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## **Fostering Virtue Formation in Aspiring School Leaders: One Institution's Journey**

Maureen V. Spelman, EdD<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

Ethical leadership is widely regarded as being central to the task of nurturing schools to become moral institutions that promote the growth and character development of Pre K-12 students (Berkowitz 2011, 94). In fact, several scholars agree that creating and sustaining a culture of character is one of the key responsibilities of school leaders (Berkowitz 2011, 104-105; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano 2018, 45; Sergiovanni 1992, xiii-xiv). It has often been noted that school leaders not only need to "talk the talk," but more importantly "walk the walk" as visible role models. The visibility of the school leader as the centerpiece in school culture can help to ensure the quality and success of the character development of the entire school community (Berkowitz 2011, 109). If we agree that transforming the culture of schools is a task that is critically dependent upon the leaders, then those leaders need to be the character they want to see in their school communities.

Berkowitz (2011, 96), however, cautions that transformational leaders need to first focus on a change of self as they prepare to lead schools in changing the culture. While character development is a life-long journey, educational leadership programs can facilitate the deepening of the individual character of candidates, thus better enabling them to go forward and support a culture of character in their future leadership roles. Increasing the capacity of future school leaders with developmental intentionality can be a significant factor in the subsequent success of school-wide character education programs and overall school culture (Drago-Severson and Blum-Stefano 2018, 53). Thus, institutions preparing future school leaders may want to consider focusing not only on specialized knowledge and management skills, but also on the development of leader character. Such a holistic approach would be designed not just to prepare effective leaders, but to prepare effective and ethical leaders.

### **Literature Review**

A review of the literature in business, medicine, and education suggests significant benefits in grounding the curriculum of leadership programs in the acquisition of virtues, the development of personal character, and the cultivation of practical wisdom. Good leadership is informed by virtues; and intentionally planning for the study of and opportunities for practice with a wide range of leadership virtues can increase the probability that a program will produce future leaders who are both effective and ethical. Hackett and Wang (2012, 874-875) suggest that leader virtues can be acquired and refined through targeted instruction and opportunities to practice.

Annas (2011, 12) suggests that the intentional threading of opportunities to explore and practice virtues throughout the curriculum can provide the time, experience, and habituation needed to develop and internalize virtuous behavior. A similar stance is offered by Newstead et al. (2019, 5)

suggesting that good leadership is informed by virtue, and mapping leadership virtues throughout the program curriculum can support the development of future leaders to be not only effective but also ethical. “The relationship between virtues and character suggests that virtues-based leadership development will facilitate the character development of leaders and the propensity for good leadership practices. . .” (Newstead et al. 2019, 5).

Leaders engaging in the processes of making decisions, judgments, and/ or navigating ethical dilemmas are often challenged by elements of ambiguity or even conflicting values. School leaders at all levels frequently struggle and search for the correct path to guide their decisions in complex circumstances. Fullan (2020, 19) posits that in education, moral purpose serves as both the end and the means. Schwartz and Sharpe (2010, 3) suggest that what Aristotle called *phronesis* or practical wisdom is a key skill in the process of making the right choices. Hackett and Wang (2012, 872) and Newstead et al. (2019, 5) agree that developing the virtue of practical wisdom should be a key consideration in the design of leadership programs. While Kristjánsson et al. (2021, 240-241) describes practical wisdom as a meta-virtue that supports the capacity of knowing and choosing the correct moral action, Kristjánsson further elaborates that practical wisdom is a process of deliberating between competing emotions, values, and alternatives (Kristjánsson 2015a, 303).

