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Citation: Sanderse, Wouter, Walker, David Ian and Jones, Chantel (2015) Developing the whole child in an age of academic measurement: Can this be done according to U.K. teachers? *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 47. pp. 195-203. ISSN 0742-051X

Published by: Elsevier

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.01.010> <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.01.010>>

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Developing the whole child in an age of academic measurement: can this be done according to U.K. teachers?

ABSTRACT

Based on a qualitative analysis of interviews with 102 teachers in 33 U.K. secondary schools, the paper shows that “developing the whole child” and “preparing children for life” were personally important to teachers. As they worked, however, in institutions centrally focused on raising pupils' academic performance, this created a tension: the majority believed that the assessment system hindered the development of the whole child. Some teachers believed that they could still make a difference in children's lives by investing in their pedagogical relationship with children. The discussion focuses on how raising students' performances and cultivating their characters may be combined.

Keywords: whole child; character education; assessment system.

1. Introduction

Should teachers in secondary schools focus primarily on helping pupils acquire subject knowledge so they pass examinations with good grades, enabling them to find a job or go to university? Or do teachers also have a responsibility to contribute to pupils' overall well-being and prepare them for life in a wider sense? These questions have been discussed throughout the history of education (Curren (Ed), 2007), and through this discussion a broad agreement has emerged that schooling has not one, but several functions. While ‘qualification’ and ‘moral education’ can go hand in hand, there is also potential for conflict between these functions. During the last twenty years, pedagogical and sociomoral dimensions of education have attracted increased attention worldwide, in particular in the context of moral and citizenship education (de Winter, 2012; Oser & Veugelers, (Eds.), 2012), but education in the West has also witnessed a marked shift towards measurable outputs, combined with more governmental control over the curriculum and stricter systems of inspection.

In 2002, Biesta & Miedema (2002) noted that “the purpose of schooling has become increasingly defined in terms of the effective production of a pre-determined output, often measured in terms of exam-scores for the so-called ‘core-subjects’ such as mathematics and (first) language” (p. 174). Twelve years later, Exley and Ball (2014, p. 29) argued that neo-liberal educational policies have become so pervasive that they have not only changed the educational system, but also what it means to be ‘educated’. Teachers often start teaching out of a dedication to a broad range of pedagogical and moral concerns, but work in environments in which they have the increasingly technical task of raising test scores. They can find their values ‘challenged’ or ‘displaced’ (Ball, 2003, p. 216) and may end up in what has been described as a state of moral or values ‘schizophrenia’ (Ball, 2003, p. 221; Sanger, 2012, p. 298). In this article, we explore the experiences that a sample of U.K. secondary school teachers have with contributing to pupils' ‘character education’, in particular, and, more generally speaking, with what has come to be known as the development of ‘the whole child’ (Miller, 2010; Noddings, 2005). In designing our questions, we assumed that the former aim is widely considered to be a significant aspect of whole-child development, namely development beyond mere education in traditional academic subjects, and our interviews revealed that this is how the teachers understood it also. Nevertheless, terms such as ‘character education’, ‘moral

education' and 'development of the whole child' are open to different scholarly interpretations, and we review some of those controversies in the following section.

As of yet, there are no detailed studies, especially outside the U.S., of teachers' experiences with whole-child development in general and character education in particular in a context of highstakes testing. For example, are teachers really committed to these ideals, and if they are, what does it mean for them to contribute to the development of a child's character? Do they have the time and freedom to make the kind of contribution they want to make? If they are uncomfortable with the current situation, how do they think that children's character education could be improved? Based on interviews with 102 teachers in 33 U.K. secondary schools, this study suggests that teachers have a strong 'moral compass' and are motivated to make a difference in children's lives through the pedagogical relationship. But the question is whether this hope is realistic considering the enormous pressure on teachers in British schools to 'perform well' in a narrowly defined sense.

