Who Is It All For?

The Student at Center Stage

Tessa Leesen, Sander Bax and Gerwin van der Laan

Content

Introduction

Students grow up in a turbulent world. They are shaping their lives against the background of profound societal challenges, such as climate change, warfare, polarization and economic inequality. The increasing digitalization of society significantly impacts students' lives and requires them to develop highly advanced digital literacy skills. Digitalization does not only force universities to rethink the way of teaching, that is, on/off campus, hybrid, or blended, but also the assessment of students. Just think about the arrival of large language models, such as Chat GPT, which calls into question almost every traditional mode of assessment. In this landscape of profound societal changes, there is an important educational role for universities.

Rather than merely transmitting knowledge and skills, universities have high ambitions when it comes to holistically shaping its students and adequately equipping them for the world they are entering. The Tilburg Educational Profile explicitly states that, in addition to knowledge and skills, the university also wants to facilitate students' *character building*. In its educational vision, Tilburg University promotes five dimensions of character building: intellectual independence; a critical mindset; social responsibility; scientific responsibility; and entrepreneurship.[1] When evaluated in light of the neo-Aristotelian approach to character education, Tilburg University seems to primarily focus on students' intellectual and civic growth,[2] which caters to the observation that the youngest generation of students enters university with a strong social and socio-critical commitment.

This edition of the Tilburg Series in Academic Education critically reflects on the student in higher education and reflects upon questions, such as the following: What kind of students do we want to educate; how do we prepare students for the world they enter after college; how to engage students in the classroom; and how to assess our students?

The edition breaks down into three parts. In the first part "Students and Character Education", the authors argue that learning is a holistic and multidimensional process that encompasses more than cognitive development. The authors ponder variations of the question what it entails to adopt a holistic approach to education. In the second part, three chapters focus on different means to realize student-centered education. The chapters introduce and evaluate innovative educational initiatives and instructional

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1   Tilburg University Internal Report (2019). Students display intellectual independence when they are able to 'independently analyze complex information from different perspectives in order to arrive at a substantiated, personal opinion' and a critical mindset when they 'question the ideas, assumptions and beliefs of others and reflect on the backgrounds of their own ideas, assumptions, and beliefs.' Students display social responsibility when they 'are professionally honest and socially committed' and 'make conscious choices, as professionals and (world) citizens, taking into account the consequences of these choices for others and for society.' When they 'follow all rules of good and ethically responsible scientific research' and 'understand the importance and impact of science in a complex (global) society and act upon this accordingly', students demonstrate scientific responsibility. To display entrepreneurship, students are able to become 'enterprising thinkers' with 'an enterprising proactive mentality' and 'take the initiative to operate successfully, in a context in which they understand what can be expected of them.'
2   The other two building blocks are, according to the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, performance and moral virtues: https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/

designs to promote student engagement and their holistic development. In the third part, "Students and Assessment", two chapters focus on assessment in the context of the challenges raised in this introduction. How to assess character education and what is the room for formative assessment? Below, we summarize the eight contributions against the background of the theme of this edition.[3]

PART I. Students and character education

The first part of this book ponders upon the added value of character education. In the first chapter "Student-Centered Education and Character Building. A Personalist Approach", Dries Deweer draws an explicit distinction between the student as an individual and the student as a person, favoring a personalist approach to students. Personalism stresses that human beings are unique, relational and spiritual beings. Deweer argues that this approach to humanity has implications for how we teach our students. A personalist perspective invites teachers to see their students as unique persons rather than an anonymous number in the classroom. As a result, the central questions in an educational context are 'Which students are being overlooked?' and 'How to facilitate, within the boundaries of what is reasonable, their personal needs?' As education should serve the holistic development of students in different respects, also the question which dimensions of personhood are potentially being overlooked, is equally important. Deweer concludes that character education is vital when teaching a classroom filled with unique, relational and spiritual persons.

Also Roshnee Ossewaarde-Lowtoo *et al.* promote the holistic development of students in higher education. In their chapter "Educating the Wholesome Selves", they turn to Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue and to his educational philosophy. For Buber (1878-1965), the essence of education is the education of character, which in turn is the education for community. In Buber's view, education has a double aim: to cultivate the wholeness of the person as well as students' citizenship. These two aims are intricately connected: a genuine democratic community is dependent on wholesome selves who are able to commit to its core ideals of civic friendship and justice. Teachers, too, have the task of helping youngsters to become such wholesome selves. In line with Buber's philosophy of dialogue, this chapter examines how teachers can educate students to become wholesome selves, and does so in dialogue with a number of students. In this way, the chapter showcases the integration of the dialogical principle into education and promotes a teaching model of transformation rather than transmission of knowledge.

Anka Hüvös and Trinh Nguyen explicitly give voice to students' perspectives on character education in the chapter 'Students at the Centre Stage of Character Education: First-Year Students' Beliefs on Ideal Qualities'. In this chapter, Hüvös and Nguyen examine what character qualities Tilburg University students believe to be worth pursuing during their university study, and how they align with the educational vision on character education

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at Tilburg University. The authors use the narrative interview as a methodological tool to collect the input of nine students from Tilburg University. The paper presents how the participating students envision a good thinker, an engaged citizen and a person able to tackle complex challenges. They conclude that students at Tilburg University both consider intellectual independence, a critical mindset, open-mindedness and curiosity to be essential characteristics of a good thinker. At the same time, the students bring to the fore qualities that are lacking from Tilburg University's educational vision, such as self-discipline, intrinsic motivation, intellectual humility, community-mindedness, civic engagement, empathy and civic service. The authors argue that, as a student-centered institution, Tilburg University will benefit from embracing students' ideas on character education.

PART II. Student-centered teaching

Realizing the ambitions outlined in Part I requires targeted educational activities. In this second part, we zoom in on three specific educational activities: the entrepreneurial literacy initiative, that aims to trigger self-reflection in students; the introduction of elements of gamification in class to increase students' engagement and active learning; and forms of online and hybrid education to offer flexibility to a diverse group of students.

In their chapter "The Entrepreneurial Literacy Initiative: An Online Extra-Curricular Key Eductional Experience", Marco da Rin and Martí Guasch acknowledge that it is a major challenge for universities to help students achieve meaning in their education beyond absorbing valuable skills and knowledge. A contribution towards meeting this challenge comes from 'key educational experiences,' which are short and intense instructional episodes with long-term positive effects on those who experience them. In this chapter, Da Rin and Guasch present the Entrepreneurial Literacy Initiative (ELI) at Tilburg University, which provides students with information to assess whether an entrepreneurial career would fit their personal goals and ambitions, to understand what such a career means, what personal characteristics best match it, and to plan for it. This Entrepreneurial Literacy Initiative has been built as a key educational experience to help students absorb knowledge and initiate a process of self-discovery that may lead them to more informed career planning. In their chapter, the authors describe the motivation, content, and structure of the Entrepreneurial Literacy Initiative, provide an overview of its pedagogical foundations, and discuss the challenges of implementing this online extra-curricular course. They reflect on how such a modular online course can provide a blueprint for similar initiatives aimed at fostering the career preparation of individual students through effective information and meaningful reflection. Since character education, including entrepreneurship in Tilburg University's definition, often is shaped as facilitating students development rather than instructing them to adopt a specific type of character, there indeed appears to be great potential for reflection in character education, also beyond ELI.

In the chapter "Unlocking the Past: Gamifying Legal History Education for Engaging Learning Experiences", Lize-Mari Mitchell and Marije Markus argue that gamification can be a tool to engage students in a highly abstract and theoretical course. Teaching a course with a strong theoretical basis, such as legal history, can pose unique challenges due to its abstract nature. Understanding the intricate interplay between legal systems, judicial decisions, and societal influences throughout different eras can be a struggle for students. Explaining complex legal concepts and tracing their historical development therefore requires instructors to strike a delicate balance between depth of analysis and accessibility for students. Addressing this can be a daunting task, demanding innovative teaching methodologies and engaging instructional materials. This chapter critically reflects on a pilot where elements of gamification were introduced in the course on European legal history. This chapter explores the theoretical basis of gaming in higher education, the process of designing and implementing an educational game that aligns with specific learning objectives, and evaluates the intentional creation of a more immersive and experiential student learning experience at Tilburg Law School.

In "Hybrid Education at Tilburg Law School: Lessons Learned from Two Years of Hybrid and Online Teaching", Stéphanie van Gulijk and Lize-Mari Mitchell evaluate a pilot project on online and hybrid education. In September 2021, Tilburg Law School (TLS) set out to determine the feasibility of online and hybrid education in one international bachelor's and three international master's programs. This chapter aims to explain the two-year pilots, offer insights into the lessons learned and best practices that have emerged, and present the results of a comprehensive evaluation, encompassing input from students, teaching staff and support staff. Van Gulijk and Mitchell conclude that hybrid education has been generally well-received, because of the flexibility it offers to students, but that it also poses challenges, such as technological issues, students' potential social and academic isolation, and an increased workload for teachers. In response to these evaluations, Tilburg Law School decided to discontinue hybrid education in the bachelor program and transition to different formats of 'flexible education' in the participating master's programs. This flexibility is embodied in three distinct educational designs: HyFlex, HyFixed, and Parallel Programs. HyFlex courses allow individual students to decide how they will participate in each session, either in person, remotely, or through watching the recorded session at a later stage. In HyFixed courses, students select either online or on campus participation at the start, with limited opportunities for change. Parallel programs, finally, offer fully online and fully on campus tracks within the same program. The flexible formats allow Tilburg Law School to further experiment with flexible formats of education. The chapter may be complementary to the earlier personalist approach. Deweer asked 'which students are being overlooked'? The flexibility proposed by Van Gulijk and Mitchell may present opportunities to include previously overlooked student groups in university education.

PART III. Students and assessment

Next to (learning) objectives reflecting character education (part I) and educational activities supporting the realization of these objectives (part II), assessment is an integral part of, so to speak, the constructive alignment of educating wholesome selves. Traditional summative assessment frameworks are not well-suited to this purpose. Two chapters propose alternative methods.

In "Empowering Students with Formative Assessment", Ties van Daal and Berend Holwerda, who both completed a bachelor's program at the Tilburg School of Economics and Management, and senior lecturers, Astrid Kramer and Miranda Stienstra examine whether formative and summative assessments differentially impact students' motivation to learn, their learning behavior and learning curve. While a motivation to learn is assumed to be present in students, in reality such motivation is often introjected. Van Daal *et al.* organized two focus-group meetings to identify possible ways forward. The participants in the research suggest, and in line with earlier models, that elements of formative assessment may stimulate students' motivation to learn – or at least to participate in educational activities. Formative assessment is also expected to reduce stress, a mental health problem that was also identified at the start of this introduction as a hindrance to student flourishing.

The final chapter "Character Assessment via Qualitative Research Methods" develops the idea of formative assessment as well. In this chapter, Suzanne van der Beek and Beatrijs de Coninck propose that qualitative research methods can serve as an inspirational source for the design of innovative assessment types. These methods allow for the participant's own assessment of character, thereby, avoiding paternalistic judgements on students' character building. The chapter reports on the findings of a pilot study, conducted at Tilburg University, where three such types of assessment were tested: a journal study, a series of focus group interviews, and a content analysis study. The article provides reflections on the advantages and limitations of these assessment types and concludes that the journal study proved most beneficial to assess character. Both students and teachers, participating in the pilot, agreed that this assessment not only facilitated a meaningful conversation on the impact the course had on their character, but also created a sense of community that helped students to feel at home in the classroom and at the university in general. Despite the shortcomings in the assessment strategies, all of them work to foreground character education as an explicitly visible part of students' academic journey.

Conclusion

Of course, there is only so much light eight chapters can shed on a complex matter. Nevertheless, this volume of the Tilburg Series in Academic Education underlines the importance of including the student perspective. Doing so, according to Part I, informs us which students may not be reached by our efforts, and which students have a different view on educational initiatives than the educators who develop them. Character education may allow us to develop students in a holistic manner, but if their expectations of what such an education entails differs from the university's, the expectations gap may also yield unanticipated outcomes. The contributions in Part II show that it may be helpful to develop a menu of educational activities supporting the ambitions. Such a menu may include an effective strategy for all students, whether previously included or not, to grow and engage with education. Elements of formative assessment may be part of this mix. Perhaps more than a formal insurance for the realization of character education, formative assessment may also stimulate a dialogue in the classroom that stimulates students' self-reflection and motivation to learn.

PART I.
Students and Character Education

Student-Centered Education and Character-Building. A Personalist Approach

Dries Deweer

What does student-centeredness mean? This concept is almost omnipresent in contemporary higher education, to the extent that it is difficult to find a mission statement without it. However, it is an ambiguous term, as it may refer to students either as a group or separate beings. Even when we agree that it should primarily refer to the latter – i.e. student-centeredness does not focus on exchangeable members of a uniform larger entity, but rather particular individuals – the question remains concerning what this means. While one often talks about "focus on the individual" or "support for individual development," we equally commonly hear terms like "personal development" or "personalized learning." Moreover, these concepts also tend to be slid together when we talk about development of "the individual person." Individual or person: does it matter? In any case, both terms refer to human beings and we practically use them interchangeably. Nonetheless, conceptual hygiene is not a bad idea, and all the more so in the context of a university with roots in the Catholic tradition. In its view of humanity, Catholic thought has made an explicit distinction between the concepts of the individual and the person. I argue that this so-called "personalist" line of thought – which unsurprisingly favors the concept of the person – should continue to inspire us. The specifics of our either implicitly or explicitly chosen view of humanity play a decisive role in the goals that we set for education. This is the case for the knowledge and skills that we aim to teach, while being even more clearly relevant for our character-building ambitions. For instance, do we want to stimulate students to become docile citizens or critical citizens? Alternatively, how do we balance the development of self-reliance versus the promotion of service to society? How we interpret what it means to be human and live a human life has a profound influence in these kinds of fundamental educational questions. In this essay, I will explore what it means to address students as persons from the perspective of a personalist view of humanity.[1]

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[1] This essay contains ideas presented in an earlier state in lectures given at KU Leuven (Deweer 2017a) and Nederlandstalig Genootschap voor de Vergelijkende Studie van Opvoeding en Onderwijs (Deweer 2017b) and previously published essays in Dutch (Deweer 2017c; 2021).

Personalism

Personalism is a philosophical view of humanity closely linked to the so-called Catholic Social Teaching, which is the Catholic doctrine concerning what constitutes a good society. Key thinkers in the personalist tradition were twentieth century philosophers such as Jacques Maritain, Emmanuel Mounier, Max Scheler, Denis de Rougemont and Paul Ricoeur. In a way, personalism is a secular version of fundamental intuitions about human existence and co-existence that underly the Catholic vision of human development and education. Therefore, it is an excellent framework to think about the role of an educational institution with Catholic roots in a thoroughly secularized society. It shows the university's founding mission to be no less relevant today, now that it is largely separate from Catholicism or a Catholic social context.

Contrary to both individualism and collectivism, personalism emphasizes that human beings are unique, relational, and spiritual beings. One only becomes human in relationship with others and in a commitment to values that extend beyond one's individual interests. This is what the concept of the person underlines in comparison to the concept of the individual, with its implicit suggestion of self-sufficiency:[2]

First, since every human being is unique, a person is never inferior to a group. Human dignity is sacred. No one is *quantité négligeable*. Not a single person is to be sacrificed for the greater number. This was not coincidentally the fundamental insight in the historical context in which personalist philosophy developed itself in the mid-twentieth century, having witnessed the horrors of fascist and communist regimes.

Second, a human being is a social creature. We dispose of our own abilities and talents, but we can only develop ourselves based on our relationships with others, in a family, in all kinds of communities, in society, and even in humanity at large. In these relationships, others take care of us and we take care of others. Connectedness is key, also stretching to previous and next generations and to the planet, our common home.

Third, there is more to life. A full human existence includes a spiritual dimension, in the broad sense of the term. Human beings need more than simply the fulfillment of biological needs. The meaning of life is found in that which transcends us, i.e. in the commitment for values and ideals that extend beyond our own individual existence.

Let me highlight some important implications of the outlined personalist view of humanity. A first implication concerns the meaning of liberty. Personalism stands in disagreement with liberalism in this regard. Liberals generally embrace a so-called "negative" conception of liberty, in which liberty is defined by an absence, namely the absence of interference.[3] Personalists read more into the concept of liberty: from their perspective, being free is more than absolute self-determination insofar as you do not interfere with others yourself. Personalists argue for a "positive" conception of liberty, in which being free equals the ability to discover and pursue one's own vocation in life within one's social context. Instead of self-determination, the focus lies on self-development with and for others.

A second implication is directly connected to the positive conception of liberty. From a personalist perspective, a community is more than simply a free association for mutual benefit. Society is not a contractual-transactional relationship, but foremost an ethical connectedness. A community is a historical shape taken by the spontaneous ethical bond between human beings, not out of self-interest but rather mutual respect and care for one another. This is why communities go hand in hand with a *bonum commune*, a common good that transcends the mere sum of individual preferences. The *bonum commune* comprises all material and immaterial conditions for each member of the community to prosper as a person, ranging from employment, social security, healthcare, and a healthy environment to education, security, freedom of conscience, etc.

The idea of a *bonum commune* implies that the community is important but not supreme. The person has responsibility towards the community, although the community is at the service of the person. A plural and dynamic conception of community follows from this. Personalism by default thinks of community in the plural. Human beings are always part of several communities, from the family to the associations, companies, religious groups, etc. Indeed, all of these communities deserve respect in their particular role. The dynamic nature of communities refers to ethical foundation. If a community is based on the spontaneous ethical bond between human beings, mutual respect and care for one another, then an implicit dynamic of openness and enlargement is undeniable. The personalist sense of community contains a drive to bring ever more people into the circle of respect and solicitude, as a logical consequence of the principle that every person matters.

A personalist perspective on student-centered education – with its particular characterization of humanity, liberty, and community – requires us to look at students as human persons. The implications are obviously manifold but I argue that we can summarize the outlook by means of two simple questions that educators – and everyone who takes responsibility in social institutions for that matter – should keep in mind.[4]

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2 Deweer (2017c).
3 Berlin 1969.

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4 Bouckaert & Bouckaert (2017); Deweer (2021).

Who are we forgetting?

Given that everyone is unique, we should never cease to confront ourselves with the question who it is that we are not or insufficiently taking into account. Which persons are being overlooked? This is the first question that personalism puts front and center. A personalist perspective invites teachers to consider their students not as an anonymous mass but rather the unique persons that they are and become.[5]

There is a strong temptation to simply think of a group of students as a single entity, in need of just one approach towards a single set of learning goals. However, whether it is due to the increased flexibility in higher education, the rising awareness of neurodiversity, the social and cultural diversity in our classrooms, or any other kind of significant difference, the fact that every student is a unique person stares us in the face. Inevitably, this comes with questions about fairness. The bar lies where it lies. We should never be tempted to compromise on what we expect our students to achieve. Nonetheless, we should strive to help every student reach that goal. Within the boundaries of reason, we need to be sensitive to personal circumstances and needs that might require us to take a different approach.

As such, a personalist perspective adds another layer of complexity to constructivism in education. Students need to be challenged to construct their knowledge and skills by actively doing and discovering what they need to learn.[6] However, you need to create the right circumstances for the right audience to do that. For example, in a master course, students can often be thrown in the deep. They first struggle with difficult material on their own, and then bring their findings into dialogue with their peers and the lecturer. For first-year bachelor students or pre-master students, this approach does not work. They require more guidance first, before they can construct their own knowledge in a sensible way. This is a matter of adequate, context-sensitive 'scaffolding.'[7] The question emerges why we usually only think about this at the group level. Obviously, workload and feasibility are key concerns here, but both didactical and technological innovation challenges us to look beyond traditional boundaries to educational scaffolding, whether it is in the form of diversification (i.e. tailoring to different students) or universal design (i.e. designing a learning environment that accommodates differences).

The question "Who are we forgetting?" is also particularly pertinent in the context of the Dutch political debate on the internationalization of higher education. The personalist perspective is a strong antidote against nationalist tendencies. "Own people first" approaches are countered by the aforementioned open dynamism of the personalist conception of community. In this sense, being hospitable to students and academics

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5   This perspective also comes to the fore in Gert Biesta's (2013) influential pedagogical theory concerning the role of subjectification, although the rich personalist philosophical tradition provides more guidance on what personhood entails than Biesta, whose theory has proven to be very multi-interpretable, as Biesta (2021, 40-41) himself has recognized.
6   Bruner (1977).
7   Renninger & List (2012).

from abroad is not only a pragmatic no-brainer but also an ethical duty. Nevertheless, the question is relentless. When internationalization creates barriers for students of disadvantaged social backgrounds – for whom studying in a foreign language often appears a daunting challenge combined with all of the other hurdles that they face – then we have probably lost these people from our sight in our focus on others. A personalist perspective challenges us time and time again to look for who we are neglecting, in an endless pursuit of a better synthesis.

Which dimensions of personhood are we forgetting?

The second question at the center of the personalist outlook is slightly different. Indeed, we are not looking at which persons we overlook, but rather which dimensions of personhood. The brief outline of the personalist view of humanity that I presented above already confronts us with its multidimensional nature. Human beings are unique but also social, materially interdependent but also spiritual. Personalists argue for an integral understanding of human needs. Jacques Maritain referred to personalism as "integral humanism."[8] Human beings do not live on bread alone. Next to material needs, we all have mental, social, and spiritual needs. In the organization of society, we should not neglect any of these needs in our pursuit of relief of another need. Community should serve our integral development as human persons. Instead of an obsession with economic growth – or any other obsession for that matter – the integral growth of our existence and co-existence as persons is the objective. A personalist strives for balance between the different dimensions of a full human life. In practice, this means that personalism calls for vigilance. This philosophy requires us to be on the lookout for dimensions that we risk neglecting, hence justifying the second question.

Which dimensions of personhood do we overlook? It is a question that lies at the very foundation of Tilburg University, whose founder – the Catholic priest Martinus Cobbenhagen – talked about his motivation in ways that echo the personalist discourse that thrived within the Catholic intellectual circles of those days:

> "Recognition of the connection between economics and ethics lies at the very heart of the new business school in Tilburg. The basic idea here is that the considerations that guide all men's acts on their pathway through life should also inform their education and training so as to turn them not only into skilled professionals but also into complete human beings.[9]"

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8   Maritain (1936).
9   Cobbenhagen (2016), 42. For a direct connection between Cobbenhagen and personalist philosophy, see especially his references to the work of Jacques Maritain: Cobbenhagen (2016), 209-237.