According to Spillane and Lowenhaupt (2019, 9-12), recognizing and managing dilemmas is central to the work of school leaders and knowledge of the rules alone will not be sufficient when school leaders are faced with the need to deliberate and adjudicate in determining the proper course of action. They note that school leaders regularly face complicated dilemmas that derive from a clash of values and are expected to craft solutions that are grounded in wise moral choices (Spillane and Lowenhaupt 2019, 9-12). Learning to handle challenging situations takes time and practice. A study of rules and codes will not be sufficient; a curriculum designed to prepare school leaders will need to intentionally integrate opportunities to explore, interpret, and apply practical wisdom as well as critically reflect on authentic challenging situations. Institutions of higher education, then, need to prepare leadership candidates for more than a specific job or role; there is a critical need to engage in the character education and character development of aspiring leadership candidates (Jubilee Centre and Oxford Character Project 2020, 2-3; Lamb, et al. 2021, 38-39).

## **Process**

The character-based education approach that has been adopted at North Central College’s educational leadership program came about as the result of a generous grant from the Kern Family Foundation. One charge stemming from the three-part grant project was to integrate virtue ethics throughout every aspect of the graduate educational leadership curriculum, infusing those values into all content, assignments, and course materials. Aspiring school leaders frequently cite the reasons behind the decision to pursue an advanced leadership degree as a desire to make a difference, solve issues, and bring good leadership to their future schools and districts (Keohane 2010, 197). Character-based leadership programs have the potential to equip aspiring school leaders with the intellectual, moral, and civic virtues as well as performance strengths that will enable them to make wise choices and contribute to not only their own flourishing but also that of the entire school community (Jubilee Centre and Oxford Character Project 2020, 7-8).

### *Articulating the “Why”*

The process at North Central College began with a series of collegial conversations involving members of a redesign team composed of the educational leadership program faculty and the department chair. These initial conversations focused on coming to a consensus regarding the contextually unique grounding elements that would guide the redesign process. Next, the team discussed and debated the specific leadership virtues and leadership styles that best fit the vision of candidates exiting the North Central graduate educational leadership program. These conversations required a reexamination of the “why” (Sinek 2009, 35-40) as discussions centered on what leadership candidates should know and be able to do as they exit the program. The curriculum redesign task force thoughtfully explored a plethora of leadership virtues through the lens of backwards design. Questions that were debated included:

- What should candidates exiting the educational leadership program look like?
- What should leadership candidates know and be able to do so that they can build a culture of character in their future school settings?
- Which leadership virtues and performance strengths will be emphasized?
- Which leadership styles and character strengths will they need to develop to then go forward and build the capacity of those who will be in their care?

The vision was to create a redesigned curriculum with an intentional focus on the moral purpose of building the capacity of graduate candidates so that they can go forward and bring Cultures of Character practices into the heart of their school communities. As a result, the curriculum redesign team agreed that the delivery of specialized knowledge and management skills would be viewed through the lens of virtue ethics. The team made the collaborative decision to ground the educational leadership program in context-specific leadership virtues and styles, the development of leader character, and the cultivation of practical wisdom.

### *Reviewing the literature*

The curriculum redesign task force explored a plethora of articles, texts, websites, etc. as they gathered information and knowledge to guide them in identifying the grounding elements, leadership virtues, and leadership styles that best fit the program vision for leadership candidates. Hackett and Wang (2012, 883-884) offer a synthesis of six cardinal leader virtues to consider in the design of leadership programs. Two of these cardinal virtues (humanity and truthfulness) have been drawn from the Confucian perspective and four (courage, temperance, justice, and prudence) are considered Aristotelian cardinal virtues (Hackett and Wang, 2012, 883-884). These six virtues are drawn from both Eastern and Western cultures and, therefore, may provide a set of leader virtues uniquely appropriate for the cultural diversity reflected in our twenty-first century schools. Hackett and Wang (2012, 883-884) propose that infusing a study of these virtues in business leadership programs is likely to positively impact leadership effectiveness and enhance overall performance in future administrative roles. Infusing educational leadership curricula with a study of key leadership virtues may have similar merits.

However, virtues are not a common topic or theme in many educational leadership programs. Faith-based institutions frequently reference virtues within their vision and mission statements;

but virtues are not generally a common topic, theme, or strand mapped throughout the curriculum. That being noted, the cardinal virtues proposed by Hackett and Wang (2012, 884-885) served as a starting point as the educational leadership curriculum designers built a contextualized list of leadership virtues.