2. Background and theoretical framework

2.1. Character education

At least partly as a response to a kind of education that focuses solely on raising pupils' academic performance, recent years have witnessed a renewed interest in moral education, broadly understood, which has taken the form of "explicit educational aims concerned with the socio-moral, psycho-moral (especially emotional) and political development of students" (Walker, Roberts & Kristjansson, 2015, p. 80). Pupils' overall well-being, happiness and flourishing are typically being presented as the inclusive metaobjectives of all those aims (see e.g. Lovat, Toomey, & Clement, 2010 (Eds.); Miller, 2010; Noddings, 2005). Despite agreement about these general objectives, they remain complex and controversial notions, which have been interpreted differently throughout the 20th century. One interpretation of what it means to educate the whole child has been offered by the approach called 'character education', which gained "widespread popular acceptance in public as well as religious and private schools" throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s (Power & Sheenan, 2014, p. 494). This raises the question to what extent a character approach contributes to the development of the whole child. Helpful in this regard is the distinction made by Althof and Berkowitch (2006) between 'moral education', which focuses on the development of how to treat others well, and 'character education', which serves to support the flourishing self, for example through the cultivation of perseverance, loyalty or courage. This distinction has raised the question whether the two are equal in status or whether one is derivative of the other. Althof and Berkowitch (2006, p. 499) note that for traditional moral educators, who focused on justice or care, the self-regarding concern is "a salient reason for distancing themselves from the character education field". At the same time, the duality of self- and other-regarding concerns connects character educators "to the academic side of schools and the central mission of schooling (i.e. educating and developing the whole child)". In this extensive sense, character education develops the 'whole child' because it pays attention to a child's flourishing, also in an academic environment. The idea that character includes the quest for academic excellence is relatively new (Lickona & Davidson, 2005), introduced at a time when the No Child Left Behind Act emphasised the importance of building academic achievement and the character of every child (Chang & Munoz, 2006). Until recently, character education was primarily understood as an approach to moral education. In postwar educational theory, character education offered a critique of and an alternative to other approaches to moral education, such as cognitive development theory, care ethics and values clarification (Sanderse, 2012; chap. 2). In this paper, we stress these historical roots, and understand character education primarily as an approach to moral education, usually informed and justified by a form of Aristotelian virtue ethics. This also means that we do not subscribe to Althof and

Berkowitch' sharp division between self-regarding and other-regarding concerns. The aim of moral education, as we see it, is to lead a good life with and for others in just institutions (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 262). As an approach to moral education, 'character education' signifies a significant aspect but not the whole meaning of educating the whole child.

In the U.S., character education has, in different guises, been present throughout its history (McClellan, 1999). Canada, Korea, Japan and China have mandated character education to be part of their national curriculum, while character education as such is largely non-existent within Europe, where it is mainly subsumed under the topic of 'citizenship education' (Nucci, Narvaez, & Krettenauer, 2014, p. 1). The recent upsurge of character education is motivated by developments in the domain of educational philosophy (Sanderse, 2012; Carr, 1991; Kristjansson, 2007), education (Lickona, 1992; Nucci, 1989) and psychology (Lapsley & Power, 2005; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Most of these authors justify character education by referring to the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384e322 BC), who is considered the 'father' of contemporary virtue ethics. Among the central tenets of an Aristotelian approach are the principles that (a) there is an objective notion of human flourishing, (b) certain human qualities (especially the virtues) are a necessary condition for flourishing, and (c) these qualities should also be the ultimate ends of the education system (Walker et al., 2015, p. 7). Therefore, in this article, character education will be described permissively as any "more or less deliberate, more or less comprehensive attempts of teachers to contribute to the ongoing development of moral virtue and practical wisdom in pupils in order to enable them to lead a flourishing life as human beings" (Sanderse, 2012, p. 204). In the U.K., character education was a theme in schools throughout the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. It diminished after WWII, and only attracted renewed attention following the gradual demise of Kohlberg's influential stage theory (Arthur, 2003, 2008). At the end of the 1990s, the government sought to identify a broad set of common values that could underpin the National Curriculum, such as respect and responsibility (Revell & Arthur, 2007, p. 80). Furthermore, new aims were added to the curriculum, such as the development of children's social responsibility, community involvement, the development of effective relationships, and respect for others. These changes amounted to the introduction of two non-statutory subjects. In 2000, Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) became part of the National Curriculum.¹ Citizenship Education was introduced two years later, after Bernard Crick's (1998, p. 7) group advised the U.K. Labour Government to make the teaching of citizenship and democracy part of the education of all pupils. The report included references to several virtues, including 'sympathetic understanding', 'responsibility', 'care', 'tolerance', 'justice' and 'courage' (p. 44). The term 'character education' was nowhere used explicitly, but the Government's Green Paper (Department for Education and Employment, 2001, p. 16) *Schools: Building Success* set out to establish 'education with character' in every school. Arthur (2005, p. 240) notes, however, that there was still much ambiguity about how education for character can be justified. In 2011, riots in London increased the call for schools to help children build moral character. David Cameron stated that the riots were caused by people 'showing indifference to right and wrong', having 'a twisted moral code' and having 'a complete absence of self-restraint'. He mentioned schools as part of a solution to counter the 'slow-motion moral collapse' (Stratton, 2011). However, others understood 'character' primarily as a set of performance traits, such as persistence, grit, self-confidence and resilience (Tough, 2013). More recently, the link between moral and performance character has attracted attention. In the spring of 2014, a Scottish university announced a research project on the relationship between self-rated character strengths and success within an academic environment, including exam performance. A few months later, Tory education secretary Nicky Morgan (2014) stated that "for too long there has been a false choice between academic standards and activities that build character and resilience", which she said, "should go hand in hand".

