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Insight Series

Virtues of the Good Teacher: Messaged from literature, policy and practice

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July 2013

<p align="center">***What makes a good teacher?***</p>

Students completing their Initial Teacher Education talked about inspirational teachers:

They had an **enthusiasm** for education and a **love of learning** which translated across to the children, they worked well as a team and created a positive working environment...they used **creativity** to create a varied and interesting curriculum.

They are **engaging,** give fun yet challenging lessons for their pupils but also they demonstrate **character** in how they interact outside the lessons, in corridors, on the playground, always being **fair, thoughtful** and interested in the students they work with.

Every child in the class feels **valued**. The classroom feels a happy and vibrant place to be.

And from people across the world (UNICEF 1996)

I think that a good teacher should be a good and complete person: **curious, passionate,** interested about their pupils' interests, wishes, feelings... A really good teacher should be child in his soul which mean, **creative, imaginative** and ready for exploration etc.
Mirjana Kazija, Rijeka, Croatia

There is a saying,*"GIVE ME A FISH AND I EAT FOR A DAY, TEACH ME TO FISH AND I EAT FOR A LIFE TIME".* This must be a philosophy of a good teacher... She/he should be **patient** and **kind,** flexible and resourceful, **tolerant** and **open minded** with a good sense of **humour. Enthusiastic** and enjoys teaching. should be **honest, imaginative and creative.** Efficient. **Self-disciplined.** Helpful. **Humble and modest........** In my opinion teacher should be like this.
SHEEBA RAMACHANDRAN, BURAIDHA, KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

One who help his students in all respects. He makes his students able to live better life. He teaches students to take decisions in all the conditions. Who is good teacher for his students and also good students for his students and society, having **moral character** and model for building new good society.
Prafull Bhasarkar, Babupeth, Chandrapur, India

Introduction

What are the virtues of a good teacher? At the heart of this debate is the extent to which society – and government on its behalf - has the right to expect, comment upon, measure and critique the personal virtues of professionals employed by the state, specifically when that work involves preparing and shaping tomorrow's citizens. Teachers are expected to be competent and accomplished practitioners, but what kind of *person* should they be? Responses to 'What makes a good teacher' in global research illustrate the intensely human, moral character expected of teachers across the world (UNICEF 2013). Encompassing virtue, emotion and knowledge they reveal the extensive demands upon teachers.

David Carr argues the essence of teaching, the moral, social and spiritual development of children, places it alongside other 'true' vocations (the priesthood and ministry) in requiring personal virtue in order to perform appropriate professional practice (Carr 2011). Yet some would argue the 'terrors of performativity' threaten the 'teachers' soul' (Ball 2003), so in a world of technical rationality and performance management, is there a place for virtues in teaching today? This report examines popular perceptions of teachers and academic literature on virtues in teaching. It contrasts these with current English educational policy makers' discourse and the views of new entrants to teaching, through analysis of survey data from an emerging study. While the dominant discourse in policy is skills-based and process driven, newly trained teachers themselves have clear views on the character strengths required of tomorrow's teachers.

Popular perceptions of teachers

> *Parents, the public, principals and superintendents say that almost all teachers are caring and qualified. There may be problems with a few "bad apples," these groups say, but most teachers do a pretty good job given the circumstances.*
>
> *Johnson and Duffett 2004*

Teachers play a unique role in the development of character in children and parents are stakeholders in that role. In a recent Populus poll of 1001 parents for the Jubilee Centre for Character and Values (forthcoming, 2013):

- 84% of all parents surveyed believed it is a teacher's role to encourage good morals and values in a student;
- 87% of all parents surveyed believed schools should develop their pupils' characters and encourage good values in students.

