I Am Responsible for Who I Become: Reframing Students' Sense of Responsibility for Their Ethics and Academic Integrity

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Abstract. Academic integrity is a key pillar of quality education. Academic integrity scholars believe character development is a must-have for any higher education integrity framework especially with the advent of Gen AI. Moreover, several business ethics education scholars are calling for a return to a curriculum which focuses on the moral growth of students. These researchers converge in holding higher education institutions responsible for the character development of their students. Recent academic integrity and character education scholarship proposes neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics as a workable framework on which to ground character development. According to neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, life is a task where decisions build or erode one's character. Inspiring students to pursue excellence throughout their education journey and beyond, presents ethics as an intrinsic aspect of working well. In this way students are helped to reframe ethics and academic integrity as an existential task, of taking responsibility for who they become. This paper contends that higher education institutions should undertake character education because of the potential misuse of Gen AI and to restore relevance to ethics and business ethics courses. It is important to incorporate a neo-Aristotelian approach to character development as a central theme in ethics or business ethics courses, alongside drawing on academic integrity experiences from other subjects as relevant and tangible case studies. This article presents the Character Development-for-Excellence Framework, explores related pedagogical strategies, and outlines how higher education institutions can support and extend character development beyond the classroom.

Keywords: academic integrity, character, Gen AI, education, neo-aristotelian virtue ethics.

1. Introduction

Academic integrity is a key pillar of quality education. Higher education providers invest resources to evaluate students on the work they have personally completed with all sources acknowledged. Academic integrity scholars (Guerrero-Dib et al., 2023; Sadiq, 2024; Susilawati et al., 2022) argue character

development is an essential component of a robust higher education integrity framework. However, there is limited research on how to incorporate this in a useful way. The advent of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI), while redefining academic integrity, also strengthens the case for including character development in institutional academic integrity. Simultaneously, business ethics education researchers want more emphasis on moral growth to restore legitimacy and relevance to the teaching of business ethics in business schools (Boon, 2024; Jaganjac et al., 2024; Zsolnai, 2024). Scholars in both fields acknowledge their discipline is responsible for the formation of moral business leaders. Recent research confirms that character can be developed during the higher education years, with a small group of scholars grounding their programmes in neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics (Arthur, 2024; Brooks & Villacis, 2023; Krisjansson, 2015). Several academic integrity scholars also believe character development should be based on neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics (Guerrero-Dib et al., 2020, 2023).

According to neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, life is a task where decisions build or erode one's character; one's choices are dynamic in that they impact one's capacity to make future decisions. In this worldview, choosing excellence (virtue) is the path to human maturity and fulfilment. When students are inspired to pursue excellence throughout their educational journey and beyond, ethics and academic integrity become more clearly understood as natural outcomes of that pursuit. In this way, students reframe ethics/academic integrity as an existential task; of taking responsibility for who they become.

This paper develops a theoretical and pedagogical framework based on neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics to guide character education. Scholars agree that character education should be incorporated into higher education but very few institutions have done so and the fact that it has been successful has not improved the uptake (Arthur, 2024; Brooks & Harrison, 2024). Character development can instil mindsets and habits of academic integrity and business ethics but more importantly education in excellence is a life investment. The proliferation of Gen AI is the catalyst for this paper as the authors believe this has the potential to threaten academic integrity and character development during higher education studies.

While there is existing scholarship justifying the appropriateness of taking a neo-Aristotelian approach in business ethics education (Kristjansson, 2024), , this paper addresses the implications for daily choices in the academic integrity context. It unpacks how virtue grows and enriches the individual and suggests a pedagogical approach which uses the academic integrity experience to enter the process of character development. The paper posits that character education be initiated and cultivated within the ethics/business ethics courses using the lived experience of academic integrity in concurrent subjects. Navigating the challenges of engaging in authentic learning, particularly in the age of Gen AI, is a real-life opportunity to understand what character is and how it is built.

2. Academic Integrity

The establishment and conservation of academic integrity is a major issue in tertiary education (De Maio & Dixon, 2022; Guerrero et al., 2020; Mulisa & Ebessa, 2021; Tatum & Curtis, 2023). Institutions are required to implement academic integrity policies, but the challenge is developing a culture of integrity. Key stakeholders agree that this is the ideal, but few scholars examine the issue of influencing student choices. Academic integrity consists in behaving ethically in the educational context and requires adherence to a range of key values. For example, Bukar et al., (2024b) refer to honesty and fairness and Sadiq et al., (2024) point to honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage. In practice these values ensure that every student receives grades which truly reflect their effort and learning.

