



The chair's dispositions as virtues



Wayne Melville ^{a,*}, Molly Weinburgh ^b, Anthony Bartley ^a, Doug Jones ^c, Andrea Lampo ^c, Jane Lower ^c, Nick Sacevich ^c

^a Lakehead University, 955 Oliver Road, Thunder Bay P7B 5E1, Ontario, Canada

^b Texas Christian University, Andrews Institute, TCU Box 297920, Fort Worth, TX 76129, USA

^c Lakehead District School Board, 2135 Sills Street, Thunder Bay P7E 5T2, Ontario, Canada

H I G H L I G H T S

- Reform requires department chairs to exhibit the virtues of hope, trust, piety and civility.
- Patterns of departmental reform appear to work outwards from hope to trust to piety and civility.
- Chairs need a strong faith in their convictions, ideally centred on the well-being of students.
- Chairs need to build trust in both the reform and in the processes of reform enactment.

A R T I C L E I N F O

Article history:

Received 22 November 2015

Received in revised form

16 March 2016

Accepted 20 March 2016

Keywords:

Dispositions

Subject chairs

Subject departments

Virtues

A B S T R A C T

This article investigates the importance of the leadership virtues of the hope, trust, piety and civility in the work of two chairs undertaking reforms in their departments within the same school. Using a narrative case study methodology, the article uses the virtues to examine how chairs shape reforms within their departments. Analysis of the data indicates that chairs must strongly value the reform, and develop departmental trust in both the reform and the processes of reform. Finally, piety and civility appear to be critical successful reforms – teachers need to have the opportunity to be engaged in the reforms.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

At its heart, teaching is a moral activity. Consequently, there has been extensive consideration of the role of character and virtues in teaching since the time of Aristotle. Since the mid-1960s approaches such as values clarification, the cognitive development of moral judgement, explorations of an ethic of caring, and character education have all contributed to our understanding of the moral nature of teaching. However, the same level of inquiry has not been directed at the dispositions that secondary school department chairs exercise in their role. Brundrett and Terrell (2004, p. 17) note that the role of the chair is: “moral and ... political ... because it

involves the creating, organising, managing, monitoring and resolving of value conflicts, where values are defined as concepts of the desirable ... and power is used to implement some values rather than others”. Understanding the disposition of the chair is important, as the culture of a department within a secondary school is often more influential on teaching and learning than the culture of the school (Ko, Hallinger, & Walker, 2015). Our particular interest is in pursuing the notion that the dispositions of the chair is critical in shaping the work of the department. Our contention is that chairs have a particular role in shaping the work of the department, and that this role can be investigated through a consideration of the chairs' dispositions. In order to undertake this investigation, we shall utilise the concept of dispositions as virtues (Sokkett, 2009).

If we accept a moral dimension to the work of the chair, then several interesting questions arise. Can chairs be taught virtue? Are virtues learnt through the practice of the chair? Is virtue something that chairs are born with? Aristotle suggests that “moral virtue

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: wmelville@lakeheadu.ca (W. Melville), m.weinburgh@tcu.edu (M. Weinburgh), abartley@lakeheadu.ca (A. Bartley), dougyjones@gmail.com (D. Jones), Andrea_Lampo@lakeheadschoo.ls.ca (A. Lampo), jlower@lakeheadschoo.ls.ca (J. Lower), Nicholas_Sacevich@lakeheadschoo.ls.ca (N. Sacevich).

comes about as a result of habit” (Aristotle, trans. 1985, p. 1103) and that the primary source of moral knowledge is the moral agent, not a set of moral principles (Prior, 1991). This importance of relationships as a source of moral knowledge implies that chairs have a moral and educative obligation to express the virtues in the conduct of their work. In doing so, they can promote the moral basis of teacher professionalism discussed by Sockett (1993) and Campbell (2008). This is an important obligation, for there is a growing literature that links the promotion of a moral understanding of the work of secondary teachers to wider reforms and ideologies (Sanger, 2012). For example, in science, a department which actively promotes virtues would appear to be better prepared to educate students towards a richer understanding of the relationship of science to society and the environment: “empowering students to consider how science-based issues reflect, in part, moral principles and elements of virtue that encompass their own lives, as well as the physical and social world around them” (Zeidler, Sadler, Simmons, & Howe, 2005, p. 360). In mathematics, the *Principles and Standards for School Mathematics* (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2000, p. 3) demonstrates a similar concern for the moral imperative: “everyone needs to understand mathematics. All students should have the opportunity and the support necessary to learn significant mathematics with depth and understanding. There is no conflict between equity and excellence.” In this exploratory article, we wish to specifically focus on the work of the math and science chairs in one secondary school in Ontario, Canada, and the dispositions that are evidenced in their conduct while undertaking reforms.

