



Hindsight in Storytelling: Narrative, Moral Identity, and Character Education

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Abstract

This paper first presents a critique of the oversimplified view of contemporary character education, which has reduced it merely to the cultivation of virtues. The paper argues for a more comprehensive consideration of the integrity and individuality of character. Therefore, the concept of moral identity is crucial. The paper further explores the measurement and development of moral identity; it indicates that existing measurement tools often fall into the theoretical trap of decomposing the whole into parts, thereby failing to include the core structural features of moral identity, such as agency, coherence, and consistency. To address this shortcoming, the researcher draws upon Tappan and Brown's narrative approach, as well as Freeman's concepts of narrative reflection and hindsight, to propose that narrative methods can serve as a means to enhance the development of moral identity and as an assessment tool. Individuals can strengthen their moral identity and catalyze real moral transformations through narrative reflection and the associated emotional residues such as shame, guilt, and satisfaction. Studies have indicated that moral identity begins to form as early as middle childhood (8–12 years old) or adolescence. Hence, educators should focus on fostering moral identity during this developmental stage; this involves encouraging students to reflect on and

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- 2 narrate their own moral stories, which can enable them to deeply examine and reflect on their moral past, thereby clarifying their most cherished moral values and their prioritization. Although this paper is philosophical in nature, its primary concern lies in practical educational issues. The practical implementation of narrative approaches can be guided by the interview outlines provided by Tappan and Brown in the appendix, guiding teachers in facilitating moral story narration or writing in classrooms. The effectiveness of implementing narrative approaches remains to be validated through future empirical research.

Keywords: character education, hindsight, moral identity, narrative, virtue

說故事中的後見之明： 敘事、道德認同與品德教育

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摘 要

本文始於對當前品德教育被過度簡化為只是德行陶養的批評，主張應更全面考慮品德的完整性和個殊化。為此，道德認同的概念至關重要。本文進一步探討道德認同的測量與發展問題，指出現有的測量工具常陷入將整體分解為部分的理論困境，未能涵蓋道德認同的核心結構性特徵，如能動性、連貫性和一致性。為此，研究者借鑒Tappan和Brown的敘事取徑，以及Freeman的敘事反省與後見之明的理念，提出敘事方法能增進道德認同的發展，並作為評量工具。透過敘事反省所達致的後見之明，以及相伴的情緒衍生物，諸如羞恥、罪惡、滿足感等，一則可強化個人的道德認同，二則可作為促成真實道德轉變的催化劑。相關研究顯示，道德認同早在兒童中期（8～12歲）或青少年期即開始形成，因此建議教育工作者在此一階段應特別注意培養學生的道德認同。這是透過鼓勵學生反省並敘說己身的道德故事，使其有機會深入檢視與理解自己的道德過去，繼而明確自己最珍視的道德價值與排序。本文雖為哲學思辨性質，主要關切的卻是實際的教育問題。敘事取向的實際操作可參考附錄中Tappan和Brown的訪談大綱，作

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- 4 為教師在課堂中引導學生進行道德故事敘說或寫作的指引。至於敘事取向的實施成效則有待未來實徵研究予以驗證。

關鍵詞：品德教育、後見之明、道德認同、敘事、德行

‘There is a time in the life of every boy’, says Sherwood Anderson, ‘when he for the first time takes the backward view of life. Perhaps that is the moment when he crosses the line into manhood.’ (Tappan, 1989, p. 300)

Introduction: Misgivings about Characterizing Character Education Simply as the Inculcation of Virtues and the Ways Forward

Contemporary character education is generally understood as an educational enterprise aimed at the inculcation of virtues with Aristotle’s virtue ethics as its major theoretical foundation. Considering that character is hard to operationalize (Cunningham, 2005) and Aristotle has a sophisticated conception of virtue, the common practice of breaking up the whole (i.e., character) into parts (i.e., the virtues) and the corresponding conception of good character as being constituted by virtues has both theoretical grounding and practical utility. This kind of reasoning is also witnessed in positive psychology’s characterization of good character in terms of 24 character strengths which are subsumed under 6 virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). However, this characterization sometimes incurs such a doubt about the critical difference between character education and virtue education.

Wanting: The Wholeness and Individuality of Character

Compared to virtue, character is less impersonal (Kupperman, 1991); moreover, character ontologically marks out who I am (McKinnon, 1999). Nobody can have my character whereas you and I may have the same set

of virtues. Kupperman (1991) gives an example: what matters in the virtue of honesty is well shared by all honest people whereas what matters in your character will “set you apart from at least some other people of good character” (p. 10). That is, character has much to do with the individuality of a person. For this reason, the researcher’s concern is that this widely-accepted characterization of character education solely in terms of the inculcation of virtues may miss the wood for the trees. Specifically, the individuality of each person’s whole character is unduly overlooked. This worry is echoed by Nucci (2001, p. 137) in his chapter on “Reconceptualizing Moral Character” where he suggests that moral character should not be characterized simply as “a constellation of personality traits or virtues but, rather, the operation of the moral aspects of the self in relation to the self as a whole.” Moral character as a whole needs to be underscored. For that matter, Chen (2022) suggests that we need “reassembling the parts into a whole” as a counterpart and complement to the current practice of “breaking the whole into parts.”

How could we set out to undertake the enterprise of “reassembling the parts into a whole?” The researcher suggests that moral exemplar education gives us a clue and directs us in the direction of moral identity. The recently emerging moral exemplar studies and the resurgence of role-model education in character education especially in the wake of Zagzebski’s exemplarism (Campodonico et al., 2019; Kristjánsson, 2006; Osman, 2019; Sanderse, 2013; Zagzebski, 2017) show clearly that highly moral people are of great variety. We need to recognize that moral exemplars are of “irreducibly different types (some of which share features in common)” and acknowledging this very fact is the first step toward a realistic moral

psychology of excellence (Blum, 1994, p. 66). Given that character education is aimed at cultivating a good character, character educators should take into consideration the crude fact that good character exhibited in real people actually takes various forms and the individuality of moral character is remarkable. The aforementioned feature of being “less impersonal” characteristic of character is conspicuously instantiated in real-life moral exemplars.

