

JUDEO-CHRISTIAN SOURCES OF CHARACTER EDUCATION Learning From England's Most Academically Improved Academy

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This article reports findings from a study of England's most improved academy, a high school in a former mining community serving a designated social priority area. The correlation between academic success and character education based upon the core values of the school is reported with reference to quantitative and qualitative data obtained from a funded research project (2007-2008) of which the author was the principal investigator. Similarities and differences between well-respected character education advocated in the United States and that engaged in at the case study academy in the United Kingdom are evaluated. Attention is drawn to the importance of students understanding and interpreting the sources of the character education and core values upon which their schooling is founded. It is argued that seeking to shape a student's character without helping that young person to understand the sources upon which that character education is based, fails to model the honesty and integrity characteristic of quality character education. Consequently, greater transparency regarding the Judeo-Christian sources of character education in the United States and United Kingdom is advocated.

INTRODUCTION

The structure of this article is straightforward. First, the national and local context is described with special reference to the students and community served by the academy in question, which enables its academic, social

and cultural transformation to be appreciated. Second, the core values and character education of the academy are described and compared with approaches in the United States. Third, the importance of students' engagement with the sources of core values and character education is evaluated.

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EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN ENGLAND: NATIONAL AND LOCAL

The case study academy described in this article lies at the heart of the former coal mining community of Thorne, near Doncaster, in Yorkshire, in the north of England. From the 1980s jobs have been scarce in the area which the academy serves, which had been ranked in the worst 10% nationally for unemployment and in the worst 4% in the country as regards educational attainment. Health levels were within the worst 5% nationally and the area had the fourth highest concentration of single parent families nationally. Even before the 2008-2009 economic downturn there were much lower levels of prosperity and much higher levels of deprivation in this area than in most of the rest of England.

In England, academies are specifically charged with raising academic standards and student attainment in areas of social and economic disadvantage. There are certain resemblances between academies in England and charter schools in America. In England, a local authority may transfer the management of a school to a private organization through the academies program. Generally this is in difficult cases where there is persistent underachievement and a series of government-sponsored initiatives have failed to bring about improvement in academic attainment. The private sponsor provides financial support as well as ongoing expertise and may influence school culture, ethos and values in order to bring about the desired transformation. Students at academies generally follow a national curriculum and take common nationally standardized assessments at the age of 16 as they do in other state-maintained schools.

Schools in England are judged (and appear in league tables in national and local newspapers and on the Internet) according to the percentage of their 16-year-olds that gain at least a "C grade" or "pass" standard in at least five school subjects in nationally standardized GCSE (General Certificate in Secondary Education) examinations. For instance, a student

gaining a C grade in GCSE maths, English, science, history, and technology would be counted in the percentage. The C grade at GCSE is important to a student's life chances and prospects because it is required for access to the next level of study. As might be expected, the academic attainment of students at the local state high school, serving the communities of Thorne and Moorends, was in need of significant improvement before its management was transferred to the Emmanuel Schools Foundation (ESF) and it became Trinity Academy in September 2005. The average over the five previous years (2001-2005) was for just 28% of students to gain five or more GCSE passes at grade C or higher. In England, GCSE courses last for the final 2 years of compulsory education (from age 14 to 16). In 2006, after the academy's first year (when students had been in the predecessor school for the first year of their GCSE course) 34% of students passed their five school subjects. In 2007, 65% of students experienced this level of success. In 2008, 74% of students achieved these results and 85% did so in 2009. In other words, between 2006 and 2009 results improved by an astonishing 50%. This article explores to what such a dramatic improvement in academic attainment might be attributed.

From initial qualitative research (such as interviews with teachers, focus group work with 14-year-olds and lesson observations carried out over several weeks during 2007-08 at Trinity Academy) it became clear that many students and staff linked or attributed the school's success to its core values (honorable purpose, humility, compassion, integrity, accountability, courage, determination). Evidence of this emphasis within the school culture was not initially sought (or even hypothesized) but emerged from the initial qualitative fieldwork. Following this qualitative phase, a confidential survey of the 191, 14-year-old students and all 101 staff was administered. This was designed to gauge the degree to which the views of the students and staff who had been interviewed were reflected more widely. The academy has around 1,200

students between the ages of 11 and 18 and the research project reported here deliberately focused upon the perceptions and experiences of 14-year-olds (Year 9) to allow for as much depth as possible during the qualitative phase in the time available. These were the students who had spent all of their secondary school careers at the academy as this research was conducted during its third year of operation.

Many schools in the United Kingdom rightly regard improved results of 10% as a significant achievement but to include 50% more teenagers in the experience of educational success in such a short period of time is unprecedented. Trinity Academy serves the same geographical area as its predecessor as it is the only high school in Thorne and Moorends. As teachers' jobs are protected when the management of a school changes, most transferred from the old school to the new one that was built next door. Put simply, the area and teachers are generally the same but the management, buildings, school culture, values, ethos and character education of the school are distinctly different. In 2007 Trinity Academy was designated by SSAT (the government's Specialist Schools and Academies Trust) as the most academically improved academy in England and also the most academically improved secondary school in Yorkshire and Humberside, a large region of England.

