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# Character Development and the In-Between

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## Abstract

A plethora of discussions have been made on character development since Aristotle's musings on Eudaimonia. These musings have led to multiple perspectives on character development; however, they rarely touch on the area of the 'in-between,' a space of tensionality (Aoki 1996) for character development within multi-cultural settings. This article explores the concept of character development, discusses the importance of the language of virtues, critiques the notion of the 'in-between,' in connection with home- and host- cultures, and concludes with the implications of the 'in-between' within the context of character development in multi-cultural settings. The intent is to explore the 'in-between' as a space for negotiations that provide opportunities for character development.

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## Introduction

Character development is a complex topic, and a plethora of philosophical discussions have been done on this topic since Aristotle's musings on *Eudaimonia*.<sup>1</sup> These musings primarily deal with what makes a human life happy and worth living. Aristotle's reflections on the search for happiness demonstrate that a life led in accordance with virtues can help to achieve *Eudaimonia*.<sup>2</sup> In the literature, character development is perceived as a formation of habit<sup>3</sup>, a way of developing caring relationship<sup>4</sup>, a mark of a decent and successful life<sup>5</sup>, a process of self-discovery<sup>6</sup>, a right way to do the right thing<sup>7</sup>, and a deliberate effort to nurture attributes such as respect, care, trust, and truthfulness.<sup>8</sup> These perspectives are contributive to enhancing our understanding of character development. However, character development, when examined within the context of a contemporary multicultural society, can be further argued and elucidated in a new direction.

The literature on character development is voluminous; however, it rarely touches on the area of the 'in-between,' especially when the 'in-between,' is seen in connection with character development in a multicultural setting.

The 'in-between' is described as a space of tensionality, an in-built space of contradiction<sup>9</sup> that exists between perspectives and values, which are founded on different cultures.<sup>10</sup> In a multicultural society, people live in the tension of binary oppositions, and their lived experiences are grounded in the 'in-between' of these binaries in which their tension is often represented by the *hyphens*, *slashes*, and *ands*.<sup>11</sup> People, caught in the 'in-between' are associated with dual identities and could be described as Nepali-Canadian, Eastern/Western, or in transit between the home- and host- cultures. Taking this into consideration, we, in this paper, argue that dwelling in such an in-built space of contradiction and developing character through the nurturing of respect, care, trust, and truthfulness is more an opportunity than a challenge for negotiations between the differences we hold. On doing this, the paper critically analyses the language of virtue, focusing on the virtues of respect, trust, care, and truthfulness; explores the concept of character development; and reflects on, and critiques the notion of the 'in-between' in connection with home- and host- cultures. With an intent to explore the 'in-between' as a crucial space for nurturing character attributes through negotiations, the paper concludes with potential impli-

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle., *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett, and Susan D. Collins. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*.

<sup>4</sup> Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Lickona, *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility* (NY: Bantam, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> Holly S. Salls, *Transforming Values into Virtue* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12* (Toronto, Ont: Ministry of Education, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Aoki "Imaginariness of East."

<sup>10</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, UK: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> Aoki "Imaginariness of East."

cations of the ‘in-between’ within the context of character development in multi-cultural settings.

## Character Development

Character development is often seen as an acquisition and disposition of virtues such as love, respect, trust, care, courage, truthfulness, endurance, and compassion, to name a few in a long list.<sup>12</sup> The importance of the acquisition and disposition of these virtues has not only been acknowledged by moral philosophers and character educators over the centuries but has also been credited even today as an integral component of the school curriculum.<sup>13</sup> In other words, there exists a conviction that “[e]xcellence in education includes character development.”<sup>14</sup> However, there is no consensus among educators regarding what character means and how character develops.<sup>15</sup> Before moving to further discussions on what character development is, it is important to talk about what the term ‘character’ means. Etymologically, character is linked to ethics and morality, and embraces ethical decisions that are made for the common good. Homiak states:

The English word “character” is derived from the Greek *charaktêr*, which was originally used of a mark impressed upon a coin. Later and more generally, “character” came to mean

a distinctive mark by which one thing was distinguished from others, and then primarily to mean the assemblage of qualities that distinguish one individual from another.<sup>16</sup>

This classical definition of character, by excluding the notion of bad or even evil characters that are often spoken of, focuses on the desired qualities and attributes that help in distinguishing persons from one another. To put it in other words, character is what constitutes a person, and keeps him/her acceptable to others, implying that persons with character are generally expected to conduct themselves properly and well. Viewing the history of morality, we often find literature that speaks of beliefs, cultural practices, and character development that have long traditions in Eastern<sup>17</sup> and/or Western religious writings.<sup>18</sup> Of these writings, we bring the most salient ones in our discussions, as our critique lies in the language of virtues in conjunction with moral teachings and character-building arguments. While doing this, we deliberately choose to concentrate on, and prioritize, the language of respect, care, trust, and truthfulness, given the discussions around virtues are quite contested, and, therefore, require a more thoroughly developed argument than can be attempted in this paper. We argue that dispositions through the language of virtue can potentially form the basis for character development in a

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<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*.

<sup>13</sup> Lickona, *Educating for Character*.

<sup>14</sup> *Finding Common Ground*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Salls, *Transforming Values into Virtues*.

<sup>16</sup> Marcia Homiak, "Moral Character", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2019 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/moral-character/>.

<sup>17</sup> Surama Dasgupta, *Development of Moral Philosophy of India* (New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co., 1965).