Besides, after delving into these moral exemplars’ first-person moral psychology (cf. Colby & Damon, 1992; Damon & Colby, 2015; Oliner & Oliner, 1988), it is found that what they possess is a good and strong character in Kupperman’s (1991) terms. The strength of character is shown clearly in their persistence in aspiring to their moral ideals regardless of high costs or great sacrifices in other people’s eyes. They do not surrender to pressure or temptations easily. Furthermore, a moral exemplar might sincerely feel it is his duty to act as he does (Urmson, 1958). They feel obliged to do what we ordinary people judge to be a supererogatory action. The “agent-observer disparity” (Carbonell, 2012) is meant to delineate the stark difference between their subjective moral psychology and ours.

Moral Identity as the Key

How should we account for the remarkable strength of character demonstrated by moral exemplars? Damon and Colby’s (2015) explanation goes as follows: once an individual highly identifies with a moral cause, he inwardly feels personal responsibility and is readily motivated to act on it. That is, as a matter of degree, strength of character is concerned with the extent to which an individual identifies himself with moral values. Obviously,

moral exemplars' high strength of character is the outcome of their strong identification with moral values and ideals. With regard to the key role of identity, Narvaez and Lapsley (2009, p. 244) indicate that:

After one makes a moral judgment one must next filter this judgment through a second set of calculations that speaks to the issue of whether the self is responsible. Responsibility judgments attempt to sort out the extent to which the morally good action is strictly necessary for the self. Moreover, the criteria for reaching responsibility judgments are a matter of individual differences insofar as it varies in accordance with one's self definition.

Whether this action is perceived to be necessary or optional depends on how much the moral agent buys into and identifies with the associated specific moral value. Specifically, is the moral value ensured by the action being understood by the agent as not only "objectively important" but also "important to them personally" (Hardy & Carlo, 2005, p. 248)? The felt personal responsibility and moral necessity is expressive of an individual's having been identified with the associated moral values. Oftentimes, we hear moral exemplars saying "I had no choice. I had to do it." (Matsuba et al., 2011, p. 186). The heartfelt "moral necessity" in Williams's (1981, 1993) term has to do with the fact that the involved moral value is so central to his self-identity and character that it is unthinkable to act otherwise; he feels personal responsibility to enact on it wholeheartedly.

The Idea of Moral Identity

Moral exemplars do the right thing or even a supererogatory action precisely because of who they are and their self-identity (Frimer & Walker,

2009). In order to illustrate the integration of morality and one's self-identity, "moral identity" is coined (Hardy & Carlo, 2011a). Moral identity generally refers to the extent to which "being a moral person is important to an individual's identity" (Hardy & Carlo, 2011a, p. 212); it entails that an individual defines himself with a moral center (Colby & Damon, 1992). If a person centers his identity more on moral virtues such as kindness and justice than non-moral virtues such as creativity and humor, he is said to have a stronger sense of moral identity (Hardy, 2006). Moral identity admits of degrees. When morality develops to the extent that it becomes essential to one's sense of self, an individual feels terribly strong personal responsibility to act on it (Damon & Colby, 2015). For that matter, the felt requirement and compulsion to act is issued from within not without. If hindered from acting, the individual will naturally feel sorry for his acts of omission and even a kind of self-betrayal and the accompanying emotions, such as guilt and shame, become visible (Blasi, 1993; Hardy & Carlo, 2011a).

What moral exemplars have in common is a good and strong character which is established as the ideal of character education. Their good character is of irreducibly various types and their strong character is embodied in their remarkable moral identity. In fact, the moral goodness of various forms exhibited by different moral exemplars could also be accounted for by means of the idea of moral identity. Blasi (1983, 1984) points out that for any two people with moral identity, different moral aspects mark out the distinctive features of their respective selves. For instance, morality for Tom and Mary both constitutes an integral part of their essential selves while Tom views compassion as an indispensable element of his self-identity and Mary regards fairness and justice to occupy that place.

In sum, the alleged ideal of a good and strong character could be explained in terms respectively of the “contents” and “degrees” of moral identity. This is well summarized by Kingsford et al. (2018, p. 655) as follows:

A person has a moral identity to the extent that they consider moral values to be central to their subjective sense of themselves. Moral identity is a dimension of individual differences then, as people differ in the degree to which moral values are more or less central to their identity, as well as in terms of which moral values hold significance for them and which do not.

In view of the potential problem of conceptualizing character education simply as the inculcation of virtues, the researcher suggests that we should reconsider character as a whole and highlight the individuality of each person’s moral character. To this end, we should take on the board the wide variety and high strength of moral exemplars’ good character. In practice, the idea of moral identity holds the key to shedding light on the individuality of moral character as a whole.

Research Methods and Structure of the Study

This study is speculative and philosophical in nature, primarily employing conceptual analysis and argument development to argue that a narrative approach can potentially fulfill dual roles: promoting the development of moral identity and assessing it. Accordingly, aside from the introduction, the paper is structured into two distinct sections. Firstly, two research questions are identified: the measurement and development of moral identity, respectively. After reviewing the existing literature and available

measurement scales, the researcher identifies deficiencies in the current state of understanding and operation. To address this gap, the subsequent section proposes “a narrative approach to moral identity development” modeled after Tappan and Brown’s (1989) approach to moral education. Acknowledging the limitations of their overly optimistic outlook, the researcher suggests incorporating Freeman’s concepts of narrative reflection and hindsight to supplement these insights. These elements are crucial in providing deeper, albeit sometimes painful, insights into one’s character, which can act as a catalyst for moral growth alongside moral residues. In conclusion, it is argued that the narrative approach holds potential to effectively serve both the measurement and development of moral identity.

