

Character Lab's Tripartite Taxonomy of Character

Overview

Character Strengths are defined as ways of acting, thinking, and feeling that benefit the individual as well as the broader community. The Tripartite Taxonomy of Character (Character Lab's Character Strengths) defines three domains of competence:

- Strengths of Heart: Interpersonal competencies, the "giving" strengths that help you relate in positive ways to other people, such as gratitude and social intelligence.
- Strengths of Will: Intrapersonal competencies, the "doing" strengths that help you achieve your goals, such as grit and self-control.
- Strengths of Mind: Intellectual competencies, the "thinking" strengths that enable a fertile and independent life of the mind, such as curiosity.

Each of these dimensions of character encompasses a multitude of strengths. The specific strengths named by the framework are meant to be exemplars of each domain.

History

Within the positive psychology tradition, researchers such as Martin Seligman have studied a variety of character strengths that are malleable and important for success in life. Before Character Lab existed, the researchers focused on strengths that pilot research and personal reflection suggested were especially relevant to schools. Research indicates that character strengths like gratitude, self-control, and curiosity have been valued by cultures around the world and throughout human history. In a recent study in *Contemporary*

The Tripartite Taxonomy of Character

Character Lab

"Our framework suggests that there are at least three different aspects of character, each predicting distinct, consequential life outcomes. School practices and programs targeting interpersonal, intrapersonal, and intellectual dimensions of character hold promise for setting children on the path to thriving socially, emotionally, academically, and physically."

– Angela Duckworth

The briefs in this 10-part series each describe an individual framework currently in use. They are intended to illustrate how frameworks can be analyzed and help practitioners learn to evaluate frameworks on the types of criteria that matter most in their settings. The briefs are not an endorsement of these frameworks.

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Educational Psychology, Park and colleagues concluded that these strengths exemplify three very broad families of character: intellectual strengths like curiosity and zest, interpersonal strengths like gratitude and social/emotional intelligence, and intrapersonal strengths like grit, self-control, optimism, and growth mindset.

The character strengths listed on Character Lab's website are illustrative of the interpersonal, intrapersonal, and intellectual competencies. The team selected some of the best-studied strengths across all three dimensions of character, although what is currently on their website is by no means a complete representation of character strengths. Indeed, resources provided to build character are continually being developed, and additional Character Strengths are being added to the website as tools are developed. Character Lab encourages teachers, students, and families to think about what's right for them and believes that if young people develop strengths of mind, heart, and will, they can thrive.

Purpose and Intended Audience

The Character Lab has produced a variety of parent-facing and educator-facing tools for those who work with and want to help young people directly. Currently, the Lab creates two forms of actionable advice, Playbooks and Thoughts of the Week. For example, online Playbooks for specific Character Strengths provide information on how to encourage, model, celebrate, and enable the strength.

Settings

Character Strengths are used in school settings in grades K-12. The framework has widespread influence, especially with its use within KIPP schools. Tools for both parents and teachers are provided to develop character in children and in themselves.

COMPETENCIES NAMED IN THIS FRAMEWORK*

Strengths of Heart

✓ Purpose

✓ Gratitude

✓ Kindness

✓ Empathy

*Note that the competencies are organized into three dimensions, one of which is strengths of heart.

Criteria Ratings: Conceptual Clarity

| FIVE CONCEPTUAL CLARITY CRITERIA | | | |
|--|--|--------|------|
| CRITERIA | LOW | MEDIUM | HIGH |
| Specificity | Each cluster and each character strength is defined. Additionally, the framework describes how the strengths manifest as behaviors that can be observed and measured. However, the framework emphasizes the dimensions of character (interpersonal, intrapersonal, and intellectual) rather than focusing on specific competencies. | | |
| Balance | Character Strengths are clustered into strengths of heart, will, and mind. These correspond to interpersonal, intrapersonal, and intellectual competencies, respectively. The framework is balanced and comprehensive, as it includes these three dimensions as well as skills, attitudes, and mindsets. | | |
| Developmental | Character Lab does not include developmental components or discuss how strengths progress with age. | | |
| Culturally Sensitive | Although Character Lab acknowledges the importance of a strength and how each strength is demonstrated may vary by community, they do not discuss these differences. | | |
| Empirically Grounded | Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses support the tripartite taxonomy of character, providing empirical evidence for intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intellectual competencies in children. Additionally, positive peer relations, class participation, and report card grades were consistently predicted by these strengths. Previous research indicates that character strengths like gratitude, self-control, and curiosity have been valued by cultures around the world and throughout human history. | | |
| <p><i>These ratings are intended to help illustrate the strengths and limits of some popular frameworks. They are neither designed to formally compare frameworks nor endorse any framework. The ratings are based on criteria defined more fully in this brief and the process of rating and appropriate uses are discussed in the introductory brief to this series. We urge practitioners to review these and prioritize which criteria are most important for use in their particular context.</i></p> | | | |

