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Character in Teacher Education

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Character and Values in Teacher Education

Teachers know that good teaching concerns far more than helping children and young people to acquire knowledge and skills. It concerns the cultivation of good character. When teachers promote honesty, justice, kindness, forgiveness, self-discipline, respect, civility, courtesy, responsibility, or determination, they are fostering the sorts of values that form the basis of good character. When a teacher encourages a pupil to achieve a personal best, to behave or to work hard, he or she is engaging in character education and 'quality character education results in academic gains for students' (Berkowitz and Bier, 2004, p. 78).

Good teachers help children and young people to the range of acquire values and virtues that will help them be the best they can be in life as well as at school. When teachers seek to foster good habits such as students' punctuality, doing work to a good standard or attendance at school rather than truanting, they are helping students to develop aspects of good character.

All schools have a moral responsibility to contribute to the common good. They are responsible for promoting a sense of gratitude and optimism in their students as well as kindness and generosity. A good education helps young people do more than pass exams: it helps them to become better people. In a diverse, plural society where different faiths are followed there is considerable agreement about positive values and the need for children and young people to be helped to acquire them in school.

Although 'Character education has been demonstrated to be associated with academic motivation and aspirations' and especially 'academic achievement' this is because it fosters 'prosocial behaviour, bonding to school, prosocial and democratic values, conflict-resolution skills, moral-reasoning maturity, responsibility, respect, self-efficacy, self-control, self-esteem, social skills, and trust in and respect for teachers' (Berkowitz and Bier, 2004). There are many benefits to character education and many reasons for teachers to develop their skills as character educators; indeed, it is impossible to qualify as a teacher or to develop as one without developing professional competence in this aspect of teaching and learning.

Character and Values in the *Teachers' Standards* (2012)

The *Teachers' Standards* (2012) acknowledges there is far more to being a teacher than teaching knowledge and skills (TS3). The Preamble summarises 'the values and behaviour' that all teachers must demonstrate throughout their professional lives. Teachers 'are accountable for achieving the highest possible standards in work and conduct' and should 'act with honesty and integrity'; they should 'forge positive professional relationships' and 'work with parents in the best interests of their pupils' (Preamble). Many of the *Teachers'*

Standards (2012) refer to values and character and not simply to teaching ability or subject knowledge.

All teachers need to have and develop the knowledge and skills they need to work with their pupils on the development of their character. To qualify and to develop, a teacher must be able to establish a learning environment that is 'rooted in mutual respect', inclusive of pupils from 'all backgrounds, abilities and dispositions' and should 'demonstrate consistently the positive attitudes, values and behaviour which are expected of pupils' (TS1). Character education addresses the 'attitudes, values and behaviour' of children and young people. How a teacher learns to model the qualities they wish to see in their pupils is an important aspect of becoming a teacher and developing as one. Teachers should 'encourage pupils to take a responsible and conscientious attitude to their own work and study' (TS2) and 'promote a love of learning' (TS4) and this necessarily involves the values of the learner. The social development of children especially concerns their character and how they treat others. To become a teacher requires developing 'an awareness of the physical, social and intellectual development of children' and learning 'how to adapt teaching to support pupils' education at different stages of development' (TS5). Integrity, honesty and good communication are integral to teaching. When assessing children and young people there is the need for trust and good relationships as a new teacher develops the ability to 'give pupils regular feedback' and seeks to 'encourage pupils to respond to the feedback' (TS6).

Character education is especially important when it comes to the conduct and behavior management of students although it should not just be seen as this. Teachers must 'manage behaviour effectively to ensure a good and safe learning environment' (TS7); fulfilling this professional standard concerns the development of the character and values of the child and how good routines and habits are established. Teachers must 'take responsibility for promoting good and courteous behaviour both in classrooms and around the school'; they are to 'have high expectations of behaviour, and establish a framework for discipline with a range of strategies, using praise, sanctions and rewards consistently and fairly'. Teachers should 'manage classes effectively' and must 'maintain good relationships with pupils, exercise appropriate authority, and act decisively when necessary' (TS7).