Just after receiving these awards at high profile ceremonies in London and receiving personal communication from the government minister responsible for schools, Lord Adonis, I asked the principal of Trinity Academy, during a recorded interview, whether "character" or "academics" was the most important priority at the academy. Without the slightest hesitation the principal replied:

Character. I've said it's character first and then the rest will come. If you've got character first the rest will come.

Clearly this is congruent with research findings from the United States that "quality character education results in academic gains for

students" (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004, p. 78). Yet Trinity Academy is also remarkable because, in the English context, it is engaged in "character education" at all when the emphasis in most state schools is upon "citizenship education" (Pike, 2007; QCA, 1998, 1999) rather than moral and character education (Arthur, 2003). The similarities and differences between character education and citizenship education have been discussed recently (Davies et al, 2005) but it is sufficient to note here that the emphasis in citizenship is upon *political* knowledge and activity (the "informed" and "active" citizen) rather than *moral* knowledge and activity. Promoting support for, and allegiance to, liberal democracy rather than supporting personal moral or character education seems to be the priority for the United Kingdom government (Pike, 2008). Yet, judging by the results achieved at Trinity Academy, the approaches to core values and character education developed there could be of considerable benefit to other schools.

Approaches vary but "if a school-based initiative targets character development," as defined by Berkowitz and Bier (2004), "in either its program design or its outcomes and goals, then it is a form of character education" (p. 74). It is important to recognize that:

Character education has been demonstrated to be associated with academic motivation and aspirations, academic achievement, prosocial behaviour, bonding to school, prosocial and democratic values, conflict-resolution skills, moral-reasoning maturity, responsibility, respect, self-efficacy, self-control, self-esteem, social skills, and trust in and respect for teachers. (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004, p. 75)

What is striking, however, is that the architects of Trinity Academy's character education were unfamiliar with authors such as Lickona or Berkowitz, books such as *Character Matters* (Lickona, 2004) or *Educating for Character—How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility* (Lickona, 1991), journals such as the *Journal of Research on Character Education* or even with such organizations as the Character Education Partnership (CEP) in the

United States. There are, therefore, some significant differences, as well as similarities, between the approaches employed at Trinity Academy and those familiar to American character educators.

Given that the academy was only in its third year when the research reported here was carried out, the endorsement of character education by a wide range of staff and students is significant. The character education at Trinity Academy is not so much a “program” as it is pervasive and in the following section the views of the sponsor, principal, staff and students are reported. Trinity Academy’s “core values” (which are the basis of its character education) are compared with Lickona’s “essential virtues” (2004) and aspects of school life that illustrate the pervasive nature of the character education are reported.

COMMITMENT TO CHARACTER EDUCATION AND CORE VALUES

According to recent research “the school leader is the most critical individual in the success or failure of a character-education initiative” and “to positively impact an entire school, the school principal’s role is essential” (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004, p. 77). The necessity of *living* one’s values as a school principal is made clear:

An effective principal needs to (1) “get it,” (2) “buy into it,” and (3) “live it.” In other words, leading a school of character requires that the principal first fully understands what quality character education entails (most do not). Then the principal must really commit to this vision and truly want to make it happen under his or her watch. Finally, the principal must have the requisite skills to enact quality character education and then to *live it out* both personally and programmatically (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004, p. 77, emphasis added)

The similarity in the language used in the following statement by the principal of Trinity Academy, where the emphasis is also upon being able and willing to “live it,” with reference to values and character, is worth noting:

We are unusual I guess. A lot of places have a mission statement and they have core values but the key thing is do they *live* in your school? Are they *alive*? Are they spoken of?

The final section of this article explores the underlying reasons that the principal of this academy gives to explain why he “gets it, buys into it and lives it” which also provides information about the origin of Trinity Academy’s pervasive moral culture. The principal’s response when he was asked about his achievements indicate his priorities and values:

We have people here who will walk out of this place who are on their way to Oxbridge, I’ve got a boy in Year 13, he’s just got straight As, physics, maths, further maths, chemistry ... but *for me* it’s the youngster who has struggled, the youngster who has been an outsider, the youngster who has no self-confidence, the youngster who has no self-worth, the youngster who has a terrible time at home who comes here and actually *for them gains confidence, gains self worth, enjoys school, makes friends, becomes accepted, does the best that they can do.* They won’t get the headlines, but that for me is what Trinity is all about.

Although the principal is one of the most significant figures in the academy’s success, the views and values of the whole senior leadership team, comprising one principal and three vice-principals, are influential. When Dr. Julie McGonigle, the vice-principal for teaching and learning was asked how significant the core values were in achieving the success at Trinity, her response was unequivocal as she stated: “They are the single greatest factor.” Dr. McGonigle’s previous research experience (2000a, 2001) as well as her insider knowledge inform this judgment. It is also significant that over the course of the case study no-one attributed Trinity’s success to its status as an academy or its business and enterprise specialism.

At Trinity Academy, most students agreed that the school’s core values were good values to follow and it is important to define what those values are. Upon the values card belong-

ing to each student, can be found the following:

Core Values—All our work will be characterised by the following values:

Honorable Purpose

We aim to be positive in everything, doing what is good and aiming to benefit others as well as ourselves.

Humility

We seek to do our personal best without bragging and to encourage others to achieve their best without being critical or jealous of their efforts.

Compassion

We care for those who are in difficulty and who are hurting, recognising that the world does not exist for us alone.