This places significant duties upon teachers, who appear to retain public support despite rare, but highly publicised instances of misconduct. Teachers are trusted, respected and have positive characteristics:

- In a recent poll 86% of the public said they trusted teachers, with only 1% reporting distrust. This compared with 64% trusting 'the ordinary man/woman on the street', and 65% trusting the police (IPSOS MORI 2013).
- A study commissioned by the then Department for Education and Skills found 50% of 2,000 public respondents saw teaching as an attractive career (Hargreaves et al 2006).
- The Guardian asked a range of celebrities what characteristics good teachers have and themes of passion for, and knowledge of, the subject, brilliant communication and kindness emerged (Jackson 2010).
- Teachers responding to the blog-post 'Get into teaching' describe passion, confidence and resilience as key attributes in the good teacher (GetIntoTeaching blog 2013).

Yet in 2011 the (now defunct) General Teaching Council of England (GTCE) heard 336 cases of 'unacceptable professional conduct', 43 of which concerned inappropriate use of social media (Vasagar and Williams 2012). Teachers are respected but they are not infallible. What is the evidence that there are universal virtues which form the basis for good, professional teaching allowing, in Aristotelian terms, for the flourishing of both the pupil and the teacher themselves (Higgins 2010)?

Academic understandings of the good teacher

People are shaped by people. There is no genuine education without earnest life-to-life interaction and inspiration. The teacher's depth of character is crucial in this equation.

Daiseku Ikeda 2006

It is possible to identify changing themes in dominant discourses of what kind of person the good teacher is. Moore (2004) charts a discourse of the late 20th Century teacher moving from charismatic in the 1980s, educational in the early 1990s, training in late 1990s and pragmatic in the early 2000s. Arguing that the emphasis has shifted from a 'caring, inspirational' model of teaching to a rational, pragmatic, technical understanding, he calls for a turn to reflexive practice for the future. For Moore, this means the teacher has to understand the multiple (and potentially conflicting) identities she holds, accommodating new ideas rather than assimilating them, with an overarching goal of developing pupils' navigational capacities rather than imposing knowledge from above. If this is the kind of teacher they need to become, what virtues will help them fulfil expectations?

Academic literature is lamentably quiet on the moral dimensions of teaching (Kristjánsson 2011, Campbell 2013) despite recognition of the importance of their role in developing the character of young people (Arthur 2003). The emphasis remains on the *competencies* required of the person (Hyland 1993) rather than character strengths, or in a limited literature on *values* in teaching as opposed to *virtues* (Bryan 2012). More recent work has begun to focus on virtues in teaching (Higgins 2011, Orchard 2011, Sockett 2012) and yet clearly, the emphasis in policy on performativity and performance measurement has shaped the discourse of what it means to be a 'good teacher'. It is easier to measure a person's conduct from a task orientated perspective than a personal virtue orientation. Teachers are variously portrayed as 'selfless saints' or 'selfish scoundrels' (Higgins 2010: 189) but in reality they are role models in the classroom through 'model(ling) integrity by choosing to do the right thing, even when no one is looking' (Lumpkin 2008). If Carr is correct, and teaching does convey particular responsibilities, as a society there is justification for an interest in teachers' 'principled dispositions' (Carr 2011).

Policy support for good teachers

> *School teaching is one of the few professions besides nursing capable of elevating a character with ordinary baseness to mythic status simply by requiring him to practice his vice within the boundaries of his chosen profession.*
>
> *Whaley 1989*

The 2004 General Teaching Council for England (GTCE) Statement of Professional Values and Practice for Teachers included the statement, 'Teachers demonstrate the characteristics they are

trying to inspire in pupils, including a spirit of intellectual enquiry, tolerance, honesty, fairness, patience….'. The revised Code of Conduct and Practice for Registered Teachers (GTCE 2009) based its recommendations on the seven principles of public life described in the Nolan Committee report (Nolan 1995), namely selflessness, integrity, honesty, objectivity, accountability, openness and leadership. Other implicit virtues within the Code were care, self-awareness, reflection and love of learning.