Criteria Ratings: Implementation Support

| FIVE IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT CRITERIA | | | |
|---|---|--------|------|
| CRITERIA | LOW | MEDIUM | HIGH |
| Intended for Practice | While the framework was derived from empirical evidence and not originally developed for practice, the research has been translated and disseminated to provide evidence-based ways to develop skills in practice. Character Lab’s website and tools are heavy on illustrations and colors and are user-friendly. The website links to research papers and recommended resources such as books, related organizations, and news for each character strength and includes videos and articles about character from experts in the field. | | |
| Resources for Practitioners | In addition to several tools such as Playbooks , other resources are available and include: classroom posters with visuals of each strength with descriptions; sections on “What the Research Says”; links to readings and videos; and ready-to-use strategies/lesson plans for educators designed to build specific character strengths in middle and high school students. | | |
| Resources for Use with Children and Youth | While resources are primarily for parents and educators, student worksheets and other resources for use by children and youth are included in Playbooks. | | |
| Resources for Measurement and Data Use | Character Lab has developed a Character Growth Card as a conversation starter for setting personal growth goals for each character strength, yet it is not a validated tool. Additionally, Character Lab specifically advises against the use of summative character assessment. | | |
| Empirically Tested | Character Lab supports a Research Network that aims to bring the latest character development strategies to schools by gathering data on the effectiveness of promising research ideas. This consortium of innovative schools around the country works collaboratively with leading scientists to conduct research that is student-centered and aligned with school needs. Additionally, Character Lab has an annual Educator Summit. | | |
| <p><i>These ratings are intended to help illustrate the strengths and limits of some popular frameworks. They are neither designed to formally compare frameworks nor endorse any framework. The ratings are based on criteria defined more fully in this brief and the process of rating and appropriate uses are discussed in the introductory brief to this series. We urge practitioners to review these and prioritize which criteria are most important for use in their particular context</i></p> | | | |

Summary of Framework

Character Lab's Tripartite Taxonomy of Character is a practical framework of interpersonal, intrapersonal, and intellectual character strengths tied to achievement and well-being. Actionable advice and many supporting tools for practitioners are provided by Character Lab, a nonprofit with the mission of advancing the science and practice of character development. The framework is grounded in research and actively being studied and improved by a dedicated organization.

About the Developer

Character LAB

Character Lab is a nonprofit organization founded in 2013 by three individuals: Angela Duckworth, a MacArthur Fellow and Christopher H. Browne Distinguished Professor of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania; Dave Levin, co-founder of the KIPP public charter schools; and Dominic Randolph, Head of Riverdale Country School. Character Lab's mission statement is to advance the science and practice of character development.

The team of scientists and educators at Character Lab pursues two related aims:

1. Generating high-impact scientific insights about character strengths via the Research Network, a school-based consortium of researchers and schools.
2. Translating scientific insights into actionable advice for teachers and parents.

References

Park, D., Tsukayama, E., Goodwin, G. P., Patrick, S., & Duckworth, A. L. (2017). A tripartite taxonomy of character: Evidence for intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intellectual competencies in children. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 48*: 16-27.

Mathematica Policy Research. (2015, September). Going to scale: As KIPP network grows, positive impacts are sustained. Retrieved from: http://www.kipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/kipp_scale-up_ifbrief-1.pdf

Useful Links to Explore Character Lab website:

- <https://characterlab.org/>

KIPP's Use of Character:

- <https://www.kipp.org/approach/character/>

About the Author



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Teresa Borowski is a graduate student in the Community and Prevention Research PhD program in Psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), where her research focuses on social-emotional competence development, particularly through dance and other arts. She works as a research specialist with CASEL's research team and the Frameworks subgroup of the Assessment Work Group. She is also the co-editor of Measuring SEL's blog. Prior to UIC, Teresa worked as a research assistant in the Infant Cognition Lab and the Cultural Studio at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and for the Learning and Memory Lab at the Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology.

The Measuring SEL Series of Frameworks Briefs

The Establishing Practical Social-Emotional Competence Assessments of Preschool to High School Students project as guided by the Assessment Work Group (AWG) is dedicated to helping advance the effective use of data to inspire practice in SEL. In deciding how the AWG could best contribute to advancing the field and complement rather than compete with other efforts underway to address the challenges of multiple frameworks and inconsistent use of language, the AWG Frameworks Subgroup, led by Stephanie Jones and Roger Weissberg, developed four series of briefs designed for practitioners. Each series and each brief in the series is designed to help advance how people think about the issues and make reasonable choices that work best for them and their context. We hope they provide a set of “building blocks” that systems and practitioners can use to advance and improve their SEL efforts. Learn more at

Introductory Series

These briefs are about what frameworks are, how they are useful, the challenges and opportunities they present in practice, and defining criteria that are helpful when considering what frameworks to use.

Comparative Series

These briefs explore efforts underway to categorize and align ways of thinking about comparing unique frameworks. The briefs also describe tools available to aid systems and practitioners in their selection and use of a framework.

Special Issues Series

These briefs identify critical issues that frameworks must address or that influence how they are used that are important to consider when selecting and using frameworks, such as equity and SEL, and developmental considerations.

Descriptive Series

These briefs each describe an individual framework currently in use. They are intended to illustrate how frameworks can be analyzed and help practitioners learn to evaluate frameworks on the types of criteria that matter most in their settings. *(The briefs are not an endorsement of these frameworks.)*

The Assessment Work Group is committed to advancing dialogue on key issues in the field and stating a perspective when appropriate. The views and opinions expressed in these briefs reflect the general position of the Assessment Work Group. They do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of CASEL or any of the individual organizations involved with the work group.