

2

The character of the teacher

Introduction

When asked to think back to our own experiences of schooling, we are likely to recall our friends, those subjects we enjoyed (or didn't!), and the teachers who educated us. Although we may recount breakthrough moments in which teachers helped us to succeed academically, teachers are not necessarily remembered for their subject knowledge or ability to convey factual information – it is often the *character* of the teacher that is fondly, or contemptuously, recalled. Indeed, even when fond memories of teachers concern academic success, the character of the teacher is often implicated: the support of a caring and attentive teacher who encouraged us to persevere when the concept was initially too difficult to understand; the teacher whose creativity and enthusiasm encouraged us out of our comfort zone and to participate; the compassionate teacher who supported us when our lives brought challenges; the teacher who gave up their time at the weekend to create tailored learning materials to support our needs; the list of examples goes on.

While it is irrefutable that in most cases parents and carers are the primary educators of their children, non-parental role models such as peers, other family members, teachers, and mentors also have the potential to positively influence children's personal and social development (Bowers et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2016). Children can and do learn more from teachers than the information conveyed in lessons. In part this is due to the amount of time teachers spend with their pupils, but it is also due to the developmental ages at which children attend school and the nature of what occurs within educational settings. Teachers ultimately play an important role in pupils' character development and construction of self-identity through the kindness and support they show the children in their care (Harrison et al., 2016c).

The work of teachers is complex and varied, incorporating a range of elements, including the communication of important moral, social, and cultural information. Most, if not all, teachers acknowledge that their personal character influences their teaching and note that personal moral values such as respect, caring, fairness, trust, and empathy influence professional practice (Joseph, 2016; Peterson and Arthur, 2021). A teacher's tone and voice often convey hidden meanings, and pupils are also sensitive to non-verbal communications; pupils make judgements about whether teachers truly care about them and their development based on cues taken from a teacher's demeanour, body language, and facial expressions.

How a teacher communicates with others, their daily interactions, and how they make decisions are all influenced by who they are as a person. The focus

of this chapter is on the *character* of the teacher and the role a teacher's character plays in informing and guiding conduct. The chapter is divided into several sections. Within the first section teaching is presented as a profession which inherently contains moral and ethical dimensions. In this, the role of teachers and teachers' motivations for joining the profession are briefly discussed. The second section attends to the standards and codes of conduct that inform teachers' work. Consideration of these standards highlights how character is implicated in a teacher's professional responsibilities. In the third section, the manner, speech, and behaviour of teachers is considered, and the influence of the teacher as a role model is discussed. In the fourth section, the desirable character virtues of 'good' teachers are discussed and explained.

Chapter Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you should have:

- Considered how a teacher's character influences the pupils in their care
- Evaluated how character is incorporated within teachers' standards and codes of conduct within your own context
- Reflected on the character virtues and qualities of a 'good' teacher.

Teaching as a moral endeavour

The moral dimensions and ethical requirements of teaching are well documented and understood within education literature, which positions teaching as an overtly moral endeavour (Arthur, 2003; Carr, 2007; Cooke and Carr, 2014; Peterson and Arthur, 2021). However, it is apparent that the tendency of education reforms to prioritise academic attainment and preparation for employability in schools has led to a lack of clarity around what the role of the teacher encompasses. Due to the prioritisation of subject knowledge and technical skills within teacher preparation programmes, combined with dominant discourses around school assessment scores and the accountability of teachers and schools, teachers joining the profession would be forgiven for understanding teaching as being concerned predominantly with educating pupils for academic success. While certainly an important and focal aspect of teaching, the prioritisation of academic skills without an adequate focus on the moral dimensions and ethical requirements of teaching risks teachers losing sight of what it truly means to be a teacher and what a responsibility for pupils' *well-rounded education* encompasses to its full extent.

Education is not limited to the teaching and learning of purely technical skills or the inculcation of knowledge, and it is generally agreed that a teacher's responsibility is for the holistic education of pupils, including personal and moral development (Bullough, 2011; Campbell, 2008a; Lapsley and Woodbury, 2016; Osguthorpe, 2013; Sanger, 2012). In fact, the majority of teachers choose

the profession for reasons associated with pupils' personal and social development, informed by moral or altruistic motivations (Book and Freeman, 1986; Brookhart and Freeman, 1992; Peterson and Arthur, 2021; Sanger and Osguthorpe, 2011). New entrants to the teaching profession will typically cite the desire to make a difference to children's lives (Arthur et al., 2015b; Sanger and Osguthorpe, 2013), to develop good people, to inspire, to foster a love of learning, and to attend to the welfare and development of young people as motivating reasons for becoming a teacher. In other words, it is very often the desire to support pupils' personal and social development – including their moral development – that underpins why the majority of teachers teach.

Teachers make a wide range of decisions about pupils as part of their daily work – their safety, their wellbeing, their learning, and their relationships. At all times, and sometimes in the face of other competing pressures, teachers act with the best interests of their pupils at heart. In this way, we can think of teachers as acting *in loco parentis* – in place of the parent within the context of the school. A teacher's role carries with it a high degree of public trust, and because of this teachers are considered to shoulder a higher level of moral responsibility than many other professions (Arthur et al., 2017b). Teachers are also inevitable role models for pupils whose attitudes, dispositions, and behaviours are constantly on display and under scrutiny. Accordingly, teachers are expected to uphold high standards of ethics and behaviour in both personal and professional domains. It is important to consider that the teacher's influence as an educator is not confined to the school building. A teacher's conduct and presence is often keenly observed by pupils, parents, and other school stakeholders outside of the school, including in online spaces and through social media. The character of the teacher – who they truly are as a person – is a central concern in teaching. In the words of Arthur et al. (2017b: 6), 'the act of teaching ... reveals the centrality of a teacher's moral and intellectual character' and the public have a vested interest in this.

