the community hold in esteem] Whatever conforms, at least outwardly, to current
practices, especially those of an institutional sort receives commendation or at least passes
without censure. [Recall that character traits were selected if no one in the group disagreed
with them- the criterion was that the trait pass without censure.] The practical effect is a
negative morality. Virtue is identified with “respectability”, and respectability means such
conduct as is exempt from overt reproach and censure rather than what is inherently worthy of
respect. The moral ideal of multitudes of persons comes to be that sort of behavior which will
pass without arousing adverse comment, just as a child too often identifies the “right” with
whatever passes without a scolding.109

When the authors of Finding Common Ground designate the character traits they
have chosen as universal, they are actually just referring to the moral understanding of
members of the community, or in Dewey’s terms, ‘multitudes of persons’ who have consented
to traits by not overtly disagreeing with them. It is likely that this process, and this form of
moral education, will not surpass the childlike assumption that an act is right if it is not
reprimanded. In order to become a capable, authentic moral agent, moving beyond
conventional morality is required. This begins, in germ, as Dewey tells, when an individual
begins to question an act: when the conventional practice is no longer passively accepted as
right. When one asks, “why is such an act praised, and not this other act?” It is at this point

109 Dewey, 254
that moral theory can develop, and not when it resides in convention as *Finding Common Ground* does. This moral questioning is an exercise in freedom. Without this freedom to question normative standards, morality would not progress, and individuals would not develop moral agency.

The traits that the public considers virtuous in a character-based morality are established according to cultural and social norms. This conventional morality, expressed in character education, makes use of what is already esteemed in society; it does not look at what ought to be esteemed, or why the public esteems some traits over others. It follows the ought/is fallacy, and declares: what is, is right. If the values of a particular society are unethical, a framework based in virtue ethics will not identify and improve upon the values it possesses. Instead, the normative structure that shapes the virtues and vices that are esteemed and condemned will persist and perpetuate conventional attitudes and beliefs concerning right and wrong. In a sexist society, sexism will persist.

Customary morality leaves some behind. There are many for whom conventional moral imperatives do not resonate. Pragmatism offers a means by which each independent moral actor can expand their moral imagination and improve their deliberative and reflective capacities. Within a pluralistic environment, imagination becomes a key quality to enable authentic moral becoming. Much of interacting with others requires an ability to understand and empathize with their experiences and perspective. In order to understand those who are different from us, we must engage our imagination. Likewise, we ought to pay close attention when others are being imaginative.
4.6 Reflective Morality

Conventional morality has been discussed at length now. Its antagonist, reflective morality, will emerge now as a savior of moral becoming. Reflection, the active component of reflective morality, concerns the critique of normative moral standards. It is different than conventional morality because it questions why something is valued in society, and considers whether or not it ought to be valued. Conventional morality passively accepts normative standards; it takes its conception of right and good, of rules from institutions and normative standards. Passive assimilation is sufficient for conventional morality, and this is neither authentic nor ethical.

The purpose of reflective morality is “that a person shall see for himself what he is doing and why he is doing it…and shall be sensitive to the forces which make him [or her] act as he [or she] does act.”110 There is a sense of agency in reflective morality that is not present within its conventional counterpart. The individual becomes responsible for accepting or refusing the customary standards of morality, and for understanding them. It is no longer sufficient to abide by current practices without thoughtful consideration of those practices. When an individual knows the various sources of motivation and beliefs he or she possesses, they can reflect and alter their behavior if necessary. Otherwise, without insight into the ways our ideas are formed, an individual is at the whim of his or her own emotions, or the praise and blame of others. Without reflection, humans act as “automated automatons.”111

110 Dewey, 255

111 Dewey, 270
Reflective morality shifts the center of gravity within the moral sphere.\textsuperscript{112} One begins to think about why something is accepted or admonished, and this leads to some principle. Without this, moral theory, even unwittingly, cannot emerge. Instead, it relies on some established belief concerning what is right and wrong.\textsuperscript{113} Within customary morality, definitive rules and precepts are accepted and enforced; these cannot emerge from reflective morality. Reflective morality recognizes the perpetual evaluation of standards and principles. It develops standards by which we can judge acts, and it judges too the standard.

Re-evaluating conventional moral norms is essential for becoming ethical. Were this not done, corporal punishment would remain an active form of discipline for students, for example, and segregation would persist in public schools. In short, conventional norms would not evolve, and public institutions would abide by outdated standards of morality that modernity finds outrageous. If custom does not evolve over time, it becomes dogmatic and unethical. In other words, custom requires a reflective moral agent if progress is to be made. New problems and issues that emerge as time passes cannot be solved by old beliefs and customs.

This discussion of reflection brings forth another central issue in facilitating the moral growth of students in Ontario public schools: freedom. By this I mean freedom to exist outside the normative standards of conventional morality. As Dewey makes clear,

[H]istory shows how much of moral progress has been due to those who in their own time were regarded as rebels and treated as criminals…Toleration of difference in moral judgment

\textsuperscript{112} Dewey, 162

\textsuperscript{113} Dewey, 162
is a duty which those most insistent upon duty find it difficult to learn...and yet without freedom of thought and expression of ideas, moral progress can occur only accidentally and by stealth.  

Caspray adopts this argument and discusses the figures of the trickster and the prophet as exemplars of the outsider who precipitates a meaningful shift in conventional morality. The trickster and the prophet are figures who function as catalysts for change in society because they are subversive: they conflict with the normative standards established by conventional morality, and this conflict compels society to question the standards that they have established. They foster the germination of a reflective morality simply by existing as outsiders; by acting in a manner that does not conform to conventional morality, subversive figures encourage reflection and reassessment of accepted norms and create a space for change to occur. Caspray describes the figure here:

“Trickster is a destroyer and creator of forms, categories and moral codes. By providing possibilities that contrast with the actual, the figure of the Trickster enacts the most powerful form of criticism—he opens up a sense of possibilities thereby making us aware of constrictions that hem us in and of burdens that oppress us or others.”

This figure is an embodiment of the ideas presented in reflective morality: it precipitates thoughtful analysis of current practices and moral norms, it is reactive and even if initially rejected, the ideas presented by a prophet or trickster may resonate with others.


115 Garrison, 238

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Moral agents, in order to authentically hold and feel the imperative weight of their moral knowledge, require a space in which they can share, and act in accordance with, their values. As Luxon states, “confidence in one’s values requires that one be able to articulate and defend these with and against others in a community.”\textsuperscript{116} This sharing, defending, and critiquing cannot be done when desirable traits are established and handed down to the students. There are bound to be individuals for whom the mark of universality misses; for whom the chosen traits do not resonate. Deweyan pragmatism honors the value of outsiders; character education does not recognize modes of being moral that do not align with the established traits.

4.7 Deliberation

Deliberation is an essential component of reflective morality: when reflection is focused on a specific course of actions, on something practical, reflection becomes deliberation. Deliberative skills are required for the development of moral agency because morality occurs in particular moments that are not governed by an easily accessible, specific code of behavior. When engaged in a moral dilemma, an individual must decide, through active deliberation, what course of action he or she will take. Conventional standards, or rules cannot outline a course of action to suit every moral dilemma, furthermore, they act as guidelines within pragmatism; nothing is fixed. A moral agent will succeed in becoming ethical if he or she has the ability to evaluate how to navigate a particular moral dilemma. At

\textsuperscript{116} Nancy Luxon, “Ethics and Subjectivity: Practises of Self-Governance in the Later Lectures of Michel Foucault,” \textit{Political Theory} 36 (2008), 200
one point, Dewey refers to conscientiousness, the extended practice of deliberation, as “moral wisdom,” which is resonant with Aristotle’s conception of practical wisdom. This navigation entails an involved course of intellectual and affective processes. It is the practical incarnation of reflective morality, and thus requires critical attention to the standards by which actions are judged, i.e. will the act interfere with or contribute to the welfare of all? In order to answer this question, potential courses of action must be imagined along with their potential effects and consequences.

Deliberation is important because it marks the beginning of moral becoming. The alternative to engaging in deliberative processes before determining how to act is to rely upon habit or custom; it is not to act ethically. To act morally requires that one intelligently interpret the rules that govern the moral domain, and consider the potential, foreseeable consequences of pursuing one course over another. Fixed rules are insufficient; for example, ‘do not lie,’ becomes problematic as a deontological constraint when one is hiding a child from a vicious predator. However, rules are necessary and should not be dismissed entirely. It is important to consider moral conventions, and reassess their value and practical consequences in particular circumstances. Moral conventions do have value, and can influence moral behavior and decision-making, but they must be provisional; not only do they conflict at times, they also evolve over space and time. To say that one rule be adopted by all to create a more ethical environment will not lead to the development of sound moral agency within communities and individuals, it will lead to dogmatism.

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117 Luxon., 258

118 ibid., 270
Treat others as an end in themselves rather than a means to an end, for example, appears to be, and perhaps is, an ethical principle that one would have a difficult time arguing against, but it requires near constant interpretation; it must be placed and understood within a variety of perpetually shifting and emerging contexts. It is not often immediately clear how to distinguish between using others as a means to an end and as an end in themselves, or even what that means in a practical sense. One has to intellectually consider and interpret standards and principles, and their consequences: how they align with the well-being of the collective, and so on. Pursuing ethical ends, for Dewey, merges with pursuing ends in general though they may not immediately appear to be moral in nature. This speaks to the problem of will: what makes an individual want to be ethical? Happiness at its most basic level is the fulfillment of some desire. When humans desire what is good for all, they are happy. What is good for all, or does not interfere with the welfare of others, is reconciled with what is good for the individual. Therefore, when an individual pursues that which will not interfere with the welfare of others, and that pursuit is culminated with the fulfillment of a desire, a morally good act is committed.

