

# PRIDE at Barr's Hill

## 1. Introduction

I am an Early Career Teacher of Mathematics at Barr's Hill School in Coventry. I completed a PGCE at the University of Warwick last year (2021/22). In my final essay, I offered some critical reflections on character education – namely, 'PRIDE' – at Barr's Hill (Brown, 2022). It was this essay that inspired me to undertake the MA in Character Education at the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, University of Birmingham. Now, in the first essay of the MA, I will again reflect on character education at Barr's Hill.

I begin by offering some refined reflections on the PRIDE virtues (§2) and their primary means of promotion, namely, PRIDE points (§3). I suggest that insofar as a villain could exemplify the PRIDE virtues, PRIDE fails the baseline test for a programme of Aristotelian character education. I also suggest that PRIDE may inhibit the development of virtue knowledge (§4). Given the uncertain role of extrinsic motivation in character education, however, I ultimately conclude that the jury is still out on PRIDE (§5).

## 2. The PRIDE virtues

As Kristjánsson (2017, pp. 17-20) explains, *character education* refers to educational activities concerned with the cultivation of *virtues*, specifically, *moral* virtues (e.g. courage, justice, honesty, citizenship). There are other types of virtues – *intellectual* virtues (e.g. curiosity, critical thinking, *phronesis*) and *performance* virtues (e.g. co-operative skills, resilience) – but only the moral virtues have *intrinsic* value; performance virtues, by contrast, derive their value only from serving the moral virtues. Without moral constraints, performance virtues can even be dangerous (Kristjánsson, 2017, p. 6); think of the co-operative skills (a performance virtue) of the Mafia. So, given a set of virtues, *V*, if a villain (someone deeply alienated from virtue, e.g. a Mafioso) could exemplify *V*, then any educational activities concerned with cultivating *V* and *only V* would not qualify as *character* education. We might consider this a baseline test for any prospective programme of Aristotelian character education. The ultimate goal of character education is the *flourishing* of the moral learner (Kristjánsson, 2017, pp. 13-14). Importantly, flourishing is not something over and above

virtues; rather, there is a *constitutive link* between virtues and flourishing (Kristjánsson, 2017, p. 7). That is, to flourish is in large part to be courageous, just, honest, etc.

'PRIDE' is an acronym for five virtues: Proactive, Responsible, Inquisitive, Determined, and Engaged. Are these virtues morally constrained, or could a villain exemplify PRIDE? The PRIDE virtues are defined in Barr's Hill's PRIDE statements (Appendix 1). To distinguish this usage from ordinary usage, I will continue to capitalise the PRIDE virtues.

In my previous essay (Brown, 2022), I explain at length that Proactive is a performance virtue in the service of learning. Responsible is a moral virtue, in particular, a *civic* virtue, as it concerns a student's moral effect on others. Inquisitive is an intellectual virtue, similar to curiosity, but guided by two moral virtues: *respect* for other viewpoints and *courage* to challenge stereotypical thinking. Determined is a performance virtue, but the end 'goals' are unspecified. Engaged is also a performance virtue, in service of building a brighter future. Indeed, the motto of Barr's Hill's trust is 'Building Brighter Futures'. In service of this ultimate principle, Barr's Hill employs three ancillary principles: 'Students First', 'It's about learning', and 'No Barriers'. The School Development Plan (Appendix 2) explains the 'No barriers' principle in terms of enabling students to 'flourish as well-rounded individuals'. It remains unclear, however, whether and how far this conception of flourishing aligns with Aristotle's conception (above).

Are the PRIDE virtues morally constrained, then? It seems so. For one moral virtue is stated explicitly (Responsible), and two others are implied (respect and courage) (Brown, 2022). These *would* guard against the possibility of a villain exemplifying PRIDE. I stress 'would', however, because the moral bulwarks of PRIDE may yet be undermined via its primary means of promotion.

### 3. PRIDE points

The PRIDE virtues are promoted primarily via *PRIDE points*. For exemplifying PRIDE, students are awarded points, which they can spend in rewards shops. Within Barr's Hill, PRIDE points are essentially money; one Head of Faculty describes them as 'a currency for buying good behaviour' (Brown, 2022). PRIDE points thus qualify as an *extrinsic* reward. This is a problem for character education.

