

- LECTURE -

**Character and Values in Society and Education**

**What Else Should We Be Teaching In Schools?**

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5 February 2015

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It is a great honour to give this lecture tonight at an institution founded to promote the importance of good values at the heart of all we do.

Nicky Morgan is shaping up to be an impressive Education Secretary. She is batting on the most difficult of wickets. Labour wants her to catch her out. So now do the Lib Dems, so it would appear do some supporters of Michael Gove within her own party. It is hardly cricket. So do many in the profession, while the commentariat have written her off as, to continue the cricket analogy, a nightwatchman who will be rapidly bowled out as soon as the action begins in the morning (after the elections).

People thought she would be a nonentity, promoted because she is a woman, safe, anyone but Michael Gove. But she is making the weather.

She is absolutely right to insist this week, as did her predecessor Michael Gove, that every single child deserves an excellent education, regardless of family background, where they live, or the school they attend. Too many young people are being failed currently in schools and this position is intolerable and must not continue.

She is absolutely right about the five keys to school success—powerful leadership, top quality teaching, high expectations of rigour and excellence, strong discipline and order, and a mastery of the basics of literacy and numeracy.

She is absolutely right about school structure. State schools that show they are capable of trust deserve maximum independence. The presumption should be that schools and teachers should be trusted, are capable of self-improvement, and that academies and free schools should flourish. Inadequate schools should have new leadership.

Working with proven providers, state or independent, is key to this. So too are ‘teaching schools’. Wellington College has for two years headed a Teaching School Federation with twelve local secondary schools. We are all gaining much from it.

I sense you are expecting now to hear the word ‘but’. I am not going to use ‘but’, but ... I will use ‘also’. Nicky Morgan is absolutely right in saying what she has done: she could ‘also’ be stressing other priorities for schools, as she did in the autumn with character. She has done so less this year, understandably, in the pre-general election climate. The media loathe character and talk of values. Oddly.

Let me tell you about the school I know best, Wellington College. When I took it over as head in 2006, 65% of our A Levels were at A and B standard, and we came 256<sup>th</sup> in the Sunday Times A Level table. Last summer, our students achieved over 95% As and Bs, and we had leapt from 256<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> in the Sunday Times table. No school has ever risen that quickly, we are told.

How did we manage it? By utilising the five factors that Nicky Morgan talks about.

First, powerful leadership. As at Brighton College, which I ran for eight years before I came to Wellington, and where A Levels rose from 55% to 81%, the swiftest at the time, strong leadership was key. I repeatedly demanded that the staff acted in line with best professional standards, and that the students worked hard in class and with homework. It wasn’t always easy and it certainly doesn’t make you popular.

Staff learnt the difference between ‘leadership’, which is about changing outcomes, and ‘managing’, which is about smoothing the *status quo*. My senior team learnt to become senior leaders not just senior managers, middle managers had to learn to become middle leaders, and developing managers to become developing leaders. The academic and pastoral sides began to work properly. Many stepped up: some did not.

Second, high quality teaching. Only one thing matters more than this in the classroom: high quality *learning*. But you will never have high quality learning without high quality teaching. All teachers need to understand what an outstanding lesson is like, and be passionate to teach to the very best professional standards in each and every lesson, each and every day.

Ofsted guidance about outstanding lessons is helpful in achieving this: but it would be so much more beneficial to schools if Ofsted wasn’t repeatedly changing its rubric. Ofsted needs to learn what outstanding leadership, management and communication is, which is not about endless new instructions and the latest jumbled thinking. It is also not about fear.

Third, high expectations of rigour and excellence. I believe powerfully in ‘expectation theory’. We achieve in life what we expect to achieve. Low expectations are the curse still in many schools, and the fault lies squarely with those teachers who do not demand the best of themselves and their students.

It is tragic that half the schools in the country never send students to Oxford and Cambridge. The tonic that preparing students for these two fine institutions has is immeasurable on sharpening intellects and developing scholarship. There is far too little said about scholarship, come to think about it, in all schools.

Every child at Wellington has their own targets and, using Dweck's 'growth mindset' approach, they are then challenged to beat their targets. Teachers are encouraged to perform at or above their own expectations.

We offer the International Baccalaureate—the finest exam system that the world has. I regularly tell our students and parents that when I recently visited Westminster Academy sixth formers told me that they opted for the IB precisely because it was more academically challenging than mere A Levels. I love that attitude.