The interest one has in achieving some end in accordance with the welfare of all, and in establishing standards that ought to be esteemed, must be whole hearted (sincere), continuous and persistent, and impartial and enduring. In order to accomplish such an important and involved pursuit, an individual must actively and intentionally practice deliberation. Much like Aristotelian practical wisdom, this requires a thorough understanding of the particular dilemma, a comprehension of the end sought (e.g., happiness), apprehension of the standards presently governing behavior, the potential effects of taking one course of
action or another, and how these consequences will implicate the welfare of others. The complexity and gravity of the situation at hand will determine the length of deliberation required of a moral agent. Dewey notes that the moral realm is not a distinct and separate sphere: all of our acts are potentially moral because they inform our character, conduct, and have consequences that extend beyond what is immediately apparent. Therefore, deliberation is a capacity that permeates all decision-making.

This process of moral deliberation, when it becomes habitual, is called conscientiousness. Dewey describes conscientiousness as “constituted by scrupulous attentiveness to the potentialities of any act or proposed aim.”

It is not a passive enacting of conventional morality; it is a thorough, intellectual weighing and examining of various potential options and outcomes. The act of deliberating, of imagining a wide range of potential consequences, should not be considered cold and scientific. Deliberation is existential in nature; the act of becoming moral is primary. Dewey underlies this point when he says, “If these [imagined, potential] consequences are conceived merely as remote, if their picturing does not arouse a present sense of peace, of fulfillment, or of dissatisfaction, of incompleteness and irritation, the process of thinking out consequences remains purely intellectual. It is as barren of influence upon behavior as the mathematical speculations of a disembodied angel.”

This falls in line with the previous discussion of establishing ends that align with one’s happiness, and do not interfere with the happiness of others. There has to be some

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119 Ibid., 273

120 Ibid., 274
imperative to follow the path one has established through deliberation; one has to desire the potential outcome in order to act according to its fruition.

4.8 Imagination

A moral agent requires a well-developed imaginative capacity in order to competently deliberate. As deliberation is reflective morality practiced in some concrete experience, imagination is the means by which the deliberative process takes place:

“Deliberation is actually an imaginative rehearsal of various courses of conduct. We give way, in our mind, to some impulse; we try, in our mind, some plan. Following its career through various steps, we find ourselves in imagination in the presence of the consequences that would follow: and as we then like and approve, or dislike and disapprove, these consequences, we find the original impulse or plan good or bad. Deliberation is dramatic and active.121

Deliberation is fundamentally imaginative. Preceding an act, imaginative rehearsal of what we might do is necessary to determine the act that will engender consequences that abide by a provisional standard of what is right. Imaginative rehearsal is likewise necessary for exploring the consequences of following a provisional standard and determining if it does indeed contribute to the general well-being of society, or if there has been some new development by which the moral actor can recognize the interference with the happiness of another in following some plan. Imagination is embedded, though not explicitly discussed at length by Dewey, in pragmatism; it is a fundamental concept underlying what it means to be

121 Dewey, 275
moral, and its development and use is requisite for authentic moral becoming. Conversely, conventional morality is marked by an absolute attenuation of imagination. An individual does not need to imagine potential courses of action if they are prescribed a set of traits, and they need only act accordingly.

Without imagination, or the ability to perceive through the mind what is not actually present, deliberation would be entirely impossible. Pragmatism rests upon its ability to perceive potential courses of action in advance of acting. It is not a simple task to create and review, in the mind, potentialities; thus, imagination is a capacity that must be practiced and valued within education if moral agency is a desired quality of an educated person. Moral decision-making cannot sufficiently take into account the implications of a chosen resolution without imagination, without rehearsing how a myriad of decisions might play out. Furthermore, the perspective of those with whom we are not close, and thus do not have insight into their experience of the world must be imagined: it cannot be known otherwise. It follows that imagination is required for empathy. Impartiality rests upon considering the effects of our behavior and decision making upon all others, some of whom we know virtually nothing about. Without imagination, we cannot be impartial. This is not to say that imagination in isolation is sufficient for the development of moral agency, rather, it is one requisite capacity.

Imagination is embedded within all kinds of daily, seemingly trivial, processes of reasoning and deciding. Deciding what meal to order depending on how we imagine it might taste, or deciding what ingredients to use when cooking requires imagination. Determining the fastest route to take when travelling. Although it seems as though there are many mundane
acts that are distinct from moral reasoning, or have no moral import, Dewey argues that they are part of our conduct, and lead to some end. Acts, though they do not seem morally significant, in fact, can be judged according to the ends that they lead to. Every act is potentially moral because it contributes to the strengthening or weakening of one’s tendencies to commit certain kinds of acts. Dewey argues that how we decide to act in a given situation “signifies a building up and solidifying of certain desires; an increased sensitiveness and responsiveness to certain stimuli, a confirmed or an impaired capacity to attend to and think about certain things, not just a tendency to repeated outer action.”

All that is comprised within the pragmatic model of moral development requires imagination; it is embedded throughout this framework, and I argue, it ought to be a prominent section of any model that encourages moral development. Abiding by provisional standards requires that one imagine what it would be like to act according to a different standard, or how to improve a standard, otherwise the act of abiding by a standard become vacuous and easy. Deliberating requires imagining the potential outcomes of an act, and potential acts. Reflection entails thinking about normative standards and determining if they are right and good, or in need of revision. These capacities contribute to ones’ conduct, and the development of authentic moral agency.

In order to act in a manner that contributes to our moral becoming, individuals must engage their capacities for reflection, deliberation, and imagination. These capacities, on their

\[122\] Dewey, 169

\[123\] Dewey, 170
own, do not equate with a morally good person, but they allow for, and contribute to, the development of authentic moral agency.

4.9 Conclusion

Moral philosophy typically offers insight into the relation between the good and the right; Dewey puts forth his concept of standards that subsumes this distinction. Standards are the means by which we evaluate and judge something; it is good if it is esteemed by society. Dewey argues that standards are provisional or they lead to dogmatism, and that the only standard worth maintaining is that which does not detract from the general welfare.

The welfare of all is a complex and complicated concept that, like all pragmatic standards, is subject to revision. Moral agents move toward its realization within a pluralistic context if all perspectives are understood as intrinsically worthy of recognition and understanding, even if they are not adopted. The interest in perpetually revising standards to align with the welfare of all must be sincere, impartial, and enduring. The capacities that enable this practice are reflection, deliberation, and imagination. These capacities encourage authentic moral becoming, and I argue, ought to inform the model for moral education in Ontario public schools.
Chapter 5: A Revised Model

5.1 Introduction

The following is a revision of Finding Common Ground. It is important to note that this thesis does not attempt to discuss methods of implementing the framework that I have suggested within Ontario public schools. Included below are a few choice sections of the document that have been rewritten to incorporate the pragmatic framework I have suggested. This revision is an attempt to convey that there are alternate viable models for moral education. By altering the language of the document, alternate models for moral becoming are possible and can be engaged, and the implications of the present model will be problematized. For example, in previous chapters I wrote about the prevalence of the word ‘respect’ through the document, and what the implications are of making this concept a hallmark of moral education, i.e. it is too easily conflated with obedience. In the sections below, I have consciously removed the idea of ‘respect’ and its connotations of compliance and hierarchy from the text, and replaced it with more active ideas associated with becoming moral, such as imagination and reflection. In order to heighten the elements of the documents that conflict most profoundly with the framework I am arguing for, I have retained, as much as possible, the neutral language used in writing the document: referring to “our students” and so on. This provides a stark contrast between the elements of the document that have been changed.

Deciding to maintain the form of Finding Common Ground while altering the content was deliberate. This thesis has argued in favour of a pragmatic framework for moral
education, and has pointed out the ways in which character education, as it is instantiated in *Finding Common Ground* perpetuates conventional morality, and tacitly promotes conformity. I will not reiterate that argument in this chapter. The aim for this revision, then, is to provide a stark contrast between the philosophical underpinnings of character education and pragmatism. Maintaining the medium while altering only those concepts that are especially problematic will alert the reader to the fundamental variance in approaching moral education from a character development perspective, and through a pragmatic framework.

There are challenges and limitations to the re-writing of *Finding Common Ground*. First, it is difficult to retain the complexity of an ethical framework within a document. Second, this exercise does not focus on the presentation, dissemination, and implementation of a dynamic model of moral education. Third, the role of this document is ambiguous: what it is meant to convey, and its intended use are not concretely explained. For example, questions like the following remain unanswered: What percentage of teachers are aware of its existence? Is it something that is referred to actively and often throughout the school year or week? How is it disseminated? Is it given out during a meeting with the principal? Is it one of many issues discussed at a staff meeting, or is it the primary reason for the meeting? Is it engaged in an ongoing manner: does it act as a finished and complete version of what character education is supposed to be, or is it a tool for discussing how character education might look in schools? Continued work on moral education might explore these aspects of character education, and thus more effectively make arguments or recommendations for practical implementation of models.
The following includes excerpts from the *Finding Common Ground* document. I have rewritten and revised the content of these excerpts so that they fall in line with Deweyan pragmatism. Actual text from the *Finding Common Ground* document is presented in italics, and is followed by a plain text revision that is in line with Deweyan pragmatism.

### 5.2 Excerpts and Revisions

#### 5.2.1 Moral Becoming and Character Development

**Character Development in Ontario Schools**

*What Is Character Development?*

Character development is the deliberate effort to nurture the universal attributes upon which schools and communities find consensus. These attributes provide a standard for behaviour against which we hold ourselves accountable. They permeate all that happens in schools. They bind us together across the lines that often divide us in society. They form the basis of our relationships and of responsible citizenship. They are a foundation for excellence and equity in education, and for our vision of learning cultures and school communities that are respectful, safe, caring and inclusive.