<sup>18</sup> Peggy Morgan, "Buddhism," in *Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions*, ed. Peggy Morgan and Clive Lawton, 61-117 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

multicultural setting, where individuals from diverse cultures and multiple identities act and interact with one another.<sup>19</sup>

## Language of Virtue

Virtue approach to character education faces many challenges in terms of its applicability in a multicultural society, where the disposition of virtues varies because of the diversity in beliefs, cultures, and traditions.<sup>20</sup> In educational philosophy, scholars from different cultures and traditions understand, interpret and analyze the language of virtue in different ways, and despite these differing views, we consider that the virtues of respect, care, trust and truthfulness are key to building human relationships and leading a life of negotiations in a multicultural setting. Aristotelian definition of virtue, which is categorized into moral and intellectual, leads to human good.<sup>21</sup> Building on Aristotle, MacIntyre considers human functioning in relation to a specific tradition,<sup>22</sup> whereas Nussbaum observes it in conjunction with universal human experience.<sup>23</sup> Green critiques these differing views and explicates tensions that dwell between what is traditional and what is universal.<sup>24</sup> The former focuses on the role of a specific tradition and the later on the welfare of all

individuals. Unlike these arguments, people caught in the binary have their own perceptions of human good when seen in connection with a culturally diverse society. Working through this argument, it can be argued that the difference of perception and interpretation of virtue as human good resonates with today's Canadian multicultural society. Hence, to serve the purpose of this paper, we consider the language of virtue as a shared public practice in the 'in-between.' In other words, virtuous language is concerned with promoting the practice of respect, care, trust, and truthfulness in the 'in-between.' Before proceeding, we provide below a brief analysis of each of these terms; and, while doing this, our concern will not be to justify them as moral good, but to show their implications in building relationships.

### Respect

In Middleton's words, the concept of respect is argued as "something that we are accustomed to both giving and receiving."<sup>25</sup> This argument points to the notion of reciprocity of respect and entails the golden rule of acknowledging others the way we want to be acknowledged.<sup>26</sup> While not disagreeing with this argument, we stress the functional aspect

<sup>19</sup> Joel H. Spring, *The Intersection of Cultures: Multicultural Education in the United States and the Global Economy*, (New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Katsushige Katayama, "Is the Virtue Approach to Moral Education Viable in a Plural Society?" *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 37, no. 2 (2003), <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.00329>.

<sup>21</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*.

<sup>22</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.

<sup>23</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, "Beyond the Social Contract: Capabilities and Global Justice," *Oxford*

*Development Studies* 32, no. 1 (2004): 3–18.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1360081042000184093>.

<sup>24</sup> Alexander Green, "MacIntyre and Nussbaum on Diversity, Liberalism, and Christianity," *Perspectives on Political Science* 46, no. 2 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1080/10457097.2016.1146028>.

<sup>25</sup> David Middleton, "Three Types of Self-Respect," *Res Publica (Liverpool, England)* 12, no. 1 (2006): 60, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11158-006-0006-4>.

<sup>26</sup> Harry J. Gensler, *Ethics and the Golden Rule* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

of respect in this paper that gets revealed through communications underpinned by virtuous language.<sup>27</sup> Here, both respect for self and respect for others are taken into account, and this reciprocity of respect is considered key to promoting and sustaining caring human relationships. This aligns with the spirit of character development initiatives: “[r]espect for diversity must be at the heart of our policies, programs, practices, and interactions”<sup>28</sup> as it provides the foundation for all kinds of human relationships.

### Care

We understand and analyze the notion of care in the context of forming and continuing human relationships.<sup>29</sup> In forming a caring relationship, we argue that functional communication between strangers is important during their first meeting. Functional communication, when argued in connection with care, needs to be seen in terms of how an individual is received, recognized, treated, and responded to in a strange setting of the ‘in-between’ by others so that a compelling relationship is formed.<sup>30</sup> The language used in the communication, by and large, becomes detrimental to further and keep this newly formed relationship sustained. With this in mind, we dig into and focus on the need for an application of care in a multicultural setting.

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<sup>27</sup> Graham Haydon, “5. The Language(s) of Virtues” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 33, no. 1 (1999), <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.00115>.

<sup>28</sup> *Finding Common Ground*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Noddings, *The Challenge to Care*, 1992.

<sup>30</sup> Caroline Walker and Alan Gleaves, “Constructing the Caring Higher Education Teacher: A Theoretical Framework,” *Teaching and Teacher Education* 54 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.11.013>.

### Trust

Unlike the cognitivist’s interpretation of trust as an outcome of rationality, which requires an examination of the trustworthiness of the trusted, we perceive trust as an expression to build interpersonal relationships.<sup>31</sup> We argue that trust is not about making assumptions about whether one is reliable or not; instead, we consider trust in terms of sharing what one has and earning both belief and reliability. There are reasons to trust someone in our contact, and these reasons, by large, are practical ones when considered in terms of building relationships. What is implied in this argument is the practical significance of trust in the formation of human relationships as trust allows people the freedom to share their stories with one another.<sup>32</sup>

### Truthfulness

In the interpretation of Aristotelian virtue ethics, truthfulness is shown to fall under the virtues of intellect.<sup>33</sup> Working with this interpretation, it can be argued that the virtue of truthfulness is concerned with being truthful in our interpersonal communications. To be truthful is, thus, considered to set the context for trustworthiness where interpersonal relations are founded and promoted. With this in mind, we perceive truthfulness not in terms

<sup>31</sup> Thomas W. Simpson, “Trust, Belief, and the Second-Personal.” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 96, no. 3 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2017.1382545>.

<sup>32</sup> Melville et al., “The Chair’s Dispositions as Virtues,” *Teaching and Teacher Education* 57 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.03.014>.