The team found it reassuring that the comprehensive literature review confirmed their belief that there is no one definitive list of leader virtues. In fact, the seminal framework article from the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtue notes that virtues are relative to the school context – the key is that each school or institution needs to select and prioritize a set of virtues that reflect the history, ethos, location, mission, vision, purpose . . . and intent of that unique context (Jubilee Centre 2017, 3). Regardless of the word choice or selected emphasis, the curriculum redesign task force agreed that the school leader is the centerpiece and key to the quality and success of programs aimed at transforming the culture of the school.

However, a focus on virtues without an emphasis on the importance of the moral compass may not result in the development of candidates who are equipped to use virtues for appropriate aims (Berkowitz 2011, 101-102; Kristjánsson 2015b, 1-2). Dishon and Goodman (2017, 193) argue that curricular approaches lacking moral aims should not be considered genuine character education programs. Based on an extensive literature review, an examination of character education models and collegial conversations, the curriculum redesign task force adapted relevant elements to create our unique educational leadership program Cultures of Character framework. The team agreed to focus on fifteen specific moral, intellectual, civic leader virtues and performance strengths. The overarching goal is to anchor these leadership virtues in the mega-virtue of practical wisdom. In addition, the team decided to emphasize four distinct leadership styles that have the potential to support cultures of character. Figure 1 represents the unique Cultures of Character framework that was finally settled upon. While candidates explore a wide range of leader virtues and leadership styles as they engage in program assignments and activities, there is a strong emphasis on the virtues and styles embedded in this contextualized framework.

Figure 1  
Cultures of Character Framework



### *Creating and Mapping Character-Based Learning Outcomes*

Reflective conversations led to the agreement that leadership candidates need to experience a program of carefully sequenced coursework that has been intentionally infused with the elements of our adopted framework. The curricular redesign task force agreed that good leadership is informed by virtue and that intentionally threading the study of virtue ethics and character education can increase the probability that the redesigned program will support the development of future leaders who are both effective and ethical. Once grounding elements and the Cultures of Character framework were clearly established, the curriculum redesign task force began creating programmatic learning outcomes that would ensure the infusion of character-based elements throughout the program. The programmatic learning outcomes were written as statements that describe the knowledge or skills candidates should acquire by the end of the program. The curriculum redesign task force settled upon five distinct Cultures of Character programmatic learning outcomes as well as three granular sub-outcomes for each to guide candidates' developmental progression toward the goal of moral leadership. The sub-outcomes are written in a candidate-centered, measurable fashion that is concise, meaningful, and achievable (see *table 1*).

Table 1  
Cultures of Character Programmatic Learning Outcomes and Sub-Outcomes

<p><b>PLO 1</b></p>	<p><b>Candidates will move through a progression in their acquisition of the program-specific leadership virtues.</b> Candidates will demonstrate and/ or provide evidence of: <i>1.1 developing knowledge and understanding related to leadership virtues.</i> <i>1.2 engaging in practice and reasoning with leadership virtues.</i> <i>1.3 modeling leadership virtues in classroom and field experiences.</i></p>
<p><b>PLO 2</b></p>	<p><b>Candidates will critically engage in character development toward becoming a virtuous leader.</b> Candidates will demonstrate and/ or provide evidence of: <i>2.1 developing knowledge and understanding related to character development.</i> <i>2.2 engaging in challenging situations and working towards deepening character growth.</i> <i>2.3 engaging in critical reflection focused on how leader virtues and character influence leadership decisions.</i></p>
<p><b>PLO 3</b></p>	<p><b>Candidates will explore, interpret, and apply practical wisdom in authentic field experiences with a focus on problem-solving, equity, and advocacy situations.</b> Candidates will demonstrate and/ or provide evidence of: <i>3.1 developing knowledge and understanding related to practical wisdom.</i> <i>3.2 practicing with dilemmas that present competing emotions, values in content specific courses.</i> <i>3.3 applying leader virtues in classroom and internship-based experiences.</i></p>
<p><b>PLO 4</b></p>	<p><b>Candidates will explore leadership styles with a focus on moral, ethical, servant, and transformational leadership.</b> Candidates will demonstrate and/ or provide evidence of: <i>4.1 developing knowledge and understanding related to leadership styles.</i> <i>4.2 engaging in program activities through the lens of leadership styles.</i> <i>4.3 applying leadership styles in classroom and field experiences.</i></p>
<p><b>PLO 5</b></p>	<p><b>Candidates will explore a variety of character development programs and initiatives.</b> Candidates will demonstrate and/or provide evidence of: <i>5.1 developing knowledge and understanding of character development programs and initiatives.</i> <i>5.2 assessing character development programs and initiatives in schools.</i> <i>5.3 designing a Cultures of Character project during the Internship experience.</i></p>

