



THE TWELVE POWERS OF BECOMING

Why the Archetypes Are Capacities to Gain, Not Types to Become

Oliver Riddett | The Archetype Approach

Maturity is not becoming one type. It is gaining access to more of yourself.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Oliver Riddett is the founder of the Archetype Approach, a developmental and relational model of childhood built around twelve universal archetypal capacities and six axes of balance. Developed through practice at Children of Towan in Porthtowan, Cornwall, the approach helps parents and practitioners look beneath behaviour and respond through balance rather than correction.

A child is described as “a Rebel.”

It sounds harmless enough. In the Archetype Approach, Rebel is a real and useful pattern: agency, truth, refusal, independence, resistance to false authority. But listen carefully to what happens when the noun hardens.

He is *a* Rebel.

The pattern has become the person.

Soon adults begin anticipating opposition before it arrives. Ordinary tiredness is read as rebellion. Curiosity becomes challenge. A frightened “no” gets folded into the same story. The model that was meant to make the child more visible begins to obscure them.

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That is exactly what the Archetype Approach must resist.

The twelve archetypes are not twelve boxes for human beings. They are twelve powers of participation: capacities a person may use, overuse, fear, avoid, borrow from others and gradually integrate.

The aim is not to discover which archetype a child is. The aim is to notice which human capacities are available, which are carrying too much, and which may need an invitation to grow.

TWELVE CAPACITIES, NOT TWELVE IDENTITIES

Watcher brings reflective attention: the ability to pause, observe and remain distinct enough to see.

Friend brings belonging: the capacity to join, attach, harmonise and experience “we.”

Rebel brings agency: the power to refuse, differentiate, question and protect what feels true.

Helper brings responsibility: contribution, care, usefulness and awareness of impact.

Planner brings structure: sequencing, predictability, preparation and the ability to make a path.

Explorer brings courage before uncertainty: movement towards what is not yet known.

Imagineer brings possibility: symbolic play, imagination, invention and alternative worlds.

Builder brings form: practical competence, construction, completion and the satisfaction of making something real.

Thinker brings interpretation: naming, comparing, explaining, reasoning and conceptual understanding.

Mover brings embodied action: learning and knowing through the body, movement, rhythm and physical participation.

Joker brings flexibility: play with perspective, tension, rules and status; the capacity to loosen what has become rigid.

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Energy brings vitality: intensity, charge, commitment, appetite and the force that gets something fully alive.

None is superior. None is safe in isolation.

A capacity becomes shadow-like not because its essence is bad but because it has lost access to the rest of the system.

THE SIX THRESHOLDS

The six axes place each capacity beside a balancing opposite:

Watcher and Friend form the axis of Belonging.

Rebel and Helper form Power.

Planner and Explorer form Order.

Imagineer and Builder form Creation.

Thinker and Mover form Cognition.

Joker and Energy form Vitality.

The word “opposite” can be misleading if it suggests enemies. These pairs are better imagined as tensions human beings repeatedly have to learn to carry.

How do I remain myself and belong? How do I possess agency without forgetting responsibility? How do I make order without closing the door to uncertainty? How does imagination become form without being killed by form? How does thought remain connected to lived experience? How does intensity remain alive without becoming rigid or overwhelming?

Development rarely answers these once. We circle them across childhood and adulthood in increasingly complex forms.

A three-year-old encounters Power through “mine” and “help.” An adolescent encounters it through autonomy, loyalty and consequence. An adult encounters it through leadership, partnership, parenting, work and conscience.

The axis is therefore not just a tool for correcting behaviour. It is a lifelong developmental question.

MATURITY IS ACCESS, NOT MODERATION

Balance is often misunderstood as standing politely in the middle.

That would make the most mature person an emotionally beige human being who never moves too far in any direction. No thanks.

Sometimes life needs a great deal of Rebel. There are moments when harmony is cowardice and somebody must say no. Sometimes life needs intense Helper: a baby is ill, a neighbour is in crisis, the group needs somebody to carry more. Sometimes Planner must dominate for a while because the storm is coming and the roof genuinely needs fixing. Sometimes the plan needs to be thrown into the sea because reality has changed.

Balance means ****access****.

Can I reach the other side when my favourite solution stops serving life?

A mature Friend can stand alone when belonging demands dishonesty. A mature Rebel can cooperate without experiencing cooperation as defeat. A mature Thinker can stop explaining and act. A mature Mover can pause and reflect. A mature Energy can loosen. A mature Joker can become serious when somebody is hurt.

That is why the centre of an axis is not the destination. The destination is mobility.

