Statement on Teacher Education and Character Education

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

Parents entrust their children to schools, into the care of teachers, for the purposes of education. With young people spending a considerable proportion of their time in schools, it is important to consider the qualities possessed by teachers who have such a formative impact on their pupils. What makes a good teacher? What kind of person must he or she be? It is not only the content of what a teacher teaches directly, but what they model in practice, as ethical exemplars, which is important. As David Carr (2007) argues, '*it is often said that we remember teachers as much for the kinds of people they were than for anything they may have taught us, and some kinds of professional expertise may best be understood as qualities of character*'.

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. As Thomas Lickona (2005) notes, '*the humanity of the teacher is the most important moral lesson in the character education curriculum*'. Good teaching should cultivate the virtues and promote good moral character. Teaching that is grounded primarily in subject knowledge and teaching expertise, skill or 'competence' does not capture the essential meaning of the occupation.

Schools ought to promote a positive moral climate that encourages teachers to exemplify the virtues that constitute such climates. The challenge facing teachers and teacher educators in this regard is whether to allow moral formation to occur unaided, letting pupils learn what they will, for good or bad, come what may; or whether to engage in intentional, transparent and deliberative approaches that attend seriously to the moral dimensions of teaching and schooling. In addition to setting examples to their pupils and peers, there are other reasons why good teachers should want their interactions with others to satisfy the requirements of morality: such reasons concern general moral aspirations towards others, professional aspirations and aspirations towards personal moral growth.

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

THE JUBILEE CENTRE FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

Virtues and Teaching

Ethical development and character formation does not happen by chance. It should be embraced by a deliberate and planned pedagogy. As educators the language we use is a powerful tool for developing character and helping pupils make progress in their moral development.

In 1995, the Universities Committee for the Education of Teachers (UCET) established a working party to formulate some ethical principles for teaching. The working party identified eleven principles fundamental to good or professionally acceptable teaching and they are worth summarising here:

> **Teachers must have:**
>
> Intellectual integrity;
> Vocational integrity;
> Moral courage;
> Altruism;
> Impartiality;
> Insight;
> Responsibility for their influence;
> Humility;
> Collegiality;
> Capacities for partnership; and
> Vigilance concerning professional responsibilities and aspirations.
>
> (Tomlinson & Little, 2000: 152-154)

This list identifies some of the key obligations of teachers, particularly their moral obligations, with a clear emphasis on courage, altruism, humility, and integrity.

No definitive list of relevant virtues can be given, but a list of prototypical virtues can be suggested and drawn upon for teacher education. The virtues may be categorised into four types, *moral, civic, performance and intellectual*.[1] It is important for all four to work in collaboration for positive human flourishing. However, particular schools may choose to prioritise certain virtues (recognising a variety and diversity in educational practice) over others in light of a school's history, ethos, location or specific student population.

Teacher education should seek to prioritise the development of all four of the types of virtues.

These are:

Moral Virtues: Those virtues that enable us to respond well to situations in any area of experience. Examples of moral virtues include courage, self-discipline, compassion, gratitude, justice, humility and honesty.

Performance Virtues: Those virtues that can be used for both good and bad ends; the qualities that enable us to manage our lives effectively. The virtue most commonly mentioned in this category is resilience – the ability to bounce back from negative experiences. Others include determination, confidence and teamwork. The ultimate value of these virtues is being enablers and vehicles of the moral, civic and intellectual virtues.

Civic Virtues: Those virtues that are necessary for engaged and responsible citizenship and political literacy. They include service, citizenship and volunteering. Thus, part of good character involves the active display of civic virtues for the benefit of others and society more generally.

Intellectual Virtues: Those virtues that are necessary for right action and correct thinking. They are required for the pursuit of knowledge, truth and understanding.

It is important to single out what the Greeks called *phronesis*, but we can call 'good sense'. This is the overall quality of knowing what to want and what not to want when the demands of two or more virtues compete with one another and to integrate

1   As defined in *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (2013) available via: http://jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/character-education/Framework%20for%20Character%20Education.pdf (accessed 20th July 2015).