Fourth, strong discipline and order. This is the absolute foundation of every effective school. Nothing can be achieved without it. One of the first things I did at Wellington College was smarten everyone up, have zero tolerance of poor behaviour, disruption, shoddy work, bullying, and drugs.

Visit Wellington College today and you will find immensely supportive relationships between students, and a shift from good behaviour based on fear of punishment to good behaviour based on inner motivation. More on that distinction anon.

At Wellington Academy, which we sponsored from 2009, we began with a hands-off attitude. In 2013, we took direct control of the school, brought in a Principal from Wellington and I became Executive Principal. Insisting on excellent behaviour and discipline across the school was one of the first priorities.

I was criticised in *The Guardian* and elsewhere for being heavy-handed in assemblies with pupils. Guilty as charged. The students were behaving poorly. I told them so forcefully. I was tough because I needed to be tough. Just before Christmas when I was standing by the front door, a student came up to me and said 'we hated you at first, sir, but now we really like belonging to the school because it is a much more orderly and friendly place'.

Wellington Academy is now coming right. Results will be up this summer. The corner has been turned.

Fifth, mastery of the basics of literacy and numeracy. Spot on. Nothing happens without this.

Nicky Morgan's five point plan will materially improve state schools. That means every child will have better access to a good education. It will mean that our static or declining social mobility in Britain will be reversed.

It will be reversed even more quickly if the new government from May 2015 was to enact the five point plan which I described in my Access Lecture last Tuesday at University College Oxford: a quarter of places at top schools for the bottom quartile: a third of schools and colleges in poor performing areas being designated as academic specialist schools: every independent school to federate with state schools: means testing places at top state schools to

squeeze out the middle class stranglehold: and state schools to broaden their vision of education including, where possible, state boarding.

Let me ask you all a question. Why do we insist on school for all our young people, taking some 500 weeks of their lives at a cost to the state of some £75,000 per pupil? What are we hoping to achieve with these 500 weeks and £75,000?

The development of each child's intellectual faculties, including literacy and numeracy, certainly.

The imparting of knowledge of science, language, and history and culture of the nation, certainly.

Communication skills in writing, speaking and digitally, certainly.

Performing well in international league tables, including PISA, perhaps.

But what about the following ten areas?

Becoming a law-abiding and responsible member of our community?

Having inner talents drawn out, nurtured and enhanced - in music, drama, and across the arts?

Learning the difference between right and wrong, and having good values, good character, grit and resilience all developed?

Developing leadership skills, so each student can learn to lead themselves, as well as others?

Learning how to become a caring and responsible parent, and a wife or husband?

Having our creativity and entrepreneurship developed, so individual talent and the national economy, can flourish?

Learning to become a good employee, who will be polite, turn up on time, be hard-working, diligent, supportive, appropriately dressed, resilient, and consistent?

Having our scholarly and cultural interests nurtured and developed?

Having ample opportunity to develop healthy lifestyles and to play competitive games, learning skills across the range of sporting activities?

Learning about our own mental, emotional, psychological and physical wellbeing, and learning how to take responsibility for our lives?

At present, the 7% who attend independent schools benefit greatly from all these ten areas. For those in state schools, it is sadly hit and miss.

At Wellington, we achieve the extraordinary academic results that we do while at the same time being one of the top arts schools—we have just received the Gold award from the Arts Council—one of Britain's top sports schools, and one of Britain's top schools for service and charitable activity.

Last year we were named Britain's most innovative school, with pioneering work in the curriculum, setting up schools in China, academies in the UK, developing the wellbeing curriculum, teaching character and leadership, and becoming the first HMC school to lead a Teaching School Federation.

Whatever the cost of the breath of this activity, it has not been at the expense of our academic success.

Exam success, the Holy Grail for governments across the world, is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for being an educated human being. This is because human beings are not machines but flesh and blood, with capacious minds, with bodies, with emotions, and with a soul.

We are organisms and the mechanistic model of the purpose of education beloved by governments fails to rise to the heights and wonders of the organic model that young people across the land cry out for, as do their parents.

Because it is not enough for young people to emerge from school with a string of exam passes and for us to pat ourselves on the back, thinking that the box has been ticked and the 'job done'. This is only a part of the whole education journey. Families have a key role in the development of the finished product. So too do schools.

Academic attainment and exam success can never be more than part of the story of the profound moral responsibility of schools to children, parents, society and the nation.

