Character Education in an Online Setting

Nicholas Colgrove, PhD

Center for Nursing Research Seminar

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Outline

- **Character Education (CE)**
  - Basics
  - Can virtue be taught?
  - Why care about character?

- **CE Approaches**
  - General overview
  - Applied online

Character Education (CE)

Basics:

Character – "the collection of stable, deep, and enduring dispositions that define who we are and shape how we characteristically think, feel, and act."

Objectives of Character Education:
- Knowledge.
- Skills.
- *Dispositions and habits.*

Goal: Promote *virtue* among students.

See Lamb, Brant, and Brooks (2022) – "Seven Strategies for Cultivating Virtue in the University."

Character Education (CE)

Basics:

Virtue = an excellent character trait.
- Well-entrenched, stable.
- Consistent over time and situations.
- Shapes thought, feeling, action, values.
- Contrast: Vice.

Categories of Virtues:
- Moral
- Intellectual (epistemic)
- Professional
    - Which character traits make a nurse an excellent nurse?
    - **CE:** How can we cultivate these virtues among students?

Can Virtue Be Taught?

"… in seeking to acquire virtue," should we "regard it as a thing to be taught, or as a gift of nature, or as coming to men in some other way?"

- Plato's *Meno (385 BCE approx.)*

Recall: CE and knowledge, skills, dispositions (habits).
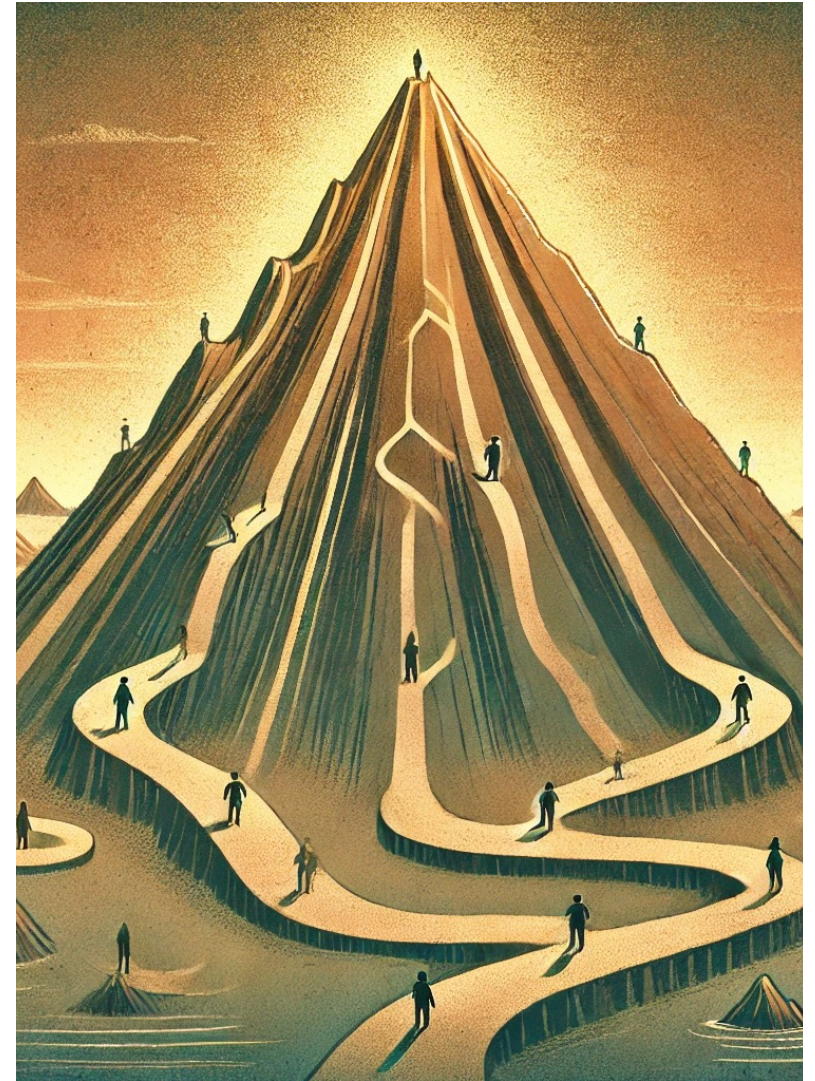
Why Care About Character?

Motivating students?
- Self-serving reasons.
  - Professional virtues.
  - Avoiding remediation.
- Patient expectations.
  - Being understood.
  - "Have a say" in care.
  - **Treated with respect.**
  - "To be listened to."
  - To "receive clear explanation and instructions."
- Patient satisfaction.

Character Education Approaches

Seven Strategies Framework:

1. Virtue literacy.
2. Engagement with virtuous exemplars.
3. Reflection on personal experience.
4. Habituation through practice.
5. Awareness of situational variables.
6. Moral reminders.
7. Friendships of mutual accountability.

