THE EUROPEAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCHER
DOI: 10.31757/euer.622

http://www.eu-er.com/

Character Building at Bachelor Psychology Program – Findings Based on a Natural Approach

Sabita Soedamah-Muthu & Ya-Ping (Amy) Hsiao
Tilburg University, The Netherlands

Abstract: Character building (CB) is a crucial aspect for basic psychologists who need to carry out their consultation tasks effectively. At Tilburg University, lecturers have the freedom to interpret the five CB dimensions and implement them in courses, including intellectual independence, critical mindset, social responsibility, scientific responsibility, and entrepreneurship. This study aims to investigate how the five CB dimensions are interpreted and implemented in the three-year Bachelor Psychology program at Tilburg University. As part of the regular quality assurance of assessment, we made a full program assessment plan in 2021-2022 and collected extra data on course practices of CB. At the program level, the five CB dimensions were related to the 13 program learning outcomes by reviewing the self-reflection report. At the course level, a template thematic analysis was used to code the course learning goals, instructional activities, and assessment. Two-thirds of the courses formulated CB-related learning goals, mostly delivered through interactive lecture forms. The instructional activities were categorized into six themes: academic standards, application, evaluative judgment, self-regulation, societal relevance, and taking initiatives. The five CB dimensions were mostly assessed by coursework method, but there was a lack of assessment of CB elements such as reflection. The five CB dimensions were implemented in most educational processes at the course and program level, despite the absence of a standardized implementation plan. We advise to focus on the assessment design for character education, particularly through the use of more authentic and performance-based assessment methods

Keywords: *character education, program curriculum design, instructional design, course assessment design, constructive alignment*

Introduction

Higher education aims to develop students into becoming lifelong learning professionals who know *how to think and behave* as good students, good employees and professionals, and good citizens (Schwartz, 2022). As stated as principle 1 in Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology by the American Psychological Association (APA) (American Psychological Association, 2011), a program should develop students to be responsible for monitoring and enhancing their own learning and to become psychologically literate citizens. Cultivating a set of character strengths is thus equally important to the development of knowledge and skills. However, compared to education of knowledge and skills, it is less clear for lecturers how to guide students to think and behave, that is how to transform students to moral agents who will do good in the world (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007; Halonen et al., 2020; Kristjánsson, 2013). Character building (CB) through *intentional instructional strategies* is therefore important to achieve the aims of higher education in general and to fulfill the quality principle in psychology programs specifically.

Wright et al. defined character as “integration of a constellation of virtues within personality” (2020, p.188). Character is a complex construct and it includes “cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioral characteristics” (VanderWeele, 2022, p.177). From the perspective of developmental psychology, we define a character strength as a *learnt quality* that has moral connotations (Kristjánsson, 2013), because good character strength enables individuals to become competent moral agents and do good in the world (Pike et al., 2021; Sokol et al., 2010). CB resembles

raising children as parents preparing them for adulthood and living independently, how to make students independent academically skilled thinkers well prepared for the professional world. Although character strengths can be partly inherited as personality traits, we follow De Regt and van Lenning's discussions (2017) that CB is *slow* learning and students need time to first establish a value system that leads to certain targeted good behavior.

As for focused character strengths, the APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major (American Psychological Association, 2016) have listed for example, self-directedness, open- and fair-mindedness, constructively critical, being ethical, civically engaged, creative and inventive (see "Goal 2 scientific inquiry and critical thinking" and "Goal 3 social and ethical responsibility in a diverse world"). As character being one pillar of the Tilburg Educational Profile next to knowledge and skills, the five dimensions[1] are defined as follows at the institutional level.