Teachers' experiences with character education Despite the growing attention to character in educational theory and policy, character education will only catch on in practice if teachers can

relate to it. Teachers' experiences matter because "improvements in moral education will require teacher training and development that ought, ideally, to be based on realistic assessment of need by experienced practitioners" (Walker et al., 2015, p. 11). However, teachers' experiences ought not to be consulted from a position where it is assumed that we already know what an 'improvement in moral education' looks like. Instead, teachers' views should be made to matter because teachers alone have hands-on experience with character education in schools. A narrative of their struggle to be ethical can help us understand what 'character education' is about in the first place. During the last twenty years, several empirical studies have probed how (pre-service) teachers and teacher educators think about the moral nature of teaching. As our interest lies in particular with teachers' experiences with character education, not all the empirical evidence on teachers' perspectives about moral education, more broadly construed, will be reviewed here. But as the re-emergence of character education took place against the backdrop of increased attention to moral education generally, some key findings from research conducted outside the U.K. may help us to understand teachers' views on character education. Existing empirical evidence overwhelmingly shows that teachers support the idea that teaching is an activity that involves issues about 'what is good, right and virtuous' (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013). Teachers are commonly drawn to the teaching profession because of its moral nature (Book & Freeman, 1986; Brookhart & Freeman, 1992); they want to be a role model and make a difference in the lives of pupils (Osguthorpe & Sanger, 2013; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013); they often use subtle and implicit ways to communicate moral messages (Fallona, 2000; Richardson & Fenstermacher, 2001) and face a variety of moral issues in their interactions with pupils, colleagues and parents (Husu & Tirri, 2001; Tirri, 1999). However, teachers face several difficulties when 'teaching morally' and 'teaching morality' in practice (Fenstermacher, Osguthorpe, & Sanger, 2009). Teachers seem to lack a rich professional knowledge and language with which they can talk about the moral dimension of teaching (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013; Sockett & LePage, 2002). One reason for this predicament is that formal teacher training does not always offer a focused and systematic treatment of the moral dimensions of teaching (Thornberg, 2008; Willemse, Lunenberg, & Korthagen, 2008). While considerable literature exists about these issues, especially in the U.S. context, much less is known about teachers' views on and experiences with character education in particular. While, in the U.S., there have been several studies on how teachers experience character education (Beachum, Cray, Yawn, & Obiakor, 2013; Jones, Ryan, & Bohlin, 1998; Leming & Yendol-Hoppey, 2004; Mathison, 1998), in the U.K., there is only Revell and Arthur's (2007) study in which pre-service teachers were asked about whether their training prepared them for developing pupils' values and character. The results seem to be in line with those from research into teachers' beliefs about moral education generally. Teachers, whether pre-service or in-service, share a commitment to developing moral values and virtues in pupils, but have different interpretations of what 'character education' involves, apart from being a role model (Campbell, 2008, p. 206). In addition, preservice teachers hesitate to act on their moral commitment (Revell & Arthur, 2007, p. 86). This seems to have something to do with the fact that teacher training courses do not prepare teachers adequately to function as character educators (Milson, 2000). However, a majority of pre-service teachers expect values education of some sort to be part of their training (Jones et al., 1998; Revell & Arthur, 2007, p. 83). This implies they either have to rely on their own personal views of character and virtue, or on the prevailing outlooks of the schools in which they work (Revell & Arthur, 2007, p. 87; Campbell, 2011).

We can conclude that, especially outside of the U.S. context, there is a dearth of detailed and comprehensive studies about (a) how teachers understand the notions of 'virtue', 'character' and 'character education', (b) how they experience putting moral and character education into practice, and (c) what their views are on how character education can be improved. In addition, so far there have been no studies about how moral and character education is experienced in a context of high stakes testing, which has become reality for many countries in the first decade of the twenty-first

century. In the U.K., there is a system of national testing, measured as 10 levels of attainment at four so-called Key Stages (age 7, 11, 14 and 16), based on programmes of study for each national curriculum subject. By exploring the experiences that secondary school teachers' in the U.K. have with building pupils' character, this paper aims to ameliorate this gap in the literature.

3. Methodology and methods

Interviews were conducted with 102 teachers in 33 secondary schools throughout the U.K. between February 2013 and June 2014 as part of a larger research project on character education. This sometimes goes by other names but normally involves the same things. In Wales, the comparable element of the school curriculum topic is Personal and Social Education (PSE). It is also known as PSHEE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education), PSED (Personal, Social and Emotional Development) and PSHCE (Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education).

The overall project investigated the situation of character education in the U.K., how developed British students were in terms of character, and how teachers experienced their role in pupils' character building. Survey-style closed questions (51) and open questions (9) were employed in the interviews, which formed part of a triangulated research design, also using moral dilemmas and pupils' self-reports on their characters. This design placed a heavy demand on schools, teachers and pupils; hence, an interview that could cover a lot of ground in a short time was needed. Complete interviews lasted between thirty and forty minutes each, and time spent on the open questions varied with participants. The whole interview was recorded and transcribed. Ethical approval was granted for the research by the University of Birmingham Ethics Committee and informed consent was obtained from participants.