The question remains reflected in the contemporary Tilburg Educational Profile, as we not only deal in knowledge and skills. Integral development is so much more, and thus we also strive for character-building. However, what is this character-building supposed to be? A personalist inspiration underlines two elements in particular: one is about the core content of character-building, and the other is about evaluation.

When it comes to the content of character-building, Cobbenhagen essentially tied academic education to a Christian concept of vocation, which is a matter of gift and responsibility: we owe our lives to our Creator who calls upon us to live well and to do good. The message is to love given that you always have been and always are a recipient of love.[10]

This idea in its Christian form might not be very relevant for us today, in our thoroughly secularized context. However, personalist philosophy contains a secular version of the same intuition. In the words of the French personalist philosopher and Tilburg University's *doctor honoris causa* of 1982, Paul Ricoeur:

> "[If] the individual considers himself as originally bearer of rights, he will take society and all of the ensuing efforts to be a mere instrument of security under the protection of which he will pursue selfish goals and he will consider his participation as conditional and revocable. If, however, he takes himself to be in debt by birth with regard to institutions that exclusively enable him to become a free agent, then he will consider himself obliged to these institutions, particularly obliged to make these institutions accessible to others.[11]"

Here you have a similar sense of gift and responsibility. Society enables us to flourish, and therefore we have a responsibility to contribute to society. This confronts us with the significance of the personalist positive conception of liberty, which – as mentioned above – is not a matter of random self-determination but rather meaningful self-development with and for others. This conception is grounded in the idea that freedom is not an automatic given but a social construct, created by the communities and the broad social environment that enable our freedom. This implies a dimension of indebtedness and responsibility to society. I think that this is a crucial aspect of the character-building that we should try to include in our education. Understanding society is also about helping students to understand this implicit vocation in society.

The other aspect about character-building in education that I want to mention is about evaluation. Many people are looking for ways to evaluate the character-building component of our programs, although this might be missing the point. Character-building is not the same as knowledge and skills education, and it is not meant to be evaluated in a similar way. To use some Dutch words without decent English equivalents: it is an

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10 Cobbenhagen (2016), 183-208.
11 Ricoeur (1991), 164 (own translation).

inspanningsverbintenis ("effort contract"), not a *resultaatsverbintenis* ("result contract"). As an institution, we need to be able to show that we make serious efforts to achieve this, as it is not up to the students to show that they have attained a certain level. When it comes to character-building, the burden is on us rather than them.

A large part of this effort concerns the question whether we as lecturers are an example of interpersonal and social commitment in our interaction with students. For example, this perspective informs the selection of topics and texts when we strive for diversity and relevance for topical public debates. Moreover, it also informs the way in which we operate in the classroom when we strive to keep everyone on board and stimulate everyone to advance, and when we go the extra mile to be available for students who struggle to participate in class.

An example

A personalist perspective on student-centered education does not primarily lead to an additional layer or additional elements in education. More importantly, it simply permeates standard practice in a coherent manner. An example clarifies this point. For years, I was responsible for teaching and assessing presentation skills in the first year of our philosophy bachelor program. Having to speak in public scares the hell out of some students. This situation emphasizes the necessity to see the students as particular persons. It requires being sensitive to their emotions and reaching out to them from person to person to ease their nerves and create a safe environment that allows them to grow. I am very happy to see that the colleagues currently in charge of the course – Hanne Jacobs and Yvette Drissen – take this approach a leap further. They are developing a project to take neurodiversity (conditions like autism, attention deficit (hyperactivity) disorder, or dyslexia, among many other conditions considered under a broad definition of the term) more fundamentally into account in the design of learning goals, educational activities and modes of assessment for communication skills.

Jacobs and Drissen build on studies on the academic success of neurodivergent students that suggest that while success in higher education is possible, neurodivergent students encounter specific obstacles from missing out on social interaction to issues arising from the nature of the prevailing learning environments. Current efforts to address these issues comprise individual accommodations, the most common being extra exam time. These accommodations often fall short in effectively addressing the challenges, and presentation skills training remains especially problematic. Conventional assessment methods for these skills may unfairly burden neurodivergent students. Jacobs and Drissen refer to a recent study explaining that traditional expectations for presenters and what is deemed "good presentation skills" may exhibit biases against neurodivergent individuals who are unable to perform in that way.[12] Therefore, the project aims to establish guidelines for teaching, training, and assessing presentation skills in a neuro-inclusive manner. They

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12 Hand (2023).

will explore modes of assessment that adhere to Universal Design for Learning.[13] This essentially means that they strive to make individual accommodations unnecessary because the nature of the learning environment is sufficiently accessible and inclusive.[14]

This approach exemplifies the two questions. "Which persons are we forgetting?" is rather obviously addressed in the concern for neurodiversity, while "Which dimensions of personhood are we forgetting?" is also addressed below the surface. The explicit pursuit of inclusive education testifies to an approach to professionalism that essentially implies social commitment for just institutions. It shows that striving for fairness is not an afterthought, not in being a teacher, neither in any other profession for that matter. As such, the very way in which we teach is itself character-building by example.

Conclusion

Seen from a personalist perspective, student-centricity is all about seeing students as persons. In this essay, I have argued that this can be summed up in a constant reflection on two questions, concerning which persons and which dimensions of personhood are in danger of being overlooked. As a final thought, let me acknowledge that – assuming this summons us not to neglect any person or any dimension of personhood – we are doomed to fail. No matter how hard we try, we will never finish the job. However, that is alright. Personalism is fundamentally "tragic optimism."[15] We are called upon to strive towards "the good life with and for others in just institutions,"[16] but not in naïveté. This pursuit comes down to acting based on hope that our efforts contribute meaning to our lives. The full recognition of our inadequacy ensures that it is not idle but reasonable hope. It is only with a touch of mildness that we do justice to students as persons and teachers as persons alike.

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13 Levey (2023).
14 Jacobs (2023).
15 Ricoeur (1964).
16 Ricoeur (1992), 239.

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Educating to Wholesome Selves

Roshnee Ossewaarde-Lowtoo, Natascha Kienstra, Aris Gude, Ian Hale & Katja Zimmermann

Abstract

The present contribution is based on conversations with students, in line with the educational philosophy of Martin Buber. For the latter, the essence of education is the education of character, which in turn is the education for community. Pointing to the selfhood-devouring power of collectivism, he emphasized the necessity of helping young people regain the desire to become their own unique wholesome selves so that they may be able to accept the responsibility for communal life. In other words, education has the twofold aim of cultivating wholeness of being and citizenship. These two aims are intricately connected: a genuine democratic community is dependent on wholesome selves who are able to commit to its core ideals of civic friendship and justice. Teachers, too, have the task of helping youngsters become such wholesome selves. But do they indeed succeed in keeping this desire to wholeness alive? When and why do they fail to do so? Does education cultivate the personal aspirations of students? When do students feel that their work becomes meaningful? Political collectivism might not be so prominently present today, and yet there are many forces that demand conformism and hence devour selfhood. What are these forces? Moreover, what can we (students, teachers, and others) do to ensure that universities become academic communities that fulfill their humanizing tasks? These are some of the questions that are addressed in this contribution.

Introduction

The language of wholeness in general and of wholesome selves in particular is quite uncommon in the context of higher education. An exploration of the historical and cultural developments that have led to the disappearance of this vocabulary from mainstream conceptualizations of higher education falls beyond the scope of the present contribution. Our main argument is that there are pedagogical, philosophical, and political reasons for reconsidering the potential contribution of higher education to the development of students' wholesome selves (also referred to as 'beautiful' souls in ancient Greek literature). Accordingly, we will also examine the implications of this reconceptualization of the aim of education for the understanding of knowledge and the student-teacher relationship, including the responsibility of the teacher. In the classical world, the wholeness or unity of the soul was conceived to be the precondition for wholesome economic and political activities. In Plato, such wholeness of the soul is reached when our rational, appetitive, and spirited (in the sense of belonging to the *thymos*) faculties are ordered. He thus

writes: "[The person] binds these all together and from many elements becomes in every respect a unity, temperate and harmonious; then and only then should he act, if he is having anything to do with the earning of money, or looking after his physical needs, or any business of the state, or his own private business arrangements" (Plato, 2013, 435). The Greek and Roman lifelong ideals of *paideia* and *humanitas*, respectively, aimed at cultivating such souls or selves. Roughly put, paideia could be said to be "the kind of education that makes for better citizens, or … for better human beings. To the Athenians, 'better' meant 'having more *aretê*,' and *aretê* meant 'excellence' or 'virtue.' Athenians believed that good education would make young people better able to use good judgment, to live reverently, and to make decisions with justice" (Woodruff, 2005, 193).

Although the idea of unified and harmonious – hence wholesome – selves is already to be found in Plato, we will not be having recourse to the Platonic conceptual framework in this contribution. Instead, we will turn to the thought of Martin Buber (1878-1965), whose works include *Bildung und Weltanschauung* (1935) and several other lectures and writings on character and education. The twofold reason for having recourse to Buber's philosophy of education is because of his dialogical approach that is respectful of difference/diversity and because he avoids the pitfalls of both ancient and modern rationalism. Hence, the soul includes the body, and correspondingly, the body is also the source of knowledge. That said, it is important to emphasize that both Buber and Plato/Socrates insist on the necessity to unify our souls *before* taking important decisions and performing important tasks. As Buber writes, "this unification [of the soul] must be accomplished *before* a man undertakes some unusual work. Only with a united soul will he be able to do it so that it becomes not patchwork but work all of a piece. … unity of the soul can never be achieved in the middle of the work" (Buber, 1994, 16). Education is essentially the education of character for Buber. Well-developed characters act "from the whole of [their] substance" (Buber, 1947, 113). In other words, they respond to the demands of particular situations with their whole life and whole being. Buber makes educators responsible for contributing to the wholeness – namely the unity – of selves (students). The educator has the task of helping young people (re)gain the desire to become their own unique wholesome selves so that they may be able to accept the responsibility for communal life (Buber, 1947, 114-115). As Juliane Jacobi (2017, 659) explains, "with his understanding of education as dialogue, Buber offers ways to conceptualize teaching and learning, individual growth as well as community building, in light of the teacher-student relationship." Accordingly, the aim of education is to enable both the individual growth of students and their capacity to relate to their social reality/environment (Jacobi, 2017, 662, 664).

Since the present issue of the Tilburg Series in Academic Education is about students and their well-being, it was consonant with the dialogical approach of Buber to involve students in the process of writing this contribution, which also makes them co-authors.[1] Due to practical reasons, we limited ourselves to three students, Aris Gude, Ian Hale, and

1   Therefore, the present project was not assessed by the Ethics Review Board.

Katja Zimmermann, from the Tilburg School of Catholic Theology (TST).[2] We conducted a stimulated recall-interview and together with the three students we identified their experiences of connecting wholeness to education (duration: approximately one hour and fifty minutes). In doing so, we asked reflective questions for each experience, in which the students in particular spoke out. The questions are related to the intended, implemented, and attained curriculum models (Van den Akker, 2003; Thijs & Van den Akker, 2009), in addition to the design, execution, learning activities, and results of learning (Imants, 2010). Examples related to the intended curriculum and its design are: "What is the purpose of education in this hyper-changing world?" "How do you evaluate education that advocates a business model, for example?" "How are students educated for meaningful employment?" Examples related to the implemented curriculum and its execution are: "What do teachers do differently?" "Why are students not motivated?" "Which relationships do you see with basic needs like competence, autonomy, and relationship?" "What attention do teachers pay to differentiation?" "How is this assessed?" Examples related to the attained curriculum, learning activities, and learning results are: "What skills do you as a student want to develop?" "Why do you want to be able to preach?" "What was the very best experience as a student at the TST and what was it related to?" "How do you experience being taken seriously?" "How can you 'taste' a text?" "How is knowledge embodied?" "What makes you want to be included in learning and teaching?" "What role do you embody?" "How does wholeness resonate in education for you?" "How approachable is the teacher?" "What does cancel and exclusion do to you in teaching?" "What form of thinking requires learning?" We assume a reciprocal relationship between an instructor's teaching and student learning in the learning process (Kienstra *et al*. 2015, 2). The first session was followed by conversations and email correspondence with individual students. All authors had access to a common Google document where all ideas and suggestions were written down. Although the specific experiences of the three TST students cannot be generalized, they are not idiosyncratic. Hence, they could potentially resonate with other (TiU) students. Similarly, suggestions with respect to courses and curricula could have a wider relevance.

The dialogical principle in education
Although the conception of the unity or wholeness of the self does differ per tradition, with varying emphases on the passions and the body, it typically involves all human faculties, namely the "whole" human being. Buber has recourse to the forerunner of the "self," namely the "soul," which he defines as the whole being, body, and spirit together. He thereby distinguishes himself from mainstream definitions of the soul as being a *part* of the human person. "The soul," Buber (1994, 18) writes, "is not really united, unless

2   These students took the MA elective philosophy course "utopie en ideologie" in 2022-23, before this project. All authors – including these three students – explicitly agreed to the audio recording of the Zoom group meeting, which was deleted after data processing. Individual conversations were not recorded. Other contributions comprised email correspondence and writing in a common Google document via the platform Google Apps @ Tilburg University. This document was deleted after the submission of a previous version of the present contribution.

all bodily energies, all the limbs of the body, are united." Such unification of the soul/person is not a one-off event, but it is instead a never-ending, non-linear process that is characterized by intermittent progress and regression. This is precisely one of the reasons why we speak of lifelong learning. The ideas that are relevant to understanding Buber's conceptualization of the unity of the soul/self are the uniqueness of every soul, their vocation, and the idea of the embeddedness of the self in relationships with nature, other selves, and spiritual beings (Buber, 2013, 70). Hence, according to Buber (1994, 9), "every person born into this world represents something new, something that never existed before, something original and unique [...] called upon to fulfil [her/]his particularity in this world." The embeddedness in the world should be noted here. The self achieves her/his destined being in the world and discovers her/his own particular way of healing that same world. The works done with our unified souls promote the healing of the world, but they also lead to "a *steadier* unity" of our souls. In other words, the practice of the good heals the world, others, and our own selves.

In *Ich und Du* (first published in 1923) – "I and You" – Buber introduces his concept of dialogue. He distinguishes between two human movements, desires, and capacities, namely the "will to enter into relation" and the will to profit and power (Buber, 2013, 35). By choosing to live the life of dialogue, we give up the motives of gain and power to develop "a genuine relationship to the beings and things in whose life we ought to take part, as they in ours" (Buber, 1994, 31). We choose to give up being a person who "prefers to observe and make use of beings whom he encounters on his life way" and instead turns "soul and deed toward them" (Buber, 1990, 121). The "It" becomes a "You." In the teacher-student relationship debate, Buber insists on a certain degree of reciprocity/mutuality in education, although it cannot be full reciprocity. A somewhat limited reciprocity follows quite naturally from Buber's conceived role of the educator and the responsibility that he attributes to the latter. The educator is deemed to accept the responsibility for the consequences of her/his words, deeds, and way of being since "whether we intend it or not, we always educate 'to' something" (Buber, 1990, 100). Educating to wholesome selves might seem a lot to ask from the educator, which is indeed the case, not because the educator is expected to be some kind of "moral genius" but rather because (s)he is expected to be "wholly alive and able to communicate [her/]himself directly to [her/]his fellow beings" (Buber, 1947, 105).

Interestingly enough, Buber refers to the person and life of Socrates to illustrate the dialogical relationship. Hence, Buber (1990, 102) writes:

> "Socrates exercised his decisive effect not through what he taught but through his life. It is not the instruction that educates but the instructor. The good teacher educates by [her/]his speech and by [her/]his silence, in the hours of teaching and in the recesses, in casual conversation, through [her/]his mere existence, only [s]he must be a really existing [hu]man and [s]he must be really present to [her/]his pupils; [s]he educates through contact. Contact is the primary word of education. It means that the teacher shall face [her/]his pupils not as developed brain before unfinished ones, but as being before beings, as mature being before developing beings. [...] for what is needed is not mere seeking for information from below and giving information from above, also not mere questions from here and answers from there, but genuine dialogue. The teacher, to be sure, conducts and governs this dialogue, but even so [s]he must also enter it with [her/]his own person, directly and candidly."

A genuine dialogue takes place when and where "each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between [her/]himself and them" (Buber, 1947, 19). This emphasis on "living mutuality" is reminiscent of Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872), the initiator of *Volkserziehung*, who is known for his concept of "living word" and who is said to have inspired Buber (Langlois, 2012; Mendes-Flohr, 2022). For Grundtvig, education involves "the communication of personal life between teacher and taught; either the teachings live in the life of the teacher and are actively responded to by the student, or they do not live at all, the teachings being mere dead words" (Lawson, 1993). The demand that words be alive has implications for our teaching and learning approaches. To what extent is the knowledge that we teach and acquire in university "alive in our consciousness" (Midgley, 2002, 7-8), "working" in us, and hence truly part of us (teachers and students)? Even more importantly, what can we do to make information become knowledge that lives in our consciousness?

Making knowledge become alive in our consciousness
It is noteworthy that students – sometimes independently from each other (in individual conversations) – expressed the need for a broader approach to knowledge. Referring to the work of the philosopher/cognitive scientist John Vervaeke, Hale (one of the participating students) observes that we favor a "propositional knowledge," which is concerned with theories and facts that can be proven to be true or false. This mathematical approach to knowledge has become dominant since the Enlightenment and especially since the 19th century. It favors abstraction to everyday life, which is the "cult of impersonality" in science that the philosopher Mary Midgley has consistently criticized throughout her whole career. By showing that knowledge not only comprises knowing what is true or

false, Vervaeke wants to do justice to the human need to understand with our whole being and the social knowledge that we acquire in relationships. It is therefore unsurprising that Hale notes that "there is a gap between theoretical knowledge and the big questions that are generally addressed in academia, and the "smaller" practical questions. How can we make knowledge relevant for daily practices?" More specifically, he wonders: "How can one close the great schism between the practice of science and spirituality? Gude [another participating student] also gives voice to this problem. Hale would like to see knowledge approached not only as propositional but also as procedural, perspectival, and participatory. It means that students are not only to get information about what hermeneutics is ("cold facts") but "should also be trained in how to practice the skill of hermeneutics, how to care about what hermeneutics cares about, and eventually to become a hermeneut as a way of being in the world." He would like to see courses designed to train students on all manners and layers of knowing, all the way to embodied understanding. A comparable approach can be found in education studies (for example, Griffiths, 1987).

A more personal engagement with texts and hence authors is something that Gude – similarly to Hale – would like to see in the curriculum. He sees it fitting that "contemplative" reading should be more integrated into the courses of a catholic theology faculty.[3] While this is already the case in a course such as "spirituality and mystagogy," Gude thinks it would be a good idea to integrate it into a course such as "dogmatics," He believes that such a contemplative or spiritual reading of dogmas would make them alive, enabling students to feel connection with the "spirit" of dogmas. Similarly, Catholic intellectual traditions could be made to inform character development initiatives. Gude notes that these traditions could broaden our conception of knowledge, character, self, and consciousness. They could also provide students with practical tools to get in touch with their "inner self" and work towards that unity of the self that characterizes a well-developed character. It must be noted that such courses would be relevant to other, "non-religious" students and do not require any commitment to religious dogmas.

A more personalized approach to education might be a way to make knowledge become alive in the consciousness of students (Järvelä, 2006). Hence, Zimmermann (one of the participating students) notes that it would be highly desirable to have "more room to connect course topics to personal aspirations (for instance by working on a project during a course)." Furthermore, she points to the element of uncertainty that is involved for many TST students, namely not yet knowing which jobs they will get. Given this uncertainty, which education should students receive? She advocates more reflection on whether we are preparing students for a "specific career or for a future which requires a certain set of skills rather than specific knowledge? What do students need to excel in the future?" Zimmermann therefore emphasizes the need to reflect on and evaluate the content and skills that current programmes offer. "Does one-size-fits-all still work and is it desirable

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3 "Contemplative reading" is the topic of the PhD thesis of the TST-teacher Juliëtte van Deursen-Vreeburg, which was successfully defended in October 2023.

especially in smaller programmes like theology (where many students have/had a prior career in a different field/different academic backgrounds)?," she wonders. Could the "changed approach to novitiate in religious communities" – for instance – be a source of inspiration? The gist of this part of the conversation was that broader degree programmes and more practical skills and competences would be highly welcomed.

To conclude this section, it is relevant to recall Ursula Franklin's distinction between implicit, social learning, and explicit learning. According to her, the integration of digital tools into education facilitates the acquisition of knowledge (facts and information) but also makes it necessary to devote explicit attention to social learning and hence understanding. As Franklin (2008, 252) explains:

> "Whenever a group of people is learning something together, two separate facets of the process should be distinguished: the explicit learning of, say, how to multiply and divide or to conjugate French verbs, and the implicit learning, the social teaching, for which the activity of learning together provides the setting. It is here that students acquire social understanding and coping skills, ranging from listening, tolerance, and cooperation to patience, trust, or anger management. [...] When external devices [such as AI-assisted technologies] are used to diminish the need for the drill of explicit learning, the occasion for implicit learning may also diminish. [...] Without an adequate understanding of the social processes of teaching and learning and a careful attention to their well-being, the whole enterprise of education can be at risk."

Given digitalization trends in education, degree programmes and specific courses could include explicit attention to the social learning that is so essential for students to find their way in the world and contribute to that same world. The related question is therefore whether we prepare students for a changing world that often demands the sacrifice of integrity, and hence of selfhood. What are ways to ensure that students do not lose their desire to wholeness? A first step would be to make them become aware of the forces that demand conformism and undermine independent, critical thinking and feeling. Therefore, in the next section we also look at some of these wholeness-undermining forces.