More recently, the Code has been replaced by the Teachers' Standards (DfE 2012) which have been described as making a 'significant break' with past professional standards (Bryan 2012) because of the requirement for teachers to 'not undermine fundamental British values' (DfE 2012:9). In the preamble to the Standards, teachers are expected to 'demonstrate consistently the positive attitudes, values and behaviour which are expected of pupils'. The main body of the Standards is entitled 'Personal and Professional Conduct', making a clear link between the person and the professional (Pike 2013).

Despite extolling the virtues of teachers, the emphasis in policy often focuses on classroom *practice*. Michael Gove introduced the White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching' (DfE 2010) as 'a vision of the teacher as our society's most valuable asset' stating 'there is no calling more noble, no profession more vital and no service more important than teaching', yet the content of the Paper is dominated by service organisation and classroom practice. Similarly, the OFSTED Inspection Framework (2013) focuses on classroom practice, and virtues of love of learning and respect are implicit rather than explicit.

Policy makers are often reluctant to enter the quagmire of defining personal attributes required by professionals, but it is reasonable to assume that those engaged in recruiting the next generation of teachers consider these in their selection processes. The requirement for teachers to demonstrate levels of competency in English, Maths and ICT have not been matched with similar requirements for virtues applicable to teaching. Nor are these reflected in Entry Profiles to Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses at university, which predominantly focus on qualifications required and have little to say on personal attributes (see http://www.ucas.ac.uk/). Similarly, the government's careers guidance website makes no mention of the personal attributes required of teachers, apart from needing 'a good sense of humour' and 'patience' (see www.direct.gov.uk/National**Careers**Service*). In recruitment policy the focus has been on improving the academic profile of entrants to the profession, with an emphasis on those with high grades at degree level entering ITE, rather than on the virtues good teachers need.

From person to practice

The literature and policy discourse emphasises the *craft* of teaching, rather than the *craftsperson*, yet popular perceptions tend to focus on the personal qualities of teachers that stand out in memory. Passion and enthusiasm, together with creativity, love of learning and integrity are frequently highlighted in popular discourses, demonstrated above. The Virtues and Values in the Professions (VPP) project within the Jubilee Centre for Character and Values[1] is seeking to understand the place of virtues within the teaching profession (amongst others) through empirical research. As part of that research, data are being collected from students completing their ITE at four institutions, via an online survey[2] asking them to identify six important character strengths for teachers to hold, and it is to emerging findings from this research we now turn.

The project draws upon the work of Peterson and Seligman (2004). Extensive background research led them to identify 24 character strengths, grouped within 6 'families' of core virtues which, according to their research, enjoy universal recognition. These strengths are listed in the survey for the VPP project and students are asked to identify and rank from 1 to 6 the top six strengths they think the good teacher should hold.

The sample

The demographic profile of the 78 survey respondents matches the profile of the English teaching workforce well, apart from age characteristics, unsurprising since the survey specifically targets new teachers as they complete their training. The gender, ethnicity and age profile of the sample, compared with government figures of the teacher workforce in state schools in 2012 (DfE 2013), is illustrated below:

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[1] The Jubilee Centre for Character and Values is an interdisciplinary research centre focussing on character, virtues and values, based at the University of Birmingham.
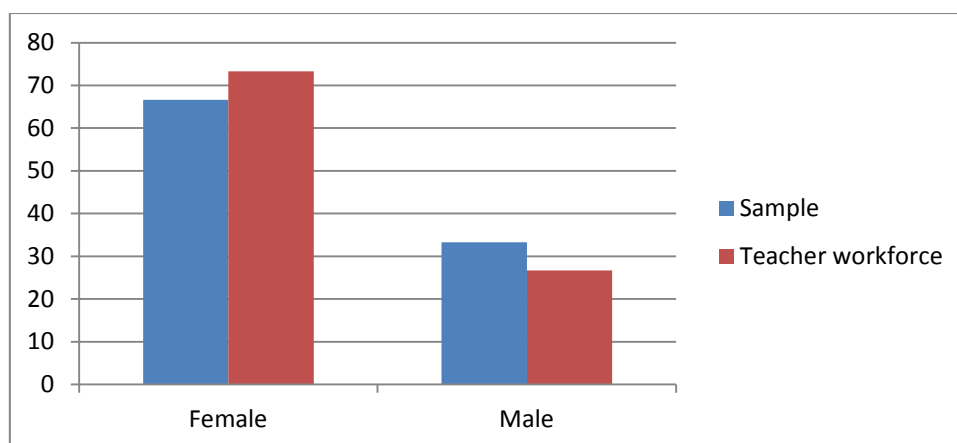[2] The online survey was administered through surveygizmo, a user-friendly web-based survey design tool.