The overarching aim of the interviews with teachers was to determine how character education was being provided in schools across the U.K. and what was helping or preventing efforts to develop the 'whole child' in their own views. Five key themes were explored: (a) the teacher's role in developing character and virtue; (b) their autonomy to direct their teaching with a focus on moral education; (c) their school's priority on moral teaching; (d) the extent to which teacher training and experience enabled them to explore moral issues; and (e) their pupils' character development.

In this paper, the interview data pertaining to the open questions in part (a)e(c) are explored in depth. To include teachers from a wide variety of U.K. schools, purposive sampling was used. The aim was to include a good variety of schools (i.e. private/public, rural/urban, faith/non-faith, small/large, deprived/wealthy surrounding areas), and thus schools were invited to participate in line with trying to meet this target. Teachers were from 33 secondary schools: 21 in England, ten in Scotland, one in Northern Ireland and one in Wales. These consisted of 12 with academy status, eight state-funded, five independent, three foundation, two voluntary-aided and one each of voluntary grammar, comprehensive and community. All except one were coeducational, and seven classified as Roman Catholic/Christian. Approximately three teachers of Year 10/S3 pupils (ages 14/15) were interviewed in each school. The teachers were either selfselected or asked to participate by the gatekeeper in each school. Of the total 102 teachers, 42 were male and 60 were female. Approximately two-thirds identified as being religious, mostly Christian, and a fifth said they were atheist; the rest did not indicate either way. While teaching a main subject was the role occupied by most, some teachers were (also), Head of Department, Head of Year, Deputy/Assistant Head, Head of School or support staff. The sample included both new and experienced teachers (who had, on average, 12 years' experience) from a range of subjects. It seems likely that the participating teachers were already interested in character education by virtue of their willingness to be interviewed, although efforts were made to include teachers who were more ambivalent about character education. Similarly, although different types of U.K. schools were included in the sample,

schools uninterested in character education were less likely to participate. However, in this study, we were not seeking to get a representative overview of U.K. teachers' beliefs about developing the whole child. Instead, we tried to understand the experiences of this particular group with developing character in the pupils they teach.

NVivo (Version 10) was used to analyse responses to the open questions. Moreover, some basic closed questions were also analysed (SPSS Version 22) and results are mentioned at times in the paper in order to provide additional background information. The qualitative analysis relates to the following predominantly open questions that were asked of the teachers: 1. Character: (a) What do you understand by the term character? (b) Can you give an example of positive character traits that you would like to see cultivated in children? 2. Teaching ambitions: (a) How much have your original teaching ambitions deviated as a result of real experiences? (b) Can you explain what those teaching ambitions were and (c) if they have changed, how so? 3. Assessment: (a) In your view, does the modern pupil assessment system hinder the development of the whole child? (b) Can you explain your answer? 4. Change in schools: (a) If it was up to you, what single change would you make in your school to achieve better character building for your pupils? (b) Can you explain why you think this would work?

The method used was thematic analysis, with the author identifying, analysing and reporting patterns from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first author approached the transcribed responses to these questions with an open mind; first immersing himself in the text, trying not to apply preconceived codes, but rather to create them anew from the breadth and depth of the content. The author read and continued to re-read the dataset, while coding text and comparing provisional and existing codes to new ones. The author could then organise coded text into meaningful clusters. After that, the analysis became broader i.e. the author explored these data at the level of themes, and checked them against the dataset. This phase resulted in a collection of main themes and sub-themes, which were then refined. The first author explained and justified the resultant themes, along with the procedure used to generate them to the other two authors who had been involved in data collection but not in coding; after which he wrote a narrative, contextualising the story in relation to the existing literature. This, in turn, was critiqued and amended by the two co-authors, until a reflective equilibrium was reached.

4. Results

The main research question to be answered with this analysis was: what are teachers' views about the extent to which they feel able to develop character in the pupils they teach? In x4.1., we examine teachers' understanding of the concepts of 'virtue', 'character' and 'character education'. We then look, in x4.2., at the question of whether teachers recognise that they have a task in developing the whole child, and in particular in moral and character education. In addition, we focus in x4.3 on how teachers' have experienced a factor that may hinder teachers' moral educational task: the pupil assessment system. Finally, x4.4 deals with the changes that teachers propose to achieve better character building for their pupils.

4.1. Understanding of virtue, character, and character education As 'character education' is a significant aspect of what it means to educate the whole child, we wanted to know how teachers understood 'character' and 'virtue'. A majority of the teachers believed that the term 'virtue' sounded old-fashioned, while only two in ten 2 See the full research report: Arthur, J., Kristjansson, K., Walker, D.I., Sanderse, W. & Jones, C., Character Education in UK Schools, 2015, Birmingham: University of Birmingham, Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues. Theme (d) is to be explored in a separate paper.