Higher education providers monitor the quality of their services which includes ensuring students engage in authentic learning and assessment (Bannister et al., 2024) because, "Academic integrity is essential for educational quality and the dependability of student achievement" (Susilawati et al., 2022, p.58). It is essential that students honestly participate in the education process by listening, understanding, thinking critically, learning the subject content, and making a genuine effort to demonstrate their learning through their submitted assignments. This is how professionals are prepared and how reputations are built. Education regulations in Australia for example require providers to have:

> An institutional policy framework to maintain and support academic integrity of students and staff that is backed by processes and practices that implement institutional policies effectively. Providers will need processes for detecting and addressing instances of plagiarism and other forms of cheating (TEQSA, 5.2, 2021b).

The associated Guidance Note adds that staff and students should practice honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility as they engage in learning and teaching (TEQSA 2021a).

A range of measures are employed to promote academic integrity. De Maio and Dixon 's (2022) review of Australasian academic integrity research in higher education (1990-2020) reveals efforts are being made at all levels of the institution and even throughout institution networks to promote a culture of academic integrity. Academic integrity scholars often argue that educating students about values such as fairness and honesty is more effective than teaching them how to avoid misconduct but provide minimal guidance on how to shift from understanding the values to living them (Bretag et al., 2011; Sefcik et al., 2020; De Maio & Dixon, 2022; De Maio, 2024; Mulenga & Shilongo, 2024).

Several researchers edge closer to addressing the actual practice of values. Mulisa and Ebessa (2021) acknowledge that inculcating values takes a long time, and strategies should emphasise personal growth rather than deterrence. Tackling

misconduct is a short term and outcomes-focussed approach which ignores the importance of mindsets and habits for long term behavioural change. Mulisa and Ebessa (2021) support a more positive approach where students explore and reflect on, the values behind academic integrity, thinking about the impact lived values have on themselves and others. Susilawati et al's., (2022) study of academic integrity in the Indonesian higher education sector, found that character plays a key role in promoting academic integrity, which develops throughout a student's academic career. This need to imbue students with something more permanent such as an attitude, mindset, viewpoint or character is echoed in the literature (Balamurugan et al., 2024; Crawford et al., 2023; Fowler, 2023; Guerrero-Dib et al., 2023; Sadiq, 2024; Striepe et al., 2023; Susilawati et al., 2022; Wulandari et al., 2024) and to date there has been limited response. This task is urgent given the link between academic misconduct and unethical business conduct discussed in the next section.

3. Academic Integrity and Professional Ethics

Research confirms a link between academic misconduct at university with workplace dishonesty (Guerrero-Dib et al., 2020, 2023; Mulisa & Ebessa, 2021; Susilawati et al., 2022; Striepe et al., 2023). If unethical behaviour can be learned and reinforced during university, it follows that ethical values and habits can also be cultivated in the same environment. Mulisa and Ebessa (2021) conducted a literature review of articles discussing academic and workplace dishonesty. They found 18 empirical studies confirming this relationship. Their study concluded that higher education providers could play a key role in developing both competent and ethical employees because they shape students' mindsets and habits over several years. Guerrero-Dib et al's., (2023) review of the literature goes further. They contend that the effectiveness of organisational ethics programmes depends on students developing ethical habits at university. These two reviews represent 22 empirical studies which overall demonstrate "that students who engage in dishonest activities in the academic context are more likely to demonstrate inappropriate behaviours during their professional life" (Guerrero-Dib et al., 2023, p.166). Guerrero-Dib et al., (2023) explicitly challenge education institutions to acknowledge their responsibility for forming ethical professionals and to use the educational journey more effectively to develop ethical attitudes and habits. Susilawati et al., (2022) do the same.

The academic integrity experience itself could be the perfect opportunity to develop mindsets and habits. Guerrero-Dib et al., (2023)'s literature review included Guerrero-Dib et al's., 2020 study of Mexican university students. Over 1200 students responded to a questionnaire about: (1) the frequency with which they conducted dishonest acts in all areas of life, and (2) how severe they rate types of academic misconduct. The research found "the more severe the students consider an act of academic dishonesty, the more ethically they behave outside of