Figure 1: Gender profile of the teaching workforce in England 2012 and survey respondents, as percentages
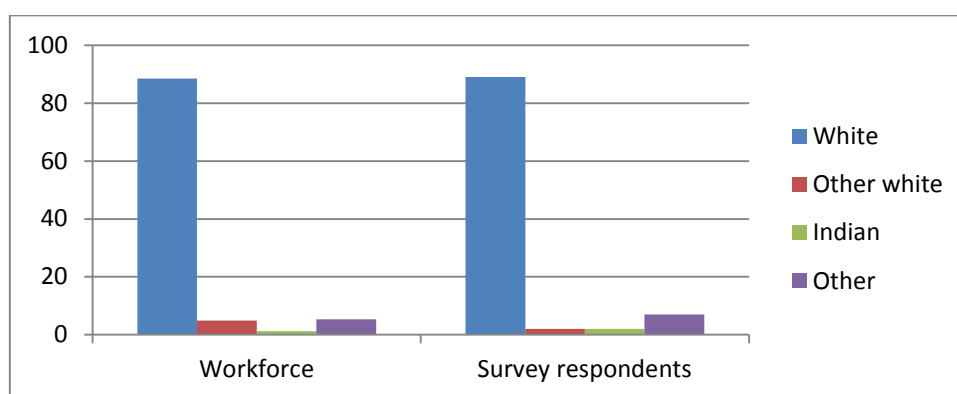

Figure 2: Reported ethnicity of the teaching workforce in England 2012 and survey respondents, as percentages (categories taken from Statistical First Release SFR15/2013, DfE 2013)

The age of survey respondents was noticeably younger than the teaching workforce for England in 2012. Within the workforce 23.6% were under 30 years of age and 21.2% over 50. In the survey, only 7% were over 50, the rest under 30.
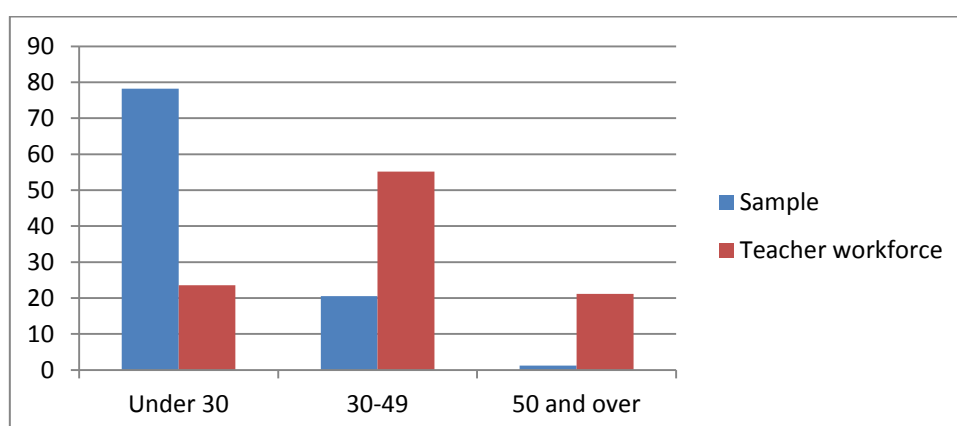