Virtue Literacy

Virtue literacy = helping students to understand the "moral and conceptual grammar of a particular virtue."

Moral	Intellectual	Professional
Generosity	Charity	Empathy
Honesty	Open-minded	Compassion
Temperance	Firmness	Patience
Loyalty	Attentiveness	Diligence
Justice	Autonomy	Adaptability

What do these virtues entail?

Virtue Literacy: Empathy

What is *empathy*?

Empathy$_1$: "the ability to understand and share the feelings of another."

The lifeguard problem.

Virtue Literacy: Empathy

What is *empathy*?

Empathy$_1$: "the ability to understand and share the feelings of another."

Empathy$_2$: "Empathy is a process that produces shared mental states *and* a cognitive grasp of, belief about, or knowledge of another's mental states. … This notion of empathy includes high-level simulation processes, like imaginative perspective-taking."

Problems: Psychological Limitations.

Virtue Literacy: Empathy

What is *empathy*?

Empathy$_3$: Three dimensions to consider:

- Affective dimension.
- Cognitive dimension.
- Motivational dimension.

Affective empathy as a *means* at most?

- PWS case.

See Read (2019) – "A typology of empathy."

Virtue Literacy: Empathy

What is *empathy*?

Some worries:

- Lack of precision makes it unclear what one is trying to teach students.

- Lack of precision may set students up for failure or burnout.

- Maybe "empathy" isn't really what we want to instill. Other virtues a better fit?

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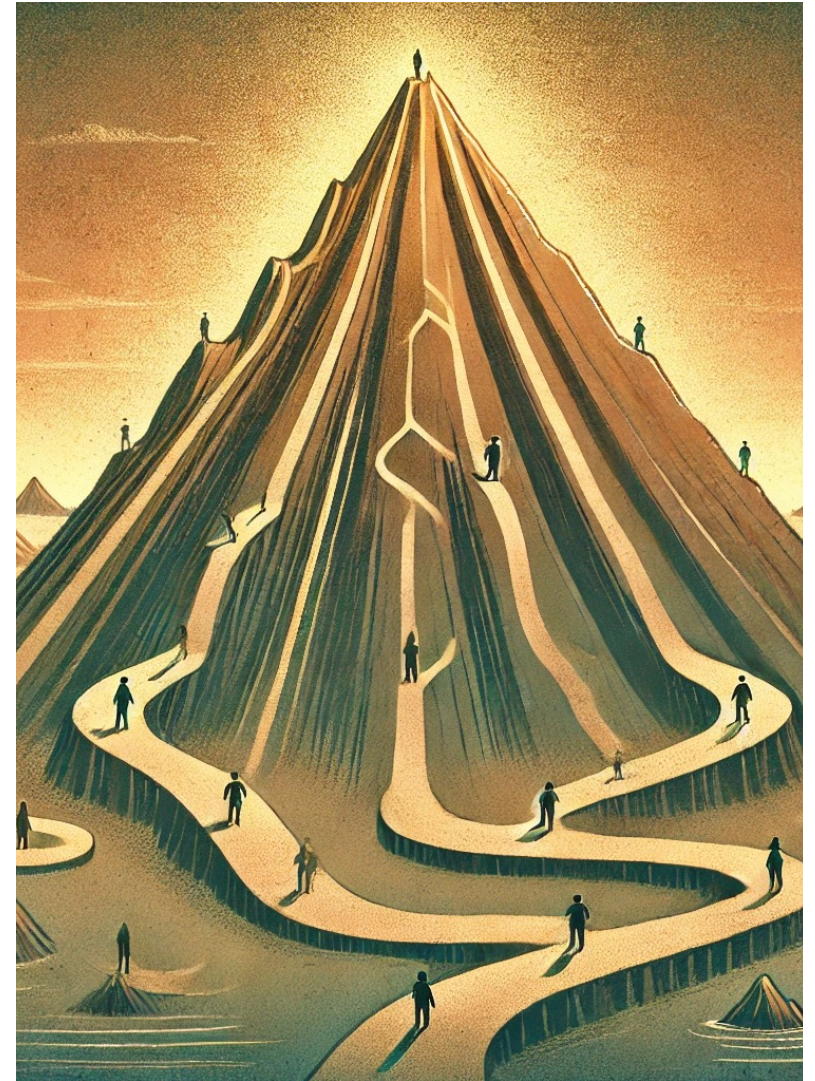# Virtue Literacy **Online**

Options:

- Craft curricula and objectives precisely.
- Surveys, group work to document students' own definitions of virtue terms. May compare/contrast with AI.
  - *Scholastic disputation method.*
- Encourage virtue identification in case studies and simulations.
- Readings on patient expectations: identify virtues that would allow them to be met.