- Intellectual independence: Students are able to independently analyze complex information from different perspectives in order to arrive at a substantiated, personal opinion.
- Critical mindset: Students question the ideas, assumptions and beliefs of others and reflect on the backgrounds of their own ideas, assumptions, and beliefs.
- Social responsibility: Students are professionally honest and socially committed. They make conscious choices, as professionals and (world) citizens, taking into account the consequences of these choices for others and for society.
- Scientific responsibility: Students follow all rules of good and ethically responsible scientific research; they understand the importance and impact of science in a complex (global) society and act upon this accordingly.
- Entrepreneurship: Students are enterprising thinkers; they have an enterprising, proactive mentality. They take the initiative to operate successfully, in a context in which they understand what can be expected of them.

These five dimensions of CB are similar to the character strengths listed by the APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major (APA, 2016). In addition, the Guidelines also suggest that the development of these strengths should be integrated in the program curriculum design (APA, 2016) and lectures should be provided with didactic models and principles for implementation (Dunn et al., 2010; Halonen et al., 2020). For example, using a logical model based on the notion of constructive alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2007) and the approach of backward design (Berkowitz, 2022) to guide lecturers to define desired characters, make them explicit in the course learning outcomes, determine appropriate assessment methods to gather evidence, and use effective instructional approaches to ensure student development on these traits.

[1] https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/about/education/tep

Research Aim & Questions

Compared to primary and secondary education, CB in higher education has been far less implemented and researched (Carr, 2017). Although it has gradually called for a revival and received more attention recently, CB is mostly implemented as extra- or co-curricular activity (e.g., service learning or as part of a honors program) or through dedicated courses (e.g., ethics) (Lamb et al., 2022). To the best of our knowledge, character education at the program level to gradually develop and assess student progress in target character strengths is up to now less investigated. In addition, our university principle of implementation CB is to provides lecturers with support, such as a toolbox, events for sharing experience rather than centralization. This means, every school has autonomy to decide the focus components and how to implement it at the program and course level. Although the implementation has *never* been a top-down approach, we have observed that teaching staffs value CB at the Bachelor Psychology program. The main aim of this study is to investigate to what extent and in what way CB and has taken place at the program and course level of our Bachelor Psychology program at Tilburg University. Then based on this analysis, we can find a baseline for further improvements.

We seek to address the following two questions:

- RQ1. How are the five dimensions of CB implemented at the program level?
- RQ2. How are these five dimensions implemented at the course level?

Methods

The Bachelor Psychology program is taught in two languages: Dutch (~350 students) and English (~ 350 students). The content of the program in both languages is *identical* in terms of program learning outcomes, course learning goals, instructional methods and assessment types, although by its nature the international curriculum puts slightly more emphasis on international aspects of the content of the courses and the cultural diversity of the students. We used 63 courses in the English track for data analysis.

As part of the annual quality assurance of assessment at Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, we made between 2021 and 2022 a full program assessment plan and collected extra data on course practices of CB. It was finalized on 11th January 2022. Given that this study was conducted as an internal quality assurance process at the program level, obtaining formal approval from the ethics review committee was deemed unnecessary. However, the Vice-Dean of the Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences provided authorization for publication of the data. Additionally, all course coordinators provided written consent via email, granting permission for their data to be utilized for this specific purpose.

At the program level, the program learning outcomes (PLOs) were formulated based on the five categories of Dublin Descriptors and Domain-specific Frame of Reference in Psychology. We reviewed the most recent program self-reflection report (SER, in which the meanings of these outcomes were elaborated) to identify the CB outcomes and related each outcome to the five dimensions of CB.

At the course level, each course coordinator filled out a course assessment plan that indicates the PLOs covered, the lecture forms and assessment types (based on the program assessment plan) used in the course, as well as described the examples of instructional activities on the five dimensions of CB. To facilitate this, the academic directors formulated the generic prompts (see Table 5) on the five dimensions to guide lecturers to retrospect their CB activities implemented in their courses.

