Cultural and historical research on character and virtue education in Latvia in an international perspective

Research report

Summarizing the Work package 2 of the postdoctoral research

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Executive summary

This report summarizes the research work implemented during the second activity "Cultural and historical research of character and virtue education in Latvia in an international perspective" of the project "Modernization of school education in Latvia through an innovative research-based programme on 21st century competences and virtue ethics development supported by a virtual campus (ARETE-school)" - 1.1.1.2/VIAA/1/16/071.

The research questions that guided the research process during this activity were: What are the theories and practices of character and virtue education in the international arena? How are teachers trained for teaching character and virtue education? How can the past and present of character and virtue upbringing in Latvia be described? What are the institutional and methodological needs for raising the quality of character and virtue education in the Latvian education system?

In order to answer these questions, several studies were carried out and they are summarized in this report in a popular science style. At the beginning of each section, the publications on which the main conclusions are based are indicated. Each of these studies has its own specific methodology and perspective, which can be explored further in these publications. Some of them are already published, others are in the reviewing process, while others are in the preparatory stage.

The report is structured in 3 parts: the first part deals with the international perspectives about character and virtue education in terms of school practice and teacher training. The second part discusses the historical aspect of moral education in Latvia, from the independence of Latvia to the present day. It also outlines the mainstream approaches in this area in the context of the new education reform. The third part presents a gap analysis and offers recommendations for the implementation of character and virtue education in Latvian schools.

The virtues and values included in Latvian legislation are thoughtfully integrated in the school reform project Skola2030. However, whereas the importance of creating and reinforcing students' habits at school is acknowledged, the possibility of teaching virtues (moral habits) and values at school is not clearly nor stated nor planned. International experience proves that character can be taught and caught at school. This research revealed that in Latvia there is a an almost unanimous support for implementing purposeful character and virtue education at school. It revealed also teachers' needs of institutional and methodological support

Contents

List of tables

1. Character and virtue education: International perspectives

This section discusses international practices in character and moral education as well as teacher training initiatives in this field.

1.1. International perspectives about character and virtue education at school

(This section is based on Fernández González, *in press* – a; Fernández González, 2018a; Verdeja Muñíz & García-Sampedro Fernández-Canteli, 2018).

There is an increasing amount of associations dealing with character and virtue education worldwide. One of the most preeminent is The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues[1] (UK, Birmingham university), which implements regular research projects, conferences and publishes open source materials for schools. The Centre for Character and Citizenship[2] (USA, St. Louis, University of Missouri-St. Louis) organizes relevant congresses and disseminates conference materials. The Association for Moral Education[3] (USA, Massachusetts, Gordon College) promotes annual conferences and publishes the "Journal for Moral Education", highly ranked in indexed databases. The Centre for Character and Social Responsibility[4] (USA: Boston University) provides widely spread open courses in character education, such as the MOOC "Ethical Leadership: Character, Civility and Community". The Character Project[5] (USA, North Carolina, Wake Forest University) provides attractive research grants and other academic resources[6]. The Grupo de Investigación en Educación y Ciudadanía[7] (Spain, Navarra University) addresses character from the perspective of Education for citizenship and democracy. The Duckworth Lab[8] (USA: University of Pennsylvania) has elaborated a useful "Grit scale" for implementing character research at school. The Centre for the 4th and 5th R[9], which stands for Respect and Responsibility (USA, State University of New York - Cortland) offers resources for "Smart & Good Schools"[10] and teachers. The project "Authentic Happiness"[11] (USA, University of Pennsylvania) has elaborated a number of questionnaires and

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[1] http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/
[2] https://characterandcitizenship.org/
[3] http://www.amenetwork.org/
[4] http://www.bu.edu/ccsr/
[5] http://www.thecharacterproject.com/
[6] http://studyofcharacter.com/
[7] http://www.unav.edu/web/facultad-de-educacion-y-psicologia/educacion-y-ciudadania
[8] https://characterlab.org/
[9] http://www2.cortland.edu/centers/character
[10] http://www2.cortland.edu/centers/character/resources/SandG/index.dot
[11] https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/

resources addressing character education from the perspective of the positive psychology. The Character Education Partnership[12] (USA, Washington D.C.) has put forward the "11 Principles of Effective Character Education"[13] and organizes a regular National Forum on Character Education, as well as the school assessment project "Schools of character"[14]. Character Plus[15] (USA, Saint Louis) provides a number of useful online resources. The of Chicago has recently launched "The self, motivation, and virtue project"[16] supporting innovative, interdisciplinary moral self research.

Many different perspectives are used for referring to the education of pupils' personality. A variety of denominations reflect this diversity: citizenship education, development of non-cognitive skills, character and virtue education, social and emotional learning, support to positive behaviour, development of attitudes and dispositions, twenty-first century skills enhancement, etc. (Duckworth and Yeager, 2015).

There are many examples of different kind of engagement with character education in different countries. For example, for historical and cultural reasons, in Spain character education often has adopted the perspective of 'education for coexistence'. There seems to be an agreement that the school is the place where cohabitation is learned, and it should be an example of the citizen and security values which it intends to promote (Verdeja Muñíz & García-Sampedro Fernández-Canteli, 2018). The project "UpToYou"[17], implemented in several regions of Spain, approaches character education from an innovative perspective, based on "emotional education understood in an integrating way, that is, for personal growth", not on external behavioural adequacy (Orón, 2016). Other countries adopted the perspective of value education. For example, the Estonian programme "Value development of Estonian society" (Eesti ühiskonna väärtusarendus in 2009-2013, with a follow up programme – Väärtusprogrammi jätkuprogramm, s.a. in 2015–2020) is funded by the Ministry of Education and covers the entire Estonian educational system. Other approaches implemented in Estonia are Philosophy for children (Lastega filosofeerimine), Mindfulness exercises in learning activities (Vaikuseminutid: tähelepanu ja meelerahu harjutused), and Wise consumer (Tark tarbija). (Verdeja Muñíz & García-Sampedro Fernández-Canteli, 2018).

