



Cultivating character in female student leaders: Case of a leadership program of an NGO in the Philippines

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Abstract

How can students' character formation be supported such that their youthful energy can become a force for the good? There is burgeoning research on how universities can help form people of character (Brooks et al. in *International Journal of Ethics Education* 4(2):167–182, 2019; Lamb et al. in *Journal of Moral Education* 1–23, 2021b). Nongovernmental organizations can also play a role. This article explores how a leadership program for students in the Philippines cultivates character using as theoretical framework the 7 strategies of character development presented in Lamb et al. in *Journal of Character Education* 17(1):81–108, 2021a. Upon examination of how the strategies are integrated, recommendations for improvement of the program design are given.

Keywords Character · Leadership program · Virtue · NGO · Female student leaders

Background

How can young students' character formation be supported such that their youthful energy can become force for the good? There is burgeoning research on how universities can play an important role in forming people of character through extra-curricular programs and course interventions (Brooks et al. 2019; Lamb et al. 2021b). Nevertheless, universities are not the only venue for character education. Education is not limited to formal settings such as degree-granting academic institutions. Education can also take place in non-formal settings to meet particular needs (e.g., professional development courses) and informal settings such as in the family and the workplace (Altarejos and Naval 2011). Van Noy et al. (2016) discuss two types of informal learning in their review of literature—(1) organized and (2) everyday informal learning. This article focuses on an organized informal learning program

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offered by a non-profit nongovernmental organization (NGO) in the Philippines, the Kalinangan Youth Foundation, Inc. (KALFI). The learning program, called KALFI LEAD, is a leadership program for young women that aims for holistic character development.

Virtues of character and leadership

Leadership has been associated with virtues of character. In various speeches of elected officials in the Philippines, leadership is always connected with virtuous qualities. For example, the late Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago, in a speech for Filipino students participating in the Youth Forum on Student Leadership and Nationalism in 2015, said that leaders, for their wide reach, must “influence for the better, not for the worst.” She emphatically underlined that “leaders are not born, [rather] it takes practice to develop the qualities of a leader” and indicated the following characteristics championed by good student leaders: integrity—which includes trustworthiness, honesty and consistency—compassion for others, initiative, and vision. Senator Panfilo “Ping” Lacson, a candidate for president in the 2022 National Elections, said in December 2021 that courage, integrity, and loyalty—virtues he learned during his studies at the Philippine Military Academy—are needed to lead the country in the face of many challenges. Speaking at the 2018 Young Professionals Summit, Vice President Leni Robredo—also a candidate for president in the 2022 National Elections—described the good leader as one who inspires, empowers, and listens (Rey 2018). She added that leadership is not about instilling fear in the people but about inspiring trust and confidence, practicing empathy and collaborative leadership. Even former President Rodrigo Duterte, whose administration’s “war on drugs” has allegedly committed human rights violations, called on the Filipino people on National Heroes Day in 2017 to imitate the good qualities of Filipino heroes being commemorated: “we will harness the same virtues [of our heroes] as we continue to fight against lawlessness, criminality, and poverty that hinder us from achieving our full potential.”

The literature on leadership also includes virtues of character pertinent to good and effective leadership (see Cameron 2011; Gini and Green 2013; Hackett and Wang 2012; Newstead et al. 2021). For example, Hackett and Wang (2012) reviewed the literature in seven leadership theories, namely 1) moral leadership, 2) ethical leadership, 3) servant leadership, 4) spiritual leadership, 5) charismatic leadership, 6) transformational leadership, and 7) visionary leadership, and—from the 59 virtues or character traits mentioned—found nine virtues common across these approaches: caring, courage, honesty, integrity, justice, prudence, responsibility, temperance, and trustworthiness. Hackett and Wang (2012) further identified six virtues as cardinal leader virtues that are foundational, universal, and interrelated: courage, temperance, justice, prudence, humanity, and truthfulness. Focusing on the virtuous leadership theory, Wang and Hackett (2016) distinguished it from other leadership theories with moral or ethical features defining it as a “leader–follower relationship wherein a leader’s situational appropriate expression of virtues triggers follower perceptions of leader virtuousness, worthy of emulation” (p. 326). The

emphasis is on the virtues of character—“‘good’ leader traits” (p. 329)—expressed in virtuous behavior and sought intentionally as a good in itself.

Recently, Brooks (2021) made a case for the role of character in leadership in the twenty-first century. He claimed that to appropriately respond to contemporary challenges, leadership competencies must be developed but the cultivation of leaders’ character virtues cannot be neglected. Brooks (2021) argued that the current societal challenges have their origin or are due, in part, to lack of virtuous character in leaders: “greed, hubris, dishonesty, dogmatism, close-mindedness, and presumption—to name only some prominent leadership vices—have played a part in the cause and ongoing impact of such events as the global financial crisis, turmoil in the Middle East, the COVID pandemic, and climate change” (p. 40). He also indicated that virtues serve as a bridge between aspiration and action thus ensuring a stable and wise integration of values in concrete behavior. He referred to the virtues “act[ing] as the intellectual and moral muscles that enable values to live” (p. 40). Lastly, Brooks (2021) considered that a variety of virtues like empathy, compassion and service (classified as pro-social virtues), open-mindedness, judgment and practical wisdom (classified as intellectual virtues), and hope are needed given the “connectedness, complexity, and precarity” of the current environment facing leaders (p. 40).