Using a template thematic analysis approach, the course learning goals, lecture forms and assessment methods, examples of the five dimensions, were coded using Atlas.ti qualitative analysis software program. A template analysis is appropriate for our research aim because it integrates both deductive (i.e., the initial template is based on the five dimensions) and inductive (the priori template can be modified based on the emerging themes) approaches (King, 2012). A limited number of tentative themes identified based on either the five dimensions or literature review were used and progressed to the final codes. The second author of this paper who is not a staff member of the Bachelor Psychology program carried out the coding independently.

Note that the number of courses that cover each dimension of CB differs (see Table 2), to compare different percentages of how CB was addressed in the courses (learning goals, instructional activities, and assessment), we normalized the total, which is done by Atlas.ti by choosing the normalization option with showing absolute frequencies (i.e., number of coded texts, quotations) and row-relative frequencies (i.e., distribution of quotations with a table row)[2].

Results

RQ1. How Are The Five Dimensions of CB Implemented at The Program Level?

Our review of the SER shows the program curriculum implements CB by providing students with a broad perspective on psychology and its role in contemporary society and to stimulate students' reflection upon their own skills, goals, and roles. This translates into a recurring emphasis on research ethics, professional ethics, and self-reflection in various courses throughout the curriculum in addition to dedicated courses on ethics, communication and group skills, personal coaching in the Program of Academic Study Success (PASS), as well as dedicated courses on Philosophy of Mind and Philosophy of Science.

Thirteen of the 24 PLOs related to the five dimensions are mapped in Table 1, which shows that CB is stated in all categories of Dublin Descriptors. This means, the five dimensions of CB are actually integrated with knowledge and skills. For example, to develop students to take social and scientific responsibilities, they first need to acquire knowledge of ethical norms that apply to the profession of psychology (PLO-1.7). For students to become intellectually independent, they first need to develop information searching (PLO-2.4) and research skills (PLO-2.5).

[2] For more explanations, please consult this link: https://doc.atlasti.com/ManualWin.v9/CodeDocumentTable/CodeDocumentTableNormalization.html.

The frequencies of how often each outcome is covered in the courses are also shown in Table 1. The most frequently covered outcomes are information literacy (PLO-2.4, *n* = 47), critical reading and evaluation of literature (PLO-3.1, *n* = 33), and scientific contribution and attitude (PLO-5.1, *n* = 26). The least frequently covered outcomes are observation (PLO-2.2, *n* = 8) and interviewing (PLO-2.3, *n* = 7) skills.

Table 1

Programs Learning Outcomes Relevant to Five Dimensions of Character Building

	Intellectual independence	Critical mindset	Social responsibility	Scientific responsibility	Entrepreneurship	Number of courses covered
1. Knowledge & Understanding						
1.7. knowledge of ethical norms that apply to the profession of psychology;			X	X		10
2. Applying Knowledge & Understanding						
2.1. general intellectual skills: logical and analytical reasoning;	X	X				47
2.2. interviewing and communication skills as a method of acquiring data and/or professional applications;			X	X		8
2.3. observation skills as a method of acquiring data and/or professional applications;			X	X		7
2.4. skills to independently find scientific literature and to do a literature study by means of digital information systems;	X			X	X	18
2.5. skills to independently apply methods of quantitative data management and data analysis;	X			X		15
2.6. skills to, under supervision, formulate testable research questions and to design practically feasible studies, including the choice of research methods.		X		X		13
3. Making Judgements						
3.1. the ability to critically read and judge scientific literature;		X		X		33

3.2. reflection on own knowledge, professional skills, and acts, as well as on the knowledge, skills and acts of others;		X	X	X	15
3.3. awareness of the responsibilities of a psychologist holding a university degree with respect to society at large.		X	X	X	14
4. Communication					
4.1. being able to clearly communicate both orally and in writing in proper academic Dutch or English on aspects of the field of psychology with peers and non-peers;			X	X	16
4.2. scientific reporting on literature studies and on empirical studies, both orally and in writing, using the most recent APA norms;			X	X	14
5. Lifelong Learning Skills					
5.1. contribute to scientific knowledge, taking an interested, investigative attitude;		X		X	26
5.2. willingness to lifelong learning.	X			X	11

As for the frequencies of the five dimensions of CB covered in the courses, Table 2 shows the results aggregated from each course assessment plan at the program level. Critical mindset (87.30%) is implemented most frequently whereas Social responsibility (38.10%) and Entrepreneurship (38.10%) are least frequently implemented.