The curriculum redesign task force then proceeded to map the Cultures of Character learning outcomes and sub-outcomes throughout the existing set of program courses. The subsequent educational leadership program curriculum map identified the specific courses where sub-

outcomes will be introduced, reinforced and/ or practiced, and finally mastered and assessed. The final curriculum map clearly designated the progressive level of mastery expected in each course (see *table 2*).

Table 2  
Programmatic Learning Outcomes Curriculum Map

	<b>PLO 1</b>	<b>PLO 2</b>	<b>PLO 3</b>	<b>PLO 4</b>	<b>PLO 5</b>
Mission-Driven Leadership	<b>1.1 - I</b>	<b>2.1 - I</b>		<b>4.1 - I</b>	
School, Home, & Community	<b>1.2 - R</b>	<b>2.2 -P/R</b>	<b>3.1 - I</b>	<b>4.2 - P/R</b>	<b>5.1 - I</b>
Curriculum & Program Assessment		<b>2.2 - P/R</b>	<b>3.1 - I</b>	<b>4.1 - I</b> <b>4.2 - P/R</b>	<b>5.2 - P/R</b>
Supervision & Instruction		<b>2.1 - I</b>		<b>4.2 - P/R</b>	
School Law & Policies	<b>1.2 - P/R</b>	<b>2.3 - M/A</b>	<b>3.2 - P/R</b>		
Operations & Management	<b>1.2 - P/R</b>	<b>2.3 - M/A</b>	<b>3.2 - P/R</b>		
Education Internship I, II, & III	<b>1.3 - M/A</b>	<b>2.3- M/A</b>	<b>3.3 - M/A</b>	<b>4.3 - M/A</b>	<b>5.3 - M/A</b>
Educational Leadership Capstone	<b>1.3 - M/A</b>			<b>4.3 - M/A</b>	<b>5.3 - M/A</b>

### ***Evaluating Current Practices***

Studies suggest that leader virtues, leader character, leadership styles, and practical wisdom can be deepened and refined through targeted instruction in tandem with opportunities for practice. As a next step, the redesign team examined the alignment of the Cultures of Character programmatic learning sub-outcomes with existing program courses. This task involved the creation of an expanded curriculum map that identified activities, assignments, and assessments aligned with each programmatic learning sub-outcome. At this stage, the curriculum redesign task force focused on highlighting and celebrating the pieces already in place and locating gaps that needed to be addressed. Eventually the expanded curriculum map specifically identified the activities, assignments, and assessments aligned with each sub-outcome, much the same as programs already align courses with the national and State leadership standards. The goal was to integrate Cultures of Character throughout every aspect of the curriculum and course delivery.

An example of the expanded curriculum map for the initial educational leadership course demonstrates the intentional integration of the embedded sub-outcomes (see *table 3*).