Throughout the article, the respondents will be referred to generically as 'teachers', even though Heads of School and support staff were not likely to teach. When asked about what they understood by the term 'character', and what 'positive character traits' they would like to see cultivated in children, the majority described 'character' with the synonym 'personality', or by using phrases such as 'who you are', 'the person as a whole' or 'what makes you unique'; terms such as your 'attitudes', 'traits' or 'qualities' were also frequently used. Q1 #168 e I feel it's about the whole person; it's about their identity, their personality, their qualities and their self-belief. Q1 #67 e I think character is about your moral values and your personality and your life philosophy, the way that you view the world and how you see yourself within it.

A second major theme from this question was the idea that one's character consists in what you do. Many teachers explained that 'character' is 'the way you respond to situations', 'the decisions you make' or, more generally, 'your behaviour'. Approximately half of the references to 'actions' had a social component: character was described as, for example, 'your interactions' and 'your relationships' with others. In some interviews, the self and other-regarding actions co-occurred, such as in: Q2 #144 e To me, character is about how you treat other people and treat yourself really and being able to make informed decisions, based on certain virtues Q1 #146 e So a character is a way that people act and the way that they, their relationships with people as well.

Many teachers combined several concepts to describe 'character', by describing it as e.g. 'how you behave and your values' (#10), or 'the kind of values and morals and their personality' (#131). Besides the main themes 'personality' and 'actions', minor themes were being 'aware of others', having 'moral knowledge' and 'moral values'. When taken together, this suggests that 'character' was seen as a description of 'the whole person', including one's perception, knowledge, attitudes, actions and relationships are much in line with current conceptions within the field of character education. 'Character' turned out to be a useful concept for teachers to describe and make sense of what developing 'the whole child' meant for them. Almost all of the teachers gave examples of positive character traits they would like to see cultivated in their pupils, using three traits on average. The 72 character traits mentioned were coded separately and later divided into three categories: performance virtues (the strength of will to achieve goals, whatever they are), moral virtues (ingredients of a morally good life), and intellectual virtues (qualities of mind to find truth). Just over half of all virtues mentioned by teachers were 'moral', a quarter 'performance' and nearly a fifth 'intellectual'. The most popular moral virtues were 'respect', 'empathy' and 'kindness', 'consideration', 'integrity' and 'optimism'. The most often mentioned performance virtues were 'self-confidence', 'resilience' and 'perseverance'. 'Honesty' and 'love of learning' were the most frequently mentioned 'intellectual virtues'.

Finally, there were several basic closed questions relating to the wider project that provide some additional information on this topic. These concern how teachers thought pupils could acquire such character traits. When they were forced to choose one or the other, eight out of ten teachers believed that virtues are mainly 'caught' over 'taught'. Additionally, when the teachers were asked whether they considered themselves to be a role-model to their pupils, all but one answered the question affirmatively. Judging from the remarks that teachers made when answering the question, this did not mean that they considered themselves to be excellent role models.

Recognition of contribution to development of whole child in response to the open question about original teaching ambitions, teachers took 'teaching ambitions' to mean either personal ambitions, i.e. what they wanted to achieve for themselves, such as becoming a senior leadership team member, or as the contribution they wanted to make to pupils' lives. For this latter group, 'developing the whole child', 'preparing them for life' and 'making a difference in children's lives' were the strongest themes in their career aspirations. This can be illustrated with the following quotes from the interviews: Q2 #154 e I want to have an impact on young people's lives, I like to be seen as a role model for young people and I like to provide students with experiences that they'll always remember and build relationships where they can look to me for support, even when they've left. Q2 #32 e ... my ambition is always to open the gates for young people. I'm a visual person. Open the gates, make those pathways, so that then they can go on and carry on. So my teaching ambitions are about being a facilitator for them to be able to carry on their journey of learning through life and being able to make sure that they're equipped enough, with enough information to make a choice.

Many teachers who indicated that their teaching ambitions had changed also talked about what became of their ambitions. Many went into teaching because they 'just wanted to teach' or because they 'loved their subject', but had become gradually interested in special educational needs, or had realised that they, through the subject they teach, have an impact on children's lives in a broader sense.

Q2 #52 e Teaching ambitions were to have great results, to have outstanding pupils, to have the perfect classes, but as I've found over the last couple of years is that that's just a dream, 'cause that doesn't happen and you pick up these things and you have children that are in more than just an educational need but in an emotional need as well and you can't neglect that, then therefore your plans change because of those things, so that's basically what I've picked up Q2 #36 e I think experience has taught me that actually it is about developing character as well, because you come across so many people with so many problems that need you to be that stable support and to help give them that confidence and to develop their characters so that when they leave school they can be their own person.