Table 2

Number of Courses That Cover Each Dimension of CB

	Intellectual independence	**Critical mindset**	**Social responsibility**	**Scientific responsibility**	**Entrepre-neurship**
N (%*)	49 (77.78%)	55 (87.30%)	24 (38.10%)	43 (68.25%)	24 (38.10%)

Note: *The total number of courses $N = 63$.

RQ2. How Are These Five Dimensions Implemented at The Course Level?

We answer this question by reporting the results on how they are implemented in the educational processes: course learning goals (LGs), instructional activities (i.e., lecture forms and topics of teaching and learning activities), and assessment.

Course Learning Goals

The course LGs are coded based on their relevance to the five dimensions. In 40 out of the 63 courses (63.49%), part of the LGs are relevant to the five dimensions. In total, 114 LGs are relevant to the five dimensions of CB. The example LGs on the five dimensions are:

- Intellectual independence: Design, carry out, and report on empirical research.
- Critical mindset: take position on sexual health and abnormalities and substantiate this.
- Social responsibility: be aware of their own influence on others.
- Scientific responsibility: critically analyze research methods (e.g., experiments, observational methods) and state-of-the-art research on emotions.
- Entrepreneurship: provide scientifically sound advice on tackling negative relationships (for example, when it comes to loneliness and bullying).

Note that some LGs were coded as multiple dimensions (see Table 3). For example, the goal "demonstrate a professional work attitude in both thesis process (individual and group meetings with supervisors) and product (e.g. effort, independence, working with feedback)" was coded as both Intellectual independence (i.e., professional work attitude, independence) and Critical mindset (i.e., working with feedback).

Although the five dimensions were covered by LGs in most courses, Social responsibility and Entrepreneurship were less frequently stated.

Instructional Activities

Table 4 shows the normalized frequencies of lecture forms through which instructional activities on the five dimensions were implemented. Instructional activities on all of the five dimensions are most frequently delivered through interactive lecture forms, such as tutorials, practicals, seminars. While group work is less frequently used compared to interactive and traditional lectures, it is the most frequently used lecture form for Entrepreneurship.

As for the instructional activities on the five dimensions, Table 5 shows some examples of these activities. Based on the Atlas.ti analyses we found 18 codes in the instructional activities examples described by course coordinators, we further clustered them into six major themes (see Table 6).

Table 3

Course Learning Goals Relevant to the Five Dimensions

Five dimensions of CB	Number of Learning goals identified	Examples of Course Learning Goals
Intellectual independence	60	• Design, carry out and report on empirical research • Perform a recruitment and selection task • Under supervision, design, execute, and report a study about a psychological question
Critical mindset	37	• Evaluate the effectiveness of advertising techniques • Formulate a reflection, relate expectations to the approach and result • Reason about what conclusions historical persons most probably would have drawn with respect to historical and contemporary issues
Social responsibility	19	• Awareness of the responsibilities of a psychologist holding a university degree with respect to society at large • Discuss the relevance and implications of the insights described for current societal issues (e.g., environmental problems, sexism, racism, gender- and social inequality in general) • Recognize and describe ethical issues and dilemmas in real life scenarios
Scientific responsibility	53	• Describe and elaborate on the most important factors that may threaten the quality of a psychological test • Reflect critically on the ethical considerations of the research • Recognize possible ethical problems in research designs and research practices and propose strategies on how to avoid these problems
Entrepreneurship	8	• Address the problem raised by the company in a manner that elicits a positive response from the company (not necessarily a solution), specifically in the reaction to the presentation • Communicate findings to the company in a clear, creative and stimulating manner during the presentation • Provide scientifically sound advice on tackling negative relationships (for example, when it comes to loneliness and bullying)
Totals	114	