Preparing students for the world

Buber witnessed youngsters being so absorbed by collectivities that they lost their individualities and hence personal responsibility for the world. This fact was an extremely serious matter for him, since according to him, those who no longer decide what they do with their whole being become sterile souls, which in fact means being no soul – no person – at all (Buber, 1947, 115). The educator is not expected to "instil" values into youngsters but instead to rekindle their desire to become their own selves. (S)he has the task of keeping "the pain the individual suffers through [her/]his distorted relation to [her/]

his own self" alive (Buber, 1947, 111). Educators can do so through their dialogical attitude, which involves generous self-giving. Nonetheless, the demand for a "self-giving" attitude may clash with the demand for impersonal professionalism. As noted above, Midgley has been a staunch critic of the cult of impersonality in universities. She did not advocate getting rid of professionalism, but she instead believed that "truly professional teachers are not just ones who know their subject properly and have studied teaching methods. They are ones who are there for the right reasons – who themselves love their subject and want to share progress in it with their pupils, ones in whose lives teaching has been an organic growth" (Midgley, 2002, 61). This love of the subject and commitment to teaching is an important precondition for a dialogical relationship with students. Interestingly enough, students can usually see and feel the absence of such love and commitment.

During our meeting, while discussing some of the challenges faced by students – which include the feeling of not being seen by their teachers – Gude recalls a presentation delivered by Hale that illustrates the dialogical principle in education. We reflect on what happened during the presentation and why the audience felt engaged. Gude notes that it was precisely because Hale was authentically present and believed what he was saying that Gude felt invited to participate in that quest for an answer. Hale emphasizes the genuine quest for an answer that has not been determined in advance. Reflecting on this particular episode, Hale notes that he discovered that the engagement with different texts and hence writers provided him with another perspective besides the first- and third-person perspectives. The attitude that is thereby required is one of allowing oneself to be surprised. In other words, it requires openness, humility but also a sense of adventure. The notion that studies/teaching/research is some sort of journey or adventure is one that recurs in our conversations. In slightly different words, we could conceive academia as some kind of space in which we *participate* open-mindedly and relationally to seek answers. Such space presumes freedom and hence the absence of ideologies and other forms of external coercion. Especially students might experience the lack of freedom and – even worse – various forms of infantilization. As Zimmermann notes, "it is crucial to identify obstacles to discuss critical (but highly prominent and relevant) topics since a university should be a place to discuss and debate. The lack of debate might cause a feeling of not being taken seriously." Given the complexity of the world, it goes without saying that teachers should acquaint students with a variety of perspectives, including perspectives with which they do not agree. This holds for all disciplines since every discipline tends to favor a few mainstream voices, relegating others to history or the margins.

There are two interrelated contemporary trends in universities that could potentially help to prepare students for a complex, pluralist world, while at the same time contributing to the wholeness of their selves, namely interdisciplinarity and "team science." The latest issue of the Tilburg Series in Academic Education "Breaking Barriers: Innovation through Collaboration" illustrates both trends. These developments in the academic world might contribute to "psychological continuity" by connecting "enquiries with each other and with our personal lives" (Midgley, 2002, 106). However, while the connection of

disciplines – enquiries – is something that might be embraced by students and teachers, the connection with "our personal lives" is not so obvious. In fact, such connection has long been discouraged in the name of "science" and "professionalism." To again quote Midgley (2002, 51):

> "Many academic people [...] may still want to maintain that science, and the search for knowledge in general, is something set apart from the rest of life – not necessarily higher, but still quite shut off. This has an odd effect on personal identity. On this view, people with an intellectual training have two quite separate sorts of business – professional and non-professional – which should never be mixed."

This artificial separation between daily life and academic life has negative implications for students as well. As Hale notes:

> "Students experience a sense that their schoolwork is arbitrary when it lacks real-world impact. Writing assignments commonly fill forgotten folders, and four-year theses end up in the paper shredder. I myself have shredded these abandoned writings, which symbolize to me the fleetingness of academic writing, which comprises the vast majority of schoolwork at the university. Hence, doing schoolwork in general and essay exercises in particular for their own sake seems a trivial pursuit since it fails to rectify concrete problems that last and benefit the world. So the question becomes, what does it take to make the student feel like their acquired academic skills matter?"

The integration of personal identity and professional identity – of both students and teachers – is perhaps something that requires more attention. Some courses at the TST explicitly aim at such integration. Although it can be hoped that teachers also benefit from such courses, it cannot simply be assumed that they are automatically enabled to transcend the fragmentation noted by Midgley.

Towards transformative education

The integration of the dialogical principle into education has conceptual implications regarding how we conceive the nature of education, teaching and learning, and the relationship between students and teachers. A few ideas that we have explored include character as wholeness, relationality, participation, dialogical quests for answers that have not been determined in advance, and hence also the possibility to diverge from mainstream academic/scientific opinions. Clearly, these ideas also have practical implications, which may be difficult to reconcile with contemporary higher education arrangements. In these

concluding remarks, we address three possible objections to the dialogical approach in education. First, it might be objected that mass education does not allow personal and personalized education, and therefore also makes the idea that education – and the educator! – contributes to the wholesomeness of individual selves tenuous. Second, certain disciplines *might* seem to be inherently so impersonal that they are not directly associated with character building. For instance, some might have difficulty seeing how teaching and learning statistics or econometrics contribute to the wholesomeness of selves. Third, the idea that teaching/learning/research is a quest for not-yet-determined answers might be difficult to reconcile with the common notion that teachers "transmit" information (usually conclusions and hence answers!).

The response to the first and second objections is that a dialogical *attitude* is expected from both teachers and students irrespective of the size of programmes. Education is in the first place a human activity and hence essentially relational. As noted earlier, whatever is done must be done with one's whole being, which includes teaching and learning econometrics and statistics. Moreover, all disciplines have the potential to contribute to wholesome selves because they help us to develop our human faculties. More personal and personalized education can be achieved through tutoring, seminars, and projects. The third objection reflects the gap between theory and practice. We know that in theory academia is about different perspectives and debates and hence a never-ending quest for answers. In practice, we tend to choose and favor particular perspectives and marginalize others. A good dialogical practice would therefore be the engagement with different perspectives. Moreover, it is always a good thing to recall the original questions that gave rise to particular standpoints. This process of posing and examining these questions once again can lead to new insights. New insights do not leave a person unaffected, and there is therefore growth. This is a teaching model of transformation and not merely of information "transmission" (Kienstra, 2021).

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Students at the Centre Stage of Character Education: First-Year Students' Beliefs on Ideal Qualities

Anna Hüvös & Trinh Nguyen

Abstract

Knowledge, skills, and character are the pillars of Tilburg University's educational vision, reflecting the university's beliefs on what qualities are necessary for students' successful learning. Aside from knowledge and skills, Tilburg University also aims to implement 'character building' in its programmes, based on the belief that it helps to students become critical thinkers who are motivated to act responsibly.[1]

In this paper, we investigate (Tilburg) university students' beliefs on desirable character qualities, and whether they align with the educational vision of Tilburg University regarding character education. Although Tilburg University emphasises student-centred learning,[2] there is missing knowledge regarding students' beliefs on desirable character traits that they hope to develop. As a student-centred university, it is therefore necessary to research student beliefs to gain insights into the success of the university's vision. Indeed, if the university's goals regarding character education do not align with the students' views, this misalignment can result in disinterested students, disillusioned educators, and an overall loss of student applicants to the programmes offered at the institution. However, if the beliefs align, students are intrinsically motivated and engaged, and teaching staff find it easier to teach.

This paper first elaborates on Tilburg University's vision of character education, before presenting students' desires, attitudes, and thoughts on character education. Students' input is derived from nine interviews conducted with the narrative method. This paper will discuss students' beliefs regarding the qualities of a good thinker, an engaged citizen, and a person who can tackle complex challenges, which offers insights into their views on good character. The findings confirm that students' beliefs have much in common with those of Tilburg University, although they also strongly value a large number of qualities that are not explicitly mentioned in the educational mission.

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1   Tilburg University Internal Report (2019), 5.
2   van Lenning & de Regt (2017), 30.

Introduction

Although character building does not systematically receive explicit attention in contemporary higher education,[3] Tilburg University acknowledges its importance. According to its educational vision, Tilburg University promotes five dimensions of character building: intellectual independence, critical mindset, social responsibility, scientific responsibility, and entrepreneurship.[4] Students display intellectual independence when they are able to 'independently analyse complex information from different perspectives in order to arrive at a substantiated, personal opinion'[5] and a critical mindset when they 'question the ideas, assumptions and beliefs of others and reflect on the backgrounds of their own ideas, assumptions, and beliefs.'[6] Students display *social* responsibility when they 'are professionally honest and socially committed' and 'make conscious choices, as professionals and (world) citizens, taking into account the consequences of these choices for others and for society.'[7] Students demonstrate *scientific* responsibility when they 'follow all rules of good and ethically responsible scientific research' and 'understand the importance and impact of science in a complex (global) society and act upon this accordingly'. To display entrepreneurship, students are able to become 'enterprising thinkers' with 'an enterprising proactive mentality' and 'take the initiative to operate successfully, in a context in which they understand what can be expected of them'.[8] In sum, as an institution, Tilburg University believes that intellectual independence, critical mindset, social responsibility, scientific responsibility, and entrepreneurship are important character traits.

Tilburg University would benefit from aligning its character-building objectives with students' beliefs and interests. Alignment implies two directions, namely adjusting teaching objectives to students' beliefs, and counting on the flexibility of students' beliefs, thus encouraging them to be receptive to the university's vision. Our paper aims to provide insights into students' beliefs, which would benefit both directions of alignment. In terms of which direction of alignment is more desirable, we eagerly await further discussions between faculty and students. Students' beliefs about learning outcomes and their importance often strongly differ from those of their teachers,[9] and the same misalignment can be expected for character traits. Therefore, this paper will position students' beliefs at the centre of character education, which is particularly relevant given Tilburg University's commitment to student-centred learning.[10] Second, students' beliefs contribute to student motivation and improve the teaching experience.[11] When character building fails to consider students' beliefs, students may display active resistance, ranging from covert ridicule to conscious non-participation.[12] Such resistant behaviours understandably result in disinterested students and disillusioned teachers. On the contrary, students' beliefs are positively related to their learning motivation.[13] Students' epistemological beliefs are beliefs about knowledge[14,15]; in character education, referring to what character is and how to develop it. Given that students' epistemological beliefs in science significantly influence their achievement motivation,[16] their beliefs are expected to play an important role in their engagement with character education. Third, students' interests are critical to their process of choosing higher education programmes.[17] Furthermore, students constantly reflect on their programme choices – even after enrolment – to assess the fit with their developing interests. After extended reflection, students may realise that the study program does not fit their interests as well as they thought and consequently choose to break off their commitment.[18] Therefore, students' interests can decide their enrolment and commitment to higher education programmes, and thus stronger reflexivity to students' beliefs and interests would help to promote Tilburg University to its prospective applicants.

Method

Our paper collected students' input on character building from the data of an ongoing research project that maps students' intellectual, personal, and civic learning gain in higher education. Part of the research project was to ask participating students across study years from different universities to reflect on the character of an ideal academic, person, and citizen.

This paper analyses nine interviews from first-year students at Tilburg University (Table 1). In comparison with second- or third-year students, we expect first-year students to be less strongly influenced by or familiar with university values and educational visions. Thus, their beliefs on character traits are valuable, enabling Tilburg University to improve student-centred learning in due course. The interviews were conducted using the narrative interviewing technique, as a tool for collecting people's stories about their life to gain a deeper understanding of how people process their experiences.[19]

3   Lamb *et al.* (2022)
4   Tilburg University Internal Report (2019)
5   Tilburg University Internal Report (2019), 5.
6   Tilburg University Internal Report (2019), 5.
7   Tilburg University Internal Report (2019), 5.
8   Tilburg University Internal Report (2019), 5.
9   Varsavsky *et al.* (2014)
10 van Lenning & de Regt (2017), 30.
11 Kinchin (2004)

12 Romanowski (2003), 11-12.
13 Kizilgunes *et al.* (2009)
14 Valcke *et al.* (2010), 624.
15 Kari & Savolainen (2010), 237.
16 Kizilgunes *et al.* (2009)
17 Holmegaard (2015)
18 Vulperhorst *et al.* (2022)
19 Anderson & Kirkpatrick (2016)

Table 1. Demographics of interviewees

Characteristics	
Gender	3 males
	6 females
Nationality	5 Dutch students
	4 International students
Discipline	5 from the Alpha* disipline
	2 from the Gamma** disipline
	2 from the Liberal arts and sciences***

Note. Total sample: N=9

* refers to Humanities, and include majors such as archaeology; area studies; digital humanities; philosophy; history; art & architecture; music, theatre & performance arts, theology...

** refers to the Social and Behavioural Sciences, and include majors such as business administration; public administration and political science; communication science, cultural anthropology; demographics; economics; environmental studies...

** In the first year, Tilburg University's Liberal arts and science offered introductory courses such as: European History, Thinking about Science (philosophy of Science), Sustainable Consumption, Introduction to Business and Economics and Social Sciences, Introduction to Cognitive Neuroscience, Introduction to Law and Humanities

The interviews asked students to describe the ideal academic, person, and citizen. An ideal academic has qualities that inspire them to know and seek the truth. An ideal learner has qualities that enable them to execute tasks and perform in a successful and fulfilling way, which helps them to complete challenges and bounce back from failures. Finally, a virtuous citizen is concerned with the collective good.[20] We assume that students name qualities that they consider important and aspire to display. The interviews were transcribed and analysed using the Atlas.ti software.

Results

We analysed the frequency of the qualities mentioned by the students to assess what they believed to be important. We selected qualities that were most frequently mentioned across interviews. Students found the following qualities the most crucial to be qualified an ideal academic, person, or citizen (in order of importance): self-discipline, intrinsic motivation, open-mindedness, curiosity, resilience, social awareness, passion, civic-mindedness, civic engagement, humility and self-criticism, critical thinking and independence of thought, attentiveness, empathy, and civic service. According to the students, these qualities are building blocks to shape a positive character. In the following section, we will discuss these qualities one by one and provide examples from the interviews with the students.

20 Baehr, 2017

Self-discipline

A person who displays self-discipline plans and executes tasks even when they do not feel like it, thus exhibiting control and regulation over excesses.[21] They know what each task entails, and they can organise themselves and their materials into a logical system. Self-regulatory learning, the use of processes and strategies to achieve academic success[22] come to them with ease, as they plan, monitor, execute, and evaluate their workflows.

> "I hope to gain an ability to be a bit more structured. To be a bit more disciplined in my studies as well. I think I need that to be a better academic. Also correlates with me being just very chaotic, that I'm all over the place and that kind of my discipline goes always to something else. [...] So, I hope that in these next few years I get a bit more discipline for me to be an academic."

Disciplined people are not only strong achievers, but they are good at regulating their own motivation, overcoming challenges and performing even when their motivational level is low.

> "If you put in work hard enough, I think that's the only thing. [...] [O]f course you need to prioritise what you [...] put your energy [in] and in which order and how much time you need for each thing and organising and planning."

Students' answers most frequently displayed self-discipline, along with its components of self-regulation, strong organisational affinity, and self-direction. Most students aspire to be an ideal learner whose greatest quality is being the master of one's own desires and obligations.

Intrinsic motivation

A motivated person is characterised as having strong reasons to accomplish something.[23] Although it is important to be in control of one's motivational fluctuations, according to the students one must have some initial drive to know and do. On the one hand, our intrinsic motivation makes us want to achieve certain goals even though we might make mistakes, and despite the fact that we might not always be correct or make intellectual fallacies. One student described it as follows:

> "If you need some certain skill, you can always learn it, but you need to motivate yourself. Like we're in uni, we're not [in] school anymore. The teachers aren't like holding out their hands anymore and being like 'oh come, you can do it, I give you a sticker.'"

On the other hand, intrinsic motivation is an instrument to achieve goals that are not

21 Peterson & Seligman (2004)
22 Baars *et al.* (2020)
23 Jubilee Centre of Character and Education (2017)

necessarily epistemic in nature (like understanding or truth) but are essential for the student (e.g., pursuing a course).

> "So like this semester we have law. I can't do anything with law. I don't like law at all. But then for the seminars, we're reading a play and I'm like, okay, I can read a play. So okay, this play potentially has something to do with the law, we'll find out. But like at least focusing on the fact that it's a play and not about law. So just like finding the small things that might keep you afloat and keep you motivated or like, yeah, a lot of self-motivation, like, okay, we're going to do this."

The motivation to learn is a quality that enables students at university to tackle their educational (and personal) challenges that are not necessarily strictly connected to their intellect but more to the act of studying and being a student.

Open-mindedness
An open-minded individual is willing to consider other perspectives and opinions that might differ from their own and is open to alternative solutions to problems with which they are presented. They are aware of what they know and what they do not know, which enables them to use their own resources better, as well as others' resources when needed.[24]

> "Just be willing to debate and have conversation with other academics, other people from different disciplines or from your discipline [...] who may not necessarily agree with your conclusions."

Moreover, an open-minded person is willing to change their mind and refine their views. Aside from accepting alternative facts and opinions, they also seek to expand their intellectual knowledge.

> "Generally, also the willingness [...] to do research to potentially let your hypothesis be proven wrong and being open to that."

Curiosity
Someone who is curious is motivated to learn and know purely to understand why things are the way that they are. They are not motivated by external factors (such as grades, or awards), but rather an internal love for knowledge.[25] They want to understand to broaden their horizons.

> "First of all, curiosity. [I] think [...] there is no way that you can be an accomplished academic if your field of discipline does not spark a particular passion. And like the child-like curiosity [...]."

24 Baehr (2011)
25 Baehr (2011)

Another student said:

> "Being interested in things [...], and just having an interest in like gaining knowledge and thinking in that way."

Students' conceptualisation of curiosity shows their belief in the importance of having a love for knowledge and an internal drive to search for information, just like a child who learns something new.

Resilience
Our conception of resilience refers to Martin and Marsh's (2006) definition of academic resilience as 'students' ability to effectively deal with setback, challenge, adversity, and pressure in the academic setting' (p. 269).[26] According to one student:

> "Oh, and you need to get used to failure. Like maybe your paper gets rejected or whatever. [...] [I]t's not about failing. It's about [...] getting up after, you know."

Such a person tackles challenges without being afraid of them.

> "No one's happy about failing, but not seeing it as the end of the world if you fail because you can't always succeed at everything directly. I just sometimes struggle with is this like, okay, it may not work out, but we're still going to try it."

Social awareness
Students frequently mentioned that it is necessary to know about current political and social issues to be an engaged or active citizen. Citizens who are socially aware have are present in and informed about their socioeconomic situation.[27]

> "Knowing about current events, like... Not per se watching the news every day, but just knowing what happens around you and knowing about the problems in your country."

Even though it might take great skill and a disposition to become and stay informed, the virtue of social awareness is behind the inclination to act. People who find it important to stay in touch with their surroundings wherever they live are motivated to stay informed.

Passion
When students were asked what an ideal academic is like, most mentioned that it is important to have passion for one's field and sharing knowledge with others. What students termed 'passion' might be connected to *zest*. A zestful person is someone who

26 Martin & Marsh (2006)
27 Dekker (2023)

is enthusiastic about their goals and love what they do.[28] Professors who display a passion for their topic are strongly appreciated in the classroom, and researchers are imagined to be passionate about their topic.

> "[I]t's nice if the professor is really passionate about his or her subject and passionate about learning or teaching others. Passionate about learning themselves."

> "[I]f you are very passionate about your field and you're teaching a class, then students will notice your passion and your excitement, which most likely will lead them to listen more."

Civic-mindedness

Students also consider the quality of civic-mindedness as desirable and important. Bringle and Steinberg (2010) characterised a civic-minded graduate as having 'the capacity and desire to work with others to achieve the common good.' Civic-mindedness refers to a person's inclination or disposition to be knowledgeable of and involved in the community, and to have a commitment to act upon a sense of responsibility as a member of that community. Their definition concerns an orientation 'toward the community and other people in the community (as distinct from an internal or self-orientation, family orientation, or a corporate/profit orientation)' (p.429).[29]

> "Drive to make the community a part of more equal. In terms of socio-economical aspects maybe. Like the never-ending pursuit of possible ways to creating just a better society. Debating and having conversations with other people from their community about in what ways they could change the problems they face."

Civic engagement

Civic engagement 'describes how an active citizen participates in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future'.[30] According to Bruce Macfarlane, being a 'good citizen' involves an ongoing commitment to participate and engage with others in society, which extends beyond voting.[31] For someone with a special interest in civic affairs, it is insufficient to simply work, study, or live somewhere, but rather they also volunteer, vote, participate in (local) events, and start discussions with their peers about current issues.

> "It doesn't have to be for a big social movement, but maybe you can protest the way that the roads look, for example, or how the sidewalks are not big enough or how there is no biking lanes. I think stuff like that is very important. I guess that

28 Peterson & Seligman (2004)
29 Bringle & Steinberg (2010)
30 Adler & Goggin, 241.
31 Macfarlane (2006), 12.

relates to holding the government accountable [...]."

Humility and self-criticism

Humility is an indispensable quality of a good thinker and academic. First, humility makes a good thinker aware of their own weaknesses and limitations.[32] They can admit to making mistakes, and they lack intellectual pride. Thus, sharing results or information is easy for them.

> "Just being open to the possibility [...] that you're wrong."

Second, a humble person is able to ask for help when they require assistance, they are not afraid of being wrong, and they are able to gracefully accept feedback and criticism. The Jubilee Centre Framework defines humility as not overestimating 'one's own performance'[33]

> "I think an open mindset, taking criticism in a good way, not in a bad way, even though it may come hard, and it may sound harsh from the teacher, but they're only trying to help you and improve your study."

Moreover, it is also important to be willing and able to turn to ourselves and evaluate our own thoughts and behaviour.

> "[A]lso being able to, like, if you notice that your opinion or what you're thinking does not correspond to facts, also being okay to acknowledge that and like change the way you're thinking."

Holding up a mirror and looking at our own actions and intellectual output, being self-critical is an important quality as a person, citizen, and academic.

Critical thinking and independence of thought

The concept of critical thinking is neither new nor neglected in academic circles, and it is certainly important for the students. The ability to think critically [...] 'involves three things: (1) an attitude of being disposed to consider in a thoughtful way to the problems and subjects that come within the range of one's experiences; (2) knowledge of the methods of logical inquiry and reasoning; (3) some skill in applying those methods' (p. 5-6).