It is also important to consider the moral dimensions of interactions and relationships between teachers and pupils. Typically, a child's first and most consistent source of moral and ethical guidance comes from the home (Jubilee Centre, 2017; Peterson and Arthur, 2021). However, teachers also share in this responsibility. Pupils spend a considerable amount of time in the presence and care of teachers and, as will be explored later in this chapter, teachers are likely to influence pupils not only as potential role models, but as exemplars of good conduct and behaviour who set standards and expectations through their daily interactions with pupils. Teachers can motivate or discourage, can inspire or deflate, and can teach pupils a great deal through what they encourage or discourage within the school and classroom environments. This form of teaching is considered to be an implicit form of moral education which occurs whether acknowledged by teachers or not (Arthur et al., 2017b).

Due to the moral nature of teaching, and because teachers work so closely with pupils, parents, and other educators, teachers are regularly faced with complex situations that have moral dimensions and require action to be taken. In such situations, the 'right thing' to do is not clear cut and it can be said that

a teacher faces a moral dilemma. In being tasked with navigating moral dilemmas in their daily practice, teachers are in a constant process of judgement and arbitration (Fullard and Watts, 2019), and rely on practical wisdom to guide them. As outlined in Chapter 1, practical wisdom develops through experience and habituation, and it is ultimately the character of the teacher which guides their choices and actions when faced with a moral dilemma.

Despite the moral nature of teaching and the understanding that teachers contribute to pupils' personal and social development, in recent years the moral dimensions of teaching have not always received the attention they should within teacher preparation and early career development programmes. Guided predominantly by teachers' standards and codes of conduct – and perhaps the assumption that those entering the profession are the 'right kind of people' and therefore already have the necessary attributes – teacher preparation programmes have tended to prioritise teaching skills and competencies over more fundamental questions of character development and professionalism. However, with changes in policy, guidance, and indeed in wider society, teacher preparation programmes are paying more attention to questions of character, judgement, and professionalism. Case Study 2.1 highlights how some teacher educators have made a focus on character a conscious and significant part of teacher training and development.

Case Study 2.1: Pre-Service Teacher Education at the University of Warwick

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At the Centre for Teacher Education at the University of Warwick, we have character and values embedded throughout our teacher education programmes. We explicitly teach about character education to help equip our student teachers to develop and instil character and moral values in the pupils they teach. However, we also recognise and prioritise the importance of the student teachers' own character and virtue development. A recent review of our Initial Teacher Education curriculum and our departmental vision and values allowed for the implementation of a number of planned and purposeful opportunities throughout our one-year Post-Graduate Certificate of Education programmes to explore and develop the character of the teacher.

One strand that has had a positive impact on student teacher character development is our work on professionalism. Teaching is a particularly challenging profession, as it is fraught with complexities, and teachers face ethical dilemmas on a daily basis that lack a clear resolution. Without support in the development of practical wisdom, early career teachers may not feel sufficiently prepared to know how to best respond when faced with challenging situations. Therefore, our department has deliberately moved away from the traditional approach to professionalism that focuses on adherence to professional codes

of conduct, as this fails to prepare student teachers for the reality of teaching. Instead, we revisit professionalism through workshop-style seminars built around ethical dilemmas to guide student teachers to consider what it means to be a professional and to understand more fully the ensuing moral responsibilities and challenges that come with being a teacher. With personal tutors facilitating the exploration of authentic professional dilemmas, student teachers are able to openly discuss how they might respond to a particular situation collaboratively and in a safe space to consider the most appropriate course of action. This process has proved to be effective in equipping student teachers to more confidently deal with issues that arise on their professional placements.

The concept of professional identity is revisited at key reflection points during the year in the student teachers' e-portfolios to capture their evolving professional identity. For example, during induction, student teachers have the opportunity to reflect on the character of teachers that have inspired them in their own education and the values they hope to embody as a teacher. Student teachers are invested in this process as the majority want to become a teacher for altruistic reasons. By providing opportunities to reflect on the kind of teacher student teachers aspire to be throughout, we help them to maintain a sense of purpose and the motivation needed to enable them to cope with the challenges and demands of the pre-service year.

We tend to find that student teachers have had little opportunity for self-reflection prior to commencing their teacher preparation programme. As a result, many begin without having developed the self-awareness to recognise their own character strengths and areas for development. With research indicating that teachers are viewed as role models by their pupils and that character can be both caught and taught, teacher educators at Warwick believe that it is part of our responsibility to support student teachers to develop critical reflection skills and nurture a commitment to their own personal growth to support and complement their development as effective classroom practitioners. To ensure that we address this responsibility, we have built in regular opportunities for guided reflection on character through both the individual tutorial programme and designated reflection sessions at key points throughout the year. To support reflection while the student teachers are on their school placements, we developed a framework aligning our Core Warwick Values of Social Justice, Intellectual Curiosity and Creativity with the virtue building blocks from the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues' *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (2017), and included a glossary of definitions to ensure consistent understanding of the values.

While on school placements, student teachers are supported in a number of ways. During their weekly meetings with mentors, student teachers have coaching conversations about their developing classroom practice. They are also encouraged to use the framework as a guide to enable them to reflect on their own values. This may include identifying which values have been particularly significant that week, values they feel they have made progress with, and recognising which values may need further development. To support student teachers who may initially struggle with this process, mentors are also

encouraged to provide feedback on character development as part of this regular professional dialogue. Mentors themselves are also encouraged to self-reflect on their own values through our mentor development programmes. We advocate an ethical coaching model which moves away from the traditional hierarchical model that is so prevalent in traditional mentoring relationships. Where mentors are prepared to devote time to self-reflection, they recognise the impact their character has on their mentees and adapt their mentoring style accordingly, thus personalising their approach to most effectively meet the needs of the individual trainee.

