If … Kipling, character and schools
Jean Gross, CBE
December 2012

School of Education
University of Birmingham
Edgbastion
Birmingham

Abstract

If you can wait and not be tired by waiting, or being lied about, don't deal in lies, or being hated, don't give way to hating, and yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise…..
Taking Kipling's well-known poem as its theme, this paper explores the different facets of character, from resilience to compassion to the ability to delay gratification and strive towards goals. It explores the work currently undertaken in UK schools to help children and young people develop these several aspects of character, illustrating how an explicit curricular focus on character development works in practice, and how whole-school systems can serve to reinforce the learning. The paper then examines the history of this work in the UK and explores current policy ambivalence about whether personal, social and emotional development is or is not the proper province of education. Finally, it summarises available evidence of the impact of this work and critically evaluates its success in inculcating values and developing character.

Introduction

For many people, Kipling's poem *If* sums up what we mean by character. It touches on psychological constructs such as resilience, the ability to delay gratification, to strive towards goals, to show understanding of and compassion for others; together these have been termed 'character capabilities' (Lexmond and Grist, 2010).

In recent years there has been a movement within UK schools to actively develop these character capabilities in children and young people. A range of different approaches are used, the most popular being SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) (DSCF, 2005; DCSF, 2007), values-based education (Hawkes, 2003), the Nurturing Programme (Bavolek and Comstock , 1985), PATHS : Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (Greenberg and Kusche, 1998) , Second Step (Frey et al, 2005) , Roots of Empathy (Gordon, 2009), the Penn/UK Resilience Programme (Gillham et al, 2007) and UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools Award (Sebba and Robinson, 2010).

Amongst those who influence or make public policy, there is often a lack of awareness of the widespread use of these programmes on the ground. The report on the 2011 riots in English cities (Riots, Communities and Victims Panel, 2012), for example, majors on the need for schools to build character attributes and proposes that programmes are introduced from abroad to develop these skills and attributes. Panel members appear not to have been aware that large numbers of schools are already engaged in this work.

Characteristics of approaches used in schools

Where there **is** already some awareness that much is happening in schools to develop character capabilities, there are often misconceptions about what the approaches involve. Critics (Craig, 2007; Furedi, 2006) have expressed the view that they involve artificial and inappropriate attempts to boost pupils' self-esteem, and that they are about wallowing in emotions and risk dissolving the nation's backbone in a sea of emotion, rather than stiffening it.

Table 1.1 illustrates the types of activity which can be seen in schools which use the approaches that are the focus of this paper. As will be evident, the activities aim to develop accurate self-perceptions rather than global self-esteem. They do indeed often seek to help pupils manage their feelings, but for the purpose of exercising self-control, rather than for any purpose of therapeutic exploration.

What many of the approaches have in common is a basis in cognitive-behavioural psychology, which has established the link between behaviours, thoughts and feelings and shown that modifying behaviour depends on the individual first developing a greater awareness of underpinning emotions and the thoughts they give rise to.
Some of the approaches listed (notably values -based education and UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools) take a less psychological stance, aiming to promote pro-social behaviour by enabling pupils to reflect on moral values or explore at an intellectual level the rights and corresponding responsibilities which enable communities to function successfully.

All the approaches have in common a recognition that building character capabilities requires explicit teaching (skill-building), but that this teaching must be mirrored by attention to relationships and the environment within the school. There is no point, for example, in exposing young people to a series of lessons on how to control their anger if they leave the lesson and see teachers or playground supervisors losing control and shouting at children, and no point in working with them on the value of 'respect' if they themselves do not feel respected in their day-to-day experience of schooling.

Experiences in the home environment are clearly even more crucial. Some of the programmes , notably the Nurturing Programme, SEAL , and a recently developed adjunct to values education called 'Family Values' , seek also to influence this environment, providing materials which schools can use with parents to increase their awareness of the work in school and help them build their child's character competences through family activities.

Tracing the history of an explicit curricular focus on the character capabilities

Developing character through relationships and the environment has been a feature of our education system since the nineteenth century. British schools have a long history of building character through their ethos: 'resilience learned through cold showers, respect through disciplinary procedures, responsibility through house systems, determination through valiant struggles on the playing fields of England'(Gross, 2010).