> "[T]he ability to really think [for] yourself, not be led in one direction or another by external pressures such as the societal norms and like the general etiquette or just like the general external pressures that may influence the way you approach a problem. Being to being able to really go against maybe these traditions, being able to go against these conventions."

32 Baehr (2015), 80.
33 Jubilee Centre Framework for Character (2017)

For the students, it crystallises in scepticism and disbelief in anything that is not evidence-based, and the ability to form one's own opinions based on reliable sources. As a great thinker, it is necessary to have the civic quality of being non-conforming and non-suggestible. Evaluating news and political actions is a crucial part of being an engaged citizen. Forming one's own opinions, thoughts and desires while keeping in mind community welfare makes one an independent thinker.

> "I think [that being] an engaged citizen is practically very much linked to being a good thinker. I believe [an] engaged citizen should be able to think for themselves [...] and being an engaged citizen is definitely the [...] one that can provide possible solutions to problems the community faces and being able to stand up for themselves and for the minority or the oppressed group and being able to express it."

Moreover, it is essential to demonstrate a careful and scrutinous assessment of various solutions to civic issues that one might come across.

> "[N]ot taking what comes to them for truth in the first instance. Like, maybe being a little sceptical, a little suspicious of things, like that could be false news or something like that."

Attentiveness

Students often complain about the difficulty of focusing when in class or at home while studying. As thinkers and citizens, it is crucial to listen to others and concentrate on tasks successfully, which is why attentiveness[34] is an important quality. According to students, being personally present in the moment, mindfully following the task at hand without being swayed by distractions is as important as it is challenging.

> "Attention and focus. Time management, I think I'm pretty good at that once I, like, put my attention and focus towards something. I'm good in continuing to do so until I'm satisfied, which is pretty fast. But yeah, I guess holding that attention for a longer period of time and even if I don't like a subject."

> "But besides that, I would like to study a bit more effectively. As in that when I set time apart to study, I actually do study, in place of like going on my phone [which is] just not very useful for my time."

Empathy

Empathy reflects the disposition to resonate with others' feelings and experiences in a deep and meaningful way. We refer to Dolan's (2022) simple definition of empathy, namely 'understanding and identifying with the emotions and situation of the other...

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34 Heersmink (2018)

being able to 'walk in the shoes' of another person to understand the adversity they face' (p.262).[35]

> "[T]his basic feeling like okay, other people make mistakes and other people have bad lives too."

> "[I]t's something like they can put themselves into how others think so [...] they can convey the ideas correctly so that people understand it."

Civic service

Civic service means that a person is inclined to help their peers and provide service for those in need with or without being asked for help.[36]

> "Of a citizen generally: helping others, being there for others. Sort of like if an active citizen, like participating in the community, which also refers to helping others, then being there to listen, being there to help."

Helping others is as important for students as empathy or attentiveness, all reflecting complementary qualities.

> "I think something like a motivation to help other people. And to make life better for other people. But also, for yourself, I think."

Discussion

We compared the beliefs of students and Tilburg University regarding desirable character traits. To review the alignment between them, this paper analysed nine first-year students' interview data, in which we discussed the qualities that students mentioned when talking about an ideal person, academic, and citizen. The next section will reflect on these results.

First, like the university, students also believe in meaningful engagement with complex information and others' ideas, assumptions, and beliefs. Students mentioned intellectual independence and a critical mindset, which are two dimensions of Tilburg University's character building. They also mentioned self-criticism and open-mindedness, which are prerequisites for the desired critical mindset where students go beyond questioning others' ideas, assumptions, and beliefs to also examine their own. Differences arise where students' beliefs emphasise the role of open-mindedness, curiosity, and humility. Curiosity initiates the learning process and contributes to the long-term motivation of students to engage with their study.[37] Open-mindedness helps to deal with learning obstacles, such as fixed or narrow-minded thinking.[38] Students described an open mindset

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35 Dolan (2022)
36 Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues (2023)
37 Baehr (2015), chapter 4
38 Baehr (2015), 58.

towards those with dissenting views (i.e., 'other academics, other people from different disciplines'). Humility helps to acknowledge one's intellectual limitations. Arguably, these qualities are valuable for cultivating intellectual independence and a critical mindset. Curiosity and open-mindedness are not mentioned in the most recent policy document on Tilburg University's educational mission, and humility is not explicitly mentioned in the university's vision or policy documents.

In addition, students believe that attentiveness and passion are character traits of a good thinker. Attentiveness is required to maintain students' learning progress[39] and aids them in demanding intellectual tasks. Students aspire to find passion for their chosen field. These qualities resonate with many but not all students in our analysis. Our findings suggests that a substantial number of students believe in the importance of and wish to develop attentiveness and passion for their studies, while they also search for these qualities in their teachers. Teachers will find this insight particularly useful in student-centred education.

Second, students' beliefs display the potential to become socially and scientifically responsible. Students aspire to gain social awareness, which is crucial to social and scientific responsibility. Indeed, students must 'understand the importance and the impact of science in a complex (global) society'[40] to act consciously. However, students' descriptions go beyond social awareness to include qualities such as civic-mindedness, civic engagement, empathy, and civic service. These qualities all describe someone who is active in the community, not only by possessing an awareness and making conscious choices but also by helping and caring for others, with a drive to address societal challenges.

Third, the university and students agree that one should be responsible and strive for successful performance. However, Tilburg University and students define this differently. While the university describes this ideal person as being 'enterprising', having 'a proactive mentality' and as someone who 'takes the initiative', students highly value self-discipline, intrinsic motivation, and resilience. Thus, Tilburg University emphasises taking the initiative to successfully operate, while students emphasise qualities that help to stay the course. Students believe that ideal learners are intrinsically motivated to pursue their goals. When motivation falters, they overcome challenges and setbacks with self-discipline and resilience.

Knowing that students value such personal qualities is nonetheless worthwhile information for educators and institutions engaging in student-centred education. If little attention is paid to students' beliefs, there may be implications for the teaching and learning experience. Students may lose interest in actively participating in their courses, or even drop out because they feel like their beliefs are not shared by the university. This

may happen –for example – if too much emphasis is placed on encouraging independent decisions and taking initiative without also focusing on training students' discipline and resilience. Disinterested and uncommitted students may also affect their teachers' motivation, which in turn can have a profound effect on the quality of education in higher educational institutions. Finally, a misalignment can discourage high-school students from applying when they find that the university's missions, visions, and values differ from their own goals. By accounting for students' beliefs, Tilburg University will be able to attract more committed and engaged students.

Through emphasising self-discipline and intrinsic motivation, first-year students already acknowledge the importance of being active agents in shaping their own character. Students and Tilburg University share common beliefs when outlining meaningful intellectual and societal engagement. Overall, students' beliefs indicate a basic preparedness to receive character education. However, they also believe in multiple qualities that are not explicitly mentioned in the most recent policy document,[41] such as self-discipline, intrinsic motivation, open-mindedness, curiosity, and humility, including civic qualities such as civic-mindedness, civic engagement, empathy, and civic service. As a student-centred institution, Tilburg University will benefit from acknowledging students' beliefs. With engaged students and motivated teachers, its character education welcomes innovation and perhaps further alignment with students' beliefs on desirable character qualities.

39 Baehr (2015), 57-58.
40 Tilburg University Internal Report (2019), 4.

41 Tilburg University Internal Report (2019), 5

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PART II.
Student-Centered Teaching

The Entrepreneurial Literacy Initiative: An Online Extra-Curricular Key Educational Experience

Marco Da Rin & Martí Guasch

Abstract

Helping students to achieve meaning in their education beyond absorbing valuable skills and knowledge is a major educational challenge for universities. A contribution towards meeting this challenge comes from 'key educational experiences,' which are short and intense instructional episodes with long-term positive effects on those who experience them (Maslow (1968); Yair (2008)). The Entrepreneurial Literacy Initiative (ELI) at Tilburg University has been built as a key educational experience to help students to absorb knowledge and initiate a process of self-discovery that may lead them to more informed career planning, which is a predictor of future professional success (Shury *et al.* (2017)). Students interested in entrepreneurship are among those who most strongly need such advice on career planning, since there is no clearly structured path into this career, and traditional educational curricula rely on highly standardized programs. In this article, we describe the motivation, content, and structure of ELI, provide an overview of its pedagogical foundations, and discuss the implementation challenges of this online extra-curricular course. We also briefly reflect on how such a modular online course can provide a blueprint for similar initiatives aimed at fostering the career preparation of individual students through effective information and meaningful reflection.

The importance of key educational experiences

Higher education has long been known to have long-term benefits for students, as reflected in their increased income, job resources or civic engagement.[1] Since traditional educational curricula are structured into highly standardized programs, studies documenting this fact focus on the cumulative effects of higher education, i.e., the overall benefits of spending more time in school, overlooking qualitative differences between different educational experiences.

A more comprehensive perspective has been proposed by Yair (2008), who argues that not all educational experiences that a student gains have the same impact. He coined the term 'key educational experiences' to identify short and intense instructional episodes

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[1] Card (1999); Cutler and Lleras-Muney (2006); Orepoulos and Petronijevic (2013); Larreguy and Marshall (2017); Solomon *et al.* (2022).

that students remember as having a decisive impact in their lives. His research draws on Maslow's (1968) concept of peak experiences, namely ecstatic and emotionally charged events that contribute to identity transformation and self-discovery at the individual level. Maslow conjectured that these experiences have a fundamental impact on personal self-awareness by combining cognitive, emotional, and identity components. His intuition was that 'peak' experiences are more important than 'ordinary' experiences for understanding personal identity due to a process of identity (trans-)formation and self-discovery characterized by saliency and meaningfulness. In Maslow's own words, peak experiences are marked by "great moments of insight and discovery" that have a deep impact on one's beliefs and self-awareness.

Yair brought Maslow's conceptual conjectures into an education context, and developed them building on Tripp's (1993) notion of 'critical incidents,' which are used to identify pedagogical experiences that extend beyond the routine and help teachers to identify salient student experiences (Angelides (2001)). Yair brought his concept of 'key educational experience' to empirical test by performing a series of interviews with Israeli adults on their educational experiences. He found that the outcomes of these experiences widely varied, ranging from traditional outcomes like knowledge and skills to less common outcomes such as the adoption of values and the development of worldviews and orientations towards work and life. Respondents reported that it was often the case that gaining a few 'key' experiences led them to a discovery of their inner strengths, hidden abilities, and previously unacknowledged passions. Such 'epiphanies' contributed to a sense of educational and personal self-fulfillment. Yair concluded that self-discovery plays a central role during one's educational experiences. He identified three contexts that are often salient for self-discovery: (i) rigorous academic challenges, which lead to a greater understanding of one's abilities, (ii) wise advice from teachers, which triggers emotional responses and generates insights; and (iii) "second chance" opportunities, which prompt a re-examination of one's identity and the discovery of new possible life trajectories.

Yair's findings therefore suggest that some strong and long-lasting effects of higher education on students' lives result from short, intense, and challenging episodes. These experiences significantly differ from the common perception of higher education as a linear and cumulative learning process (think of academic degrees). This carries important implications, as if key educational experiences can have such a profound impact on individuals' lives, then we should create opportunities for students to experience them. Beyond providing subject matter skills and knowledge, we believe that this should be one of higher education's most important goals.

The Entrepreneurial Literacy Initiative

Motivation
Tilburg University has recently experimented with an initiative inspired by key educational experiences. In February 2022, we launched the first edition of the Entrepreneurial Literacy Initiative (ELI) for MSc students at the Tilburg School of Economics and Management (TiSEM). ELI has been supported by a Comenius Senior Fellowship during the 2021/22 and 2022/23 academic years.

ELI provides students with elements to assess whether an entrepreneurial career would fit their personal goals and professional ambitions, understand what such a career means, what personal characteristics best match it, and plan for it. ELI does not address 'how to' implement an entrepreneurial idea – a domain already crowded with a plethora of educational offerings within academic and non-academic institutions – but rather helps students to decide whether they want to move in that direction. It is therefore an initiative that by design contains important components of self-reflection and discovery of one's identity.

Our motivation comes from years of teaching entrepreneurship and being involved with entrepreneurial ecosystems. We realized that students are often unaware of what an entrepreneurial career is and how to prepare for it. In a way, we felt that they would make a blind choice by stepping in or out of an entrepreneurial journey. Instead, we believe that it is a very important educational goal to provide students with tools to also assess non-conventional careers. For this purpose, we built ELI as a key educational experience around two pillars: (i) knowledge about entrepreneurship; and (ii) personal discovery and self-reflection activities to verify whether such a career would fit one's goals and personality.

Did we really need a new initiative for entrepreneurially-minded students to achieve all this? Existing courses offered at the university level in the Netherlands as well as (to our knowledge) in other EU countries or the US fall short of our vision. They fail to prepare for a career planning process and mostly target students who have already chosen to enter into entrepreneurship, offering skills related to the venture creation process. Nonetheless, the planning phase is important since successful entrepreneurs typically start their careers in the corporate world, building up resources that later facilitate success in their newly founded firms.[2] This reality is far from the young college drop-out entrepreneur depicted in media outlets as the quintessential successful entrepreneur. Those are indeed highly successful outliers, which do not reflect the average entrepreneur. Our goal is therefore to educate students to make more informed and conscious career choices that can lead to a successful and rewarding professional life.

2   Azoulay *et al.* (2020).

The focus on entrepreneurship is not trivial. Many careers have a relatively established career path, with well-known degrees taking students into the profession (e.g., lawyers, auditors, medical doctors). This is not obvious for (aspiring) entrepreneurs, as there is no simple and structured career path into entrepreneurship. Nonetheless, research shows that an informed and conscious career choice is useful for students to reach successful long-run professional outcomes.[3] Students curious about an entrepreneurial career are many: a staggering 20% of Dutch graduates aspire to start a business within three years.[4] The question therefore arises concerning how to prepare those students for an unstructured and shapeless path into entrepreneurship. ELI fills this gap by providing students with the tools and knowledge to understand whether an entrepreneurial career fits them, preparing them to enter an entrepreneurial experience should they ever decide to pursue it.

ELI as a key educational experience
While designing ELI, we especially cared about two elements that qualify EFI as (or closer to) a key educational experience.

First, we provide both a cognitive and an identity-discovery component. The cognitive component comprises the absorption of knowledge about entrepreneurial careers; for example, learning about key facts and stats about entrepreneurship. This provides students with domain material that they can use to assess their career aspirations. The identity-discovery component is the set of activities that lead to identity formation by helping students to reflect on their personal and professional life goals.

Second, by bringing students to compare knowledge about entrepreneurial careers with their personal goals, ELI leads them to experience a 'critical incident' (Tripp 1993). This is a situation that differs from those in their traditional academic curriculum. Through these 'critical incidents,' students experience a 'eureka!' moment of personal development, finding meaning and 'enlightenment' about how they see themselves in a career perspective.

While we lacked sufficient time to focus on this crucial aspect of ELI (i.e., measuring student experiences), several students commented on the experience in terms that seem to reflect such revealing moments.

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3 De Vos *et al.* (2009); Hooley *et al.* (2011); Shury *et al.* (2017).
4 Panteia (2018).

Pedagogical principles and structure
We have structured ELI to provide a key educational experience that could be useful to a large number of students. The main pedagogical principles that underlie ELI are the following:

1) ELI develops fully original materials for university students to acquire knowledge about what an entrepreneurial career is and to reflect on whether it satisfies their long-term personal and professional goals. We have used some videos or podcasts from outside sources simply to provide high-quality examples of knowledge that we developed in our video lectures;

2) ELI brings students research-based insights, not just anecdotes or popular wisdom. We want to provide students with well-grounded insights that concern fundamental characteristics of the entrepreneurial process, as well as its demands on those embarking in it;

3) ELI targets students of any discipline, and therefore it does not require previous field knowledge. As entrepreneurs come from many different strands of life and have a variety of educational backgrounds, we want to be inclusive and take on board all types of students;

4) ELI is delivered fully online. We do this to reach students in an effective way, so that they can absorb the materials and engage with the challenges that we propose at their convenience. We believe that this is important to make ELI easily accessible and appealing.

We derived ELI's pedagogical approach from the above principles.

First, ELI is offered as an extra-curricular course, enabling students from any field and program to take it. This could grow in the future, or evolve into a structure where some parts of it are optional.

Second, we provide the materials through Canvas – Tilburg's LMS of choice – letting students either follow at our suggested weekly pace or take the material when convenient over a period of eight months. While we believe that it is effective for students to keep learning at a constant pace over 13 weeks (pauses for exams and holidays excluded), we realized that some students have a strong preference for bunching their attention in a short period of time.

Third, we deliver ELI's content using various online educational activities, including video lectures, podcasts, case discussions, self-reflection exercises, knowledge clips, interviews with ecosystem protagonists, and online discussions.

Fourth, while the course is extra-curricular, students who successfully pass the end-of-module quizzes can claim an (equivalent to 2-ECTS workload) edu-badge, an official certification created by a consortium of Dutch universities.[5] This proved to be quite popular with participants.

We structured ELI as a course with (suggested) weekly materials that typically comprised one self-produced video lecture, a set of slides for each video lecture, an external video or podcast, academic references for those interested in further reading, and self-reflection/discovery exercises for the personal development modules. All modules include a simple quiz, with the possibility of a re-sit for those who fail it. The materials cover 13 weeks of content, with no activities during holidays and exam periods.

Content

While much can be found on the journey of the relatively few entrepreneurs who brought their company to success, little exists on the demands of that journey, including the risks and difficulties, ups and downs, and the necessity to properly prepare personally and professionally before launching a venture. While these hurdles and preparatory steps are well documented in academic research, they fail to reach out to the wider public, including students.[6]

ELI provides knowledge about the entrepreneurial process, its demands, and the skills necessary for planning an entrepreneurial career. ELI's curriculum revolves around two pillars. The first is about knowledge, and covers broad topics about entrepreneurship, e.g., key facts and statistics on the entrepreneurial ecosystem, myths about entrepreneurs, risks and returns associated with an entrepreneurial career, the nature of the entrepreneurial process. The second area includes topics related to career planning skills, e.g., dealing with failure, getting ready to mobilize financial, human, and commercial resources. ELI's second pillar is about personal discovery and development. Personal discovery is about finding which values and goals define one's self, as well as one's personal strengths. We developed this module together with our colleague Monique van Dijk from the Tilburg School of Theology. Personal development includes running a standardized online personality test and assessing how one's personality would match with the challenges of entrepreneurship. We developed this module with our colleague Marianne van Woerkom from the Tilburg School of Behavioral Science.

The overarching theme of ELI's curriculum is therefore about creating awareness of what an entrepreneurial career really means and requires, taking the student through a self-discovery journey about her interest for such a career, and facilitating the management of the rollercoaster-type experience of venture creation.

5   https://www.surf.nl/en/about-edubadges?dst=n5050
6   Fairlie and Robb 2007; Chatterji 2009; Hall and Woodward 2010

Implementation

ELI started targeting master students on the grounds that they are more mature and closer to entering the job market than bachelor students, more conscious about their career planning, and therefore more interested in ELI. To date, the program has run two cohorts: a 2021-2022 edition with 61 enrolled students and a 2022-2023 with 114. Both editions were implemented in the second semester of the academic year (February–June). During the first edition – limited to TiSEM students – we mostly developed course materials and experimented with different student engagement approaches, contents, and formats. For the second edition, we augmented the materials and improved communications. Through Career Services, we also reached out to students in other schools at Tilburg (Law, Social and Behavioral Sciences, Humanities and Digital Sciences). Despite the timid attempt (a single email), 30 students from these schools enrolled. In this second edition, we also had a few bachelor students who happened to get through the registration process. ELI has also been used in the Extended Master Program at TiSEM, with over 20 students enrolled in each edition.

We experienced several challenges from bringing our initiative to students.

Our main implementation challenge has been the promotion of ELI to students. We were aware that reaching out would require work, as the extra-curricular nature makes it difficult for students to notice ELI among the standard course offerings. We thus experimented with a number of promotional actions, finding that student are more responsive to some channels than others. In particular, they pay attention to postings by Academic Directors and Career Services, while dissemination through their student association and via on-campus posters had little traction. We also made a few brief class presentations in some large courses, which were highly successful in gaining students' 'active attention.'

A second challenge has been managing communications with the many stakeholders. This absorbed significant time, definitely more than expected. One reason was the sheer number of stakeholders. We had stakeholders at the front-end, bringing us to students: Academic Directors and MSc program managers, student associations, Career Services officers, the Extended Master Program manager, and the Vice Dean of Education. We also had stakeholders at the back-end, allowing us to prepare, store, and deliver the course materials: IT and teaching support services (e.g., educational support on content and delivery, edu-badge certification, Canvas Analytics, ELI website...), video editing contractors, knowledge clips multimedia team, Faculty Management Team, TiSEM Administration office (budgeting, invoicing...). Many of these people were new to us and ELI was new to all of them, requiring a large number of individual meetings. Altogether, these efforts created inefficiencies and slowed the pace of course delivery.

A third challenge has been the timing of dissemination. We proceeded by experimenting with different formats, and learnt that disseminating too close or far from the start of ELI would harm participation. We also learnt that in order to grab 'active attention' leading to

enrollment it was useful to use repeated messages from different actors, such as Academic Directors, Career Services, Vice Deans of Education, and ourselves.

A fourth challenge has been keeping students active across the modules of an extra-curricular course. For this purpose, we had to learn how to nudge students, which required tracking student progress through their completion of assignments and evaluation activities. Contacting students was useful even when it failed to push them back into action, because we learnt what was hampering their participation. In most cases this was an increased pressure from school obligations which they had not anticipated. We plan to develop a tool to make nudging automatic in the future.

A fifth challenge has been the structure of interactions with students. While ELI is fully online by design, we tried to organize some synchronous activities to increase motivation and better know the participants, their goals, and their struggles. This proved quite demanding as it is difficult to schedule a meeting when students from different programs (and Schools) have very different time commitments. While this was somehow disappointing, it further pushed us into developing a fully asynchronous approach. The power of asynchronous was also reflected in the success of interactions among students, which we achieved using an AI-powered discussion board. We plan to stick to a fully asynchronous set-up in the future.