Character, teachers' standards, codes of conduct, and professional responsibilities

At this point in the chapter, it is necessary to consider how the concept of character connects with a teacher's professional role and responsibilities, as set out by government and non-governmental bodies in various forms of teachers' standards and codes of conduct. The standards that teachers work towards and within will be familiar to any pre-service student teacher. These standards are often a primary focus in the training and development of all teachers, with conduct and practice evidenced in line with the standards. Once qualified, standards for teachers remain important, but these can often sit more in the background than for beginning teachers. In Australia, for example, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has set out professional standards which frame development in each standard according to career stage and professional capability: 'Graduate', 'Proficient', 'Highly Accomplished', or 'Lead'. At the 'Graduate' level of standard 7, in which teachers 'meet professional ethics and responsibilities', teachers are expected to 'understand and apply the key principles described in codes of ethics and conduct for the teaching profession'. At the highest level ('Lead'), teachers 'model exemplary ethical behaviour and exercise informed judgements in all professional dealings with students, colleagues and the community' (AITSL, 2018: 22).

In most, if not all, educational jurisdictions, standards for teachers will include a similar ethical dimension focused on the character of the teacher. However, teachers' standards commonly face criticism for focusing too much on technical competency and not enough on the character and qualities that teachers should demonstrate (Beauchamp et al., 2015; Fullard and Watts, 2019). In England, the *Teachers' Standards* (DfE, 2013) focus largely on skills, echoing a technicist model of teaching. Typically, standards for teachers emphasise criteria which are focused on a teacher's level of knowledge and professional responsibilities. It has been argued that standards such as these lack a framework of values and qualities conducive to the profession, focusing too much on what teachers *do* and not enough on what a teacher *is* (Arthur et al., 2005).

However, despite a general lack of emphasis on the character and qualities that teachers should demonstrate, the character of the teacher is undoubtedly implicated in their personal and professional conduct. Having introduced the different categories (or building blocks) of character virtues in Chapter 1, it will be possible for readers to unpick some of the more generic statements and mechanical language in different versions of teachers' standards and codes of conduct, and to highlight how a teacher's character, if not explicitly mentioned, is implicated in these. Take, for example, the first statement in Box 2.1. It only takes a few seconds to tease out the desirable character virtues that underpin this statement: namely, that teachers must be *honest, kind, respectful, and helpful* (to name only a few).

Reflective Activity 2.1: Identifying implicit character virtues

Consider the statements provided in Box 2.1. Which character virtues would you expect teachers to have and demonstrate in order to satisfy these statements? You might find it helpful to refer back to Table 1.2 for a list of different virtues.

Box 2.1: Statements taken from the Teachers' Standards in England (DfE, 2013)

Teachers **must**:

- 1 'demonstrate consistently the positive attitudes, values and behaviour which are expected of pupils' (2013: 10)
- 2 'maintain good relationships with pupils, exercise appropriate authority, and act decisively when necessary' (2013: 12)
- 3 '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' (2013: 14)

In other parts of the UK, standards for teachers arguably pay more attention to character and are less ambiguous in their wording than in England. One need only look at the first few pages of the draft *Professional Standards for Teachers in Scotland* (GTCS, 2021) to see explicit mention of the character virtues that teachers must demonstrate: *trust, respect, honesty, courage, wisdom, truthfulness, and integrity*. Furthermore, the teacher's role in contributing to a 'caring and compassionate ethos' (GTCS, 2021: 5) is emphasised. In Wales, the *Code of Professional Conduct and Practice* (EWC, 2019: 3) makes explicit teachers' 'personal responsibility as a role model', acknowledging the influence

of teachers who will be admired and emulated; and in Northern Ireland, the *Professional Standards for Teachers* (LLUK, 2009) outlines six professional values for teachers, including empathy and trust, respect, and creativity.

Reflective Activity 2.2: Evaluating the teachers' standards or codes of conduct in your own educational context

In this activity, you are asked to evaluate the standards or codes of conduct set for teachers in your own educational jurisdiction. To do this, you will first need to access and read through the relevant document(s), which are usually accessible on government websites and may be provided during teacher training. Next, you will need to evaluate how, and the extent to which, the character of the teacher is implicated. To do this, you might ask the following questions when reviewing the document(s):

- Which moral, intellectual, civic, and performance virtues are mentioned explicitly within the standards?
- Which virtues are implicit, or implicated in the standards?
- To what extent do the standards focus on technical competencies and how does this compare to a focus on the teacher's character?
- Do the standards make reference to professional judgement?
- Which virtues are missing, in your opinion?

Finally, suggest changes that could be made to the standards or codes of conduct so that they include a more explicit focus on the character of the teacher – you might like to make changes directly onto the document in a different colour, or to re-write certain statements. You should be able to explain why you have made these changes and why you think they are relevant to the profession.

A teacher's influence on pupils as a role model

Whether teachers acknowledge their role as an exemplar or not, young people in their care will learn from their manner, behaviour, attitudes and dispositions.

– Sandra Cooke, 2017: 420

In the early parts of this chapter we argued that beyond the teaching of subject knowledge and transferrable skills, there is a certain inevitability of teachers influencing pupils' character development as positive role models and mentors in schools; teachers are always 'on display' as exemplars of speech, behaviour, and general conduct. As Cooke notes in the quotation above, regardless of whether teachers are aware of their influence or not, teachers influence pupils through their very presence and behaviours. Various research studies suggest that how teachers enact their wider responsibilities for pupils' personal and social development is ultimately perceived to depend on a teacher's character

and presence (Fenstermacher et al., 2009; Peterson and Arthur, 2021; Richardson and Fallona, 2001; Tickle, 2001).