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Engagement with Virtuous Exemplars

Basic Idea: Exemplar = a "model or standard of virtue."

- Focus on *particular* virtues.

Pedagogical Functions:

1. Provide students with role models to emulate; concrete examples to ground theoretical info.
2. Provide students with "counterfactual models."
3. Give insight into how particular virtues may be applied in specific cases.
4. Demonstrate attainability of virtue.

Note: Exemplars "who are perceived to share similarity or proximity in age, stage, gender, culture, values, interests, or profession … are particularly effective at increasing moral motivation and emulation."
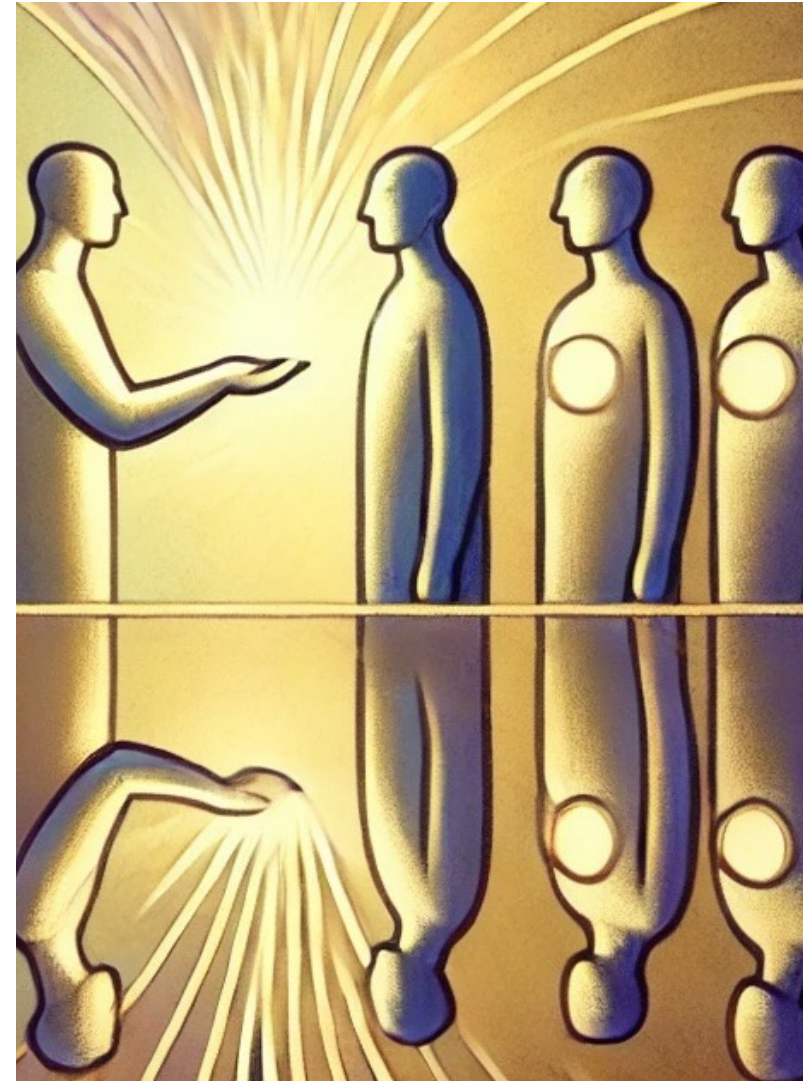
Engagement with Virtuous Exemplars <u>Online</u>

Options:

- Assign autobiographical works by moral exemplars in the field.

  - Use virtue literacy to attend to which virtues are exemplified, which emotions are experienced, etc.

- Guest speakers, *especially* open Q&A with exemplars.

- Case studies and counterfactuals; what went wrong, what would the exemplar do?