The Character and Values of the Teacher

Professional conduct concerns the character of teachers as well as that of their students. Supporting the 'ethos of the school' and being able to 'communicate effectively with parents with regard to pupils' achievements and well-being' (TS8) requires certain values and attributes of character on the part of the teacher. Part Two of the *Teachers' Standards* (2012) is devoted to the 'personal and professional conduct of the teacher' and his or her 'behaviour and attitudes'. Although 'attendance and punctuality' are part of the professional conduct, teachers must do far more than turn up on time. They

must 'uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school'. This is to be done by 'treating pupils with dignity, building relationships rooted in mutual respect, and at all times observing proper boundaries appropriate to a teacher's professional position' including the 'need to safeguard pupils' well-being'.

Teachers should show 'tolerance of and respect for the rights of others' and uphold 'fundamental British values' which include: 'democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs'. Teachers have to ensure 'that personal beliefs are not expressed in ways which exploit pupils' vulnerability or might lead them to break the law'. Much that is required by law of teachers and their teaching concerns their own character and values as well as those of their pupils.

Teachers in the UK need to support fundamental British values such as tolerance. It is important to note that the tolerance children and young people (and teachers) exercise may not be based upon agreement but respecting disagreement and difference. Put simply, if there was no disagreement there would be nothing to tolerate. Not everyone has the same beliefs or priorities in life. Freedom of religion and freedom of conscience and belief is a hallmark of a tolerant liberal society. A pupil does not necessarily have to agree with other people's choices but, in general, their right to hold different views is respected. Teachers are responsible for: 'not undermining fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs'.

All too often, we are afraid to discuss differences in a plural society (because of inadequate and insufficiently robust notions of tolerance). It is especially important as society becomes more and more secular that this does not lead to intolerance of religious perspectives but tolerance of secular perspectives. To require citizens of faith to approve of practices, which they believe their sacred scriptures prohibit would be illiberal. Clearly 'tolerance is good, discrimination is bad and children should be brought up by their parents and teachers to respect others, especially those who differ from them in religion, race or culture and, also, perhaps more controversially, those whose way of life at a more personal level differs from that of the majority, for example, in terms of their sexual relationships and their approach to marriage and family life or in their moral views and conduct' (Almond, 2010)

The Professional Learning of the Teacher

In order to be a good teacher one needs to be (or to become) a certain kind of person. Not all individuals who possess good subject knowledge or who want to be teachers will be well suited to join the teaching profession. Teaching is 'more professionally commendable when it is carried out by those who are trustworthy, respectful of others, fair, patient, loyal, principled, discrete, responsible, conscientious, good humoured, witty, optimistic, self-restrained, persistent or lively' and it is much less so 'where those who teach are untrustworthy, disrespectful, unfair, spiteful, indiscreet, lazy, bullying, humourless, charmless, poorly motivated and self obsessed' (Carr, 2007, p.

370). But we have to be careful to distinguish between *personality* and *character* here. When we speak of the character of the teacher we are referring to something more important than personal style.

We may appreciate a colleague's ability to perform, tell jokes and recount anecdotes in the classroom (and the staffroom), but these will not compensate for lack of diligence or self-control in these respective areas. We are more likely to censure a colleague for laziness (and failing to prepare lessons or mark work) than for being dour. When it comes to professional learning, we should consider the character, as well as the charisma, a teacher needs in the classroom. As a student teacher on teaching placement there are important opportunities to see one's own professional character develop as well as the character of one's students. Student teachers regularly report that they have become more resilient, resourceful, responsible, patient, diligent or kind as they have worked with children and young people; in short, they have become more *professional*.