There is a common perception within the field of character education that teachers are role models for the pupils in their care (Arthur et al., 2017b; Harrison et al., 2016c; Lumpkin, 2008; Osguthorpe, 2008; Revell and Arthur, 2007; Sanderse, 2013). This view is also shared by the Department for Education (DfE) in England, which outlines the following guidance for the preparation of teachers in the *Initial Teacher Training (ITT): Core Content Framework* (DfE, 2019b: 9): 'Teachers are key role models, who can influence the attitudes, values and behaviours of their students'. This guidance clearly acknowledges the powerful influence of teachers on their pupils. Student teachers and qualified teachers also share in this view, often acknowledging that modelling is one of the primary means through which they can influence the moral development of their pupils (Arthur et al., 2015c; Sanger and Osguthorpe, 2013). Accordingly, Harrison et al. (2016c) assert that teachers must accept responsibility as role models, and set examples of appropriate behaviours in different situations.

Attention paid to role models in education has often focused on the *imitation* or *emulation* of individuals. In this way, role-modelling is sometimes understood as little more than holding up individuals as those worthy of emulation in the hope that the individual's 'worth' will become apparent to pupils and that, in turn, pupils will seek to imitate these positive attitudes and behaviours. For Kristjánsson (2006b: 46), this view of role-model education, which emphasises behavioural elements, is 'to a large extent, educationally under-ambitious and morally under-developed'. Instead, Kristjánsson advocates an alternative form of role-model education which accounts for affective, conative, cognitive, and behavioural elements. In other words, a form of role-model education in which pupils are able to identify the qualities demonstrated by the individual, understand why the qualities are valuable, and are motivated and strive to develop these qualities themselves. In other words, a more critical and personally relevant way of learning from role models. Sanderse (2013) echoes this view and suggests that, for role-modelling to be effective, teachers need to explain not only how the exemplified qualities are morally significant for pupils, but how pupils can develop the qualities themselves.

While a focus on role models is common within literature on character education (and we return to this later in the book), teachers themselves tend to function as role models for pupils implicitly, and explicit role-modelling on the part of the teacher is likely to be employed less (Sanderse, 2013). Of course, teachers may well explicitly model good behaviour when they feel this is necessary, especially with younger children. For example, a teacher may draw attention to how they exercise virtues such as civility and kindness in speech and conduct, or how they would help and share with others. However, more often than not a teacher's influence as a role model occurs subconsciously, operating through their conduct in their interactions with pupils, colleagues, families, and community partners.

When school-aged pupils are asked to identify their character role models, described as someone who is 'looked up to' as a 'good person', parents and other

familial adults are identified far more frequently than teachers (Johnson et al., 2016). Yet it is notable from the research literature that this perception changes with age. Teachers are recognised as role models to a greater extent in retrospect (Sanderse, 2013); accordingly, older pupils are far more likely than younger pupils to perceive teachers in this way (see Johnson et al., 2016), and this suggests that as pupils mature they may be more able to reflect on and identify the individuals – including teachers – who have influenced them. Younger children may understandably be less able to identify individuals who are positive (and negative) influences – be it peers, teachers, parents, siblings, or celebrities in the media – but as adolescents and adults, pupils may be more able to look back and identify not only who, but *how* individuals, such as teachers, influenced them during their formative years. It is interesting to note, too, that a large proportion of role models are chosen based on their personal qualities and characteristics which are regarded as ‘character-relevant’ in nature – for example, the role models are ‘kind’, ‘caring’, ‘nice’, and ‘trustworthy’ (Johnson et al., 2016).

Reflective Activity 2.3: Which teachers were role models for you?

Think about your own experiences of education and schooling. Which teachers do you remember? Do you remember individual teachers because they acted as a positive role model or because they were a negative role model (or perhaps they were a mix of both)? What did and have you learned from these teachers? Thinking back to the four types of character – moral, intellectual, civic, and performance – what virtues do you wish to ‘model’ for pupils?

How teachers influence pupils as role models is complex and involves a range of factors. Some pupils might identify a teacher (or teachers) as a character role model and consciously seek to emulate their manner and actions. However, as the research mentioned above suggests, the majority of pupils will not recognise fully the influence of their teachers until later in life. Some of the ways that teachers can positively influence pupils as role models are shown in Box 2.2 below, but of course there are many factors at play which may affect the strength of the influence in each case. The amount of time spent in the presence of influential models is one; teachers are more likely to be seen as positive character role models where they have formed meaningful relationships with pupils within which they demonstrate certain qualities (being kind, compassionate, honest, and so forth) in a stable and consistent manner. A teacher who spends extended periods of time with pupils may play a more significant role than a teacher who sees pupils once a week, or indirectly in and around the school. This said, it is also the case that in some instances a seminal moment in a pupil’s life may be more fleeting – a momentary and unexpected act of caring or kindness is a case in point. It is important, therefore, not to underestimate the impact of even the briefest of interactions with pupils.

A teacher's character is constantly on display and is the subject of consistent evaluation. Teachers 'are under the close examination of students, who see and hear in teachers' eyes, voice and body language what they are really saying' (Arthur et al., 2017b: 8). Take a secondary school or subject-specific teacher who has limited contact time with pupils. The teacher has multiple classes a day and their time with any one pupil is limited to one hour once a week. One might question how this teacher could influence the pupils they teach beyond the academic boundaries of the classroom context. Once again, it is important to highlight that pupils' interest and engagement in a lesson is not purely down to the subject matter or a teacher's ability to convey information; pupils may well look forward (or indeed not look forward!) to even brief interactions with teachers based on *who* the teacher is and how they interact with pupils. These interactions are shaped by a teacher's conduct.