Excellence in education includes character development. Through character, we find common ground.\(^{124}\)

**Moral Becoming in Ontario Schools**

What is our model of moral becoming?

\(^{124}\) *Finding Common Ground*, 8
Deliberate effort to develop those capacities required for the flourishing of good, kind individuals and communities. Reflection, deliberation, and imagination will allow our students to thoughtfully consider the normative standards that implicate our interactions; imagine how those standards, if they remain in place, will shape society and school communities, especially concerning the marginalized members of our communities; imagine potential alternate standards and means to human happiness; and deliberate upon a variety of courses of action with the aim of allowing sufficient freedom for all to pursue courses that bring happiness. Let this model form the basis of our relationships and of a reflective, cooperative society.

This is a foundation for authentic moral becoming

5.2.2 Key Messages

Key Messages
- Respect for diversity must be at the heart of our policies, programs, practices and interactions
- Learning cultures and school communities must be respectful, caring, safe, and inclusive.
• Character development must be integrated into the curricular experiences of students and embedded into the culture of the school and classroom in an explicit and intentional manner.

• Character development is not a stand alone initiative; it has linkages with learning and academic achievement, respect for diversity, citizenship development and parent and community partnerships. \(^{125}\)

\(^{125}\) Finding Common Ground, 4
Key Messages:

- Participation with diversity: welcoming a variety of perspectives and exploring new ways of being in and understanding the world, must be at the heart of our policies, programs, practices and interactions.

- Learning cultures and school communities must be dynamic, imaginative, reflective, and deliberative.

- Imagination, reflection, and deliberation are capacities that must be integrated into the curricular experiences of students and embedded into the culture of the school and classroom in an explicit and intentional manner.

- The attempt to encourage the development of moral agency is not a stand alone initiative; reflection, deliberation, and imagination are capacities that have linkages with learning and academic achievement, respect for diversity, citizenship development, and parent and community partnerships.
5.2.3 Key Beliefs and Principles

**Key Beliefs and Principles**

The following beliefs and principles provide the framework for Ontario’s Character Development Initiative. They are intended to guide the planning, implementation, and review processes of boards and schools.

*A Commitment to Share Responsibility*

1. Character Development is a:
   a. Primary responsibility of parents and families.
   b. Cornerstone of a civil, just and democratic society
   c. Foundation of our publicly funded education system

2. Character development must be a whole-school effort. All members of the school community share the responsibility to model, teach and expect demonstrations of the universal attributes in all school, classroom and extracurricular activities.

3. Character development is not a new curriculum. It requires an integrated, cross-curricular approach to learning. It is in everything that we do in schools and is embedded into policies, programs, processes, practises and interactions.

4. Student engagement is essential in the character development process. The meaningful participation and involvement of students is central to the success of the initiative.

5. Character development supports student achievement because it:
   a. Develops the whole student as an individual, as an engaged learner and as a citizen.
b. Addresses the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains of learning

c. Contributes to respectful, safe, caring and inclusive school environments that are prerequisites for learning

d. Creates learning environments that are positive and collaborative so that teachers spend less time disciplining and more time doing what they do best—namely, teaching

e. Sets high expectations for learning and behavior and engages students in sharing the responsibility for their own learning

6. Character development strives for an ever-growing depth of self-awareness, reflection and understanding. It is not about indoctrination. It is about the development of critical and analytical thinking. It is not about punishment. It is about developing self-discipline. Behavioral consequences are addressed in Codes of Conduct that are mandatory in all Ontario schools.

7. Character development is about community development. Engaging the community in sharing the responsibility for character development is essential to the success of the initiative.

8. The increasing diversity of Ontario’s population creates an opportunity for us to determine the beliefs and principles we hold in common. When school boards engage a wide cross-section of their communities in building consensus on character attributes, they are, in essence, engaged in a process of finding common ground.

9. The principles and attributes of character development are universal, based in equity and transcend differences as well as other demographic factors. Empathy for others and respect for the dignity of all persons are essential characteristics of an inclusive society.
10. *The Character Development Initiative upholds and reinforces the tenets of human rights, constitutional rights, and federal and provincial legislation.*

**Key Beliefs and Principles**

1. The development of moral agency is a:
   a. Dynamic process that we collectively contribute to.
   b. Cornerstone of a society that strives to shed its divisive practices, including racism, classism, sexism, and more; and strives to strengthen its imaginative and equitable practices.
   c. Integral part of our publicly funded education system.

2. Actively and thoughtfully engaging in the moral sphere must be a whole school effort
   a. All members of the school community share the responsibility to model, teach, and expect demonstrations of imagination, reflection, and deliberation in all school, classroom, and extracurricular activities

3. Practicing imagining, reflecting and deliberating requires an integrated, cross-curricular approach to learning. It is in everything that we do in schools and is embedded into policies, programs, processes, practices and interactions.

4. Student engagement is essential in the development of imaginative, reflective, and deliberative capacities. The meaningful participation and involvement of a truly diverse range of students is central to the success of the initiative.

5. A pragmatic model of moral becoming supports student becoming because it:
   a. Sets high expectation for learning and engages students in sharing their diverse perspectives in a caring environment

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*Finding Common Ground, 5*
b. Creates an environment that is positive and collaborative.

c. Contributes to caring and inclusive school communities that enable deep and active learning.

d. Sets high expectations for the school community to encourage and foster imaginative learning processes

6. This pragmatic model strives from an ever-growing depth of self, and other-awareness, reflection, imagination, understanding. It is not about indoctrination. It is about the development of authentic moral agency. It is not about punishment.

7. Moral becoming is about community development. Engaging the community in imaginative and reflective practices is essential to the success of the initiative.

8. The increasing diversity of Ontario’s population creates an opportunity for us to continually explore and seek to understand the standards and principles held by all members of the school community. When school boards engage a wide cross-section of their communities through discussion, active listening, and reflecting upon conventional normative standards, they are, in essence, creating an inclusive, free space.

9. This initiative upholds and reinforces the freedom of individuals to present themselves in the best way they know how to be, and to strive to become more fully aware of their sense of morality and how they interact with others.

5.2.4 Finding Common Ground

*Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12*
Engaging our students, our schools and our communities.

The government has introduced a series of initiatives designed to enhance academic achievement for all students in Ontario’s publicly-funded elementary and secondary schools. Through the Character Development Initiative, the government addresses a complementary and equally critical aspect of student success focused on developing the student as a learner, as an individual, as a citizen and as an active member of the school and broader community. The concept of character development is rooted in the belief that parents, schools and communities share the responsibility for, and the benefits of, the development of our young people as empathetic and involved citizens.

This K–12 initiative involves all members of the board, school and community in developing the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that students require to become caring and socially responsible members of society. The initiative also affirms the importance of respect as a fundamental characteristic of relationships in Ontario schools.

Students are the centre of our school system. Consequently, they must be active participants in this process. Character development can neither be done to them nor can it be successful without them. The commitment of everyone in the school and community to engaging students in building inclusive school cultures characterized by positive attributes and responsible citizenship is essential to this initiative.

Character cannot be acquired passively, nor can it be delivered solely as units of curriculum. Character must be developed through active participation and supported by dialogue, reflection and action. The Character Development Initiative is grounded in the vision of an education system
in which students play a pivotal role, and are actively engaged in their own learning, in the life of the school and in their communities.

*Character development is about citizenship in action.*

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**Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12**

**Engaging our students, our schools and our communities.**

A pragmatic model of moral education will contribute to the authentic moral becoming of our students. This concept is rooted in the idea that in order to navigate complex moral dilemmas, our students need to develop the capacity to imagine potential courses of action, and their potential consequences, and reflect upon conventional standards while seeking to determine if they ought to be the standards by which we abide. It is rooted in the idea that we will all contribute, and engage with, the development of our selves and young people as empathetic and imaginative citizens.

This K-12 initiative involves all members of the board, school and community in developing the capacities that all members of the school community require for authentic moral becoming, and consequently, the improvement of society. The initiative also affirms the importance of empathy as a fundamental characteristic of relationships in Ontario schools.

Students are the center of our school system. Consequently, they must be active participants in this process (as teachers, principals, staff, and all members of the school community). Moral becoming is not something that can be imposed upon another; this model, therefore, will not be successful without engaging participants. The commitment of everyone in the school community to engaging one another in sharing ideas and experiences will help to

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127 *Finding Common Ground*, 8

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identify the implications of the conventional standards of behavior we presently abide by, and enable us to discern which are problematic, and which are conducive to equality.

5.3 Conclusion

What is most striking about the re-writing that I undertook, is the ease with which the fundamental principles can be rewritten. Relatively little of the form and function of the document is altered. Much of what is contained within the document has such little bearing upon the principles contained therein that it need not be removed; it is compatible with each competing ethical framework. This may be inevitable in this format, however. The language throughout the document is simple and repetitive; it is not a complex document that requires thoughtful, time-consuming interpretation. The facile, easily understood and adoptable vision put forth in the original document indicates something propagandistic; the repetition of simple ideas that are presented as innocuous and benign and provided en masse to educators throughout the province, and online to whom ever is interested. This reiterates the argument that the document serves political, rather than ethical ends. As previously mentioned, this exercise in revision is an attempt to provide a stark contrast between a pragmatic framework, and a character based framework for moral becoming. It is outside the realm of this thesis to suggest improved ways that this framework might be presented and implemented in Ontario public schools. The aim is to apply, to some extent, that which has been written in the preceding chapters; to give it a concreteness that may contribute to the understanding of, and force of the argument.
Chapter 6 : Conclusion

*Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Public Schools, K-12* is an initiative put forth by the Ministry of Education in Ontario that serves as a form of moral education. Character development is conceptually derived from virtue ethics, though it extrapolates only limited and partial elements of this ethical theory. As a result, the initiative is not a viable ethical framework. Although the initiative employs language that suggests it is a moral endeavor, upon close examination of the initiative, including the way it discusses morality (though implicitly, without using the word, ‘moral’), character, and citizenship, it is clear that the initiative serves political ends. It does not sufficiently engage with the realm of moral philosophy in its development of an ethical framework, nor does it acknowledge the complexity and ambiguity that mark the moral realm. As a result, normative, conventional standards are tacitly enacted and perpetuated; authentic moral becoming is not facilitated.