Cultivating virtues of character

Developing people as leaders involves the cultivation of virtues of character. Virtue, according to Aristotle (ca. 350 B.C.E./2004), “is a state involving rational choice, consisting in a mean relative to us and determined by reason—the reason, that is, by reference to which the practically wise person would determine it” (1107a 1–5). Virtues are generally considered as excellent qualities of one’s character—ἀρετή, virtue in Greek, basically means excellence or perfection—that allow the person to think, feel, and act “at the right time, about the right things, towards the right people, for the right end, and in the right way” (Aristotle ca. 350 B.C.E./2004, 1106b21–23). According to Aristotle, a virtue of character is acquired by carrying out actions like those of persons already possessing a given virtue (Pakaluk 2005). Although this gives character educators some hints as how to support character formation—by modelling themselves the virtues they would like their students to cultivate—other strategies culled from diverse fields of research are also valuable. Lamb et al. (2021a) synthesized the research in philosophy, psychology, and education and presented seven strategies for cultivating virtue within an Aristotelian framework: (1) habituation through practice, (2) reflection on personal experience, (3) engagement with virtuous exemplars, (4) dialogue that increases virtue literacy, (5) awareness of situational variables, (6) moral reminders, and (7) friendships of mutual accountability.

For Aristotle, virtue, a stable disposition, is born from repeated actions which have an effect on the agent (ca. 350 B.C.E./2004, 1050b) hence, the strategy of *habituation through practice*. However, virtue is not mere automatism, a simple repetition of acts devoid of consciousness of the end and its choice, rather, it includes knowledge of the end and the right judgment of practical wisdom

(Rodríguez Luño 1988) thus the pertinence of *reflection on personal experience*. The person of good character or the wise person ($\phi\rho\acute{o}\nu\iota\mu\omicron\varsigma$) is the model or measure for virtue, according to Aristotle (ca. 350 B.C.E./2004, 1107a 1–5, 1113a 32–34), thus the need for *engagement with virtuous exemplars*. The practice of virtues would require knowledge of particular virtues and their application in different situations thus the relevance of *dialogue that increases virtue literacy*. In addition, given that actions are a fruit of a confluence of factors including situational variables and biases, it is necessary to increase *awareness of situational variables* that may inhibit or promote the practice of virtue, thereby allowing the agent to address them appropriately. As mentioned, the practice of virtue requires constancy thus consistent *moral reminders* that prompt persons about their moral commitments are fitting. Lastly, the cultivation of *friendships of mutual accountability* is vital for a person is a social being (Aristotle ca. 350 B.C.E./2004, 1169b 18) and one's character is not formed in isolation. For Aristotle (ca. 350 B.C.E./2004), friendship is a relationship characterized by reciprocal goodwill where each person desires what is good for the other, i.e., to become more virtuous (1156a 1–5).

Purpose of the study

The seven aforementioned strategies provide educators interested in supporting the youth's character development a concrete course of action; however, effective virtue cultivation would require a concentrated and intentional effort which can be addressed by holistic programs of character development. One such program is the Oxford Global Leadership Initiative (GLI), a voluntary, extracurricular leadership program for postgraduate students in the University of Oxford established in 2014. Brooks et al. (2019) reported the considerable potential of programs integrating leadership and character development like GLI in influencing the emerging leaders' lives and their immediate context, together with the promise of long-term social impact.

Given this encouraging picture, this article explores KALFI LEAD, a leadership program that claims to promote holistic character development in its participants. Since such integrated leadership and character development programs have a great potential for the individual and the society, it is necessary to inquire whether the KALFI LEAD program design incorporates research-based strategies for character development. Using documentary analysis of the so-called analytic induction approach (Patton 2002), I examined the documents provided by KALFI LEAD program staff (i.e., handbook and the curriculum), and those publicly available on the internet (i.e., website and YouTube videos) applying Lamb et al.'s (2021a) Aristotelian model of character development as theoretical framework. In other words, I analyzed the KALFI LEAD documents with the seven strategies of character cultivation and their definitions in mind, discerning whether a particular strategy is incorporated and in what manner. Lamb et al.'s (2021a) description of each strategy was supported by specific and practical examples on its application in a holistic leadership and character

development program thus lending itself excellently to educators seeking to design or improve programs of character development.

This study builds upon the contribution of Lamb et al. (2021a) to the theory and practice of character education by applying the framework they developed as guide in improving KALFI LEAD. Although the character development strategies Lamb et al. (2021a) presented was applied in a university setting through GLI, the strategies themselves can be used in character formation programs for diverse age groups. In fact, Lamb et al.'s (2021a) discussion of each strategy utilized literature dealing with varying age groups. Excepting the differing target age group, KALFI LEAD is akin to GLI in that it is also a voluntary leadership program and aims to supplement the curricular offerings of formal educational institutions.

I begin with a brief description of the NGO called KALFI to facilitate an understanding of the context in which the leadership program is delivered. I then proceed with the analysis proper where I first describe each of the KALFI LEAD program design components and then examine in what ways are the seven strategies for cultivating virtue (Lamb et al., 2021a) integrated. The KALFI LEAD program is a holistic leadership program with six main components. It is the whole program, and not simply one component, that aims to cultivate leadership and character in the participants. For each component, I specify what strategies for virtue cultivation are incorporated. I also cite examples of how the strategies are translated in real-life, with the aim of giving program designers and other educators inspiration on how the Aristotelian framework could be concretely integrated into their own leadership programs. Furthermore, I intersperse the analysis with testimonials from the KALFI LEAD participants providing glimpses into the impact of the program on their lives. I end the analysis by giving several recommendations for improvement of the program design.

