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REPLY

On Preparing Moral Educators: A Reply to Commentators

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We are grateful for the careful attention that was afforded our target article by the distinguished commentators and for the present opportunity to advance further the conversation on how best to prepare educators for the moral work of teaching and school leadership. A reprise of our main themes is in order. The sprawling literature on moral-character education has a long and complicated history, yet comparatively little of it addresses how best to induct preservice teachers into their vocation as moral-character educators. To this end we organized the literature around three training models that we called Best Practice, Broad Character Education, and Intentional Moral-Character Education. Each model derives from a somewhat different theoretical and empirical literature and reaches for distinctive educational goals.

For example, the goal of Best Practice moral-character education is to produce Good Learners. The goal of Broad Character Education is to fortify good learners with dispositional skills, mind-sets, and character strengths (among other variables) that sustain the press toward academic learning and social-emotional competency. The goal of Intentional Moral-Character Education is to produce the Moral Self (or, alternatively, encourage the formation of moral self-identity). Moreover, each model is associated with somewhat different literatures. The Best Practice goal of producing good learners typically appeals to educational science literatures that document effective strategies for student learning. On this account moral-character education is just good education. Although there are firm grounds for considering Best Practice a legitimate model of moral-character education, a stance that is probably the default in teacher preparation, the concern is that this model makes it too easy to remand the language of morality and values to the hidden curriculum.

Broad Character Education is driven by public health models, by the science of resilience, trait psychology, and positive youth development. One class of Broad Character Education is motivated by the epidemiology of risk and so is concerned to prevent problem behavior or reduce risk exposure. A second class is concerned to enhance positive qualities by catalyzing social-emotional competencies, character strengths, or mind-sets. This second class of Broad Character Education assumes that just because a youngster is problem free (as in the first class) does not mean that he or she is fully-prepared to engage effectively the opportunities and challenges that are ordinarily encountered along the course of development.

Consequently, the literatures of positive development ideally guide the design of something else other than the standard curriculum, that is, the design of interventions and curricula that build various positive developmental competencies. The literature is replete with programs like this, programs that reduce risk behavior, build competencies, and otherwise fortify good learners with dispositional qualities that promote positive psychosocial development. Although there are good reasons to consider these programs instances of moral-character education, there are also countervailing considerations, as Westheimer (this issue) noted.

For one thing, the literatures of Broad Character Education do just fine without the language of values, virtues, or morality. Many school-based interventions are framed in the language of developmental psychopathology, for example, using risk-and-resilience frameworks or else invoke positive youth development or public health models. Often the success of these interventions is claimed for moral-character education if they bring about a reduction of problem behavior, the manifestation of

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which is thought indicative of "bad character." In this case any educational intervention that brings about a good outcome might be counted as moral-character education.

Yet what if moral valuation was not hidden (Best Practice) or optional (Broad Character Education) but was instead the explicit target of educational planning? Intentional moral-character education would treat morality as the independent variable, as it were. It asserts that there is more work to do after reducing risks, developing competencies, and building character strengths. The goal of intentional moral-character education is to transform the "fortified good learner" into a "moral self." We noted in the target article how self-determination theory and framing learning objectives in terms of intrinsic moral goals might be the mechanism that contributes to the distinctly moral formation of fortified good learners.

One final point before we take up the commentaries: The three models that we proposed are not disjunctive options for teacher education. Rather, each perspective should find its place in a seamless curricular weave of preservice training. The effective moral educator is primarily an effective teacher skilled in the pedagogies of Best Practice. The effective moral educator skilled in Best Practice also knows how to mobilize adaptive motivational orientations and how to help students build character strengths and social-emotional competencies. The effective moral educator is fluent in the language of moral valuation and finds occasion to frame instructional lessons in a way that makes the moral self the aim of education.

With this reprise we now turn to the three uniformly cogent and helpful commentaries on our article. We found ourselves in broad agreement with each of them. Consequently, we focus our remarks here only those matters that require further clarification or elaboration. One general point to make here was that our article had a large descriptive intention. That is, we wanted to organize the vast moral-character education literature in a way that critics and advocates could get their hands around it. But description is not advocacy (in all instances).

In fact we think the terms *moral* and *character* have been attached to *education* in highly profligate and unhelpful ways. For example, we do not endorse the application of *moral-character* to specific programmatic interventions motivated by public health models or informed by risk-and-resilience literatures or even programs motivated by positive youth development. Perhaps our critique is too implicit to be noticed in this article, but it is explicitly made elsewhere (e.g., Lapsley & Yeager, 2013).