Figure 3: Age of the teaching workforce in England 2012 and survey respondents, as percentages

The priority character strengths of teachers

Respondents were asked to choose six, and then rank from 1-6, the character strengths they felt teachers should have to be a good teacher, from Peterson and Seligman's 24: 1 was the most important, 6 being the least important of the 6. Data were exported from the online survey into Excel spreadsheets and simple statistical analysis undertaken. Later in the project more sophisticated analysis will be undertaken. At this stage, the focus of interest is to identify the most frequently cited character strengths, to understand the importance attached to those strengths, and the degree of consistency amongst respondents in their rankings. Table 1 below shows how all 24 character strengths were identified by respondents, in descending order by number of citations.

Character strength	Number of people mentioning this strength, in descending order	Number of people ranking this strength 1 to 3	Number of people ranking this strength 4 to 6
Fairness	65	46	19
Creativity	60	39	21
Love of learning	52	34	18
Humour	46	17	29
Teamwork	34	15	19
Honesty	28	16	12
Perseverance	28	12	16
Leadership	28	10	18
Kindness	22	10	12
Social Intelligence	21	10	11
Judgement	19	8	11
Curiosity	15	3	12
Perspective	12	3	9
Forgiveness	9	3	6
Self-regulation	8	2	6
Zest	8	2	6
Hope	6	1	5
Bravery	3	1	2
Modesty	2	0	2
Appreciation of beauty	1	1	0
Love	1	1	0
Gratitude	0	0	0
Prudence	0	0	0
Spirituality	0	0	0

Table 1: Character strengths by number of citations; number of rankings 1-3; and number of rankings 4-6.

From this, the most frequently identified strengths were fairness, creativity and love of learning, all of which were ranked at 1-3 by more people than those who ranked them 4-6, reinforcing their perceived importance. The chart below illustrates the numbers of people citing the ten most frequently identified character strengths, ranking them between 1 and 6 and it is to these we now turn to examine the finer details.

Figure 4: The ten most frequently cited character strengths identified by numbers of respondents.

In their work, Peterson and Seligman (op cit) group the 24 strengths into six 'families': wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence. Of these, only temperance (forgiveness, humility, prudence and self-regulation) failed to appear in the first ten character strengths identified by respondents. Justice (teamwork, fairness and leadership) appeared in all three aspects, and wisdom, courage and humanity each recorded two character strengths in the top ten. Transcendence had one mention, humour. By examining the breakdown of rankings of those strengths most frequently identified, a more nuanced picture emerges. Figure 5 below illustrates the distribution of rankings 1-3 for the ten most frequently identified character strengths.

From the chart, fairness and love of learning both recorded more first place rankings than second and third places, again reinforcing the importance placed by respondents on these strengths.

Once second and third rankings are included in the analysis, creativity joins the list, followed by honesty, humour and teamwork.