Two Research Questions

As suggested, if we wish to integrate moral identity development into character education, what should we do? Two concrete questions are: What actions should we take to intentionally enhance the development of moral identity, and how can we determine an individual’s current state of moral identity? The former is a pedagogical issue and the latter is about measurement and character assessment. In practice, in undertaking the enterprise of moral identity formation, to examine an individual’s state of moral identity regularly is required. In tackling these two questions, a general challenge confronting us is that even though scholars’ interest in moral identity is surging, it has proven to be a challenge to measure the construct of moral identity and to map its developmental trajectory (Kingsford et al., 2018; Lapsley & Carlo, 2014; Narvze & Lapsley, 2009).

Measurement of Moral Identity

In comparison, the measurement problem has made great progress. It is widely known that moral identity rises when Kohlberg's stage model comes under attack (Krettenauer & Hertz, 2015). That is because the correlation between moral cognition and moral action is proven to be small to modest in magnitude, and it is suggested that there is more to moral functioning than reasoning (Hardy, 2006). Moral identity is proposed as a promising direction for resolving the vexing problem of the moral judgment-action gap (Hardy & Carlo, 2011a, p. 215) and to act as a key source of moral motivation (Blasi, 1983, 1984, 1993; Colby, 2002; Colby & Damon, 1992; Hardy, 2006; Hardy & Carlo, 2005; Hardy & Carlo, 2011a, 2011b; Hart, 2005).

In the early stage of research development, moral identity has proven "difficult to define and operationalize" and efforts to explore the linkage between morality and identity have been primarily "theoretical and philosophical" (Hardy, 2006, p. 208). Afterwards, the empirical studies of moral identity to date have mostly focused on investigating the correlation between moral identity and moral behavior, especially the predictive power of moral identity in explaining behavior (Kingsford et al., 2018, p. 653; Krettenauer & Hertz, 2015, pp. 137-138). For that purpose, the construct of moral identity must be subject to operationalization.

The instruments of moral identity measurement on offer mainly take the form of self-report¹. For readers interested in moral identity measurements,

¹ Self-reporting has the concern over social-desirability bias and for that matter, Hardy suggests that future studies should seek to develop measures that "incorporate other measurement formats, such as implicit, behavioral, observational, and other-report measures" (Hardy, 2006, p. 214).

please consult Kingsford et al. (2018, p. 655). Among others, Aquino and Reed's (2002) explicit moral identity scale² asks participants to answer 13 items using a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) to measure "the self-importance of being a moral person" which is characterized in terms of 9 selected stimulus moral traits.³ For instance, item 1 is "It would make me feel good to be a person who has these characteristics." And item 2 is "Being someone who has these characteristics is an important part of who I am." And item 6 is "Having these characteristics is an important part of my sense of self." Two features of this scale is remarkable. First, it is important to note that the selected 9 moral traits are not meant to represent "an exhaustive list of traits that map onto every person's moral identity"; instead, they act as a stimulus to "invoke a set of associations with other traits that are aligned with a person's moral self-concept" (Aquino & Reed, 2002, p. 1426). In brief, the 9 moral traits are simply intended to evoke the participant's cognitive association of what a moral person looks like. Secondly, since the scale is meant to measure the extent to which being a moral person is important to oneself, what information this scale can provide is simply a general evaluation of the self-importance of moral traits. It does not indicate which moral traits are more central than others to the respondent.

For that matter, if we want to understand a given person's current state of moral identity, Aquino and Reed's (2002) explicit moral identity scale is not informative enough. By contrast, Hardy's (2006) prosocial identity

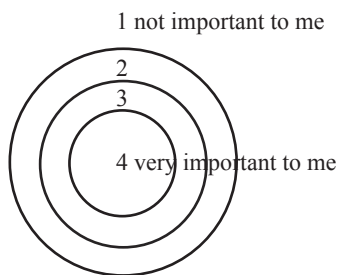
² They claim that "We are not aware of preexisting instruments that measure the self-importance of moral identity" (Aquino & Reed, 2002, p. 1429).

³ They are respectively being caring, compassionate, fair, friendly, generous, hardworking, helpful, honest, and kind (Aquino & Reed, 2002, p. 1427).

assessment is straightforward. This assessment utilizes Barriga et al. (2001)'s the Adapted Good-Self Assessment (GSA for short) which is "designed to measure moral self-relevance, that is, the centrality to the self-concept of moral virtues" (Barriga et al., 2001, p. 542). Each participant is asked to rate 16 virtues on a scale from 1 (not important to me) to 4 (very/extremely important to me) according to how important each virtue is to their self-concept. To enhance the participant's understanding and serve as a visual aid as participants rate each virtue, the four response labels are placed on a diagram of three concentric circles as follows. Of the 16 virtues, 8 are moral traits (considerate, kind, sympathetic, and generous)⁴ and the other 8 are non-moral virtues (imaginative, hard-working, outgoing, intellectual, funny, logical, independent, and energetic)⁵.

Figure 1

Four Response Labels



⁴ It seems a typo when Hardy (2006) puts it "Of the 16 virtues, 8 were non-moral virtues...and 4 were prosocial moral virtues" (p. 210). In Barriga et al.'s Adapted GSA, kind is replaced by helpful, and the other 4 moral virtues are respectively honest, sincere, fair, and dependable (Barriga et al., 2001, p. 542).

⁵ In Barriga et al.'s Adapted GSA, hard-working is replaced by industrious and intellectual is replaced by athletic (Barriga et al., 2001, p. 542).

According to Hardy (2006), if a person centers his identity more on moral virtues than non-moral virtues he has a stronger sense of moral identity. Moreover, after finishing Hardy's prosocial identity scale, an individual instantly learns about which virtues, be they moral or non-moral, are most central to one's self-concept. S/He comes to know whether s/he is simply lukewarm or really keen on a given virtue in Urmson's (1958) term. Clearly, this measure is easy to administer.