In response to this initiative that rearticulates conventional normative standards, I argued a pragmatic ethical model to serve as a framework for moral education in Ontario public schools. Not only does this model recognize, and indeed incorporate, the diverse range of perspectives that comprise Canadian society, it embodies the parameters of the moral realm: the complexity and ambiguity are recognized and their influence is present in the provisional nature of principles that guide moral becoming in Deweyan pragmatism. This model emphasizes the development of capacities that will facilitate authentic moral becoming, rather than offer a strict code. The capacities, reflection, deliberation, and imagination enable thoughtful navigation of moral dilemmas that results in, if not contribute to, at least the absence of interference with the collective well-being.
Moral education permeates virtually all aspects of education. Unconsciously or not, standards of judgment concerning right and wrong, assessments of value, and conceptions of the good life are presented by all members of the school community; they are interpreted and consumed by young minds. If we do not pay close, critical attention to the ways in which we facilitate the moral becoming of students, and the way we conceptualize the good life, we are at great risk of perpetuating divisive, inequitable, classist, racist, sexist, ageist, etc., normative standards that will continue to shape our society and the way we interact with one another. Furthermore, in continuing to accept and implement character education, we will facilitate a diminished and reductive approach to morality: students will conflate moral becoming with being respectful, or conforming. Emphasizing imagination, deliberation, and reflection will allow students to navigate not only the moral realm wisely and authentically, it will allow them to successfully navigate many of their experiences, and to contribute to an education system that fosters thoughtful, creative, fair modes of being in the world. Through imagining a variety of alternative routes to realizing some end, and the consequences of following a particular course; through reflecting upon conventional standards and thoughtfully, critically deciding whether or not a standard should persist; through deliberating before an act takes place, all with an eye toward the general welfare, society and education can be improved.
Une publication équivalente est disponible en français sous le titre suivant : Vers des points communs : le développement du caractère dans les écoles de l’Ontario (de la maternelle à la 12e année).

This publication is available on the Ministry of Education website at http://www.edu.gov.on.ca
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It is a pleasure to introduce the document *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K–12*. This document reflects the collaboration of three departments of the Ministry of Education with the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat leading the initiative.

It is important to acknowledge the many schools and boards that already have character development programs. We congratulate them and urge them to take their existing programs to new levels of effectiveness. Their experience and expertise will be invaluable as we build capacity in other school boards so that character development becomes a reality in all Ontario schools.

Consultations were held across the province in the spring of 2007 with the primary purpose of gathering input on the October 2006 discussion paper on character development. This document has now been revised to reflect the perspectives gathered during these consultations.

This initiative is coming at the right time in education in Ontario. There is a sense of optimism for the future of education in the province. Students are improving in their learning and achievement. Character development will make our vision of education truly balanced and holistic as we revisit the foundations of an equitable and inclusive public education – namely, intellectual, character and citizenship development.

This is the time for us to reaffirm our commitment to the potential of our publicly-funded school system to deliver on its promise to educate all students successfully. But it must be recognized that a quality education includes the education of the heart as well as the mind. It includes a focus on the whole person. It means preparing students to be citizens who have empathy and respect for others within our increasingly diverse communities. It also means providing opportunities for students to understand deeply the importance of civic engagement and what it means to be productive citizens in an interdependent world.

Character development is education at its best.

We invite all Ontarians to make character development a foundation of our education system. Our students deserve no less.

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Avis E. Glaze  
Ontario’s Education Commissioner and  
Senior Advisor to the Minister of Education

George Zegarac  
Assistant Deputy Minister  
Strategic Planning and Elementary/Secondary Programs Division

Dominic Giroux  
Assistant Deputy Minister  
French Language Education  
Educational Operations Division
Character development is the deliberate effort to nurture the universal attributes upon which schools and communities find consensus. These attributes provide a standard for behaviour against which we hold ourselves accountable. They permeate all that happens in schools. They bind us together across the lines that often divide us in society. They form the basis of our relationships and of responsible citizenship. They are a foundation for excellence and equity in education, and for our vision of learning cultures and school communities that are respectful, safe, caring and inclusive.

Excellence in education includes character development. Through character, we find common ground.
Ontario’s Character Development Initiative emphasizes the importance of equitable and inclusive schools in which all students are welcomed and respected, feel a sense of belonging, and are inspired to achieve to the best of their ability. Our focus on reaching every student requires high expectations for all students in learning, academic achievement and citizenship and character development.

- Character development is about excellence in education, communities that are vibrant and caring, and students who will think critically, feel deeply and act wisely.
- A quality education is about more than academic achievement – it is about the development of the whole person.
- Parents and families have the primary responsibility for the development of their children’s character, with the support of their school and community.
- Student engagement is essential to all character development processes.
- Ontario teachers and all education workers play a pivotal role in the success of character development in our schools.
- Character development must be a whole-school effort. All members of the school community share the responsibility to model, teach and expect demonstrations of the universal attributes in all school, classroom and extracurricular activities.
- Respect for diversity must be at the heart of our policies, programs, practices and interactions.
- Learning cultures and school communities must be respectful, caring, safe and inclusive.
- Character development must be integrated into the curricular experiences of students and embedded into the culture of the school and classroom in an explicit and intentional manner.
- Character development is not a stand alone initiative; it has linkages with learning and academic achievement, respect for diversity, citizenship development and parent and community partnerships.
The following key beliefs and principles provide the framework for Ontario’s Character Development Initiative. They are intended to guide the planning, implementation, and review processes of boards and schools.

A Commitment to Share Responsibility

1. Character development is a:
   - primary responsibility of parents and families
   - cornerstone of a civil, just and democratic society
   - foundation of our publicly funded education system.

2. Character development must be a whole-school effort. All members of the school community share the responsibility to model, teach and expect demonstrations of the universal attributes in all school, classroom and extracurricular activities.

3. Character development is not a new curriculum. It requires an integrated, cross-curricular approach to learning. It is in everything that we do in schools and is embedded into policies, programs, processes, practices and interactions.

A Commitment to Student Achievement and Engagement

4. Student engagement is essential in the character development process. The meaningful participation and involvement of students is central to the success of the initiative.

5. Character development supports student achievement because it:
   - develops the whole student as an individual, as an engaged learner and as a citizen
   - addresses the cognitive, affective and behavioural domains of learning
   - contributes to respectful, safe, caring and inclusive school environments that are prerequisites for learning
   - creates learning environments that are positive and collaborative so that teachers spend less time disciplining and more time doing what they do best – namely, teaching
   - sets high expectations for learning and behaviour and engages students in sharing the responsibility for their own learning.

6. Character development strives for an ever-growing depth of self-awareness, reflection and understanding. It is not about indoctrination. It is about the development of critical and analytical thinking. It is not about punishment. It is about developing self-discipline. Behavioural consequences are addressed in Codes of Conduct that are mandatory in all Ontario schools.

“Inclusivity is not an option; it is a moral choice that must be made and someone needs to lead the way. Our school has done that, and now we are in a good and peaceful place.”

– Nicole Levesque
Chaplain, Ottawa Catholic School Board
A Commitment to Community Building and Equity

7. Character development is about community development. Engaging the community in sharing the responsibility for character development is essential to the success of the initiative.

8. The increasing diversity of Ontario’s population creates an opportunity for us to determine the beliefs and principles we hold in common. When school boards engage a wide cross-section of their communities in building consensus on character attributes, they are, in essence, engaged in a process of finding common ground.

9. The principles and attributes of character development are universal, based in equity and transcend differences as well as other demographic factors. Empathy for others and respect for the dignity of all persons are essential characteristics of an inclusive society.

10. The Character Development Initiative upholds and reinforces the tenets of human rights, constitutional rights, and federal and provincial legislation.

“Teaching good character is the responsibility of each and every member of our community. It is about recognizing and exemplifying positive character traits that both our children and we display. Children are our most valuable asset, they are our future. What we chose to invest in our children today is what our world of tomorrow will be.”

– Elaine Pavloff Tordei
Community member, York Region
What Character Development Is and What It Is Not …

Ontario’s vision of character development must be clearly articulated to ensure that there are common understandings of the key beliefs and principles on which the Character Development Initiative is founded.

The following statements provide an overview of what character development is – and what it is not.

