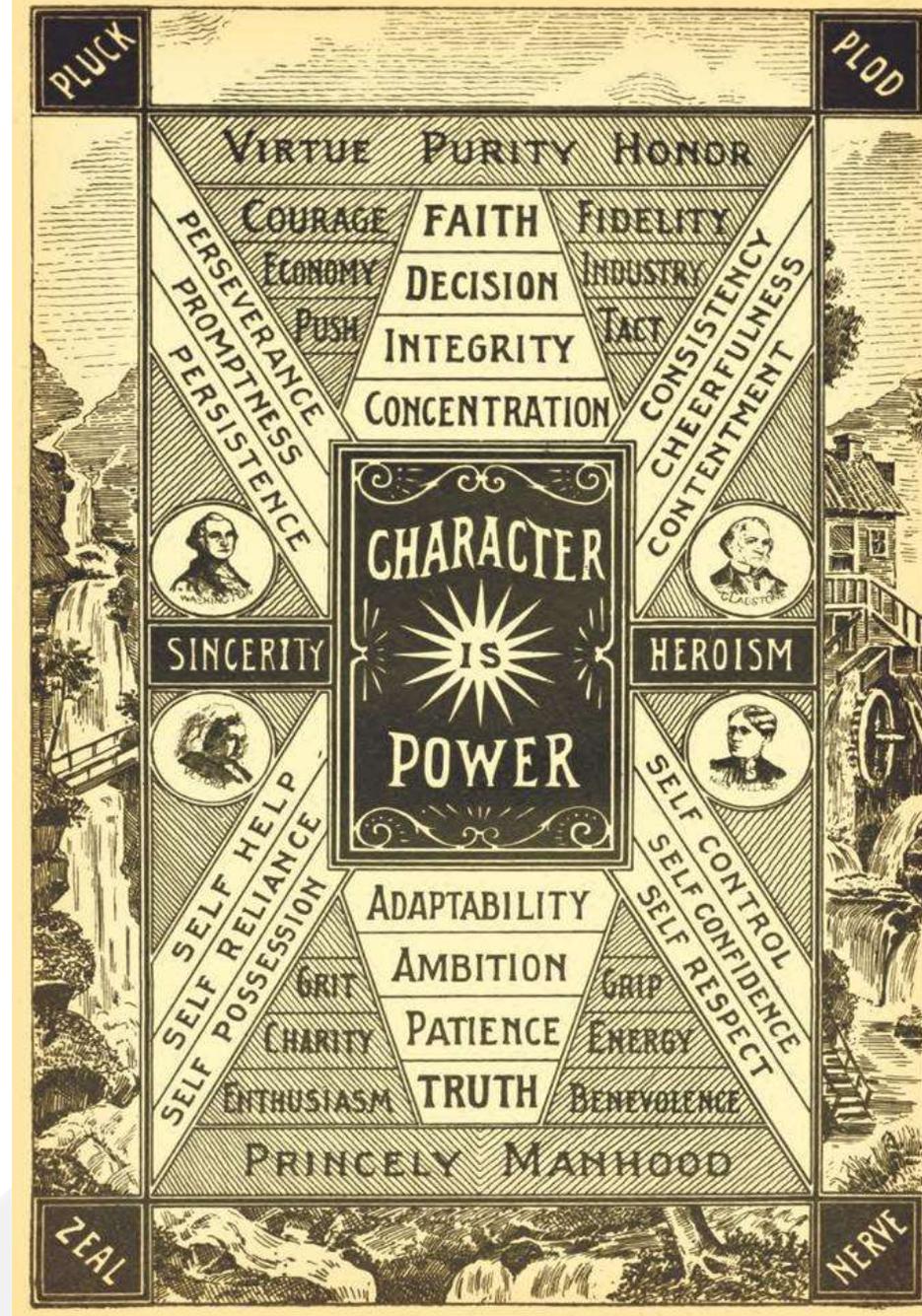


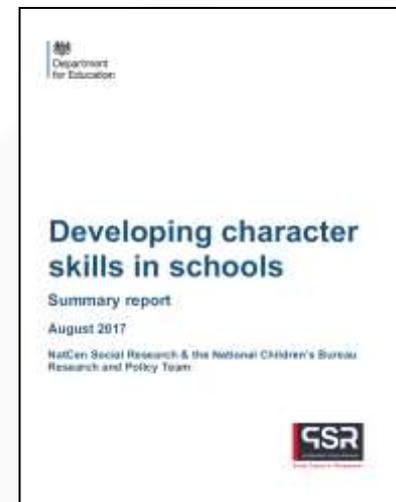
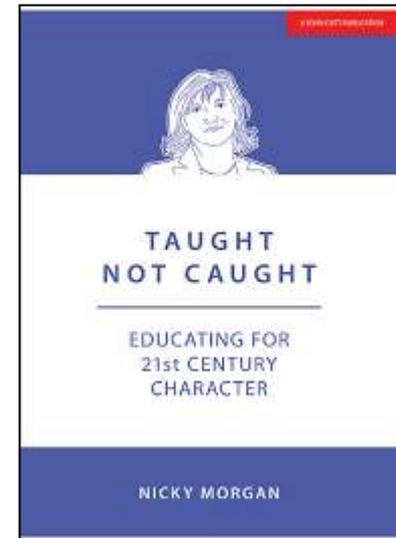
What's wrong with character education? *Re-visiting the relationship between character & citizenship.*

Lee Jerome



Character Education in England

- Championed by Nicky Morgan
- 2015-16 £3.5m grant funding
 - £500,000 to Premiership Rugby
- 2016-17 £6m grant funding to promote character traits inc. resilience and respect
 - £2m for projects with a military ethos
- Templeton Foundation
 - Funds the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, University of Birmingham
 - \$5,750,000 (2017-2020) ‘Transformative Britain’
 - \$7,940,000 (2015-2017) ‘Service Britain’
 - \$8,500,000 (2012-2015) ‘Gratitude Britain’
 - Funds University of Leeds \$1,300,000 (2016) ‘The Narnian Virtues’



What's the relationship between

Character
(being a good person)

Citizenship
(being a good citizen)



Are they just 2 sides of the same coin, or might there be tensions between them?





The view of one Citizenship teacher

Janet and John: Citizenship

This is Janet
This is John

John is kind
He picks up litter
Janet asks "Why?"
Mother says "Do stop questioning things"

Janet is sad
She wants to start a petition about litter
John told Mother
John is knightly

Janet has now been reported under Prevent
She challenged the status quo
See Janet cry
See Janet cry



Structure of this presentation

1. Education for character and citizenship – some similarities and differences from the literature
2. Individualization and education in the Risk Society – the context for character and citizenship
3. What do children learn? Some examples of classroom resources from the Jubilee Centre
4. Some concluding thoughts – so what is wrong with character?

1. Education and character

Both are expansive!

“Almost nothing is beyond the scope of character education...” (Davies, Gorard and McGuinn, 2005: 349).

“Nothing of what is human should be unfamiliar to [the citizen], nothing of what is experienced in society should be foreign to democratic citizenship” (Audigier, 1998: 13).

Similarities

- Both often draw on a discourse of crisis – a democratic deficit, or a breakdown of respect or general youth problem.