However, a warning issued by Blasi and Glodis (1995, p. 405) is relevant here, "When attempting to investigate an interesting but difficult idea, it is not uncommon to resort to simplifying strategies, which end up distorting the original idea." Even though Hardy (2006) knows clearly that "Moral identity is a complex, multi-faceted aspect of morality that has proven difficult to define and operationalize" (p. 208), a conspicuous feature of his prosocial identity assessment is that it is apparently modeled on the "venerable trait conception of personality" (Nucci, 2001, p. 125) and in line with the afore-mentioned reasoning of breaking the whole into parts. It must be emphasized that this practice is ironic since the most important implication drawn from studies on moral identity and moral self is,

The recognition that what is being developed in terms of moral character is not a set of traits but, rather, *an integration of moral and social understandings, affects, and skills with the way in which one defines oneself in moral terms and in relation to the given social context*. This is an undoubtedly less straightforward and more complex way of looking at things than being able to size people up in terms of such virtues as honesty, diligence, and the like. It also makes it much more difficult for us as educators to clearly identify students as either having good

character or not. For if we recognize that being able to identity a good person is often *a matter of being able to see the world from the vantage point of the actor*, the enterprise of aretaic evaluations becomes, as Socrates acknowledged in *The Meno*, a very difficult task, beyond even his wisdom. (italics mine) (Nucci, 2001, p. 138)

That is, moral identity study aims to bring to the fore the subjective and experiential aspects of how the agent (actor) perceives the role of himself/herself in a given moral situation. The problem is that Hardy's prosocial identity scale does not highlight the interplay between the moral agent and the moral demands issued by the situation. In this regard, Hardy confesses that this scale fails to "account for subjective and structural dimensions of identity, such as agency, continuity, and coherence" and measures such as this cannot "capture much of the richness of moral identity shown by more qualitative approach"; for this, Hardy suggests that future studies should "seek to develop and use measures that grasp more of what is involved in moral identity" (Hardy, 2006, p. 214).

Developing a more sophisticated measure of moral identity is out of this paper's purview and the researcher's expertise. The above discussion is meant to stress that the current available instruments are not satisfactory. Among others, they fall short of depicting the "agency, continuity, and coherence" characteristic of moral identity. The researcher surmises that this is because the scales in use can only paint a static picture of the participant's current state whereas the "agency, continuity, and coherence" of moral identity can be exhibited only over time. The temporal dimension also needs to be taken into account. In addition, the researcher agrees with Kretzenauer and Hertz that this scale can only represent an individual's current state of

moral identity; however, it cannot provide useful information about “how did you get to be the kind of person you are now?” (Frimer & Walker, 2009, p. 1672). Taking into account the above two points, the researcher proposes the following narrative approach to moral identity, which can serve not only as a pedagogical method for developing moral identity but also as a formative self-assessment instrument to be used regularly over time.

How to Form and Develop Moral Identity? A Neglected Topic-Due to a Top-Down Logic in Research

At the outset, it needs to be noted that moral identity development is not entirely independent of the ongoing educational efforts to instill virtues and provide moral exemplar education. Quite the contrary, the contents of moral identity, i.e., moral rules, values, and ideals, are mainly learning outcomes incrementally resulting from the inculcation of virtues. In short, moral virtues are primary fuel for moral identity. For that matter, it can be said that character education in practice has laid the groundwork for the initial formation of moral identity. However, to give moral identity the attention it deserves and formally integrate it into character education, the researcher will explore the pedagogical question: what deliberate actions should we take to enhance the development of moral identity?

It is generally acknowledged that “the issue of moral identity *development* has been investigated much less” (*italics original*) (Krettenauer & Hertz, 2015, p. 138). It is found that moral identity research is wanting in its developmental story and fails to illuminate the evolving nature of the construct (Kingsford et al., 2018, p. 653; Krettenauer & Hertz, 2015, p. 143; Lapsley, 2010, p. 90). That is the because “most work on moral identity

formation is rather speculative in nature” (Hardy & Carlo, 2011a, p. 213) and the present few empirical studies are cross-sectional in nature mainly of adolescents and adults (Hardy, 2006, p. 214); as a result, “we know little about early precursors of moral identity or developmental trajectories across the lifespan” (Hardy & Carlo, 2011a, p. 213). To make up for this deficiency, Kretenauer and Hertz (2015) argue that we need to bring “development to the forefront” (p. 142). And “more longitudinal work on moral identity is needed, over longer periods of time (e.g., adolescence through young adulthood)” (Hardy, 2006, p. 214). Empirical studies of this kind await further work.

Furthermore, Kretenauer and Hertz explain that the neglect of the issue of moral identity formation is attributed to a “top-down logic in research,” which suggests that:

According to this logic, it is advisable to first identify the critical features of a mature adult moral identity that reliably predict moral behavior. Once this task has been accomplished, researchers are assumed to be better equipped to track the developmental pathways that lead to the desired outcome [Walker, 2014]. This logic of research certainly has its merits, however, it leaves earlier and less mature forms of moral identity largely undefined. As a consequence, the developmental processes that link less developed with more mature forms of moral identity remain elusive. Identifying a possible endpoint of development as such is not sufficient for extrapolating a developmental history. Investigations into developmental change of important features defining a person’s moral identity, therefore, are indispensable. (Kretenauer & Hertz, 2015, p. 143)

In a similar vein, Narvaez and Lapsley (2009, p. 250) argue that,

The literature on moral self-identity and the moral personality seems largely preoccupied with sketching out what it looks like in its mature form in adulthood. This is not inappropriate. Often it is useful, if not essential, to get a handle on the *telos* of development before one can investigate the possible developmental trajectories that gets one there (Kitchener, 1983). Still, the relative paucity of work on the development of the moral self is striking. This is due partly to the lack of interest in developmental antecedents among personality, cognitive, and social psychologists...*(italics original)*

The above explanation is well exemplified in moral exemplar studies, which portray the actual moral psychology of highly moral individuals as the ideal endpoint of moral development. However, the developmental and educational question of how to become such a person remains largely unanswered. There are no ready-made, easy answers to this profound question. In the following sections, the researcher aims to propose a potential pedagogical heuristic to enhance moral identity development.