For others, however, reality was a check on their ambitions. What they could do to change children's lives for the better turned out to be less than expected, because they realised that there are limits to what you can do as an individual teacher, for example because parents, friends and other teachers have an influence too, and also because the workload was so high that they could not take time to sit down and talk with children. Q2 #67 e I suppose the realisation that I couldn't do that for everybody, that there might be one or two people that I could .

'Honesty' was counted as an intellectual virtue, as it mainly co-occurred with phrases such as 'being truthful', 'reliable' and 'acknowledging strengths and weaknesses' (cf. Carr, 2014). make things click for, but actually, there is no teacher that goes into a room and transforms everybody's life, you know, it's about small steps and it's about a collective effort. Q2 #13 e I think you want to be a really good teacher, but I think because people demand results as well, I think it's trying to balance being a good teacher and being someone they can come and talk to, but going through the curriculum, it's that sort of thing.

While some teachers had become disappointed, there were just as many who realised through experience something they had not imagined before, i.e. that they do not only teach a subject, but have an impact on children's lives too.

Teachers' attitudes towards the pupil assessment system. The answers to a number of basic closed questions suggest that the teachers had mixed feelings about the freedom and time to contribute to the development of the whole child. On the one hand, over half of the teachers believed that they 'always' developed the whole child, and almost a third said they 'often' did so. Also, more than half of the teachers claimed that they were 'very free', and another third said that they were 'quite free' to be innovative in developing the whole child. On the other hand, four out of ten felt that they only 'sometimes' or 'occasionally' could deviate from the standard curriculum. Moreover, almost 80 percent indicated that the assessment system hinders the development of the whole child.

Our main interest is the follow-up question which asked them to explain why they thought the modern pupil assessment system hindered the development of the whole child (or not). While a few advantages of testing were mentioned, most responses contained references to disadvantages of the pupil assessment system. The single disadvantage mentioned most was that the assessment system puts so much pressure on teachers to perform well academically that teachers ignore the development of the whole child: Q3 #109 e I think, well, they're very much in an exam-based system and we're constantly being pursued to reach targets and sometimes, because of that, you're not always looking at the whole child. Q3 #174 e We have to pack in as much as we can in terms of qualifications because that's how us as a school are being assessed against other schools, so in terms of getting top grades, getting the biggest qualification in the shortest amount of time sort of thing, so the emphasis isn't on whole child, the emphasis is on grades.

The pressure to produce good results left less time for quality interactions between teachers and pupils, and even when there is time for interactions, teachers tend to be more stressed. Stress seems to prevent teachers from recognising the 'golden moments' in their classrooms to develop children's' characters. Some teachers also noticed the effects this had on pupils. Children became stressed too or were primarily motivated by getting good grades, committing less to the things that are not assessed but do contribute to their character development. Q5 #38 e I just think schools are such busy, rushed places and there's so many things going on that if we could just occasionally get off the hamster wheel and have more time built in, otherwise there's a danger that the conversations you have, that you need to have, become too superficial or too much of a tick box approach than actually genuinely making an impact Q3 #54 e a student in my form, very bright lad, he's going to get A stars left, right and centre, but he's lazy, he regularly lies to staff about reasons why he hasn't attended stuff and he sicks off subjects which he now doesn't think are important to him, in terms of his French or his RE and whatnot and actually, because of that focus of the assessment system and how the assessment system is a stepping stone to the next step, students become blinkered in a way that causes them to throw away enormous chunks of experience because they don't see it as important

At the same time, a minority of teachers acknowledged that testing does hold a purpose, for example to track the child's development and adjust it when necessary. They also said that tests can prepare them how to succeed in reaching standards, as being assessed is part of life. Q3 #172 e Assessing pupils' progress is an ongoing consistent thing and I totally agree with it, that we should, you know, stage by stage assess the pupil, 'cause if you don't, they can fall through the wayside and I do believe that we should, even though I find it pressurised, but we should be showing progression Q3 # 119 I feel assessment is very much part of education and the majority of our pupils are looking to college or university qualification as well, so that's their aim. Thus, while many teachers believed that assessment pervades everything that goes on in schools, some teachers believed that assessment and the development of the whole child could go hand-in-hand, if assessment had its 'proper' place. Most of these more optimistic teachers were Scottish teachers who cited the

Curriculum for Excellence, which, they believed, looks at the whole child by focussing on four capacities and adopting different forms of assessment.

