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HISTORICALVIRTUESINU.S.SCHOOLING HOWTOREFINECHARACTEREDUCATION

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"Historical Virtues" in U.S. Schooling: How to Refine Character Education?

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I. Introduction

This article includes current issues of character education in American public schooling as findings indicate character education has little long-term influence in the development of virtues for students. Next, I trace the historical roots of virtues from philosophy and theology. These intellectual and moral habits could redefine expectations in modern educational settings, as well as future societal practices. I argue that students need a collaborative effort from parents and teachers that can instill "historical virtues."Through service activities and discussions, students can learn how to internalize moral standards. In conclusion, moral implications from such a traditional understanding of virtues support individual happiness and social progress.

Socrates, as quoted by Plato, spoke these words over 2,500 years ago, "The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers."Educational debates about practices for a child's moral development have existed since the beginning of time. Indeed, the problem of providing a moral education to students has been, as well as remains, a longstanding issue in American public schooling (Xiandong 2014; Fullinwider 2010; Kunzman 2006; Noddings 2000; Ryan and Lickona 1992).People hold memories from their school experiences for the rest of their lives, and many aspects of character education can be refined in order to provide positive experiences for students. In this article, I seek to shed light on these moral education debates by examining and extending a "historical virtues" approach in present-day U.S. education.

II. Questioning Character Education

Character education focuses on students' development and manifestation of virtues. Development psychologist Thomas Lickona (1991) asserts that honesty, respect, and prudence are important virtues for students to learn and live. Teaching virtues, however, involves many complexities. First, educators, policy makers, administration and even researchers question how these virtues can be taught for long-term moral development in character education. Second, if virtues are not gained by instruction, then educational leaders wonder how these virtues can be gained in school contexts. To grapple with these concepts about moral development more fully, recent research indicates that character is difficult to learn—that is, acquire—through explicit means (Davis 2003). Commanding a person to be responsible or compassionate or kind does not mean that a child improves upon that particular trait. Other research indicates that hands-on approaches, such as volunteer service with discussions and journal writing, do enhance students' moral judgments (Narvaez 2001; Lopez and Lopez 1998,Dulack et al. 2011).Therefore, educators should consider how these specific techniques of moral instruction can lead students to improve their moral thinking.

I am arguing here that service activities and discussions throughout a child's schooling hold valuable components for student moral development. Lawrence Kohlberg and Richard H. Hersh (1977) famously noted, "Whether we like it or not, schooling is a moral enterprise. Values issues abound in the content and process of teaching" (p. 53). I concur. Because of various interactions and rules, school teachers have intricate moral responsibilities so that they implement ways that students can explore beliefs which are evaluative in nature about right or wrong. With character education in mind, these traits cannot be talked into people's hearts; in fact, as Kohlberg (1981) pointed out, character education relies too much on a training method, which often manifest as conscious examples of how to behave. As we shall see shortly, hidden moral curriculum, in rules and dialogues, plays a key role too (Sizer and Sizer 1999; Coles 1986; Paley 1992). Educators, historically and now, thus question how to effectively teach virtues—not to mention the standards of those virtues. Referring to my earlier example, Socrates wondered how virtues should be taught and shared doubts that people learn by explicit means. Despite many complexities, how are sustainable virtues developed? Let us first consider the typical reaction of people who feel forced into a way of thinking. While some people may obey, history reveals that many people will rebel, because they cannot be told what to think or do concerning their own sense of right or wrong. And yet, a child does learn by observing, participating,

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and discussing with careful facilitation of how to behave in virtuous ways.

III. Tracing Historical Roots of the Virtues

In U.S. education, the theoretical roots that shaped character education originated from ancient Greek philosophy. These virtues ethics are questioned and explored as Plato writes conversations between Socrates and his companions in the *Republic.* Through these Socratic dialogues, four virtues are introduced in order to describe various classes of the city: wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice (Plato trans. 1992).The guardians of the city have experience to show wisdom. Other people of the city also demonstrate and share particular virtues; in other words, they use their virtues in the best interest of the city. For instance, the warriors must show courage while they protect the city and its people. Virtues require right reason in actions and contemplation.