Professional and personal 'values' are important because they enable teachers to distinguish between personality and character. Values are '*principles and fundamental convictions which act as justifications for activity*' and they encompass 'enduring beliefs about what is worthwhile' (Halstead and Pike, 2006, p. 24). Teachers need to possess the attitudes and values that underpin their ability to make good judgments in the classroom. This is important because 'values' cannot be limited to one strand of the requirements for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), they underpin everything that teachers do. One of the qualities that teachers must have is a commitment to work with children and young people on the development of their values and character. A teacher cannot be considered to be a '*good teacher*' on technical grounds alone. Being an ethical teacher requires more than technical craft of the classroom skills; it rests upon particular values. We cannot judge teaching simply by technical skills or subject knowledge because it is a *profession* and entails important ethical commitments. One of these professional commitments is being prepared to work with young people on the development of their character and values. A teacher has a position of responsibility for leading young people not just in an area of the curriculum but also in life.

Teachers of Character

A mark of unprofessional conduct is not taking one's responsibilities seriously. To limit oneself to simply teaching a subject or discipline is not to face up to one's professional obligation and moral responsibilities. Yet some student teachers, as well as some experienced teachers, still feel uncomfortable when it comes to teaching children values or feel it is not their job to address aspects of character: 'Our temptation as educators of adolescents in an increasingly pluralistic society is to remain hands-off and assume a non-interference policy when it comes to the topic of moral choices and commitments' (Bohlin, 2005, p.4). Yet teachers are *in loco parentis* and this is

what good parents do. Character education is taking one's responsibilities seriously as an ethical educator.

If any teacher is inclined to adopt a 'hands off' approach to character and believes character is none of their business, we need to be aware that when educators focus on academic progress and decide that morality should be relegated to the private realm, the 'pushers of pornography' and other anti-social vices 'proselytize them in a much larger, much more pervasive scale' (Bohlin, 2005, p. 4). One Head teacher who makes the case passionately and with eloquence asks: 'Is it a crime for us to try to influence or persuade them that love is better than violence, gentleness better than force, that it is better to love someone wholly than to use his or her body selfishly. In a society in which rock stars and professional athletes purvey their existential and ethical views, shall educators keep silence?' (Jarvis, 1993, p. 65-66)

Many pupils who fulfil their academic or vocational potential need to work on their character in order to become kinder, more compassionate or more tolerant young people. The teacher's task is to help them - and it is written into the *Teachers' Standards* (2012) that they should do so. English and the humanities are especially rich in opportunities to learn about human character because they abound with examples of human vice and virtue. Work on moral dilemmas and ethical issues in science or on truth and honesty in maths lessons on statistics also have significant potential for considering core values and character. A tutor group may work on core values and the sort of character they wish to develop. The hidden curriculum is important and we need to look at whether the practices of good character are encouraged in the routines of the school, its communication patterns, behaviour management system and the ways in which others are treated. Books such as *Educating for Character – How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility* or *Character Matters* by Tom Lickona are recommended. These and articles reporting research on character and values are invaluable resources for teachers and parents. Case studies of individual teacher's work or of whole school approaches to fostering positive values show the way to go.

Recommendations for Practitioners and Policymakers

1. For all courses of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) leading to QTS (Qualified Teacher Status), whether PGCE, Schools Direct or Teach First, to include taught sessions on the importance of working with children and young people on the development of good character and positive values in meeting the *Teachers' Standards* (2012) and addressing current Ofsted priorities such as behaviour management.
2. For all ITE courses/routes to include, in handbooks and course documentation, a statement of the values they seek to foster in student teachers and their pupils.
3. For all student teachers to include in their portfolios of evidence against the Standards how they have addressed character and values education while teaching.