Overall, implementing ELI has been a constant learning process driven by experimentation. While we still have much to learn and improve, we believe that we have managed to correctly frame the dissemination and delivery phases, and put them on effective development tracks.

Student participation and feedback
Throughout the implementation of the two editions of ELI, we have sought feedback from students, both informally via discussions in small groups or with individuals, and through a final satisfaction survey.

Overall, students were willing to engage and expressed appreciation for the materials that we have been producing. Initially, they also pointed to a lack of information about how the choice, preparation, and fit with an entrepreneurial career would play out in their personal case. These reactions prompted us to seek a solution. We involved Marianne van Woerkom, an organizational psychologist with experience on positive psychology and the job market, and recorded another experimental session on discovering one's personality and its matching to an entrepreneurial career. While short and limited in scope, this addition was very well received by students, and exemplifies the many useful indications we received from ELI participants. We believe that this feedback is an important signal that students do care for building their future, and are hungry for initiatives that may help them improve their personal growth.

The satisfaction survey was also rich in feedback. We asked students about their preferred modules, the types and combination of learning activities (e.g., video lectures vs business cases vs podcasts) and the flexibility in taking the materials, among others. Students gave a mean of 83/100 in their overall satisfaction with the program, which we take as a strong encouragement towards improving ELI. We also left space for open-ended suggestions, many of which were informative.

Looking forward: challenges and opportunities
A major educational challenge for universities is to help students to achieve meaning in their education beyond absorbing valuable skills and knowledge. ELI sits squarely on this challenge. As it stands, ELI is still an early-stage experiment in key educational experiences, and our goal is to make it grow successfully.

This poses some challenges and brings opportunities that we briefly review here.

Our immediate challenge is to have ELI seeded into the educational offer of Tilburg University. For this purpose, we are working to secure internal funding, and organizational support, beyond what TiSEM is providing us for the 2023/24 academic year. Accordingly, we are working to open ELI up to all faculties, involving their educational leadership (Vice Deans and Academic Directors) in supporting us. We are also experimenting with allowing bachelor students in their third year to participate. A major challenge will be to achieve efficient coordination with a much larger set of stakeholders that what we have dealt with so far.

Second, we aim to complete our materials to better complete the curriculum. Third, we want to find ways to structurally include the personal discovery and development modules by Monique van Dijk and Marianne van Woerkom, which requires some additional funding.

By achieving these results, we could make ELI a stable laboratory for helping students to build a more informed approach into (an entrepreneurial) career preparation. In this respect, ELI provides an interesting opportunity to experiment with a format that might be fruitfully applied also in other universities.

We believe that two elements are very important for such initiatives. One is the focus on both career-relevant contents and personal development experiences, which enable the possibility of a true 'key educational experience.' These two aspects are rarely developed jointly, as career preparation focuses on job-readiness and presentation to potential employers. We found that a more structured approach joining information and personal self-reflection addresses a need that students find otherwise neglected by their university. This is particular important for careers that do not have a clear path into the profession.

The second important element is ELI's modularity and asynchronous nature. These two elements make it easy for students to participate when they can devote attention. Relying on in-person, scheduled initiatives for extra-curricular activities would likely result in low participation and high attrition rates, effectively hampering an initiative's success.

In this perspective, we hope that ELI has broken new ground and paved the way for additional experimentation in educational innovation.

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Unlocking the Past: Gamifying Legal History Education for Engaging Learning Experiences

Lize-Mari Mitchell & Marije Markus

Abstract

Teaching courses with a strong theoretical basis, such as legal history, can pose unique challenges due to their abstract nature. Understanding the intricate interplay between legal systems, judicial decisions, and societal influences throughout different eras can be a struggle for students. Explaining complex legal concepts and tracing their historical development therefore requires instructors to strike a delicate balance between depth of analysis and accessibility for students. Addressing this can be a daunting task, demanding innovative teaching methodologies and engaging instructional materials. One such innovative method is introducing gamification elements or gaming into the educational process. This can potentially offer benefits such as increased engagement, active learning, immediate feedback, skills development, enhanced collaboration between students and a personalized learning experience. It has also been shown to promote retention, create a positive learning environment, and encourage lifelong learning. However, while this can be a powerful tool, it should be used thoughtfully and purposefully to align with educational objectives and the needs of the students to ensure a meaningful integration of gamification elements into the curriculum.

This intentional use of gamification was exactly the aim when the Tilburg Law School innovation team collaborated with Erik-Jan Broers on his European Legal History course. A primary concern was that students had difficulty connecting disparate timelines and historical developments into a coherent whole. This was addressed by developing and integrating a deck card game based on the principles of a quartet as a component of the education process. In addition to addressing the primary concern, the game also has other, unintentional benefits, like connecting first-year students with their peers and increasing their social interaction. This chapter explores the theoretical basis of gaming in

higher education, the process of designing and implementing an educational game that aligns with specific learning objectives, and the intentional creation of a more immersive and experiential student learning experience at Tilburg Law School.

Introduction
In the 21st century, rethinking pedagogy is just as important as recognizing the essential skills that today's learners need. Educators are increasingly interested in using experiential learning as a transformative pedagogical approach[1] which has been shown to be effective in nurturing both academic acumen and essential workforce skills.[2] However, many learners are used to traditional pedagogies, where the focus is on memorizing or applying basic processes. A sudden pivot towards pedagogies that are strongly reliant on technology may pose a threat to effective learning. The question arises: how can educators derive the correct blend of traditional and digitally advanced pedagogies for effective learning?

One potential answer is the use of game-based learning (GBL). By integrating elements of gamification or full developed games into education, instructors can offer an engaging, immersive, and dynamic learning experience. The benefits are manifold, including heightened engagement,[3] active participation,[4] immediate feedback,[5] skill honing,[6] enhanced collaboration,[7] and personalized learning journeys.[8] Moreover, GBL can foster retention, cultivate a positive learning environment, and instill a lifelong learning ethos.[9] However, leveraging this powerful tool requires a thoughtful and strategic approach, aligning gamification with educational goals and students' specific needs.

Tilburg Law School recognizes the significance of innovative education and has established an education innovation team dedicated to transforming the teaching landscape. Employing a blended learning approach, this team collaborates to improve existing educational design, fully redesign courses and integrate effective methodologies. One such endeavor involved the bachelor's course on European Legal History.[10] This course faced challenges in helping students to connect diverse historical timelines and legal developments – for example, Roman Law, the early and late middle ages, and the early modernity – into a coherent narrative in conjunction with a limited teaching staff. To address this, the team employed GBL by developing a card game based on quartet principles. Beyond its primary goal, the game unexpectedly fostered student camaraderie and interaction.

This article delves into the realm of GBL, dissecting its components, merits, and conditions for successful integration. In exploration of the foundations of GBL, the synergy between educational theory, game design, and the blended learning approach will also become clear. The intertwining of these principles empowers educators to craft holistic and effective learning experiences. By incorporating GBL techniques, Tilburg Law School not only aims to meet the distinct needs of the current generation but also shape a future of education that resonates with the dynamic and evolving landscape of knowledge acquisition, driven by AI, personalized learning, and emerging technologies.

Game-based learning
Before delving into the specifics of GBL, it is crucial to differentiate it from gaming and gamification, as these terms are often used interchangeably but represent distinct concepts.

Gaming refers to the act of playing digital or physical games solely for entertainment and leisure. The primary focus of gaming is enjoyment, escapism, and competition, without a direct educational objective. While games might contain educational elements, they are not inherently designed to deliver structured learning outcomes.

Gamification does not necessarily involve the use of complete games,[11] but incorporates game design and elements such as points, badges, and leaderboards into non-game contexts.[12] The aim is to positively change human behavior by enhancing motivation, engagement, and participation.[13] It does not aim to entertain but rather make activities more enjoyable and rewarding by tapping into the psychological mechanisms that drive engagement in games.[14]

On the other hand, *GBL* involves using specially designed educational games – both digital and analogue – to attain specific learning objectives.[15] These are sometimes referred to as "serious games."[16] It can involve adapting an existing game for classroom purposes, such as board or card games.[17] These games are created with educational goals in mind and provide interactive and immersive experiences that allow students to learn by doing, experimenting, and making decisions within the game's context.[18]

At Tilburg Law School, we make use of both gamification and game-based learning (hereafter referred to as GBL), although this article will focus on the latter, which continues to gain significant prominence within higher education curriculum design.

1   Nayar & Koul, 2020; Kang *et al.*, 2022; Valiente *et al.*, 2022.
2   Schreck *et al.*, 2020; Jonathan & Laik, 2019; Crisp, 2018.
3   Breien & Wasson, 2021.
4   Chang & Yeh, 2021.
5   Rooney, 2012.
6   Chang & Yeh, 2021.
7   Rooney, 2012; Breien & Wasson, 2021
8   Rooney, 2012; Wouters & Van der Meulen, 2020.
9   Rooney, 2012; Breien & Wasson, 2021; Chang & Yeh, 2021.
10 This is a Dutch course, Europese rechtsgeschiedenis, which is a first-year course lectured by Erik-Jan Broers and Rik Leenheer.

11 Bencshik, 2021.
12 Mustafa & Karimi, 2021.
13 Bencshik, 2021; Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Kim, Song, Lockee, & Burton, 2018.
14 Bencshik, 2021.
15 Wiggins, 2016.
16 Rooney, 2012.
17 Medeisiene, 2019.
18 Medeisiene, 2019.

Foundations of game-based learning

In most cases, introducing GBL into a classroom provides an engaging, motivating and enjoyable experience for students. However, to achieve the aims of GBL, it is important to keep in mind that an entertaining experience does not necessarily equal a valuable learning experience. We agree with experts such as Rooney[19] who espouse the importance of underpinning serious games with a sound theoretical framework that integrates and balances theories from both pedagogy and game design.[20] We agree with Rooney[21] that this includes integrating and balancing play (game design) and pedagogy.

In the pursuit of effective educational design within our specific context at TLS, we have experienced that the combination of blended learning and GBL yields the best results. For this purpose, we have combined insights from the work of Last[22] and Last and Jongen[23] on blended learning and Rooney's theoretical framework for serious game design. The subsequent discussion will draw upon insights from these two frameworks to illuminate our approach and outcomes.

Blending learning as the foundation

Last and Jongen's approach to blended learning as well as the later Toolkit on Blended Learning[24] bridges the gap between traditional educational frameworks[25] and innovative methodologies, like blended learning and GBL. Last[26] visualizes education design through the metaphor of a tree, with the roots representing educational theory, the trunk being the teacher or institutions educational vision, the branches being the theoretical learning and design principles, and finally the leaves on the branches representing the techniques employed, such as teaching methods, activities, tools, etc. In this analogy, the GBL teaching activity within the class setting would form part of the leaves. As we delve into this synergy, envision Last's tree as supporting the edifice of GBL, with each level reinforcing the next. Our discussion will follow the elements of this metaphorical concept by focusing on the philosophical roots, the actionable strategies, and finally the teaching and educational activities.

It is perhaps important to note that not all games that we have introduced are digital and would therefore not strictly be considered under the blended learning umbrella. For instance, the example of the quartet that we discuss later in this article is analogue. It is therefore perhaps perplexing why we chose to root GBL in blended learning principles. This has been an organic process as the innovation team has an overarching aim of

incorporating blended learning. It was a natural bridge for us to use blended learning principles and our workflow within the GBL conceptualization. Upon reflection, we found that these two seemingly distinct concepts integrate well, regardless of the presence of an online element. Last and Jones[27] also specifically mention GBL as a potential activating learning activity that can be part of a blended learning educational design.

Philosophical roots

Last's model accentuates the importance of an underlying educational theory of philosophy. For GBL, one should similarly start with the philosophical foundation. This paper recognizes the complex nature of learning and the wide variety of educational philosophies and pedagogical practices on which to base GBL. The underlying philosophy is closely intertwined with the specific game chosen for implementation, especially when using an existing game that is already rooted in a specific learning philosophy. These philosophies include flow theory, cognitive load theory, experiential learning and constructivism. For purpose of this paper and the later discussion of the quartet game, theories associated with constructivism come more strongly to the fore.

Correspondingly, Rooney[28] reiterates that at the core of most GBL lies in constructivist theory, which posits that individuals actively construct their own knowledge through experiences and interactions with the environment. GBL aligns seamlessly with this theory by creating immersive environments that prompt learners to explore, interact, and engage in problem-solving activities. Constructivism is not without critique, as some scholars caution that it may prioritize subjective experiences and individual interpretations at the expense of objective knowledge, potentially leading to a lack of foundational understanding.[29] However, as part of a comprehensive course design that incorporates different learning activities and corresponding philosophies, constructivism allows for a more holistic educational experience. As learners navigate through the challenges presented within games, they encounter a dynamic process of trial and error, fostering a deeper understanding of concepts.[30] This aligns with Piaget's idea of assimilation and accommodation, in which learners incorporate new information into their existing cognitive structures and adapt their mental frameworks to accommodate new insights.

Furthermore, GBL encourages active learning, as learners are not mere passive recipients of information but active participants in the learning process. This resonates with Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism,[31] which emphasizes the importance of social interaction and collaboration in knowledge acquisition. Last and Jonge[32] also explain that social constructivism places the student at the center, assigned paramount importance

19 Rooney, 2012.
20 Kiili, 2005; Seeney & Routledge, 2009; Rooney, 2012.
21 Rooney, 2012.
22 Last, 2021.
23 Last and Jongen, 2021.
24 Curio, 2021.
25 For example, primarily lecture-based teaching where the student is a primarily a passive listener and the textbook being the primary source of information for students.
26 Last, 2021.

27 Last and Jones, 2021.
28 Rooney, 2012.
29 O'Connor, 2020; Sweller and Clark, 2006; Klahr and Nigam, 2004.
30 Rooney, 2012.
31 Hodson and Hodson, 1998; Erbil, 2020.
32 2021.

to self-directed learning and collaboration with others. Games often incorporate elements of cooperation, competition, and teamwork, promoting a sense of shared learning and mutual support among students. For instance, multiplayer games facilitate collaborative problem-solving and communication, fostering the development of crucial interpersonal skills that extend beyond the virtual realm. These games have to potential to create an environment for students to develop 21st century skills,[33] such as critical thinking, social skills and decision-making.[34]

Actionable strategies

Shifting upwards, Last's model introduces the significance of translating philosophical ideals into an educational vision that branches into actionable strategies that guide the learning journey. Continuous emphasis is placed on the difference between theory and didactics, and Last and Jongen[35] caution against an overreliance on learning theories or attempts at a direct translation from theory to teaching. To support this process, the authors provide learning and design principles for blended learning, based on various educational philosophies. It holds interest that social constructivism lies at the heart of seven of these principles, including active learning, contextual learning, collaborative learning, scaffolding and feedback. This is another confirmation of the synergy between Last and Jongen's blended learning model and Rooney's theoretical framework for serious game design. It is here that a pivotal juncture emerges, translating strategies from educational theory into the immersive world of serious games. This step harnesses the power of play to foster active learning, presenting students with opportunities to engage deeply, problem-solve creatively, and learn through experiential exploration.

Just as Last and Jongen's model advocates for learner engagement through diverse activities, the architecture of a well-designed serious game compels players to actively participate, analyze challenges, and make informed choices. This mirrors the active learning strategies at the heart of blended learning. Serious game design infuses educational content with a structured game to enhance motivation and engagement.

Here, Last's strategic roadmap naturally lends itself to the process, emphasizing constructing student-centered learning paths. Educators can adapt collaborative, student-centered strategies into game mechanics that encourage cooperation, competition, and exploration within a realm outside of the classroom, whether physical or digital. The fusion of blended learning's strategies with serious game design creates a learning ecosystem where strategy translates into immersion. Students become active participants in their education, exploring content, analyzing scenarios, and making choices within the context of engaging gameplay. The transition from theory to interactive experience mirrors Last's

journey from philosophical roots to tangible outcomes. The gaming realm offers learners opportunities to navigate challenges, responding to different stimuli, just as Last's model suggests that learners should interact with content, peers, and educators in diverse ways.

Teaching and assessment activities

When moving to the practical translation of the educational design, Last[36] incorporates the Constructive Alignment model, which posits that all teaching and assessment activities – at both the program and course levels – should directly support the intended learning outcomes. In simple terms, each learning activity and assessment is based on specific learning objectives. The starting point to this is the intended concrete learning outcomes, which form the basis for designing learning and assessment activities. Similarly, the outcomes should be the deciding factor in the game design. During an intentional process, the game should cater to the outcomes, and not the other way around.

While most learning outcomes are focused on knowledge and skills, it is also important to keep in mind that education has various functions that surpass the transfer of knowledge, including socialization, effective communication, and self-directed learning. Therefore, there needs to be room for the informal and spontaneous. The educational design ideally reflects the various aims of education. Within blended learning, this is achieved by creating opportunities for students to become part of smaller teams, where they are motivated to interact and actively participate in a more informal and spontaneous manner. GBL naturally leans towards this.

Crucially, Last's approach parallels the heart of GBL, namely the student journey. Deliberately constructing a sequence of activities that build upon each other mirrors the pedagogical aim of GBL, engaging learners progressively to master challenges and absorb knowledge in a personalized manner.[37] Rooney's discussion on the importance of game design strategies for engagement, motivation, flow, and immersion in the context of GBL underscores the critical role that these elements play in enhancing the educational experience.

As a final thought briefly regarding assessment, the interplay between assessment and learning forms a central theme in both frameworks. Last and Jongen's emphasis on ongoing feedback and formative assessment aligns seamlessly with the inherent feedback mechanisms in serious games. Through integrated assessments that are intertwined with gameplay, students receive immediate feedback, enabling them to adapt and progress in real time, reflecting a feature that echoes Last and Jongen's approach to fostering continuous growth and improvement.

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33   Qian and Clark, 2016.
34   The space within this paper does not allow for a more in-depth discussion of constructivism and GBL as the constructionist nature of learning is complex in itself. It holds importance to note that different constructionist theories can be utilised within GBL, including problem-based learning, situated learning and experiential learning. It is recommended that these are explored in more depth when conceptualising GBL.
35   Last and Jongen, 2021.

36   Last, 2021.
37   Rooney, 2012.

A practical example of game-based learning: european legal history

In pursuit of educational innovation and student engagement, the TLS educational innovation team has aimed to continuously analyse and innovate the courses that form part of the Dutch Bachelor of Law program. This is achieved by using a blended learning approaching similar to that of Last and Jongen. This requires various intake, brainstorming and design sessions with the course instructors and – depending on the interventions decided upon – could take anywhere between a few weeks or stretch across academic semesters.[38] Depending on the issues involved in a course, learning activities are designed that take place online, at home or on campus, being synchronous or asynchronous, where a teacher is involved or students are in the lead.

Members of the educational innovation team analyzed the instructional design of the European Legal History course together with the course instructors Erik-Jan Broer and Rik Leenheer. This course has a substantial student enrolment of up to 400 and faces challenges of limited teaching staff and content overload for students. The course material stretches across various time periods and historical developments. Students rarely seemed to be able to demonstrate a holistic and coherent understanding of the course material and struggled to grasp the interplay between legal systems, judicial decisions, and societal influences throughout different historical periods. In collaboration with the educational innovation team, the course instructors identified the need for a creative and interactive learning approach that could simultaneously address these issues and enhance students' historical comprehension.

To tackle these challenges, the team embraced the philosophy of social constructivism and the university's aspiration for a connected student community, which was taken into consideration in conjunction with the learning outcomes and educational barriers. An asynchronous and student-driven learning activity was conceived to address understaffing. Concurrently, the concept of creating a game aimed at enhancing student interaction and engagement on campus was cultivated. The concept of an analogous card game emerged, allowing students to play individually or in groups both within and outside of the classroom.

After thoughtful brainstorming, the decision was made to create a quartet card game. The aim was to assist students in grasping historical timelines and overarching themes in European legal history. The game featured sixteen distinct time periods, each containing four cards representing key concepts such as historical figures, legislation, and legal developments. For example, for the Romantic Period, the four key concepts are the German jurist FC von Savigny, the Historical School, spontaneous legal development and the concept of "Volksgeist." Every student received a complimentary pack of cards, encouraging collaboration and self-directed learning.

The quartet card game was strategically designed to align with the course's educational objectives. The game's instructions emphasized its supplementary role in reinforcing – rather than replacing – class content. Two variations of the game were introduced: the classical quartet and the knowledge quiz. The former required players to collect pairs of four by requesting cards from fellow participants and answering related questions. The latter involved laying pairs of four cards face down, with players taking turns to answer questions posed by others about their chosen set. Both variations aimed to encourage interaction, retention, and a deeper understanding of course concepts.

The GBL initiative was seamlessly integrated into the course curriculum. Specific classes were designated for game incorporation, enriching the learning experience and promoting peer collaboration. To celebrate students' mastery of the course content, a tournament was organized at the end of the term, allowing willing participants to showcase their knowledge in a friendly competitive environment.

The quartet card game swiftly gained popularity among students, as both an in-class activity and a self-directed learning tool. By challenging students to unravel the intricate connections between legal systems, judicial decisions, and societal influences spanning diverse historical epochs, it not only encouraged critical thinking but also promoted engaging discussions and nurtured camaraderie. During mentor sessions, students reported playing the game even beyond campus settings, enhancing their engagement with course content. The game's success lay in its ability to marry interactive learning with historical comprehension, and combining blending learning and game design principles, meeting the dual objectives set by the educational innovation team.

A voluntary evaluation of the quartet card game initiative was undertaken at the end of the semester,[39] incorporating feedback from 78 participants.[40] The data indicated that the pilot initiative yielded significant success in addressing the initially identified challenges. Although the link between student academic achievement and the card game has not been explored, students reported that the game helped them to link various historical timelines and legal developments, enabling them to grasp the broader context, which was ultimately the aim of introducing the game into the course design. It also revealed areas for refinement. Looking ahead to the upcoming academic year, the goal is to seamlessly integrate the game into the formal curriculum without requiring additional time or space. This entails incorporating game-related images into class presentations, fostering a strong connection between students and the course content. By infusing the canvas pages with the visual aesthetics of the game, the boundaries between asynchronous and synchronous learning can be blurred, enriching the learning experience. Furthermore, to infuse an element of competition and motivation, gamification features such as more frequent tournaments and leaderboards are being contemplated. This evolution of the

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38 For more information on this process, it is recommended to contact the authors of this paper.

