

# Introduction

Many of us became teachers for reasons of the heart, animated by a passion for some subject and for helping people learn. But many of us lose heart as the years of teaching go by. How can we take heart in teaching once more so that we can, as good teachers always do, give heart to our students?

—Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*

If you are reading this book, there's a good chance you are a teacher. If so, I'd like to begin by acknowledging the difficulty of the work you do. As teachers, we are in the business of shaping hearts and minds. This is extremely challenging work even under the best of conditions. It is even more challenging under the conditions in which so many teachers find themselves: feeling overburdened, exhausted, frustrated, discouraged, inadequately supported, underappreciated, and underpaid.

I insist on not losing sight of these challenging conditions in the pages that follow. This book is about an educational ideal. It's about learning to teach in light of one of the deeper and more important aims of education. Yet, whether in the classroom or in other areas of life, pursuing ideals can be risky business. It can inspire efforts and expectations that are untethered from reality—that ignore the actual conditions on the ground. It's no surprise that so many idealistic pursuits are fragile and fleeting.

My aim is to approach the subject matter of this book in a way that is sensitive to the difficulty of the work you do and the challenging conditions under which you do it. I may fail at this pursuit here and there. But I am committed to keeping these failures to a minimum. After all, my reason for writing this book is to do what I can to benefit and support you as a teacher. My training as a philosopher and my work in K–12 education

have given me a unique perspective on the purpose of education and how a teacher's instructional values, habits, and practices can be brought into alignment with this purpose. In my ongoing work with teachers, I've learned that many of them find this vision highly compelling. I hope you will too.

## PROFESSIONAL DISCONNECTION

The consequences of the nonideal conditions just noted are several and beyond what can be cataloged here. However, I'd like to draw attention to one consequence in particular. Doing so will allow me to say a bit more about the overarching aims of the book. The consequence I'm thinking of is an abiding sense of professional disconnection or alienation. Specifically, many teachers today experience a painful discrepancy between (1) what they are expected to care about and devote themselves to on a daily basis and (2) the reasons they became teachers in the first place.

Many of us were drawn to teaching out of a sense that education is a profound human good. At some point in our educational journey, we experienced learning as joyful, exhilarating, and intrinsically worthwhile, as adding meaning and new direction to our lives. More likely than not, this experience was bound up with an experience of a particular teacher—of someone who cared passionately and intelligently about us and the subject she or he was teaching. Inspired and reoriented by this encounter, we devoted ourselves to pursuing similar experiences with students of our own.<sup>1</sup>

Yet far too often, the life-giving vision that compelled us to enter the profession gets swamped by a proliferation of roles and responsibilities, an overriding concern for academic achievement as measured by standardized tests, shifting policies and expectations, an absence of resources and support, inadequate compensation, and more. Such challenges can leave even the most hopeful and idealistic of teachers feeling deflated and discouraged, if not downright cynical.<sup>2</sup>

This state of affairs leaves many teachers wrestling with questions such as: What's the point of what I'm doing? Am I really making a difference? What can I reasonably hope to accomplish as a teacher? Is all this hard work really worth it? Isn't there a better way?

## AIMS OF THE BOOK

If you occasionally find yourself wrestling with questions like these, this book is for you. It has two overarching aims. The first is to develop a rich and concrete picture of what education is *for*—of one of its ultimate aims or goals. Here and throughout the book, the focus will be on *intellectual virtues*, which are the personal qualities or character strengths of good thinkers and learners. These virtues include curiosity, open-mindedness, intellectual courage, intellectual tenacity, intellectual humility and more. My hope is that in acquainting you with the language and concepts of intellectual virtue, you'll be in a better position to articulate and practice much of what you already care about and aspire to as a teacher—and that this, in turn, will help you reconnect with your professional calling.<sup>3</sup>