<sup>33</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*.

of measuring accuracy, but in connection with sincerity, since “[t]he connection between the moral and the intellectual, in terms of truthfulness, is seamless.”<sup>34</sup> This seamless connection indicates that to be truthful requires neither a context nor a condition in order to form and promote relationships.

The virtues chosen and discussed above are so interconnected that they cannot function on their own.<sup>35</sup> The virtues of respect, care, trust, and truthfulness are, thus, considered to serve together in building and promoting sustainable relationships in the ‘in-between.’ The seamless combination of moral and intellectual can be operated with the virtuous language of respect, care, trust, and truthfulness. We believe that such practice in a culturally diverse setting leads us to understand what character entails and how it develops. We further argue that the sincere practice of these virtues in a multicultural society is not only viable but a must in terms of negotiating differences.

However, while initiating an argument on character, an important question arises: what engraves our character? A common answer to this question may point to several possibilities, and none of these can be considered in isolation. These possibilities include where we are born, how we are raised, who our companions are, what beliefs and convictions we

are exposed to, and how our parents and teachers treat us in our growing and educative processes. Each of these is congruent with MacIntyre’s argument on the importance of multiple narratives “embodied in a single life.”<sup>36</sup> Further, these possibilities are themselves derivations of other factors such as history, culture, surroundings, family, and schools in developing one’s character. This line of argument leads us to acknowledge the “centrality of communities, social contexts, webs of interlocution, and different ways of life”<sup>37</sup> in the shaping of a person’s character. A prominent message in this acknowledgment is that all social agencies, including family, school, and community are important to shape one’s character because it is in these social agencies that an individual comes across and interacts with various character exemplars.<sup>38</sup> These interactions become contributive to helping community members understand and acknowledge the complexity of pluralism with multiple perspectives on morality and character.

The impact of social agencies in one’s life is usually seen in both Western liberal and Eastern communitarian societies. As implied in the literature, these social agencies, whether it be a liberal or communitarian society, remain highly influential in an individual’s personality growth. Seen through the lens of the ‘in-between,’ the sections below explore and

<sup>34</sup> Hugh Sockett, “Dispositions as Virtues: The Complexity of the Construct,” *Journal of Teacher Education* 60, no. 3 (2009): 298, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487109335189>.

<sup>35</sup> Sockett, “Dispositions as Virtues.”

<sup>36</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 218.

<sup>37</sup> Nel Noddings and Mark Slote, “Changing Notions of the Moral and of Moral Education,” in *The*

*Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Education*, ed. Nigel Blake, Paul Smeyers, Richard Smith, and Paul Standish (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 342.

<sup>38</sup> Yi-Lin Chen, “A Missing Piece of the Contemporary Character Education Puzzle: The Individualisation of Moral Character,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 32, no. 4 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-012-9331-6>.

critique major strands of thought on both communitarian East and liberal West, reflect on the common elements, and attempt to locate areas of shared responsibility between the different schools of philosophy.

## The Communitarian East

Eastern societies can be characterized as communitarian in their makeup since they prioritize self-ordering communities.<sup>39</sup> For the well-being of these communities, it is believed that the ongoing cultivation of morality in an individual is indispensable. In communitarian societies, communal integrity is placed at the center, and moral values are taken as the key to a decent and successful life.<sup>40</sup> These moral values are often associated with the different religious practices found in the East, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Jainism, and Confucianism. However, Hinduism and Buddhism, in their many forms, claim the highest numbers of adherents in the East. It does not mean that other schools of beliefs are less important. The first author of this article is more at home with Hinduism and Buddhism, and his interest is more in research from a phenomenological perspective. This perspective attempts to dig into a person's lived world, focuses on hermeneutic significance, and interprets the essence of the phenomenal experience of an individual.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *The Democracy of the Dead: Dewey, Confucius, and the Hope for Democracy in China* (Chicago, Ill: Open Court, 1999).

<sup>40</sup> Harry J. Gensler, *Ethics and the Golden Rule* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

The first author's past is attached to a particular cultural heritage with communitarian values. His family, and the Nepali neighborhood, schools, temples, and monasteries, where he grew up, are the sources of many of the values he holds most closely. Having been grounded in Nepali culture, he has practiced family rituals and traditions for over four decades before migrating to Canada. His life is now associated with a Western multicultural society as a Nepali-Canadian. The experience of being caught in the tensional space of the 'in-between' with two identities indicates several challenges the first author negotiates with. The essence of this narrative is that his lived experiences resonate more with Hinduism and Buddhism. His readings and ritual practices in these religious traditions have remained highly influential in his *being* and *becoming*. The first author's experiences reflect an inseparable interconnection of religion, morality, and philosophy; and our morality is formed with religious beliefs and cultural practices and is tremendously guided by the doctrines of *Dharma* and *Karma*, which may be understood as 'righteousness' and 'right action' in English.<sup>42</sup>

In Hindu and Buddhist philosophy, morality is primarily concerned with *Dharma*, 'righteousness,' and *Karma*, 'right action.'<sup>43</sup> Working from the *Vedas* and the *Gita*, the ancient books of Hindu philosophy, Dasgupta states

<sup>41</sup> Max van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (Toronto: The Athlouse Press, 1990).

<sup>42</sup> Dasgupta, *Development of Moral Philosophy*.