Program description

Kalinangan¹ Youth Foundation, Inc. (KALFI)

Kalinangan Youth Foundation, Inc. (KALFI) is a private non-stock, non-profit foundation established in 1983 with the mission of providing young Filipino women personalized mentoring and meaningful youth development programs, envisioning them as “empowered young women with integrity, achieving their personal best and contributing positively to society” (KALFI 2019). KALFI’s various activities are offered in the study centers it established or assists in eight different locations in the country. The centers are located near schools and universities making its activities for holistic formation accessible to the youth.

¹ The word “kalinangan” suggests the “laborious task of cultivating rough terrain” (KALFI 2019).

KALFI LEAD: Raising a new wave of women leaders

KALFI started a leadership program in 2011 called KALFI LEAD with the aim of forming young women as exemplary servant leaders through holistic character development (KALFI 2022c). LEAD stands for Leadership, Excellence, Accountability, and Discipline and the four-year program aims to inculcate these virtues in its participants.

KALFI LEAD is offered to a select number of female students. Senior high school and college students apply and undergo a selection process based on academic qualifications, past leadership experiences, leadership essays, and recommendation forms. As a monitoring tool for fulfillment of requirements, and hence retention, the leadership program implemented a points system where participants gain a number of points for required, additional, and optional activities and must meet a minimum of 500 points at the end of each semester.

The program's motto, "in order to be useful, serve," shows KALFI LEAD's emphasis on servant leadership. The program seeks to develop in the participants an "attitude of and ability to SERVE, i.e., self-giving" (KALFI 2021). This conception of leadership as service to others recalls Robert K. Greenleaf's theory of servant leadership—a "philosophy, embedded in a set of behaviors and practices that place a primary emphasis on the well-being of those being served" (Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership 2021). The program's focus on instilling social responsibility in its participants is due to KALFI LEAD being inspired by the social teachings of the Catholic Church that foregrounds the dignity of the human person and the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, among others. Although inspired by Christian ideals and offers optional spiritual formation activities like retreats, the KALFI LEAD program is open to students, volunteers, and staff of all creeds.

Cognizant that virtuous qualities are necessary for a person to lead through service, KALFI LEAD provides character formation through the different components of the leadership program. The program is "designed to assist students' growth in virtue, which enables them to struggle and attain the good that they seek" (KALFI 2022a). This recognition of the role of virtues of character in leadership brings to mind Brooks's (2021) understanding of virtues acting as the muscles that enable values to be brought to life in stable concrete behavior.

KALFI LEAD program design components

KALFI LEAD cultivates leadership and virtues of character in its participants through a holistic program. The analysis of the program documents reveals six main components: (1) leadership development curriculum, (2) outreach or service projects, (3) participation in orientation events, teambuilding, and conferences, (4) on-the-job training, (5) leadership project, and (6) mentoring. All components work in tandem to cultivate leadership and character. The discussion is presented in tabulated form at the end of the section, followed by recommendations for the improvement of the program design.

Leadership development curriculum (1)

Conscious that leaders are not born, KALFI LEAD developed a leadership development curriculum that intends to provide participants with the theoretical knowledge necessary to lead effectively. The curriculum is delivered through various modules under nine themes grouped under four blocks as indicated in Table 1 that are spread

Table 1 Leadership Curriculum from 2019–2022^a as indicated in the KALFI Handbook and Planner (2021)

Block 1: Defining for purpose	Block 2: Designing for impact	Block 3: Developing capability	Block 4: Driving performance
Theme 1: Knowing the self	Theme 4: Impact through leadership: best practices	Theme 6: Marketing and public relations	Theme 9: Positive change in society
Theme 2: Knowing what society needs	Theme 5: Impact through strategic excellence	Theme 7: Finance	
Theme 3: Knowing what is right		Theme 8: Human Resources	

^aThe leadership curriculum in the previous years had 4 different themes: 1) Introduction to leadership: Who am I?, 2) Leading with integrity: Am I good? Am I whole?, 3) Lead to serve: Do I live for others?, and 4) Vision: Where will I lead my people? The curriculum from Academic Year 2022 onwards still follows the four Blocks but the nine themes have been replaced by concrete topics that may be offered.

throughout the four-year program. Resource speakers are invited to deliver each module through dynamic workshops or talks.

One example of a module delivered in 2021 under the theme “Knowing what society needs” is “Step Up: A KALFI LEAD Module on Serving the Poor.” The three guest speakers invited were involved in social initiatives. One speaker, a management staff of one KALFI study center, drew from her economic and theological background to discuss the principle of preferential option for the poor. Another speaker was an official of a school established by an NGO that offers technical-vocational education to underprivileged young Filipino women who talked about the social impact of their school. The last speaker was the executive director of another NGO that provides poverty alleviation interventions in various sites in the Philippines.

After the resource speakers, six older KALFI LEADers were invited to present their own initiatives for their communities to serve as inspiration for the new participants. For example, one second year university student spoke about her volunteer work at a local NGO offering weekly character building sessions for teachers, students, and parents. Another KALFI LEADer, a senior high school student, presented the social initiative she started called Escentia PH that supports the women of a local village who became unemployed due to the Covid-19 pandemic by marketing and selling their homemade organic soap products.