I would argue that schools that make children and their parents believe that exams are all-important are cynical and negligent. Worse, they are ignorant. Because, as governments so readily say, school provides a once in a lifetime opportunity.

That opportunity is all the more precious when young people come from disadvantaged home backgrounds, which do not provide the same chances for enrichment as those from more affluent backgrounds.

The work of education, as the linguistic root suggests, is to 'lead out'. Schools need to lead or draw out of young people all their talents and aptitudes. We cannot and must not define this

task purely in terms of academic success. Not the least because a focus on mere academic success often drains the lifeblood out of academic subjects, creating heavy and dull minds.

Human intelligence anyway is multi-faceted. No one has stated this more clearly and eloquently than Howard Gardner of Harvard in his work on multiple intelligences.

As a headmaster, I know that what is not 'led out' of young people, what is not nurtured, by the age of 16 or 18 may remain dormant in that person for the rest of their lives.

At Wellington College we have adapted Gardner's work into our own bespoke model which we call the 'eight aptitudes'. It is made up of an octagon with four sets of paired intelligences: the logical and linguistic, moral and spiritual, personal and social, and creative and physical.

I know that you know that Aristotle taught that an emphasis on character grounded on values is essential to education and to the creation of a good society.

I know that you know that some of the wisest thinkers in the last two millennia, including all the great spiritual figures from the great religious traditions, have placed great stress on the importance of character.

I know that you know that good character is not simply a question of DNA at birth, but is nurtured by schools, as well as by family and friends.

So why then do governments not talk more about the importance of character? Is it because they fear a loss of focus in the school improvement crusade? Is it because they believe that valuable lesson time will be sacrificed?

I will show you this afternoon that these fears can be allayed. I will argue that an emphasis on character and breadth is not at the expense of academic work. I will show that the lesson time does not have to be eroded by schools focussing on character and breadth.

I argue that academic learning will become much profounder with an emphasis on character and breadth. I will show that exam success can be boosted by an emphasis on character and breadth.

Why? Because good character strengths are a greater predictor of success in university and in life than mere exam passes.

Governments of all parties are guilty of spreading an untruth, of popularising a false dichotomy, that schools can either have exam success or offer breadth.

## **Kings Langley, Hertfordshire**

Kings Langley is a comprehensive school in Hertfordshire which in 2002 was placed in the bottom 3% of maintained schools nationally. Over the following ten years, the school has been utterly transformed.

In 2010 Ofsted praised it for outstanding attendance and for the wellbeing of its students. Last year they were placed in the top 25% in the country at GCSE in virtually every category.

Headmaster Gary Lewis places the school's emphasis on character at the very heart of the transformation. Kings Langley follows the Penn Resilience Programme, which comes out of the positive psychology department at the University of Pennsylvania, where Martin Seligman is the leading figure.

Intensive staff training and modelling of character strengths and resilience is fundamental. Staff work alongside students on self-evaluation, and open themselves liberally to constructive criticism. Teachers have to reflect on whether they themselves are courteous and punctual, and on the quality of their teaching and marking.

They reflect on one of my favourite questions of all that I ask: 'Why did you first go into teaching?' 'Are you the teacher you wanted to be when you first thought about teaching?' Ah, that goes to the very heart, if answered honestly.

A rolling 'three week focus' helps keep everyone at Kings Langley fresh. For the three weeks leading up to Christmas, the focus for students and teachers was on holding doors open, and ensuring that thanks were offered on each occasion. Eye contact has been another recent focus.

Lewis says a key part of his job as head is 'to provide obvious leadership', constantly modelling and insisting that the emphasis on character is lived deeply across the school.

Actual examples of schools is essential. This is what happens in two state primaries.

## **King Solomon Academy**

King Solomon Academy in London belongs to the dynamic ARK group. King Solomon has one of the most energising atmospheres I have ever witnessed in a school.

Character education lies at its heart. The distinguishing characteristic is perhaps the singular emphasis on high academic aspiration, with the school promising their pupils a place at an academically rigorous university and a successful life.



The school is clear that excellent exam grades are necessary. But so too is character and the confidence to make the students, a disproportionately high number who are on free school meals, believe that they have a right to achieve these aspirations.

From the moment children enter the school, teachers talk about university and graduation. Class names and year group names reinforce this by using university names.

Pupils are spoken to about their ‘jobs’ as learners and as scholars. Careers are regularly discussed. A smart uniform code underlines how they will be expected to dress.

Corporate identity is immensely strong, with most interactions and all transitions following set routines and behaviours. Working for the greater good is constantly underlined.