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[12] http://character.org/
[13] http://character.org/more-resources/11-principles/
[14] https://www.character.org/schools-of-character/
[15] https://characterplus.org/
[16] http://smvproject.com/
[17] http://www.uptoyoueducacion.com/en/

In English speaking countries there is an ongoing academic discussion about the benefits and shortcomings of character education and citizenship education, even if both fields are intimately connected. Character education is sometimes criticized for being supposedly narrow and instrumental, emphasising the individual, moral dimension of character, whereas critics of citizenship education question its rejection – or at least downplaying – of transcultural moral values, its uncritical inculcation of democratic values, a frequent political bias, and a lack of attention to cultural diversity (Fernández González, 2018a; Fernández González, *in press* - b).

Materials, projects and academic work for facilitating character and virtue education

Educators around the world have elaborated materials for facilitating character education at school. As a sample of this huge work, we can mention the projects "Teaching Character through Subjects"[18] and "Teaching Character through the Curriculum – A guide to educating the virtues through and within 14 secondary school subjects"[19], which include practical materials for use in the classroom in several subjects. The association Character.org offers effective lesson plans, methodological strategies and best practices examples related to their "11 Principles of Effective Character Education"[20].

The research projects "The Schools of Virtue"[21] and "Schools of Character"[22] present several case studies about schools that successfully implement character education. The "Framework for Character Education in Schools"[23] is a position paper including a compelling advocacy for character education and synthetic definitions of character and virtues useful for the classroom. Some examples of organizations promoting mindfulness in schools all around the world as a way of developing personality are "Mindful teachers"[24], "Mindfulness for Schools"[25], "Stillness revolution"[26] and "Mindfulness in Education"[27].

Academic work in this field is also growing constantly. The conferences organized by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues of the University of Birmingham, such as "Cultivating

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[18] http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/1676/character-education/resources/teaching-character-through-subjects
[19] http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/TeachingCharacterThroughtheCurriculum.pdf
[20] http://character.org/lessons/lesson-plans/
[21] http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/1589/projects/current-projects/schools-of-virtue
[22] http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/character-education/SchoolsOfCharacterPDF.pdf
[23] http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/character-education/Framework%20for%20Character%20Education.pdf
[24] www.mindfulteachers.org
[25] www.mindfulnessforschools.com
[26] www.eftandmindfulness.com/mbct-course.html
[27] www.mindfulnessineducation.com

Virtues: Interdisciplinary Approaches"[28] (2016) and "Educating Character Through the Arts"[29] (2018) are good examples of this growing trend. Another example is the special issue "Character education" (fall 2019) of the journal "Estudios sobre Educación" of the University of Navarre in Spain, and the work of the Association for Moral Education[30] in United States.

However, the work done in the direction of teacher training is still insufficient in this field. In the next section we look at the recent developments in the domain of teacher professional development in addressing character education at school.

1.2. Teacher training for character and virtue education

(This section is based on Fernández González *et al.*, *submitted*; Verdeja Muñíz & García-Sampedro Fernández-Canteli, 2018; Fernández González, *in preparation*).

A recent parent's survey in UK showed that 84% of all parents believe that it is a teacher's role to encourage good morals and values in a student. The overwhelming majority (95%) agree that it is possible to teach a child values and shape their character in a positive sense, through lessons and dedicated projects or exercises at school. Research undertaken by the Jubilee Centre ("The Good Teacher"[31]; "The Teacher Education: Character and the Professional Development of Pre- and In-Service Teachers"[32]) points to the importance and the difficulty of implement efficient teacher education for character education. Their "Statement on Teacher Education and Character Education"[33] is a position paper including a compelling advocacy for a better teacher training in this field.

Examples of efforts for engaging with teacher training for character education can be found in different countries. In Spain, the Regional Boards of Education and Culture regularly update the criteria and programmes for the development of the Teacher Training Plans. However, little has been done in initial teacher training (ITT) regarding education for coexistence, education in values, education in social skills or education for an intercultural coexistence, as they remain optional subjects in many ITT curricula. The situation is similar regarding Continuous Teacher Training (CTT). Some concrete actions for coping with this

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[28] http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/1643/conferences/cultivating-virtues
[29] http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/1743/conferences/educating-character-through-the-arts
[30] https://www.amenetwork.org/
[31] https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/Research%20Reports/The_Good_Teacher_Understanding_Virtues_in_Practice.pdf
[32] https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/1757/projects/current-projects/teacher-education
[33] https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/character-education/Statement_on_Teacher_Education_and_Character_Education.pdf

problem are the so called 'pedagogical get-togethers' (reflective informal meetings initiated by teachers at school), and working groups of methodological innovation. (Verdeja Muñíz & García-Sampedro Fernández-Canteli, 2018). In Estonia, the programme "Development of teachers' value education competencies in teacher training" provided educational materials about value education in teacher education (Schihalejev, 2014). The University of Tartu provides teacher training courses in the field of character and value education (e.g., "Philosophy for children", "Teacher ethics and value education"). However, it is not enough to prepare the future teacher to support students' moral development (Schihalejev, 2014).