Table 4

Lecture Forms of Instructional Activities on the Five Dimensions

Five dimensions of CB	**Interactive lectures**		**Traditional lectures**		**Group work**	
	n*	*%***	n*	*%***	n*	*%***
• Intellectual independence	43.11	*48.44*	34.76	*39.06*	11.13	*12.50*
• Critical mindset	42.00	*47.19*	32.00	*35.96*	15.00	*16.85*
• Social responsibility	37.83	*42.50*	37.83	*42.50*	13.34	*15.00*
• Scientific responsibility	49.67	*55.81*	37.26	*41.86*	2.07	*2.33*
• Entrepreneurship	58.31	*65.52*	0	*0*	30.69	*34.48*

Total	230.92		141.85		72.23	

Notes: *Absolute frequencies; **Row-relative frequencies, divided by the normalized total $N = 89$. For example 48.44% means that counts (generated with Atlas.ti) of teachers' quotations relating to intellectual independence divided by the total number of quotations (43.11/89).

Table 5

Teaching and Learning Activities Relevant to the Five Dimensions

Five dimensions of CB	**Generic prompts (in italics) and examples of instructional activities implemented in the course**
• Intellectual independence •	*Students are stimulated to have their own ideas* • Students have to independently gather information from reliable sources for the group writing assignment. • Students have to come up with their own ideas about a personality trait (ex. How a person behaves with this trait/life outcomes).
• Critical mindset • •	*Students are stimulated to think critically about their own and others' work* • Students write a report about 3 papers about a certain topic and need to reflect on this in the discussion. • Students are encouraged to critically question whether some results can be generalized across countries.
• Social responsibility •	*Students are stimulated to act in the interest of their environment and the society as a whole* • Students reflect on their role as mental health professional and the impact on their client'' lives. • Students are informed that views on the mind have consequences for the way they view / help clients.
• Scientific responsibility •	*Students are educated on scientific responsibility and are stimulated to work accordingly* • Ethical issues in doing research with human participants is discussed as part of the practicum; broader ethical issues (e.g., societal responsibility as scientists) are discussed in the book and lectures. • Students are trained in applying the latest scientific insight on several cases.
• Entrepreneurship •	*Students are stimulated to work creatively on their own projects* • Students create and pitch their own advertisements. • Students need to be creative for the two group writing assignments.

Table 6

The Six Themes and Their Codes

Themes	**Codes**
Academic standards	• APA • Ethical standards • Theoretical framework
Application	• Application to new situations • Application to societal issues
Evaluative judgement	• Evaluation • Feedback or peer review
Self-regulation	• Questioning

	• Reading • Reflection
Societal relevance	• Relate to societal issues • Role and responsibility as psychologist • Social and interpersonal skills
Take initiatives	• Active participation • Information searching • Own ideas for formulating opinions • Own ideas for Coursework • Own ideas for thesis

Table 7 shows normalized frequencies of these themes on the five dimensions. The most frequent three themes are **take initiatives** (*n* = 90.03, e.g., independently gather information from reliable sources for the writing assignment group; formulate their own opinion when using pre-recorded videos; make self study assignments), **evaluative judgement** (*n* = 57.17, e.g., reflect on advantages and disadvantages of different methods for certain research questions; discuss shortcomings of literature; evaluate claims and give arguments pro or con), and **societal relevance** (*n* = 47.07, e.g., there was a Question and Answer (Q&A) session every week where the materials of last week were applied to current social issues; come up with their own ideas for changing behavior to solve societal problems; work on an inclusion problem at a real organization).