Explicit, as distinct from implicit, teaching of aspects of character capabilities was first formalised in the 1988 Education Reform Act. Programmes of Study for personal and social education (PSE) were introduced although PSE (later PSHE- Personal, Social and Health Education) as a subject sat outside the national curriculum. Schools were expected to provide PSE education, but it was not statutory.

Proposals to make the subject statutory were introduced by the Labour government in 2010 but foundered during pre-election wash-up negotiations with opposition parties on the Children, Schools and Families Bill.

Meanwhile, the Labour administration had between 2003 and 2007 developed a curriculum resource focused on developing children's 'Social, Emotional and Behavioural Skills' (SEBS), subsequently renamed 'Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning' (SEAL). In June 2005, the SEAL curriculum materials were made nationally available to all primary schools. Similar developments for secondary schools followed in 2007.

These materials formally set out the character capabilities that children should be helped to acquire by the time they leave school. They then suggested classroom activities for every age group from three to fourteen, which progressively develop these capabilities in a sequenced manner.

Their origins of the SEAL materials are interesting, in public policy terms. Although the actual materials were more about developing prosocial behaviour than tackling behaviour problems (not fixing the naughty kids but growing good ones) **,** they stemmed from government's wish to tackle perceived 'bad behaviour'. It was on these terms that Ministers welcomed the initiative as politically helpful. The true focus of the materials was introduced, therefore, somewhat under the policy radar**.**

In another part of the DfE, meanwhile, the 'Every Child Matters' framework (DCSF, 2004) was developed following the death of Victoria Climbié. Bringing a focus on broader issues of child wellbeing, it helped to legitimise the contribution of the SEAL approach in promoting positive mental states rather than simply tackling poor behaviour. Another predominant policy discourse, focusing on learning and attainment, led to the renaming of SEBS as SEAL, in 2005.

SEAL was only one initiative amongst many that sought to develop character capabilities through the taught curriculum. Other approaches, such as values-based education, the Nurturing Programme, Second Step and PATHS pre-dated it by several years. SEAL's wide use and popularity in schools, however, may have stimulated the market, paving the way for trialling of further schemes such as Roots of Empathy, and the Penn/UK Resiliency programme.

Policy ambivalence

Since the 2010 general election, there has been a return to a period of ambivalence amongst policy makers as to whether a focus on the personal, social and emotional development which underpins 'good character' is or is not the proper province of education.

While the Every Child Matters regime of the Labour government placed duties on schools and local authorities to promote children's wellbeing, these were removed by the Coalition government. A new mission statement appeared on the walls of the DfE: 'Our vision is a highly educated society in which opportunity is more equal for children and young people no matter what their background or family circumstances.' In this vision, schools' prime job is to transmit culture. Apart from the welcome focus on social mobility, the mission and the policies which surround it have little to do with a purpose of education which, in the words of Professor Roger Weissberg, enables children and young people to 'not just to succeed in

tests, but succeed in the test of life'.

As for the curriculum, whilst an expert academic and professional group was convened in 2011 to advise on the review of 'academic' National Curriculum subjects, PSHE sits with an internal civil servant review. The results of this review have yet to be announced.

Outside of policy on schools, however, there is still a strong policy focus on personal development. The review of the curriculum for children under five has established personal, social and emotional learning as one of three 'prime' areas which those who work with young children must prioritise. At the other end of the age spectrum, DfE have emphasized the importance of developing young people's social and emotional capabilities in their Positive for Youth cross-government policy for young people aged 13 to 19 (DfE, 2011). Similarly, government's thinking about social mobility (Cabinet Office, 2011; Milburn, 2012) frequently references the importance of non-cognitive 'soft skills' which allow us to successfully operate with other people in society.

Evidence of impact

Ambivalence about the role of an explicit focus on character competences within education will only be resolved if there is hard evidence of the impact of this work on policy goals.

The international evidence on programmes to develop personal, social and emotional competences is convincing: 'Systematic reviews of interventions, using the most rigorous and exacting criteria, are repeatedly demonstrating definitively that the best of them are effective' in developing competences such as 'cooperation, resilience, a sense of optimism, empathy and a positive and realistic self concept' and in improving outcomes on a range of dimensions from involvement in crime to mental health to substance misuse and educational attainment (Weare and Nind , 2011) .