Among other international initiatives regarding teacher training for character and virtue education, the Jubilee Centre of the University of Birmingham offers an online 3-year MA programme in Character Education[34]. Another MA with a similar content is the "Education, MA: Character Education Emphasis (non-certification)"[35], which is offered at the Lindenwood University in USA. Other MA programmes in the field of ethics are "MSc Pedagogical Sciences: Ethics of Education: philosophy, history and law" (University of Groningen), "Religious education, applied ethics" (Utrecht University), "MA in Philosophical Ethics" (Research - Radboud University), etc. However, they are thematically further of the field of character education. There are also free online courses available for teachers in this field (MOOC), such as 'Building Character through Youth Social Action'[36] and 'What is Character?'[37]

Several international projects address also teacher training for character education from different perspectives. The Erasmus + project "ACT – ACTive Citizenship Projects to Enhance Pupils' Social and Civic Competences", involving England, France, Spain and Greece, includes teacher training on how to conduct an active citizenship project with pupils. The research project "Virtues in the Professions"[38] address teachers' work and training among other professions. The association Character.org offers different workshops and courses for teacher training and school leaders' training[39] in the field, based on their "11 Principles of Effective Character Education" sourcebook. Among the project offering teacher training for character education from the perspective of Philosophy for children, "DialogueWorks"[40] and

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[34] https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/postgraduate/courses/distance/edu/character-education.aspx
[35] http://www.lindenwood.edu/files/resources/charactereducation.pdf
[36] https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/youth-social-action
[37] https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/what-is-character
[38] http://jubileecentre.ac.uk/1595/projects/published-research/virtues-in-the-professions
[39] http://character.org/training/institutes-and-workshops/ ; http://character.org/more-resources/11-principles/
[40] http://www.dialogueworks.co.uk/education

"SAPERE"[41] (UK) are teacher training programmes with different levels addressing philosophical teaching and learning, and aiming at improving teachers' listening skills and their ability to learn about students' capacities. In Germany, the "Akademie Kinder Philosophieren"[42] offers courses for teachers and parents focussing on deep human anthropological issues: who am I? Me and the others. What is the world? What are values? In Austria, the "Akademie Philosophieren mit Kindern und Jugendlichen"[43] trains teachers for leading philosophical reflection with big groups of pupils, family, colleagues or in a team. The mindfulness perspective is addressed by teacher training programmes such as "MiSP Training Courses"[44], which focusses on teaching mindfulness to pupils of different ages (7-11 and 11-18-year-olds) and provides also training for school leaders and teacher trainers.

Conclusion

This overview of international practice proved the topicality of character and virtue education worldwide, and the academics' and practitioners' conviction that character and virtues can be purposeful taught and caught at school form many different perspectives. It revealed also the increasing awareness of the pressing need teachers have for institutional and methodological support, and the necessity of providing qualitative teacher training in this field as a precondition of successful and sustainable development of character education.

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[41] http://www.sapere.org.uk
[42] https://kinder-philosophieren.de/akademie-kinder-philosophieren/fortbildungsangebot
[43] http://www.wir-philosophieren.at/Aufbaumodule.html
[44] http://mindfulnessinschools.org/courses

2. Past, present and future of character and virtue education in Latvia

2.1. Character and virtue education in Latvian history

It has been often argued that history is a mirror for reflection, and that historical knowledge helps to understand human beings and society, is a source of new ideas, and helps to evaluate current societal processes (Ķestere, 2005, 6-9). This section summarizes the results of the research implemented for understanding the conceptualization and main characteristics of character education in three different periods of Latvian history: from the independence till the Second World War (1918-1939); the period of Soviet occupation of Latvia (1945-1991); and the period from the reestablishment of the independence till present.

2.1.1. Character education in Latvia between the two World Wars (1918-1939)

During the interwar period, in the Republic of Latvia several new trends in pedagogy have strongly criticized the inability of schools and educational theory of that time to organize the pedagogical process more efficiently and to influence the formation of personality. These new trends, which influenced the formation of the concept of virtue education, can be divided into those that emphasize the public interest in pedagogical activity, requiring education and upbringing to be subjected to social demand (social pedagogy, citizenship education theory, etc.); and those that emphasize the development of personality, its natural talents, abilities, aspirations, interests and needs (theory of free education, personalized pedagogy, etc.). These conceptual differences were also the cause of the differentiation of teachers and educators in two groups: social democratic educationist, interested in culture and politics and represented institutionally by the Latvian Union of Teachers (social democrats, left-wing teachers, hereinafter LUT); and the Latvian National Teachers' Union (national, right-wing teachers, hereinafter LNTU). Teachers' professional organizations were important centres for the generation of educational ideas and information, and they brought together a large number of teachers, providing them with opportunities for communication and discussion.

Descriptions and definitions of the understanding of the moral concepts in the pedagogical environment can be found in the encyclopaedic publication "Latvian Conversation Dictionary", published in the third decade of 20th century (1927-1940) by Švābe, Būmanis, and Dišlers. The definitions of this dictionary are based on the knowledge of earlier scientists, such

as K. Müllenbah, J. Endzelin (Dictionary of the Latvian Language 1853-1916, 1923-1932), P. Birkets, V. Olavs and J. A. Students.

In order to study educators' understandings of character and virtue upbringing during this period, two relevant media of this period were analysed, the official 'voice' of teachers' associations, were analyses, namely – the pedagogical journals "Educator" [Audzinātājs] (1925-1939), representing the position of the Latvian Union of Teachers; and "Our Future" [Mūsu Nākotne] (1922-1934), published on behalf of the Latvian National Teachers' Union. The research questions were: Are there differences between Latvian teacher organizations in the use of the notions of "character" and "virtue" in their most important editions "Our Future" (LUT) and "Educator" (LNTU)?

