The Casey Review: British Values and the Common Language of Virtues

Joseph Ward
University of Birmingham, UK

Dr. Tom Harrison
University of Birmingham, UK

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

> '*What the Statesman is most anxious to produce is a certain moral character in his fellow citizens, namely a disposition to virtue and the performance of virtuous actions*'
> *Aristotle (cited in Morrall, 2004)*

Summary

In December 2016, Dame Louise Casey published her review into opportunity and integration in Britain which found 'high levels of social and economic isolation' (Casey, 2016) in certain parts of the country. Amongst the measures recommended to tackle the social malaise highlighted by the report, Casey suggested that '…fundamental British values be included in a new oath for all holders of public office' (ibid.). Communities Minister, Sajid Javid, lent his support to this idea, arguing that in countering the issue of segregation, 'civic and political leaders have to lead by example' (Javid, 2016). However, his endorsement of this policy was challenged by a number of commentators who suggested that such a measure would do little to genuinely mitigate the fractured society described in the report.

The more substantive educational recommendations of the Review also focused on British values, seeking to '…establish a set of values around which people from all different backgrounds can unite' (Casey, 2016). Casey suggested that a bolstering of teaching British values in schools, introduced into the curriculum in 2014, would help to integrate isolated individuals and segregated communities. In response to Casey's report, this paper aims to examine what the implications of these recommendations might be for the British education system. It will highlight some of the ambiguities surrounding the teaching of British values, and suggest how an additional focus on the concepts of moral character and common or universal virtues, detached from a specific national identity, could be beneficial to such provision. As suggested by Lord James O'Shaughnessy, virtues such as compassion, courage and service '…are a flag around which every family and community can rally' (2016).

A number of **theoretical** and **practical** benefits of integrating character and common virtues into the teaching of British values are highlighted, summarised as follows:

THEORY: Acknowledgement and development of moral character posits the existence of certain 'common/universal virtues' which extend across cultural boundaries. Integration of this philosophy into the teaching of British values could help to enhance delivery and ultimately social cohesion.

PRACTICE: Encouraging discussion and reflection in the classroom and schools more broadly can help teachers and students to consider how universal virtues such as compassion, gratitude and honesty can inform discussions around citizenship and provide a more inclusive teaching environment.

The Rise of British Values in Schools

Whilst the notion of teaching and encouraging British values has been mooted in policy circles at least since Gordon Brown's premiership, it has always been subject to criticism. The ambiguity surrounding the concept is highlighted by Casey's tentative recommendation that, first and foremost, such a set of values need to be clearly established. Some commentators, such as David Goodhart, acknowledge the need to establish and promote a national identity, but argue that British *values* is too abstract and contentious a notion. Goodhart suggests that 'Values, meaning different and sometimes conflicting notions of how to live a good life, are in a way the problem, not the solution. It is shared experience and mutual interests, and the way these can be fostered by public institutions and public rituals, that are a better means for overcoming difference' (2013: 287).

Despite these contentions, the Department for Education (DfE) introduced the mandatory teaching of British values as part of SMSC provision in schools across England in November 2014 (DfE, 2014). This initiative built on aspects of the Prevent anti-terrorism strategy, and was introduced as a response to the Trojan horse investigation into the alleged 'Islamisation' of several Birmingham schools. The DfE specified that British values should be 'actively promoted' through teaching an appreciation of the rule of law; an understanding of the democratic process; respect for individual freedoms; tolerance of those with different beliefs; and an understanding of how to tackle discrimination. These requirements were incorporated into the SMSC curriculum, which already sought to teach students about the social and political landscape of Britain, as well as aspects of moral education related to good citizenship.

As the teaching of British values now forms part of Ofsted's criteria for assessing pupils' 'cultural development' within SMSC, schools have adopted a variety of approaches in its delivery. Although much of this provision may be of good quality, there remains a tendency in some schools for such subjects to be taught in a 'box-ticking' manner. As James Arthur and others have identified, the mounting pressure on teachers and the somewhat arbitrary nature of school regulation has meant that teaching of British values, citizenship and SMSC is often lacking (see Arthur, 2015; Harrison *et al*, 2016). The Casey Review implicitly acknowledges this, by recommending that 'more weight' should be attached to the subject. Whilst a bolstering of British values teaching may well contribute to enhanced integration, placing an emphasis on character and common virtues could be a more effective way of allowing pupils to discuss shared experiences, and to use a common language in discussing what they think it means to be British.