Figure 6 below illustrates the distribution of rankings 4-6 for the ten most frequently cited character strengths. By these criteria, humour was the most frequently identified, followed by creativity and then fairness and teamwork. At the lower end of the top ten cited strengths, kindness and social intelligence recorded similar numbers of rankings 1-3 and 4-6.
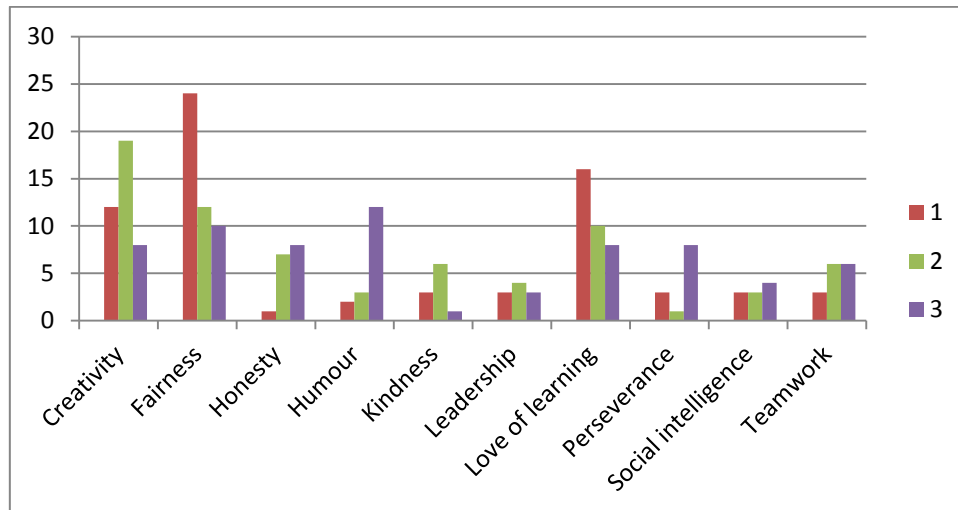

Figure 5: The distribution of rankings 1-3 of the ten most frequently identified character strengths
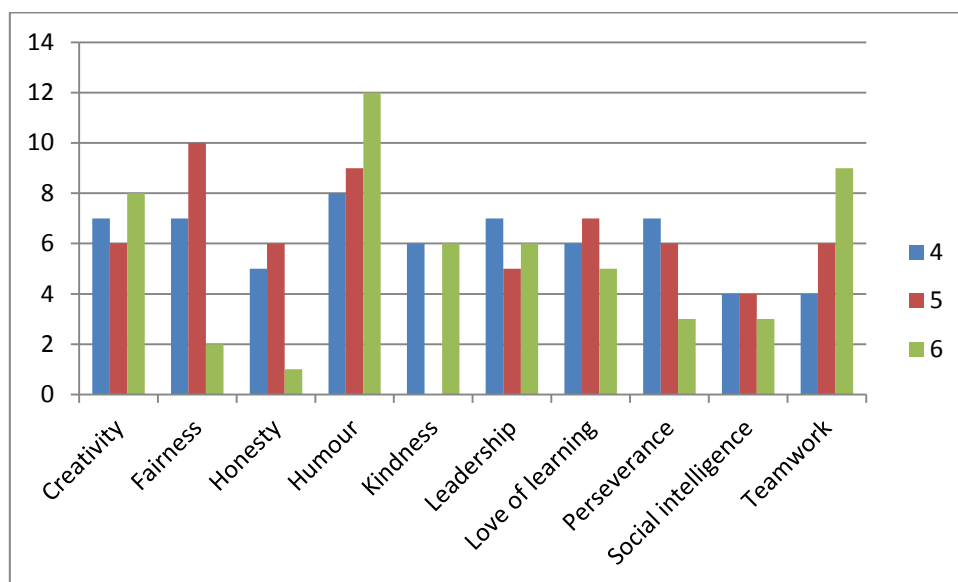

Figure 6: The distribution of rankings 4-6 of the ten most frequently identified character strengths

This finding demonstrates the value of the ranking exercise, because it reveals the details behind the headline figures. Examining the distribution of rankings allows a picture to emerge of both

dominant and divergent views on the importance of specific strengths. Four strengths recorded more than 50% of rankings 1-3: fairness, creativity, honesty and love of learning, suggesting a degree on consensus that these are important strengths in good teachers.