In addition to introducing these virtues, Plato argues people have an obligation for truth and education. He explains the "Allegory of the Cave," which demonstrates people should search for wisdom (514a-520a).Despite human errors, this quest for justice, truth, and happiness remains a core component of his work on virtue ethics. Plato is able to "compare the effect of education and of the lack of it on our nature" (514a) through this cave experience of people not willing to take risks and to trust each other so that ideas can grow. Aristotle, Plato's student, regarded wisdom as essential for both individual pleasure and social progress (Aristotle trans. 1999). Plato and Aristotle agreed that moral reasoning is fundamental to fulfillment in life, despite Aristotle placing emphasis on habits as a way to behave virtuously while Plato was concerned about effective modeling and example behaviors. Virtuous thinking, of course, may not lead to moral action. However, for all of these considerations about moral reasoning and roots, educators do understand that these virtues are crucial for collaborative workings of a society.

To Christianize these virtues in the Latin West, Ambrose of Milan first used the term "cardinal virtues" (Ambrose, trans. 1953). During a funeral for his brother Satyrus, he is the first known person to reference the Greek virtues and use the term *virtutes cardinals* as his goal was to show praise. For a person to live by these virtues, that person had achieved a worthy and moral life. Jerome, then, referred to them as modeled from the Greek fathers, which saved original ideas from Origen's analysis (Hagendahl 1958). Many scholars refined theory about development and usage of virtues. However, Thomas Aquinas developed a virtue-oriented system that has become a significant voice in character tradition.

From the writings of Aquinas, four essential virtues—prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance—are guiding a person's moral thought and actions (Aquinas trans. 1981). These specific virtues are referred to as the "cardinal" virtues, because intellectual and moral life requires these habits as they exemplify human morality. This concept is seen perfectly when Aquinas wrote, "The word *cardinal* comes from hinge, that on which a door opens… so the cardinal virtues are those on this the entrance to humane living turn" (Aquinas trans. 1999, p. 1).In other words, a good life pivots around these traits. Prudence guides the other virtues through experience and practical living as the intellectual virtue. The other three are moral virtues in Thomistic thought. Justice requires fair relations with other people. Two components, as observed by Aquinas, must exist in order for people to demonstrate justice: doing good and avoiding evil. Fortitude involves endurance and mental confidence, and Aquinas expounded it as acting with proper courage in the face of challenges. Temperance allows humans to avoid an excess of pleasurable indulgences. In particular, this trait promotes the practice of moderation so that humans recognize and act with a healthy balance. In order to develop, these traits are viewed as the cornerstones of natural morality.

After having identified philosophical and theological roots of virtues, I would like to explain the educational meaning of "historical virtues" in this article. I am simply considering historical virtues as any and all the traits of these original Greek virtues that exist for people to use in ethical and critical ways. The four earthly virtues are considered foundations in both philosophy and theology. Indeed, many philosophers express that a well-ordered person and well-ordered society use these specific virtues (Mattison III 2008). For the purposes of this article, I am taking into account any traits of these virtues since they were written by Plato and passed down to his students and their students. This type of communication remains a key factor in moral education. Schooling interactions, understood in this way, could cultivate the traits within these virtues, especially valuable characteristics. To illustrate, justice includes honesty, dignity, and gratitude, and these various traits of the virtues become salient for human activities. Implementing these virtues does not mean that limitations exist pertaining to a certain discipline or subject. Thus, moral education of these core virtues can be learned and utilized in any context so that students *feel* the importance of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance as a foundation to social progress and human happiness.

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IV. Understanding and Implementing Historical Virtues as a Community

As mentioned previously, research studies indicate that hands-on service and dialogue improve moral thinking. The point here is to consider and inspire ways that educators can build these components into curriculum, whether explicitly or implicitly. Students, who are interacting with information and each other, can grapple and question the meaning of virtues while they learn. In a classroom, students are learning what type of community is accepted from the leaders. Although it might be assumed that the director in many ways is the classroom teacher, I would like to point out that students also act in leadership roles that influence their peers greatly. People of all ages experience this every day. For instance, employees at work behave as what is acceptable to other peers. If a person does not like specific demonstrated words or actions, then the expectations are conveyed. Sometimes this is verbally spoken, but often the reactions are nonverbal cues. To further explain this natural moral development, one of the founders of moral development research, Jean Piaget (1966) noted how his research subjects heuristically learned the system as they discussed, reacted, and refined the rules to fit their game. This information is powerful, though because human nature can never conclusively be predicted from situation to situation, it does indicate how children test and waitin order to discover outcomes.