Integrity

We can be trusted to be honest and truthful, to say what we mean and to do what we say.

Accountability

We recognize that having the freedom to express ourselves means we must also accept responsibility for our words, thoughts and actions.

Courage

We aim to do what is right, whatever the cost; we stand up for the weak, whatever the danger; we face our fears and find ways of defeating them.

Determination

We know that hard work and the refusal to give up are essential if we are to achieve anything worthwhile.

It is significant that the core values of Trinity Academy in England have so much in common with the essential virtues (Lickona, 2004, pp. 8-11) upon which much influential character education in the United States is based. The possible reasons for such similarities are considered in the final section of this article that addresses the sources of values. Comparing the seven core values that Trinity Academy's character education is founded upon with the

10 essential virtues for strong character described by Lickona is illuminating especially as the two have developed in isolation of each other:

1. Wisdom or Good Judgement

“how to put the other virtues into practice—*when to act, how to act ...*”

Wisdom enables us to discern correctly, to see *what is truly important in life*, and to set priorities *All our work* will be characterized by the following values (Lickona, 2004, p. 8).

Determination

We know that hard work and the refusal to give up are essential if we are to achieve *anything worthwhile*. (Trinity Academy)

2. Justice

“includes so many of the interpersonal virtues – civility, *honesty, respect, responsibility* and tolerance” (Lickona, 2004, p. 8).

Integrity

We can be *trusted to be honest* and truthful, to say what we mean and to do what we say.

Accountability

We recognise that having the freedom to express ourselves means *we must also accept responsibility* for our words, thoughts and actions (Trinity Academy).

3. Fortitude

“*to do what is right* in the face of difficulty ... *Courage*, resilience, patience, perseverance, *endurance*, and a healthy *self-confidence* are all aspects of fortitude” (Lickona, 2004, p. 8).

Courage

We aim *to do what is right*, whatever the cost; we stand up for the weak, whatever the danger; *we face our fears* and find ways of defeating them. (Trinity Academy)

4. Self-control (temperance)

“Self-control is the ability to govern ourselves ... to control our temper, regulate our sensual appetites and passions ... It's the power to resist temptation” (Lickona, 2004, p. 7).

Accountability

We recognise that having the freedom to express ourselves means we must also *accept*

responsibility for our words, thoughts and actions. (Trinity Academy)

5. Love “selfless love”

“A whole cluster of important human virtues – **empathy, compassion, kindness, generosity, service**, loyalty, patriotism ... and forgiveness make up the virtue of love” (Lickona, 2004, p. 9).

Compassion

We **care for those who are in difficulty and who are hurting**, recognising that **the world does not exist for us** alone. (Trinity Academy)

6. A Positive Attitude

“The character strengths of hope, enthusiasm, flexibility, and a sense of humor are all part of a **positive** attitude” (Lickona, 2004, p. 9).

Honourable Purpose

We aim **to be positive** in everything, doing what is good and aiming to benefit others as well as ourselves. (Trinity Academy)

7. Hard Work

“hard work includes initiative, **diligence**, goal-setting, and resourcefulness” (Lickona, 2004, p. 10).

Determination

We know that **hard work** and the **refusal to give up** are essential if we are to achieve anything worthwhile. (Trinity Academy)

8. Integrity

“being faithful to moral conscience, **keeping our word**, and standing up for what we believe... to be **‘whole’** so that **what we say** and do in different situations **is consistent** ... Integrity is ... **telling the truth to oneself**” (Lickona, 2004, p. 10).

Integrity

We can be trusted to be **honest** and truthful, **to say** what we mean and to **do what we say**. (Trinity Academy)

9. Gratitude

“Gratitude is often described as the secret of a happy life. It reminds us that we all drink from wells we did not dig. It moves us **to count our everyday blessings**” (Lickona, 2004).

Honourable Purpose

We aim **to be positive in everything**, doing what is good and aiming to benefit others as well as ourselves. (Trinity Academy)

10. Humility

“Humility enables us **to take responsibility** for our faults and failings (**rather than blaming** someone else), **apologize** for them, and seek to make amends” (Lickona, 2004, p. 11).

Humility

We seek to do our personal best without bragging and to encourage others to achieve their best **without being critical** or jealous of their efforts. (Trinity Academy)

Accountability

We recognise that having the freedom to express ourselves means we must also **accept responsibility** for **our words**, thoughts and actions. (Trinity Academy)

Research has shown that “staff involvement and commitment to character education is critical to effective implementation” for, “if staff do not understand the initiative, they will likely implement it ineffectively or reject it for the wrong reasons” (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004, p. 75). The validity of this conclusion is attested by findings from England’s most improved academy where core values are widely endorsed and subscribed to by staff. When surveyed, 88% of staff either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that “The Core Values of this school are easy to buy into” and 95% either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that, “Here whole school values are explicit and the kids know what they are.” Yet, 88% of staff thought that “in many other schools the whole school values are not as explicit as they are here.” The following extracts from interviews with teachers give an indication of this endorsement:

I was at (the previous school) before transition and continued in my role in the new school ... I think prior to the academy, I mean there wasn’t ... the ethos wasn’t as specific, it wasn’t as clear. Having those core values at least makes people ... not just the students but also the staff as well ... think about what they are

doing and how they actually fit in with those values ... they're there all the time. (English teacher)