Conversely, four strengths recorded more than 50% of rankings 4-6, suggesting a lower priority for more respondents. These were leadership, humour, kindness, and perseverance, illustrated in Figures 7-10 below.
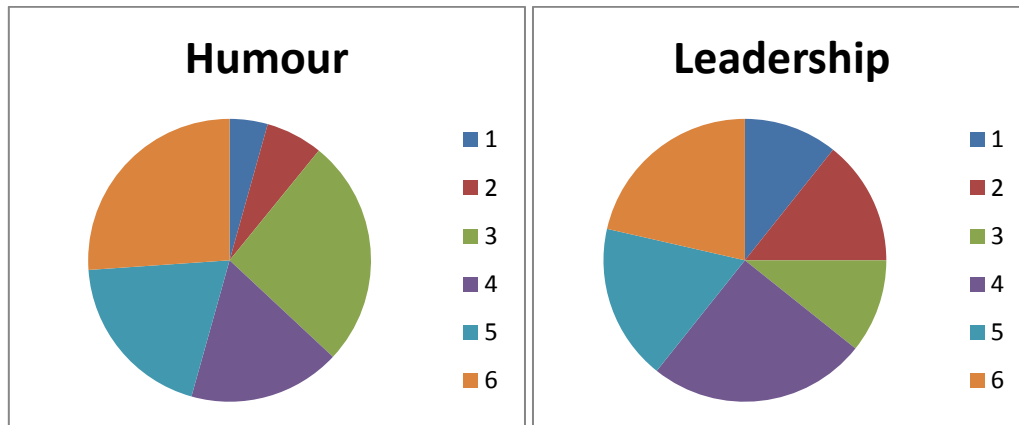

Figure 7: distribution of rankings for humour   **Figure 8:** distribution of rankings for leadership
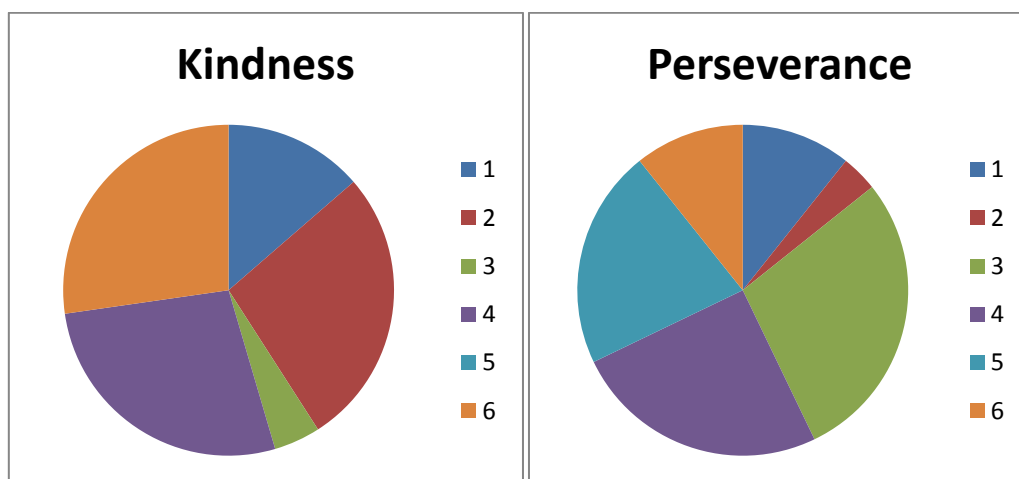

Figure 9: distribution of rankings for kindness   **Figure 10:** distribution of rankings for perseverance