To illustrate and delve further into the influence of teachers in this way, let us consider two examples: the first, a teacher who embodies in speech and behaviour what we would generally consider to be 'good' character – someone who is kind, attentive, and respectful. When approached by a distressed pupil in a lesson or after school, the teacher makes time to speak and listen to the pupil's worries and concerns. The teacher prioritises the pupil's welfare over their other immediate responsibilities and is visibly interested in what the pupil has to say. The teacher takes time to listen, reassures the pupil, and advises them. Through the teacher's interaction, they display kindness, respect, and compassion to the pupil. This conduct enables the pupil to trust the teacher. The second is an example of a teacher who, as a result of their preoccupation with teaching knowledge and understanding, is abrupt with pupils and often displays a lack of interest in their thoughts, interests, and concerns. The teacher sees their role as purely academic; their responsibility is to teach knowledge and understanding, nothing more. The teacher is noticeably disinterested in pupils' wider lives and at times is even discourteous, resulting from a desire to ensure that pupils focus on the lesson and its objectives. Although the teacher's transactional view of the teacher–pupil relationship does not acknowledge their wider influence, let us consider what is displayed to pupils in the class: it would be fair to say that this teacher models a lack of respect, civility, and kindness. In addition to the obvious tension with teachers' standards and codes of conduct, the teacher risks teaching pupils that their manner and behaviours are acceptable within the school community.

Many readers will be able to recall teachers they had who embodied aspects of the descriptions provided in Box 2.2.

Box 2.2: How teachers can positively influence pupils through their speech and conduct with pupils, staff, and parents

Speech and communication:

- Ensuring courtesy and politeness of speech (including tone of voice)
- Maintaining positive facial expressions and body language

- Showing support and encouragement/compassionate understanding
- Taking the time to stop and listen
- Showing humility, patience, and kindness
- Being positive.

Conduct:

- Prioritising individuals' welfare, happiness, and wellbeing
- Showing acts of kindness, gratitude, and respect
- Engaging in and encouraging prosocial behaviours
- Maintaining fairness and integrity
- Providing equal opportunities for all
- Demonstrating respect for democracy and respect for authority
- Fostering and celebrating independence, individual differences, and creativity.

Engagement in learning:

- Showing enthusiasm and enjoyment in tasks
- Demonstrating persistence when problem-solving or encountering challenges
- Fostering independence and creativity
- Providing opportunities for all pupils to pursue their interests.

It is interesting to note that both positive and negative experiences with teachers can have an influence on career choices later in life, and that it is often the character of the teacher that is implicated. To illustrate this point, we draw on interviews that two of the authors conducted with pre-service student teachers as part of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues' *Teacher Education* project.¹ When asked to reflect on their own experiences of education, many of the student teachers explained that they were inspired to become teachers because of the positive experiences they had with a teacher (or teachers) during their own schooling; teachers who were approachable, supportive, and cared for them. The student teachers often explained that they had begun their preparation as a teacher, at least in part, because they wanted to emulate certain teachers and support pupils in the way that they had been supported themselves. In contrast, a small number of the student teachers spoke of negative experiences they had with teachers during their own schooling, and highlighted aspects of the teacher's character which caused or contributed to this. Admirably, they explained that they were motivated to teach in order to become positive models for pupils, despite having negative teacher models themselves.

Of course, for many pupils it will be clear when 'good' character is lacking in the models they are provided. They will recognise, based on their other experiences and upbringing, that such behaviours are not desirable or acceptable. However, for younger pupils and those without strong positive models, the modelling of negative behaviours may well have an adverse impact. Albert Bandura's (1977) social learning theory has much relevance to what is being discussed here. Social learning theory proposes that behaviours are learnt

through observation and imitation. Learning can be influenced by reinforcements following the behaviour, but it can also occur in the absence of direct reinforcement when learners interact with others (models) within particular environments, including through observation. What we can take from social learning theory is that pupils may emulate the models they are presented with and can learn from how others act and are treated (for example, how another child is praised for kindness or, more negatively, how another child's legitimate view is dismissed out of hand). A teacher who lacks respect, civility, and kindness in their manner, attitudes, and behaviours is unlikely to be one we would want teaching our own children, even if they were effective in enhancing academic progress. On the other hand, we would likely be delighted if our children were taught by a teacher who displays kindness, respect, and compassion. A teacher demonstrating 'good' character virtues such as these not only provides a positive model for pupils but, in doing so, helps to create a positive learning environment in which pupils feel comfortable, safe, respected, and ready to learn.

Teachers' character virtues

So far, the focus of this chapter has been on how the character, conduct, and behaviours of teachers influence pupils. We have been discussing these professional qualities in a reasonably general way – teachers who are kind, honest, compassionate, and so on. It is also important for teachers – and indeed teaching as a profession – to consider more specifically and precisely what the desirable professional qualities of teachers might be. Indeed, it is likely that as you have worked through the chapter, *you* have also been reflecting on what professional qualities *you think* are most relevant to the role of a teacher. In this final main section in the chapter, we draw on the findings of research that presents the character and qualities of 'good' teachers according to teachers at various career stages, as well as three case studies which illustrate character virtues in the teaching profession.

Definitions of a 'good' teacher within the research literature include qualities relating to moral character such as kindness, compassion, and trustworthiness, among others (Tickle, 2001). These characteristics are those associated with the creation of positive learning environments and effective relationships with pupils. To briefly recap some key points raised earlier in this chapter, there is a wide view that 'good' teachers possess more than just the technical skills necessary to transmit information to their pupils (Hansen, 2001; Korthagen, 2004). In addition to subject knowledge, a passion for their subject, and a desire to learn, a 'good' teacher must be of good character – someone who is kind, caring, determined, who has patience and a sense of humour (Arthur et al., 2017b). Pupils tend to share in this perception of a 'good' teacher. In a recent YouGov poll (2018), pupils predominantly described 'good' teachers by discussing themes which relate to moral character: teachers who are kind, who can be trusted, who listen, and who help.

The character virtues and qualities of ‘good’ teachers form a core part of the recruitment process of schools. When recruiting staff, school leaders will, by and large, actively look for applicants who can demonstrate relevant qualities in addition to applicants who have the necessary skills, or emerging skills, to teach well. It is the character of prospective teachers that often separates successful from unsuccessful candidates. During both informal interviews, for example when visiting a school prior to submitting an application, and formal interviews, an applicant’s character is under scrutiny by the school’s leadership team. Case Study 2.2 illustrates what prospective teachers can expect during interviews, as well as the virtues and qualities that school leaders actively look for applicants to demonstrate during this process. The character virtues and qualities include:

- Confidence
- Humility
- Teamwork
- Kindness
- Empathy
- Humour
- Good communication.