The results show that, over time, the term "character" in both journals was used proportionally more often and more stable than the concept of "virtue", which was used more frequently by the Latvian National Teacher Union in the journal "Educator" than the Latvian Teachers Union in the journal "Our Future". The concept of "virtue" was used less and less in both journals between 1926 and 1933. Between 1934 and 1938, both concepts were used much more frequently than before. But in the journal "Our Future", both concepts were most often used between 1931 and 1933; before that (1922-1931), this journal used the term "character" steadily in all years, but the concept of "virtue" – gradually less. The two journals published by the teachers' associations give priority to character education, but the virtue education associated with it is also often treated, especially in the Latvian Union of Teachers' journal "Our Future".

Conclusion

Before Second World War, the interest in pupils' character and virtue education was high among educators and policy makers in Latvia. The main virtues to be developed included prudence and freedom, will strength and willingness to serve, as well as openness and drive after truth in the formation of a new world view. These priorities were dramatically changed in the next historical period – the Soviet Latvia.

2.1.2. Character education during the occupation of totalitarian regimes (1940-1991)

In 1931-1934 there was an official educational turn that put educational achievement and proper conduct and discipline as the centre of Soviet education. Progressive education, in fashion since the October revolution (1917), was dismissed by the regime, and Paedology, the science of child development, was declared anti-Marxist (Brickman & Zepper, 1992, 34-35).

In 1935-1936 Makarenko, the most influential educational theorist in the Soviet Union, reinforced this new trend. Between 1946 and 1948, the work of Zhdanov, secretary of the Central Committee, in the field of education resulted in the establishment of the so-called "iron curtain of the mind" (Brickman & Zepper, 1992, 37). After the dead of Stalin (1953), the focus on discipline education at school continued till the end of the Soviet period.

Several written academic sources published in Soviet Latvia intended to school teachers mention explicitly character and virtue education: Two teaching manuals for teacher training (Jesipovs & Gončarovs, 1948; Iļjina, 1971) and three collections of scientific papers. Jesipovs's & Gončarovs's book 'Pedagogy - a teaching book for pedagogical schools' (1948) was used for teacher training in Latvia for more than two decades. Its section 11 (pp. 246-305) was named 'Contents and methodology for virtue education'. This work was replaced by Iļjina's book 'Pedagogy' in 1971, which was used for teacher training till the end of Soviet system. The title of its section 6 (pp. 93-111) was 'Virtue education', and section 7 was called 'Soviet patriotism and proletarian internationalist education' (pp. 112-123). The collections of scientific papers were written by the leading educational academics of Soviet Latvia, members of the Department of Pedagogy and Psychology of the Latvian State University, which published them in 1962 (6 papers), 1964 (9 papers) and 1967 (9 papers) within the series "Questions about upbringing in the Soviet school". 14 out of these 24 scientific papers addressed explicitly character and virtue education.

In these sources, the term 'upbringing' referred to "the development of knowledge-based communist convictions in the future generation, and the creation of character features of personality that are appropriated in communist society" (Jesipovs & Gončarovs, 1948, 12). The expression 'Soviet virtue education' appears very often and refers to the education of the Soviet personality as a whole, whereas the word 'character' was almost always understood as 'personal strength' or 'willpower'.

For Soviet educational theorists, educating a flourishing personality would be possible only after the new Soviet society will be established: "The radical improvement and development of humanity through upbringing will be possible only after the socialist system will replace the exploitative society through revolution, creating the conditions for a truly comprehensive development and upbringing of human beings" (Iļjina, 1971, 41).

Five concrete virtues were particularly relevant for a Soviet citizen: Soviet patriotism, socialist humanism, collectivism, discipline, and strength of character. Among them,

patriotism, discipline and strength of character were the most important, and, in the sources explored, Latvian academics put a great deal of effort to explain in detail the methods for achieving the formation of the New Soviet Man with its communist consciousness and its readiness to work and fight for the Soviet ideal.

A striking aspect of Soviet virtue education in light of classical Aristotelian character education theory is the total absence of any reference to the central virtue of *phronesis* (i.e., wisdom or morally good judgement in practical action which guides the other virtues and enable to perceive, know, desire and act with good sense). In the Soviet system, the sole criteria of importance/relevance of an idea was its relation to the Soviet ideology, and it seems that in Soviet character education, Soviet ideology replaced phronesis as the criteria of 'good sense' and in its role of *auriga virtutum*. Phronesis was probably considered superfluous and even dangerous, as the ideology provided already univocal criteria for action.

A related question is the treatment of critical thinking. It was considered as legitim when it referred to oneself (self-criticism for enhancing communist consciousness), to comrades (revealing others' deviances from the ideals of communist society), and to capitalism; but, in a regime of latent terror, it was not even thinkable to question the Soviet regime, its rulers or its ideology.

Conclusion

Soviet educationist stressed the development of students' performance virtues, such as will strength, order and discipline, while crucial intellectual virtues, such as prudence and love for truth which were considered as a priority for moral education during the previous period, were now ignored or controlled. Moral conscience was replaced by communist consciousness, and personal flourishment was relegated to an instrumental role at the service of the social project of communism (Iļjina, 1971). The rejection of transcendence, the 'scientific materialism' and the atheism inherent to Marxism-Leninism did not accept any source of morality external to the totalitarian Soviet ideology.

2.1.3. Character education in Latvia after the recovering of the independence

The re-establishment of Latvian independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union had as consequence the creation of a certain moral vacuum in society. The old Soviet virtues were discredited and the interest about the way of life of Europeans produce an initial indiscriminate importation of moral values, mostly out of curiosity. But in many educational settings these new moral values were not easily token for granted; they were received with a certain lack of

confidence. The possibility of coming back to the religious practice did not implied a deep understanding of the contents of Judaeo-Christian values after 50 years of official atheism.