- Both also suffer from relatively low profiles / status in schools.
- Both make demands of teachers to align pedagogies with values and content.
- Some traditions such as service learning are seen as leading to both outcomes.
- Both are concerned with morality.

Differences

- Citizenship tends to be subject-based, character is broader – whole school and cross-curricular.
- Cit. tends to focus on learning through moral dilemmas or problems to understand a range of perspectives, whilst Char. is often more concerned with teaching right behaviour.
- Suissa argues that Char. avoids the political dimension of life because underlying it is an assumption there is one 'right' answer to moral problems, whereas a political education would explore different traditions of thinking about what is right and why.
- Ultimately both traditions are so broad, this is difficult to pin down with any accuracy or certainty.

2. Individualization and the Risk Society

Character:

- Individualisation
- Responsibilisation
- De-politicisation

Features of the Risk Society (Beck).

- Individuals manage their life trajectories with support of state sponsored choices
- Erosion of citizenship for consumption
- Erosion of collective (class action) for individual responsibility

In schools this links to:

- Responsibility for making the right school 'choice'
- Ever sharper focus of individual performance, tracked against predictions
- Individual accountability (and risk management)
- 'Therapeutic turn' to promote self-regulation and emotional intelligence through reflection and curricular interventions (Ecclestone & Hayes)
- Problems, therefore, accounting for group / social inequalities ("the soft bigotry of low expectations" according to Nicky Morgan)
- The need for resilience and grit to overcome obstacles and hardship
- Character individualises responsibility for overcoming social inequalities



3. What do children learn?

Four resources were chosen because they linked most obviously to the concerns of citizenship education, and were thus intended to explore the extent to which character is compatible with, or least supportive of, citizenship education.