Narrative Approach to Moral Identity Development

Regarding the developmental trajectory, it is generally acknowledged that (Kretzenauer & Hertz, 2015, p.141):

Moral identity development consists of three phases. The first phase, childhood, is void of moral identity. It is followed by the period of

identity formation (adolescence to emerging adulthood). After identities are formed, individuals embark on moral identity elaboration, which is likely a multidirectional process where the moral identities of some individuals are further strengthened and others' not.

Probably influenced by E. Erikson's identity development, it is widely accepted that an articulate sense of self does not emerge before adolescence. However, this view is increasingly challenged (Krettenauer & Hertz, 2015, p. 141; Narvaze & Lapsley, 2009, p. 251) and some (Kingsford et al., 2018, p. 653) suggest that middle childhood is a "potentially fruitful period of investigation in relation to answering questions concerning when and how moral identity might first emerge." Their reasoning goes as follows (Kingsford et al., 2018, p. 661):

What distinguishes moral identity is the ability to engage in objective self-reflection, to conceptualize oneself in generalized, higher order moral attribute terms that subsume multiple tendencies, and to take an evaluative stance towards such attributes, that is, to be genuinely and independently self-evaluative, research suggests that these particular cognitive capabilities begin to emerge during middle childhood (8-12 years).

This explanation provides an important clue regarding the types of abilities that are necessary, or rather, prerequisites for moral identity formation. The researcher suggests below that narrative approach (NA for short) could effectively utilize these abilities of the moral agent to actively aid in the development of moral identity. To achieve this goal, the researcher will first introduce Tappan's NA, which is already applicable in classroom.

Subsequently, the researcher will explore Freeman's insightful concepts of narrative reflection and hindsight to complement Tappan's somewhat one-dimensional positive view of moral development. Finally, the researcher will conclude by explaining how NA facilitates the development of moral identity while enabling individuals to understand their current state of moral identity.

Narrative Tradition in Moral Education

Storytelling in moral education has a long and universal tradition across various cultures worldwide (Tappan & Brown, 1989, p. 182), and it remains vibrant and relevant today. In Plato's *Republic*, he acknowledges the educational importance of stories and emphasizes the need for careful scrutiny of stories due to concerns that children may imitate undesirable actions exhibited by major characters, such as cheating and stealing. Similarly, narratives take pride of place in L. Zagzebski's exemplarism. Narratives of fictional and non-fictional persons, either written or spoken, serve as an effective medium through which the younger generation learns whom to admire and who are worthy of emulation (Zagzebski, 2017, p. 15). In line with this, Olberding (2012) argues that the *Analects* embodies an exemplarist spirit, where the narrative elements of the text, depicting exemplars such as Confucius, Zilu, and Zigong, are intended to inspire us to aspire to be like them. The leading figure of contemporary character education in the USA, T. Lickona also talks about "storytelling as moral teaching" in his seminal book *Educating for Character* and remarks that stories, either written or oral, are the most favorite teaching instrument for moral educators in the world. That is because the teaching of stories is through attraction rather than compulsion; they invite readers and listeners to

feel and think instead of imposing something on them (Lickona, 1992, p. 79). In line with this, recently Carr and Harrison's (2015) *Educating Character Through Stories* also argues for the educational use of stories for character formation.

Different from this, what follows is concerned with the flip side of storytelling, namely, the educated as story-teller and story-writer rather than listener and reader. Based on the aforementioned universality of the narrative tradition, the researcher posits that the moral narratives discussed in the following sections, where learners act as narrators, are not exclusive to Western culture but represent a universally applicable approach.

Tappan's NA: Moral Authorship and Moral Authority as the Telos of Moral Development

Considering the increasing public attention on the importance of moral education and widespread dissatisfaction with the prominent contemporary approaches to moral education, such as the just community approach, values clarification, and character education (i.e., socialization approach) and inspired by the "narrative turn" in social and human sciences, Tappan and Brown (1989) put forth a narrative approach to moral development and moral education. Since the 1980s, the role narrative plays in helping people understand human experience has regained sustained attention from philosophers, psychologists, and historians, among others. It is widely acknowledged that narrative and storytelling as a "fundamental human activity" (Tappan & Brown, 1989, p. 185) existing transculturally and transhistorically. MacIntyre goes so far as to claim that man is "essentially a story-telling animal" and narrative is "the basic and essential genre for the

characterization of human actions”⁶ (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 216, 208). Echoing that view, Polkinghorne remarks that “Narrative is a scheme by means of which human beings give meaning to their experience of temporality and personal actions” (cited from Tappan & Brown, 1989, p. 185).

Taking inspiration from this line of thought, Tappan suggests that the *telos*/endpoint of human moral development is moral authorship (Tappan & Brown, 1989, p. 190) and moral authority⁷ (Tappan, 1991, p. 7). To be specific, when an individual is invited to recount their particular moral experience, the natural impulse is to compose a narrative by “authoring” a story about it. In the process of storytelling, the holistic psychological complexity of moral experience in the form of the unity of cognitive (what s/he thought), affective (how s/he felt), and conative (what s/he did) dimensions is retrospectively represented. Besides, the individual also imposes a meaning on the series of events comprising the story, including “moralizing” it, that is, expressing a moral perspective through which the narrator endeavors to assert authority, sustain, and justify (Tappan & Brown, 1989, pp. 187-189). In this regard, historian Hayden White asks a rhetorical question: “Could we ever narrativize *without* moralizing?” The answer is undoubtedly “no” (cited from Tappan & Brown, 1989, p. 188).

⁶ Freeman may take issue with this. Freeman (2010, p. 31) indicates that even in ancient Greece, both fashioning personal narrative and the genre of autobiography are not to be found. It is St. Augustine’s *Confessions* (originally 397) that marks the emergence of a first-person narrative (Freeman, 2010, pp. 32-33).

⁷ Tappan suggests moral authority to replace moral autonomy to act as the *telos* of moral development because the latter “assumes a ‘transcendental’ epistemic and moral subject” and does not pay sufficient attention to the very fact that human beings are inevitably embedded in a social-cultural-historical context all the time (Tappan, 1991, p. 6).