Table 7

Major Themes of Instructional Activities on the Five Dimensions

Five dimensions of CB	**Academic standards**		**Application**		**Evaluative judgement**		**Self-regulation**		**Societal relevance**		**Take initiatives**	
	n*	*%***	n*	*%***	n*	*%***	n*	*%***	n*	*%***	n*	*%***
Intellectual independence	0	*0*	2	*3.85*	7.67	*13.46*	8.97	*15.74*	4.00	*7.02*	33.98	*59.62*
Critical mindset	0	*0*	0	*0*	35.00	*61.40*	18.00	*31.58*	4.00	*7.02*	0	*0*
Social responsibility	0	*0*	13.82	*24.24*	1.73	*3.04*	10.36	*18.18*	25.91	*45.45*	5.18	*9.09*
Scientific responsibility	20.12	*35.29*	10.06	*17.65*	10.06	*17.65*	6.71	*11.76*	10.06	*17.65*	0	*9.09*
Entrepreneurship	0	*0*	0	*0*	2.71	*4.76*	0	*0*	2.71	*4.76*	51.57	*90.48*

Total	20.12		26.07		57.17		44.04		46.68		90.67	

Notes: *Absolute frequencies; **Row-relative frequencies, divided by the normalized total $N = 57$ For example 13.46% means that counts (generated with Atlas.ti) of teachers' quotations relating to evaluative judgement divided by the total number of quotations (7.67/57).

Unfortunately, 23 course activity examples on Scientific responsibility did *not* mention any specific content to explain what this actually meant. As for the graduation thesis, which is the final step before graduating from the Bachelor Psychology, Social responsibility was not mentioned in the instructional activity example.

Assessment

Based on the program assessment plan, both formative and summative assessments were used for assessing CB. On average, 2.05 assessment types were used per course. Table 8 shows the normalized frequencies of the three assessment methods for assessing the five dimensions. Coursework (e.g., individual or group assignments or presentations, cases) was used most frequently on the five dimensions, especially for assessing Entrepreneurship. Examples of the assessment tasks are "apply the alternative model of personality disorder on a case example", "creatively think and design an approach to conduct an intake", and "critically evaluate the studies they conducted as part of their group paper assignment".

Table 8

Assessment Methods on the Five Dimensions

Five dimensions of CB	**Coursework**		**Examination**		**Other Assessments**	
	n*	*%***	n*	*%***	n*	*%***
Intellectual independence	28.47	*46.67*	24.40	*40.00*	8.13	*13.33*
Critical mindset	21.00	*34.43*	30.00	*49.18*	10.00	*16.39*
Social responsibility	25.42	*41.67*	20.33	*33.33*	15.25	*25.00*
Scientific responsibility	21.53	*35.29*	32.29	*52.94*	7.18	*11.76*
Entrepreneurship	52.92	*91.67*			5.08	*8.33*
Total	152.33		107.03		45.64	

Notes: Other Assessments include peer feedback, class or group discussion, practicum, etc.; *Absolute frequencies; **Row-relative frequencies, divided by the normalized total $N = 61$

Examination with either selected- (e.g., multiple-choice) or constructed-responses (e.g., short answer or essay) questions was used more frequently to see Critical mindset and Scientific responsibility. Examples of the assessment

tasks are “evaluate claims”, “critically question whether some results can be generalized across countries”, “critically evaluate statistical analysis.”

Other assessments (e.g., peer feedback, class or group discussion, practicum) were used more frequently for assessing Social responsibility. The graduation project, a thesis, was used for assessing four of the five dimensions, except Social responsibility. Examples of the assessment tasks are “come up with their own ideas for their thesis” and “critically evaluate the literature for their thesis”.

Although reflection is mentioned in 33 courses, it was regarded as a teaching and learning activity rather than an assessment type.

Conclusions & Discussions

Our analyses show that the five dimensions of CB have been implemented at both program and course level. Two-third of courses formulated explicit LGs and integrated instructional activities of CB with knowledge and skills outcomes. Instructional activities of CB were delivered mostly through interactive lectures and group work is used most frequently for developing Entrepreneurship. These activities stimulated students to take initiatives, to practice evaluative judgements and to think of societal relevance. Multiple assessment methods and types were used for assessing CB and coursework is the most frequently used method. For example, several courses asked students to apply the NIP ethical codes by the Dutch Institute of Psychologists to solve real cases from patients.