<sup>43</sup> Werner F. Mensky, "Hinduism," *In Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions*, ed. Peggy Morgan and Clive Lawton (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).



that “*Dharma* as ‘duty’ emphasizes the systemic duty of every individual to act, in every life situation, in such a way that righteousness is achieved; in other words, to act appropriately.”<sup>44</sup> This argument places morality at the highest position, implying that no negotiation of moral values is expected, even at a difficult time of life. This notion of morality, though, appears to be too ideal to bring into full practice, especially in life-threatening contexts. Discussions on Buddhism show that morality is concerned with notions of meditation and sacrifice.<sup>45</sup> This argument indicates the need for the renunciation of the body for spiritual attainment. However, the spiritual attainments, as argued in the *Dharma* and *Karma* philosophy, do not necessarily come through meditation and sacrifice alone; these attainments are, rather to be acknowledged as meditative moments of engagement with the surroundings.<sup>46</sup> Such argumentations comply with an ‘I-You’ mode of existence, which explicates our relationship with everything around us that we encounter.<sup>47</sup> Hence, we argue that there are challenges in the implications of the principles of *Dharma* in the context of pluralistic Canadian societies, where negotiations of moral values are made in our everyday life. Yet, what is notable in the notion of *Dharma* is that it denotes a life of moral integrity.

In the arguments above, the need for moral integrity is explicitly shown in the principles

<sup>44</sup> Dasgupta, *Development of Moral Philosophy*, 4.

<sup>45</sup> Christopher W. Gowans, *Buddhist Moral Philosophy: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>46</sup> Nel Noddings, *Happiness and Education* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>47</sup> Martin Buber and Walter Kaufmann, *I and Thou* (New York: Scribner, 1970).

of *Dharma* and *Karma*, which are believed to guide, maintain, and promote the ordering of a community. In order to maintain and promote community ordering and harmony, community decisions are prior to autonomous decisions.<sup>48</sup> However, it does not necessarily mean that autonomous decisions are grossly ignored and taken otherwise in Eastern communitarian societies. Rather, there is an implicit execution of autonomy in Eastern communitarian moral integrity, which, in Western liberal philosophy, is explicit.

## The Liberal West

In contrast to the Eastern philosophy of communitarianism, Western societies can be more generally characterized as being founded on liberal philosophy. In Western moral theory, it is argued that every individual in a society is capable of deciding what is moral; in fact, individuals are considered to have intrinsic worth, and they themselves are regarded as the ultimate source of morality.<sup>49</sup> This approach to character development is different from a virtue approach that places more importance on social agencies. However, the emphasis on autonomy does not necessarily mean ignoring the importance of community, as individuals are actors of the community they belong to. Building on Kant, it is put forth that acting morally means obeying laws, which requires “us to act in a way

<sup>48</sup> Hall and Ames, *Democracy of the Dead*.

<sup>49</sup> Immanuel Kant, “Morality and Rationality,” in *Moral Philosophy: Selected Readings*, ed. George Sher (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1996).

that can be justified to everyone in terms of principles each can accept.<sup>50</sup> This argument leads to the concept of the universal with a clear focus on the importance of human rationality and autonomy.

The liberal West's emphasis on the autonomy of an individual appears to be in sharp contrast with the communitarian East's emphasis on the self-ordering community. This apparent dichotomy becomes important in discussions around multiculturalism, particularly as it impacts understanding issues of individual rights, social justice, and community responsibilities.<sup>51</sup> Based on the Kantian notion of autonomy and universalism, liberal political philosophy is committed to valuing social justice, protecting individual freedom, and promoting cultural pluralism and economic democracy.<sup>52</sup> This argument points to forming a just community, and for that, "liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect – are to be distributed equally."<sup>53</sup> This argument of justice implies that both the political and economic rights of individuals, regardless of their ideology, origin, race, culture, ethnicity, colour, and sex, are paramount to any society and state. While saying this, liberal philosophy envisions a framework of a democratic society with components of freedom, equality, and dignity. What is problematic with this school

of thought, then, within a multicultural society grounded on the Western tradition? In Nussbaum's response, Rawls's theory of social justice is considered to fall short in addressing issues of global justice.<sup>54</sup> Much more promising results, Nussbaum suggests, are expected to come with the capabilities approach that is concerned with "a set of basic human entitlements, similar to human rights, as a minimum of what justice requires for all."<sup>55</sup> In critiquing Nussbaum's principles, it is argued that treating an individual as an end and pluralism about values are crucial to flourishing human diversity.<sup>56</sup> In this argument, what is implied is Nussbaum's emphasis on both freedom of choice and human diversity that align with the structure of Canadian multicultural societies. This alignment suggests that diversity exists not only in our societies, but more so in human capabilities. With this in mind, we now make a succinct comparison between liberal and communitarian schools of philosophy. However, the purpose of making a comparative analysis of both the Eastern and Western perspectives is not to see one's superiority over the other; instead, it is to examine how they can be contributive to each other in the context of character development.

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<sup>50</sup> William Nelson, "Kant's Morality," in *Moral Philosophy: Selected Readings*, ed. George Sher, (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1996), 419.

<sup>51</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>52</sup> Nelson, "Kant's Morality."

<sup>53</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), quoted in Will

Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002): 55.

<sup>54</sup> Nussbaum, "Beyond the Social Contract."

<sup>55</sup> Nussbaum, "Beyond the Social Contract," 4.