Some teachers explained how they managed to pay attention to the development of the whole child while simultaneously helping pupils to achieve high score on examinations. Q3 #94 e I think we're tied very strictly to the curriculum, that I think sometimes it doesn't give us the freedom in the way we teach that will allow us perhaps to teach it in a holistic way, so I think a lot, it would be good to be able to bring a lot of things in the way we teach and what we teach and how we teach, it's far more involving what's going on in the world Q3 #143 e It is difficult with Maths because they sit just a formal assessment at the end, so in that way, I suppose it does, but I think the teaching styles that we use are actually, we try to get them to work obviously in groups and obviously when we plan our lessons, we have to think about social, moral, behavioural things within that. What these teachers seemed to suggest is that, despite their task in preparing pupils for assessments, they are still there in the classroom with their pupils. They may not be completely free in what to teach (the content), but they believed that how they teach it (the 'manner' or 'style') can still make a difference in children's lives.

The Curriculum for Excellence, implemented in schools in 2010e11, is the national curriculum for Scottish schools for learners from age 3 to 18. The purpose is to enable young people to become "successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors". See: <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/>.

Teachers' ideas to improve character building for pupils The question of what 'single change' teachers would make to improve character education resulted mainly in ideas for changes that individual teachers or schools at large could make. For schools, teachers had two kinds of recommendations: the first was to stress some parts of the curriculum more, in particular PSHE and sports. Teachers noted that PSHE does not have the same parity in time as other subjects. If there was more time, teachers would have more time for discussions, and pupils could learn by reflecting on their experiences, instead of by memorising lessons. Some teachers mentioned outdoor education as they thought that it gave children unique (formative) experiences that they would not forget. Q4 #119 e Perhaps the only thing I would change is maybe that in PSHE, that there was a little bit more time, because it's a very small proportion of their curriculum The second recommendation for schools was to organise more extracurricular activities. The three kinds of activities mentioned most were having children volunteer, taking them on school trips/ excursions, or doing special projects with pupils, such as a residential training on leadership. Q4 #67 e I think to make time for specific events that simply looked at character, so we're really fortunate, we have something called, what do they call them now, stem Citizenship days, where the entire school is off timetable for a day and they have activities that relate to things like interview skills or the world of work or personal finance or how to be organised, so things that are kind of life skills. These activities seem to offer a 'free space' where assessment does not loom over everything that children do. Extracurricular activities offer children the opportunity to be intrinsically motivated, be creative, express themselves, and learn to cooperate with others.

For individual teachers, the clearest recommendation was to have a strong relationship with children. They expressed this idea in a number of ways. For example, they recommended teachers to 'engage with the child', 'just sit and be with the children', 'take time to get to know them', 'be interested', 'show an openness about children's backgrounds', and 'have pupils express themselves'. Q4 #124 e I think the way to go, if you want to develop the allround pupil, is a smaller school. because I think the large schools are impersonal; staff don't know their pupils as well; it's about that interaction with adults and young people e that's key. Q4 #157 e it's just in the basic relationships

with the children that you have, just show them you're interested and our children are so open, they'll just open up to you with everything.

Finally, the teachers in this sample encouraged all teachers to stimulate children to work together, and particularly to have them cooperate with children that are somehow different than themselves, in terms of culture, religion, social background, sex, age, or educational abilities. The teachers valued teamwork, for example through team sports, because it is supposed to build character. Q4 #36 e I think maybe more reliance on them having this team spirit and actually being confident with each other and actually so instead of them being on their own all of the time and having their own assessment criteria and everything else, actually being encouraged to work together and support one another because I think if they're able to support one another then they're going to be able to actually have confidence in their own abilities and to not be afraid to be themselves. The teachers believed teamwork makes children appreciate and respect others more, recognise the value of supporting or caring for others, and more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, which can, in turn, contribute to self-confidence and a sense of identity.

Conclusion and discussion

Our focus in this paper has been the development of the 'whole child' as seen from the perspective of teachers in a context of academic testing in UK schools. We assumed that 'character education' clarifies its moral aspect, thereby not covering its complete meaning. Most of the teachers in this study believed, however, that the term 'character' referred to 'personality', 'who you are' and 'the person as a whole' which suggests that 'character' for them meant 'the whole child'. This study also found that 'character' had moral connotations for most of the teachers who mentioned virtues, such as respect, empathy and kindness, when asked directly what positive traits they would like to see cultivated in their pupils. Character education programs that focus only on resilience and perseverance do not do justice to the much broader understanding of 'character' that these teachers describe and aspire to develop in their pupils.

When asked about how their original teaching ambitions had changed since beginning their careers, many teachers talked about the contribution they had wanted to make to pupils' lives, which they described as 'developing the whole child', 'preparing them for life' and 'making a difference'. Some disappointed teachers acknowledged that they had less of an impact on children's lives than expected, and a large majority of teachers considered the assessment system to hinder the development of the whole child. Testing had become so pervasive that other educational goods had been overshadowed. They were sometimes less aware of 'golden moments' that could be seized to develop children's characters. Other teachers, however, realised through hands-on experiences that the scope of their responsibility was larger than transferring subject-related knowledge.