Our study started with our observation that CB has been implemented implicitly. After asking course coordinators to fill out the course assessment plan, the mapping results and examples demonstrate that the Bachelor Psychology program has implemented the five dimensions of CB to a satisfactory extent at both program and course level. Our findings are in agreement with studies on character education where the implementation is often implicit, with or without explicit instructional activities and assessment (Halonen et al., 2020; Sokol et al., 2010). But our study shows the implementation of CB is actually implicitly hidden in the course educational processes and we needed to examine this by asking the course coordinators to gather the actual practices. Although CB-related PLOs were defined in the course LGs, to close the loop based on the notion of constructive alignment, the assessment design needs more attention. In the future, we recommend to make CB elements more explicit in the courses starting from the program curriculum design, the formulation of course LGs, design of instructional activities and assessment. First, the mapping results of the PLOs to the five dimensions of CB need to be further scrutinized by the program curriculum team and then communicated to all actors. This step is a pre-requisite to create a culture and environment that empowers all stakeholders, lecturers and students to co-develop the targeted character strengths (Berkowitz, 2021; Berkowitz et al., 2017).

Second, although CB is formulated as LGs in many courses, we still need to provide course coordinators with more instructions on how to formulate goals specifically to address CB. We observed that some goals were internal. The use of Bloom’s taxonomy of the affective domain can guide lecturers to make more observable/measurable LGs and

to guide courses across different years of the curriculum to gradually and progressively develop students CB on the five dimensions.

Third, although interactive lectures were used to deliver instructional activities, for students to internalize and characterize the five dimensions into behavioral changes, we need to provide lecturers with more guidance on the use of authentic cases and scenarios to stimulate student thinking from multiple perspectives (e.g., cases made APA PASS[3]), and to articulating a clear link between behavior and internal thoughts (Shephard, 2008; Sokol et al., 2010). Fourth, although coursework and other assessment types were used to assess CB, we need to advance lecturers' assessment expertise on more authentic and performance-based assessment (e.g., presentations, solving cases/problems). These alternatives assess actual implementation of targeted dimensions and student analysis of situational complexities and self-evaluation and reflection on their own performance and behavior (e.g., work-based assessment, portfolio assessment).

We conclude that making CB more explicit and structured in the program curriculum and course design is important to implement CB more systematically and effectively. In the future, we should involve more stakeholders to have multiple perspectives on the design of CB and to provide lecturers with more support on implementation of CB.

Acknowledgements

We thank Academic Director of the International Bachelor Psychology dr. Jelle Sijtsema, all course coordinators of our psychology program for their inputs on character building, and our Vice Dean of Education, Professor dr. Marcel van Assen, for his approval and support on this paper. We thank our student assistant Robyn Luiten for all her work to collect this data.

References

American Psychological Association. (2011). *Principles for quality undergraduate education in psychology*. http://www.apa.org/education/undergrad/

American Psychological Association. (2016). Guidelines for the undergraduate psychology major: Version 2.0. *American Psychologist*, *71*, 102-111. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037562

Berkowitz, M., & Bier, M. (2007). What works In character education. *Journal of Research in Character Education*, *5*(1), 29-48.

Berkowitz, M. W. (2022). Implementing and assessing evidence-based character education. *Journal of Education*, *202*(2), 191-197. https://doi.org/10.1177/00220574211026908

Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2007). *Teaching for quality learning at university*. Open University Press.

[3] http://pass.apa.org

Carr, D. (2017). Virtue and character in higher education. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *65*(1), 109-124. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2016.1224806

de Regt, H., & van Lenning, A. (2017). *Exploring an educational vision for Tilburg University*. Tilburg University.