In her thoughtful commentary Noddings (this issue) poses two fundamental questions: should schools adopt particular moral education curricula, and then how should teachers be prepared for their work as moral educators? She doubts that curricular approaches could work, as most of them have failed. Even Kohlberg's approach to moral education only addresses moral judgment, leaving untouched the possibility that individuals clever and well educated in the language of moral decision making nonetheless "lie, cheat and display other moral faults." Noddings points out that the history of character education gives no reason to think that separate, formal programs could work. Indeed, we have our doubts as well (Lapsley & Yeager, 2013).

We have given Noddings (this issue) and other commentators cause for thinking that we are endorsing particular and specific moral education curricula for schools. One might think this the case after reading our section on Broad Character Education that references public health interventions and programs that promote positive youth development. These programs all require something else of teachers other than best practice pedagogy, and we make the entirely descriptive point that often these programs are counted in favor of moral character education.

But we also noted that however and whenever these programs work does not hinge on any conceptualization of morality, virtues, or values. We are critical of attempts to treat as moral character education any program that yields good outcomes. Instead, we agree with Noddings (this issue) that the use of the language of moral valuation "should be used in all subjects across the curriculum; its use does not require a special course or pre-specified learning objective."

Regarding the second question on how teachers can be prepared for their work as moral educators, Noddings (this issue) suggests that teachers should become familiar with the history of

moral character education, philosophy, and history of public education, and the strengths and weaknesses of each attempt. We totally agree with this. "Such knowledge," Noddings claims, "should warn [teachers] against adopting any packaged program in moral education and, paradoxically, provide them with a host of ideas to be analyzed, tried out, and evaluated" (p. 214, this issue). Teachers should be unafraid of discussing moral issues in instructional lessons and as they arise in the ordinary transactions of classroom life. Her example of how the topic of atheism was treated in a school is a paradigm example how the language of moral valuation can be recruited by teachers for intentional moral-character education.

Milner and Delale-O'Conner (this issue) suggest that we undertreated several important issues, such as what moral education is, how teachers align their own worldviews, privileges, and paradigms with those of their students, and who decides what acceptable behavior is. There is contending discourse around all of these questions, and it is by no means clear, according to the authors, just how teacher education is to handle it without simply mandating rightness or normalizing Whiteness. The concern is that the moral-character education that we describe can too easily be recruited to perpetuate racism or else impose cultural standardization of students of color.

As a remedy, Milner and Delale-O'Conner (this issue) urge teacher education to pursue a morality that challenges inequity, racism and discrimination. They write, "Pursuing this type of morality would build a collective character of empathy and action that would better insure learning opportunities for those who are most grossly underserved in school and society" (p. 218, this issue). In their account, educators who are morally conscious would learn the pervasive effects of poverty on child outcomes, and the link between poverty and race. Educators would learn about structural and socioeconomic barriers that seem deeply ingrained in educational structures that struggle to serve students of color. Educators would be equipped to challenge the social ills of injustice and inequality. Teacher education would focus on building the collective character required to care for our most vulnerable children.

It is easy to get behind this agenda. It is also easy to see how discussion about morality and values in teacher education can quickly expand to take on a certain political urgency. What begins as a discussion of the role of teachers as moral educators quickly becomes one about "whose justice? which rationality?" (following MacIntyre, 1988). It becomes a discussion riven with ideological tension between progressives and conservatives and whose side are you on. Little wonder that the language of morality and virtue is generally absent in schools of education when everything is up for grabs, when moral language is contested and bound up with political goals. Milner and Delale-O'Connor (this issue) want teacher educators to attack the sources of systemic inequality and discrimination that spin out of racism and poverty. This is what morality is for. Moreover, they think we have essentialized values and dispositions; and nobody likes grit and the traits of performance character.

We can only assure Milner and Delale-O'Connor (this issue) that nothing in our survey of what passes for moral-character education is so prescriptive that it rules out consideration of the profound claims of social justice on educators, or the structural and historical sources of racism, discrimination, and inequity that plague education and society. We think effective moral-character education should have the telos of a just society in mind, and students should learn how to speak well the moral language that articulates that vision. Effective moral-character education can help students understand what it means to live well the life that is good for one to live, even if there are plural conceptions of what good lives lived well amounts to. This is hardly an essentialist strategy. Unless one is willing to say that human personality is without dispositions (which is not an entirely fanciful notion given the claims of ethical situationists), then educators cannot evade the prospect of forming dispositions and returning to character education once the political telos is agreed upon. We must assume that attacking sources of social injustice and advocating for the underserved will require dispositions of a certain kind; and we must assume that classrooms, schools, and teachers will have something to do with it.