I'm not saying for a second that the (predecessor) school had no values, 100% not saying that, but they were in no way explicit or ... you couldn't have asked a pupil at (the predecessor) school "What are this school's values?" and have got an answer with any degree of certainty ... you know like here they're explicit and the kids know what the values are ... it's reiterated in assemblies, you know, during assemblies it's linked to themes, they're given the little cards ... the independent learning centre down there ... they're emblazoned across the glass ... the kids just know what they are ... it is through the system and through assemblies ... but I think staff probably use the values with the kids as well without actually realising they're doing it. (Geography teacher)

It is important to consider how the school achieved such a transformation in culture and established the emphasis upon the importance of developing good character through the core values. The vice principal for teaching and learning at Trinity Academy, Dr. Julie McGonigle, explained how the practice of the staff was informed by the core values. She related how a teaching and learning group, comprised of teachers from Trinity's predecessor school, had "looked at a value each meeting" and asked, "What does that look like in a lesson?" and had "watched a lesson and critiqued it on the basis of the values." Dr. McGonigle also related that during the training before the new academy opened, one manager had even remarked, "I've just had a son, and to be presented with a kind of set of core values it gives me hope that I have something on which to base my parenting."

It is an easy matter for values to appear on a card or to be engraved on a glass wall (as they are next to the private study area at Trinity Academy) but quite another for them to become embedded, over a relatively short period of time, into a school culture. Further, seeking to communicate values through the pastoral care system of a school is quite different to character education that pervades the academic curriculum. At Trinity Academy

character education appears to be pervasive and is a concomitant of its ethos. Students were observed being prompted to apply their school's core values to their studies, from studying a Shakespeare play and finding out examination results to discussing vandalism in a local park and looking at historical source images on the slave trade. The following extracts from lessons serve to illustrate:

History Lesson on the Slave Trade (lower ability group, mainly boys)

Teacher:

When you look at what you see on the screen and when you see these sources try and just imagine if that was you ... just try and put yourself in that position as if it was you... Now then, what we're going to try and focus on as we do this is to try and ultimately look at some of the things that we obviously hold very dear to ourselves in the school we work in and the school we are in and that is *some of the core values*. And what I've tried to do, to try and narrow it down for you, is pick three of what I would consider to be the *most relevant core values that we try and look at day by day* in the work we do and how it applies to what we are going to look at today ... I don't think there's a better example of anything so far we've done in our history course this year... The first one is the *honorable purpose*, right? You've got to think to yourself if that was you, are the actions that you're taking part in, are they in some way benefiting other people or would they be benefiting others around that particular area ... straight away with slavery, this word of *compassion*—are you caring for other people, are you thinking of other people ... and just looking after their best interests when they're having times of difficulty, right? The final one is this idea of *integrity*. Are the people that are doing these things (what you're seeing in the sources) ... are they honest? Is what they're doing honest? Are their intentions honest? (emphasis added)

In an English literature lesson the teacher was observed engaging in the sort of practice advocated in *Teaching Character Education through Literature* (Bohlin, 2005) although the teacher was unfamiliar with character education or Bohlin's work from the United States. In the following example, the English teacher

encourages students to undertake a character analysis task employing the students' understanding of the school's core values as a frame. This use of the core values as a framework did not occur in every lesson for this teacher was observed making no reference to core values on two previous occasions (when teaching writing to persuade and writing to explain) but the fact that the school's core values are discussed in English *at all* would seem to be innovative practice, especially in the United Kingdom.

English lesson on Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* (higher ability group)

Teacher: Think about our core values because we've been looking at all the different qualities of these characters. Think about the core values that we at Trinity live by or try to live by. I want you please to write down which core value you think Beatrice and Benedick either embody or break. Okay, what do I mean by embody?

Student: Stick to

Teacher: Stick to – so which one do they either stick to or break? And I'd like a brief explanation. You've got 3 minutes to do that...

Which of the core values?...

(Children discuss task)

Teacher: Just bob your pens down for me please. Very quickly, hands up if you have a core value that you think Beatrice embodies? Sarah?

Sarah: Determination

Teacher: Why determination?

Sarah: Cos um she stands up for what she believes in like when Hero is getting um-slandered and like the shame of it, she believes him

Teacher: Good yeah determination—could also be seen as courage. How about a core value that she breaks? Anyone got a core value that she breaks? Chris?

Chris: Humility

Teacher: Why humility?

Chris: She can be quite boastful

Teacher: She can be quite boastful, I do agree. Very quickly, has anyone got a core value that Benedick embodies?

Jo: Courage because he fought in a war

Teacher: Absolutely courage because he fought in a war and the big one, the one that he breaks?

Gary: Integrity

Teacher: Why Integrity?

Gary: Because he lies about his feelings toward Beatrice

Only 35% of the 191, 14-year-old students, thought core values “came into” their English lessons whereas 90% believed core values came into their PTE (Philosophy, Theology and Ethics) lessons, of which 65% said this was “quite often or very often.” This would seem to confirm the view of a student in a focus group who explained, “that’s the main part of it [PTE] where we hear them mentioned.” However, the real figures might be far higher when one considers that students are not always aware of how value-laden lessons are, especially if the term core values is not explicitly mentioned. For instance, 97% of students also either agreed or strongly agreed that, “Teachers want us to respect other people, other people’s views” which indicates the way in which the academy’s core values are pervasive.