Character education aims to cultivate virtues that have *intrinsic* (non-instrumental) value, namely, the moral virtues (Kristjánsson, 2017, p. 19); that is, we are supposed to exemplify courage, justice, honesty, etc., for their *own* reward. Intrinsic motivation is vital for moral education (Curren, 2014). But intrinsic motivation is undermined by extrinsic rewards, which is likely because they diminish our sense of autonomy (Deci, Koestner and Ryan, 1999). It might be reasoned that extrinsic rewards thereby undermine the cultivation of moral virtues, and thus character education (Brown, 2022). There is some empirical evidence to support this conclusion: extrinsic rewards have been found to undermine altruism (a moral virtue) in young children (Warneken and Tomasello, 2008).

Suppose that a student exemplifies Responsible (a moral PRIDE virtue) by handing out books and is awarded a PRIDE point (a common scenario). The PRIDE point, qua extrinsic reward, is likely to undermine her intrinsic motivation for being Responsible: she will be less likely to hand out books because she enjoys helping others and more likely because it leads to a separable outcome, namely, PRIDE points. The PRIDE point has thus undermined the virtue for which it was awarded.

As the moral PRIDE virtues crumble, so enters the possibility of a villain exemplifying PRIDE. Indeed, it is easy to imagine a villain who instrumentalises moral virtues as a means to some extrinsic end (e.g. money or PRIDE points). PRIDE thus seems to fail the baseline test for a programme of Aristotelian character education.

#### 4. Virtue knowledge

Despite the empirical evidence to the contrary (Deci, Koestner and Ryan, 1999; Warneken and Tomasello, 2008), there may yet be a role for extrinsic motivation in character education. After all, the Palace of Reason is entered via the courtyard of Habit and Tradition (Peters, 1981), and the *Framework for Character Education in Schools* (Jubilee Centre, 2022) suggests that extrinsic motivation may play a part in practical habituation. As Watts, Fullard and Peterson (2021, p. 79) explain, a student who volunteers to help because they anticipate a reward may eventually realise the intrinsic satisfaction of doing good. Perhaps PRIDE points play such a role at Barr's Hill, encouraging students along the path to good character. Alas, PRIDE has another problem.

Often, when a student exemplifies PRIDE or does something generally commendable, teachers will proclaim something like, "Good! That's a PRIDE point." Seldom, however, will they specify the PRIDE virtue for which the point was awarded: "That's a *Responsible* point," say. Let alone explain that Responsible derives its moral worth from helping others. As such, students are several levels of abstraction removed from what really matters. We as teachers may be able to descend with ease from the abstract to the particular, but it would be a mistake to assume the same of our students, especially if they are novice moral learners. The abstract nature of the PRIDE point system may therefore inhibit the development of virtue knowledge and understanding, a key component of virtue literacy (Jubilee Centre, 2022). And while knowledge of virtues alone is not sufficient to change behaviour, a lack of such knowledge would certainly make the path to good character a more tortuous one.

PRIDE as a programme of character education may also be impeded by the fact that 'pride', on the ordinary usage of the word, is closer to a vice than a virtue: it is closer to hubris than humility. If a student mistakenly believes that they are being rewarded for being proud, this may further frustrate their progress towards good character; it may even send them in the wrong direction altogether!

## 5. A tentative conclusion

These reflections suggest that as a programme of Aristotelian character education, PRIDE at Barr's Hill has some serious defects. But Aristotelian character education is but one form of character education; there are many others. As a form of *Toughian* character education (Tough, 2013), for instance, where character is conceived in instrumentalist terms, PRIDE would fare much better. That said, there are good reasons to favour Aristotle's conception of character to Tough's conception (Kristjánsson, 2017).

Sticking with Aristotle, then, the prime defect with PRIDE seems to be PRIDE points. Indeed, PRIDE has some moral elements, but they are undermined by the use of extrinsic rewards; for it is easy to imagine a villain who exemplifies virtue only as a means to an end, and so does not really exemplify virtue at all. On this matter, the research is unequivocal: extrinsic rewards undermine intrinsic motivation (Deci, Koestner and Ryan, 1999; Curren, 2014; Warneken and Tomasello, 2008). Yet others think that there *is* a role for rewards in character education

(Jubilee Centre, 2022; Watts, Fullard and Peterson, 2021). Thus arises a curious tension, perhaps even a paradox, one which I hope to explore further in my next assignment. It may transpire that Aristotle can abide PRIDE points, after all.

## References

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