The leadership development curriculum of the KALFI LEAD program incorporates various strategies of character development provided by Lamb et al. (2021a). Given that each module is delivered by resource speakers invited for their expertise and leadership experience characterized by service and virtue, participants are given the opportunity to engage with exemplars that serve as models to admire, emulate, and learn from. When asked what impact did KALFI LEAD have on her, one student said “To be honest, what I like most about KALFI LEAD are those Sunday² classes where they introduce us to professors³ that are highly esteemed. We get to

² Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, LEAD modules were given in person on Sundays.

³ Past resource speakers also included professors in Philippine universities.

learn a lot from them which are outside the four walls of the classroom, the things which you can use in real life and for that I am really grateful” (Kalfi Leader 2017).

Additionally, given that the delivery of the modules are spread out throughout the four-year program, the participants are provided regular moral reminders of their commitment to both servant and virtuous leadership. The leadership modules also serve to increase the participants’ virtue literacy. Revealing the impact of the KALFI LEAD modules, a KALFI LEADer shared that “the lessons I learn from KALFI LEAD online⁴ modules and talks also widen my perspective about social topics and youth values. All the formation I get from KALFI helps me improve myself every day and remain grounded at the same time” (KALFI LEAD 2021).

Outreach or service projects (2)

With the goal of fostering an attitude of service and a stable commitment to serve society, KALFI LEADers join an outreach activity organized in the study center they are assigned to. They dedicate time and energies to giving weekly academic tutorials or catechism classes to children from underprivileged neighborhoods. Another outreach activity that students can choose to join are regular visits to the sick in hospitals or in their homes or visits to poor communities. Students are also asked to spearhead a service project of their own choice and design. As a leadership program, KALFI LEAD is unique in that the participants are “offer[ed] constant opportunities to participate in socio-civic activities and extend help to local communities” (KALFI 2022d).

The many opportunities offered to KALFI LEADers to engage in service projects integrates the strategy of habituation through practice, the first strategy presented by Lamb et al. (2021a). Recognizing that leadership marked by service and virtue cannot be learned from the leadership modules alone, the KALFI LEAD program stresses upon the participants’ stable and active involvement in outreach activities and other service projects held annually or monthly. Students have remarked on how beneficial these outreach activities have been: one student said, “one of the main things that KALFI LEAD has encouraged over the past year was doing visits [to the sick and the poor]. At first I didn’t realize how important they were but then I think that these visits were incredibly essential to help me get a better picture of what the world is really like” and she continued, “it really pushed me out of my comfort zone because you never really know how generous you can be until you have given up everything” (Kalfi Leader 2017). Her remarks reveal that her participation in the outreach activities have helped her see the real needs of the community, which is important for the cultivation of empathy (Anderson and Konrath 2011), and helped her grow in generosity through the commitment to a regular outreach activity. Attesting to how the practice of service and virtue serves to cultivate such in the person, another student declared that “we are not only helping the beneficiaries but we are also helped in the process” (Kalfi Leader 2017). For one LEADer, the weekly dedication to outreach “taught [her] that service is a commitment” (Banilad Study Center A Project of KALFI 2018).

⁴ Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, LEAD modules were delivered online through synchronous sessions.

Participation in orientation events, teambuilding, and conferences (3)

At the start of the program, new participants take part in an orientation organized by older KALFI LEADers. Participants also take part in a teambuilding called Anchored Leadership with their cohort each year as well as in an inter-cohort retreat-seminar, Leap to Lead. These events allow the KALFI LEADers to forge friendships with their peers.

This component of the KALFI LEAD program exemplifies the following strategies of character development provided by Lamb et al. (2021a): habituation through practice and friendships of mutual accountability. The annual teambuilding is a venue where the LEADers can practice leadership in an informal setting through collaboration with one another. For KALFI LEAD, leadership is not reduced to possession of power based on an institutional position but is characterized by collaboration, service, and virtue. Additionally, these orientation and teambuilding activities provide an optimum space for the development of friendships among the participants. The teambuilding is usually held for two days and the opportunities for sharing meals and other moments outside the formal program allow the participants to converse and deepen in their knowledge of one another thus creating a sense of community within each cohort of LEADers. One participant appreciated this aspect: “It’s very overwhelming to be surrounded by women with the same values who have voices wanting to be heard as we continue to empower one another” (Banilad Study Center A Project of KALFI 2018). Another expressed her gratitude for the friendships that were made: “Words can’t express how thankful I am towards KALFI. As I look back and remember all the memories we have made together, I would say that I will be forever thankful and grateful to KALFI because of the amazing experiences I have shared with the wonderful people I met (mentors and unexpected fellow girls who also became my friends)” (KALFI LEAD 2021).

KALFI LEADers also participate in an annual conference. The KALFI LEAD Summit is a student leadership conference organized by fourth-year KALFI LEADers for their peers. The Summit convenes high school and college students and current KALFI LEADers to talks by successful KALFI LEAD alumnae and other prestigious professionals tackling a particular theme that hopes to broaden the students’ perspectives and inspire novel and relevant social initiative ideas. The Summit also serves to commemorate the KALFI LEAD program’s recent milestones and other accomplishments. KALFI LEADers also prepare an exhibit of their current projects or experiences in the program and answer guests’ questions, creating a space for social networking and friendships with other like-minded youth leaders. To date, there have been eight KALFI LEAD Summits⁵—the first one, held in 2014, was organized by the first KALFI LEAD cohort.