The remaining two strengths, social intelligence and teamwork, received an almost even distribution of rankings from 1-6, suggesting a lack of agreement amongst respondents about the importance of these strengths to the good teacher. See Figures 11 and 12 below.
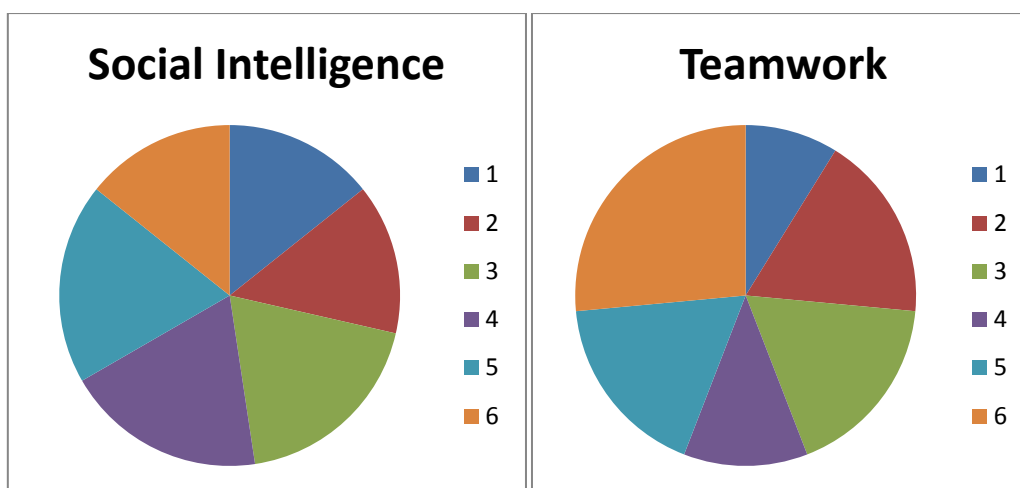
Figure 11: distribution of rankings for social intelligence **Figure 12:** distribution of rankings for teamwork

Finally, it is worth noting that three virtues were not chosen by any of the respondents: gratitude, prudence and spirituality, and two strengths were chosen by only one respondent each, love and appreciation of beauty. All of these, apart from love, fall within the broader 'families' of transcendence and temperance, suggesting beginning teachers responding to the survey placed less value on these aspects of character.

What makes a *good* teacher?

The virtues of fairness, creativity, honesty and love of learning were most frequently cited as most important by graduating ITE students in the VPP survey. These resonate with the virtues identified in popular discourse that good teachers should hold. This may simply reflect absorbed perceptions but they suggest that future teachers hold a commitment to justice and wisdom that bodes well for education. Having a good sense of humour was emphasised in government recruitment literature for teachers, but there was less obvious consensus about its importance amongst survey respondents. Social Intelligence and teamwork, closely related, were lower down the priorities and showed a dispersed distribution of rankings. They are clearly important in teaching, but it is not clear the place they hold. Transcendence and temperance featured very little if at all in responses.

These findings resonate well with the policy discourse on the virtues of good teachers, despite the focus on technical competence. The 2004 GTCE Statement (2004), revised Code of Conduct and Practice (GTCE 2009) and the Teachers' Standards (DfE 2012) all highlight 'intellectual

enquiry', 'love of learning' and 'positive attitudes' respectively, reflected as well when members of the public describe teachers with passion for, and knowledge of, the subject. Beginning teachers recognised that in their foregrounding of love of learning in survey responses.

Similarly, honesty and fairness are key strengths for teachers described in the above Codes and Standards, as well as popular discourse. Honesty and integrity were two of the seven principles of public life described in the Nolan Committee report (Nolan, 1995) and if teachers are to expect such behaviour in their pupils it is right that they hold these virtues themselves. Fairness in teaching may manifest itself in a number of ways including treating pupils with respect, responding to pupils as individuals, upholding school policies in a transparent fashion for example, and these are all within the spirit of the Teachers' Standards. Therefore, although not highlighted in the *political* discourse, there is a high degree of consistency between professional Codes and Standards in teaching, public perceptions and the reported virtues of these beginning teachers.

This report has discussed early findings from a much larger, on-going study. Upon completion of data collection, the emerging picture may change and important aspects of enquiry will include:

- What are the differences between genders, ages and ethnicities in reporting character strengths?
- What is the relationship between religious beliefs and reported character strengths?
- Do reported character strengths in teachers change as training and work environment shape practice?
- What place do character strengths of humour, social intelligence and teamwork play in the good teacher?

The overarching question for our analysis will be to understand the relationship between character strengths and classroom practice. In order to be a good teacher, what kind of a person does one need to be? This report represents an early contribution to that debate.

Acknowledgment

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