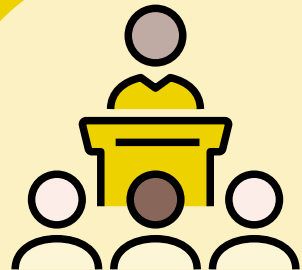




Bringing Character to Life: Virtues in Teaching

AIDAN THOMPSON
ANDREW MAILE



Introduction

The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues has sought to explore the place of character and virtues in professional education and practice through its 'Virtues in the Professions' research (2012–2020).

To date, the research has engaged more than 3,500 participants, across first year undergraduate students, graduates, and professionals with at least five years' of experience. The research considered the virtues important to teachers, doctors, lawyers, nurses, and business professionals, and emphasised the moral character and virtues of a person over any ethical duties or rules that are prescribed by a regulatory body. The research has considered each profession in its own right, as well as looking across the data for comparisons and contrasts between the professions.

shape the moral character of their students. Teachers can exemplify virtues through personal example, which also provides opportunity for personal flourishing and a professional commitment that serves the greater good of society. The application of the findings to the workplace will be enhanced with quotes from leading education authorities and previous Jubilee Centre research. It is hoped that teachers gain practical and actionable take-aways that will enrich their working lives by contributing to their professional purpose and sense of vocational flourishing.



The research that underpins this booklet is drawn from 546 novice and experienced teachers and teaching educators. The aim of this booklet is to highlight the importance of developing professionals' abilities to authentically display and enact the virtues in the workplace that resonate with their personal life. In prioritising professional moral development, school teachers can contribute to the formation of young people, and

'Moral ethics have always played a central role in good education and practice.'

The Good Teacher

'What character education does, is it allows a school to establish a set of universal values that everybody can understand. That's parents, students and staff.'

**Gary Lewis, Chair,
Association for Character Education**

Character and Virtues in Teaching

A traditional conception of a 'good' professional includes requisite technical competencies for the field **and** excellences of character, required for sound ethical decision-making (Carr, 2018).

Character encompasses positive emotional, behavioural and cognitive habits that motivate and foster human excellence (Kristjánsson, 2015). Virtues reflect intrinsically and morally good qualities that help guide ethically sound decisions and actions; examples include honesty, modesty and kindness.

Research by the Jubilee Centre has found that little attention has been paid to character in teaching, and that the moral virtues that teachers are required to adopt have been neglected in recent years. Yet, there remains an inherent interest in reinvigorating these for personal and professional good, both by regulatory bodies and by pre- and in-service professionals themselves.

Whilst people are moved to pursue a career in teaching by the potential to create an impact in society, and to apply aptitudes for public speaking and problem solving, many of the participants in Jubilee Centre research found that the pressures surrounding the modern education system create moral challenges for teachers.

Research conducted by the Jubilee Centre in 2012–2015 asked 546 pre- and in-service teachers to rank their most valued virtues, with regards to themselves, and to the 'ideal' teacher. Participants were also given a series of moral dilemmas to respond to, and asked to justify their actions by way of sound reasoning.

Fairness

Fairness emerged as the top-ranked virtue among teachers. Teachers gave examples of fairness in their classroom practice as listening to everyone's concerns, being able to justify actions, decisions and reprimands, and creating fair learning opportunities for the whole class.

Honesty was the top-ranked virtue across all five professions studied. Honesty, as a moral virtue, and fairness, as a civic virtue, epitomise the moral and civic duties of a teacher in the classroom.

Research with student teachers tells us that where teachers are given opportunities to meaningfully reflect on their moral development, then there are positive outcomes for:

- more engaged classroom practice;
- more considered personal development of staff and students;
- general outlook on being a teacher;
- opportunities to embed character development in teacher training (pre- and in-service).



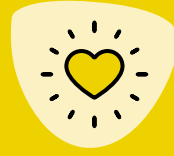
The importance of virtue in teaching



Traditionally, education has placed important concern on the moral, ethical and social development of children. Yet an increasing emphasis is placed on measurable outcomes, particularly academic achievement, thus promoting an instrumental approach to teaching.



Initial Teacher Education in the UK has largely changed to fit with this changing emphasis in education. Students are often taught classroom management and cognitive development techniques, rather than broader considerations of educational and moral purpose.



Where schools promote positive cultures of character and virtue, so other outcomes are positively affected. These outcomes include higher performance levels among staff, greater sense of professional purpose, good citizenship, greater staff commitment and feelings of well-being.