At institutional level, during the first years the government had more urgent priorities than the moral education of youth. Only around the turn of the millennium, and with the inclusion of Latvia in the European Union (2004) the question of on which moral values should the country function became topical.

2.2. The present of character and virtue education in Latvia and future perspectives

(This section is based on Fernández González, Pīgozne, Surikova, & Vasečko, *in press*; Fernández González, Surikova, Pīgone, & Vasečko, *submitted*; Fernández González, 2018a; Fernández González, 2018b; Fernández González, *in preparation*).

In this section we will look at the legal and academic aspects of character education, and the we will summarize the results of the research implemented about the current understandings of character and virtue education in Latvia and the role of school in this domain.

2.2.1. Juridical and academic frameworks

In this sub-section we look at the current legislation regarding character and virtue education in Latvia, and we present the treatment of character and virtue education in the recent school reform Skola2030. We also explored the teacher training for character education and some ongoing character education programmes and projects implemented in Latvia.

Virtue education in the legislation and in the school reform project "Skola2030"

The Foreign Investors' Council in Latvia (FICIL, 2016) proposes to launch a new stage in the modernization of the Latvian education system, focusing on 21st century skills for both students and teachers. In FICIL's opinion, curriculum redefinition in accordance with the current needs of labour market, is necessary. This reform should harmonize the activities related to the competence-based approach with the new "guidelines for virtue education" or with character-based education.

The recent "Guidelines for virtue education in Latvian schools" (Cabinet of Ministers, 2016b) define the main directions for character and virtue education of learners at schools, and the procedures for assessing the appropriateness of teaching aids and materials, as well as teaching and upbringing methods, for ensuring the moral development of the learner. The education process should promote the learners' understanding, responsible attitude and behaviour corresponding to the following values: life, human dignity, freedom, family,

marriage, work, nature, culture, Latvian language and Latvian state. The virtues that allow to testify and implement those values are: responsibility, diligence, courage, honesty, wisdom, kindness, compassion, moderation, self-control, solidarity, justice and tolerance. Teachers are expected to be responsible for education at school.

At the level of the education system, one of the sub-goals set in the new Education Development Guidelines 2014-2020 is to "promote the development of individual's professional and social skills" (Parliament, 2014). In this context, the European Structural Fund (ESF) project "Career Support in General and Vocational Education Institutions"[45] (Cabinet of Ministries, 2016a) is being implemented from January 1st, 2016 to December 31st, 2020 in all Latvian general and vocational education institutions, promoting the development of pupils' personality and intrapersonal skills while acquiring career management skills. In its turn, the National Centre for Education implements the project "Competence Approach to Learning Content"[46] (Cabinet of Ministries, 2015) from October 17th, 2016, to October 16th, 2021, which promotes the acquisition of the same values mentioned in the Guidelines for virtue education in Latvian schools[47] (Cabinet of Ministries, 2016b).

The project "Skola2030"[48] stipulated that values constitute a significant part of students' education. They are the basis for habits that, when they are deliberately developed, become virtues. In other words, virtues are values that have been internalized. The school's task is to provide a comprehensive understanding of values such as life, human dignity, freedom, family, marriage, work, nature, culture, Latvian language and Latvian state for children and young people, creating a respectful attitude and a sense of responsibility about oneself and one's actions. The project description states that neither values nor virtues can be taught or instilled directly; therefore, the responsibility of teachers is to strengthen habits. Values and their enactment (virtues) are learned by people throughout their lives, even beyond the boundaries of educational institutions. Pupils see values that are relevant for them in daily communication and interaction both within the family, at school, and among friends and in other social settings.

Initial teacher training and professional development programmes

The necessary education and professional qualifications for teachers in the Republic of Latvia and their professional competence development procedures are established in the

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[45] http://www.viaa.gov.lv/lat/karjeras_atbalsts/karjeras_atbalsts_2016_2020/
[46] http://visc.gov.lv/visc/projekti/esf_831.shtml, https://www.skola2030.lv/
[47] http://visc.gov.lv/visc/projekti/dokumenti/esf_831/20161027_prezent.pdf p. 4.
[48] https://www.skola2030.lv/

Regulations No 569 of 21 September 2018 by the Latvian Cabinet of Ministers[49] (Cabinet of Ministers, 2018). Teachers can develop their professional competence in higher educational institutions, teachers' professional NGOs and other institutions recognized by the Ministry (e.g., education services of municipalities). The contents of their regular compulsory training (at least 36 hours every 3 years) can include 'teacher`s general competencies' (including pupils upbringing and civic competences), 'curriculum and didactics' and 'educational leadership'.

There are some continuous teacher training courses offered in Latvia in the field of character education. For example, the following course were offered in 2017-2018: the seminar "Improvement of a Teachers' Professional Competence on the Issues of National and Virtue Education"[50]; the programme "Improvement of virtues in the upbringing process"[51]; the programme "Transversal competences in a civic and national education in a competence-based learning process"[52]; the programme "Basic principles of successful upbringing within the aspect of value and virtue education"[53], etc. Recently, the Education Development Centre has launched the programme "Value education"[54] about value education integration in the study process at school, and including transversal competences.