⁵ The past KALFI LEAD Summits are as follows: *Youth and Response Ability: The Essentiality of Initiative* in 2014, *Youth Empowering Society: Providing Transformative Solutions* in 2015, *Synergy: Individual Action Towards Conscious Co-Action* in 2016, *Kinaadman (Knowledge): Knowledge and Passion in Action for Service* in 2017, *Adhikain (Ambition): Fusing People, Purpose and Passion for Life to Impact Society* in 2018, *Likha: Adbokasiya sa Pagkakaisa (Creation: Advocacy for Solidarity)* in 2019, *Yugto: Ang Pagbangon ng Sambayanang Pilipino (Stage: The Rise of the Filipino People)* in 2020, and *MULAT: Pagtuklas sa Katotohanan ng Makabagong Mamamayan (CONSCIOUS: Discovering the Truth by the Modern Citizen)* in 2021.

The Summit incorporates the following strategies of character development provided by Lamb et al. (2021a): engagement with virtuous exemplars, dialogue that increases virtue literacy, awareness of situational variables, and friendships of mutual accountability. Resource speakers invited for the Summit are prestigious professionals and KALFI alumnae who speak on a given theme that serves to widen the participants' perspective. Their sharing of their own experiences in leading in their own milieu serves to make leadership within the reach of the participants and be a model for them to emulate. The Summit also incorporates dialogue that increases virtue literacy and awareness of situational variables through the open forum where KALFI LEADers ask the speakers further questions regarding what they share that are, oftentimes, questions about how they faced a particular situation and what steps they took to overcome a certain challenge. Lastly, given the time provided for interaction between the participants during the exhibits, there is an opportunity for friendships of mutual accountability to develop. Other participants pose questions to the poster presenters in an atmosphere of trust and desire to learn or help the other improve.

On-the-job training (4)

KALFI LEAD participants are fielded out to different partner institutions for on-the-job training (OJT) which lasts for 12 days or 96 hours throughout one academic year. Although due to the Covid-19 pandemic, KALFI LEADers since 2020 have not had their OJT, past partner institutions included vocational training schools for the Home Leadership program; a Philippine government agency for Media Leadership; an NGO for Servant Leadership; a restaurant for Business Leadership; and the KALFI offices for the Administrative Leadership program.

This component of the KALFI LEAD program exemplifies the first strategy of character development provided by Lamb et al. (2021a), habituation through practice. Through the OJT, KALFI LEADers are given the opportunity to practice leadership in diverse settings—home, government agency, NGO, and industry. The OJT is also an opportunity for the KALFI LEADers to engage with exemplars—their OJT work supervisors and other colleagues—whom they can learn from, emulate or, in the case that they discern actions not in keeping with virtuous practice, refrain from imitating. Their OJT workplace could also be conducive in fostering awareness of situational variables for the KALFI LEADers may learn from the workplace how a certain virtue is practiced and what variables may affect, positively or negatively, the effort to practice virtue within the daily operations of an organization.

Leadership project (5)

KALFI LEADers are given the opportunity to apply what they have learned from the leadership modules by spearheading various projects throughout the four-year program. For example, they organize the orientation for the new cohorts as well as the KALFI LEAD Summit in their last year on the program. They also design and manage their own social initiatives to benefit selected beneficiaries. They work on the projects first as a cohort, then in small groups, dyads, and as an individual.

This component of the KALFI LEAD program incorporates habituation through practice, the first strategy of character development provided by Lamb et al. (2021a). By actually collaborating with other KALFI LEADers in group projects, the students are given the opportunity to practice leadership within their given role in a project which may not necessarily be as the overall-in-charge. Such arrangements bring to the fore that leadership is not about occupying a position but about leading characterized by collaboration, service, and virtue.

Mentoring (6)

Mentoring is a major component of the KALFI LEAD program and is claimed to be the secret of the leadership program's success. The mentoring program gives KALFI LEADers an opportunity to gain from the mentor's "practical wisdom, sincere guidance, undivided attention, and friendship" (KALFI 2022c). It also seeks to support the participants in learning from and finding meaning in their journey into young adulthood marked by significant changes and transitions. According to KALFI (2022b), "helping someone learn how to learn is the fundamental process and the primary purpose of mentoring."

KALFI LEADers are paired with experienced professionals who serve as their mentors. These mentors are volunteers of KALFI who receive training for basic mentoring skills (e.g. presence, active listening, communication, receiving and giving feedback, building resiliency). To safeguard the culture of excellence, the mentees are encouraged to give feedback about the mentor to the KALFI LEAD program heads.

Mentors and mentees meet at least twice a month for a mentoring session where the mentee's holistic development—socio-emotional, cognitive, and identity—is the focus. At the start of the KALFI LEAD program, both mentors and mentees fill out a mentoring agreement where they settle on the frequency of the mentoring sessions, the duration for each session, and the general topics to be covered.

The mentoring session is intended to be a reflective space for the mentee where the mentee can "reflect on and learn from key incidents and think through their own solutions" (KALFI 2022b). The mentor is tasked to create an atmosphere of openness and trust that promotes a healthy dialogue. Through the mentor's questions, the KALFI LEADer is enabled to "reflect on her motivation for wanting to excel in her chosen field and contribute to society in a significant way" (KALFI 2022b).