Wholeness does not flatten character. It gives character more doors.

INITIATION AS ACCESS TO THE UNAVAILABLE POWER

This is where the language of initiation becomes useful.

A genuine developmental threshold often asks for a capacity that was previously unavailable, unnecessary or actively avoided.

The socially confident child begins school and discovers that Friend alone cannot manage every room. They need Watcher: pause, read the group, notice before entering. The fierce Rebel discovers that agency without Helper eventually damages the very relationships in which freedom has meaning. The brilliant Imagineer reaches the frustration of a beautiful idea that exists only in their head and needs Builder to give the dream hands.

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The Planner encounters a journey that cannot be controlled. Explorer must be tolerated. The Thinker who can explain exactly why the bike works eventually has to get on it. Mover becomes necessary. The Energy child who can fill an entire room discovers that real vitality includes being able to shift state, laugh at oneself and release intensity. Joker becomes medicine.

The threshold does not remove the original strength. The child does not become less imaginative when they learn to build, or less independent when they learn responsibility.

They become less imprisoned by the strength that previously did all the work.

This is one reason the balancing opposite can initially feel threatening. It asks the self to surrender a reliable strategy.

To the Planner, Explorer looks like chaos. To Rebel, Helper can look like submission. To Friend, Watcher can feel like separation. To Thinker, Mover can feel crude or uncontrolled.

The threshold is the place where the avoided power becomes usable.

SHADOW AS CAPTIVITY

The word shadow can easily become another moral label. “That’s the shadow Rebel.” “He’s in Joker shadow.” Used carelessly, we have simply invented fancier language for naughty.

A more humane understanding is captivity.

The capacity cannot move.

A child uses Joker every time shame approaches because seriousness feels unbearable. Another uses Planner every time uncertainty appears because surprise feels unsafe. A Helper rushes to care for everyone because receiving care creates vulnerability. A Friend cannot risk disagreement because belonging has become the condition of safety.

These patterns may be adaptive. They may have been learned for good reasons. They may also be temporary developmental experiments rather than deep psychological structures.

The intervention is not to attack the active archetype. It is to widen the field around it.

What experience would make another response available?

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Can the Joker remain loved while becoming serious? Can the Helper receive without owing? Can the Rebel cooperate without disappearing? Can the Planner survive a plan changing? Can the Watcher enter the group and still remain themselves?

Balance is created through experience, not lecture.

NOT A SCORECARD FOR CHILDREN

This is the safeguard that has to sit at the centre of the system.

If practitioners start producing radar charts that imply a child is “low in Helper” or “high in Rebel” and then treat those scores as the child’s truth, the model has eaten the child.

Observation must remain primary.

A refusal might involve Rebel. It might also be exhaustion, pain, sensory overload, imitation, confusion, a developmental language gap or an entirely reasonable rejection of what the adult is asking.

An adult who has fallen in love with the archetypal map may become less curious because the pattern feels satisfying. This is the Thinker’s danger: naming can create the illusion that seeing is complete.

The model must bend towards the real child, never the child towards the model.

Pattern is a question.

The child gets the final word through what actually happens next.

THE PERSON WHO CAN MOVE

Imagine adulthood not as perfect equilibrium but as increasing freedom of movement.

I can stand alone and belong.

I can lead and serve.

I can plan and improvise.

I can dream and build.

I can think and act.

I can intensify and loosen.

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The mature person may still have obvious preferences. One person is gloriously Planner-heavy, another intensely Imagineer, another deeply Friend. Wholeness does not create twelve equal slices of personality.

It creates choice where there was once compulsion.

The question becomes not “Which archetype am I?” but “Which power is trying to lead here, and is it the power this moment actually needs?”

That is discernment.

THE TWELVE POWERS AND THE THRESHOLD

Seen this way, the whole of childhood is initiatory in small, repeated ways.

The child learns to wait and gains Watcher. Joins a group and deepens Friend. Says no and discovers Rebel. Carries a real responsibility and grows Helper. Makes a plan and uses Planner. Walks into the unknown and borrows Explorer. Invents a world and strengthens Imagineer. Makes the world stand up with Builder. Names and compares with Thinker. Acts with Mover. Releases rigidity through Joker. Commits fully through Energy.

Then life complicates each gift by introducing its opposite.

The child is not being initiated into an archetype.

They are being initiated into a wider humanity.

Perhaps that is the deepest use of the Archetype Approach: not to tell us what kind of child is standing in front of us, but to help us notice what forms of human possibility are trying to become available next.

SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

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