PTE (Philosophy, Theology and Ethics)—Focus group for the research project

Dr. Pike: OK, so PTE ... do you think you've covered the whole school values or have you heard them mentioned in PTE?

Aaron: Yeah *that's the main part of it where we hear them mentioned.*

Sam: That's the base of it really.

Dr. Pike: The whole school values are really covered in PTE?

Sam: Yeah.

Dr. Pike: Tell me a bit about that.

Sam: Well we've studied Bible and like we've only done ... tiny bits, so doing the Bible like *the core values and that come up a lot in the Bible so we see them a lot.* And like last year when we did the story of Ruth our teacher told us how it fits into core values.

Dr. Pike: And can you explain to me how the story of Ruth makes sense of the whole school values?

Sam: She had *courage to leave her home* and town and she was *determined to go with her step-mum* and like make it work and that.

Dr. Pike: OK, anybody else on whole school values in PTE?

Hayley: We do it in Expressive Arts.

Dr. Pike: Really? Tell me about that.

Although those leading Trinity's transformation were unaware of the *Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education* (Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis, 2007) that are central to the Character Education Partnership's (CEP) work in the United States, there is a remarkable degree of congruence between the school's approach and these principles. Using the CEP's *Character Education Quality Standards* (CEP, 2008) as an evaluation tool Trinity Academy scored 3.9 out a maximum of 4.0 when assessed independently by the principal investigator who carried out the case study and also by Dr. Julie McGonigle, the vice principal for teaching and learning.

According to the CEP's Principle 1, "core ethical values—such as caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect for self and others—along with supportive performance values—such as diligence, a strong work ethic, and perseverance—form the basis of good character." A school committed to character education "stands for these values" and "holds all school members accountable to standards of conduct consistent with the core values" which are "treated as a matter of obligation as having a claim on the conscience of the individual and community" and "transcend religious and cultural differences" (Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis, 2007, p. 1). It is important to state that this is a remarkably accurate description of the approach to core values at Trinity Academy with its emphasis upon accountability for all. The CEP's Principle 2 states that "Good character involves understanding, caring about, and acting upon core ethical values" (Lickona et al., 2007, p. 1) and this is borne out by Ofsted's (the department of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools) inspection report on Trinity Academy that stated:

The academy's core values are central to all areas of its work and contribute very well to the students' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Teachers apply the academy's rules consistently, which means that students know clearly the difference between right and wrong. Students' social development is excellent and they show high levels of respect towards peers, staff and the school environment. Students readily understand and accept that high expectations extend to all that they do, and while the vast majority accept and conform to these, a small minority find compliance personally challenging. The number of recorded incidents of disruptive behaviour in school has fallen sharply since last year, which has resulted in a significant reduction to the number of exclusions. Overall, students' behaviour is very good. (Ofsted, 2007)

The CEP's Principle 3 emphasizes the proactive nature of character education and notes that, "Schools committed to character development look at themselves through a moral lens to assess how virtually everything that goes on in school affects the character of students" (Lickona et al., 2007, p. 1). This is a particularly important characteristic of Trinity Academy where character education is pervasive and central to the school's identity. The CEP's Principle 4 states that school is a "microcosm of a civil, caring, and just society" so that "the daily life of classrooms and all other parts of the school environment (e.g., the corridors, cafeteria, playground, school bus, front office, and teachers' lounge) are imbued with a climate of concern and respect for others" (p. 2). This is also testified to by Ofsted's inspection report on Trinity Academy:

Students feel safe because they believe that teachers listen and respond quickly to any concerns raised. However, a few students and parents indicated that some bullying still occurs, although this is decreasing because the academy acts quickly to deal with any issues. The vast majority of students enjoy attending the academy, which is reflected in improved attendance rates over the last year. (Ofsted, 2007)

The "chaos" described by a parent in the school replaced by Trinity Academy and its

impact upon her son illustrate how important it is for a school to be “civil, caring and just”:

I was an LSA [learning support assistant] over there [in the predecessor school] ... so I worked within the classroom. Total chaos the last few years ... I had a son who is as good as gold, never in any trouble but not bright, B band, middle band, and their classes were chaos, never learnt a thing. But his last year here [at Trinity Academy], he learnt more in his last year here than he learnt in 4 years over there but it was too late for him.

The CEP’s Principle 5 states that students are given “opportunities for moral action” which is reflected in the responsibilities Trinity students have both inside and outside school, in the United Kingdom and in countries such as South Africa where they work with AIDS orphans. According to Principle 5 young people “need many and varied opportunities to apply values such as compassion, responsibility, and fairness in everyday interactions” (Lickona et al., 2007, p. 2) and it is interesting to read the assessment of the school inspectors, in this regard:

There are many opportunities for students to take on responsibilities within the academy and the wider community, for example in drama, music and dance. A number of older students hold Junior Sports Leader Awards, and others are encouraged to take the lead in organising assemblies and events as part of the house and prefect systems. (Ofsted, 2007)

The CEP’s Principle 6 refers to “a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners, develops their character, and helps them to succeed” (Lickona et al., 2007, p. 2) and suggests that effective character educators will look for the “natural intersections between the academic content they wish to teach and the character qualities they wish to develop” (p. 2). Although this can take many forms, examples are given of “debating historical practices and decisions” and “discussing character traits and ethical dilemmas in literature” both of which were witnessed at Trinity Academy and have been described in

this article. The CEP’s Principle 7 emphasizes the need to foster students’ self-motivation and the importance of providing “meaningful opportunities for reflection, problem solving, and restitution” (p. 3) rather than mere “compliance.” Here again, Ofsted confirms that this is very much an integral part of Trinity’s approach to pastoral system:

The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding. The strong Christian ethos emphasizes a caring and supportive environment. Students receive clear guidance to enable them to meet high expectations and the process of engaging students more actively in aspects of their own education is developing across the academy.