In the UK, there have been impact evaluations of some of the programmes used, but not all. Evaluations also vary in their approach; many are based on perceived rather than actual impact, and few achieve the 'gold standard' of evaluation using Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs).
PATHS has had a small-scale quasi-experimental evaluation in Hampshire (Curtis and Norgate, 2007) which found a significant improvement on behaviour, using the strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) for an intervention group but not the control group. A large scale five-year study is currently underway at the University of Manchester, examining the impact of the PATHS curriculum in primary schools in England through a cluster-randomised controlled trial.

Roots of Empathy RCT evaluations in Canada show modest effect sizes in relation to the programme's ambition to develop pro social skills (around .07) and combat bullying behaviour (around .10) when compared to more intensive classroom interventions such as PATHS (which has an effect size of around .7). Those effects sizes are likely to be reviewed and revised, however, as a result of a first European evaluation launched last year on the Isle of Man.

The Penn/UK Resilience Programme (Challen et al, 2011) has had a robust evaluation showing significant short-term improvement in pupils' depression symptom scores, school attendance rates, and academic attainment after one year of weekly or fortnightly programme workshops. There was, however, no impact on any of the outcome measures at follow-up two years after the programme finished.

Finally, the SEAL approach has mixed evidence of impact. One evaluation (Hallam et al, 2005) showed clear improvements in social skills and relationships in a sample of over 5,000 primary-aged children, beyond those expected by maturation. This study did not use a control group. 77% of headteachers indicated that as a result of the programme behaviour had improved in classrooms. 83% said that staff pupil relationships had improved, 84% that the children's respect for people had increased, and 77% that the children's motivation had been enhanced.

Effective, thorough implementation across a whole school, with strong leadership, appears to be essential in achieving impact. Banerjee (2012) found that primary and secondary schools with a strong SEAL implementation (engagement of all staff, SEAL learning opportunities for all pupils, integrated approach to SEAL, behaviour, and well-being, delegation of SEAL responsibilities to all staff within a clear management structure) were significantly more likely than schools with a weak implementation to develop a school ethos characterised by positive social relationships, attitudes, and behaviour. They were also more likely to have more positive pupil experiences of peer interaction, better Ofsted ratings for behaviour, lower levels of truancy, higher attainment in tests at age 11 and in GCSEs at age 16.

The length of time needed to arrive at a truly whole-school approach in large institutions such as secondary schools may help to explain the findings of a quasi-experimental study by Humphrey et al (2010) which found that SEAL had no significant impact in secondary schools two years into implementing the approach.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to demonstrate that schools can play a key part in supporting the development of strong, resilient but compassionate young people, and that whilst much more research is needed, particularly in this country, there is some evidence that what they are doing is having an impact.

The goal is simple; we end as we began, with Kipling:

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue, or walk with Kings - nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you, if all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it, And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!

References
Banerjee, R., Weare, K., and Farr, W. (2012) *Working with Social and Emotional Aspects of*

Learning (SEAL): Associations with school ethos, pupil social experiences, attendance, and attainment. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Bavolek, S. and Comstock, C. (1985) *Nurturing Program for Parents and Children: Parent Handbook.* Family Development Resources, Incorporated.

Cabinet Office, (2011) *Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers: A Strategy for Social Mobility.* London:
Cabinet Office.

Challen, A., Noden P., West A. and Machin S. (2011**)** *UK Resilience Programme Evaluation: Final*
Report. London: DfE.

Craig, C. (2007) *The potential dangers of a systematic, explicit approach to teaching social and emotional skills (SEAL).* Glasgow: Centre for Confidence and Wellbeing.

Curtis, C. and Norgate, R. (2007) An Evaluation of the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies Curriculum at Key Stage 1. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 33–44.

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (2004) *Every Child Matters: change for children*. London: DCSF.

DCSF (2005) *Social and emotional aspects of learning for primary schools.* Nottingham: DCSF
 Publications.