All pupils learn ‘Philosophy for Children’, used as a vehicle to help the young question life/themselves/others critically, to listen to others and how to manage disagreement.

Weekly celebration assemblies reward those who exemplify school values.

Pupils are offered a variety of prestigious positions, including being a school ambassador, a class ambassador or participating in the ‘Learning Council’.

The school believes that its emphasis on character and values has already made a marked impact on good behaviour in and outside class. Their evidence suggests that the pupils have imbued much of the culture of high aspirations, though it is too early yet to assess whether the dreams of high performance at university and beyond will be realised.

### **West Kidlington Primary School in Oxfordshire**

At West Kidlington Primary School, ‘having good values’ as the school puts it, is the principal thrust and motivation.

Values are described as ‘beliefs that shape behaviour’. All adults working at the school are regularly asked the question ‘What values do you expect of everyone at this school and what do they expect of you?’

Having good values are seen as utterly essential to any effective learning: the core values at West Kidlington are trust, respect, honesty, perseverance, peace and love.

School assemblies are the jewel in the crown. They have been rated as outstanding in every inspection since 2002, and attract visitors from across the world. Exploring and living values lie at the heart of each assembly. Pupils learn about putting values ‘inside their hearts’.



Inspections regularly comment upon how profoundly values inform and shape the pupils' behaviour and morality. Secondary schools say they can recognise West Kidlington students because of the way that they behave.

Neil Hawkes, the longstanding head of the school until 1999, believes the key to any school becoming one where values underpin its entire structure is to have a strong head who can take stakeholders along with them.

He believes that with leadership any school can make the transition to a values school, but that no one should underestimate the resistance that will be met.

### US Charter Schools

Compelling evidence from US schools also points to the importance of character.

The story of the branch of 'Charter Schools' called 'KIPP' (i.e. 'Knowledge is Power Program') is now well known.

KIPP schools had been enormously successful in the 1990s, not the least with black and Hispanic children from low income families in New York and elsewhere, at winning admissions and indeed scholarships to top colleges.

But this tale of exams success lost its sheen when it was realised that only a fifth of those who graduated completed their four year college degree. David Levin, the co-founder of KIPP, was alarmed. He discovered that the research of Angela Duckworth, a psychologist showed that self-control could be a more reliable predictor of student success than their IQ and exam scores.

Enter the appropriately named Paul Tough, whose book 'How Children Succeed' has now been published in the UK.

Tough argues that research by economists, psychologists, neuroscientists and educators have all shown that the skills that a student requires see them successfully through university and beyond has less to do with IQ and more to do with personality traits.

Tough's conclusions that children who grow up in dysfunctional environments find it harder to concentrate, and this can be shown by malfunctions in the brain including the pre frontal cortex, are echoed by research by Kids Company.

Tough points to the need for highly-talented teachers and programmes to address the damage. But Kids Company shows that loving affirmation and mentoring can heal damaged brains and personalities.

## Riverdale School

Dominic Randolph, head of the private school Riverdale in New York, was another to be fascinated by the failure of the KIPP students after they had gone to College.

He teamed up with KIPP founder David Levin to probe the essence of resilience, and they whittled it down to seven qualities: self-control, grit, zest, social intelligence, optimism, gratitude and curiosity. They then set about making these the cornerstones of their respective schools' programmes.

The 'Character Growth Card' emerged after rigorous debate by students and staff at Riverdale and at KIPP Schools.

The seven qualities bear closer examination. Optimism stresses a refusal to let setbacks adversely affect one. Zest is about enthusiasm and active participation.

Grit is about diligent work and the completion of tasks. Curiosity is about asking questions and independent thinking. Social Intelligence is about adaptability, inclusion of others and finding resolution. Gratitude is not only about feeling, but *expressing* appreciation. Self-Control is about prioritising long-term gains above easy fixes.

Randolph deliberately teamed up with David Levin to show that the schools at the very opposite ends of the social scale can work together and produce a programme to the lasting benefit of their students.

Children at Riverdale have a report card which provides feedback on these seven strengths.

Teachers across all ages bring them into their lessons, whether they teaching literature, history or mathematics, by seeking out practical illustrations of their importance and relevance.

Parents' evenings provide the opportunity for mothers and fathers to be informed about the strengths and their practical relevance in day-to-day living.

Teacher CPD is heavily focused on strengths. There is a real passion across the teaching staff to live the seven qualities.