Dunn, D. S., Brewer, C. L., Cautin, R. L., Gurung, R. A. R., Keith, K. D., McGregor, L. N., Nida, S. A., Puccio, P., & Voigt, M. J. (2010). The undergraduate psychology curriculum: Call for a core. In *Undergraduate education in psychology: A blueprint for the future of the discipline.* (pp. 47-61). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/12063-003

Halonen, J. S., Nolan, S. A., Frantz, S., Hoss, R. A., McCarthy, M. A., Pusateri, T., & Wickes, K. (2020). The challenge of assessing character: Measuring APA Goal 3 student learning outcomes. *Teaching of Psychology*, *47*(4), 285-295. https://doi.org/10.1177/0098628320945119

King, N. (2012). Doing template analysis. In G. Symon & C. Cassell (Eds.), *Qualitative organizational research: Core methods and current challenges* (pp. 426-450). SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526435620.n24

Kristjánsson, K. (2013). Ten myths about character, virtue and virtue education – Plus three well-founded misgivings. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *61*(3), 269-287. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2013.778386

Lamb, M., Dykhuis, E. M., Mendonça, S. E., & Jayawickreme, E. (2022). Commencing character: A case study of character development in college. *Journal of Moral Education*, *51*(2), 238-260. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2021.1953451

Pike, M. A., Hart, P., Paul, S.-A. S., Lickona, T., & Clarke, P. (2021). Character development through the curriculum: Teaching and assessing the understanding and practice of virtue. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *53*(4), 449-466. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2020.1755996

Schwartz, B. (2022). Science, scholarship, and intellectual virtues: A guide to what higher education should be like. *Journal of Moral Education*, *51*(1), 61-72. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2020.1772211

Shephard, K. (2008). Higher education for sustainability: Seeking affective learning outcomes. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, *9*(1), 87-98. https://doi.org/10.1108/14676370810842201

Sokol, B. W., Hammond, S. I., & Berkowitz, M. W. (2010). The developmental contours of character. In T. Lovat, R. Toomey, & N. Clement (Eds.), *International Research Handbook on Values Education and Student Wellbeing* (pp. 579-603). Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-8675-4_33

VanderWeele, T. J. (2022). The importance, opportunities, and challenges of empirically assessing character for the promotion of flourishing. *Journal of Education*, *202*(2), 170-180. https://doi.org/10.1177/00220574211026905

Wright, J. C., Warren, M. T., & Snow, N. E. (2020). *Understanding virtue: Theory and measurement*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190655136.001.0001

Corresponding Author Contact Information:

Author name: Ya-Ping (Amy) Hsiao

Department: Teacher Development

University, Country: Tilburg University, The Netherlands

Email: y.p.hsiao@tilburguniversity.edu

Please Cite: Soedamah-Muthu, S., & Hsiao, Y.P. (year). Character Building at Bachelor Psychology Program – Findings Based on a Natural Approach. *The European Educational Researcher, 6*(2), 17-33.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.31757/euer/622

Conflict of Interest: We declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

Data Availability Statement: The data that support the findings of this study are available upon reasonable request from the first author. The data are not publicly available due to confidentiality concerns. However, de-identified data may be available upon request and with permission from the data owner.

Ethics Statement: This study was approved by the Vice-Dean of Education at the Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences. All course coordinators provided written informed consent of their inputs. The data were collected and stored in compliance with relevant data protection and privacy laws. Course coordinators were informed of their right to withdraw from the study. Any identifying information has been removed to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the course coordinators.

Author Contributions: S.S.M. in her function as Academic Director of the Bachelor Psychology (Dutch track) conceptualized and led the internal quality assurance of program assessment, oversaw data collection and analysis, and drafted the manuscript. Y.P.H. in her function as assessment specialist education conducted the qualitative analyses, contributed to the interpretation of results, and co-wrote the manuscript. Both authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Received: March 9, 2023 ▪ Accepted: April 21, 2023