- Reflection on personal experience (next strategy) – what does exemplar mean for *you*?
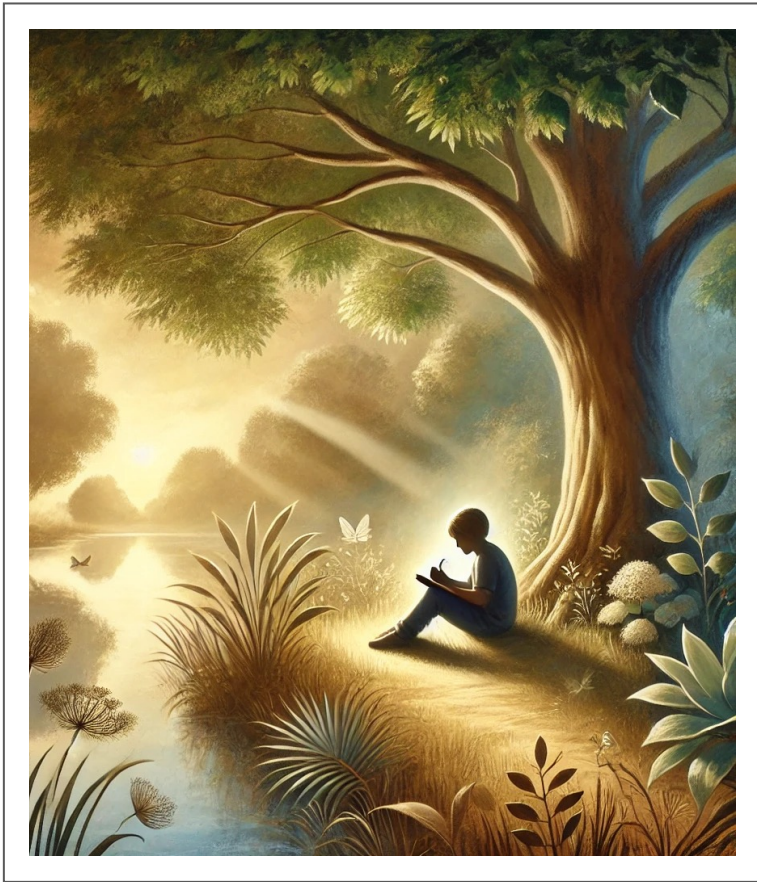
Reflection on Personal Experience

Basic Idea: Encourage students to integrate CE content into their own narratives and career trajectories.

- Lamb et al: "prompt reflection on personal experiences where participants have exercised, or failed to exercise, specific virtues, or where they have experienced the effects of others' virtues or vices."
  - Make it about *them*.
- May apply looking back or looking ahead.

# Reflection on Personal Experience Online

Options:

- Weekly journal assignment(s).
  - Reflect on particular virtues: instances, importance, etc.
  - Apply content from literacy tasks, exemplar interactions, & case studies to one's own life.
- Character development plans: "how will *you* work on developing a given virtue? Or, if not applicable, explain why."

Character Education Approaches

Seven Strategies Framework:

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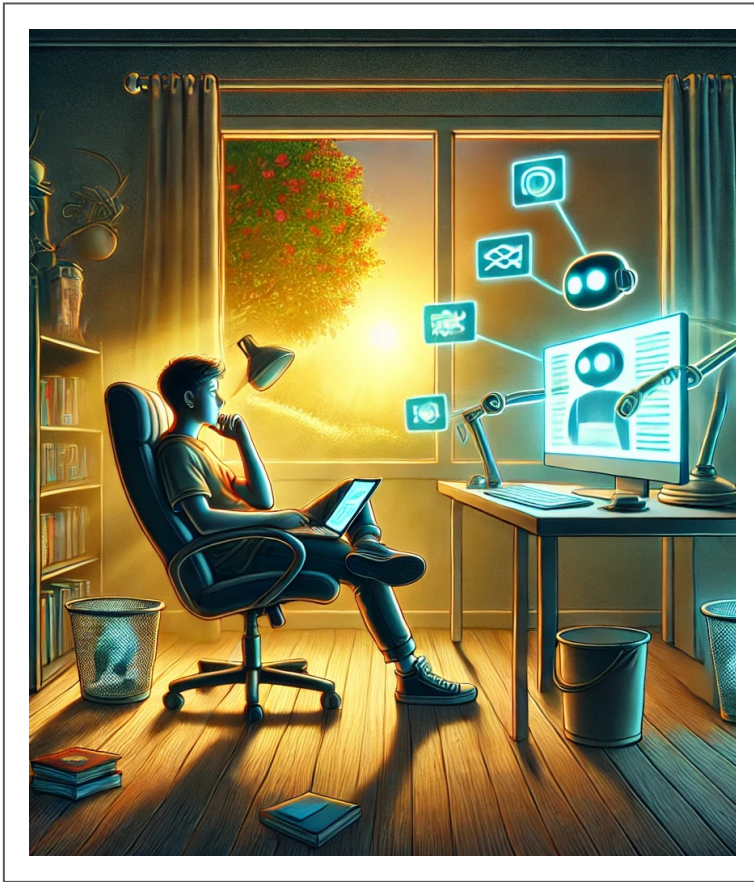
Things to Discuss?

Complications for online education:

- Case studies, simulations, and *authenticity.*
- Virtue and practical wisdom (gained through *experience*).
  - Ability to *read the room.*
  - Ability to *relate* to others.
- The specter of AI.
  - AI assignments, completed by AI, graded by AI?
  - The *value* of education?

That's all for now!

Please send questions to
Ncolgrove@augusta.edu

Thank you!