



Personal character and tomorrow's citizens: Student expectations of their teachers

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Character
Citizen
Student
Teacher
Expectation
Perception

ABSTRACT

Research evidence from UK primary and secondary schools suggests that students expect teachers to engage in character development and values education and that this assists in their holistic learning. This article is based on a major UK research study which indicates that explicit and implicit attention to values in schools is positively welcomed by students. Students of all ages believe that the teacher can make a difference in contributing to their personal moral development. According to the students in this study, a successful values education program relies on the teacher as model and mentor, as well as pedagogue. This article considers the role of teachers on the character development of young people aged 10–19, largely based on the perceptions of over 5000 students in England. The data includes documentary analysis, interviews and surveys with teachers and students.

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1. Introduction

In the last decade, the character of young people as an educational issue has gained significance in Britain and around the world (Arthur, 2003, 2010; Layard & Dunn, 2009; Lexmond & Reeves, 2009). Teachers have increasingly been expected to deal with the changing expectations of parents and the wider society and are often seen as guides, mentors, advisors, coaches and role models to the young; in short, to possess a formative charge in addition to an academic teaching role (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Bucher, 1997; Lisman, 1991). Carr (1993) has claimed that the moral values of teachers are essential for the development of students:

Because values are, of their essence, kinds of commitment, and because a proper grasp of their significance requires firsthand experience of their operations and practical consequences, an effective teacher of values can only be the individual who clearly exhibits them in his personal life. (p. 205)

The presence of certain values in the actions, behaviour and vocabulary of teachers can stimulate the social and moral development of students. It is not surprising therefore that teaching is still seen by some as more than simply a profession (Hansen, 1995). Nevertheless, the demands on teachers need to be seen within the notion of 'professionalism' (Arthur, Davison, & Lewis, 2005; Campbell, 2003) because teachers are expected to possess a moral professionalism that is manifested in their behaviour (Strike & Soltis, 1985). 'Professional values' connote the complex sets of beliefs that are considered positive and appropriate for teachers to hold, and the actions by which those beliefs may be communicated to students. A teacher should not be indifferent to these values, or to his or her students, and should promote these values to each student.

Schooling is generally seen as contributing to the development of values in the young because teaching is above all a 'self giving' enterprise concerned with the good of students (Halstead & Pike, 2006; Lovat, Toomey, & Clement, 2010; Noddings,

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Table 1
Schools by age group.

Age group	No. of schools/colleges
10–11	5
11–12	6
14–16 (a)	6
14–16 (b)	5
16–19	3

2002; Nucci & Narvaez, 2008). There is evidence to suggest that teachers can influence the way students understand and address complex moral and social issues (Campbell, 2003; Carr, 1993; Hansen, 1995, 2001; Noddings, 2002; Nucci & Weber, 1991). Many authors have given attention to the moral dimension of teaching and the moral role of the teacher (Carr, 1993; Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990; Oser, 1994). Role modelling of values by teachers through setting examples is known to be a key instrument in values development (Arweck, Nesbitt, & Jackson, 2005; Bucher, 1997; Halstead & Taylor, 1996; Kristjánsson, 2006; Lickona, 1991; Powney et al., 1995; Rose, 2004). Nevertheless, it is recognised that teachers are simultaneously confronted with attitudes and behaviours of students that often hinder the education process. Empirically, it is also the case that relatively little is known about the role of teachers as moral educators.

2. The research questions

The aim of this research was to find out what influence teachers have on young peoples' character development as modern citizens. The research questions were: What is the role of teachers in students' character development? How do teachers conceive of their moral role? What are the expectations of students of their teachers? In this article, character is defined as a set of personal values which guide conduct. The term 'character education' is used in the sense that it is synonymous with moral education when referring to the teaching (either explicitly or implicitly) of those values which contribute to the personal and social wellbeing of the individual. The paper is based on the findings from five separate but linked studies on the character development of young people aged 10–19 years and over 1000 student teachers. A total of 25 schools were involved (see Table 1).

The school sample was largely opportunistic, involving schools in the Midlands, the South-East and South-West of England. A total of 5207 students and 21 teachers participated (see Table 2). Teachers were identified by head teachers as those who were deemed to be involved with, or responsible for, students' pastoral development. The teachers selected included form tutors, teachers of citizenship education and those who delivered the personal and social programs. In addition, 1013 student teachers were surveyed at two universities.

School students involved in interviews were selected by teachers to include a range of academically oriented, sports-oriented and vocationally/practically oriented students, students from different ethnic groups and students who were disaffected, disengaged or had learning difficulties. Questionnaire surveys involved whole cohorts of students in each participating institution.

Data were collected from interviews with students (group and individual) and teachers (face-to-face), questionnaire surveys with students, as well as school prospectus and inspection reports. Slightly different questions were asked for each age group during the administration of the questionnaires. Although the content of the questions was similar, the phraseology, the language used and the number of items for each theme varied, dependent upon the age group being asked. Further evidence was collected in the form of written reflections. Parental consent was obtained for those students involved in the interviews. All participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and students taking part in the questionnaire survey were also told that participation was voluntary and that they could opt out at any point if they so wished. The interviews sought to find out the kinds of values students held, sources that influenced their core selves and how the school helped shaped their character. The interview data were categorised and synthesised according to the questions on which the interview schedule was based.

3. Character development and the teacher's moral role

Research suggests that, apart from parents, teachers are often regarded as the people most likely to have an influence on students' moral character (Huitt, 2004; Lovat & Toomey, 2009; Tom, 1984; Vengeler & De Kat, 2003). Teachers regularly

Table 2
Population.

Age group	No. of teachers interviews	No. of students interviews	No. of students questionnaire	Response rate (%)
10–12	11	51	1906	91
14–16 (a)	N/A	98	1831	85
14–16 (b)	N/A	N/A	688	100
16–19	10	118	515	94

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