39 The authors can be contacted for access to this data.
40 This unfortunately amounted to less than 20% of the student cohort, suggesting a partial perspective on the student experience. Nonetheless, coupled with informal discourse within mentor groups, these findings offered valuable insights.

initiative demonstrates the team's commitment to enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes through innovative and holistic approaches.

Figures 1-3. Quartet game

Conclusion

This paper has explored how GBL can become a powerful strategy that fuses engaging gameplay with educational objectives and potentially bridges the gap between traditional modes of instruction and contemporary learning needs.

This article has delved into the foundations of GBL, emphasizing the synergy between educational theory, game design, and blended learning approaches. By combining these principles, educators can craft holistic and effective learning experiences that cater to the needs of today's learners and adapt to the ever-evolving landscape of knowledge acquisition. The example of the quartet card game in the European Legal History course illustrates the practical implementation of GBL principles. This game has not only addressed challenges related to limited teaching staff and content overload but also promoted interactive learning, critical thinking, and student collaboration. The game's integration into the curriculum has been met with enthusiasm, fostering engagement and knowledge retention. The ongoing commitment to enhancing student engagement through creative approaches – such as infusing gamification features and integrating the game into the formal curriculum – underscores Tilburg Law School's dedication to providing a dynamic and enriching educational experience.

The strategic incorporation of GBL at Tilburg Law School exemplifies the potential of this approach to revolutionize education, enhance student outcomes, and prepare learners for a future that demands adaptability and active participation in the learning process. It serves as a testament to the importance of aligning educational goals with innovative methodologies to positively shape the future of education in a way that speaks to the current generation of students.

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Hybrid education at Tilburg Law School: Lessons learned from two years of hybrid and online teaching

Stéphanie van Gulijk & Lize-Mari Mitchell

Abstract

In September 2021, Tilburg Law School (TLS) started a two-year pilot project to determine the feasibility of online and hybrid education in three international master's programs and one international bachelor's program. A basic feature of these hybrid courses is a combination of online and face-to-face learning environments serving both on-campus and online students. However, online and hybrid education largely remains a novel field to date. Given that higher education on a large scale and with an international classroom is only now starting to tap into the potential of these flexible educational models, it is a learning and continuously developing process. For example, upon conducting a literature review, one quickly finds an over-emphasis on basic education didactics, policies, and educational design and a significant research void within higher education. Within this context, TLS has forged a path towards effective hybrid education. The two pilot years were characterized by opportunities, difficulties and continuously finding innovative solutions maintaining keeping the student educational experience as the central guiding principle and closely monitoring the workload experienced by the lecturers involved. Various changes, interventions, and assistance came to the fore during this process, which included the development of basic conditions for hybrid education and assessment, hiring specific knowledge from a hybrid learning expert and community engagement officer, and developing various new training materials and teaching tools. Upon nearing the conclusion of the two-year pilot stage, evaluations were conducted with both students and (support) staff to gain insights into their experiences with online and hybrid teaching. These evaluations in many ways confirmed what was already known, but also provided unexpected insights regarding the student experience, their perception of educational innovation measures, and the importance of discerning between their educational wants and needs. Moreover, we also had to take into account the willingness and capacities of our TLS lectures to devote considerable extra effort into hybrid and online education. Upon the conclusion of the pilot stage, entirely new educational models were developed, courses redesigned, and ways to enhance the student hybrid experience were identified. Among others, it leads us from online and hybrid education towards *flexible* education, which seems a permanent but continuously developing feature of these TLS programs. This paper aims to explain and reflect on the TLS experiences with the two-year pilots and offer insights into the lessons learned and best practices that have emerged, which

can serve to contribute to future innovative teaching approaches within TLS and Tilburg University.

Introduction

With the emergence of COVID-19, for several internationally-oriented TLS academic programs, the need for ensuring inclusivity and openness while retaining the benefits of an international classroom became an increasingly pressing need. Many of our international students were not (yet) able to travel to Europe or the Netherlands, while others suffered from the severe housing shortage on the Dutch housing market. Due to these practical problems, some of our internationally-oriented programs became very difficult to reach for our international student community. Being an open and inclusive law faculty with a strong belief in the international classroom approach, we began exploring the potential of piloting online and hybrid education as a way to give the academic directors and lecturers in these programs room to expand and deepen their experience with online learning, and offer our students flexibility and a genuine international learning environment. Therefore, in September 2021, TLS started a two-year pilot project to determine the feasibility of online and hybrid education in three international master's programs – International Business Law (IBL), International Business Taxation (IBT) and Law & Technology (L&T) – and one international bachelor's program, Global Law (GL). These four academic programs were chosen because they are all internationally oriented, conducted primarily in English, and have a significant percentage of international students. Especially in the IBL and L&T master's programs, a considerable share of our intake is from beyond the Netherlands or even outside the European Union. TLS believes that it is important that future lawyers can not only participate in their national legal environment but also in a globalized society. We therefore introduce them to other cultures and legal systems during their studies, and encourage intercultural awareness by interweaving the international dimension in our education, promoting an international classroom in certain academic programs and through exchange and internships. Obviously, such an international classroom is vital for the aforementioned four programs to genuinely provide an international or even global perspective to our students. The aim was therefore to provide an option for a hybrid classroom, which in the most basic sense is a classroom where a number of students and the instructor(s) are in a physical tech-enabled classroom (this implies that the audio and visual technology allows both groups to observe and participate seamlessly) and other students participate synchronously, online via the internet using platforms like Teams or Zoom. At TLS, students could opt to attend online or on campus. The choice of which modality they prefer rests solely on the students' personal needs, irrespective of where they are situated.

This pilot project and the ongoing process that follows it also fits well into the TLS strategic vision on education, as reflected in the TLS Strategic Plan 2022-2025.[1] TLS aims to be a leading law faculty in educational innovation to meet the needs of today's students

1   https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/about/schools/law/about/stategy

and continue offering them state-of-the-art academic knowledge and skills that prepare them for contributing to the complex society. COVID-19 has proven to be a catalyst for educational innovation. TLS wants to continue the major steps that have been taken in the field of digitalization of education and nourish the spirit of our lecturers and academic directors. In today's information society, it is important to offer education that stimulates students' attention and curiosity. We continuously investigate how new forms of education can strengthen our portfolio, while keeping in mind the wishes and needs of specific target groups of students. For example, since September 2022 TLS has offered a blended learning approach in all courses of the Dutch Bachelor in Law as we believe that this learning method better suits the current bachelor's students' needs and wishes regarding certain flexibility and ownership. This systematic blended learning approach[2] along with the hybrid and online pilots has yielded extensive expertise in hybrid and online teaching and assessment. In the next sections, we explore both the opportunities that have been created and difficulties that we had to overcome.

Starting point: innovation team and basic conditions

Implementing new methods in existing academic programs not only requires vision by a Faculty Board but also relies significantly on courageous and forward-thinking academic directors, and the willingness of lecturers to leave their safe haven and explore new possibilities. Even when these elements are present, adequate support must be provided. Lecturers must be able to continue to focus primarily on the content and feel supported with the technology and skills involved in online and hybrid education. One of the most important factors in starting up the pilots in September 2021 was the presence of an Education Innovation Team in TLS. During Covid-19, the TLS Faculty Board set up a TLS Education Innovation Team, which now comprises an educational psychologist, instructional designers, creative thinkers, and dedicated scholars on hybrid and online teaching. Together they assisted our lecturers' switch from on campus to online education and assessment during Covid-19, and since then they have guided, supported, and reflected on how to implement the TLS strategic vision on education into our programs. For the hybrid and online education pilot, this in particular meant that lecturers needed help with i) the technical facilities in the lecture halls, ii) setting rules for the conduct of students in an online or hybrid setting, iii) provide interactive and enthusiastic education based on online didactics and iv) fraud-proof assessment tools.

2   To avoid any misunderstandings, it is important to define what is understood by blended, hybrid and online teaching. Blended education primarily revolves around the utilization of online educational tools such as Wooclap and Canvas, while combining traditional on-campus instruction with digital resources and components. This integration aims to diversify the delivery methods of education, rendering it more engaging and tailored to students' needs. On the other hand, hybrid and online education primarily concerns the mode through which students engage in their educational experience, whether in a physical classroom or through digital platforms. Hybrid education encompasses blended learning as a subset, although it is worth noting that blended learning does not inherently encompass hybrid education. Even in a fully on-campus course, instructors can incorporate blended learning elements, such as using internet-based interactive surveys and polls during in-person classes. Conversely, in online academic programs, all students engage with course materials and instruction through online platforms, with the lecturer delivering entirely web-based courses. In hybrid academic programs, students have the flexibility to choose between attending on-campus classes or participating online. More detailed explanations will be provided below.

The Innovation Team and Faculty Board proactively addressed these needs to create a thriving hybrid and online learning environment. For the initial requirement of upgrading technical facilities in lecture halls, we secured investment from Tilburg University Executive Committee and TiU Facility Services. Following this investment, in collaboration with other TiU faculties we prioritized scheduling for hybrid programs to optimize the utilization of the new equipment. Additionally, we provided essential support to educators delivering hybrid courses. Student moderators were introduced to assist during lectures, ensuring a harmonious integration of online and on-campus students. These moderators are trained to oversee the online student group, fostering a seamless blend with their on-campus counterparts and mitigating any sense of subordination.

Second, the behavior of students within hybrid education can be complicated and frustrating when students show free-riding, inappropriate or even disrespectful behavior, such as passive attendance or recording classes without permission. Establishing rules in a hybrid setting proves to be considerably more complex than in an on-campus environment. Together with our student-assessor, the Faculty Board introduced a new code of conduct in the form of an educational video.[3] We show this video several times during the academic year to create awareness among our students. Furthermore, the Education Innovation Team actively engaged in various courses to observe ongoing developments and formulate a comprehensive set of conduct guidelines to be distributed at the commencement of each course.

Providing interactive and enthusiastic education based on online didactics is the third need that we addressed. Crafting the optimal educational approach for online teaching has presented an ongoing challenge, given the continually evolving and advancing technology landscape. However, we have found that the key in hybrid teaching is combining in-person and online elements for effective learning. It involves establishing clear learning objectives, selecting appropriate content for each mode of instruction, keeping both the online and on-campus students in mind and integrating technology and assessment methods. Effective communication, flexibility, and engagement strategies are key to creating a successful hybrid learning experience. To provide more guidance to academic staff, four basic conditions for teaching in hybrid and online programs[4] were developed by the Faculty Board and the Education Innovation Team. The first area focuses on ensuring equal quality of education, which includes guaranteeing learning objectives for online students, maintaining equal interaction opportunities, and promoting the use of digital learning environments for interaction between the two groups. The second area reflects the student perspective, which emphasizes the importance of well-being and community building for online students, particularly bachelor students. It encourages cooperation between the two target groups and creating opportunities for them to interact to enrich the learning environment. The third is the lecturer perspective, which focuses on providing

3   https://tilburguniversity.cloud.panopto.eu/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=f3a4c719-018c-442d-81b8-af9b00c4afc3
4   Available upon request from the authors.

optimal support to lecturers in delivering hybrid education. It includes ensuring lecturers have the necessary technical facilities, support in course management, and assistance in using the Canvas platform. Lecturers are also supported in the areas of didactics and community building to effectively serve both target groups. This final condition aims to maintain assessment parity between the two target groups while preventing fraud, with special attention to bachelor GLB students. It includes ensuring that assessment formats, duration, content, and accessibility of assessment reviews are the same for both groups. Formative assessments and the entire curriculum for bachelor students receive particular attention to prevent fraud in assessments due to the lower level of bachelor education.

These guidelines serve as a compass, ensuring that our approach to hybrid and online education consistently upholds the highest standards and caters to the holistic needs of all stakeholders involved.

Finally, one significant challenge in successfully implementing hybrid education revolves around the evaluation of students in these programs. This is especially relevant for the three master's programs, where a substantial number of students participated online during the pilot. In order to maintain fairness, all examinations for both hybrid and online programs were conducted digitally, eliminating the need for separate assessments for different student cohorts. However, this decision necessitated a robust approach to preventing academic dishonesty and fraud.

Drawing from the experience gained during the COVID-19 pandemic, lecturers and the Education Innovation Team formulated fundamental prerequisites for online assessments:

a. Clear guidelines were established at the commencement of the academic year, mandating the recording of lectures for all courses.
b. The assessment format, duration, method, and content remained consistent across both student groups.
c. Accessibility to assessment reviews and the level of feedback provided were standardized for all participants.
d. Formative assessments offering intermediate progress feedback were harmonized for both student groups.
e. Recognizing the potential vulnerability of bachelor-level assessments to fraudulent activities, due to the type of assessment at this level, a heightened emphasis was placed on developing measures within the curriculum to deter fraud among bachelor Global law bachelorsstudents.

After one year of piloting with hybrid and online teaching, these basic requirements have been structurally implemented in the four pilot programs. Together with the TLS Assessment Policer, in 2023 we have also developed a set of specific guidelines and measures, which are available for online assessment. Based on this policy, the academic

directors together with the Assessment Policer will create a new or modified assessment plan in which they will also anticipate Large Language Models.

Evaluating the hybrid pilot project

To determine whether online and hybrid education should continue at TLS after two years of piloting, we conducted a comprehensive evaluation, encompassing input from various stakeholders, including students, education staff, and support personnel. The student survey[5] – a crucial component of this assessment – aimed to provide insights into the student experience. The survey covered diverse aspects of hybrid education related to the basic conditions discussed in the previous section, including quality of education, technology usage, class interaction, lecturer interaction, well-being, student-to-student interaction, the benefits of hybrid teaching, and open-ended questions. A total of 199 students participated in the survey, representing all four programs, with an even distribution across online, on-campus, and flexible participation modes. Interestingly, students from five of the seven continents took part, indicating a global reach. Notably, 47% of students revealed that the hybrid nature of the program influenced their decision to enroll. Based on the survey data, there are various reasons for this. However, it appears that the key driving force behind this trend is the increased demand for flexibility among students, as further discussed below.

One of the primary concerns was whether students perceived hybrid education as being of equal quality as traditional on-campus teaching. The findings revealed that 76% of online students believed that they learned as much as on-campus students, challenging the notion that online education is inferior. However, quite unexpectedly, 29% of on-campus students expressed skepticism, feeling that they may not learn as much as their online peers, shedding light on potential concerns within this group. Unfortunately, the survey did not provide an option to elaborate on this, although it is a noteworthy point for further investigation. Classroom interaction between on-campus and online students remained a focus, with a significant portion believing that it suffered when students from the other mode participated. However, the smaller the group size, the less prominent we found this result to be. Overall, 68% expressed satisfaction with hybrid classes, emphasizing the need for *flexibility* in education.

As stated before, the integration of technology into classrooms was a crucial aspect of the pilot and significant budget was allocated to upgrading the on-campus classroom technology during the two pilot years. The majority of courses use educational technology (hereafter referred to as EdTech) for engagement,[6] with an impressive 92% agreement. Technical facilities received positive feedback, although there were disparities in audibility between online and on-campus students, which is naturally vital for effective class interaction. Addressing this disparity was identified as an improvement opportunity.

5   The survey was conducted using Qualtrics. Survey questions and data available upon request from the authors.
6   Primarily Wooclap, Canvas and Zoom integrated functionalities.

Lecturer interaction was positively perceived, with students feeling they had an equal opportunity to actively participate. However, some students faced challenges in interacting across online and on-campus groups, highlighting the need for enhanced engagement strategies. Online students expressed concerns about social and academic isolation, particularly in feeling connected to the school and university, courses, lecturers, and peers. Enhancing these aspects was identified as a priority. While communication channels were strong, there was also some frustration regarding lecturer feedback. On the other hand, the majority of students believed that lecturers possessed sufficient skills for hybrid teaching, reflecting a very positive aspect of the educational experience.

The survey showcased that students appreciated the advantages of hybrid teaching, emphasizing flexibility and adaptability. Most students agreed that the hybrid program provided them with the flexibility to choose class formats and timings. Additionally, it accommodated part-time employment for many, enhanced time management skills, and was seen as a solution to housing shortages in the Netherlands. A significant portion believed that it cultivated self-drive and responsibility.

In response to the open-ended questions, students valued the flexibility and accessibility of the hybrid program. However, they repeated their dissatisfaction reasons, which included technological issues, isolation, and concerns about camera usage. Suggestions for program improvement included lecturer training, enhanced technology in lecture halls, better scheduling of hybrid and online courses in the best equipped lecture halls, more class format choices, mandatory camera usage, and providing the option of having programs that simultaneously offer a separate fully online and fully on-campus option.

In the staff survey, we posed a limited set of questions to gauge staff sentiment towards online and hybrid teaching. Our inquiries revolved around their satisfaction with this teaching mode, perceptions of technical resources, experiences with academic support staff, workload implications, flexibility, their interactions with students, and their stance on the continuation of hybrid and online teaching. Notably, the staff survey yielded a more diverse range of responses compared to those received from students, revealing variations both across and within the different programs.

One prominent observation was that staff reported feeling less connected to online students, highlighting a potential gap in engagement between the two modes of instruction. Additionally, it was evident that hybrid teaching significantly increased the workload for staff members, which was a common concern across various programs. Interestingly, the staff's perspectives on the program's continuation were mixed, challenging our initial expectation that they would predominantly oppose its continuation. Resistance was more pronounced in bachelor's programs with larger student cohorts, while the majority of staff supported the continuation of the hybrid program with the master's programs. In fact, in the three master programs lecturers were generally satisfied with the hybrid teaching mode and strongly appreciated the improved technical facilities in lecture halls and

assistance of student moderators. This reiterates the students' perception that smaller courses facilitate easier connections across online and on-campus groups.

Moving towards flexible education

The evaluation of TLS's hybrid and online education pilot has revealed overall positive perceptions among students. While certain challenges were encountered, the survey results emphasize the value of flexibility, adaptability, and the ongoing need for improvements in hybrid education to offer a comprehensive learning experience for students worldwide. Following the survey results and extensive discussions with all stakeholders, the Faculty Board decided to continue hybrid education in the three master programs and stop hybrid and online education in the first and second year of the GL bachelor program. The most important reason for discontinuing in this bachelor program is its significantly larger student cohort (300) compared to other programs (40-120). We found that the larger the cohort, the less that we are able to achieve the aims of the basic conditions as mentioned in section 2 above. Another very important reason is the majority of students in master programs compared to the first- and second-year students in GL who need more guidance, social interaction, community building and the 'Tilburg campus experience.' This is quite different compared to third-year bachelor students, as they have different needs such as exchange and labor market orientation. Therefore, since the 2023/24 academic year, the GL program offers online attendance only during its *third year, while the first two years have reverted to only on-campus teaching*. For the third bachelor year, a sustainable *flexible* education model that allows students to receive their education both on campus and off campus and fits with their needs to seek professional development and exchange during this final year is apt and currently being further developed. As for the three master's programs, TLS will continue to offer both *hybrid teaching, albeit in varying formats per academic program*.

To further develop flexible and hybrid education at TLS, we decided to focus on four key action points that were also identified from the survey results:

1) Curated teaching design
2) Technical facilities and camera usage
3) Community building
4) Class engagement

Curated educational design

Education delivery is now tailored to the specific requirements of each program. Recognizing that a one-size-fits-all teaching approach does not suit different courses, adjustments were made based on factors such as class size, available technical resources, and student engagement. The goal is to take staff needs into account while striking a balance between student preferences for flexibility and their need for stability and accountability. As one student aptly put it during interviews, she desires the flexibility to choose her class

attendance based on her mood but understands that it may result in her only attending online with her camera turned off, which she knows is not conducive for her learning. She explained that students are seeking guidance from the school to allow them choice, but also the have them honor these choices. She explained that students are seeking guidance from the school to enable them to make choices, but also to have the school honor these choices. For example, allowing students to decide, during registration, whether they would prefer to attend classes online or on-campus and then not permitting them to switch this preference during the semester. This sentiment of flexibility vs. structure was echoed in discussions with other students.

Therefore, the three master programs and the third year of the bachelor GL now follow diverse approaches and incorporate different online and on-campus elements. It is no longer appropriate to simply refer to them as hybrid education, and hence the overarching term "flexible education" has been introduced, defining a program that both incorporates online education elements and serves two target groups, one attending remotely and the other on-campus. As part of flexible education, three broad educational designs were formulated to address these aspects of curated educational design and balancing students' desires and needs. The choice of approach is based on various factors, including the size of the group, previous difficulties/success with student attendance, staff sentiments within the specific program and the program content. This is further explored below.

Hyflex education

Hyflex courses emphasize flexibility and student choice, allowing individual students to decide how they will participate in each session, as opposed to choosing a single modality for the whole program. This might include attending in person, joining remotely via Zoom or Teams, or watching recorded sessions later. TLS follows a policy of releasing recordings ten days before exams, largely ensuring synchronous class attendance. The Law and Technology program offers this flexibility, with positive feedback from both students and lecturers. With medium-sized groups (80-150 students),this program chose hyflex based on historically not having difficulty with low numbers of student attendance and staff being open to a more flexible approach.

Hyfixed education

In hyfixed courses, students select either online or on-campus participation at the course's start, with limited opportunities for change. Online attendance is closely monitored, and only students registered online can participate. Class recordings are typically released ten days before exams. The IBT program applies this model. Online attendance is closely monitored, and only registered online students can participate in this modality. This model is also applied to the third year of the GL bachelor's program. The IBT program features smaller student cohorts (around 35 students), and the staff has faced instances where only a few or even no students attended on-campus sessions. The survey data indicated that this situation has had a notable impact on course planning and staff morale. As a result, the teaching staff collectively decided to adopt a model that strikes a balance between

granting students some degree of flexibility in their learning choices while providing lecturers with a greater degree of predictability.

Parallel programs

Parallel programs offer both fully online and fully on-campus tracks within the same program, without synchronous contact between the two groups. Theoretical coursework can be presented through traditional classes, podcasts, or other formats. The IBL program delivers theoretical content online, with weekly smaller group meet-ups for both online and on-campus students. The program places a strong emphasis on fostering smaller group discussions, providing students with the opportunity to actively engage with course materials alongside their instructors and fellow peers. This approach prioritizes active participation from every student during these discussions, creating a dynamic and interactive learning environment that promotes parallel engagement between students and their educators.