Character development in Ontario schools …

- ✔ is about all members of the community sharing the responsibility for supporting students and families in the development of character
- ✔ is about critical and analytical thinking, questioning, anticipating problems and contributing to solutions
- ✔ is about self-management, self-discipline and the development of interpersonal competencies
- ✔ is about self-awareness, reflection and understanding – doing what’s right because it’s the right thing to do
- ✔ is about the development of standards of behaviour against which we hold ourselves accountable
- ✔ must include the active involvement and engagement of students
- ✔ is a process that develops character in a deliberate and intentional manner through interactions with others and engagement in the wider community
- ✔ is embedded in all aspects of school life – in its policies, programs, practices, procedures, processes and interactions
- ✔ is about inclusiveness, equity and respect for diversity
- ✔ is about ensuring that there are opportunities to engage students in general, and disengaged and marginalized students in particular, in the initiative
- ✔ is about all students and all schools
- ✔ is about the universal attributes upon which diverse communities find common ground and is a component of many faith traditions
- ✔ complements religious and family life education in Catholic schools
- ✔ is about a process of engagement in which communities come together to build consensus on the values they hold in common
- ✘ is not about schools taking over the responsibility of parents and families
- ✘ is not about compliance
- ✘ is not about behaviour based on a fear of punishment
- ✘ is not about behaviours motivated by extrinsic rewards and recognition
- ✘ does not seek to indoctrinate
- ✘ cannot be done to students
- ✘ is not found in a textbook, binder or manual
- ✘ is not a new curriculum or an add-on
- ✘ is not about the “few” or the exclusion of some
- ✘ is not a form of religious education
- ✘ is not about a government imposing a set of moral standards
Student success is the fundamental measure of an education system. It is the ultimate expression of respect for our students and professional accountability for their achievements. Student success, however, is multidimensional. In addition to academic success, studies indicate that Ontarians share a belief in the need to develop character and to prepare students for their role in society as engaged, productive and responsible participants.

The government has introduced a series of initiatives designed to enhance academic achievement for all students in Ontario’s publicly-funded elementary and secondary schools. Through the Character Development Initiative, the government addresses a complementary and equally critical aspect of student success focused on developing the student as a learner, as an individual, as a citizen and as an active member of the school and broader community. The concept of character development is rooted in the belief that parents, schools and communities share the responsibility for, and the benefits of, the development of our young people as empathetic and involved citizens.

This K–12 initiative involves all members of the board, school and community in developing the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that students require to become caring and socially responsible members of society. The initiative also affirms the importance of respect as a fundamental characteristic of relationships in Ontario schools.

Students are the centre of our school system. Consequently, they must be active participants in this process. Character development can neither be done to them nor can it be successful without them. The commitment of everyone in the school and community to engaging students in building inclusive school cultures characterized by positive attributes and responsible citizenship is essential to this initiative.

Character cannot be acquired passively, nor can it be delivered solely as units of curriculum.

Character must be developed through active participation and supported by dialogue, reflection and action. The Character Development Initiative is grounded in the vision of an education system in which students play a pivotal role, and are actively engaged in their own learning, in the life of the school and in their communities.

Character development is about citizenship in action.
A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Our vision for education in Ontario is one of excellence in academic achievement and the development of both character and the competencies of responsible citizenship. We are committed to excellence and equity. As the province strives to provide the best possible education for all students, there is a need to transmit from one generation to the next the habits of mind and heart that are necessary for good citizenship to thrive. To this end, the Character Development Initiative, which goes hand in hand with a strong academic program, unifies and strengthens these efforts.

Developing character is a shared responsibility. There is a need for families and schools to work cooperatively to encourage students’ learning and maturing as social beings. Students are at the centre of everything that we do. Family and school alliances are necessary to create a web of support for the continuous improvement of our schools.

Our citizens are our province’s best asset. They contribute to nation building and to the continued development of a civil society. When schools address the qualities that contribute to the health and well-being of our society, they are, indeed, contributing to the improvement of the world that our students will inherit.

Character development, when fully implemented, permeates the entire life of the school. It is woven into policies, programs, practices, procedures, processes and interactions. It is a way of life. It recognizes that a respectful, caring, safe and inclusive school climate enhances learning.

Schools cannot do this alone. Everyone who works or volunteers in our schools or has a vested interest in the quality of our education system and in the calibre of our graduates has a part to play in the success of character development initiatives. For that reason, we call upon all partners in education – students, teachers, principals, supervisory officers, parents, guardians, secretaries, custodians, school council members, bus drivers, trustees, business and community leaders, members of social service agencies and faith communities to join with us in nurturing the best of the human and universal qualities that our graduates need to be successful in our increasingly interconnected and interdependent world.

We believe in the potential of our students to be responsible members of our communities and in their ability to demonstrate the universal values that we espouse as a society. We want our schools to continue to be safe models of effective relationships where students learn about and put into practice attributes such as respect, responsibility, fairness and empathy. We want students to develop self-discipline and the personal management skills that will make their communities and workplaces the best that they can be.

Together we can make this happen.
A quality education is not only geared towards the intellect, but also towards attitudes, behaviours, dispositions and sensibilities. It emphasizes all aspects of the self and domains of learning – the cognitive, affective, attitudinal and behavioural. It is about the education of the whole person. Character development, which encompasses all these domains, is a fundamental goal of education in Ontario.

Many studies, such as *The Schools We Need* (2003), highlight the importance parents place on character development while building strong foundational skills in literacy, numeracy and critical thinking. According to this study, one of the highest priority for parents is for schools to help students develop as responsible citizens and to learn how to make ethical decisions.

Another Ontario research study reinforces the finding that, indeed, parents are concerned about the character development of their children. In the *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Mary Ann Evans and her colleagues at the University of Guelph reported on their comprehensive 2004 study, *Beginning Reading: The Views of Parents and Teachers of Young Children*, in which parents who were representative of the demographics of south western Ontario were surveyed. Parents were presented with nine domains of learning and asked to rate the importance of each in preparing their children for the future. Parents consistently rated character development as a high priority.

Preparing students for the workplace is also an important goal of education. The *Ontario Skills Passport* (OSP 2007), based on extensive research and consultation by Human Resources and Social Development Canada, and Ontario’s Ministry of Education, identifies Essential Skills and important work habits that are used in virtually all occupations. Inherent to these are characteristics such as reliability, responsibility, integrity, initiative and respect. This is reinforced by the perspectives of Canadian employers in the *Employability Skills Profile* by the Conference Board of Canada (2000). It states that personal management skills such as honesty, adaptability and respect for diversity are essential for students entering the workplace.

Daniel Goleman’s research on *Emotional Intelligence* (1996), and *Social Intelligence* (2006) states that Emotional Quotient (EQ) is more important than Intelligence Quotient (IQ) in determining success in school and in life. His writing emphasizes the importance of social and emotional literacy, which he describes as the ability to identify, manage and express one’s emotions in a mature and conscientious manner. These literacies improve students’ academic achievement and overall school performance. Canadian studies (Parker 2003; Parker et al., 2004) support these research findings.
The *Early School Leavers* report (2005), based on the voices of Ontario youth, identifies the primary protective factors for keeping students successfully engaged in school as “forms of alternative schooling, caring teachers, self-determination and insight”. The three key recommendations from the report are to, “be more understanding, be more flexible, and be more proactive in reaching out to youth, families and communities”. Dr. Bruce Ferguson, co-author of the report, summarizes this in his advice to teachers: “Just care.”

Howard Gardner (1999), another seminal researcher in the field of education, developed the Theory of Multiple Intelligences. Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Intelligences are two of the eight “intelligences” that he identifies as contributing to effective learning and life functioning. These researchers agree that characteristics such as respect and empathy form the basis of interpersonal understanding and effective relationships.

> “Mounting research shows that students who feel connected to school – to teachers, to other students, to the school itself – do better academically.”  
Character development is the deliberate effort to nurture the universal attributes upon which schools and communities find consensus. These attributes provide a standard for behaviour against which we hold ourselves accountable. They permeate all that happens in schools. They bind us together across the lines that often divide us in society. They form the basis of our relationships and of responsible citizenship. They are a foundation for excellence and equity in education, and for our vision of learning cultures and school communities that are respectful, safe, caring and inclusive.

Excellence in education includes character development. Through character, we find common ground.

Character development in Ontario schools is a deliberate and intentional process. All relationships, experiences and interactions are opportunities for the explicit nurturing of character attributes. It is critical that the attributes that form the basis of character development initiatives are identified through a board process of consultation with diverse communities. Through this process, communities identify the qualities which schools should foster through systematic and intentional practices and processes.

Studies in character education have demonstrated that, when implemented on a school-wide basis, positive results and improvements are realized in the following areas:

* student engagement, motivation and achievement
* self-discipline, pro-social behaviour and interpersonal relationships
* equity and respect for diversity
* preparation for the workplace
* school culture, civility and feelings of safety
* school community partnerships
* volunteer activities
* civic engagement
* engagement in social justice issues

Formal and informal character development initiatives currently exist in a variety of forms across Ontario. Many boards and schools have implemented character development as a key component of their priorities. Character development is clearly evident in initiatives that address areas such as respectful and accessible workplaces, environmental awareness and protection, restorative practices, local and global health initiatives, athletic codes of conduct, student-led conferences and student leadership development. A growing number of boards have also developed curriculum resource documents that explicitly link curriculum content and expectations across subject areas to character development.
The quality of the relationships in schools is an integral factor in creating cultures that transform buildings into caring and engaging learning environments. Learning involves individuals other than teachers, students and administrators. All those with whom students interact contribute to their education. Volunteers, school-based social service workers, classroom and school support staff, and bus drivers – all those who work and volunteer in our schools are part of the wider learning curriculum. From a welcoming “Good morning”, to respectful listening and guidance in difficult situations – students learn powerful lessons about what it means to be a caring person of character from the adults around them.

Teachers play a key role in the character development of students. When students reflect upon their education they frequently identify a teacher as the single most important factor in their success in life. Exemplary teachers have always fostered positive attributes, explicitly and implicitly, in their classrooms. They model high expectations in academics and behaviour, develop relationship skills and attitudes, integrate qualities such as honesty and fairness into lessons, and organize their classrooms to reflect principles of inclusion and engagement. The relationships that teachers forge with students build school and classroom environments that support learning and character development.

In their 2004 research, Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson and Wahlstrom states that:

“Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school.”