However, the point of this book is not merely theoretical or philosophical. It is also extremely practical. Accordingly, its second overarching aim is to provide a concrete account of what it looks like to teach for intellectual virtues, that is, to show how teachers can help their students practice and grow in curiosity, open-mindedness, attentiveness, intellectual courage, and related qualities. My focus will not be a narrow set of pedagogical tricks or techniques. I won't be proffering any tidy answers or silver-bullet solutions. Instead, we will explore together a constellation of *principles*, *postures*, and *practices* adaptable to a variety of educational settings. Importantly, many of these principles, postures, and practices are likely to be familiar to you already; you may even be an expert in one or more of them. Such familiarity shows that teaching for intellectual virtues is not a wholly new or foreign approach. Instead, it involves engaging in practices that many of us already know to be effective, but doing so in a particular way and with a particular educational vision in mind.

In other ways, internalizing what the book has to offer may prove challenging. On the picture it develops, good teaching has as much to do with *who we are* as teachers as it does the instructional methods or practices we employ in the classroom. It bears on our fundamental beliefs, values, and attitudes about teaching and learning. Therefore, if you're going to meet the book on its own terms, there's a good chance you'll feel personally stretched

and challenged by it. To my mind, this is all to the good, for such stretching can create space in our hearts and minds for a richer and more meaningful way of understanding the work we do with students every day. It's a way of helping us, as Parker Palmer envisions, "take heart in teaching once more so that we can, as good teachers always do, give heart to our students."<sup>4</sup>

## KEY SOURCES

In prosecuting these aims, I'll be drawing on three main bodies of knowledge and experience. The first consists of research in educational theory and psychology related, directly or indirectly, to teaching for intellectual virtues. This includes research that focuses explicitly on intellectual character or intellectual virtues.<sup>5</sup> Because these constructs have only recently begun to capture the attention of educational theorists and psychologists, this literature is relatively small. However, there is a great deal of additional research that, in less direct but still meaningful ways, also bears on our understanding of intellectual virtues, their educational importance, and how they can be fostered in an academic context. This research includes work in the philosophy of education about the proper aims of education and the nature of intellectual and moral virtues.<sup>6</sup> It also includes significant bodies of research in educational theory and psychology on such topics as thinking dispositions, habits of mind, mindfulness, grit, self-control, intrinsic motivation, metacognition, active learning, growth mindset, social and emotional learning, critical thinking, and more.<sup>7</sup> While these topics are not identical to that of intellectual virtues, they overlap and intersect with each other in various and important ways. Thus, I'll be drawing on the research on these topics throughout the book.

The second main source I'll be relying on is my training and background as a *virtue epistemologist*. Virtue epistemology is an approach to the philosophical study of knowledge that pays special attention to the excellences, or virtues, of good thinkers and knowers.<sup>8</sup> Put another way, virtue epistemology focuses on the personal characteristics required for competent and motivated learning. For approximately twenty years, I've been thinking and writing about topics central to virtue epistemology. My published

work in this area includes numerous journal articles, book chapters, and encyclopedia entries, as well as two books: *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology* and *Intellectual Virtues and Education: Essays in Applied Virtue Epistemology*.<sup>9</sup> While most of this research has been geared toward other philosophers and academic researchers, it has given me a command of the concepts central to virtue epistemology that will prove useful as we explore together what intellectual virtues are, why they're important to education, and how they can be fostered in a classroom setting.<sup>10</sup>

The third main source I'll be drawing on consists of extensive experience implementing a focus on intellectual character development in a K–12 setting, together with hundreds of hours of professional development work with K–12 teachers. Because this experience will inform much of the rest of the book, it bears some explanation.

From 2010 to 2013, I helped found the Intellectual Virtues Academy of Long Beach (IVA), a public charter middle school (grades 6–8) in Long Beach, California.<sup>11</sup> IVA is premised on the idea that a comprehensive educational program can be oriented around helping students cultivate qualities like curiosity, open-mindedness, intellectual courage, and intellectual humility. The idea is not to make intellectual virtues the focus of a separate curriculum or schoolwide program. Rather, it is about integrating opportunities to practice and develop intellectual virtues across the academic curriculum and throughout the life of the school.