THEORY: Common Human Virtues and the Philosophy of Character

➢ What do we mean by 'common/universal virtues'?

Given the world's cultural diversity, it may appear controversial to posit the idea of virtues or concepts that are universally accepted. However, many philosophers of character, such as Aristotle, suggest that a number of virtues are held in common across humanity. A key tenet of this philosophy is the proposition that there are proto-typical or universal 'goods' to which people, whatever their background, adhere and relate to in some capacity. As set out in the Jubilee Centre's *Framework for Character Education in Schools*, a list of such virtues might include (not exclusively): courage, justice, honesty, compassion, gratitude, and humility (JCCV, 2013). This notion has been corroborated empirically by a number of social scientists and philosophers, who have conducted studies suggesting such virtues are likely to 'be recognised and embraced by representatives of all cultures and religions' (Kristjánsson 2015: 16; for empirical evidence see Nussbaum 2011; McGrath 2015). In the case of the work by McGrath (2015), in particular, these findings extend across 75 different countries with a sample of over 1 million participants.

As a result, one can assert with relative confidence that the common language of virtues would be accessible in the classroom to pupils from diverse backgrounds, as most pupils would be familiar with concepts such as honesty and courage and have their own way of engaging with the topic. This can help to enhance children's understanding of the views and different approaches of their peers on concepts which they are likely to be familiar with and they will perceive as 'good'.

➢ The broader philosophy of character

This notion of common or universal virtues is part of the broader philosophy of moral character. An overview of the philosophical grounding of character, as well as character education, is included in the Jubilee Centre's *Framework* (ref'd above):

> 'Character is a set of personal traits or dispositions that produce specific moral emotions, inform motivation and guide conduct. Character education is an umbrella term for all explicit and implicit educational activities that help young people develop positive personal strengths called virtues' (2013: 2).

There are two further concepts which are integral to this broader philosophy: the 'golden mean'; and practical wisdom (or 'phronesis'). The first of these, the 'golden mean', refers to the discernment of excess or deficiency of a particular virtue, and choosing the appropriate balance between the two in any given situation (see Kristjánsson, 2015: 28). The notion of tolerance, which, along with respect, is at the very heart of the DfE's guidance on British values provision, might be used as an example here. In most situations it may well be right to be understanding and tolerant of the views of others,

and respect their right to speak. However, if it is clear that what they say is particularly hurtful or derogatory to any person(s), then it may well be right in intervene to prevent further hurt or offense being caused. In this case, one might propose the deficiency of tolerance to be narrow-mindedness (intolerance), and the excess to be passivity (over-tolerance). If the first stage is determining this 'golden-mean', developing the ability to be balanced, to make the best judgement, and to act upon it is called 'practical wisdom'. This intellectual capacity is very much the guiding force of a person's character, directing the application of all other virtues (see Practice 1 below for more detail).

There are also some more explicit connections between the philosophy of character and the development of British values. Whilst there is a clear distinction between character and citizenship, the *Framework* highlights the role of so-called 'civic' virtues in character development, cultivating those dispositions that comprise engaged and responsible citizens (e.g. service, volunteering). In this light, the linkages between character and citizenship become apparent and one can begin to consider using the concept of character to feed into SMSC and citizenship education.

PRACTICE: Integrating Character Education into the Teaching of British Values

Some commentators felt the Casey Review was underdeveloped in terms of discussion of practical methods to help with the provision of British values education – especially as only three of the report's recommendations were related to education at all (see Whitaker, 2016). Below, a number of specific pedagogical approaches adapted from character education are outlined and explained in relation to the benefits they might bring to the process of teaching citizenship, SMSC and British values.