School leadership is instrumental in creating a culture and climate that supports student learning. The principal, along with staff, students and parents, establishes the expectations, practices and processes that define both the operations of the school and the quality of the relationships that create the sense of caring and belonging that students need to succeed.

School leaders inspire, articulate and set the example of the school’s character vision. They are intentional in their pursuit of a learning environment that develops the whole person; they make the attributes explicit through action.

Effective leaders have always worked with students, staff and parents to create trusting relationships that respect and encourage academic learning, character development, student engagement, equity of outcome for all students. They include the voices of all members of the diverse educational community.
The Character Development Initiative supports student involvement in building and extending positive, caring school and community cultures. It recognizes the importance of mentoring relationships between students and caring adults. It aligns with curriculum at both the elementary and secondary levels, offering many opportunities for teachers to embed, integrate and include character attributes in the curriculum and in the culture of the school and community. Overall, it prepares students for citizenship and civic involvement and to be fully engaged, responsible members of their communities.

Trustees play an important role in education in Ontario. They represent democracy in action and are the eyes and ears of their communities. In our publicly-funded education system, trustees carry forward the hopes and aspirations that parents and communities have for their children and youth. They ensure that the education provided is of the highest quality and that the goals of the school board are comprehensive and inclusive. It is the role of trustees to translate parental and community expectations into a concrete plan of action for the students in their board. Trustees play an essential role in the community engagement process. They exercise stewardship in ensuring that excellence in academic achievement, equity of outcome, respect for diversity and the key principles of character development are embedded in the strategies that they establish for their school boards.

In all Ontario publicly-funded boards – English and French, Catholic and public – character development addresses the whole student as an individual, as a learner and as an engaged citizen. It strives to prepare students for community and work with attributes that business and community leaders have identified as essential such as honesty and responsibility. It strives to create the relationships, experiences and culture in which all students can learn, thrive and succeed.

In all French-language schools, civic engagement provides an important conduit for students to affirm, celebrate and enrich their francophone culture and identity. The government’s Aménagement linguistique policy stresses the importance of building students’ leadership skills, encouraging their involvement in cultural and intercultural activities, initiating school-community projects that involve a cultural element, integrating cultural experiences into the daily life of the classroom and school and creating meaningful networks among all partners in education, including students, schools and communities.

This initiative, along with the Politique d’aménagement Policy, should assist all students in developing a solid personal identity as well as a feeling of belonging to a strong francophone cultural community, all the while preparing them to contribute to the improvement of the wider, interdependent human community.

– Suzanne Moncion
Superintendent of Education
Conseil des écoles publiques de l’Est de l’Ontario

English Catholic education is founded on the basis of inculcating Catholic values. Historically, Catholic education has stressed community involvement as an important means for students to put beliefs into practice. The Catholic School Graduate Expectations, developed by The Institute for Catholic
Education (1998), describe the life roles, knowledge, skills and attitudes the Catholic community holds for its students.

“The Catholic Character and Culture initiative brings an explicit focus on character development to our call to form our students in their faith and educate them to become citizens of the world who can transform it into a more just and loving society.”

– Michael Schmitt
Director of Education, Lakeshore and Algonguin Catholic District School Board

The mission statement for French-language Catholic schools adopted by the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops (OCCB) was developed following a province-wide consultation with parents, teachers, secondary students, school administrators and school boards. The document, L’École catholique de langue française (2005), sets out a clear vision for French-language Catholic schools.

“The mission of French Language Catholic Schools is to allow students to acquire extensive knowledge and most of all extensive values. These Christian values, rooted in the tradition of the Catholic Church, are also human values which are accepted across the world. Through the discovery of the richness of their Catholic heritage, our students are encouraged to use their time and talents towards caring for their neighbors and thus becoming engaged citizens, responsible and open to the world.”

– Bernard Lavallée
Director of Education
Conseil scolaire de district catholique Centre-Sud

There are strong connections between existing character development programs and the teachings of our Aboriginal peoples – First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures. Their teachings are interwoven through life, and include respect, honesty, bravery, truth, wisdom and love.

An explicit focus on these and other teachings promotes harmony and enhances positive interactions in our schools and communities. When students learn about the traditions and beliefs of others in their school communities, they gain an understanding of and respect for differences. Aboriginal perspectives must be honoured in the development of implementation plans for the Character Development Initiative.

Aboriginal peoples are the descendents of the original inhabitants of North America and have unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. Their common link is their indigenous ancestry.

Ontario First Nations, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework
Learning and academic achievement, respect for diversity, citizenship development and parent and community partnerships are all essential to the character development initiative. Each contributes to the development of character and to students' educational experience.

These essential elements cannot exist in isolation, or solely in policies, practices and programs. They are linked together and enhance one another, forming the foundation of character development. Together, they create the conditions for respectful, safe, caring, inclusive learning cultures.

Character development provides students with tools for increasing academic achievement and for building a solid foundation for thoughtful decision-making and problem-solving. Students will use these skills to influence positive outcomes in their lives and across the elements of the initiative.
School communities must value differences in learning styles, student ways of knowing, and the contributions of all members of their learning community. This ensures the success of every student, regardless of ability or disability, special education needs or other factors. Character development is central to ensuring that all students reach their potential. Positive learning environments encourage peer-to-peer support, mutual respect and inclusion, and the development of character attributes such as optimism and perseverance. Active student engagement within such learning environments will provide a strong foundation for the skills, knowledge and attitudes that all students, particularly those with special education needs, require to both succeed and excel in achieving their goals.

There is a growing body of research evidence that character development and greater student engagement in the life of the school are linked closely to academic achievement. In fact, Douglas Willms of New Brunswick's Canadian Research Institute for Social Policy advocates that “we need to consider student engagement as an important schooling outcome in its own right” (2002). A study by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2003), which examined data from 42 nations, concluded that one in five students in Canada has a low sense of belonging at school. This results in lower academic achievement during the schooling years, and often leads to continued difficulty in adulthood.

The Character Development Initiative is pivotal in creating and sustaining school environments characterized by high expectations for learning and high levels of student engagement. There are four pillars of the Student Success / Learning to 18 Initiative; the first three are literacy, numeracy and pathways. The 4th Pillar, Community, Culture and Caring, provides an essential avenue that leads to higher levels of student success. This pillar focuses on supporting school cultures that develop a sense of community and caring relationships to provide all students with greater opportunities to achieve success. Community, Culture and Caring connect students to school, support relationships that will engage students, especially those who are disengaged from school, and promote student mentoring and advocacy.

Character attributes such as honesty and integrity provide students with high standards for behaviour, for making decisions that are personally empowering and for creating quality relationships. This translates ethical knowledge, skills and attitudes into action.

Ontario’s growing diversity provides our students with a rich opportunity to explore and develop the attitudes and the interpersonal and community-building skills that a mature democracy demands.

Today’s students need to function effectively in our diverse society and in our global economy. With increasing ethnocultural and racial diversity the need to find common ground based on our values and beliefs, in communities and as a province, takes on greater significance. Building consensus on what we hold in common is essential for the development of peaceful communities and enduring relationships.

The Character Development Initiative will provide a powerful means to facilitate student growth and development in the context of our diverse schools and communities. Character can neither be taught in the abstract, nor as a course of study. Students develop character through their interactions with others in their diverse classrooms and communities. Qualities such as empathy are best nurtured through relationships that cross the lines that often divide people in society.

We want our schools, our communities, our province, our nation and our world to embody the qualities of effective relationships. The Character Development Initiative brings together the essential elements that individuals and society need in order to achieve excellence in all facets of life.

Ultimately, we want our students to think critically, feel deeply and act wisely.
LEARNING AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Academic achievement within a culture of high expectations for learning for all students, from all backgrounds and circumstances, remains the primary responsibility of schools. A number of research findings have identified strong linkages among character development, the creation of caring and engaging school cultures and improvements in student achievement.

Expectations of students in our changing society include high levels of learning competencies. In addition, new competencies are required in areas such as environmental responsibility, global awareness, economic astuteness, social responsibility, technological proficiency and areas that help us cope with emerging opportunities and challenges. Learning to meet these critical expectations will prepare and empower our students to be full participants in their education and in their communities.

In an information-rich, knowledge-based society, ethical principles are needed to guide decision making for the common good. Ontarians want our schools to prepare students for the responsibility that this entails. High standards and high expectations are essential components of a quality education. There is also a world-wide focus on higher levels of literacy. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) document entitled Literacy as Freedom (2006) states that:

“Literacy is one of the fundamental instruments of freedom. In today’s world the use of written communication is embedded in socio-political and economic systems at local, national and global levels. It is part of the way institutions function and is a key to learning opportunities.”

Participation in today’s democratic processes in all spheres of life and in our schools, our communities, our province, our nation and, indeed, our world requires a growing complexity of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours.

The government has made improvement in publicly-funded education the centre-piece of its mandate. Its vision is of an education system that excels provincially, nationally and internationally. It also recognizes that education is about more than academics; education must develop the human qualities that create vibrant and inclusive communities.

Debates about the key purposes of education have persisted over the years. A variety of perspectives converge on the belief that schools serve multiple purposes, with academic achievement as a primary responsibility. Other purposes are shared among schools, all stakeholders and community members.