<sup>56</sup> Ingrid Robeyns, "Capabiltarianism," *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 17, no. 3 (2016),

<https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2016.1145631>

## A Brief Comparison between the Two

Communitarian philosophy argues that liberalism, being and practicing an extreme form of individuality in the name of human autonomy, not only downplays but also ignores the significance of community traditions and values.<sup>57</sup> To put it in other words, communitarian philosophies give more moral recognition to the community over an individual's autonomous self. To the communitarian, what counts as moral depends at least in part on the community context. This leads to an argument that the standards of justice and foundations of morality are found in forms of life and the traditions of the different communities we live in; and the notion and application of morality can vary from one particular context to another.<sup>58</sup> Communitarians thus do not forefront the individual's self-governing capacity and do not demand universalizable criteria for justice. In contrast, liberalism gives moral recognition only to the individual. The liberal school of thought, premised upon rationality, asserts that every person, as an autonomous being, is responsible for deciding for him or herself what is good and what is right.

The argument above seeks to deflate the autonomy and universalism of liberal philosophy. Communitarian philosophy advocates a narrative conception of the self, which sharply contradicts an autonomous concep-

tion of the self.<sup>59</sup> In narrative conceptions of the self, our stories, history, culture, traditions, narratives, and our attachments to them occupy a central place. An implication of this perspective is that communitarianism fears losing one's ties to community and the declining of family values, community traditions, public spaces, and civic organizations. Liberalism counters such arguments, and states that human beings are rational beings; and they can reach their full potential only when they exercise their rights and freedom to the fullest extent.<sup>60</sup> So, the debates go on especially in multicultural societies; and the issue of character development seems to fall in the 'in-between' of the liberal-communitarian schools of philosophy, particularly while considering the issue in the context of contemporary multicultural societies such as Canada.

When considering the communitarian with the liberal from the perspective of the 'in-between,' these philosophies are independent at times and interdependent at other times. Much of this depends on the socio-cultural contexts: communitarianism conceives the self as a narrative, whereas liberalism conceives it as autonomous. Despite these differences in the conception of the self, there lies a commonality, that is, both the conceptions of the self emphasize self-discovery. For liberalism, self-discovery means a process of making choice, and for communitarianism, it is to find how one's life is embedded in one's

<sup>57</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.

<sup>58</sup> Daniel Bell, "Communitarianism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 Edition), ed.

Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/communitarianism/>

<sup>59</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.

<sup>60</sup> Bell, "Communitarianism."

history and narratives.<sup>61</sup> In these arguments, what is crucial in making a choice, or leading to a process of self-discovery, largely depends on how well an individual exercises rationality while keeping the importance of the community at the centre. Working with this, it can be argued that the ‘in-between’ space of individual and community or the third space of liberal and communitarian, marked by the *and*, deserves our considerable attention.

The liberal-communitarian debate demonstrates not only the difference, but also an inseparable interlinking between an individual and the community, where the individual lives. In both schools of philosophy, individuals are taken as important members of a community; the community where they can exercise the freedom of choice by utilizing the rationality of their autonomous self; implicitly in a communitarian society, and explicitly in a liberal one. Each individual is considered to be capable of questioning and even rejecting certain ways of community life. This is truer in a multicultural society, as the values of one culture may not be adequate to function within the whole community, for which members have to form a consensus and promote a sense of shared responsibility. Viewing this in conjunction with character development, what remains vital is a person’s connections with the web of social interlocutors along with a sense of shared responsibility.

## Shared Responsibility

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<sup>61</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.

<sup>62</sup> *Finding Common Ground*.

<sup>63</sup> *Finding Common Ground*, 5.

<sup>64</sup> *Finding Common Ground*, 6.

Individual-community connections reiterate the fact that character development is a shared responsibility of parents, schools, and communities.<sup>62</sup> It is considered as a collaboration among members of a community that focuses on community development, mutual benefits, and diversity of interests within the community. Emphasizing the centrality of socio-cultural connections among members, the Ontario character development initiative clearly states that “[c]haracter development is a primary responsibility of parents and families; a corner stone of a civil, just and democratic society; and a foundation of our publicly funded education system.”<sup>63</sup> It is well acknowledged that publicly funded schools in Ontario are getting increasingly multicultural, and their provision of the multicultural environment “creates an opportunity for us to determine the beliefs and principles we hold in common.”<sup>64</sup> Educational initiatives, from this point of reference, are expected to lead “to help people understand the social and cultural aspects of the world in which we live and learn.”<sup>65</sup> Implied in these arguments is a deep connection between social institutions, cultural differences, and character development.

In a multicultural society like Ontario, character development is described as nurturing “the universal attributes” that “bind us together across the lines that often divide us in society.”<sup>66</sup> This description of character development reflects a traditional approach to character education, which, in the context of

<sup>65</sup> Nel Noddings, *Philosophy of Education* (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 2012): 213.

<sup>66</sup> *Finding Common Ground*, 3.

a multicultural society, is highly problematic.<sup>67</sup> It cannot be denied that character development is an inculcation of attributes, but these attributes are often defined and determined by socio-political and cultural contexts. These attributes also differ from one context to another, where the notion of ‘universal’ appears to be both contested and debatable. This indicates an incongruence between the Ontario character development policy and Ontario social contexts.<sup>68</sup> So, the questions arise: what are these universal attributes, and who determines them in a multicultural setting? These questions lead to identify the need for interactions and negotiations between components of diversity within a framework of critical democracy in which members from each culture group can have their voices shared with one another.<sup>69</sup>