For that matter, strictly speaking, narrative is “moral” in two distinct senses. Firstly, when Tappan and Brown ask the student (interviewee) to share an experience of facing a moral conflict and deciding the right thing to do (see Appendix 1, from Table 1 Moral Conflict and Choice Interview, Tappan & Brown, 1989, p. 195), the story told by the student necessarily implicates moral values. That is, the topic of the story is moral in nature. Clearly, it is a moral narrative. However, what White has in mind is another sense in which narrative is said to be moral. He aims to highlight that narrativizing and moralizing are inextricably linked, whether in the case of moral narratives or historical narratives. In any case, when narrating, the narrator “attempts to endow a sequence of events with the kind of legitimacy and meaning that would justify and sustain the moral perspective on behalf of which it is written” (Tappan & Brown, 1989, p. 188). For that matter, the narrative approach to moral development under discussion is clearly “moral” in a dual sense.

In the simplest sense, an individual can achieve moral authorship simply by “authoring” their own moral story. As mentioned earlier, since moralizing is intertwined with narrativizing, claiming moral authority for one’s own moral perspective naturally follows. At this stage, the proposed goals of moral development—namely, moral authorship and moral authority—are achieved simultaneously. Regarding moral authority, it is worth quoting a substantial paragraph from Tappan’s elaboration⁸.

What does it mean to claim authority for one’s own moral thoughts, feelings, and actions? To claim such authority means, for one thing, to

⁸ The same idea is also articulated in Tappan and Brown (1989, p. 191).

clearly express and acknowledge one's own moral perspective. It also means to honor, and thus authorize, what one thinks, feels, and does in response to a moral problem or dilemma, even in the face of conflict and disagreement. And, it means to assume *responsibility* and *accountability* for one's moral actions, and for acting on behalf of one's moral perspective. (See Niebuhr, 1078; Blasi [1984, 1985] argues similarly that moral responsibility is tied directly to an individual's sense of his or her moral *identity* and *authenticity*.) (italics original) (Tappan, 1991, p. 7)

In this elaboration, the researcher raises three points. Firstly, Tappan appears to merge asserting authority over one's moral perspective with asserting authority over one's moral thoughts, feelings, and actions. If the moral thoughts, feelings, and actions in question are intended to denote one's thoughts, emotions, and actions "at that time" during a moral conflict and decision-making process, the researcher disagrees with this conflation. Ultimately, "authoring" a moral story and moralizing the narrative—expressing one's moral perspective on a series of events—necessarily occurs "after the fact". It's reasonable to assume that the moral perspective one articulates "at this moment" may differ in content from what one thought, felt, and did then. For instance, an individual might articulate a moral perspective today that disapproves of their past thoughts, feelings, or actions. In essence, given the time elapsed between then and now, new meanings that "had been unavailable in the flux of the immediate" (Freeman, 2010, p. 32) may now be integral to one's current moral perspective. I will shortly revisit this point by incorporating Freeman's idea of the profound influence of "hindsight".

Secondly, Tappan outlines a three-layered meaning of claiming moral

authority. The first involves acknowledging or expressing one's moral perspective, the second involves honoring or authorizing it, and the final layer entails assuming responsibility for one's moral actions. At first glance, this structure bears resemblance to the three steps of rational value choice in the Values Clarification (VC) approach—namely, “choosing”, “prizing”, and “behaving”. Tappan and Brown (1989, p. 198) acknowledge that NA and VC share similarities in avoiding indoctrination and demonstrating commitment to diverse moral issues and concerns. This sets them apart from Kohlberg's developmental theory of moral cognition, which focuses exclusively on issues of justice and fairness. A fundamental distinction lies in the central role of the relationship between the author of a moral narrative and their audience in NA as opposed to VC approach, which tends towards a form of radical individualism and relativism (Tappan & Brown, 1989). Despite Tappan and Brown's (1989) efforts to differentiate NA from VC by emphasizing that in NA, “the author and his audience (most likely, his teacher) engage with each other and learn from each other through the stories they construct and understand together” (p. 198), it remains unclear exactly how this relationship functions.

Lastly, addressing my concern about moral identity, Tappan directly mentions that Blasi's perspective on moral identity aligns with his emphasis on the link between asserting authority for one's moral perspective and taking responsibility for one's actions, including acting in accordance with one's moral perspective (Tappan, 1991; Tappan & Brown, 1989). According to Blasi, moral (self) identity is concerned with the degree to which morality is integrated with an individual's sense of self (Aquino et al., 2011; Blasi, 1984). It should be noted that when a moral value (say compassion or

justice) becomes an integral part of one's essential self, moral identity has a steady motivating power, motivating the moral agent to "be true to oneself in action" (Blasi, 1984, p. 130). That is, they will feel a "moral compulsion" and a "strict obligation to act" (Blasi, 1984, p. 132). It is in view of the strong link between moral identity and the motivation to act that Blasi purports moral identity to bridge the notorious gap between moral cognition and moral action. Now Tappan and Brown consider assuming authority for one's moral perspective is tantamount to integrating that moral perspective into one's essential self and therefore becomes an integral part of one's moral identity.

The Use of Narrative as a Channel for Cognizing and Further Developing One's Current Moral Identity

NA helps individuals develop moral authorship and claim moral authority for their moral perspectives. This form of NA stands in contrast to the prevailing practice of using other people's stories to morally educate young individuals (Tappan & Brown, 1989). Tappan and Brown emphasize that unlike CE, which does not encourage students to "learn anything from their own moral experience" (Tappan & Brown, 1989, p. 198), NA, as they propose, places significant emphasis on students narrating their own moral stories and learning from their personal moral experiences. The researcher argues that integrating this NA approach into current character education practices could enhance the formation of moral identity.