Case Study 2.2: Recruitment in Schools: The Importance of Character

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As a headteacher of three secondary schools in the East of England for eighteen years, I understood the need for committed staff, both teachers and support staff, who would drive character education. They would do this in their daily interactions with pupils and colleagues and in their determination to ensure that they took every opportunity, both in and outside of the classroom, to consistently reinforce all aspects of our character provision. Apart from a well-resourced and regular commitment to on-going teacher education and personal development, it was obvious to me that we needed a recruitment process which not only allowed access to the best subject teachers available but also enabled us to recruit individuals who shared the school’s value system and, by definition, would then promote that value system at every turn.

In addition to my own experience in interviewing thousands of prospective teachers, evidence gleaned from some of the best Schools of Character in England, shows that considerable thought and professional care is invested in organising the interview process to ensure that it is truly effective. Not only will the school have the opportunity to determine the professional competence and values-driven nature of the applicant but the applicant should have ample opportunity to ensure that the community they are seeking to join fulfils all of their

expectations around personal development and key values systems. From the nature of a job advert and the content of the prose defining and describing the school community, new teachers should be able to read an advert from a school and immediately understand the ethos and culture of the school.

Typically, a well-constructed interview programme might follow a similar format to that presented below:

- Welcome and introduction to the school involving relaxed meetings with key leaders including the headteacher or principal. During this phase, the content of the day will be carefully explained and the fact that it is very much a two-way process suitably reinforced. Interviewees need to present themselves in a professional manner taking every opportunity to communicate an assertive but empathetic style.
- The school will arrange for a number of opportunities for the candidate to meet with prospective colleagues and pupils. There will almost certainly be a tour of the school led by pupils who will happily provide an honest and frank summary of the school's organisation and culture. These opportunities should be fully exploited and candidates should always remember that they are 'on interview' the moment they enter the school. I used to seek feedback from pupils and colleagues throughout the day assessing the character and likelihood of interviewees to 'fit into the school's way of doing things'.
- During 'non-formal' segments of the day, the candidate should concentrate carefully on how they are communicating with pupils and other staff. Positivity and warm body language is vastly more important than words used and in addition to showing commitment to hard work with a real sense of humour, candidates need to be brave and entirely honest in communicating their personal values, morals, and character traits so that there is no ambiguity. Experience has shown that individuals who remain loyal and truthful to the values which they hold dear are always much more convincing than individuals who adapt their personal presentation in a misguided attempt to 'meet the perceived needs of the school'.
- It is almost impossible to predict the type or nature of questions that might be asked during the interview process. However, candidates should be confident to talk about areas of their life which highlight exactly who they are. Personal experiences and interests described in a manner which reinforces the character traits of the individual, for example, highlighting willingness to lead or work collaboratively with others, affords an opportunity for the interviewer to make an honest and realistic assessment.
- It is not easy to obtain the right balance between humility and self-promotion. However, candidates who are able to provide concrete examples of how they have overcome personal and professional challenges and have shown resilience and determination to succeed, no matter what the obstacle to be overcome, tend to be those teachers who will be able to cope with the multitude of challenges which will inevitably be faced in any classroom.
- Nearly all interviews will involve teaching a sample lesson. I used to enjoy lessons which were pacy, challenging, and threaded with good humour and positive interaction. The sample lesson affords the candidate an opportunity

to interact purposefully with individual pupils, highlighting a willingness to engage in mutually respectful relationships. Ultimately, teaching is all about the quality of relationships that a teacher is able to construct and, as a head-teacher, the ability of a candidate to demonstrate that they were able to adapt their approach and show genuine kindness and empathy with pupils of all aptitudes, was for me a crucial factor in determining their success.

Two reports produced by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues highlight further how good character is perceived in the teaching profession. Arthur et al. (2015b) used the 24 character strengths of the Values in Action (VIA)² to help to understand the character strengths attributed to an 'ideal' teacher by teachers at varying stages of their careers. A later study by Arthur et al. (2018) sought to understand how pre-service student teachers perceived the character strengths of a 'good' teacher. While there is not space here to provide a comprehensive overview and comparison of the findings from these two projects, some key findings are provided (if you are interested in learning more about the findings from the projects and how they compare, you are advised to read chapter four of *Ethics and the Good Teacher* (Peterson and Arthur, 2021) and the original sources (see Arthur et al., 2015b, 2018)).

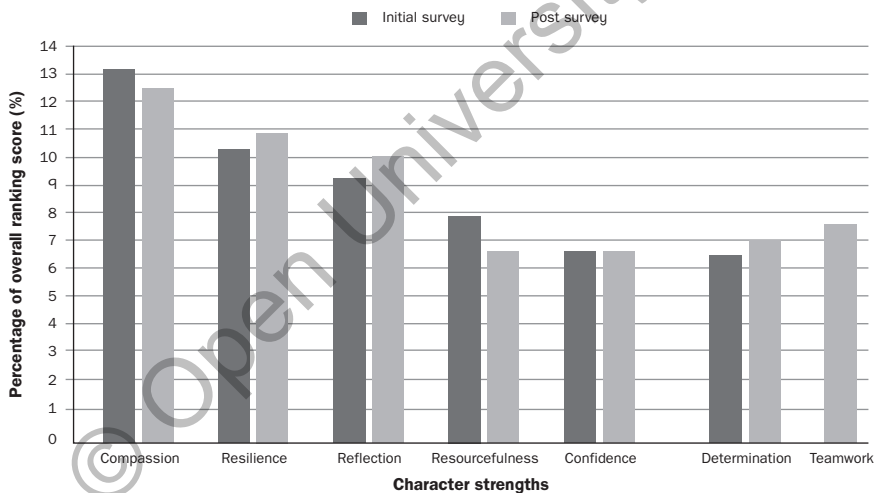
The virtues that teachers perceive as important or relevant in the profession are likely to change with time, experience, and career stage. However, it seems that there is a degree of consensus in the way that an 'ideal' teacher is perceived by teachers at different stages of their careers. Arthur et al. (2015b) asked pre-service student teachers, newly qualified teachers (those in their first year post-qualifying as teachers), and experienced teachers (those with five or more years' teaching experience) to rank the top six character strengths which describe an 'ideal' teacher. Table 2.1 shows the character strengths ranked highest by each group, with fairness, creativity, love of learning, humour, and perseverance featuring in the top six ranked character strengths across groups.