DCSF (2007) *Social and emotional aspects of learning for secondary schools.* Nottingham: DCSF
Publications.

DfE (2011) *Positive for Youth: A new approach to cross-government policy for young people aged 13 to 19.* London: DfE.

Frey, K., Nolen S., Van Schoiack Edstrom, L., and Hirschstein, M. Effects of a School-Based Social-Emotional Competence Program: Linking Children's Goals, Attributions, and Behavior, *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2005, pp. 171-200.

Furedi, F. (2006) Be afraid. Here come the happiness police. *The Independent*, 27 July.

Gillham, J., Reivich, K., and Jaycox, L. (2007). *The UK Resilience Programme.* Unpublished manuscript, University of Pennsylvania.

Gordon, M. (2009) *Roots of Empathy*. New York: The Experiment.

Greenberg, M. and Kusche, C. (1998). *Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies*. Institute of Behavioral Sciences, University of Colorado.

Gross, J. (2010) Character: caught or taught? In Lexmond, J. and Grist, M (eds) (2010) *The Character Enquiry.* London: Demos.

Hawkes, N. (2003) *How to Inspire and Develop Positive Values in Your Classroom*. Oxford: LDA

Humphrey, N., Lendrum A. and Wigelsworth, M.   (2011) *Social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) programme in secondary schools*: *national evaluation*. London: DfE.

Lexmond, J. and Grist, M. (Eds.) (2010) *The Character Enquiry*. London: Demos.

Milburn, A. (2012) *Fair Access to Professional Careers: a Progress Report*. London: Cabinet Office.

Riots, Communities and Victims Panel (2012) *After the riots: final report of the Riots, Communities and Victims Panel*. London: Riots, Communities and Victims Panel.
Schonert-Reichl, K., Veronica Smith, V. , Zaidman-Zait , A. and Clyde Hertzman, C. (2012) Promoting Children's Prosocial Behaviors in School: Impact of the "Roots of Empathy" Program on the Social and Emotional Competence of School-Aged Children. *School Mental Health*, Volume 4, <u>Issue 1</u>, pp 1-21.

Sebba, J. and Robinson, C. (2010) *Evaluation of UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award.* Universities of Brighton and Sussex.

Weare, K., Nind, M. (2011) *Promoting mental health of children and adolescents through schools and school based interventions* School of Education, University of Southampton .

Table 1 Personal, social and emotional learning in schools

Character capability	Example classroom activity
If you can keep your head when all about you Are losing theirs and blaming it on you, *If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you, But make allowance for their doubting too;*	
Self control , agency	Children watch a balloon blown up until it bursts ; they learn how to notice angry feelings building up and what they can do to avoid the 'anger explosion' Children listen to the fable of the scorpion who asked a frog to carry him across the river, stung the frog half way and said 'I couldn't help myself – it's in my nature'. They hold a class discussion on whether we are responsible for our own actions.
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting…	
Delaying gratification	Children discuss the well-known 'marshmallow test' in which pre-schoolers had to choose between eating one marshmallow or waiting and getting two , and how it predicted later success in life. They devise and try out their own age-appropriate version of the test.
… Or being lied about, don't deal in lies, Or being hated, don't give way to hating,	
Respecting others	Children explore how language and images are used in tabloid newspapers to demonise certain groups (foreigners, young hooligans, Muslim extremists etc.). Children decide on the rights and corresponding responsibilities of children and adults in school and reflect these in a Classroom Charter
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster, And treat those two impostors just the same; *If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken, Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,* *Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken, And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools*	
Resilience – bouncing back after setbacks	Children bounce rubber balls and make a poster about what helps people 'bounce back' after setbacks. The teacher shows clips from TV competitions where contestants are not successful, and children generate ideas on how to cope with disappointment.
If you can make one heap of all your winnings, And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss, *And lose, and start again at your beginnings, And never breathe a word about your loss* *If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew, To serve your turn long after they are gone,* *And so hold on when there is nothing in you, Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'*	
Striving towards goals, persistence	Children explore the lives of historical and sporting characters who have shown persistence in reaching their goals. They set simple goals for themselves, break them down into steps and work towards them with the help of a self-chosen peer supporter.