In mentoring, "the mentee gains from the experience and knowledge of the mentor who uses such knowledge to hone the student towards developing her talents and possibilities to the full" (KALFI 2021). Mentors bring up the topics tackled in the leadership modules and support the mentee in her own goal-setting. Mentoring becomes a venue where theories are concretized so as to be lived by the student. The mentoring conversation highlights the cultivation of virtues like "moral integrity, perseverance, magnanimity, and humility" because KALFI LEAD considers that people "cannot take the lead without developing themselves into complete individuals" (KALFI 2022c). The mentee is helped to both appreciate and exercise the virtues cognizant that "servant leaders should practice what they preach" and

“demonstrate these admirable traits and lead by example” (KALFI 2022d). The mentors also model the target LEAD virtues and share their own experiences and effort in living them. The mutual sharing lays the ground for a meaningful friendship—appropriate to the mentoring relationship—between mentor and KALFI LEADer. For KALFI LEAD, “mentoring and friendship are keys to developing character” (KALFI 2022b).

Although not strictly a mentoring relationship, KALFI LEADers also have frequent interactions with the KALFI LEAD program manager, sector heads (of Student Affairs, Mentoring, Events and LEAD Curriculum), and the LEAD coordinator of their assigned study center with whom they can consult matters and ask advice from. The program staff themselves model the target virtues.

This component of the KALFI LEAD program incorporates various strategies presented by Lamb et al. (2021a). Habituation through practice and engagement with virtuous exemplars are incorporated through mentors and program officers modeling the target virtues of the LEAD program. Additionally, reflection on personal experience is incorporated in the one-on-one mentoring session where the LEADers are asked to reflect upon their circumstances and come up with their own action plans. A KALFI LEADer commented that “my mentors are always willing to listen to my plans and give their guidance, suggestions, and support” (KALFI LEAD 2021).

Such mentoring sessions also incorporate dialogue that encourages virtue literacy for they are structured not as a lecture where the LEADer simply absorbs all that the mentor talks about but as a two-way conversation where mentors actively listen to the LEADer’s concerns while, at the same time, giving the necessary advice and encouragement that the LEADer can clarify and adapt or adopt to her life. One KALFI LEADer shares her experience: “To my mentor, I open up about my struggles and everything that I need to overcome and I think that it really helps because she’s there to say it’s okay, try again” (Kalfi Leader 2017).

The mentor’s sharing of her own experiences is a concrete manifestation of how the program tries to raise awareness of situational variables that affect virtuous behavior. Through the sharing of someone older and more experienced, the LEADers are made aware of the situational variables that can inhibit the carrying out of virtuous behavior or practices in the workplace etc. The twice a month mentoring session also serves as a moral reminder of the LEADer’s commitment to leadership characterized by service and virtue.

Lastly, although a professional tone is maintained in the dealings between mentor and mentee and between the program officers and the participants, friendships of mutual accountability are developed—the mentors and program officers strive to help the participants improve and thus practice correction through giving of regular feedback and strive to develop the students’ sense of responsibility. The participants themselves are asked to practice correction and help the mentors and program officers by giving their observations if the culture of excellence is being preserved or not. The one-on-one mentoring is a venue for valuable learnings and cultivation of friendships. One participant shared “through mentoring, I get advice that is tailor-fit to my needs as a student, as a leader, and as a person. Not only that, I also get to bond with my mentor through our regular *chikahans* [catching up] in the mentoring sessions” (KALFI LEAD 2021).

The preceding analysis is presented in tabulated form below. Based on the data from the documentary analysis, KALFI LEAD does incorporate all seven strategies of character development. The first column of Table 2 lists the seven strategies by Lamb et al. (2021a) and the second column specifies in what way KALFI LEAD integrates them.

Recommendations for the improvement of the program design

Granted, KALFI LEAD incorporates all seven strategies of character development, however, the integration of each strategy can be improved. Based on the data from the analysis and the consulted literature on leadership and character education programs, I give several specific recommendations for program incorporation. A recapitulation of the recommendations are presented in tabular form at the end of the section.

Based on the analysis of KALFI LEAD's program design, many of the strategies of character development converges in the mentoring component. However, the strategies of habituation of virtues through practice and moral reminders can be integrated further. The mentor can encourage the KALFI LEADER to identify a virtue she would like to cultivate and commit herself to concrete behavior manifesting that virtue over a period of time akin to the 'Plan for Character Development' being used in the course, 'Commencing Character: How Should We Live,' of Wake Forest University (WFU) in the United States. Taking inspiration from a practice of Benjamin Franklin, in that course, "students choose a target virtue, write a conceptual analysis of the virtue and its related vices, apply a plan to habituate the target virtue over a two-week period, and then write a reflection on their experience" (Lamb et al. 2021b, p. 5). To serve as a 'moral reminder,' the mentor will guide the KALFI LEADER in each mentoring session to take stock of the progress from the past weeks and encourage her to consistently and continuously implement her plans for the cultivation of the target virtue. The above recommended practices would allow the intentional cultivation of virtues of character, essential in an Aristotelian conception of character formation. Such deliberateness is necessary for good intentions of living the virtues alone, without a plan for their cultivation, are fragile.

To integrate reflection on personal experience and dialogue that encourages virtue literacy, the delivery of a pertinent leadership module as well as the teambuilding can be enhanced to also include a segment where KALFI LEADERS can reflect and identify the virtues of character indispensable for good leadership based on their personal experience either through a group discussion or an individual written reflection (Lamb et al. 2021a). Such reflection is necessary for the development of practical wisdom, without which seemingly virtuous behavior would simply be an automatism, and not full virtuous action (Arthur et al. 2017).