Using a different set of character strengths based on the four types of virtue introduced to you in Chapter 1, Arthur et al. (2018) asked pre-service student teachers to select and rank the top six character strengths which best describe the character of a 'good' teacher at the beginning of their programme (initial survey) and at the end of their programme (post survey). Figure 2.1 shows how pre-service student teachers ranked the top six³ character strengths at the two time-points. The analysis revealed similarity between the initial survey and post survey for the character strengths of a 'good' teacher. In fact, the same character strengths featured at both time-points (compassion, resilience, reflection, resourcefulness, confidence, and determination) with the exception of *teamwork*, which was included in the post survey. Interestingly, this finding corresponds with the findings of Arthur et al. (2015b): *teamwork* was the only character strength that differed between pre-service student teachers and newly qualified teachers, as can be seen in Table 2.1. This finding suggests that early career teachers recognise and value *teamwork* as an important character

Table 2.1 Top six character strengths of an ‘ideal’ teacher ranked by pre-service student teachers, newly qualified teachers, and experienced teachers in research by Arthur et al. (2015b)

Pre-service teachers	Newly qualified teachers	Experienced teachers
Fairness	Fairness	Fairness
Creativity	Creativity	Love of learning
Love of learning	Love of learning	Creativity
Humour	Humour	Humour
Leadership	Teamwork	Perseverance
Perseverance	Perseverance	Social intelligence
		Honesty ⁴

Figure 2.1 Top six character strengths of a ‘good’ teacher ranked by pre-service student teachers in research by Arthur et al. (2018)



strength. Teamwork is likely to be especially relevant to early career teachers as they take on additional responsibilities and are inducted into their teaching roles.

Reflective Activity 2.4: The character of a ‘good’ teacher

How would you describe the character of a ‘good’ teacher? If you had to choose and rank six character strengths or virtues which *best* describe a ‘good’ teacher, which would you choose and why? Next choose and rank the six which *best* describe your character. Which have you chosen and why? How do these compare to those you attributed to a ‘good’ teacher?

It is important to note that while ranking measures such as those used in these studies enables us to see which character strengths are prioritised, they do not provide a comprehensive list of character strengths relevant to the profession – if you were asked to rank the top character strengths of a ‘good’ or ‘ideal’ teacher you might compose a more extensive list! The final two case studies in this chapter help to highlight some of the other character strengths and qualities that are important to teachers. Case Study 2.3 focuses on in-service student teachers who gain their teaching qualification/accreditation while employed full-time as teachers. As this case study highlights, humility, curiosity, honesty, justice, and respect are all important character virtues needed to successfully navigate teacher preparation. Case Study 2.4 features a personal reflection from a teacher, who considers the importance of character to their own work and life.

Case Study 2.3: Teach First Trainees

LOUISE MACARTHUR-CLARE, Development Lead, Teach First, UK

As a charity with a focus on ending educational inequality, Teach First places trainees in schools where they can have the biggest impact on disadvantaged pupils. The trainees we recruit have aspirations that align to the Teach First mission and a belief that they have a part to play in supporting that mission. Research has shown that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to succeed in the classroom and go on to higher education than their more advantaged peers, impacting further on social inequality. I have worked at Teach First as a teacher educator for the past five years and have seen hundreds of trainees take their first steps into their teaching career. Whatever their age, background, or motivation to become a teacher, trainees all share in a Teach First experience that helps to shape their character and the character of their pupils.

Unlike most teacher preparation routes, our trainees enter the classroom full-time from the start of the academic year. Trainees receive five weeks of preparation through our summer institute before starting in schools, yet their identities as teachers are only beginning to form at this early stage. Because of this, trainees need to have, and develop, a great deal of confidence. A trainee's new identity grows rapidly as, through reflection, motivation, curiosity, and resourcefulness, they make changes to their practice that ensure that the pupils in their classrooms are making progress. The process of listening to and acting upon the feedback given by a variety of support roles can take humility and determination to move forward. Sometimes, as in all schools in challenging circumstances, pupils come to the classroom and are not fully prepared to learn. This could be because they haven't had breakfast that morning, they have had to get themselves ready for school as their parent works shifts, or they can't see the point in the education that is being provided for them. Dealing with this first requires an understanding and awareness of the community that trainees are serving, and the challenges faced by its families. It also requires compassion from the trainee to understand that the experience of

every child they teach is different, and gratitude for the steps forward that are taken, when giant leaps are not always possible.

I have found that as trainees develop their understanding of pupils' needs, they start to realise their influence and position as a role model. Teachers do not just enact character traits in the classroom, they exemplify them at all times. As our trainees make their way towards the later part of their first year of the programme and into the second year as a newly qualified teacher, they start to see the impact they can have on their pupils beyond the attainment of grades. Many realise how they can inspire pupils to have high aspirations for what they can achieve and can become. Sometimes trainees share their own struggles and explain how, through resilience, they progressed despite setbacks. Others overtly teach about and model good character – for example, showing *honesty* to pupils through careful feedback and apologising to pupils if they have got something wrong or mishandled a situation; *justice* when managing behaviour, showing that this is needed even when we think something is unfair; and *respect* to others, showing this even when we are angry or disagree with their point of view. These realisations often mean fundamental changes to the way that the teacher interacts with their pupils, but with this shift comes a more rounded sense of what it means to be a teacher and the impact that they can have on a pupil's life.