2. Dispositions, virtues and the chair

It is becoming increasingly clear that secondary subject departments are crucial in any discussion, or plan, for school improvement (Ko et al., 2015). Departments exert a strong cultural role in shaping both what and how teachers' work, the standards that represent 'good teaching' in the subject, and the political capacity to respond to reform initiatives. Sergiovanni (2005) has argued that in order to be effective instructional leaders, such as chairs, must: “behave consistently, almost instinctively, in moral ways ... these leaders know and focus on what's important, care deeply about their work, learn from their success, and are trustworthy people” (p. 112). In doing so, they can shape “how life in the unit [department] ought to be lived and how that life will enable students to acquire requisite habits of mind and moral sensibilities or dispositions” (Dottin, 2006, p. 28). For our purposes here, dispositions can be defined as the: ‘the professional virtues, qualities, and habits of mind and behaviour held and developed by teachers on the basis of their knowledge, understanding, and commitments to students, families, their colleagues, and communities’ (Sockett, 2006, p. 23). While this definition is generalized to teachers, a role that all chairs fulfil in addition to being the chair, the question that comes to mind is this: “what are the specific moral dispositions that a chair must demonstrate if they are to lead reforms within their department?” The focus on the chair, and their actions, is appropriate, for as Sockett (2009) argues: “dispositions are the property of the agent, manifest only in intentional action, and they function as predictions about human actions but are not the causes of them” (p. 292).

Reforming the practices of a department requires the chair to identify, understand, challenge, and address existing practices, a task made difficult by the tightly held beliefs that teachers hold (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013). Both mathematics and science, as disciplines, are subject to constant change and scrutiny, and as high status subjects, both tend to be protective of their power and prestige. For science teachers, a disciplinary emphasis on

decontextualised abstract conceptual knowledge, coupled with confirmatory practical work, have been “relatively constant features of science education across the 20th century and into the 21st” (Tytler, 2007, p. 3). Mathematics teachers, most prominently in the United States, face continuing political battles as: “*traditionalists fear that reform-oriented, ‘standards-based’ curricula are superficial and undermine classical mathematical values [and] reformers claim that such curricula reflect a deeper, richer view of mathematics than the traditional curriculum*” (Schoenfeld, 2004, p. 253). *One of the key positions in mediating these competing, and often contradictory, forces within a school is the department chair.* This is because the conduct of the chair is critical in modelling, establishing, and maintaining the intellectual and social conditions under which teachers can engage in meaningful, sustained, professional learning (Brundrett & Terrell, 2004). The dispositions of the chair are vital in modelling, establishing and maintaining these conditions, especially during times of reform.

2.1. Dispositions as virtues

Since the time of Aristotle, virtues have been regarded as being of an excellent and stable disposition (Henderson & Horgan, 2009, p. 297). While virtues may be ‘those acquired moral qualities that are embedded in the social practice of teaching and that are necessary to the particular professional task’ (Sockett, 1993, p. 62), the importance of virtues in education is more implied than explicit, given that the dynamic nature of teaching and learning often leaves little time for teachers to articulate virtues in their practice and conversations. In his discussion on teaching principles and virtues, Kilbourn (1998, p. 38) states that there is usually “neither need nor occasion for their conscious expression.” Conversely, Sockett (2006, 2009) argues that conceptualizing teacher's dispositions as virtues provides a sense of direction for teacher practice. For teachers, dispositions as virtues can be grouped into three main categories: virtues of character, intellect, and care. While there is significant overlap between these categorisations, they can be represented as:

- (a) Virtues of character include self-knowledge, courage, sincerity, integrity, trustworthiness, and endeavour as including virtues of the will, such as persistence, perseverance, and heed.
- (b) Virtues of intellect include truthfulness, accuracy, consistency (e.g., in the application of rules), fairness and impartiality, especially in making judgements, clarity, thoughtfulness, and open-mindedness.
- (c) Virtues of care include tolerance, tact, discretion, civility, receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness notably in becoming trustworthy and compassionate (Sockett, 2006, p. 296).

Both the moral and intellectual virtues of teachers possess three general characteristics of dispositions, being stable, learnt, and possessing a cognitive core (Sockett, 2009, p. 296). For an individual teacher to become virtuous:

- (a) is the result of the individual's initiative ... We become virtuous by seeking to become generous, kind, and so forth through the specific contexts of our lives.
- (b) implies that the individual has surmounted internal counterinclinations (e.g., laziness or fear) or overcome external obstacles (e.g., lack of money) ...
- (c) is always driven in its exercise by intrinsic motivation. To be truthful or generous for instrumental motives, for example, is not authentically to be truthful or generous (p. 296).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6850725>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6850725>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)