IVA opened its doors in the fall of 2013. By nearly every measure, the school has met or exceeded the expectations of its founders. Enrollment is strong. The student body is diverse. Scores on state tests are well above district and state averages. And the school is in a sound and sustainable financial position.

Two additional features of the school strike me as especially indicative of its success. First, IVA is a remarkably happy place. While no school is perfect, when one sets foot on the IVA campus or in one of its classrooms, one quickly gets the impression that this is a warm, vibrant, and flourishing educational community—that the students are (mostly) glad to be there, feel cared for, and are free to be themselves. This impression is confirmed

by annual surveys of students, parents, and teachers, who routinely report extraordinarily high levels of support and satisfaction. A second striking feature is that IVA has been systematically designed around the aim of giving students well-supported opportunities to practice and grow in intellectual virtues. The curriculum, core instructional practices, professional development programming, advisory program, routines, traditions, systems, and policies have been thoughtfully and painstakingly formulated in light of the school's mission and vision. This systematic approach is thanks in no small part to the school's founding and current visionary principal (Jacquie Bryant), founding program administrator (the late and beloved Danielle Montiel), founding board chairman (Eric Churchill), and an extraordinary and exceptionally hardworking group of teachers, staff, and other stakeholders.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the role of cofounder and "resident philosopher," my work at IVA has involved writing significant portions of IVA's charter, serving on the board of directors, participating in the school's advisory program, assisting with grant writing, coleading training events for teachers and other stakeholders, meeting regularly with school leadership to discuss the implementation of the IVA's unique educational philosophy, and more. Together with my work in virtue epistemology, my experience at IVA has led to many opportunities to speak to and work closely with teachers from all over the world. This includes pre-K, K–12, and college and university teachers working in traditional public, charter, and private school settings. These interactions with teachers, including teachers at schools very different from IVA, have given me a good sense of what educating for intellectual virtues can look like across a diverse range of educational contexts and student populations. I will draw on this understanding throughout the book.

## OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

I turn now to provide a very brief sketch of each chapter and to offer some remarks about the book's intended audience and how it might be used in different contexts.

The opening chapters revolve around two questions: What are intellectual virtues? And what is their educational significance? Chapter 1 situates intellectual virtues relative to other, more familiar educational aims (e.g., knowledge and skills, good citizenship, and career preparation). Chapter 2 focuses on the nature and structure of intellectual virtues, providing extended profiles of nine individual virtues that occupy an important role in the remainder of the book.

The next two chapters address the principles and postures central to teaching for intellectual virtues. Chapter 3 explores ten pedagogical principles that can be used to guide the thinking and practice of teachers seeking to have a favorable impact on the intellectual character of their students. Chapter 4 examines a complementary set of pedagogical postures, or attitudes, aimed at fostering a classroom environment conducive to intellectual character growth.

Chapters 5 through 9 explain and provide numerous concrete examples of the pedagogical practices involved with teaching for intellectual virtues. Chapter 5 addresses the importance of getting comfortable with, and introducing students to, the language and concepts of intellectual virtue. Chapter 6 focuses on the role of self-reflection and self-awareness in the development of intellectual virtues. Chapter 7 defends the idea that teaching for intellectual virtues goes hand in hand with teaching for deep understanding. Chapter 8 explains how to provide students with well-supported opportunities to practice the skills and abilities characteristic of intellectual virtues (e.g., asking good questions, thinking for oneself, and perspective-switching). And chapter 9 explores the practice of modeling intellectual virtues for our students.

Chapter 10 tackles the issue of assessment. While noting various pitfalls and other limitations associated with trying to assess students' intellectual character, the chapter articulates several guiding principles that can be used to govern these efforts. It also describes several specific assessment practices and tools aligned with these principles.

The final chapter, Chapter 11, reviews several steps teachers can take to begin teaching for intellectual virtues in a more deliberate and systematic

way. It is aimed at helping teachers begin to align their fundamental values, concerns, and practices with the goal of helping their students make progress in a set of target virtues. It also revisits the value of doing so, which includes deep benefits for teachers and students alike.