We think the category of intentional moral character education can accommodate Milner and Delale-O'Connor's (this issue) (and Westheimer's, this issue) concerns. This category argues that the moral self is the aim of moral education. It encourages students to care about morality as a second-order desire and to identify with it in self-defining ways. But moral self-identity is not monolithic. There is no one sanctioned or acceptable way of living a moral life in pluralist democratic societies. Indeed, moral self-identity, in our conceptualization, is a dimension of individual differences. It is a way of talking about personality. It is not even strictly personal insofar as the claims that morality makes on us will necessarily include matters of justice, fairness, equity, and goodness. Nothing in our account prevents preservice teachers from developing a certain critical consciousness with respect to social justice in education. Nothing in our account handicaps children from growing up to be activists for social change or prevents educators from addressing issues of poverty, race, and discrimination.

Westheimer (this issue) suggests in his commentary that we unaccountably endorse a "depoliticized" view of the public sphere and then offer no critique of the moral failures of the broad polity. Westheimer is concerned that we presume a universality of moral goals and yet holds up as examples specific programs whose values are at odds with the more general goals we try to articulate. In some ways his critique is similar to Milner and Delale-O'Conner's (this issue). Although Milner and Delale-O'Conner argue that teachers adequately prepared for moral education should be alive to issues of social justice and be mindful that values are often deeply implicated in positions of power, privilege, and race, Westheimer argues that moral education must not disable students from negotiating and deliberating as democratic citizens. Westheimer is concerned that our focus on the moral self as the aim of education is too individualized to enable students to take social action for the cause of social justice. The moral self might be kind and compassionate in his or her personal life but may be ill equipped to take up sociopolitical responsibilities as a citizen in a democratic polity, and citizenship education is where the action is.

Of course we want the moral self to be an actively engaged democratic citizen too, just as we want the moral self to take a stand for social justice and advocate for children who are vulnerable. As we noted earlier, the moral self is simply one who cares about morality as a second-order desire, who is driven "*all the way to action*" by self-defining moral commitments (Frankfurt, 1971, p. 8). Nothing in our account limits morality to personal acts of compassion or kindness. Nothing in our account prevents the moral self from taking on the polity as a whole as the target of moral volition. Indeed, in some formulations, moral self-identity can in fact be constructed around an orientation toward others that emphasizes the centrality and importance of group or communal commitments, as opposed to strictly individualistic concerns (Jenson, 2011).

Further, recent research documents that the moral self is one who integrates agentic (individual) and communal goals. The moral self is concerned about the public good, engages in public discourse, and is motivated to make a positive contribution to society (Frimer & Walker, 2009; Walker & Frimer, 2007). Walker and colleagues (Frimer, Walker, Dunlop, Lee, & Riches, 2011; Frimer, Walker, Lee, Riches, & Dunlop, 2012; Walker & Frimer, 2007) showed, for example, that moral selves integrate agency and communion, use agentic means to achieve communal ends, and promote and integrate self and other interests. In short, the moral self we advocate is precisely the active democratic agent that Westheimer (this issue) is looking for.

Like other commentators, Westheimer (this issue) worries that moral education should not be one specific program universally applied to all teachers and students. He was "surprised by the ease and frequency with which the authors breeze by a list of presumably universal goals that are plainly contentious" (p. 209, this issue). As one example, he notes, "Not everybody sees youth sexuality as a psychopathology" (p. 209, this issue). Of course we did not say that the risk reduction and health promotion programs that we grouped under the heading "Broad Character Education" are "universal goals." We did not say that youth sexuality was a kind of psychopathology. In fact, as noted earlier, this category is a grab bag of programs that are motivated not by conceptions of morality or virtue but the literatures of developmental psychopathology, public health, and positive psychology. We

include them in an article on character education because as a strictly descriptive matter, these programs are often claimed for the success of "what works" in character education. We do not like it any more than Westheimer does and have said so.

Then there is the literature that invokes the traits of performance character. Grit is one such trait. Many others are considered "character strengths." Some show up on the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) report card. But nobody seems to like grit. As Westheimer (this issue) put it, "Simplistic regurgitations of centuries-old dictums to 'stick to it' and 'work hard' are not going to help children develop a sense of their moral selves" (p. 210, this issue). Of course not, and that is not a claim that we make. Grit is nothing without a moral compass, and the same is true for all of the other character strengths. For that reason we locate these constructs under "Broad Character Education" and not Intentional-Moral Character Education; and we agree with our interlocutors that unattended by morality, these traits "has, historically, led humanity to some dark places."

Surely there are few topics more pressing than the moral work of teaching and the moral formation of students. We are grateful to the commentators for their remarkably stimulating and helpful contribution to this conversation, and we look forward to further collaboration moving forward.

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