Randolph believes that schools need to redefine the entire concept and measurement of success. Students need to be given feedback 'not just on whether they solved a mathematical equation, but on how well they approached the solving of the problem.'

'We have been too focused on the 'ends' of education and insufficiently on the means,' he says.

Two principal points remain in contention about character education: whether character education makes any difference, and whether should there be lessons on the curriculum specifically on character. Let's look at these.

Academic research produced by The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at The University of Birmingham offers conclusive evidence from research across many countries that character education is not only vital for good schools, but that it is also effective. Their website should be consulted by all who want to know more.

On the opposite side of the debate, academics argue that 70% to 80% of character is predetermined, and that character education is thus a waste of time for the great majority of students.

But can such a determinist and fatalist view be accurate? In my experience of a lifetime in schools, education research can prove pretty much anything you want it to prove. Ditto psychological research.

Yet every good teacher I have ever met in state and independent schools knows instinctively that a core part of their job is to develop the good character of their students. They don't need educational research to tell them it can't be done; neither do parents, who would laugh at the notion that the character of their children is formed before birth and that they can make no impact on it.

Carol Dweck's work shows conclusively to my satisfaction that brain functioning is malleable and can be enhanced under the right stimuli.

Moral awareness as well as academic ability can be raised through systematic and repetitive application. This lies at the heart of character education.

A bigger debate exists on the second area in contention: should curriculum time be given to the building of character? Some exponents of character education, including James O'Shaughnessy, Cameron's former policy advisor who is now setting up a chain of free schools, believe that character education is so important that it should be taught in discrete lessons.

Others believe that character building can be done equally well without losing valuable lesson time to special classes, by having a determined focus right across school life on the development of good character virtues, and the provision of opportunities for the young to be challenged to put these traits into operation.

I don't think we need to get hung up on this debate. Schools should be free to decide their own allocation of curriculum time. If they choose to have lessons specifically on character, and can at the same time run orderly institutions which achieve strong results, then they should be allowed to take these decisions themselves.

Those who deny that the instilling of good character is not a job for schools are nihilists. They inhabit a world in which there are no moral certainties, no belief in human progress, no acceptance of how education is vital to human transformation and growth. Accept their philosophy, if you like. But if you do, I hope you go nowhere near schools, nor become parents, nor go within 100 miles of children and adolescents.

As philosophers from Aristotle onwards have taught, human beings flourish when they live ethically, and good character should be learned from schools, as well as parents and society.

Schools have suffered woefully from the moral vacuum of the last 25 years, with government after government insisting that the only important objective of schools is good exam grades.

We are fast creating a rule-governed society, where people are incapable of taking moral choices and distinguishing right from wrong, and act only in accordance with the laws and their fear of punishment.

We need to be doing far more in schools to develop the inner moral nature of all our young people, so that they have an inner sense of the common welfare, and seek to be positively good citizens, rather than just law-abiding ones. Untold damage has been done because of the failure of our politicians to impart a sense of moral purpose.

You do not have to be a rocket scientist, or a Chief Inspector of Schools, to know what a good school is like. The atmosphere is orderly, the students treat each other with respect, they and the staff look smart, the environment is attractive and well presented, and the classrooms and classroom activity is purposeful.

In every good school without exception, there will be a sense of respect for each other, integrity from teachers and students, a kind atmosphere, a commitment to curiosity and hard work.

Schools do what the governments tell them to do. At the moment, the overwhelming message is still 'exams are all that matter'.

So should schools prioritise character or exam results? They should prioritise both.

Is this a matter for schools or for families? It is a matter for both.

Does character matter more at primary school than for secondary school? It matters for both.

Why then do I say that schools should prioritise character-building and values above exams? Because if you prioritise exams in the way that governments are doing, little or nothing will happen with character and values.

But if you prioritise character and values, exam success will follow, and for the right reasons.

The students will behave well in class. They will respect their teacher and each other. They will want to learn, rather than being made to learn. They will want to behave rather than being made to behave. They will probe beneath surface learning to the depths of subjects because they will be more reflective people.

Nicky Morgan, and Michael Gove before her, is taking schools powerfully in the right direction. I understand and approve of her current emphasis on exams and basic literacy and numeracy.

If the Conservatives are re-elected, and they might be, and if she is appointed Education Secretary again, and she might be, I have every confidence that she will move from the back foot to the front foot, and score a century before lunch fired by the vision that I have outlined for you this afternoon.