The CEP’s Principle 8 draws attention to the extent to which a school “Engages the school staff as a learning and moral community that shares responsibility for character education” and “devotes time to staff reflection on moral matters” so that “staff members assume this responsibility by modeling the core values in their own behavior” (Lickona et al., 2007, p. 3). Teachers at Trinity are given the opportunity to engage in such reflection each week as they listen to the principal’s whole school assemblies and they certainly model the high standards in school they expect of students. This was confirmed as a strong feature of Trinity Academy from both the qualitative and quantitative data. The CEP’s Principle 9 focuses on “shared moral leadership and long range support” (p. 3) and is one of Trinity’s key strengths according to the Ofsted inspectors:

The principal is an outstanding leader who provides clear strategic direction for all students and staff. His vision for the academy is based firmly on the core values that underpin its work. He has created an environment where students can learn and achieve well by effectively tackling low expectations and aspirations. The principal maintains a high visible presence around the academy and reinforces his high expectations of both students and staff to build a culture reflecting the academy’s Christian ethos, where everyone can achieve their “personal best.” (Ofsted, 2007)

It is also important, with regard to leadership, to recognize the ongoing, long-term, commitment of the Emmanuel Schools Foundation, and its Chairman Sir Peter Vardy, to developing good character in students at Trinity Academy. Sir Peter Vardy's experiences as an employer undoubtedly inform the approach to values and character. Moral values and the importance of being respectful, honest, trustworthy, diligent, responsible, determined, as well as enjoying challenges, are evident from the "Vardy Values" of Reg Vardy Plc which Sir Peter Vardy built up from a single garage to a company with 6,000 employees and a turnover of 2 billion pounds (Pike, 2009b).

When asked who the "customers" were in schools, Sir Peter Vardy explained that parents and students, as well as the government, could be regarded as customers who "need to see that we are doing our best" (Interview, October 21, 2008). The high level of "customer satisfaction" is indicated by survey results obtained for the research project during 2008 at Trinity Academy in which 85% of Year 9 strongly agreed or agreed with the statement "I think this school is very good." Results from Trinity Academy's own survey in 2007/2008 indicate that 92% of parents who responded either strongly agreed or agreed that "The school is led and managed well" and 91% either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement "I feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem or complaint." It is encouraging to note the conclusion of Ofsted inspectors, however, that "partnerships with parents are improving" (Ofsted, 2007, p. 4) even in a social priority area where families face considerable economic and social challenges. This is central to the CEP's Principle 10, which indicates the importance of engaging "families and community members as partners in the character-building effort." The CEP's Principle 11 focuses on the character of the school that, it is suggested, can be assessed through surveys that ask students to indicate respect for others, the staff's growth as character educators and students' commitment to core ethical values. In addition to conducting

its own research, the fact that Trinity Academy was prepared to welcome an external university-based researcher to investigate such issues is further evidence of its ethical commitments. In terms defined by the CEP's *Character Education Quality Standards* (CEP, 2008), Trinity Academy provides comprehensive, pervasive and systemic character education.

THE SOURCES OF SHARED VALUES IN CHARACTER EDUCATION

It is to the issue of the legitimacy and validity of disclosing the sources of values in character education that the present article now turns. What has been described so far may be familiar from some "schools of character" in the United States but there are also significant differences, namely the disclosure and discussion of *the sources* of values in character education at Trinity Academy. When the principal of Trinity Academy was engaged in a discussion with a group of 14-year-olds, one student asked him where the school's values came from and "Who actually started the core values?" and his answer illustrates his level of honesty regarding sources of values:

Who actually thought of the core values?...

The way we did it was we sat down and we thought "Well what do we want Trinity to look like?" ... we mean Trinity as a school and a school is people, right, it's us, it's who we are, it's our attitudes, it's our outlooks, it's our behaviours, it's our priorities. So we thought, "Well what do we want the people to look like, what do we want Trinity to look like?" and in the end we said "Well we want it to look like the best person looks like" ... And so we thought, "Well who's the best person who ever lived?" and we thought "Jesus Christ is the best person who ever lived." Well how was he the best? How was he? Well he put other people first, so that's humility. He overcame all the big challenges in his life with determination and courage, and whatever he did he did for the right reasons with honorable purpose. He was compassionate to people around him even when they let him down he was compassionate. So that's where those core values came from.