As argued, an individual’s life is embedded within one’s history, culture, surroundings, and local narratives. These narratives are considered to shape one’s character despite the differences that exist between one community to another. A multicultural community, which is believed to become richer with these multiple narratives, provides opportunities for connecting to, negotiating with, and learning from one another. In this context, the notion of ‘universal’ is debatable; however, there certainly exists certain virtues in human communities, which include respect, care, trust, and truthfulness. A disposition to

these virtues usually requires human rationality and practical wisdom. Kant’s arguments on morality rest on the performance of human duties primarily guided by reason.<sup>70</sup> While reflecting on these arguments, Kant’s morality resonates with Western liberal autonomy, whereas the virtue ethics of Aristotle echoes, by and large, with Eastern moral principles. To illustrate this point, Confucian moral philosophy, as argued by Hall and Ames, is concerned with the self-ordering community, where the “priority of morality over penal law is a bedrock value in any viable form of communitarian democracy.”<sup>71</sup> What is remarkable in this argument is that the cultivation of the human intellect is considered to take place in our local surroundings and social institutions, which, thereby, provides ways to achieve moral excellence. This leads to the point that it is possible to argue that both Eastern communitarian and Western liberal character philosophies are linked to each other, and their arguments on moral philosophy center around the acquisition of virtues. We argue that these virtues are usually accepted and followed by most human communities through the promotion and implementation of shared responsibility.

While agreeing upon the acquisition of respect, care, trust, and truthfulness at a larger level, it is interesting to explore how people living in the binaries of liberal-communitarian or East-West, Nepali/Canadian, and

<sup>67</sup> Sue Winton, “Character Development and Critical Democratic Education in Ontario, Canada,” *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 9, no. 2 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700760903100758>.

<sup>68</sup> Sue Winton, “Positioning Ontario’s Character Development Initiative in/through its Policy Web of

Relationships,” *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 58, no. 1 (2012).

<sup>69</sup> Winton, “Character Development.”

<sup>70</sup> Salls, *Transforming Values into Virtues*.

<sup>71</sup> Hall and Ames, *Democracy of the Dead*, 171.

home-and host-cultures acquire and practice them. Ontario Ministry of Education remains silent about the complexity of living in the binaries; however, its focus on respect and responsibility opens avenues for discussions on how character develops in a culturally diverse community.<sup>72</sup> Taking this into consideration, we argue that making connections and negotiations between the differences is crucial for those grounded in the hyphenated space of the communitarian-liberal 'in-between.' This argument resonates with the first author's lived experience who lives with a dual identity of Nepali-Canadian. In this point of reference, character development in Ontario public school classrooms is concerned more with making connections and building trust for negotiations in the 'in-between,' which are required to take place within a respectful, caring, and inclusive classroom environment. In other words, character development is a negotiation between the differences that occurs in a participatory, democratic, and respectful environment. Having said this, the section below briefly critiques the concept of the 'in-between' and examines its relation to character development.

### The 'In-Between'

The concept of the 'in-between,' which can be considered a lived phenomenon for migrants in multicultural societies, was introduced by

Bhabha as the 'third space.'<sup>73</sup> Aoki further discussed and theorized the notion of the 'third space' as the 'in-between.'<sup>74</sup> Although we use the notions of the 'in-between' and the 'third space' interchangeably in this work, our inclinations are more to the former than to the latter. The reason is that the hyphenated space within the 'in' and the 'between' of the 'in-between' is where the first author exists as a Nepali-Canadian. It is also because he considers the 'in-between' as a specific form of a bounded version of the 'third space.' Hence, having the first author's experience grounded within the 'in-between,' the focus is more on Aoki's works while critiquing the 'in-between' and applying it in the context of character development in a multicultural setting.

The 'third space' points to an interstice – a space that exists between people, between things, between times, and between cultures.<sup>75</sup> This statement implies that the 'third space' refers to an unfamiliar location of differences, where lived experiences are shared, social and community interests are emphasized, and cultural values are negotiated. Such a space is important for people coming from distant ends and living together.<sup>76</sup> To be precise, the 'third space' is a location of cultural differences, where "[p]rivate and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy."<sup>77</sup> We argue

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<sup>72</sup> Winton, "Positioning Ontario's Character Development."

<sup>73</sup> Bhabha, *Location of Culture*.

<sup>74</sup> Aoki, "Imaginariness of East."

<sup>75</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, "The Third Space: An Interview with Homi Bhabha," in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London, UK: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990).

<sup>76</sup> Ted T. Aoki, William F. Pinar, and Rita L. Irwin, *Curriculum in a New Key: The Collected Works of Ted T. Aoki* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2005).

<sup>77</sup> Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 13.

that the ‘inter’ in ‘interstitial’ is the cutting edge of negotiation between cultural differences, and the negotiation is believed to take place in the ‘in-between’ spaces. This hyphenated space in the ‘in-between’ is described as “a generative space of possibilities,<sup>78</sup> a space wherein in tensioned ambiguity emerges,”<sup>79</sup> and the dwellers in this space are those who have migrated into a host culture.

In Aoki’s perception, this contradictory space can potentially offer opportunities for people from diverse cultural backgrounds to connect and negotiate with others. Revisiting the first author’s 12 years of lived experiences on Canadian soil and in multicultural settings, he finds gradually positioning himself in the ‘in-between’ location of Eastern Nepali home and Western Canadian host cultures. This positioning has enabled him to perceive both lives and the world through different lenses. He has changed over these years and is changing constantly. He realizes that this subconscious move to the ‘in-between’ has enabled him to live-with-others in communities that are different from the one where he was born and brought up. The closer he reaches, the better he understands his new surroundings. While doing so, the first author is consistently in a process of (re)discovering and (re)constructing his own identity, by choosing the ‘in-between’ as a place to dwell and grow. This experience of dwelling

in the ‘in-between’ of Nepal and Canada has enriched his understanding of the world. We argue that this is a phenomenal experience of migrant students in Ontario public schools, where the essence of the phenomena is the ‘is-ness,’ a mode of being-in-the-world.<sup>80</sup> In this mode of *being* and *becoming*, the hyphenated spaces or the in-between spaces are important, and their importance needs to be carefully examined.