Barriers to virtue at work



Teachers reported that time pressures limit their ability to reflect on the best way to practice moral virtues and act as moral exemplars, largely due to increasing workloads, a prescriptive education system, and a narrow focus on academic success.



Teachers criticised a focus on standardisation, formal accountability, control and inspection. A carrot and stick approach limits the possibilities for teachers to cultivate intrinsic motivation to develop and enact professional character.



Teacher training programmes emphasise the importance of personality traits and performance strengths, such as self-confidence and resilience, and prioritise these above moral virtues, such as fairness and honesty.



Supporting virtue in teaching



Empowerment and authenticity are assets to cultivate and nurture in the classroom. They enable teachers to express their personal character and virtues and require the purposeful fostering of character strengths.



Workload pressures reduce the time that teachers take to reflect on matters of character, particularly on the sort of moral exemplar they hope to be. Allowing teachers more time to meaningfully reflect on their character development can help maintain and grow their passion and enthusiasm for teaching.



The development of 'good' character leads to practical wisdom; this requires open-minded teachers who recognise diversity of circumstances and situations, and are thoughtful and decisive in their actions.



Supportive colleagues provide an important framework to help teachers meet the multiple demands of the role, and opportunities to learn from one another by sharing experiences and encouraging authentic expression of character.

The single most powerful tool you have to impact a student's character is your own character.

**Statement on Teacher Education
and Character Education**

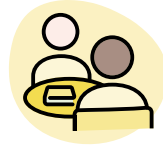
Supporting professional virtue



Continuing professional development that puts character at the centre of the teachers' role can contribute to the development of virtues among teachers, especially the cultivation of practical wisdom.



Emphasise and foster collaborations and collegiality. This often involves informal support such as mentoring, where junior colleagues can gain invaluable when senior colleagues act as role models and exemplars of professional virtue in the classroom.



Character is not developed in a vacuum. Mentoring allows teachers to learn from others, share experiences, and talk through how one may navigate an ethical dilemma they have faced.



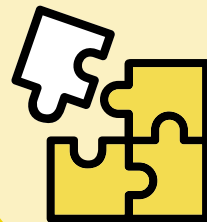
Teacher educators should consciously model the appropriate behaviours and actions that they wish their student teachers to display in the classroom. Teacher education should provide opportunities for student teachers to reflect on and evaluate their own practice; on what works and what doesn't.



Attempts to improve the quality of teaching through standards, inspections, incentives, performance management, competency criteria, tests, indeed anything that is quantifiable and easily measured have too often resulted in quantification replacing wisdom.



'Developing pupils' character [is] the set of positive personal traits, dispositions and virtues that informs their motivation and guides their conduct, so that they reflect wisely, learn eagerly, behave with integrity and cooperate consistently well with others.' (Ofsted Education Inspection Framework, 2019)



What is the role of professional virtue in the classroom?

The role of the classroom teacher requires much public trust and a greater level of moral responsibility than many other professions. Good teachers are expected to challenge pupils' minds and shape their characters. www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/teachereducationstatement

What advice can we give teachers when living their roles as character educators in the classroom?

The most important lesson [for teachers to learn] is that character educators should never give up the hope that an individual student can be helped [on their character development journey]. No two people will progress towards virtue in exactly the same way, nor at exactly the same speed. All provisions in the field of character education thus need to take account of contextual and individual differences and seek practical solutions that work for each individual school, class, or student. www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/framework

Why is developing professional wisdom important for teachers?

'You don't want to become just like a load of robots that just follow procedures and protocol and rules; each situation is different and you need to develop the skill to make judgements'. (Arthur et al., 2015) www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/thegoodteacher

Final Comment

Teaching is a journey, from student teacher to experienced practitioner. Where current Initial Teacher Education focuses on preparing teachers for the practicalities of entering the classroom, greater attention needs to be paid to teachers' moral aspirations for joining the profession.

Teachers are character educators that learn from experience, and from the experience of colleagues. As experience grows, so confidence in applying one's own professional wisdom grows too. This wisdom can often counter the negative impact of an over-emphasis on standards and inspections.

Aidan Thompson is Director of Strategic Initiatives in the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, University of Birmingham.

Andrew Maile is Research Fellow in the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, University of Birmingham.



UNIVERSITY OF
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Edgbaston, Birmingham,
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www.birmingham.ac.uk

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