In contrast to this openness it has been claimed that even highly respected character educators, such as Lickona, “take an approach that divorces conceptions of virtue from particular traditions” so that while teaching common virtues “these approaches avoid narratives for defining, understanding and applying these virtues” (Glanzer, 2003, p. 300). Indeed, Glanzer pins the blame for the demise of moral and character education in public schools in the United States upon “the current structure of American public education that encourages moral educators to provide forms of moral education divorced from particularity and acceptable to all” (Glanzer, 2003, p. 294). Evidently the charge of being “divorced from particularity” cannot be made of the principal of England’s most improved academy who is wedded to, and passionate about, rather than divorced from, particular Christian foundations. The possibility of having a Christian foundation or starting point while respecting diversity is sometimes doubted by those who are uneasy about referring to the Judeo-Christian sources of much character education. The “Trinity experience” may prove illuminating in this regard.

In its core values, Trinity Academy uses the sort of inclusive moral vocabulary to be found in the work of influential educators such as Lickona in *Educating for Character—How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility* (1991):

Despite this diversity, we can identify basic, shared values that allow us to engage in public moral education in a pluralistic society. Indeed, pluralism itself is not possible without agreement on values such as justice, honesty, civility, democratic process, and a respect for truth. (Lickona, 1991, p. 20)

Trinity Academy is not afraid to acknowledge the Christian inspiration for its values but neither does it seek to proselytize. A diverse group of people endorse and subscribe to the core values at Trinity Academy who do not share the same sources for those values as its principal. One history teacher, who had trans-

ferred from another school, illustrated this rather well in an interview:

I mean I am not a Christian but I can subscribe to those values because they are just humanitarian I suppose basically, and if you’re a decent human being you would share those core values anyway.

Indeed, this reflects the views of the sponsor, Sir Peter Vardy, who believes the core values are good for everyone in society:

If you don’t believe in the Christian faith as we do they’re still the basic principles for living and nobody would argue with the principles we’re talking about.

Although sources may differ, the core values of Trinity Academy are subscribed to by people of various religious or secular persuasions. People may differ in their beliefs about the sources of, or justification for, values but the values themselves can often be agreed upon (Dagowitz, 2004). Certainly, how young people understand and interpret their school’s ethos and its values is important in terms of their autonomy and there is a good deal of safety (as well as intellectual honesty) in the beliefs of those who see the core values as Christian values being declared and open. When asked if Trinity Academy’s core values were, in some sense, “Christian,” the explanations given by students differed:

Year 9 (14-year-olds) Focus Group

Dr. Pike: OK, are those [the core values] Christian values?

Lauren: No, just every life values.

Dr. Pike: Let’s just go round, you can all tell me what you think. We’ll start here and work our way down. Are those Christian values?

Sam: Yeah but you know like they’re values that a lot of people hold in lots of different religions as well, it’s like it’s not just the Christian values because it’s common sense really about the values that a lot of people hold because it’s right to hold them.

Dr. Pike: OK

Daisy: They're not just Christian values because if you think about it it's just what a normal everyday person should be like, so you should be accountable to other people and you should be like determined and have courage, so it's just every day.

Dr. Pike: Are those Christian values or not, what do you think?

Peter: Well a bit, yeah. Just a bit, I don't know.

Audrey: I don't think they are because whether you are a Christian or whether you aren't a Christian they're still very good like values to follow. Like you've got to have determination to do things and courage to do things, and just because you're not a Christian it doesn't mean that you don't need determination and you don't need courage.

Dr. Pike: OK.

Daisy: I think they're just every day things that you need to do.

This confirms that the school adheres to its ethos statement for although there is a Christian starting point, the freedom to differ from that starting point (a sort of confessional pluralism) is available to everyone:

Ethos Statement

The academy is one of the City Academies established by the Department for Education and Skills in conjunction with industrial and commercial sponsors. It has been established as having a Christian ethos and business and enterprise specialism. Both of these emphases are seen as key elements in the culture of the academy. However, no single creed or philosophy will be presented to the students in isolation but presented alongside alternative views. No member of teaching staff will be expected to teach against their conscience or beliefs and the right to express personal opinion within a proper professional context is fully protected.

When all 101 staff and 191 fourteen-year-olds were surveyed, 99% of staff and 75% of students at Trinity Academy agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "Whether you are a Christian or you aren't, the schools' core values are still very good values to follow."

This research carried out at Trinity Academy in England indicates that agreement and shared values are entirely compatible with a Christian faith that is respectful of others. The importance and validity of declaring the sources of one's values is confirmed by research indicating that "students like teachers to express their own values besides indicating differences in values" (Veugelers, 2000, p. 44). This is in keeping with the position outlined in the academy prospectus that states:

We have a Christian ethos which means that faith and belief are important and we encourage students to think for themselves about the big questions of life

At Trinity Academy, weekly school assemblies stimulate engagement with the "big questions" of life and the time (2 hours per week) and the high profile given to a subject such as Philosophy, Theology, and Ethics, encourages students to explore and debate ethics and worldviews, demonstrates the commitment of Trinity to encouraging students to critically evaluate sources. In addition, assemblies prompt students to consider truth claims and the basis of such claims. The principal explained:

My assemblies are littered with the phrases "This is what I believe, it's up to you as to what you think," "I suggest this to you," "Christians believe" ... I don't say to people: "This is it, you'd better believe me or else," I say, "There's a lot of views out there. This is mine."