The ‘in-between,’ in a multicultural context stands as a bridge, a metaphysical bridge in Aoki’s words that calls people standing on the two far ends.<sup>81</sup> One end of the bridge is represented by immigrants with their home culture, and the other end by those with their host culture. The center of the bridge is the ‘in-between’ of the two far ends and is meant to hold people together for a prolonged time. In fact, “[o]n this bridge, we are in no hurry to cross over... such bridges lure us to linger.”<sup>82</sup> Building on Aoki’s bridge metaphor, Lee argues that the ‘in-between’ space of the bridge allows for a prolonged conversation of “reciprocity of perspectives, of ideologies, between two deep world views.”<sup>83</sup> This expression asserts that it is more important to linger on the bridge than to cross over to either of the ends. Aoki’s invocation to linger further suggests that the dwelling in the ‘in-between’ is to share one’s experiences and differences with others, learn from the differences of

<sup>78</sup> Aoki, "Imaginariness of East."

<sup>79</sup> Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 318.

<sup>80</sup> James M. Magrini, "Phenomenology and Curriculum Implementation: Discerning a Living Curriculum through the Analysis of Ted Aoki's Situational Praxis," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 47, no. 2 (2015),

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2014.1002113>.

<sup>81</sup> Aoki, "Imaginariness of East."

<sup>82</sup> Aoki, "Imaginariness of East," 316.

<sup>83</sup> Yu-Ling Lee, "Lingering on Aoki's Bridge: Reconceptualizing Ted Aoki as Curricular Techno-Theologian," *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* 31, no. 3 (2017), 23.

others, and, as the golden rule suggests, treat others the way you would like to be treated.<sup>84</sup> This lingering on the bridge is considered crucial for connecting people of two different lands, two different world views, and two different language-speaking communities. These connections, in turn, lead to a negotiating process by employing the language of virtues that may be considered as the key to character development.

In developing these arguments around the 'in-between,' we have come to a synthesis that the 'in-between' space has potential to offer opportunities for character development in a multicultural classroom. Thus, despite the 'in-between' being a tensioned space, our reflections on the changing identity of migrants as a Nepali Canadian or a Japanese Canadian resonate with Aoki's conception of it. Since migrants are experiencing their dwelling in the hyphenated space and witnessing a process of *being* and *becoming*, we consider the 'in-between' to be a space of multiple possibilities that offer ample opportunities for character development.

### **Linking the 'In-between' and Character Development**

In a wider sense, "[c]haracter development is about community development."<sup>85</sup> Our position in this paper suggests that community development is a shared responsibility, which

in a multicultural society, takes place in the trope of the bridge metaphor. In using the bridge as a metaphor, it is clear that creating a welcoming and inclusive environment is key to prolonging our lingering in the center of the bridge. The center of the bridge is seen to be a space of silence and emptiness, and when people move from both ends, conversations are heard and negotiations are made. In making these negotiations, participants from both ends need to communicate using a language of virtues. Using the language of virtues means that dwellers of the 'in-between' need to demonstrate and reciprocate respect, care, trust, and truthfulness. As discussed earlier, dispositions of these virtues through our words and actions can potentially serve to build and promote harmonious relationships between people and their worldviews. Further, the purpose of negotiation is to acknowledge the autonomy of an individual and build up harmonious relations between people, representing the binaries of East and West.<sup>86</sup> Harmonious relations lead to a practice of moderation, a Buddhist principle, and enhance collaboration.<sup>87</sup>

We consider that collaborations in the 'in-between' are the outcomes of negotiations. The term 'negotiation' generally refers to common human activities people in a society perform in their everyday lives; to be more specific, it is to reach an agreement between two perspectives in order to create, maintain, and strengthen human relationships.<sup>88</sup> In other

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<sup>84</sup> Gensler, *Ethics and Golden Rule*.

<sup>85</sup> *Finding Common Ground*, 6.

<sup>86</sup> Hall and Ames, *Democracy of the Dead*.

<sup>87</sup> Gensler, *Ethics and Golden Rule*.

<sup>88</sup> Engle, Robert L., Mohammed N. Elahee, and Ekrem Tatoglu, "Antecedents of Problem-Solving Cross-Cultural Negotiation Style: Some Preliminary Evidence," *The Journal of Applied Management and*



words, negotiation is an act of forming a consensus between the differences. To negotiate the differences then means to respect the modes of existence. In the context of this paper, negotiation is neither to be seen as a transaction between opposites nor to be considered as a means to reach a definitive settlement. Rather, it is to be seen as transformative, allowing people to share experiences and thus come to mutual respect and understanding. Negotiation, therefore, is integral to character development. Negotiations, which are made through connections, require a transitional space, a meeting ground, or the ‘in-between,’ where we can experience transitional phenomena. Viewed this way, the essence of the ‘in-between’ is concerned with opening up the possibilities of a richer understanding of human relationships. The notion of lingering in the bounded space of the ‘in-between’ forms a basis for initiating dynamic relationships between home and host culture values. These values are understood through recurring communications in the third space.<sup>89</sup> As a result, a deep sense of respect emerges between and among people despite their different modes of living. This scenario may be seen in Ontario public school classrooms, where students, representing either home- or host- culture, share what they have in common, and learn from the differences they carry.

Dwelling in the ‘in-between,’ then, is an act of living between two different horizons,

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*Entrepreneurship* 18, no. 2 (2013),  
<https://doi.org/10.9774/GLEAF.3709.2013.ap.00007>.