To integrate fostering awareness of situational variables that partly influence a person's living out of virtues, a leadership module can incorporate a discussion of the toxic cultures or practices that may be present in the LEADERS' future professions, systemic inequalities and injustices in the Philippines society, and possible biases or prejudices that the LEADERS may unconsciously hold. Behavior is not completely independent from the situation such that a person, for example, considered to

Table 2 Analysis of KALFI LEAD's integration of the 7 strategies of virtue cultivation (Lamb et al., 2021a)

Seven strategies of Character Development (Lamb et al., 2021a)	How KALFI LEAD integrates them
(1) habituation through practice	<p>participation in regular outreach or service projects</p> <p>participation in annual teambuilding where participants practice leadership in an informal setting</p> <p>on-the-job training (OJT) which lasts for 12 days or 96 hours throughout 1 academic year in diverse settings—home, government agency, NGO, and industry</p> <p>participants designing and managing their own leadership project</p> <p>mentors and program staff model the target virtues</p>
(2) reflection on personal experience	<p>one-on-one mentoring session where the LEADers are asked to reflect upon their circumstances and come up with their own action plans</p>
(3) engagement with virtuous exemplars	<p>invited resource speakers for the leadership modules and the annual leadership conference serve as models to admire, emulate, and learn from</p> <p>mentors and program officers model the target virtues</p> <p>OJT as an opportunity to engage with exemplars (e.g. OJT work supervisors and other colleagues) to learn from, emulate or, if the case may be, refrain from imitating</p>
(4) dialogue that increases virtue literacy	<p>open forum where KALFI LEADers ask invited speakers further questions</p> <p>mentoring sessions as a two-way conversation where mentors actively listen to the LEADer's concerns while, at the same time, giving the necessary advice and encouragement that the LEADer can clarify and adapt or adopt to her life</p>
(5) awareness of situational variables	<p>open forum where speakers are asked further questions about their personal experience to overcome a certain challenge</p> <p>mentor's sharing of her own experiences during mentoring experience in the OJT workplace reveals how a certain virtue is practiced and what variables may affect the effort to practice virtue within an organization</p>
(6) moral reminders	<p>whole KALFI LEAD program lasts four years</p> <p>delivery of leadership modules is spread throughout four years</p> <p>mentoring occurs twice a month</p>
(7) friendships of mutual accountability	<p>belonging to a community of youth leaders with shared values</p> <p>informal moments during teambuilding and outreach provide an optimum space for the development of friendships</p> <p>conversations between poster presenters and participants during the exhibit</p> <p>LEAD mentors and program officers give the LEADers regular feedback while LEADers are also asked for their observations on the mentors and officers</p>

be generous by her friends and family may, given an unfamiliar or extraordinary situation like being in a deserted street with a group of people of dubious character, may pass up the chance to help a needy person for fear of her safety. The disclosure of these external and internal variables—from those in the workplace or in wider

society to personal tendencies and biases—that may influence virtuous behavior is valuable as a forewarning to guide one’s behavior appropriately.

The current KALFI LEAD program gives prominence to engagement with virtuous exemplars by inviting resource speakers and selecting mentors who are not only competent in their fields but also are regarded as people of character. Another practice that could be adopted is to expose the KALFI LEADers to readings or videos about historic or contemporary exemplars, either autobiographies or third-person narratives. KALFI LEAD may find inspiration from the Oxford GLI that provides readings that “include an excerpt from a biography of Nelson Mandela; analyses of historical or contemporary leaders in politics, business, law, and medicine; and letters and personal narratives from influential thinkers and leaders” (Lamb et al. 2021a, p. 89). These readings or videos can be about Filipino historical and contemporary leaders in order to increase its relevance for the participants nevertheless, they can also feature leaders of other nations and cultures to develop participants’ universal perspective. KALFI LEAD may also find inspiration from the ‘Commencing Character’ course of WFU that requires a ‘Profile in Character,’ where students are asked to “identify a personal exemplar, interview that person about their life and character, and then write a 4–5-page profile of the exemplar’s character and its impact on the student’s life” (Lamb et al. 2021b, p. 5). Such a practice would generate an understanding of a more ordinary and everyday type of virtuous exemplarity and leadership which the LEADers could emulate in their own lives.

Although the cohort-based design and various program features already encourage friendships among the KALFI LEADers themselves as well as with the program managers and mentors, friendships of mutual accountability can be further integrated through inclusion of a lecture or readings or videos on friendship—on what friendship is all about, its different kinds, and exemplars of friendships—and subsequent discussion of the topic among the KALFI LEADers and individually with their mentors. Given that not everyone may understand friendship as one that facilitates the cultivation of virtue, an exploration of Aristotle’s conception of authentic friendships is necessary. This is especially important in our times where a friend request sent and accepted already constitutes friendship and where friendships based on utility and pleasure or egocentrism are common.