That being said, the researcher finds that the moral narratives recounted by the children and young people interviewed by Tappan and Brown (1989, 1991) in their works portray a somewhat simplistic and optimistic view. They

often reflect on past moral choices in a manner that reaffirms their initial thoughts, feelings, and actions. Through this process, they vividly identify which moral ideas and values they have consistently upheld in their daily lives. Moreover, when confronted with moral dilemmas, narrators can clearly prioritize their moral values. By reflecting on their lived moral experiences through their current moral perspective (Tappan & Brown, 1989), individuals come to recognize the development of their moral identity thus far.

Certainly, it is plausible for individuals to maintain a consistent moral perspective over time. However, this optimistic portrayal doesn't capture the complete reality. In addressing this aspect, Freeman's insights offer valuable perspective. Specifically, Freeman's concept of looking backward and hindsight helps to fill in this gap.

Freeman's Ideas of Hindsight, Narrative Reflection, and Identity

Freeman maintains a paradoxical view that hindsight, particularly in the form of narrative reflection, is invaluable for further development. It is paradoxical,

For while "development" generally connotes movement forward in time and would thus seem to be an essentially *prospective* concept, "narrative" generally connotes movement backward in time and would thus seem to be an essentially *retrospect* concept. (italics original) (Freeman, 2014, p. 9)

In short, to move forward, we need to look back first, a process that is well served by the medium of narrative. To be specific, the task of unearthing the buried past is carried out through hindsight and narrative reflection. It is widely accepted that narrative is a primary vehicle for exploring human

life and, in particular, for understanding human selfhood (MacIntyre, 2007; Ricoeur, 1991). Theodore Sarbin even goes so far as to say that “I became convinced that for human beings, stories have ontological status. We are always enveloped in stories. The narrative for human beings is analogous to the ocean for fishes” (Hevern, 1999, p. 301). That is, the empirically confirmed “narrative need” of human beings (Vitz, 1990, p. 716) indicates that narrative is not only a simple mode of representation but also enjoys an ontological status in human nature. So, how can narrative serve the function of self-understanding?

The power of hindsight.

In line with Tappan and Brown, Freeman considers narrative to be an invaluable method of self-scrutiny. The exact phrase used by Freeman is “narrative reflection” which intimates the very fact that narrating one’s life story, be it discrete occasions (i.e. small stories) or the whole life one has lived (i.e. big stories), must involve reflection. And it is emphasized that narrative reflection inherently involves hindsight. So, what is hindsight?

In speaking of hindsight, therefore, I am referring specifically to the process of looking back over the terrain of the past from the standpoint of the present and either seeing things anew or drawing “connections,” as Birkerts had put it, that could not possibly be drawn during the course of ongoing moments but only in retrospect. (Freeman, 2010, p. 4)

Hindsight is a process of “pausing to attend [to the past],” involving recollections which “seek to redress the *forgetfulness* that so often characterize the human condition” (Freeman, 2010, p. 7). In consideration

of the common misgiving about “hindsight bias”⁹ as a source of distortion of the past, Freeman urges us to reconsider hindsight in a different light:

One that allows for the possibility not only of distortion but insight, not only of lies but truth. Indeed, some truths can *only* be attained in hindsight, via what I am here calling *narrative reflection*. For all the power that “now” may have, it is also saddled with definite limits. (italics original) (Freeman, 2010, p. 23)

There will be a delay, a postponement. Only later, after the moment has passed, will seeing be possible. *Oh, no*. Look at what I’ve done. *If only*....(italics original) (Freeman, 2010, p. 20)

As a counterforce to common views, hindsight can instead serve as a source of insight which is unavailable and inaccessible to the “now” when the immediate experience is still undergoing. Only when it is over could the deep meaning of the event be possibly revealed. As put, “Realizations, narrative connections, are made after-the-fact, when the dust has settled” (Freeman, 2010, p. 26). The irreplaceable function of hindsight lies in its ability to reveal the deeper meaning of events that were not visible at the time.

The above pertains to the “rescue” function of hindsight. Reflecting on the personal past in retrospect and taking stock of it can rescue us from the shortsightedness, blindness, and oblivion inherent in the human condition. Nevertheless, Freeman emphasizes the value of the present moment as well,

⁹ Freeman indicates that the word “hindsight” is often followed by the term “bias”. The very fact shows that hindsight is frequently relegated to be “a source of distortion of ‘what really was’” (2010, p. 6).

suggesting a complementary perspective. He employs an aerial view to make this point:

Consider the metaphor of the aerial view. When sitting in an airplane on the ground, everything outside seems sharp and well-delineated; once high in the air, the concrete things you saw on the ground become shapes, patterns, generic designs. You can also see things that could not be seen on the ground, or you may see familiar things in a different way. Depending on the scenery, it can be quite beautiful. The same is true of hindsight; there is much that can be appreciated, anew, from afar...This is one of hindsight's great gifts. (Freeman, 2010, p. 74)

Hindsight is compared to the aerial view which enables the viewer to see the scene (the event) in a synoptic way allowing him/her to “take into consideration all the ins and outs of the matter, its context in space and time” (Freeman, 2010, p. 86). This view from afar, i.e., the aerial view of hindsight, enables us to see how episodes are interrelated and fit together in an evolving narrative, whereas one's immersion in the moment blinds one to “the big picture” (Freeman, 2010, p. 207). Likewise, in asking the identity question ‘*who am I*’ a perspective of reflectiveness and distancing is required (Blasi, 1988, cited from Kingsford et al., 2018) since ‘the *subject* is never given at the beginning’ (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 437). Rather, to have a sense of self, the agent must conceive of his/her life as a narrative which is evolving over time (Phelan, 2014). In this regard, hindsight in the form of narrative reflection meets the need.

Hindsight, self-understanding, and moral life.