However, this offer is fragmentary and partial. There is a need of innovative teacher training programmes for character education which contain innovative approaches and methods and meet the needs of today's schools and society. Schools need teachers who are able to initiate innovative practices of character and virtue education. Teachers' need to be empowered for elaborating materials and initiating programmes for character education at school that are cultural-sensitive, adapted to the concrete educational spaces, school-environment sensitive and family inclusive. And families increasingly need support from school to transmit values to youngsters in a sustainable way

Ongoing character education programmes and projects in Latvia

There are several projects and initiatives related to character education in Latvia: among them we can mention the Erasmus+ project "Shaping Characters"[55], the document "Education

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[49] https://likumi.lv/ta/id/301572
[50] https://www.macibuiestade.lv/notikumi/pedagogu-profesionalas-kompetences-pilnveide-valstiskas-un-tikumiskas-audzinasanas-jautajumos
[51] https://lmc.lv/lv/jaunumi/atvert/sia-latgales-macibu-centrs--piedava-apgut--a-limena-pedagogu-profesionalas-kompetences-pilnveides-pr
[52] http://www.rv1g.lv/index.php/talakizglitiba/
[53] http://lpmc.lv/macibas/backPid/7/browse/2/category/skolu-darbiniekiem/article/veiksmigas-audzinasanas-pamatprincipi-vertibizglitibas-un-tikumiskaja-aspekta-6decembri.html
[54] http://www.iac.edu.lv/programmas/new-program-page/
[55] http://www.shapingcharacters.eu ; http://www.iksd.riga.lv/public/88494.html

for modern competence: description of study content and approach"[56] (in Latvian: "Izglītība mūsdienīgai lietpratībai: mācību satura un pieejas apraksts"), elaborated within the ESF project "Competence-based approach in the educational content" (2016–2021), the conference "Topical issues and trends of character education in Latvia and worldwide"[57], the research project "Teachers' ethics, development of transversal and socio-emotional competences and character education to promote quality of education" within the research project "Human, technologies and quality of education"[58], 2016-2018 (Faculty of Education, Psychology and Art of the University of Latvia), the Erasmus+ project "Supporting teachers for developing intra-personal competencies and character education at school - Arete Catalyst"[59] (2017-2019).

Some Latvian schools have started to implement experimental character education programmes, such as "Integrating an effective character education programme at the Riga Catholic Gymnasium"[60]. There is also a noteworthy programme for the upbringing of values, implemented at the Laurenču Primary School (Sigulda)[61] which actively involves parents and pupils.

Conclusion

In Latvia there is a strong institutional buy-in and legal support for character education at school, as well as a methodological culture supporting ethical education. In addition, there is a high awareness about (pre-service and in-service) teacher training needs in this field. However, due to the current educational reforms, teachers are overloaded with new information and they rarely have the necessary time and support for implementing character and virtue education at school. Moreover, it seems that the teacher training offer is fragmentary and insufficient.

2.2.2. Understandings of character and virtue education in Latvian education system
During April - October 2018, an online survey involving 2200 respondents from different educational sectors (parents, pupils, pre-service and in-service teachers, and school leaders) was

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[56] http://www.izm.gov.lv/images/aktualitates/2017/Skola2030Dokuments.pdf
[57] http://katolis.lv/notikumu-kalendars/backPid/369/category/seminari/article/konference-rakstura-izglitibas-aktualitates-un-tendences-pasaule-un-latvija-1.html
[58] https://www.pzi.lu.lv/petnieciba/lu-petniecibas-projekti/cilv-tehn-un-izgl-kval/1aspekts-cilveks-un-izglitiba/skolotaju-etika-un-transversalo-kompetencu-21-gs-prasmju-attistiba/
[59] https://www.lu.lv/en/jf/par-mums/ul-media/news/zina/t/18242/
[60] https://www.izglitiba-kultura.lv/avize/nr3-513
[61] https://laurenci.edu.lv/

implemented in Latvia about the understandings and challenges of character education and virtue education in Latvian educational context (see Table 1 and Table 2).

Table 1: Respondents by region

Region	N
Riga	759
Latgale	324
Kurzeme	236
Vidzeme	211
Zemgale	656
Overall	**2186**

Table 2: Respondents by sector

Sectors	N
9th grade students	386
12th grade students	454
Future teachers	244
Teachers	474
School leaders	127
Parents	463
Educational authorities	32
Overall	**2180**

The first section of the survey concerned the understanding of character and virtue education and included quantitative and qualitative data. During the analysis of the quantitative data, it was found that in Latvian educational system there is a general agreement of all sectors (parents, pupils, pre-service and in-service teachers, and school leaders) to say that character and virtue are quite well-known concepts, and that they are different, and therefore character education and virtue education are also different things, but they are interconnected. Respondents have a quite favourable opinion and acceptance of both character education and virtue education, and this tendency is slightly stronger regarding character education. Both kinds of education are particularly relevant to improve students' behaviour. Respondents strongly agree that character education is not directly related to religious or political education, and that it enhances academic performance and employability, whereas virtue education is particularly helpful to build good relationships and promotes both individual and social well-being. Teachers and school leaders reported the highest agreement to definitions of character education that included both students' self-involvement and non-formal education activities.

As regards the qualitative data of this section, the different topics were found in the respondents' statements regarding character and virtue education. In connection with character, respondents often mentioned the development of will strength, individual development, personality development, the formation of individuality and decision making. On the other hand, virtue education is often referred to as development of moral strength, attitudinal development, quality relationships, behavioural choices, moral upbringing, value education, ethical upbringing, religious upbringing, Christian upbringing, spiritual upbringing and sexual education. Analysing the main tendencies in respondents' statements, one can conclude that character education and virtue education are interconnected but different. Raising character is

associated with the development of willpower, which enhances personality development, and is manifested in a person's attitude, first of all to himself, as well as in the careful choice of behaviour and friends. The essence of virtue education is in the development of the moral strength, manifested in the moral quality of the person's attitudes, relationships, and behaviours.