Technical facilities and camera usage

Regarding technical facilities, additional lecture rooms have been equipped with Catchbox microphones,[7] and audio-visual equipment have been upgraded. This process is ongoing as it has significant budgetary implications. During the surveys, both staff and students voiced frustrations with online students keeping their cameras off. A school-wide policy laid down in a code of conduct now requires students to have their cameras on during online classes, although they have the option to blur their background or use an alternative one. Bianci *et al.* (2023) refer to this as "humanizing Zoom," which involves enhancing the personal and interactive aspects of online education.[8] This is steadily gaining traction within higher education post-COVID teaching.[9] However, students can still keep their camera off under certain circumstances, although they must inform the lecturer or student moderator in advance. Notably, there has been no reported pushback from students, as communication about these expectations was clear and timely, with room for student input.

Community building

Online students often grapple with the challenge of social isolation and a sense of detachment from the academic community.[10] Unlike their on-campus counterparts, they may miss out on the spontaneous interactions that occur in physical classrooms and the camaraderie that takes develops during campus-based extracurricular activities. This isolation can lead to feelings of disconnection, loneliness, and a perceived lack of engagement in the vibrant academic life of the institution.[11] The absence of face-to-face interactions and the opportunity to build relationships with peers and professors can hinder their overall educational experience, as reflected in the evaluation results.

At TLS, we believe that addressing this issue is crucial to ensure that online students feel valued, included, and a genuine part of the Tilburg academic community, thereby enhancing their motivation and commitment to their studies. We decided to be more intentional with the community building within the flexible programs. Up until this point, the greatest responsibility was with individual lecturers and we encouraged open lines of communication with online students not only regarding coursework but also to check in on their well-being and provide opportunities for virtual office hours and discussions. However, the students' need for a more social element of connection was clear from the survey. For this purpose, a community building officer was appointed, who has created virtual spaces for social interaction, such as online forums or discussion boards for students to connect, share experiences, and collaborate on assignments. Additionally, we have organized virtual events, workshops, and webinars that encourage participation from both online and on-campus students. One instance of such events is the "Legal Hackathons" organized by the IBL program. These gatherings bring students together to collaboratively brainstorm, create, and present innovative solutions aimed at improving legal processes. Additionally, other events encompass online murder mystery challenges that challenge students to apply their legal knowledge, social events in the form of pub quiz-style gatherings, and career fairs. In consultation with the Program Committee and Faculty Council, we attributed a vast amount of money[12] to each academic director to promote social activities and community building events for students in their program.

While this has helped to bridge the gap and create a more inclusive academic atmosphere to an extent, in some cases we have struggled with attendance at these events. It is an interesting paradox of students yearning for connection but then failing to join opportunities when created. This might be due to various reasons including digital fatigue, social anxiety or limited awareness. We aim to investigate this further to ensure that our social engagements reap the aimed benefits.

7   https://catchbox.com/ A Catchbox microphone is a throwable, soft-cased wireless microphone designed for audience engagement during live events. It encourages participants to catch and speak into the microphone, promoting interactive discussions without the need for microphone runners. The soft casing ensures safety while adding an element of fun to class engagements.
8   Kushlev and Epstein-Shuman, 2022; Wong *et al.*, 2023.
9   Bianchi *et al.*, 2023.
10   Khaskheli *et al.*, 2022; Ibraheem *et al.*, 2022; Rutkowska *et al.*, 2022.
11   Guo, 2022; Khaskheli *et al.*, 2022; Ibraheem *et al.*, 2022; Rutkowska *et al.*, 2022.
12   From the Quality Agreements Funds.

Class engagement

The Education Innovation Team continuously enhances classroom engagement through various EdTech programs like as Wooclap,[13] Feedback Fruits,[14] and Pitch2Peer,[15] which offer dynamic features for online and hybrid learning. Alongside introducing EdTech, we prioritize staff development through workshops and one-on-one training to combat "Wooclap fatigue" observed among students. Educators' enthusiasm for EdTech is commendable, although we advocate caution against over-use.

Workshops stress using EdTech intentionally, moving beyond mere entertainment to enrich learning. By thoughtfully selecting and integrating EdTech tools, educators can tailor their methods to cater to diverse learning styles, individual needs, and foster critical thinking. This approach not only alleviates "Wooclap fatigue" but also boosts content engagement and encourages collaboration.

Our ultimate goal is to empower educators to create immersive, interactive online learning experiences, addressing concerns raised by both students and staff during our evaluation.

Conclusion

The two-year pilot project on hybrid and online education at TLS has been a transformative journey, driven by a commitment to students' needs, innovation, high quality of our education and assessment, and inclusivity in the face of the evolving educational landscape and digital transformation. A comprehensive evaluation of the pilot reveals a rich tapestry of insights, challenges, and opportunities that have shaped the future of online and hybrid education at TLS.

The journey began with a vision of inclusivity, openness, cultural awareness, and internationalization, catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The need for flexibility and a genuine international learning environment led to the exploration of online and hybrid education. Key factors contributing to the success of the pilot were the presence of an Education Innovation Team, substantial investments in technical facilities in lecture halls, developing a set of basic conditions for online teaching and assessment, clear conduct guidelines, and the willingness to explore innovative educational designs. These initiatives aimed to address the multifaceted needs of both students and staff participating in the hybrid programs.

The survey that we conducted among teachers, lecturers, and the educational support team revealed that hybrid education was generally well received, emphasizing the importance of flexibility and adaptability. However, challenges such as tech issues and social isolation surfaced, leading to the introduction of measures to enhance online learning.

Based on the evaluation, TLS has embarked on a journey towards "flexible education," recognizing that a one-size-fits-all approach does not suit all programs, lecturers and students. This flexibility is embodied in three distinct educational designs: hyflex, hyfixed, and parallel programs, each tailored to the unique requirements of its respective program. Within these programs, we remain committed to continuously improving the technical facilities, the intentional use of EdTech to ensure quality education and a sense of belonging and community for the student body.

We believe that the TLS hybrid education pilot has been a testament to adaptability and resilience in education. It has paved the way for flexible education that caters to the diverse needs of students and staff, while continually evolving to meet the challenges of the digital age. As TLS continues on this journey, it remains committed to providing an inclusive and dynamic learning environment that prepares students for the complexities of the modern world.

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13 https://www.wooclap.com/ Wooclap is designed to make presentations more interactive and gather real-time feedback from the audience. Educators can use Wooclap to gauge student understanding, encourage participation, and create more engaging learning experiences using tools like wordcloud, multiple choice questions and polls.

14 https://feedbackfruits.com/ FeedbackFruits is a software platform designed to facilitate interactive and collaborative learning experiences in educational settings. It offers various tools and features to enhance student engagement and participation in both physical and virtual classrooms. FeedbackFruits includes tools for activities such as peer review, group discussions, interactive documents, and more. Besides in-class activities, it also has various functionalities to ease feedback load on educators.

15 https://pitch2peer.com/ this peer reviewing tool is more appropriate for use outside classroom activities, but can also be integrated for class engagement.

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PART III.
Students and Assessment

Empowering Students with Formative Assessment

Ties van Daal, Berend Holwerda, Ya-Ping (Amy) Hsiao, Astrid Kramer & Miranda Stienstra[1]

Introduction

A university campus is like an eco-system with its own rhythm and tides. At the beginning of the semester, lecture halls are filled with students and the campus is crowded. As the semester progresses, lecture halls become increasingly emptier, and little by little the stream of students on campus becomes smaller. However, at that point, when everyone thinks that students will never return, the campus slowly fills up with students again. The library is filled with students, living on coffee and going through piles of slides, the exam period is approaching, and everyone is preparing for assessments. This pendulum swing of campus activity is neither desirable for the students' learning behavior nor their connection to fellow students.

In this essay, we focus on the impact of assessment on students' motivation, their learning behavior, and learning curve. We use self-determination theory (SDT) to argue that by placing formative assessment (as opposed to summative assessment) more centrally in assessments, it facilitates a better learning curve for students. However, it is first necessary to revisit what we know about what brings our students to university. By understanding their drive to study, it is more likely we can create an optimal learning environment. In addition, we would like to create debate within our academic community about how assessment influences students' study behavior.

The idea for this essay originated from a larger project on the balance of summative and formative assessment in one of our bachelor programs initiated by ourselves, Astrid Kramer and Miranda Stienstra, both senior lecturers in the department of Strategy and Entrepreneurship at the Tilburg School of Economics and Management (TiSEM) and Amy Hsiao, assessment specialist at the Teaching and Learning Center of Tilburg University. However, since we want to understand students' motivation to learn, we believed that the best way to explore such a topic was to write this essay together with students. Therefore, we invited Ties van Daal and Berend Holwerda as co-authors. Ties van Daal is a master's student in Societal Transitions and Philosophy at Erasmus University Rotterdam and completed his bachelors in Business Economics and Philosophy at Tilburg University. Berend Holwerda is a master's student in Economics and completed his bachelor in

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[1] The authors are in alphabetical order and contributed equally.

Econometrics and Operations Research at Tilburg University. Ties and Berend are both student assistants in education at TiSEM.

In this essay, we first describe SDT in the educational context of a university to create an insight into what motivates student to take on learning activities. Next, we zoom in on how formative and summative assessment affects students' motivation to learn. Finally, we mention starting points for positive change based on ideas from students.

Motivation according to self-determination theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a motivation theory developed by Ryan and Deci in 1985, based on the basic premise that different types of motivation drive individuals' behavior. SDT distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. According to Deci *et al.* (1991), intrinsic motivation means that individuals *"engage in activities that interest them and they do freely so"* (p. 328). Extrinsic motivation connects to activities that are performed because they are instrumental, and they are considered useful instead of interesting. There are four types of extrinsic motivation, namely external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation (Ryan & Deci 2020). Placed on a continuum of motivation, external regulation means high external motivation, whereas integrated regulation means high internal motivation. *External regulation* implies that individuals are motivated by outside rewards or punishments. *Introjected regulation* is one step closer to intrinsic motivation, whereby individuals are driven by internal rewards of self-esteem and the wish to avoid shame or guilt. Identified regulation means that people see the value of the activities that they are performing and are therefore motivated to do them. *Integrated regulation* is closest to intrinsic motivation. With this type of motivation individuals not only see value of the activity but they also experience that the value and therefore the activity is in line with their core interests and values.

At the university, teachers often assume that students are intrinsically motivated, because they think that students have made a deliberate choice for a study and that it aligns with their personal interests. In our talks with students, we often heard that they attend university because they *"feel it is the logical next step"* and *"it is expected from them."* These answers do not imply (strong) intrinsic motivation. Many of our students are at the university because they feel they have to be here, and thus they seem to be motivated by introjected regulation, the type of motivation that drives behavior by wanting to avoid shame and guilt (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

In line with our personal experience, Dopmeijer *et al.* (2023) wrote in a recently published report about Dutch students and their mental health that students have been brought up with the idea that they are the ones who determine their future success, although the downside is that they also feel responsible for potential failure. Students seem driven out of fear of failure and *"enough is enough"* does not exist for them, as they believe that they always could have tried harder (Dopmeijer *et al.*, 2023).

Understanding what drives our students is crucial if we want them to optimally learn during their time at the university. If our students were intrinsically motivated, they would study out of pleasure and joy, and because it is interesting. Instead, it seems they are more extrinsically motivated because they feel that they need a diploma to get a job, for example. Ideally, the university helps students to transition from external motivation to internal motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

SDT explains three different needs that affect individuals' level of motivation: people need autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Deci *et al.*, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Autonomy is about the feeling of ownership of one's decisions, and it is strengthened if people have the feeling that what they do has value and weakened is people feel controlled or pressured. Relatedness revolves around feeling connected to other people within the activity. In a university context, relatedness means a positive connection with teachers and peers and being part of an academic community. Competence refers to the feeling that people can perform the task that they need to do, and by doing so they grow their skills, which in return creates confidence in their own ability (Ryan & Deci, 2020). If we want our students to make the most out of their time at the university, we should focus on these three basic needs of students. At present, we do not do this sufficiently, which is largely related to how we assess our students. In the next section, we will explain the difference between summative and formative assessment and how our focus on summative testing might reduce our students' internal motivation.

Summative and formative assessment

The Dutch higher education system is focused on summative assessment (assessment of learning), which is the assignment of a grade based on the level of student achievement of intended learning outcomes at the end of a particular unit of learning (e.g., a course or curriculum) (Nitko & Brookhart, 2014). In most cases, if the grades are at least 5.5 (on a scale of 1-10), teachers assume that the student has achieved the course learning goals. Ticking learning goals contributes to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes of a bachelor or master program.

Courses are usually designed in such a way that summative assessment is at the end of the course. The student either receives a passing grade for this one assessment and passes the course or otherwise fails the course. With such a course design, students show low levels of internal motivation, they start studying late and are only triggered to start learning when assessment comes close (Ryan & Weinstein, 2009). Therefore, students have low troughs and high peaks in their learning curve.

An alternative to summative assessment is formative assessment (assessment for learning), which involves monitoring student progress, providing feedback, and feed-forward to reduce the gap between the current level and the final level of the intended learning outcomes (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Nicol & Macfarlane, 2004). Examples of

formative assessment are online quizzes, discussing homework, and feedback on intermediate input while writing a bachelor or master thesis. Research shows that students learn best when there is a balance between summative and formative assessment (Russel, 2010). However, studies also show that in the short term students are especially willing to learn if there is a graded assessment in return (Wu & Jessop, 2018). This is likely the case because currently the majority of students are motivated by low levels of internal motivation due to a focus on summative assessment. It requires a long-term perspective to increase students' internal motivation through formative assessment.

Within formative assessment, the aim of feedback is to provide information on both what the student has not understood and what they have already mastered. It is important to understand that formative assessment is not simply summative assessment in which grading is substituted for feedback, as the difference between summative and formative assessment is more fundamental. According to McCallum and Millner (2021), feedback should be viewed as *"an ongoing process that offers students a chance to engage with the feedback and improve their work and their feedback literacy"* (p. 2). Hence, in contrast to an exam for which one obtains a grade, feedback does not take place at a single point in time. Formative assessment highlights learning as a process rather than highlighting end products such as ECTS, grades or the number of graduated students. As Wu and Jessop (2018) stated: *"Assessment for learning promises a paradigm shift from a testing culture to a learner-centered assessment culture"* (p. 1021). To make this cultural transition happen, McCallum and Millner (2021) argued that it is crucial to enhance the student's ability to monitor their own progress and take responsibility for their own learning progress. Formative assessment is a tool to show the student how their learning behavior affects their chances of reaching the end goal. Even if we accept that studying at a university will always be a means to an end and therefore externally motivated, we can still reach for the maximum internalization possible. Enabling students to see the value of their studying behavior is crucial in this attempt.

Contextual factors hindering formative assessment
Research shows that when educators are under stress, they become more controlling and have less ability to give students the autonomy that they need (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). In recent years, the workload among lecturers has increased due to an increasing number of students and decreasing government funding per student (Universiteiten van Nederland, 2021). Teachers spend a lot of time on summative assessment, leaving little time for well-designed formative assessment (Broadbent *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, due to the group size within large-scale programs, formative testing is seen as "optional" and "nice to have" (McCallum & Milner, 2021), which is not desirable. It is also not possible to expect individual staff members to come up with solutions to this complex problem. It is important to look at the underlying structure in terms of how education is organized and a balance between summative and formative assessment is desirable. Change should be a program-wide initiative facilitated by the university, as individual teachers do not

have the span of control to make such a change. Another factor that hinders formative assessment in programs in general is the emphasis of the accreditation of programs by the Netherlands Flemish Accreditation Organization (NVAO) on summative assessment. An accreditation checks whether students who receive a diploma have achieved the intended learning outcomes of the program, which can be demonstrated with summative assessment. Because an accreditation looks primarily at summative assessment, there are few incentives for universities to increase the role of formative assessment in policy (Wu & Jessop, 2018).

Formative assessment in tutorials
Ryan and Deci (2020) explain that students need structure, which they define as *"setting clear expectations and goals, having consistency in rules and guidelines and providing informational support for engagement and rich efficacy feedback"* (p. 3). Tutorials are the place for engagement and feedback, in which students learn actively while receiving feedback both from peers and teachers on their learning progress. Tutorials could therefore contribute well to the need for relatedness and competence. Surprisingly to us, in our talks with students almost none identified a tutorial as a place where formative feedback is given, even though students felt like they were being assessed.

Almost all of our students come to us immediately after high school. The behavior of high-school students is highly controlled (e.g. attendance requirement, homework checks), which creates a situation that motivates students in the short term but leads to inactivity once the strictness ends (Ryan & Weinstein, 2009). The transition from high school to university leads to a situation in which students are less likely to attend classes, which is strengthened by the fact that students underestimate the value of on-campus activities. Students mostly see value in activities that show a direct effect on their grades and somehow on-campus activities often do not make that cut.

Creating interaction among students and between students and teachers is even more important in tutorials in large-scale programs. In general, in those programs there are fewer interactions between students and instructors, resulting in more anonymity and passivity, less engagement in a subject, and less motivation to learn (Gibbs & Jenkins, 2014; Mulryan-Kyne, 2010).

In our conversations with students, we asked what they need to participate in tutorials. A common answer was that students need a safe environment to learn, and unfortunately tutorials are often not experienced as such. Students are reluctant to speak because they feel judged by both their peers and teachers, which is a pity because student interaction leads to valuable feedback. Students consider giving an incorrect answer as failing, and therefore prefer to avoid participation in discussions. The students actually seem to prefer to avoid (formative) feedback in tutorials, and thus their motivation to avoid shame therefore might even inhibit learning.

What is the way forward?

In this essay, we have argued that the current system of assessment does not facilitate students' motivation, their learning behavior, and learning curve. Summative assessment leads to stress and suboptimal learning. The process is structured in such a way that students do not receive feedback on their learning during the process, because either students opt out of taking part in formative assessments or feedback is not optimally offered. As previously mentioned, students learn best when there is a balance between summative and formative assessment. However, implementing such a system requires a fundamental change in the instructional design of our programs, which requires time.

Following the ideas behind SDT, we organized two small-scale meetings with students from several bachelor and master programs from TiSEM to have an in-depth talk about what motivates them. Those meetings combined with conversations that we had as a writing team and earlier interactions with students confirmed the idea that students have very good ideas about how to spark their motivation and empower them in their learning process. In the next sections, we highlight some of those ideas.

Explain the "why"

Wu and Jessop (2018) argued that education has undergone a marketization, *"with students paying fees and expecting formal qualifications to 'deliver the goods' of education, potentially skimming over the messy, risky and never-ending process of learning, in favour of just getting the credentials"* (p. 1020). Ryan and Deci (2020) argued that by making students see the value of learning activities, it raises their feeling of autonomy if they partake in that activity. The learning process can be improved by explaining the "why" of a lecture, course, minor or any other learning unit. Why is this course part of a study program? Why is this course important for your future career? Why is this course taught in this way? If students understand "why," they understand the value of learning activities better and their learning process will improve.

Use of language

The way in which we label learning activities also affects how they are perceived. Students associated words like "test" or "assessment" with negatively charged words like "stress" and "pressure." Therefore, while explaining the value of the learning activities in a course, we should avoid using such terms. Rather, we should develop a shared language in which we can easily convey the value of partaking in certain learning activities to students.

Feedback on summative assessment

Feedback for learning can also happen after a summative assessment. An example is using the inspection of an exam as an opportunity for all students to receive feedback. Most students with whom we spoke mentioned that they rarely attended the inspection of an exam, especially when the course was completed with a sufficient grade. It is only seen as a supplement rather than an essential part of the course and the learning process. When the course is completed with a failing grade, the incentive to come to the inspection is usually higher. However, due to the way in which inspections of exams are currently organized, students are not facilitated in their learning process. There is usually registration at fixed times and scrap paper to take notes is not allowed to prevent fraud. Although these measures can be explained from the risk of fraud, the focus in this way of working remains on the performance of summative assessment and the student learning process is not central. The setup of perusals should be redesigned by keeping both the learning opportunities of students and the time constraints of teachers in mind.

Rhythm of learning units

Student life seems to be a rhythm of extremes, where the balance between social life and study swings like a pendulum depending on the moment of the semester. The fact that the exam is usually at the end of the semester means that it is not always given the highest priority during the semester and takes the highest urgency and priority in the last two weeks of the semester. Accordingly, there seems to be something inherent in the current assessment structure that allows students to put off studying. As a result, the learning curve has a peak moment before the exams, rather than a more continuous progression throughout the semester. Short learning units all structured in the same way might contribute to more continuous learning.

Safe environment

Students mentioned that they are hesitant to speak up, ask questions, or participate in discussions because they feel judged by their peers and teachers, which is counter-productive to their learning process. Even though many students' hesitance might only come from within themselves and may not even be justified, it hinders their learning process. Accordingly, we should be more alert to creating a perceived safe learning environment.

Conclusions

There are two worrying phenomena in higher education. First, students experience performance pressure, which leads to stress and affects their mental health (Dopmeijer *et al.*, 2023; RIVM, 2018). Second, increasingly fewer students are taking part in (on-campus) teaching and learning activities. We believe that one of the underlying causes of both worrying phenomena is the fact that most students are motivated by introjected regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2020), which does not fit well with a focus on summative assessment focus.

Universities are currently stuck in a suboptimal situation and potentially even a downward spiral in which students only study on their own to pass exams and almost succumb under such stress. Summative assessment typically creates high pressure and stress among students (Dopmeijer *et al.*, 2023). A balance between summative and formative assessment is better than a single focus on summative assessment. Formative assessment can be a way to reshape learning because it fits better with the need for autonomy compared to summative assessment (formative assessment does not have to be compulsory). Besides, formative assessment could increase the feeling of competence

because students receive feedback on the progress of learning in terms of what went well and what could be improved. Finally, formative assessment can also help in the need for relatedness, whereby especially tutorials could play an important role here. If students take part in tutorials, they not only learn about course material but also interact with peers, which increases the sense of belonging.

We believe that a focus on formative assessment can be a way out of the downward spiral. Teachers should be unburdened instead of simply receiving another task and we should change the narrative of studying towards learning and away from simply passing courses. This is only possible through shared dialogue within our academic community. Are you in?