1. *Virtue knowledge, virtue reasoning and virtue practice*

Firstly, it is useful to outline three aspects of teaching virtues which underpin much of the practice of character education. In order to demonstrate their understanding it is important that students are able to develop the knowledge, the ability to reason, and then to implement, the virtues in practice. An awareness and understanding of this process in relation to universal virtues will help to enhance discussion and engagement. Each of these stages can be summarised as follows:

1. *Virtue knowledge:* the ability to recognise particular virtues and emotions and situations in which it is appropriate to exercise them;

2. *Virtue reasoning:* appreciating the merits of certain virtues, understanding 'the golden mean' between two extremes of action and acknowledging any flaws we may have and may want to change;
3. *Virtue practice:* putting the above considerations into practice, reflecting on our reactions to situations and learning from the actions of others (adapted from Harrison *et al.*, 2016).

Educating for each part of this process may take a number of practical forms. Principally, students must be able develop a good awareness of the different virtues, why they are exercised in certain situations, and identify examples of when they and others have put them into practice. An example of how this might be integrated into British values teaching might be through a discussion of a concept such as individual liberty or free speech. In these situations, it is important for teachers' to encourage students to respect their peers and be tolerant, to be courageous and principled, but to do so in a caring and compassionate manner. This can allow for constructive discussion and debate of what it means to be British, and for reflection on the actual conduct of the lesson and how common virtues might underpin engagement between classmates.

2. *Reflection, critical thinking and practical wisdom*

There is an extensive body of evidence that highlights the benefits of 'guided self-reflection' as part of character-building activities (Arthur. et al, 2017; Harrison. *et al*, 2016; Arthur. *et al*, 2014a). Indeed, the virtue reasoning element of the above method requires extensive reflection for pupils to do it effectively. Any classroom exercise considering what might constitute values shared across the class will require critical thinking and reflection from both students and teachers. Questions posed to students which require them to reflect would be a good way of approaching both universal virtues and British values in class – e.g. 'What does compassion mean in relation to good citizenship?' and 'Is the understanding of honesty uniform across cultures?´ A further consideration of practical wisdom in relation to these questions might also help students to think about what this might look like in practice. Discussion of quite open questions similar to the above examples can help to emphasise the links between the common virtues and concepts which are central to the establishment and cultivation of 'British values'.

3. *Discrete classes and teaching through subjects*

Much of the material included in Casey's recommendation is with regard to subject knowledge – ensuring that vital aspects of British history, culture and tradition are conveyed effectively to students through the relevant subject teaching, or similar methods in SMSC. The inclusion of universal virtues and aspects of character education through these distinct subjects can help to develop a different set of skills in young people. In History, for example, children can explore moral dilemmas of the past and 'the tensions between public morality and private vice' (JCCV, 2015; see also JCCV, 2016). In this sense they can learn about civic roles and responsibility and their place in Britain's history as well as the moral dimensions of different events and actors. Another example might be in English, where students can focus on specific literary characters and how they display certain virtues or vices (see Arthur *et al*, 2014b). This could encourage them to consider how a moral dilemma or an encounter with adversity in a fictional setting might relate to broader society. This can allow for a more novel and honest

exploration of where British values might originate, and how they might have been inspired by British culture or by figures from the past.

Conclusion

This paper suggests that the teaching and cultivation of values should be a more interactive, collaborative and inclusive process which will help to enhance the moral character of the next generation and thus the tolerance, respect and community cohesion which the Casey Review identified as currently lacking across Britain. The above three examples are provided as a sample of some pedagogical tools proven to be effective in the development of character. The integration of these methods of character and universal virtues education into SMSC and the teaching of British values could have a number of implications for social cohesion. Involving pupils in discussions of concepts to which they can all relate inspires a culture of teaching which is bottom up, as opposed to top down. This would allow students to consider common virtues and concepts, which they may have encountered through different religious or cultural contexts at home, in their own way, and to understand the values and aspirations they hold in common rather than focusing on values that may be culturally relative.

'To combine diversity with solidarity, to improve integration and racial justice, it is not good just preaching tolerance, you need a *politics that promotes common in-group identity'* (Goodhart, 2013: xxiii).

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