Conclusion

Respondents have a quite favourable opinion and acceptance of both character education and virtue education. They are seen as complementary, and both work in synergy. Respondents' understanding of the concepts of character and virtue education is very diversified, even if some common tendencies exist: while character education is often connected with will strength and clear personal decisions, virtue education is often associated with moral attitudes, respectful, careful relationships, and virtuous behaviour. However, for historical reasons in a number of respondents there is an association between the concepts of "virtue education" / "character education" and the Soviet totalitarian regime, which suggests that, in the communication with society and the media, maybe the expression "education of moral habits" should be used instead.

3. Challenges for improving character and virtue education in Latvia

The results of the second part of the survey are summarized in this section: respondents' thoughts and recommendations for successful implementation of character upbringing in Latvia, as well as conclusions of the expert group on the strengths and weaknesses of opportunities and threats of improvement of character and moral education in Latvia.

3.1. The role of school and necessary support for character education

(This section is based on Fernández González, *in preparation*)

Respondents were asked to express their views on the role of school and teachers in upbringing. The open questions of the survey allowed them to express their thoughts and suggestions in this area. Primary analysis of total quantitative data suggests that 92% of respondents believe that it is possible to purposefully educate children's moral habits and values at school through appropriate lectures, projects and voluntary activities. 77% of respondents also believe that the school is co-responsible for this educational work (with parents), and 74% believe that promoting good moral habits and raising values are part of the role of teachers. Analysing Riga City data separately, it was found that 89% of 759 respondents in Riga believe that it is possible to purposefully raise the moral habits and values of children at school through suitable lectures, projects and voluntary activities. 74% also believe that the school is responsible for this educational work (with parents), and 68% believe that promoting good moral habits and raising values are part of the role of teachers. In the case of parents, whether the school is currently cooperating with you, 51.2% of the parents questioned answered in the affirmative, but 48.8% said no.

Some typical respondents' statements regarding the necessary support for the upbringing of character education (CE) and virtue education (VE) at school are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Respondents' statements about the necessary support for moral education

Fields	Expressions
Latvian policy makers	Do not use ideological abstractions. Distribute school and family responsibilities. Avoid the dominating academic approach. Pay attention to upbringing. Define CE/VE goals, using historical experience. Salaries matter. Shared discussion on identified problems!
Education system	The school day is too long, even good students have difficulties to focus. There is no time left for home and family. The number of pupils in the classroom is too large, it should be less. Balance academic and upbringing work. Research is needed. More fluid communication with teachers.

Curricula	Two opposing opinions: 1) Include VE content in curriculum. Review the content of Social sciences. Introduction of the subject in psychology. 2) Do not change the curriculum. Integrate VE/CE into everyday communication rather than as subject. Adapt the curricula to the needs of the children.
School atmosphere	Talking more to students. Creating a favourable, safe environment by introducing codes of conduct at school. Hire support staff. Responsibility!! Uniform requirements for all teachers. Systematic / planned school staff work on VE/CE.
Education and support for parents	Enhance the role of the family. Learning from moral exemplars. Talk more with kids. Give parents regular information about school, the situation classroom. Creating a favourable, safe environment by introducing moral codes in the family. Suggestions for parents about what to do at home, how to create a morally supportive environment.
Teacher training	Work on teachers' personality and virtues. Increase their self-confidence. Getting experience already at University. Learn from CE/VE practitioners. Practical training.
Young teachers at school	Developing the character and virtue of new teachers. Teacher as a positive example. Continuous help of mentor at school. Organizing excursions, lectures. Exchanges with older colleagues, hints and tips. Methodological help. Ideas for the classroom. Learning new methods. Help to communicate better with their pupils
Teachers' professional development	Continue targeted training: courses, seminars. conferences, example, lectures, knowledge of character types, methods, practices. Provide scientific literature and Internet resources (worksheets, lesson plans etc.). Meaningful further education. Teachers' mobility for exchanging experiences.
Upbringing and learning process	Lecturing children in an understandable language. Transform school from 'competition' to 'collaboration'! Don't make the pupil's markings influence their life quality: numbers should not affect their future. Learn more about pupils in class. Talk more often to students
Teaching and learning materials	Age-sensitive materials with video attachments for pupils: video films with modelling situations. Prepared role plays, questionnaires, tests etc. Preparing exercises, classroom tasks. Methodological materials, study materials, handouts. Interactive lessons.
Education and support for society	Creating a favourable, safe environment by introducing in society a code of human ethics. Coordinate the support from parents, NGOs, institutions. Cooperation with local governments. Charity work. Collaboration of all involved.

3.2. Enhancing character and virtue education in Latvia: SWOT analysis

(This section is based on Fernández González, *in press* – b; Fernández González *et al.*, *submitted*; Fernández González, 2018a; Verdeja Muñíz & García-Sampedro Fernández-Canteli, 2018).

In order to discuss the results of the study and to clarify the needs for character education in the context of Latvia, at the end of 2018 and the beginning of 2019 several expert think-tanks and focus groups were organized with Latvian and foreign experts attended by school leaders, teachers, parents, education authorities and foreign scientists. The sectoral distribution of participants presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Participants in the character education discussions by sector

Sectors	N
Foreign scientists (EE, SP, UK)	15
School directors	35
Teachers	45
Parents	35
Educational authorities	8
Academic personal (University of Latvia)	9
Overall	**147**

Table 5 shows the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for improving character and virtue education in Latvia.