Engaging students as active participants in the learning process and providing relevant programs and supports are essential for academic achievement. Research tells us that when character development initiatives are implemented well they are multifaceted in nature. Further, DeWit, McKee, Fjeld and Karioja (2003), in their Ontario study of 22 schools, clearly establish the strong link between the quality of teacher-student relationships and academic achievement and behaviour. The social, emotional and academic aspects of classrooms have a direct impact on learning. Trust, a sense of belonging and active engagement create an environment that engenders success. This substantiates what all educators know – that student social and emotional engagement and academic success are intertwined. The common saying, “I don’t care how much you know until I know how much you care” speaks to the importance of the strong teacher-student relationships that underlie academic success.
Curriculum documents for Ontario’s public education system currently provide teachers with expectations that are geared towards social, interpersonal and citizenship development. The civics, social studies and guidance programs are cases in point. The Kindergarten to Grade 12 document, *Choices into Action: Guidance and Career Education Program Policy for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools* (1999), for example, emphasizes student development, interpersonal development and career development. The document states:

“Students will learn to demonstrate self-discipline, take responsibility for their own behaviour, acquire the knowledge and skills required for getting along with others both within and beyond school, and choose ways of interacting positively with others in a variety of situations. They will also learn about thoughtful and non-violent problem-resolution, social responsibility, working cooperatively with others and caring about others.”

Examples abound in curriculum documents. All include expectations related to the responsibility of schools to develop positive character attributes as an integral part of students’ education.

Excellence in education includes character development.
RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY

The Character Development Initiative upholds human rights. Ontario schools are communities in which students develop the respect for diversity that is the foundation of all positive human relationships. Respectful interactions validate the unique identity of each individual and all members of our diverse communities. Through character development and equity initiatives, students learn the respect, empathy and sense of fairness necessary to ensure the fundamental human rights of all people. Character development reinforces the need for students to demonstrate their commitment to these issues and to be strong advocates in defending the rights of others.

Whereas policies, legislation and programs define the scope and expectations of equity initiatives; character development provides motivation and brings humanity to the implementation of equity initiatives.

When character development includes a strong respect for diversity, students become attuned, not only to that which they have in common with others but also to their own humanity. Respect for the dignity of all people is an essential characteristic of our society.

In the future, our citizenry will continue to be increasingly diverse. People come to Canada, and particularly our province, from around the globe. Ontarians represent the world in miniature. Their perspectives, cultures and world views enrich the fabric of our society and provide deep opportunities for all people to develop the attributes that ensure integration and inclusion. They also require us to find unity and a common bond within our diversity through the values we hold in common. These values will provide a focus for developing equitable and inclusive schools.

A civil and compassionate society has, at its core, both respect and empathy. These qualities extend from one person to another and form the basis of positive and enduring relationships that create the human connectedness necessary for social cohesion and for both individuals and society to thrive.

Respect for fundamental human rights and the inherent dignity of all persons is integral to the school cultures and the society we envision. Our schools must be proactive in ensuring that all biases and barriers that threaten the ability to learn, grow and contribute are removed. All members of our school communities must model and embody the highest regard for relationships characterized by respect for diversity.

The multiple perspectives that exist within our communities demonstrate the need for school boards to be increasingly responsive to the needs and aspirations of their diverse communities. The community consultations on character development conducted by Ontario school boards are expected to follow inclusive processes to ensure that diverse perspectives are heard and included. This ensures that groups from all walks of life achieve consensus on the universal attributes and provide on-going input into their board's character development initiative.
The Early School Leavers Report (2005) comes to the following conclusion:

“With our increasing diversity, there is a growing need to find common ground on the values we share. It is essential that issues of power, equity and social differences are properly addressed. The development of an inclusive school environment results in a process of schooling that is not only more relevant for social and minority youth, but enhances the overall scope of the entire curriculum for all students.”

A culture of character and equity in Ontario schools means that respect for diversity must be at the heart of our policies, programs, practices and interactions. This culture includes every child; eliminates barriers; involves the broad community; and builds, enhances, and aligns with existing initiatives. It is the foundation of excellence in education.

When all members of our school communities commit to creating cultures in which character and equity permeate everything they do, we create the inclusive culture that must characterize all Ontario schools. Schooling remains one of the few commonly shared experiences with the potential to bring students from diverse backgrounds together to forge common understandings of the kind of society they wish to create.

Respect for students from diverse backgrounds is reinforced through a commitment to equity of outcome and converges on student achievement. Equity and excellence are two sides of the same coin and are evident in student achievement. Boards and schools committed to equity of outcome for all students have common practices, such as:

- the establishment of high expectations for all students
- the differentiation of curriculum and instruction
- the accommodation of diverse learning styles
- a regard for diversity as a strength
- outreach to vulnerable students and those who may feel marginalized

Education has a moral imperative. When we prepare students for responsible citizenship we are also fostering responsible stewardship. The qualities we nurture in our students today will contribute to and enrich the quality of their relationships and human interactions.

When expectations arise from commonly shared values, and when common understandings are embedded in the culture of our classrooms, we experience teaching and learning at their best. Our quest for character and commitment to equity and excellence must be relentless. They unlock the full potential of inclusive education.
Character development is an avenue through which students develop respect for self, others, property, the environment, diversity, human rights and other attributes upon which we find common ground as Canadians. It creates and expands opportunities for students to learn about, analyze, question, and contribute to, the building of their communities, our nation and the world. They develop an understanding of the interconnectedness and linkages that underlie social cohesion. Citizenship development is a deliberate effort to nurture these democratic ideals.

It is important that we engender the ideals of democratic citizenship in our students. Citizenship is a responsibility as well as a right. Rights include the freedom to express beliefs and work and live in environments free from discriminatory practices. Along with these rights comes the responsibility to support equitable and democratic processes within our schools, our communities, our province and our nation. As citizens, we work hard to maintain and improve the educational, environmental, cultural, economic, political and social aspects of our society. Citizenship is a privilege that we must not take for granted.

Our publicly-funded schools are committed to inspiring and engaging our students’ idealism and enthusiasm in understanding, critically analyzing and practicing the democratic processes. Through curriculum such as language, mathematics, social studies, The Arts, and more specifically, Grade 10 Civics and Canadian History, Grade 11 Law, and Grade 12 World Issues, students are learning positive and pro-social concepts of ideal citizenship. Through service learning, students have opportunities to experience both the need for and rewards of building community. Through increased participation in board and school committees and initiatives, students learn to share in constructive decision-making. Through leadership experiences, students act upon their principles and gain insights into how their decisions impact on the lives of others.

Ontario has a graduation requirement of forty hours of community involvement activities. A large proportion of Ontario students exceed this expectation in their service to their communities. Their strong sense of volunteerism is nurtured through these activities. Civic engagement is an important component of education for citizenship. It also provides opportunities to develop competencies and connectedness between our students and their schools and communities. Service learning provides safe environments to learn and practice the skills and knowledge required to take on greater opportunities and challenges in the future. It can also invoke in our students the joy of giving, sharing, building, and understanding themselves in the context of a caring society.

Increased opportunities for involvement in leadership in the classroom, in schools, in the board and in the community develop many of the skills required for positive and effective participation as citizens in schools and communities. In these contexts, the Character Development Initiative challenges students to:

- make principled decisions
- think critically about their world
- anticipate problems and contribute to solutions
- develop higher levels of personal and social responsibility.
Developing an understanding of how organizations function, how decisions are made and the importance of casting one’s vote are vital to students’ education and to their future roles as engaged citizens.

Student leadership should not be limited to the few; each and every student in our schools should have opportunities for leadership. It may be through acts of courage such as letting the teacher know that bullying is occurring, or through acts of compassion such as taking the lead in educating other students about street children. It may be in group work and cooperative learning in the classroom, in making positive suggestions for improving the learning environment or in mediating a conflict. Student leadership also involves civic engagement, participation in decisions about their education and service learning. It is learning the skills of positive advocacy for themselves and for others.

Active student engagement in learning, civic participation, service to others and leadership roles requires the development of knowledge, skills and character attributes. The research of Althof and Berkowitz (2006) affirms the interconnectedness of these elements. It states that ideas in this field converge on the notion that competent, engaged and effective citizenship is necessary for a full political, economic, social and cultural partnership. This requires a set of citizenship competencies that include:

- a strong knowledge of civics and governance
- critical-thinking, problem-solving and decision-making skills
- communication, social and participatory skills
- an understanding of and commitment to character development.

These strands of competent citizenship can be taught and practiced in classrooms and in schools in partnerships with communities. This requires adult and student commitment to character building in all facets of learning.

Understanding their communities and how events and circumstances impact on people and environments gives students a window to the world. They need a continuum of opportunities to discover what it means to be a citizen. These range from recognizing the daily behaviours that make our world a better place, to taking responsibility for others in need, exercising their right to vote, and taking action on issues of justice. Schools must take a leading role in citizenship development as students assume increasingly important responsibilities for the improvement of their communities.

“Character development has shaped who I am today. It’s made me realize that my voice is important; that I need to be involved in what’s happening and that I can make a difference.”

– Kristen Duncan
Grade 12 student, Peel District School Board
PARENT AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Parents and families have the primary responsibility for the character development of their children. Families strive to model and reinforce positive attributes on a daily basis. They find ways to ensure that the attributes are taught explicitly, making sure that over time, there is continuity in their development. The success of the character development initiative is dependent on the meaningful engagement of parents and community partners and the linkages forged together.

Community members and organizations, business, local government, and faith communities work collaboratively with schools to share this important responsibility. Character development is an integral part of many youth, sports and community-based programs. It is nurtured in cooperative education and work-experience programs that reflect the call from the business community for schools to develop well-rounded individuals capable of thriving in a global economy.

Partnerships must involve all members of school communities in creating cultures that reinforce the social and emotional knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that students require to become caring and socially responsible citizens.

Parents can support character development initiatives at all stages of their children's development from Kindergarten to Grade 12, in a variety of ways including:
- serving as positive role models at home, at school and in the community
- reading to and with their children, followed by reflective discussions about the characters in the stories and the values they demonstrate
- nurturing the development of qualities such as empathy and respect for others in interpersonal relationships
- talking with their children about character attributes and how they apply to situations at home and in the community
- teaching the skills children need to make sound decisions and to determine how their actions impact on others

- contributing to and supporting character development initiatives in their children’s school.