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Character Assessment via Qualitative Research Methods

Suzanne van der Beek & Beatrijs de Coninck

Abstract
Universities are becoming increasingly interested in implementing character education as a part of their curricula, although this implementation encounters obstacles at different levels. This article focuses particularly on the complications regarding the formal assessment of character building at Tilburg University. It proposes that qualitative research methods can serve as an inspirational source for designing assessment types, as these methods foreground participant agency and generate in-depth understanding. More particularly, this article reports on the findings of a pilot study at our Dutch university, where three such types of assessment were tested, based on a journal study, a series of focus group interviews, and a content analysis study. Based on these findings, the article provides reflections on the advantages and limitations of these assessment types2.

Introduction
As per our Tilburg Educational Profile (TEP), our university is invested in understanding students as (future) critical and caring participants in a larger society. This is most concretely addressed via the notion of character building, which is centered as one of three main areas of education, besides knowledge and skills. Character building refers to our ambition to help students to become "thinkers aspiring to work for the benefit of their community, their society and humanity as a whole" (De Regt and Van Lenning, 2017, p.8). It explicitly extends the scope of our education to include students' orientations and decision-making beyond the university walls. This presents teachers with a number of complications, chiefly including how to ascertain whether students are reaching these goals, and thus how to assess a part of students' development that unfolds outside of the university's limits.

In this article, we focus on this problem of assessing character building as we report on the findings from a pilot study conducted at the Department of Culture Studies (TSHD). In this study, we explored the option to operationalize qualitative research methods as formative assessment tools, seeking to learn whether these research methods offer us new and relevant models for assessing character building in our students. We designed three different assessment types based on a journal study, a set of focus group interviews, and a content analysis study, which were implemented in three courses in different culture studies courses in addition to the summative assessments already implemented in these

courses. In our presentation of the results of this study, we aim to offer teachers at Tilburg University some educational tools with which to explicitly integrate and assess character education in their teaching practices.

Character building at Tilburg University

The concept of character building – as operationalized for our university – was outlined by Herman de Regt and Alkeline van Lenning in the first issue of this Tilburg Series in Academic Education (2017), outlining the TEP as being built around three pillars: knowledge, skills, and character. These pillars are used to structure teaching and assessment in the education programs. Whereas the first two pillars – knowledge and skills – are relatively straightforward, the notion of 'character' as an educational cornerstone has created hesitations among teachers and students (Leesen & Van Lenning, 2021). De Regt and Van Lenning (2017) argue that "our central objective is to educate students to become thinkers aspiring to work for the benefit of their community, their society and humanity as a whole" (p.8). Besides acquiring knowledge and developing skills, students at this university should therefore also build character, which can manifest in many different ways. The university's educational vision centers this notion around the contribution to core social issues: "solidarity with the less fortunate, empathy with and openness toward those holding dissenting views, and responsible management of our vulnerable (social) world" (De Regt and Van Lenning, 2017, p.1). In other words, the educational criterium requires students to become "enterprising thinkers, thinkers that take action, thinkers that prudently put the insights they have acquired into practice in society – thinkers who not only understand society, but also propel it forward, driven by a strong feeling of solidarity and a powerful sense of empathy, always taking into consideration the human dimension and a sustainable world" (De Regt and Van Lenning, 2017, p. 3). For teachers, this means that they should support their students in developing this moral and civic character and encourage them to actively contribute to core societal issues. Practically speaking, both teachers and students should be able to answer the following question about any course in they are involved: 'After following this course, the student is motivated to...?'

The implementation of character education as a main pillar in our university's educational profile has been hesitant for a number of reasons that resonate with the general objections outlined above. Teachers argue that the notion of character building seems significantly different from the more traditional educational goals relating to knowledge and skills. Here, we recognize the notion that character building should extend beyond the official curriculum. Moreover, as different students lead different kinds of lives outside of the university, the direction and goal of their character growth will differ. Whereas the development of cognitive growth can (largely) be judged via homogenized metrics, the assessment of character building requires an individualized approach. As such, teachers indicate that the assessment types available to them cannot grasp this part of the students' learning curve. Indeed, they suggest that it would be almost condescending to evaluate students' growth in character via something as reductive as a written test and a numerical grade. As a result, many teachers chose to decentralize or even ignore character education

in their assessment. This leads to a didactic framework that is mainly focused on cognitive outcomes (knowledge and skills) and neglects the affective domain regarding students' changes of internal values and attitudes. This not only means that we lack insight into the ways in which we facilitate our students' character growth, but also that students are largely unaware that the university is an opportunity to develop themselves beyond the cognitive level. Indeed, in addition to evaluating students' knowledge and performance, assessment also performs the important function of focusing students' attention to certain parts of their education. Those elements that are formalized in our assessment types are granted the privileged position of "what you should be learning" in a course or program (Barrow, 2006). By including character education as an explicit part of our assessment, we might therefore also promote its more central position in our teaching and learning practices.

To facilitate teachers who are struggling to include the assessment of character building in their education, we explored the effects of three different assessment types. The design of these assessments focused on the main challenges as indicated by our teachers as outlined above. We recognize teachers' hesitation to claim authoritative knowledge over the students' character growth during the course, and we propose to employ formative rather than summative assessment strategies in relation to character building. The strategies that we propose are primarily designed and executed to monitor students' progress and their engagement with learning goals related to character building. We also acknowledge the resistance felt by teachers to reduce the variety and personal significance of this growth via a single test and numerical grade, and we propose to assign a final evaluation in the form of a "pass/fail" or by allowing students to grade their own growth.

The general design of the assessment types explored in this pilot study were based on qualitative research methods, which are designed to provide rich descriptions of complex phenomena and therefore lessen the risk of reducing students' character growth unnecessarily. These methods are intended to prioritize the voice of the main participants in a specific situation and are therefore suitable to centralize students' experiences rather than the teacher's perspective. Furthermore, qualitative research methods allow the researcher to study selected issues, cases, or events in depth and detail without the data gathered being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis. This ensures that students can bring in forms of character growth that the teacher might not have predicted.

For this pilot study, we selected three research strategies to be implemented as formative assessment types related to character education. The strategies chosen were a journal study, a set of focus group interviews, and a content analysis study. These three assessment types were tested in the fall semester of 2021 in three different courses taught by one of the authors. All courses pertain to topics from the field of culture studies and have a small number of students (between 10-25 students per course). The journal study was implemented in an elective course for a BA program, the focus group interviews were implemented in a second-year course of a two-year MA program, and the content analysis study was implemented in an elective course for students following a one-year MA

program. For all courses, the teacher had formulated explicit learning goals related to character education and centralized them in the opening classes of the course (see table 1).

After following this course, the student is motivated to...?	
Course 1	critically reflect on the position of children's literature in the broader cultural field; critically reflect on the position of "the child" in different cultural contexts.
Course 2	apply a critical eye to (popular) media narratives in your everyday life; critically reflect on the different ways of creating knowledge about (popular) media narratives.
Course 3	evaluate your position in relation to text for young audience from different perspectives (including socially, culturally, linguistically, and historically) and critically think about the impact of this specific position; critically reflect on the notion of positioning oneself and make decisions on what we consider to be within and without our context.

Table 1. Learning goals related to character building in the three selected courses.

Results and discussion
In this section, we present the analysis of the data from our three-part study on the implementation of qualitative research methods as tools for the formative assessment of character building. The data analyzed here was collected by the authors. One of the authors was the primary teacher in all three courses and was therefore present for all educational activities in these courses, while the other author was present for all moments of explicit assessment in the courses. Throughout the semester, both authors came together on a weekly basis to discuss their observations and decide on possible necessary changes in the structure of the study. Students were explicitly included in this discussion during the first class and the final class of the courses. The input from the students is included in the analysis presented below. The data was analyzed with an eye for the perceived effects of the three different assessment types. We present the advantages and complications that we encountered in all three types and note suggestions for the implementation of each type. Before we evaluate the specific results for each of the three assessment types, we address three complications that occurred in all three settings.

General findings
The most explicit complication that occurred in all three classrooms was rooted in students' unfamiliarity with the concept of character building. During the first class of each of the three courses, the teacher made special mention of the learning goals related to character building and the assessment types designed to test them. Students responded with surprise and even confusion to these discussions and needed quite some time and explanation before the purpose and intended outcome of these assignments landed with them. Students needed an explicit and elaborate introduction and explanation of character building before it could be taught and assessed, which is in line with observations made

in different contexts (cf. Kristjánsson, 2017; Kiss & Euben, 2010; Leesen & Van Lenning, 2021). Based on this finding, we encourage teachers to introduce the notion of character building at the beginning of their course. The abstract notion of character building can be made more concrete in the context of the course by formulating one or two learning goals related to character education, namely specifying the areas in which the course will facilitate character growth. In turn, this helps students to understand what is expected of them. Teachers can give different kinds of prompts to assist students in reflecting on their own character building. Based on previous studies (Ruiz-Primo & Furtak, 2007; Furtak & Ruiz-Primo, 2008), we advise teachers to avoid prompts that are too general (e.g. 'How have you developed in terms of character building?') and formulate more specific (for example, directly related to the course learning goals) and practical prompts (e.g. 'What part of this week's course can you bring with you outside the university walls?'; 'In what other part of your life can you apply this knowledge or skill?').

Following the global Covid-19 pandemic, a substantial part of our education has become at least partially online. Our observations suggest that implementing character education through online education is possible, albeit with limitations. Online environments proved beneficial for preparatory work and individual reflection, although they were found to be mostly disruptive in relation to exchange between students. Discussions on character building tend to include personal topics that can make students feel vulnerable and awkward. An online environment contributed to this sense of restriction and blocked meaningful conversations, which is again in line with previous findings (Van Lenning & De Regt, 2022). Whenever possible, we advise teachers to host discussions related to character education in an offline context.

Finally, as character education is a new perspective for most students, we run the risk of losing sight of this dimension after the introduction in the first class. In order to help students to remain engaged with their character growth, the topic needs to come up in regular teaching activities outside of the assessment. Accordingly, teachers should identify moments and opportunities of character building whenever they come up in class, which can manifest in different ways; for example, when students link the class discussion to observations from their daily life, or whenever the teacher notices that a student has changed their opinion on a societal issue after a critical discussion during the course. Teachers can refer to input by students in class discussions, which makes them feel seen and that their work in this aspect is taken seriously. Teachers are also encouraged to highlight moments when they signal character building in their own development. Next to this, teachers are advised to inquire from time to time how students are working with character building. If they are facing issues, these can be addressed in a group setting.

Findings from the journal study
Our first assessment type was structured as a journal study. Given (2008) argues that "using journals is one of the most effective research tools to mine the rich personal experiences and emotions of participants' inner lives" (p.214). Journals are used in

qualitative research to allow participants the agency to decide on the amount of information that they seek to disclose, the way in which they decide to present this information, and the moment at which they log this information. Using this strategy to assess character education can therefore direct the agency to the students rather than the teacher. The journal study was operationalized as an assessment type by encouraging students to reflect on the possible moral implications of the different learning tools of their course (e.g. literature, assignments, lecture, in-class discussion). They can log their reflections on a dedicated discussion board on Canvas, where they can also respond to each other's posts. Students were required to post at least five reflections and respond to as many posts by other students throughout the semester. They are free to choose what part of the course material they post a reflection on. This assessment type allows for a large degree of agency and individual reflection on the part of the student.

The journal study was implemented in an elective course for a BA program that is also included in a number of pre-master trajectories. As a result, this group of students did not know each other very well, they did not often see each other in other courses and many of them were new to the university context. At first, students were hesitant to use Canvas to post reflections. During our final class, students explained that they were intimidated by the semi-public nature of the platform used. This hesitation was broken when a small number of enthusiastic students started posting regularly, thereby giving the other students the confidence to do the same. Many students started out responding to other people's posts, before posting their own original reflections. Group learning was therefore present from the very beginning. Students confirmed that this assignment had facilitated a sense of community among the students. It ensured that students remained in contact with each other outside of the classroom and were able to share more personal reflections more quickly. This was particularly beneficial for this group, as the students came from different backgrounds and were not grouped together in other classes.

However, it is important to stresss that this sense of vulnerability is something to take seriously as it can hinder students in their self-expression. One way to create a safe(r) environment for students is by limiting the public nature of the posts, e.g. by creating platforms for small groups of students. Another way in which the teacher can encourage students to participate is by participating themselves. It became clear that students responded positively whenever the teacher highlighted moments of her own developing character in the context of the course. After these moments in which the teacher showed vulnerability herself, students posted more – and more meaningful – reflections on the platforms.' This strategy was even more effective whenever the teacher included posts from the students in her own reflections (e.g. 'I read a reflection post by one of you in which they connected a theme of last week's class to their own ambitions and it got me thinking about my own relation to this topic'). Students later reported that this made them feel seen and that it stressed that their character development was taken seriously.

We made participation mandatory for this assessment type. Although we did not assign a numerical grade to the quality of the reflections, we required students to post at least five original reflections and at least five responses to reflections from their peers during the fourteen-week course. Students reported back that they needed this top-down incentive to participate. However, due to the personal nature of this type of education, it is necessary to strike a balance between educational structure and intrinsic motivation, which was ensured by setting a formal goal for the number of reflections and responses in which students needed to participate, while allowing them the freedom to select the class and topic they want to reflect on based on their own interests and ambitions. A suggestion made by our students was to also allow freedom in the form of their reflection. Whereas we had asked for written reflections, students expressed the desire to express themselves via a variety of forms, including voice messages, images, music, and videos.

Findings from the focus group interviews
Our second assessment type was structured as a set of focus group interviews. This is an interview strategy in which a researcher leads a small group of participants in a theme-based discussion. Due to the free and dialogical nature of this setting, focus groups allow participants to explore their own ideas while being stimulated by each other. The aim of this discussion is not to reach a certain conclusion, but rather the researcher uses the conversation and group dynamic as their data (Given, 2008, pp.353-4). Used as an assessment type, we organized three fifteen-minute focus group sessions at the beginning, middle, and end of a course. Students were asked to prepare these sessions beforehand via individual reflections at home. During the sessions, the teacher used specific questions that relate to character education to open the conversation but allowed the students to control the direction of the conversation. This assessment type is particularly useful in creating a dialogue and an appreciation for the diversity of views and experiences around a topic.

This assessment type was implemented in a second-year MA course. This meant that the group of students had already been following classes together for a full academic year and were familiar and comfortable with each other. The discussions were held in small groups of approximately five students per group plus one teacher or teaching assistant. The quality of the students' input in these discussions was not measured via a numerical grade, but all students were required to participate in all three discussions. In order to heighten the quality of the discussions, students were asked to prepare these beforehand on an individual level. Examples of questions offered as prompts to prepare with include: 'What parts of last week's class will you take with you outside university walls?', 'How have you reached this course's learning goals concerning character building?', and: 'On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent have you met this course's learning goals concerning character building?' Students later reported that they generally forgot to complete these preparations. This lack of interest already indicates that students did not feel involved in this part of their course work.

This same disconnect was clearly noticeable during the in-class discussion. Despite the group's familiarity with each other, the students were visibly vulnerable and confused during these sessions. They volunteered very little contributions and had to be explicitly encouraged by the teacher to share their insights. In order to fill awkward silences, students initiated conversations on topics unrelated to character building (e.g. evaluations of the course in general, ideas they had for their final paper). Students later reported that this awkwardness came from an uncertainty about what was asked from them in these sessions. Although the explanation of the implementation on character education was the same as in the other two cases, this group was most disconnected from the topic. Based on the evaluation of this assessment type with our students in the final class, we propose that this disconnect might be a result of the incidental nature of this assessment type (not continuous but located at three specific moments in the course) and the stress on group discussion, which removes a sense of individual responsibility in the students. It might help to organize more frequent discussions and make the individual preparation of the discussions mandatory. Additionally, we advise teachers to carefully prepare the group discussions by collecting moments of character growth that they observed in their classroom and in themselves. These examples can be used to inspire students when they feel lost during the discussion.

Findings from the content analysis study

Our final assessment type was constructed as a content analysis study. This method is used in research to identify patterns in data sets and trace changes in longitudinal data (Given, 2008, pp.121-122). This method was implemented in an elective course for MA students. In order to use this strategy as an assessment type, the students needed to first create their own data set and second to analyze this data set. At the end of every class, the teacher reserved five minutes to inquire if students had noticed any potential for character growth in that week's learning material. These reflections were encouraged via prompts that were similar to those outlined in the previously discussed methods. They were anonymously collected through a digital response system and then posted on Canvas by us. Because the reflections were collected anonymously, students were not hindered by a sense of vulnerability (as was the case with the journal study), which helped them to be open and honest in their reflections. The setup facilitated individual reflections and ensured that character education remained an explicitly visible part throughout the duration of the course. A disadvantage of this setup is the limited time that is offered to students to facilitate their reflection. Students later confirmed that the time constraint affected the quality of their reflections. Again, concrete and practical prompts offered by the teacher can be a constructive way to help students to overcome this mental block. It should be noted that the digital response system can present technical problems for students, which raises obstacles in their moment of self-reflection. To prevent this, the teacher would also use the response system in all other parts of her teaching, thus ensuring that the students were comfortable with the system.

Because the students added new reflections every week, the data set expanded throughout the course. During the final class of the course, the students were asked to analyze the data set that they themselves had created. They were instructed to look for any recurring themes or frequently mentioned obstacles, and any significant outliers in the data. Students were also asked to think of reasons for patterns or outliers. Finally, students were asked to compare their own entries with the results of their content analysis, assessing how their own learning curve resonated with the group. The teacher and students discussed the results of their analysis and reflected on the implications, which helped students to connect their individual learning to the group's learning. It proved mostly constructive as many students were able to gain an insight into the different ways in which different students developed during the course. Most notably, students remarked that they were struck by the strong variety in their peers' reflections: different people took away different lessons and opportunities from the course, depending on their own interests and lived experiences. It should be noted that this final exercise requires quite some analytic skills from the students. The assignment succeeded because the students in this course were all in a master's program and were trained in content analysis as a method. However, it would naturally be unsuitable for students who lack this training.

Conclusion

In light of the growing interest in character education at our university, this article has explored one of the main complications in implementing this type of education in our curricula, namely how character development can be assessed. We propose that strategies from qualitative research can serve as the basis for constructing these assessment types. The analysis of our results indicates that different strategies all come with different opportunities and obstacles in facilitating the assessment of character education. The different assessment types might foreground group learning or individual learning, require little or considerable supervtaision from the teacher, create situations in which students are vulnerable or enhance a sense of community. Teachers will need to construct their assessment type based on the specific classroom situation (size of the group, online/offline teaching, familiarity among the students, students' analytic skills, etc.) Table 2 presents a preliminary list of criteria for effective engagement in the formative assessment of character building, which can serve as a starting point.

Out of the three assessment types explored in this pilot study, the journal study resulted in the most positive outcome. Both students and teachers agreed that this assessment not only facilitated a meaningful conversation on the impact of the course on their character, but it also created a sense of community that helped students to feel at home in the classroom and at the university in general. The least effective strategy out of the three was clearly the focus group sessions. Although this assessment might be improved by making the individual preparation for each session a mandatory requirement, the present execution of the assessment clearly did not encourage students to reflect on their character development. In fact, it actively made students feel awkward and insufficient in the classroom.

Whereas this study reports on preliminary results based on a small data set collected in one department, we see sufficient indication that the general strategy promoted here shows immediate results in a classroom context. We therefore encourage colleagues to pursue developing and fine-tuning these kinds of assessment types so that teachers are provided with the necessary tools to include the assessment of character education in their students. Despite all shortcomings that remain regarding these strategies, all of them work to foreground character education as an explicitly visible part of students' academic journey.

General criteria for effective engagement in the formative assessment of character building
Provide clear instructions at the start of the course
Explicitly encourage continued engagement with the theme throughout the course
Present general learning goals that indicate the kind of character building that is facilitated by the course
Allow space for individualized interpretations of the general learning goals
Combine individual reflection with communal learning
Create a sense of community among students
Prevent students feeling too vulnerable
Limit the number of students involved in discussions on character building
Use online platforms only for individual reflection, not for communal exchange
Focus on formative rather than summative assessment
Do not evaluate the assessment via a numerical grade from the teacher

Table 2. List of criteria for effective engagement in the formative assessment of character building

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About the authors

Suzanne van der Beek is Assistant Professor of Children's Literature and Online Culture at the Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences

Beatrijs de Coninck completed the MA Culture Studies at Tilburg University and currently works as a primary school teacher

Ties van Daal is a student in the Master Societal Transitions and Philosophy at Erasmus University Rotterdam and an alumnus of the Tilburg School of Economics and Management

Dries Deweer is Associate Professor in Political Philsophy at the Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences

Martí Guasch is Assistant Professor of Accounting at the Tilburg School of Economics and Management

Aris Gude is a student in the Master Theology at the Tilburg School of Theology

Stéphanie van Gulijk is Full Professor of Private Law at Tilburg Law School

Ian Hale is a student in the Master Theology at the Tilburg School of Theology

Berend Holwerda is a student in the Master Economics at the Tilbug School of Economics and Management.

Anna Hüvös is a PhD candidate at University College Tilburg

Ya-Ping (Amy) Hsiao is a Senior Assessment Specialist at Tilburg University

Natascha Kienstra is Professor of Moral Education at the Tilburg School of Theology

Astrid Kramer is Senior Lecturer at the Tilburg School of Economics and Management

Marije Markus is Head of Educational Innovation at at Tilburg School of Law

Lize-Mari Mitchell is Education Innovation Policy Officer at Tilburg Law School and PhD candidate at Universiteit voor Humanistiek, Utrecht

Trinh Nguyen is a PhD candidate at University College Tilburg

Roshnee Ossewaarde-Lowtoo is Assistant Professor in Philosophy at the Tilburg School of Theology

Marco Da Rin is Associate Professor in Finance at the Tilburg School of Economics and Management

Miranda Stienstra is Senior Lecturer at the Tilburg School of Economics and Management

Katja Zimmermann is Assistant Professor in Property Law at the University of Groningen and student in the MA Canon Law at KU Leuven.

WHO IS IT ALL FOR? THE STUDENT AT CENTER STAGE