Tabula 5: Enhancing character and virtue education in Latvia: SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
1. Strong institutional buy-in: Character education is included in the Education Development Guidelines, the project "Competence Approach to Learning Content" and the project Skola2030". 2. Strong legal support: Cabinet of Ministers' regulation No 480 "Guidelines for the upbringing (virtue education) of learners and the procedure for evaluating information, teaching aids, materials and teaching/learning and upbringing methods" (adopted in 2016). 3. Strong methodological culture for ethical education. the National Centre for Education (VISC) elaborated "moral upbringing (virtue education) guidelines" and educational materials. 4. High awareness about (pre-service and in-service) teacher training needs in the field of virtue and character education.	1. There is a lack of unified understanding of character education in Latvia. 2. There is a lack of teachers' training and professional development programmes on character education. 3. Lack of methodological materials for usage in the classroom. 4. Lack of collaboration between families and school in this field.
Opportunities	**Threats**
1. Some institutional efforts of elaboration and implementation of character education programmes (Riga Catholic Gymnasium, Laurenču school in Sigulda, etc.) 2. Ongoing or completed research projects in the field (e.g., Erasmus+ project "Shaping Characters" (2015-2017), the UL's project "Teachers' ethics, development of transversal and socio-emotional competences and character education to promote quality of education" (2016-2018), Erasmus+ project "Supporting teachers for developing intra-personal competencies and character education at school - Arete Catalyst", this current postdoctoral research project). 3. Existing international projects (UK, USA, Australia, Spain) that can inspire character and virtue education in Latvia (transfer and adaptation of materials and programmes).	1. Current educational reforms: teachers are overloaded with new information, need to concentrate in the new approach. 2. Difficulty to find competent teacher trainers in the field. 3. Terminological misunderstandings: "virtue education" and "character education" have different connotations (maybe the expression "education of moral habits" should be used instead).

Conclusions and recommendations

The virtues and values the Latvian legislation put forward in 2016 are thoughtfully integrated in the school reform project Skola2030. However, whereas the importance of creating and reinforcing students' habits at school is acknowledged, the possibility of teaching virtues (moral habits) and values at school is not clearly nor stated nor planned, letting this central aspect of education to children' ability to grasp it in the school environment and out of the school.

International experience proves that character should be taught and caught at school. This research revealed that in Latvia there is a an almost unanimous parental support for implementing purposeful character and virtue education at school.

The research revealed also teachers' awareness of their responsibility, and their need for institutional and methodological support. The necessary changes in the education system should start with teachers' and school leaders' training, so that they become catalyst of moral and academic excellence for the whole school community.

Latvian society as a whole needs to be educated about what means (and what does not mean) character and virtue education, their mutual complementarity and their difference with value education. In this regard, the social media, public conferences and debates would be helpful. Existing documentaries about character and virtue education could be translated into Latvian and disseminated in the public television channels and other media.

The main suggestions received during this wide consultation for undertaking character education at school and for offering appropriate teacher training are summarized below.

Recommendations for introduction of character education and virtues programmes at school

- Regarding terminology: for historical reasons, it might be convenient to use the term "education of moral habits" instead of "character education" or "virtue education". Clarification of the meaning of values and virtues (similarities and differences) should be addressed.
- Each school should define its educational goals and objectives including character education and collaboration with families. The character development plan of the school should be clear and foresee time enough to develop each moral habit (for example, 2 months). School leaders should support teachers, allotting them time for personal reflection and regular discussions among them.

- The programme should have the agreement and involvement of the majority of the educational community (including teachers, administration, parents and support staff). The school principal and administration should strongly support character education. Parents and students should be involved in the choice of school values/virtues and in the design of the corresponding educational programme.

- Internationally approved instruments (e.g., the school self-evaluation sheet "11 Principles of Effective Character Education") could support school in this effort. The programme could be introduced at school through a continuing workplace learning programme for teachers (6 to 32 hours), resulting in a personalized plan for character education at school.

- Virtue literacy (cognitive contents, such as the vocabulary of virtue and character) should be integrated with appropriated emotional virtue education that inspires students and helps them to internalize and put into practice their knowledge. Video, classic literature and personal contact with inspiring role models of virtue growth are advisable.

- The teaching and learning methods should include class activities, and also practical activities out of the school with a social component. Reflection tool for students should be included (journal, personal mentoring conversations, or other).

- An appropriate way of teaching character through subjects without overloading teachers is to work on the worksheets the teachers already use, helping them to include the perspective of character education in the way the subject contents are delivered. Methodological seminars for teachers and parents could address this work practically.

- The implementation could be supported by e-class system to facilitate communication with parents, and by e-leaning systems (such as uzdevumi.lv) to facilitate teaching and learning.

- The school spaces should reflect creatively the school educational priorities. Posters and other visual materials may be useful if they are elaborated by students and parents themselves.

Recommendations for a teacher training programme for character education

Given the importance of teacher education, the following suggestions are put forward. This professional development programme should aim at the integration of the following aspects mentioned in Latvian educational law: development of teachers' general competencies, methods and didactics (e.g., elaboration of teaching/learning materials for use in the classroom), and school and class management (including school culture creation). The programme should be in line with current educational reforms.

Regarding the contents of the programme: Teachers need to acquire personal experience and understanding of their own values and virtues, obtained through personal and group reflection. Nowadays, acquiring a multicultural perspective of personality development is necessary. Mindfulness exercises, which enhance awareness and open (non-judgemental) attitude, would be desirable to work on teachers' self-knowledge and own values.

Regarding the classroom materials: The programme should be practically oriented. Teachers need concrete support materials to implement character education in the classroom. Many materials are available online, so the programme should show catalyst teachers where to find these resources and include practical work about how to adapt them to their local context.

Regarding the programme methodology and assessment: Teachers often are saturated. The programme should be built on what teachers have already done in this field, and the programme delivering should be flexible. Methodology should be attractive and innovative, including blended learning and use of virtual spaces, collaboration and peer assessment.

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