Table 3  
Programmatic Learning Outcomes Expanded Curriculum Map for Mission Driven Leadership

<b>Course: Mission Driven Leadership</b>	<b>PLO 1 leadership virtues</b>	<b>PLO 2 own character development</b>	<b>PLO 4 moral, ethical, servant, transformational leadership</b>
<b><i>Progressive Level</i></b>	<b>1.1 "I" (introduced)</b>	<b>2.1 "I" (introduced)</b>	<b>4.1 "I" (introduced)</b>
<b><i>Aligned class activities</i></b>	Prerequisite Virtue PowerPoint Presentations  Ethical Dilemma Discussions	Character & Virtue Pre-Assessments Discussion Forum Conversations	Prerequisite Leadership Readings  Instructor Presentations
<b><i>Aligned course assignments</i></b>	Leadership Virtue – Self-Assessment & Assessment by School Leaders	Leadership Identity Assignment Leadership Dispositions – Self- Assessment & Assessment by School Leaders	Leadership Aspirations Interview  Ethical Dilemma Group Notes
<b><i>Aligned formative assessments</i></b>	Writing Prompt Pre & Post-Assessment	DIT Pre- & Post Assessment Phase II E-Portfolio	Leadership Artifact Reflections Leadership Learning Teams Presentation

The curriculum redesign task force then moved on to reviewing the master course outlines that serve as the basis for each instructor’s working syllabus. These educational leadership master course outlines include the basics and non-negotiables for each program course. The curricular redesign task force compared the expanded curriculum map to the existing master course syllabi. The eight educational leadership program master course outlines were subsequently revised to intentionally articulate, enhance, and align the existing program structure with the Cultures of Character mission and vision – essentially supplementing the excellent courses already in place. The revised master course outlines highlight and amplify the character education and virtue ethics elements already contained in the original program and fill in new elements resulting from the creation of Cultures of Character programmatic learning outcomes and sub-outcomes. In addition,

the curriculum redesign task force further enhanced the existing master course outlines with the addition of activities, assignments, and assessments described in the expanded curriculum map.

### ***Onboarding Instructors***

To ensure that all instructors are supported as they navigate this redesigned educational leadership program, a persistent Blackboard course has been created. Each program faculty member, adjunct instructor, and internship supervisor now has access to this persistent course site in their personal Blackboard course listing. The Blackboard site contains a plethora of resources to help deepen each instructor's understanding of the educational leadership program Cultures of Character initiative and support their efforts to address the programmatic sub-outcomes into their respective courses. In this Blackboard site, adjunct and new instructors can review papers, articles, links to websites and videos to deepen their understanding of the character-based curriculum revisions. In addition, there are folders containing important content and competence resources. There are also activities that provide opportunities for instructors to reflect and ask questions via Blackboard discussion tools.

The overall intention of this persistent Blackboard site is to strengthen our professional collaboration partnerships and carefully onboard all program instructors. New faculty members, adjunct instructors and internship supervisors will play a critical role in the fidelity of implementation and modeling of the Cultures of Character programmatic learning outcomes that have been adopted and embedded in each educational leadership program course. As instructors engage with the onboarding site folders and exercises, this Blackboard resource will provide opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and understanding as well as help to build a shared Cultures of Character vocabulary.

### ***Professional Development & Mentoring***

As a first professional development step, an introductory YouTube video entitled *Supporting the Development of Competence & Character in Aspiring School Leaders* was created and distributed to each new faculty member, adjunct instructor, and internship supervisor. The goal of the video presentation is to build knowledge and understanding related to the character-based revisions as well as create buy-in and a sense of ownership for the redesigned curriculum. This video presentation provides an overview of the process and activities that the educational leadership faculty engaged in as they collaborated to intentionally infuse character-based education and virtue ethics into all aspects of the educational leadership program. Each adjunct instructor and internship supervisor was then invited to participate in a one-to-one Zoom meeting with the coordinator of character initiatives to walk them through the program context and grounding as well as the resources on Blackboard.