<sup>89</sup> Bhabha, *Location of Culture*.

<sup>90</sup> *Finding Common Ground*, 4.

between two entities, and, more particularly, between two cultural convictions, which come from the home and the host cultures. Being in such a tensioned space is not only to admit the differences we have but also to investigate endless opportunities to discuss and figure out ways of building up and maintaining relationships. This argument closely aligns with the spirit of *Finding Common Ground*, which states that: “character development is not a standalone initiative.”<sup>90</sup> In other words, dwelling together in the ‘in-between’ is an important initiative that opens opportunities for trusting and building harmony among dwellers. We believe that character neither exists nor develops in silence; it comes with our dynamic communications with others and develops along with the attributes of respect, care, trust, and truthfulness that are founded on healthy and harmonious relationships. It is seen that migrants “embrace and explore the complexity and richness of the space between entrenched possibilities,”<sup>91</sup> which echoes this paper’s first author’s lived experience of living in Ontario since 2010. These years, in the first author’s experience, have shown some challenges to face but more opportunities to grow.

To sum up, the tension in the arguments above lies in the binaries such as *us* and *them*, *center/margin*, and *dominant-dominated*; within these binaries exist the ‘in-between’ spaces represented by a ‘*slash*,’ a ‘*hyphen*,’ and an ‘*and*.’ To address this tension requires a

<sup>91</sup> Sonya C. Dwyer and Jennifer L. Buckle, “The Space Between: on Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 8, no. 1 (2009): 62,  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690900800105>.

bridge to linger, and on the bridge, the longer the lingering is, the healthier and more stable human relations become.<sup>92</sup> Despite having different cultures and modes of existence, what keeps our relationships stable and alive is the attempt we make to dwell in the space between the 'I-You' mode of existence.<sup>93</sup> This argument leads to a point that the attempt to dwell in the 'in-between' provides potential opportunities for us to grow, develop our character, and view the world with an enriched perspective, the perspective that pays less attention to the notion of racism and power of culture,<sup>94</sup> and more to a world of relations and humanity. Human connections made in the 'in-between' and negotiations made between the differences potentially open opportunities for character development. This demonstrates that the 'in-between' and character development are interconnected, and this interconnection allows us to re-conceptualize character development within the rapidly changing scenario of multicultural classrooms.

## Conclusions and Implications

To conclude, there is a strong connection between character development and the 'in-between.' The 'in-between' is found to be such a location where people from different ends, backgrounds, and cultures dwell together, share their stories, and become respectful to one another. It is the center of the bridge metaphor, a space where both the communitarian East and the liberal West seek

commonalities, both the home and host cultures look for common ground, and people living in the binaries explore opportunities to grow. The 'third space' then is a location for the differences to co-exist. Negotiating the differences means respecting the different modes of existence. The 'third space' is a location where Eastern segments and values meet and interact with Western segments and values. In multicultural settings, the 'third space' gives a sense of belongingness to multiple worlds. This perception of belongingness is crucial for human development because we all want to belong; for that, we need to be part of a community of multiplicity. The connotation of multiplicity becomes evident when dwelling in the 'in-between' is considered as an act of living between two different persons, two different things, two different places, two different times, and two different identities.

To be more specific, it is living 'in-between' family and friends, between personal and professional lives, between private and public zones, between now and then, between Nepal and Canada, between reality and fantasy, between hope and fear, between a sense of being secured and unsecured, between challenges and opportunities, between spiritual and material, and between liberal and communitarian. These multiple understandings of the 'in-between' keep one in a state of an ongoing paradox with a unique opportunity for generative and creative possibilities. The act of dwelling in the 'in-between' can be physical

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<sup>92</sup> Aoki, "Imaginariness of East."

<sup>93</sup> Buber and Kaufmann. *I and Thou*.

<sup>94</sup> George J. Dei *Racists Beware: Uncovering Racial Politics in Contemporary Society* (Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2008).

and metaphysical, and temporal and spatial, implying that Aoki's notion of dwelling in the 'in-between' is both rich and complex. Like many migrants, the first author is grounded in the midst of these inner feelings and lived experiences of dwelling in the 'in-between.' This grounding leads to an important point that character development is the negotiation of the differences in the 'in-between.'

## Implications

The conclusions drawn and the experiences lived by the first author led to three important implications. The first of these implications is concerned with the importance of live and dynamic communication to take place in the 'in-between.' Communications are the tools to break through the silence of the 'in-between.' Through communications, relations are built and intimacy is enhanced, which in turn strengthens human connectivity. The second implication is concerned with the centrality of the language of virtues in making human connections and negotiations. Using the language of virtues usually refers to being respectful, caring, trustworthy, and truthful to others in both words and actions. Communications, which are underpinned by the virtuous language, are fundamental to strengthening our connections, easing negotiations, and enhancing our relationships with others. The third implication is about the need of an inclusive environment in the 'in-between.' The inclusive environment refers to both caring and welcoming, where

everyone, despite their cultural differences, feels respected, cared for, trusted, and welcomed. In other words, communications, based on the language of virtues, not only reciprocate respect, care, trust and truthfulness between the dwellers but also promote a shared public practice in the 'in-between.' This leads us to conclude that negotiations in the 'in-between' spaces are crucial to character development in the changing structures of our communities and classrooms. It is because what is stated in the policy documents needs to be re-examined through the lenses of what is enacted in the 'in-between.'<sup>95</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Ted T. Aoki, "Teaching as Dwelling In-Between Between Two Curriculum Worlds," in *Curriculum in a New Key: The Collected Works of Ted T. Aoki*, ed.

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