As noted, hindsight serves as a vehicle for gaining insight into our

personal past, which was unavailable at the time of action, thereby rescuing us from the shortsightedness or oblivion. Over time, we can view our personal history more clearly, including recognizing our past errors. Freeman introduces the term “moral lateness” to describe this phenomenon to the effect that only with the passage of time can we see the moral self clearly. Functionally, hindsight serves as an important counterbalance and corrective to our moral shortsightedness. He gives an example as follows:

In the midst of my anger or horror or weakness, I can convince myself, quite spontaneously, that what I am doing is justified, even right, good. But then, later on, after the dust has cleared, I may see it all anew, and with painful clarity. (Freeman, 2010, p. 69)

To be fair, when looking backward on the personal past, the insight gained via hindsight could be joyful or painful. Hindsight could be a source of consolation or a source of deep shame (Freeman, 2010). To be specific, after looking backward over a terrain of my past, I may at times come to realize what is truly important for me, who I care for most, and whom I have been devoted to so much. And this insight may come with deep fulfillment. However, on other occasions, looking back leads me to find my cowardice, shortsightedness, or other vices. This sort of hindsight really hurts and becomes a source of regret, remorse, guilt, and shame. For that matter, Freeman (2010, p. 27) claims that “Hindsight is thus an area of both promise and peril, pleasure and pain.” I would say either way, hindsight promotes our self-understanding including understanding of our current states of moral identity.

It should have been clear that the moral stories shared by Tappan and

Brown are mostly rosy pictures in the sense that the authors of lived moral stories give a full consent to what they thought, felt, and acted in the past. The hindsight in those instances is mainly about the subsequent continuous endorsement of the same moral perspective and therefore they're very likely to feel deep fulfillment about themselves now and then. Roughly speaking, via hindsight, the author sees clearly that there is no rupture between who I was and "what I have subsequently become" (Freeman, 2010, p. 67). In some sense, Tappan and Brown bring the bright side of hindsight to the fore.

By comparison, Freeman goes to great lengths to illuminate the darker aspects of hindsight, suggesting that insights gained often challenge our previous moral perspectives—what we thought, felt, and how we behaved. Instead, the phenomenon of "moral lateness" associated with hindsight sometimes reveals uncomfortable truths about oneself, particularly the errors in our past actions and beings.

After telling a tragic story of the Italian chemist, writer, and Jewish Holocaust survivor Primo Levi, extracted from Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved* Freeman makes the comments:

Hindsight can be perilous...looking backward over the ugly terrain of their pasts; it can cut like a knife into the heart of one's existence, revealing painful truths that one could not or would not see earlier on... there was no evading the horror of hindsight. (Freeman, 2010, p. 81)

When painful insights gained through hindsight come into view, as Levi expresses, "It was useless to close one's eyes or turn one's back to it because it was all around, in every direction, all the way to the horizon" (cited from Freeman, 2010, p. 83). Levi's experience vividly illustrates how

hindsight can persistently haunt an individual. Despite its discomfort, even painful hindsight holds significant moral educational value as it motivates individuals to transform themselves for the better.

Concluding Remarks

This paper begins with a critique of the prevalent practice of characterizing character education solely as the inculcation of virtues, arguing that the wholeness and individuality of character should also be duly taken into account. To address this deficiency in contemporary character education, it is argued that the concept of moral identity holds the key. Two follow-up questions concern the measurement and development of moral identity, respectively. After pointing out the existing ready-for-use measurement tools fall prey to the reasoning of “breaking the whole into parts” and thus fail to address such structural dimensions of moral identity as “agency, continuity, and coherence,” the narrative approach, modeled on Tappan and Brown’s method and refined with Freeman’s ideas of narrative reflection and hindsight, is proposed to fulfill dual roles: promoting the development of moral identity and assessing it. With that said, a caveat is in order: the suggested idea of moral identity is not meant to replace the existing practice of inculcating virtues. Instead, the inculcation of virtues and the formation of moral identity must go hand in hand; or rather the former paves the way for the latter.

Since relevant empirical studies indicate that moral identity emerges as early as middle childhood (8-12 years old) or adolescence, the researcher suggests that educators working at this educational stage should also

deliberately focus on cultivating moral identity. This involves assisting each student in recognizing their current state of moral identity and subsequently enhancing it. These issues are respectively referred to as the evaluation and pedagogical challenges. The researcher suggests that NA could serve these two purposes simultaneously. By encouraging students to reflect on their lived moral experience by narrating their own moral stories and expressing their current moral perspective, which are often accompanied by emotional reactions in the form of moral residues, they have the chance to review and take stock of their moral past and understand who they have become. This process helps them identify which moral values they treasure most and how they prioritize them. Their moral identity thus becomes more evident to themselves.

This article originates from criticisms of current character education deficiencies and proposes a narrative approach as an effective method to foster moral identity development. The narrative approach is suitable for promotion at certain stages, approximately in Taiwan, during late elementary school and beyond. While this article is speculative in nature, its intention is to address practical educational issues. The practical implementation of the narrative approach can refer to the interview outline proposed by Tappan and Brown in the appendix of this article, which guides teachers in leading students to narrate or write their own moral stories in the classroom, thereby promoting the formation and assessment of their moral identities. As for the effectiveness of implementation, it awaits verification through future empirical research.

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Appendix

Moral Conflict and Choice Interview

All people have had the experience of being in a situation where they had to make a decision, but weren't sure of what they should do. Would you describe a situation when you faced a moral conflict and you had to make a decision, but weren't sure what you should do?

1. What was the situation? (Be sure you get a full elaboration of the story.)
2. What was the conflict for you in that situation? Why was it a conflict?
3. In thinking about what to do, what did you consider? Why? Anything else you considered?
4. What did you decide to do? What happened?
5. Do you think it was the right thing to do? Why/why not?
6. What was at stake for you in this dilemma? What was at stake for others?
In general, what was at stake?
7. How did you feel about it? How did you feel about it for the other(s) involved?
8. Is there another way to see the problem (other than the way you described it)?
9. When you think back over the conflict you described, do you think you
10. learned anything from it?
11. Do you consider the situation you described a moral problem? Why/why not?
12. What does morality mean to you? What makes something a moral problem for you?

Resource: cited from Tappan & Brown (1989, p. 195)