

## Inclusion as a Moral Imperative in Character Education

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### What's the goal?

An act is virtuous only if it is chosen for its own sake.

– Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*

- Moral development involves becoming **autonomous** – able to act on values you genuinely endorse (e.g., Aristotle, 2004; Kant, 2012; Piaget, 1932; Kohlberg, 1981).
- Accordingly, **character education** seeks to **foster autonomy** in young people (e.g., Jubilee Centre, 2022).



### But there's a problem...

Researchers should ensure that every person from whom data are gathered for the purposes of research consents freely and voluntarily to participation.

– BPS Code of Human Research Ethics

- As per ethical research guidelines (e.g., BPS, 2021), character education studies usually recruit **voluntary** participants.
- But volunteers are **already autonomous** (by definition).
- As a result, studies tend to include only those already disposed to virtue.
- Meanwhile, **less-autonomous individuals** – those who need more moral support – are systematically **excluded**.
- This **sampling bias** risks creating an ever-widening “**character gap**.”

### A fairer way forward

The end furnishes the motive force for the search for means, but once the means are found, they are apt to become interesting on their own account.

– Woodworth, 1918,  
*Dynamic Psychology*

- One way to correct this bias is to use **extrinsic motivators** (e.g., rewards) to widen participation.
- This could bring in students lower on the autonomy spectrum – making samples more **inclusive** and **representative**.
- This approach is not without **risks**, e.g. “motivational spillovers” (Gubler et al., 2016).
- But it could help **close the character gap**.

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