American children do spend significant amounts of time in classrooms. Even so, they are surrounded by many social networks of adults, besides their classroom teachers, who touch their lives. Coaches, tutors, friends' parents, and community leaders interact with youth as they navigate their social relations. With this in mind, students often tend to imitate adults around them. A significant body of research indicates parents are a child's first teacher and the strongest influence for academic success (Henderson and Mapp 2002; Jeynes 2007; Mihyeon 2014). Teachers and parents must act with moral responsibility so that students understand expectations regarding moral behavior too. According to Bransford et al. (2000), students account only 14% of their time in school, while they spend 33% sleeping and 53% at home and in the community. When the school and outer community become connected, the students' best interest for intellectual and moral development can be enhanced.

One example of success through mutual respect, strong community, and committed love can be seen with Deborah Meier's "small-schools movement" where school leaders promote the ideology of dreams as public property (1995).She recognizes schools acting with cooperative investment, because the community values inclusion and collaboration. I would like to extend her idea by proffering that these creative collaborations often lead to moral lessons, relating to prudence and justice, since community members begin to cherish differences and to build relationships. The historical virtues stay the same, yet students must learn how to apply them in daily habits, whether at school or not.In order to learn these virtues, students must observe how teachers use and live these traits. As with a story, morality is not told but needs to be illustrated. Students, who become active learners and not passive recipients, are able to engage in school opportunities where they work on social projects or fund-raise for causes; in other words, these types of experiences foster service and care. Math classes could use formulas and budgeting skills to build or fund-raise for people in need. Furthermore, social sciences classes, such as history, philosophy, and geography, could discuss issues of fairness and learn practices for compassion. As moral thinking develops, students learn to adjust rules of social interactions (Piaget 1966), and this becomes apparent by the moral nature of interactions within a school system. Based upon this view, teachers constantly make moral judgments of what and how to teach in their classrooms. Children, most importantly, tend to imitate what they see and hear, following the lead of teachers and other students. For this reason, if American educators want to build a community of virtuous people, then they also recognize that passing down virtues requires moral responsibility and much love.

V. Concluding Thoughts

This model of historical virtues that developed from ancient history and philosophy are not new—rather, it involves applying and embracing habits of these virtues in present-day times without a prescriptive approach. Given the complexities of human thoughts and actions, educators, parents, and mentors should encourage an openness to explore and discuss how to practice a life of love through these historical virtues. However, students are always watching and absorbing new information, and they will develop an internal moral compass from pragmatic application. If these virtues are not examined with proper attention, students will neglect the significance of virtues, truth, and happiness. By allowing and encouraging questions, educators demonstrate moral teachings are there, not to constrict at all, but lead people toward balance and happiness. Fulfilled lives respect others and self. Educators and parents have a responsibility to provide space and support while students grapple for personal meaning and evolve from moral challenges. As a significant moral development pioneer, Piaget (1966) observed, "Moral consciousness appears when the self is no longer in a state of harmony, when there is opposition between the various tendencies that constitute it" (388).Therefore, conflict promotes progress and all educators can seize

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the opportunity to promote moral development from everyday school challenges.

To conclude, this discussion examines the origin of historical virtues and the current need to refine character education by exploring and applying traditional moral standards for situations of the 21st century. As demonstrated through this review of the history and implementation of virtues, I argue that increased awareness and deepened understanding of how to apply these virtues are key components in order to improve modern character education practices. Historically, and certainly today, students ask, "Why does being morally good matter?"We can answer, despite thousands of years filled with inquiry and debates, humans know a simple, universal truth: individual happiness and social progress are rooted in love. Put succinctly, to develop good people we have to care and provide an authentic moral education for all. Socrates had concerns about a morally good education for the youth of many, many years ago. Heasserted that education should make its most critical concern a question of how humans can learn to live virtuously since fulfilled and happy people understand lives as rooted in an ethic of love.I second the motion.

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