The book concludes with two appendices. Appendix A provides a table with a brief description of, and slogan for, several key virtues. Appendix B provides several self-assessment scale items for each of these virtues.

As I hope this overview makes clear, one of the main offerings of the book is a comprehensive *framework* for thinking about and engaging in the practice of teaching. This framework is anchored in a particular vision of what teaching is *for*—of the characterological attributes that teaching at its best seeks to foster. However, the framework is not merely an educational philosophy. It also includes a suite of principles, postures, and practices that can be adapted to different educational levels and settings. In this sense, it spans both theory and practice: it addresses the *why* and the *how* of teaching for intellectual virtues. Finally, the framework is not intended to capture a wholly new or original approach to teaching. Rather, with a nod to Samuel Johnson’s observation that people “more frequently require to be reminded than informed,” its purpose is to motivate, deepen, and integrate many of the known elements of impactful teaching.<sup>13</sup>

## INTENDED AUDIENCE AND USES

This book is written primarily for teachers. I give special attention to how middle school and high school teachers in particular might benefit from its core ideas and recommendations. My rationale for this focus is twofold. First, most of my hands-on work with teachers has been at the secondary (versus primary or postsecondary) level. Second, for developmental reasons, middle school and high school students are ripe for several of the ideas and practices described in the book. They are, for instance, increasingly capable of higher and more active forms of thinking. They are also beginning to carve out their own values and identities. These and other developmental factors put this group in a very good position to practice and internalize the activities and aims discussed in these pages.



That said, the overall framework of the book is readily adaptable to primary and postsecondary settings. Indeed, young children are developmentally inclined to practice such virtues as curiosity, open-mindedness, and intellectual humility in ways that many adolescent students may not be. This aptitude can make teaching for these and related virtues even more natural at lower levels. As for postsecondary students, I have been implementing the book's principles and practices in my own classes at the university level for many years. This work has resulted in many changes to my teaching. These changes have added a richness and meaningfulness to my work with students. In light of course evaluations and other feedback I have received over the years, the changes also appear to have had a favorable impact on many of my students. While the book is aimed primarily at teachers, I hope several other audiences, including educational administrators, researchers, and policy makers, may also find it of some use.

In terms of how the book might be used, I have mainly imagined its readers to be individual teachers or groups of teachers who are looking to reconnect with their passion for teaching or to reconceive of the meaning and purpose of their work with students. The book could also be used in a professional development context, where it could provide teachers and school leaders with an opportunity to wrestle with big questions in education and to reflect on, discuss, and experiment with several concrete pedagogical practices. For similar reasons, the book could also be used in teacher training programs (e.g., in educational foundations or methods courses). Regardless of how it is used, I recommend trying to read it in conversation with others. Again, some of the terms and concepts are likely to be new. Discussing this material with others can make it easier to process. It can also encourage readers to ask thoughtful questions, critically assess what they're reading, and make concrete applications of it.

While the book need not be read from beginning to end, I recommend against skipping immediately to the chapters on pedagogical practices (chapters 5 through 9), especially if the motivation for doing so is to get as quickly as possible to the "practical" parts of the book. For, as I've already suggested, teaching for intellectual virtues isn't just about how we teach; it's also about *who we are* as teachers—about our fundamental values,

hopes, cares, and concerns. Chapters 1 through 4 explore these and related themes in considerable depth.

## CONCLUSION

In my twenty years of experience as an educator, I've been struck, on the one hand, by how difficult it can be to teach in a way that feels connected with what I reflectively consider the most important and life-giving aims of education. I'm well aware of how easy it can be to grow complacent, even cynical. On the other hand, I've also become convinced that the language and concepts of intellectual virtue provide a rich and compelling way of understanding the purpose of education; that this purpose points in the direction of certain pedagogical principles, postures, and practices; and that the adoption of this approach can be a way of resisting the drift toward complacency or cynicism. This is the big picture we'll be exploring together in the pages that follow. I hope you'll experience the book as challenging but nourishing and that it will do something to rekindle your passion and restore your wholeness as a teacher.