Lastly, and more importantly, the KALFI LEAD program can revisit its target virtues and elaborate on how each virtue is conceived and how might they be manifested in practice. As Berkowitz (2022) stated, starting with the end in mind is necessary if one is to design an effective character development intervention. Clearly, KALFI LEAD stresses on developing the participants’ attitude and ability to serve based on the conception of leadership as servant leadership and the program design is logically aligned with that outcome principally through its emphasis on participation in and organization of regular service projects. However, KALFI LEAD also claims itself to be a holistic character development program for virtues are regarded as indispensable if the LEADers are to really “attain the good that they seek” (KALFI 2022a). This is in consonance with Brooks (2021) conception of virtues acting as the “muscles” that enable the desire to serve to be brought to life in stable concrete behavior. Unfortunately, based on the documents analyzed, the KALFI LEAD program is not clear on the meaning of the virtues adopted as target virtues. There is a need to clarify the meaning of each target virtue within the context of a

Table 3 Recommendations for the improvement of KALFI LEAD's program design

Seven strategies of Character Development (Lamb et al., 2021a)	Recommendations for the improvement of KALFI LEAD's program design
(1) habituation through practice	Bimonthly mentoring to incorporate a 'Plan for Character Development' where the participant is asked to identify a virtue she would like to cultivate and commit herself to concrete behavior over a period of time
(2) reflection on personal experience	An appropriate leadership module and teambuilding to be enhanced with a segment for reflection on the virtues indispensable for good leadership based on participants' personal experiences either through a group discussion or an individual written reflection
(3) engagement with virtuous exemplars	Expose participants to readings or videos about Filipino and international historic or contemporary exemplars, either autobiographies or third-person narratives
(4) dialogue that increases virtue literacy	Same as recommendation for strategy #2
(5) awareness of situational variables	A leadership module to incorporate a discussion of the toxic cultures or practices that may be present in the participants' future professions, systemic inequalities and injustices in the Philippines society, and possible biases or prejudices that the LEADers may unconsciously hold
(6) moral reminders	Continuous and consistent implementation of 'Plan for Character Development'
(7) friendships of mutual accountability	Strengthen the participants' understanding of friendship through the inclusion of a lecture, or readings or videos on friendship and subsequent discussion of the topic among the participants and individually with their mentors
Clarify outcomes. It is recommended that program staff conceptualize what each KALFI LEAD target virtue (i.e., leadership, excellence, accountability, and discipline) means and how might they be manifested in practice	

leadership development program so that program staff, mentors, and the participants themselves know exactly the desired outcomes.⁶ The first step to a robust conceptualization of each virtue is the classification of each target virtue as described below.

Character education programs typically aim at cultivating a combination of moral, intellectual, civic, and performance virtues (McGrath et al. 2021; Shields 2011; Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues 2017). The target virtues KALFI LEAD aims to cultivate in its participants are leadership, excellence, accountability, and discipline and they can be classified under moral and performance virtues, and, what Havard (2021) calls, leadership virtues.

⁶ The description of the target virtues in the KALFI Handbook and Planner (2021) is not sufficient and robust enough to give program directors, facilitators, mentors, and participants an understanding of what the target virtue means and how it is manifested. For example, the target virtue of excellence is simply identified with the requirement of good academic standing. The identification of good academic results with excellence is suspect because a person may actually attain good grades in school through dishonest means.

Accountability is a synonym for responsibility and discipline and these are readily understood as virtues. In fact, Character Counts! (2022) identifies responsibility as one of the six pillars of character while Lickona and Davidson (2005) include responsibility and discipline in their list of eight strengths of character. Both responsibility and discipline are considered as performance character strengths (Character.org 2022). Performance character strengths or performance virtues, according to the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues (2017), are “character traits that have an instrumental value in enabling the intellectual, moral and civic virtues” (p. 5). Leadership, on the other hand, can be classified under the moral virtues. The VIA Institute on Character (2022) conceptualizes leadership as a strength within the virtue of justice which is classically considered as one of the moral virtues.⁷ Lastly, excellence, intimately related with magnanimity, is one of the two virtues Havard (2021) considers as constitutive of the essence of leadership, the other being humility.

The above recommendations are summarized on Table 3. The first column lists the seven strategies of character development and the second column contains the recommendations for the improvement of KALFI LEAD’s program design.

Conclusion

The KALFI LEAD program was designed to give female youth leaders relevant leadership training, instill in them a disposition of service particularly to the disadvantaged, and provide them with holistic character formation so as to “enable them to struggle and attain the good that they seek” (KALFI 2022a). Given such objectives and the concern for program effectiveness, it was necessary to confirm whether the KALFI LEAD program design incorporates research-based strategies for the cultivation of virtues of character necessary for leaders and thereafter, provide recommendations for the improvement of the program design.

The program does incorporate the seven strategies of character development as presented in Lamb et al. (2021a) but there is room for improvement as can be seen in the given recommendations. More importantly, it is recommended that program staff, together with the mentors, conceptualize what each KALFI LEAD target virtue means and how might they be manifested in practice. Such a clarification on the outcomes is necessary in the efforts of program design improvement, implementation, and assessment.

Given the great potential of holistic programs of leadership and character development for influencing emerging leaders’ lives and their communities (Brooks et al. 2019), programs similar to KALFI LEAD can be analyzed to determine whether strategies for leadership and character development are effectively incorporated in their program designs. The Aristotelian framework of character development (Lamb et al. 2021a), however, will have to be applied with attention to particular socio-cultural and educational contexts of the institution and/or program under study. In the case of KALFI LEAD, it would be objectionable to indiscriminately adapt the

⁷ Philosophers who have conceived of justice as a moral virtue are Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas, among others.

practices of the Oxford GLI, the program that first embodied the framework, given the difference in sociocultural and educational contexts of both programs. Nevertheless, such framework for virtue cultivation was valuable in determining whether KALFI LEAD is designed in such a way that it is able to achieve what it claims to do. The next course of action would be to assess KALFI LEAD's impact in the lives of its alumnae and their communities. This article has hopefully provided educators interested in the character development of the youth with ideas of how the Aristotelian framework can be concretely integrated into their own leadership programs.

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Conflict of interest None to declare.

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