'Living with good sense entails considered deliberation, well founded judgement and the enactment of decisions. The ability to learn from experience and mistakes is at the heart of "good sense". It is, therefore, an essential virtue for the education of teachers.'

such demands into an acceptable course of action (see Cooke & Carr, 2014). Living with good sense entails considered deliberation, well founded judgement and the enactment of decisions. The ability to learn from experience and mistakes is at the heart of 'good sense'. It is, therefore, an essential virtue for the education of teachers.

At the start of their careers, many teachers are motivated to choose their profession for its moral content (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011); further, research demonstrates that people enter the teaching profession from a desire to make a difference to children's lives and to develop good people (Arthur *et al.*, 2015). Sadly, however, this early moral aspiration is not adequately developed in teacher training and beyond. There is also a reported lack of moral *self-knowledge* among teachers. Indeed, Sockett & LePage (2002) found that a number of teachers at the beginning of a non-traditional graduate programme could not critically reflect on themselves as moral agents. An ideally good teacher is a certain sort of person, who exhibits pedagogical *phronesis* in their dealings with students. Such a view of teaching as a moral profession clearly calls for a richer account of the nature and requirements of teacher training, and even for the revival of the age-old idea of teaching as a moral vocation.

Teacher Education and Character Education

Student teachers expect to engage with values and values-related issues during their formal education, and such engagement ought to influence their own values and attitudes. Personal and professional values often play a significant role in the selection process for entrance to teacher education and applicants ought to be encouraged to reflect on such values throughout teacher education courses and their lives as teachers. Recently, the APPG on Social Mobility[2] and the Carter Review on Teacher Education have both called for character education[3] to form part of teacher education. The official Teachers' Standards for teacher education make clear that teachers must make the education of their pupils their first concern and that they are accountable for achieving the highest possible standards in their conduct.[4] The expectations that underlie the judgement for the award of Qualified Teacher Status presuppose a high level of mutual respect between teacher, parent and pupil. The student teacher needs to achieve the required standards by demonstrating professional behaviour and showing respect for pupils, colleagues and parents, as well as for gaining the respect of others through their own actions and behaviours.

'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.'

Good teacher education depends a great deal on the ethos of individual schools wherein trainees should learn how to become teachers with character. School culture is influenced by the wider educational culture and priorities of the era that are set out by the government and other authorities. The overwhelming, bureaucratic dynamic of some schools is likely to diminish moral judgement and decision making in favour of a network of tests and audits, engulfing students and teachers alike with an imperative to defer to authority for rewards and punishments. In other schools, however, teachers describe holistic school policies rooted in broad and encompassing philosophies. 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. The worth of teaching, and teachers themselves, is largely seen in terms of the economic value of qualifications. Little attention is paid officially to purpose, to questions of meaning, and the ends to which a pupil's acquired knowledge, skills and understanding will be used. The teacher is portrayed as a technician charged with specific tasks which are measurable in outcome rather than on what the teacher is and can become. As Carr (2016) argues '*a significant problem to which such work has responded has been recent official or centralist policy promotion of technicist models of professional practice that have sought to reduce teaching to the mastery of a repertoire of behaviourally conceived teaching skills or "competences" for the purposes of teaching*'. It is not possible to detail the full range of human abilities and qualities of a teacher within the concept of competence.

Debating whether or not teachers ought to engage in building the character of their students is a sign that we have asked the wrong question. The more important question is 'how do we prepare teachers to engage with the positive character formation of their pupils?'