Teachers recommended that schools should offer more 'free space' where pupils could develop as human beings without feeling the constant pressure to perform. They also said that sports and extra-curricular activities could stimulate pupils to be creative, express themselves, and cooperate with others. Other recommendations included making time to engage with children, getting to know them, showing openness about their backgrounds, and engaging in what interests them. Even those teachers who said that they could morally educate pupils despite the current assessment system agreed that the content of the curriculum was rather fixed, but still they believed they could make a difference in children's lives through the pedagogical relationship with pupils.

Confirming previous research, many teachers in this sample were drawn to their profession because of its moral nature and considered role modelling an important method to morally educate pupils

(Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013). Previous research found that the moral nature of teaching is already an important part of preservice teachers' identities (Goldstein & Lake, 2000; Sternberg, Karlsson, Pitkaniemi, & Maarenen, 2014) and this study shows that the teachers, who had been practicing on average for over ten years, still considered teaching a moral endeavour. Many teachers in this study had learned through hard classroom experiences that realising their educational aims for children was not always easy. They had discovered that deviating from the standard curriculum in order to address moral issues was not always possible. Another finding, which to our knowledge has not been reported before, is the extent to which these teachers viewed the 'pupil assessment system' as a hindrance to educating the whole child. This raises the question of whether the U.K. secondary school assessment system has become so demanding that aims to raise pupils' academic performances have completely replaced the broader aim to cultivate pupils as good human beings, or whether it has only challenged them (Ball, 2003, p. 216). While this study confirms that many of the teachers were under a lot of pressure, sometimes leading to disappointment, some of them did find ways to educate the whole child, despite the context of high-stakes testing. They believed that they could reinforce this task by investing in the pedagogical relationship with children (see Gu & Day, 2007). This finding confirms previous research, showing that when schools increasingly focus on stimulating pupils to qualify through examinations, some teachers do succeed in staying true to their ideals. These individuals often mention establishing relationships with students as a strategy preventing them from 'burn out' (Hong, 2012). Clearly, teachers teach not only for pupils' future benefits, but also because they enjoy the respect, love and affection between children and themselves in the present. Probably, they love to see children grow through play, sports, daily tasks and other social interactions (van Manen, 2012, pp. 72e74). However, the question remains, can clinging to this relationship withstand the pressure of preparing pupils for exams in an educational system that remains mostly unchanged?

A perennial question is whether raising students' performances and cultivating their moral characters can both be achieved in secondary schools. Historically, 'character education' refers to kinds of modelling and teaching that help children to develop moral virtues, such as justice, temperance and courage, and the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom. However, when teachers were asked what positive character traits they would like to see cultivated in pupils, they also mentioned 'self-confidence', 'resilience' and 'perseverance'. Two important lessons can be learnt from this.

First, if character education is to fully catch on in education, it seems both pragmatic and justified to focus on a more expansive definition that is likely to have resonance with teachers similar to those in this study. Second, many school interventions in the name of character education focus only on performance virtues such as resilience and persistence, which does not fit with what most of these teachers want for and are developing in their pupils. Taken together, these teachers' perspectives remind us of the need for balance in terms of cultivating character in pupils. For example, when perseverance is cultivated without an idea of what projects are worthwhile, we run the risk of having children pursue trivial or even immoral goals. "Performance only has value in so far as it complements moral aspirations and makes them more serviceable", Kristjansson (in press) writes. It seems as if children's academic performance can be stimulated, but possibly also in a way that moral virtues are foundational in a life of character.

Finally, how the measurement of exam-scores can be squared with proper attention to the development of the whole child, is a difficult question. This issue is approached in the literature in roughly two different ways. The first view is that pupils' characters will only be taken seriously in today's U.K. education system if the development of the whole child can be measured in the same

way as subject-knowledge is now. The second view is that the evidence based 'what-works approach' to educational research and practice must be abandoned for a value-based approach (Biesta, 2007, 2010). Those in favour of the measurement of virtue and character seem to assume that it is possible and desirable to measure children's characters in the same way as their subject knowledge. Critics of assessing character, however, have argued that the standard scientific research methods do not apply to the education of the whole child (for a discussion, see Kristjansson, in press, chap. 3). In our opinion, these two extreme views preclude us from seeing that there may be a middle position. We concur with Curren and Kotzee (2014) who argue that, while one should be very cautious talking about measuring individual pupil's character by using standardised tests, there is certainly a sense in which it can be evaluated, if only through teachers' everyday judgments of pupils' virtues. A future challenge is to understand 'evaluation' in such a way that all functions of education are done justice to.

Acknowledgement

This publication was made possible through the support of a grant from the John Templeton Foundation (number 39663). The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the John Templeton Foundation. We thank Kristjan Kristjansson for his encouragement and suggestions on earlier versions of the manuscript.

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