4. All secondary/subject specific junior school teachers to create a portfolio of resources (tasks/texts/media etc) for teaching character and values through specific topics.
5. For all schools delivering ITE and all HEI providers of ITE to publish – or publish links to/docs from (the Jubilee Centre) examples of ‘Character across the Curriculum’ identifying opportunities for character education in each subject (we need to create this).
6. For all student teachers to report how learning to teach has been a character building experience. What qualities have they developed/acquired on teaching practice/placement? (patience, resilience, kindness, tolerance, stamina, work ethic etc?)
7. For all student teachers to identify their own core values as professional teachers. Each student teacher should identify between 6 and 10 core values they espouse with definitions of under 30 words for each.
8. For each student teacher to identify and comment on the core values of the schools in which they train and to write a report on how each school provides for the character education of its pupils.
9. For all ITE Reading Lists to include as compulsory reading key M-level books and articles on teaching character education and values (e.g. Lickona’s *Character Matters* and *Educating for Character – how our school can teach respect and responsibility*)
10. For all ITE students to report a ‘case study’ either from the literature or their own research of how a particular school/teacher has addressed character and values 1) in a curriculum subject 2) in tutor/pastoral role 3) whole school ethos including behaviour management systems

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New Teachers' Standards Preamble: Teachers make the education of their pupils their first concern and are accountable for achieving the highest possible standards in work and conduct. Teachers act with honesty and integrity; have strong subject knowledge, keep their knowledge and skills as teachers up-to-date and are self-critical; forge positive professional relationships; and work with parents in the best interests of their pupils.

A Teacher must:

1. Set high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge pupils

- establish a safe and stimulating environment for pupils, rooted in mutual respect
- set goals that stretch and challenge pupils of all backgrounds, abilities and dispositions
- demonstrate consistently the positive attitudes, values and behaviour which are expected of pupils.

2. Promote good progress and outcomes by pupils

- be accountable for pupils' attainment, progress and outcomes
- plan teaching to build on pupils' capabilities and prior knowledge
- guide pupils to reflect on the progress they have made and their emerging needs
- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how pupils learn and how this impacts on teaching encourage pupils to take a responsible and conscientious attitude to their own work and study

4. Plan and teach well structured lessons

- impart knowledge and develop understanding through effective use of lesson time
- promote a love of learning and children's intellectual curiosity

5. Adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils

- know when and how to differentiate appropriately, using approaches which enable pupils to be taught effectively
- have a secure understanding of how a range of factors can inhibit pupils' ability to learn, and how best to overcome these
- demonstrate an awareness of the physical, social and intellectual development of children, and how to adapt teaching to support pupils' education at different stages of development

6. Make accurate and productive use of assessment

- know and understand how to assess the relevant subject and curriculum areas, including statutory assessment requirements
- make use of formative and summative assessment to secure pupils' progress
- use relevant data to monitor progress, set targets, and plan subsequent lessons
- give pupils regular feedback, both orally and through accurate marking, and encourage pupils to respond to the feedback

7. Manage behaviour effectively to ensure a good and safe learning environment

- have clear rules and routines for behaviour in classrooms, and take responsibility for promoting good and courteous behaviour both in classrooms and around the schools, in accordance with the school's behaviour policy
- have high expectations of behaviour, and establish a framework for discipline with a range of strategies, using praise, sanctions and rewards consistently and fairly
- manage classes effectively, using approaches which are appropriate to pupils' needs in order to involve and motivate them
- maintain good relationships with pupils, exercise appropriate authority, and act decisively when necessary

8. Fulfil wider professional responsibilities

- make a positive contribution to the wider life and ethos of the school
- develop effective professional relationships with colleagues, knowing how and when to draw on advice and specialist support
- deploy support staff effectively
- take responsibility for improving teaching through appropriate professional development, responding to advice and feedback from colleagues communicate effectively with parents with regard to pupils' achievements and well-being

PART TWO: PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

A teacher is expected to demonstrate consistently high standards of personal and professional conduct. The following statements define the behaviour and attitudes which set the required standard for conduct throughout a teacher's career.

Teachers uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school, by:

- treating pupils with dignity, building relationships rooted in mutual respect, and at all times observing proper boundaries appropriate to a teacher's professional position
- having regard for the need to safeguard pupils' well-being, in accordance with statutory provisions

- showing tolerance of and respect for the rights of others
- not undermining fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs
- ensuring that personal beliefs are not expressed in ways which exploit pupils' vulnerability or might lead them to break the law

Teachers must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach, and maintain high standards in their own attendance and punctuality