Case Study 2.4: Teaching and Character: A Personal Reflection

LAURA HORTON, Classroom and Ward Teacher/Alternative provision in a medical setting, James Brindley Academy, UK

I believe the journey of training and working as a teacher has undoubtedly changed my character for the better. I wanted to join the profession to make a difference to pupils who needed extra support at school for academic, social, emotional, mental, or physical needs. I hoped to cultivate a classroom environment where children could flourish, and perhaps I could too. A teacher's role is more than a job; it is a large part of who I am and has shaped my character and how I interact and navigate my own life.

I currently teach at a hospital as part of an alternative provision. I have the honour of working alongside medical staff to fulfil pupils' personal development and academic needs during a challenging period in their life. My daily work is rewarding and fulfilling as I feel like I am constantly changing and meeting new versions of myself through the pupils I teach. Every day I meet a range of different children with their own needs and personalities along with their families; I often bond with them during their time at the hospital. Something is humbling about being allowed into their world when it is practically falling apart. I get to support pupils and families in ways I never imagined, whether it be as a comedian, a maths teacher, a storyteller, or just for a comforting chat during a difficult day.

Reflecting upon my current practice, the most beneficial skill I am learning is to be present and calm in the teaching moment – to really listen and observe what the pupil is feeling and doing. The next steps come with greater clarity; pupils engage more as it feels like a conversation and the learning moves organically. In the past, I can recall being so nervous, almost frenetic, about getting the timing of the sessions right or thinking about the pupil who just called out, that I was never present in the teaching moment. Undoubtedly, I will have sessions and days like this where I am too ‘inside my head’ and instructive, but I am certainly noticing the benefits of having the courage to be ‘still’ in the classroom and let the pupils really actively engage in their learning journey.

A teacher’s role cultivates virtues of confidence, empathy, leadership, and communication, but the role equally challenges these virtues. Teaching presents emotional and physical hardship; you work long hours and become emotionally attached to the pupils you teach. The initial character traits I encountered as the most challenging were courage and self-identity. I began my teacher preparation as someone who was quite shy and lacking in confidence; I believed that everyone else had better ideas, a ‘larger’ personality, and seemingly effortless social skills. However, step by step, I persevered, worked hard, and gained the highest grade I could by applying myself and believing that I could get there too, my way. Over the years, I have realised there are many ways to be a good teacher. I may not be the most extroverted character, but a lecturer once said that I was a ‘quiet’ teacher, which he believed the teaching profession could benefit from as I brought different qualities to the classroom, as your pupils will. This small conversation stuck, which brings me to the important note on finding ‘anchors’. Particularly in my current role, colleagues can provide some of the best examples of generosity, honesty, and working together. I hold these traits to be of the upmost importance as we collectively understand how much working together can benefit each other and can lead to ultimate happiness and fulfilment in the role. By being somebody’s ‘anchor’ and being generous with your time, you not only build firm foundations of friendship, but you also support others simply because it is a good thing to do. For example, I am always there to chat, fix the technology, or recall the name of ‘that resource’.

Positive experiences with people can prove just how rewarding teaching is – from when a pupil develops their character because of their experience in the classroom, or when you have completed a challenging term and stand back to reflect upon all the fantastic work a class has produced. Teaching is not a role that you can switch off at the end of the day, as you are always thinking of pupils’ wellbeing and progress, and your own personal ‘performance’ and conduct during the teaching day. Equally, despite the challenges, I adore my job, I am proud of the obstacles I have overcome through sheer determination and perseverance, whilst reflecting proudly on how I have grown as a person.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the focus has been on the character and qualities of teachers. We started by explaining that it is the character of teachers which we often

recall when thinking back to our own experiences of education. You have been introduced to how teaching is regarded as a moral endeavour and we explained that in most cases teachers enter the profession as a result of a moral or altruistic motivation. We explored the standards and codes of conduct that teachers must uphold, and you reflected on how the character of the teacher is implicated (explicitly or, more often than not, implicitly) within these standards. We then discussed the influence of teachers as role models for pupils and the impact that teachers can have, even with limited contact time. Finally, we outlined the desirable virtues and qualities of teachers, as well as the character strengths regarded as relevant to 'good' teachers and necessary to succeed in the profession. You were asked to reflect on your own perception of a 'good' teacher and to compare this to how you would describe your character at this stage in your career. This latter task is likely one that you will revisit time and again throughout your career.

Notes

- 1 <https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/2937/projects/character-education-research/teacher-education>
- 2 <https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths>
- 3 Seven character strengths are shown in Fig. 2.1 because two character strengths, *Resourcefulness* and *Confidence*, shared the same overall ranking score in the post survey.
- 4 Seven character strengths were included because *Social Intelligence* and *Honesty* scored the same.

Further reading

Arthur, J., Fullard, M., Watts, P. and Moller, F. (2018) *Character Perspectives of Student Teachers: Initial Insights*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham, Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues. [Online.] Available at: https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/user-files/jubileecentre/pdf/projects/TransformativeBritain/Character_Perspectives_Student_Teachers.pdf

A research report that presents a number of key findings from a study that sought to understand how student teachers perceive character in teaching, including the virtues of a 'good' teacher.

Peterson, A. and Arthur, J. (2021) *Ethics and the Good Teacher: Character in the Professional Domain*. London: Routledge.

A book that brings together reviews of existing literature and analysis of empirical data from three research projects conducted by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues – The Good Teacher, Schools of Virtue, and Teacher Education – to explore the ethical dimensions of the teaching profession.

Sanderse, W. (2013) The meaning of role modelling in moral and character education, *Journal of Moral Education*, 42 (1): 28–42.

A journal article in which the author examines pedagogical and psychological ideas on what it means for teachers to be role models of and for character.