Adjunct instructors often operate in silos, quite removed from the collegial environment that full-time faculty members enjoy. It is critical that the onboarding activities be implemented with an awareness of and compassion for their unique situations. Each full-time faculty member has been assigned as the point person for specific program courses. As adjunct instructors are scheduled to teach an educational leadership course, the assigned faculty member serves as the contact person and personal mentor for that instructor. This one-to-one pairing is designed to allow for further

discussions around the vision, mission, framework, and programmatic learning outcomes with a focus on implications for their respective course assignments. These mentoring conversations also provide a platform for a deeper exploration and sharing of resources housed on program webpages and the Blackboard Onboarding site. Faculty mentors can also offer support and examples from their own course syllabi to support adjunct instructors and new faculty in planning for implementation of the Cultures of Character framework and programmatic learning sub-outcomes into their respective courses.

For example, the first course in the educational leadership program has been revised and enhanced to not only meet the national and State standards but to do so through the lens of virtue ethics and the Cultures of Character vision and mission.

- The previous course text has been replaced with a series of leadership-focused articles.
- In the approach of a flipped classroom, prerequisite PowerPoint presentations offer direct instruction on the leadership virtues that are a focus of the Cultures of Character framework.
- Weekly instructor presentations explore leadership theory and offer introductions to thought leaders across a range of professional fields through the lens of moral leadership.
- Practice with character-based ethical dilemmas takes place during each on-campus class meeting. Each dilemma group activity is guided by a reflection frame and the exercises conclude with time to reflect in community on character-related learning.
- Assignment rubrics have also been enhanced to include criteria that encourages candidates to reflect on how each assignment has impacted their growing competence, as well as their development toward becoming a virtuous leader.

Ongoing professional development opportunities are made available to adjunct instructors and internship supervisors as they become available from a variety of character and virtue focused organizations. Throughout the academic year all instructors are presented with dates and options for both in-person and online professional development sessions. Program faculty serve as mentors and continue with supportive and problem-solving conversations as needed, to build knowledge and maintain strong relationships with all instructors. The goal is to keep all instructors engaged and supported to ensure the fidelity of implementation for the redesigned curriculum.

### ***Leadership Candidate Voice***

Candidate voice is a valuable source for feedback, constructive criticism, and continuous program improvement. At the graduate level, platforms for the inclusion of the voice of leadership candidates is offered in a myriad of ways. The revised courses offer formative opportunities for candidate choice and voice in character education focused assignments. For example, in the first course, Mission Driven Leadership, candidates develop personal vision, mission, beliefs, and values statements. Later in the Curriculum & Program Assessment course, candidates explore a variety of character education assessments and then design an original character education needs assessment tool. That original needs assessment can later be part of the internship Cultures of Character project. Ethical dilemmas related to competency topics are discussed and debated in courses throughout the program. Finally, in the Educational Leadership Capstone course,

candidates produce a video detailing a personal vision for character education in their school or organization as well as a formal leadership platform paper that includes a personal definition of leadership along with a discussion of leadership style, leader character, and how leadership virtues are congruent with that personal definition.

Instructors are committed to intentionally finding ways to include candidate voice throughout the program. The redesigned courses also offer opportunities for voice in candidate-led professional learning presentations coupled with opportunities for peer feedback. Leadership candidate voice is solicited in both informal and formal course evaluations. End of term informal evaluations invite candidates to “pay it forward” and offer suggestions to improve courses. In addition, an external assessment team engages leadership candidates in one-to-one interviews at the beginning, middle, and end of the program.

### ***Measuring Impact***

The plan is to engage in a cycle of assessment and improvement and so ensure that the educational leadership program continuously evolves to meet the ever-changing needs of aspiring leaders. Moving forward, feedback will be gathered from all stakeholders (faculty, adjunct instructors, internship supervisors, leadership candidates, and eventually alumni) via surveys/ questionnaires and focus group conversations. Each spring the faculty will meet to examine and analyze quantitative data at both the course and program levels. These data reviews will be enhanced with qualitative data from focus group conversations. The goal will be to reflect and dialogue around all the data to guide ongoing efforts to offer an exemplary educational leadership program that supports the development of leadership candidates with a strong moral compass.