- A lesson about Rosa Parks (for 8-10 year olds) focusing on the virtues of justice and courage.
- A lesson on justice (for 11-16 year olds).
- Two lessons on human rights (for 10 year olds).
- A teachers' handbook (for teachers of 11-16 year olds) providing an overview of a taught course and guidance on assessment.

The analysis focused on:

1. If citizenship education and character are complementary then to what extent does this material resonate with the way that a citizenship teacher might tackle the same issues?
2. To what extent do the resources reflect Kristjánsson's (2013) defence of character education against its critics.

3. What do children learn?

Justice

- Simplified narrative includes:

- She fell in love and married

- Her husband encouraged her to return to college

- She experienced racism

- All the questions and tasks focus on individual manifestations of justice, including: when have you displayed justice, when have others...

- The de-politicisation and individualization of the story renders justice an individual capacity to do what is right, rather than a political concept to be debated...



Rosa Parks

3. What do children learn?

Justice

- Simplified narrative includes:

- She fell in love and married ‘the only black men she ever met who wasn’t afraid of white men’
- Her husband encouraged her to return to college, because he felt education was essential to the civil rights movement
- She experienced racism, which was compounded by the complicity of some black people

- All the questions and tasks focus on individual manifestations of justice, including: when have you displayed justice, when have others...

- The de-politicisation and individualization of the story renders justice an individual capacity to do what is right, rather than a political concept to be debated...



Rosa Parks

3. What do children learn?

Justice: what those

- Desire the right
- Desire their fair
- Desire that others get a virtuous life

How do we have a meaningful conversation about whether children desire the right thing to the right degree if we have no language to talk about what is 'right' and why that might be, when and for whom?

Do you delight in seeing a just distribution of the earth's goods and are you pained by unjust manifestations of distribution?

Are you pained by the undeserved good fortune of others?

Do you experience pleasure at the bad fortune that befalls others?

- Over-doing it includes "actions that show I am too concerned to give others the right sort of things, normally at the expense of others (closer to home)"
- Under-doing it includes "actions that show I want less than my fair share... [which] can be motivated by a pride in asceticism, laziness or a low sense of self-worth," this is described as a "self-destructive pathway."

3. What do children learn?

Human Rights

- Synonyms: kind & polite
- What makes us human?
- What must be protected to promote these attributes?
- How do we use the term 'rights'?
- Who 'patrols' rights?

There is also a script for teacher 'corrections' of recalcitrant children:

"Everyone has the right to feel safe here in our school, please think about how your actions are affecting others."

This lesson opens up a space where children could think about why rights are important and the technical meaning of human rights...

But it doesn't mention 'duty bearers' and individualises responsibilities.

A lesson on discrimination fails to link to rights at all. Scripted teacher praise includes:

"I like the way you have read the case study carefully and thought about what led to this person being discriminated against."

There is no discussion of what criteria one would use to make this judgement i.e. no need to use 'rights' talk

4. So what is wrong with character education?

Kristjánsson (2013) has defended character education against a number of 'false' or 'mistaken' criticisms. These include:

1. It is not **paternalistic** because teaching about virtues does not entail prescribing them.
2. It is not **anti-democratic or anti-intellectual** because habituation plus phronesis is more than just behavioural training.
3. It is not inherently **conservative** because virtuous people would demand social reform.
4. It is not **individualistic**, it is just expedient to start with individuals because that fits with child development. This does not preclude understanding social change.

1. These resources do seem to fall into the trap of prescribing virtues and virtuous behaviour
2. There are limited opportunities to discuss what constitutes justice in different contexts and from different perspectives
3. This assumes that students would make the leap to support reform, there is no developed sense of politics nor of challenging the political system
4. In an intensely individualising institution / society, starting with the individual seems to confirm 'common sense' notions of 'good'

Final thought

Character education seems mainly concerned with the question:
How should I live a virtuous life?

A more political question (following Rawls, Suissa and Kisby) might be:
How should I live my life in a diverse world, where I need to get on with others who have different beliefs about how to live their lives?