The community can support character development initiatives in schools in a variety of ways including:
- forming partnerships with local schools
- implementing a character development initiative in their workplace
- providing youth with extracurricular and civic engagement opportunities
- contributing to and supporting the character development initiatives in their local schools.

Schools must seek out alliances among parents and community partners to support learning and character development. There are numerous community organizations that share this responsibility with schools and families. These alliances create a web of support for children and youth and help to provide the foundation upon which educators build.

When we work together, we build strong communities that support our shared goals for our children and youth.

“We need character development in our schools and in our businesses – what you do and what you say have to match. When our students develop strength of character they’ll be able to reason out or talk to someone about whatever comes at them.”

– Candace LaFrance
Parent, Keewatin-Patricia District School Board
Implementing Character Development

The Character Development Initiative was launched in October, 2006 at a provincial symposium attended by educators, students, parents, trustees and community members. Following the symposium, Character Development Resource Teams were established across the province to support school boards with their implementation planning. In the spring of 2007, consultation sessions were held across the province to share additional information about character development and gather input on the elements of the initiative and on implementation plans. The input collected is reflected in this document.

School boards in Ontario began the implementation of the Character Development Initiative during the 2007–08 school year. Many school boards have already developed and implemented programs which address aspects of character development. For these boards, the initiative provides an opportunity to add depth to existing programs.
KEY EXPECTATIONS

The primary responsibility for the implementation of the Character Development Initiative resides with school boards. They are expected to demonstrate evidence of the following in their implementation:

1. a collaborative board-based process to engage a diverse cross-section of the community in the development, implementation and review of the initiative

2. the selection of attributes through a board process of community consensus building

3. a board-wide and school-wide commitment to model, teach and expect demonstrations of these attributes in all school, classroom and extracurricular activities

4. student leadership development and expanded opportunities for student voice and engagement in the education process and in their communities

5. character development practices that are holistic in their approach and that reflect the academic, social and emotional, attitudinal, and behavioural domains of learning

6. board and school plans with a deliberate focus on character development and alignment with other ministry documents and expectations, for example: Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework; Aménagement linguistique, A Policy for Ontario's French-Language Schools and Francophone Community; the forthcoming Equity Strategy and Action Plan; Choices into Action; Safe Schools and Student Success initiatives

7. the infusion of character development into the policies, programs, practices, procedures and interactions in the board and schools

8. the collection of baseline and ongoing data regarding the implementation and impact of the initiative on areas such as student achievement, graduation rates, attendance, student leadership, student behaviour, student engagement in the learning process, school culture and student involvement in their communities.

“Over the years, character development has made a significant impact on our schools. We started by working with the community to determine what character development should look like. It was a truly inclusive process in which we involved our students, staff, parents and community. I believe that the support that we have for character development in York Region is a result of the strong community consultation process upon which our program was built. Community engagement certainly plays a pivotal role in the success of character development.”

– Bill Hogarth
Director of Education,
York Region District School Board
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION SUPPORT

The Provincial Character Development Resource Teams
Character Development Resource Teams have been established across the province to support all English and French, Catholic and public school boards. Team leaders are experienced in the implementation and extension of character development programs.

Resources
The document entitled Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K–12, is located on the Ministry of Education website at www.edu.gov.on.ca. Character development information will be posted regularly on this site along with updates on the work and structure of the Character Development Resource Teams. Links to character development electronic resources and event highlights will also be provided.

Support documents such as Character Development in Action: Successful Practices, K–12, and research to support practice will be shared with educators and posted on the Ministry website. Educators will also be encouraged to share implementation and teaching strategies through their Resource Teams and Ministry contacts.

KEY ACTIONS TO DATE

- consulted with 26 selected boards to identify effective implementation practices and collect input regarding implementation requirements and challenges June, 2006
- convened a Provincial Symposium to build awareness and common understanding of the key principles of the provincial Character Development Initiative October, 2006
- produced a webcast for the education sector to support the Character Development Initiative December, 2006
- established Character Development Resource Teams to share successful practices and provide leadership for school boards in implementing and extending their character development initiative December, 2006
- provided school boards with incentive funding and supports to initiate or expand upon their character development initiatives January, 2007
- conducted fifteen regional forums to engage parents, community and business organizations and the education sector in sharing responsibility for the initiative February through June, 2007
- provided school boards with nine capacity building sessions for Board Character Teams, Student Achievement Officers and Student Success Leaders to enable them to provide support for schools as they initiate, or expand upon, their character development initiatives April through June, 2007
- released the document entitled Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K–12 to provide direction for the initiative June, 2008
- release the document entitled Character Development in Action: Successful Practices in Ontario Schools, K–12 to support implementation and planning Fall, 2008
The following summarizes the roles the Ministry of Education, school boards, schools, teachers, all board and school staff and students will play in making this initiative a reality.

**Ministry of Education**

The ministry will:
- coordinate and provide leadership for the work of the Provincial Character Development Resource Teams
- provide school boards with start-up funding and supports to initiate or expand their character development initiatives
- produce resources, such as webcasts and examples of successful practices, to support implementation and extension of the initiative
- develop guidelines for data collection and analysis for determining the success of the initiative at the board level
- conduct research and monitor the effectiveness of the implementation and impact of the initiative at the provincial level

**School Boards**

School boards will:
- collaborate with their Provincial Character Development Resource Team to develop the processes and practices necessary for successful implementation
- establish a collaborative board-based process for engaging students, staff, parents and school councils, as well as a diverse cross-section of business and community representatives, in the development, implementation and review of their initiative, with local trustees playing a key role
- ensure that students play a key role at all stages of the development of this initiative
- establish a culture of respect for diversity through policies, processes, practices, and interactions
- provide the knowledge, skills and leadership development required for students to take on their expanded roles effectively
- promote the character attributes agreed upon by the community in their workplace practices and interactions
- ensure that their character development initiative is aligned with and becomes an integral part of Board and School Improvement Plans
- provide a key role for school councils to play in reaching out to and engaging community members in this initiative
- expand access to, and opportunities for, student engagement in their learning environments
- expand access to, and opportunities for, civic engagement and citizenship development of all students
- partner with parents, community and local organizations to provide programs that further engage students in the community.
- monitor and collect data on the effectiveness of their board’s character development initiative.
School Principals

Principals will:

- model the character attributes agreed upon by the community in their workplace practices and interactions with others
- provide leadership in the implementation and development of the character development initiative in their school
- ensure that all members of the school community – students, teachers, parents and support staff – are engaged in school-wide implementation and development of the initiative
- ensure that student leadership reflects the diversity of the school population, and that students provide meaningful input into plans and decisions regarding the initiative
- ensure that there are opportunities to engage students in general, and disengaged and marginalized students in particular, in the initiative
- provide the knowledge, skills and leadership development required for students to take on their expanded roles effectively
- ensure that the character development initiative is aligned with and becomes an integral part of the School Improvement Plan
- provide professional learning opportunities for members of the school community in the area of character development
- ensure that character development is embedded in all subject areas and in all classrooms, extracurricular and school-wide programs
- expand access to, and opportunities for, student voice and engagement in their learning environments
- expand access to, and opportunities for, civic engagement and citizenship development of all students
- provide a key role for school councils to play in reaching out to and engaging community members in this initiative
- partner with parents, community and local organizations to provide programs that further engage students in the community
- monitor and collect data on the effectiveness of the character development initiative.

“"A culture of learning in a classroom is based on respect. Tolerance or acceptance of others is not enough. Respect involves all students – all that they are, have experienced, and have to offer – including those who challenge or disturb us and those from whom we learn. It starts with respectful and trusting relationships – we have to know what this looks like. We teach respect by modelling; this is the greatest of all lessons and it has to be in place before learning in areas such as literacy and numeracy can happen.

Character development needs to be part of everything we do. It has made me a more respectful person, a more respectful teacher. This is a wonderful journey that we’re on together.”

– Dan Celetti
Teacher, Algoma District School Board

Teachers

Teachers will:

- model the character attributes agreed upon in the board-based community consultation process in their workplace practices and interactions
- continue to engage students in the creation of a classroom learning environment that is collaborative, caring and characterized by high expectations for learning and equity of outcome
- provide the knowledge, skills and leadership development required for students to take on their expanded roles effectively
- assist in creating a school culture that values caring relationships between teachers and students, fosters a sense of belonging, nurtures democratic principles and encourages student voice in decision making
- use the attributes identified in Ontario Curriculum and other ministry documents and by local communities in the development of classroom behavioural expectations in collaboration with students
- embed character development in their subject areas and in all classrooms, extracurricular and school-wide programs.
All Board and School Staff

All staff will:
• model the character attributes agreed upon by the community in their workplace practices and interactions
• assist in creating school and board cultures that value positive relationships, service excellence and equity.

Students

Students will:
• contribute in meaningful ways to the development of plans and decisions for the implementation of the character development initiative in their school
• include diverse members of their population in the daily life of the school: students who are disengaged, vulnerable and who may feel marginalized
• seek opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to expand their roles in their classrooms, schools, boards, and communities
• encourage all students to become involved in leadership development opportunities
• demonstrate their concern for others by responding to issues of social justice in their schools and local communities and contributing to their solutions
• seek opportunities for meaningful local community involvement, civic engagement and citizenship development.
References


Character Development in Ontario Schools

Creating Positive Learning Cultures and School Communities

Respectful  Caring  Safe  Inclusive

Learning and Academic Achievement
Citizenship Development
Parent and Community Partnerships
Respect for Diversity

Character Development