In addition, a team of external reviewers has been engaged to provide an objective assessment and analysis of the impact of the revised educational leadership program. This external assessment team aims to assess the impact of the full revised program as well as track the impact over time as program graduates move into leadership roles. For the full program assessment, the external team will analyze data from a variety of sources. Each candidate will take a Defining Issues Test pre-assessment during the first week of the first course in the educational leadership program. The same assessment will be administered as a post assessment in the final week of this two-year program. Leadership candidates will engage with a Professional Standards for Educational Leaders self-assessment at three distinct points throughout their journey through the program. The external assessment team will also hold one-to-one interviews with candidates at the beginning, middle, and end of the program. Once candidates have completed their journey through the fully revised program, the external assessment team plans to implement an Intermediate Concept Measure tool (currently in the design phase) to determine the impact of the revised program over time.

As researchers in higher education, program faculty will measure and evaluate the impact of curricular revisions at the course level. Assessments are being used to gather quantitative and qualitative data to guide the continuous improvement of the revised, character-based education curriculum. A variety of assessment tools have been planned to monitor and measure the impact and fidelity of efforts to meet national and State standards, as well as the Cultures of Character programmatic outcomes and sub-outcomes. For example, in the first program course – Mission Driven Leadership – the following set of assessments are in place:

- Pre and Post Defining Issues Test (Moral Reasoning).
- Pre and Post Writing Samples (Virtue Knowledge and Understanding).
- Formative Assessments (Virtue Components).
  - Online Discussion Forum Conversations.
  - Group Reflections on Ethical Dilemmas.
  - Phase II Interview Transcripts.

## Conclusion

Realistically, the work of grounding education leadership programs in leader virtues, character development, and practical wisdom may not be for those who are not fully committed to the work. The internal culture will need to be carefully considered and navigated. Several daunting challenges face those undertaking the task of redesigning programs to fully immerse leadership candidates in the transformative process of becoming effective and ethical leaders. Selection and admission processes need to be reviewed and perhaps revised. The demands of external stakeholders cannot be ignored, and so program designers will have to devise approaches to meeting national and State requirements through the lens of virtue and character. Resistance to the heavy work of curricular revisions may require difficult conversations and intentional efforts to build consensus and support. And last, but certainly not least, there will need to be a concentrated effort to provide resources and professional development to ensure the buy-in of faculty, adjunct faculty, field supervisors, and school-based mentors.

That being noted, there appear to be significant benefits to be found in the hard work of grounding the education leadership program curriculum in leader virtues, character development, and practical wisdom. Good leadership is informed by virtue and so intentionally threading the study of and opportunities for practice with leader virtues can increase the probability that a program will produce future leaders who are both effective and ethical. Opportunities to explore, discuss and evaluate the literature surrounding character education, compare various character education approaches, and participate in meaningful discussions will be critical in helping candidates to develop their own unique understanding of effective character education programs. The intentional development of candidates' personal character through practice by engaging in and reflecting on ethical dilemmas throughout coursework can better equip future leaders for the real-world of school leadership. The ability to exercise practical wisdom can be nurtured and deepened through authentic field experiences, job shadowing, as well as internship opportunities. These benefits seem to point toward the worthiness of educational leadership programs grounded in leader virtues, character development, and practical wisdom. Such programs have the potential to effectively prepare candidates to go forward and build a culture of character in their future school communities.

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## **Endnote**

1. Maureen V. Spelman currently serves as a visiting professor in the North Central College educational leadership program, as well as the coordinator for character initiatives related to the Kern Family Foundation Grant. She has held P-12 professional roles ranging from that of an elementary and junior high school teacher to department chair and principal. In the 20+ years Dr. Spelman has been in higher education she has taught in a variety of education undergraduate and graduate programs and held roles ranging from adjunct instructor to full professor. In addition, she has co-authored numerous grants to support professional development and coaching programs for educators and school leaders in the Chicago metropolitan area. Her vision is to build the capacity of school leadership candidates so that they can go forward and bring Cultures of Character practices into the heart of their school communities.