2   See www.centreforum.org/assets/pubs/character-and-resilience.pdf (accessed 22nd October 2015).
3   'Character education is an umbrella term for all explicit and implicit educational activities that help young people develop positive personal strengths called virtues.' See *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (2013) available via: http://jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/character-education/Framework%20for%20Character%20Education.pdf (accessed 20th July 2015).
4   See https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/301107/Teachers__Standards.pdf (accessed 14th September 2015)

'Although many teachers possess a strong interest in moral issues, they rarely consider themselves adequately trained to critically reflect upon these in any sophisticated way'

(Sockett & LePage, 2002)

Evidence

Parents are the primary educators of their children's character, but a poll conducted by Populus (2013) shows that parents want all adults who have contact with their children to contribute to such education, especially teachers.

A 2015 Jubilee Centre study of 546 novice and experienced teachers and their educators found that ethics has always played a central role in good education and practice (Arthur *et al.*, 2015). The Jubilee Centre's work has sought to develop and advance previous research in the field. In 1993, Joseph and Efron's study examined 180 teachers' understandings of themselves as moral agents and discovered that teachers perceived their role not only as that of teaching subject matter, but also exhibiting and imparting moral values. Further studies have found that some teachers consider the moral dimensions of education to be even more important than academic success (Tuff, 2009). Across selected schools in Europe, Puurula & colleagues (2001) found that most teachers viewed affective education as part of their role. Although many teachers possess a strong interest in moral issues, they rarely consider themselves adequately trained to critically reflect upon these in any sophisticated way (Sockett & LePage, 2002). Indeed, experienced teachers typically have called for an increased focus on moral reflective practice in teacher training (Arthur *et al.*, 2015).

'For centuries, the concept of the teacher as a moral educator of the new generation has endured as both a stated objective of the professional role and an implicit inevitability of its moral agency...Moral education, as it is broadly conceived, includes both what teachers as ethical exemplars model in the course of their daily practice and what moral lessons they teach directly either through the formal curriculum or the informal dynamics of classroom and school life.'

(Campbell, 2003: 47)

Recommendations for Teacher Education

The following recommendations seek to ensure that teacher education addresses the moral complexities of the teacher's role.

Encourage all new teachers to reflect on why they entered the profession: to define their sense of purpose. Teacher educators should stress the importance of the role in transforming both young people as well as their contribution to flourishing societies;

Increase the focus on the moral development of teachers in both initial teacher training and continued professional development;

Create space in courses for the critical, moral reflection on practice and how teachers might identify and/or address moral dilemmas;

Schools should recruit new teachers on their compatibility with a schools' mission and values based ethos;

Ensure a greater recognition of the importance of mentoring in the education of teachers. This would include giving proper time, space, recognition and reward to those who carry out this extremely important role.

Conclusion

Teaching has a significant moral dimension. However, this dimension has lost ground to competing agendas affecting the profession in recent years. The emphasis on the character and conduct of teachers themselves requires an appropriate moral focus in the education of teachers. The character and integrity of the teacher is fundamental and it is no less important than mastery of subject content and teaching techniques. This is why teachers should not only exemplify positive character traits to their pupils, but also help the pupils to reflect on their own character strengths and weaknesses.

Knowledge of the virtues will not necessarily change behaviour. A pupil can understand, through teaching, what the most desirable virtue to display in certain circumstances may be, but be unable to translate this knowledge into positive action. This is why the gap between understanding virtues, on the one hand, and virtues in action, on the other, requires modelling by teachers. In this sense, teacher education should be understood as a process of formation of the person as a teacher. Proposals to promote and encourage character building, indeed the flourishing of the next generation, ought to be welcomed by all.

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University of Birmingham
Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School
Oxford Brooks University
University of Birmingham School
Holy Cross Catholic Primary School
Museum of World Religions
Ark Boulton Academy
Redhill School
Wellington College
University of York
University of Edinburgh
Teach First
DEMOS
University of Sussex
The Church of England Office
SSAT
Arnett Hills JMI School
Wigmore High School
Kings Langley School
Kehelland Village School
Floreat Brentford Primary School
Floreat Wandsworth Primary School
King's Leadership Academy
The Laurels School
Association for Character Education