What makes the moral culture possible at Trinity Academy is that it acknowledges and respects the Judeo-Christian tradition as a source of shared values for everyone but it does not seek to impose the religious truth claims of Christianity on anyone. This distinction is important. As the data from Trinity Academy demonstrates, people often have different justifications for the same values. Nevertheless, the source of the core values for the founders of the academy is highly significant. The traditional approach to character education "has long relied upon an Aristotelian prin-

principle that character is formed in large part through habitual behaviour that eventually becomes internalized into virtues (character)" (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004, p. 80). Yet this can also be seen as "Christian" behavior whereby "a man who perseveres in doing just actions gets in the end a certain quality of character" or, to put it another way, "Don't waste time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor; act as if you did" (Lewis, 1943, p. 48). Trinity Academy provides high quality character education that does not avoid an exploration of the sources of its core values or the biblical narratives and teachings in which those values are located (Pike, 2002, 2003) and many schools, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States, could learn from its example.

If a school should be a "microcosm of a civil, caring, and just society" (CEP Principle 4) students need to consider the foundation on which liberal, democratic societies such as those in the United Kingdom and United States are built. It is vital that students are aware of the sources of the seminal belief that "all men are created equal" asserted in The Declaration of Independence (and also enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights). The American Revolution was largely fought by Protestant settlers and this is significant because it was the Protestant belief in the "priesthood of all believers," asserted at Reformation, which emphasized that ordinary people matter. That people have infinite value can, however, be traced even further to the Judeo-Christian teaching that human beings are 'made in the image of God' (Genesis 1: 26). Lickona notes that 'we should help students appreciate that every person has intrinsic dignity and value—sacred value, if one believes that we are each created in the image of God' (Lickona, 2004, p. 140). For the research reported here, Sir Peter Vardy stated his belief that God 'made man in his own image and we are all made in the image of God' (Interview, October 21, 2008) and, according to the survey data, the principal and vice-principals at Trinity Academy all subscribed to the view that "Every individual

amongst our student body is created in God's image." This is a powerful belief which supports the expectation that each child, irrespective of social background, can succeed in an area where there has been a history of failure.

Arguably, although social justice is emphasized in many religions, "of all faiths primitive Christianity was the most radical, egalitarian and inclusive, smashing down all barriers between people, and even the barrier between individuals and God," so it is "no accident that the West was the only civilization to abolish the slave trade and slavery voluntarily" (Koch & Smith, 2006, p. 39). In fact, it was William Wilberforce's Christian commitments that provided the justification for the abolition of slavery in England at a time when others considered it to be entirely acceptable. The same Judeo-Christian doctrine that inspired the abolition of slavery, by declaring the inherent and equal worth of each individual, has inspired the core values and character education at Trinity Academy. These have "transformed the life chances and opportunities of students" (Ofsted, 2007) living in a social priority area in twenty-first century Yorkshire, the county William Wilberforce represented as Member of Parliament from 1784-1812.

Students should be sufficiently culturally literate to understand the importance of biblical 'source' texts for the liberty and equality they experience in a liberal democracy (Pike, 2008, 2009a). For instance, they should appreciate that in a liberal democracy, the professor of politics is not awarded more votes than the cleaner of her office (on the basis of superior knowledge) largely due to the influence of the Judeo-Christian belief in equality. To acknowledge this is to be historically accurate not "partisan." Indeed, the similarity between Lickona's essential virtues and the core values at Trinity Academy may be attributed to Judeo-Christian sources that the United States and the United Kingdom share. There is a compelling educational argument for students gaining an understanding in school of Christianity as a seminal cultural and political influence. Indeed, just as the Bible is a seminal

literary influence in these nations, which students need to understand whether or not they believe its truth claims (Pike, 2002, 2003), the Judeo-Christian sources of character education should be acknowledged.

If the best education has “clear core values that are transparent and consensual” (Copley, 2005, p. 109), secular schools need to learn how to tolerate a greater degree of honesty with regard to the justification for values, when these are found in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Educators must not make the mistake of assuming that consensus can only be gained by being exclusively secular or that a secular position is more “neutral” than a faith-based one (Pike, 2009a). All too often schools tend to “promote the adoption of secular core values on the basis that they constitute a common denominator, to which religious and secular people alike can subscribe” but fail to grasp that if values are limited to the secular “they are in practice anti-religious since they leave religion out” (Copley, 2005, pp. 109-110). To force people to be antireligious was not the intention of the founders of the United States and has important implications for schooling.

Those concerned with character education in both the United Kingdom and United States often avoid declaring their sources and eschew any reference to the Judeo-Christian tradition in the desire to be inclusive and to demonstrate that “basic human values transcend religious and cultural differences” (CEP Principle 1). In this case, however, what is universal in application is Judeo-Christian in origin. The core values of Trinity Academy were not inspired by “religion” in general but by the Judeo-Christian tradition in particular. A pressing challenge for character educators is to find ways of enabling young people to critically engage with the sources of the values underpinning the character education they experience. After all, to seek to shape a student’s character without helping that young person to understand the sources upon which their character education is based, fails to model the honesty and integrity characteristic of high quality character education. At Trinity

Academy original sources are acknowledged. Schools in the United States and the United Kingdom, and elsewhere, need to have the courage of character to learn from the transformation at Trinity.

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