

forming new beliefs and understandings and when maintaining or revising already established beliefs and understandings.

In her discussion of open-mindedness, Hytten (2015) was primarily focused on knowledge (e.g., teachers should be open to revising their beliefs when they are in error). At the same time, in her discussion of social justice education, Hytten often appealed to the types of understanding that teachers need—for example, understanding of “their own positionality in relation to inequalities” (p. 3). By incorporating understanding, alongside knowledge, into a conception of open-mindedness as a virtue for social justice educators, we emphasize teachers’ role not just as conveyers of facts but as central actors tasked with fostering students’ development while embedded within a particular community. Open-mindedness is, thus, a virtue of social justice educators because it disposes them to seek deeper understanding of their students, their communities, and their fields, understanding that is indispensable in the pursuit of social justice.

Before moving on to consider the third element of the virtue framework (conditions for success), I introduce one further consideration of the value of open-mindedness as a virtue in the pursuit of social justice. Recently, the concept of epistemic justice has received increased attention, notably in the work of Fricker (2007, 2013), who has developed a theory of epistemic injustice. The concept of epistemic injustice draws attention to the possibility that students may be treated unjustly not only in their capacity as members of democratic society but also in their capacity as knowers. Considering epistemic justice in relation to social justice education, open-mindedness arguably plays a role in preventing epistemic injustice in schools. Teachers and students who are open-minded are motivated to give proper consideration to the epistemic claims of others, which in turn supports the aims of democratic and social justice education. Thus, valuing open-mindedness as a virtue for both teachers and students contributes to epistemic justice by helping students to be treated fairly within schools and outside of schools in broader democratic society as students move into their role as mature citizens.

Now, let’s consider the conditions that support teachers in following through on the open-minded motive across different contexts. As described above, these conditions may be either internal or external. Examining the internal conditions for success draws attention to intrapersonal obstacles that may prevent teachers from being open to revising their beliefs and expanding their understandings. Take two examples: intellectual arrogance and intellectual cowardice.

Teachers who are intellectually arrogant fail to acknowledge that they are fallible cognitive agents whose knowledge and understanding can be improved. This arrogance may prevent a social justice educator from being open to considering information that might challenge his or her current perspectives. Say a veteran teacher has developed classroom practices that she believes best promote fairness for all students. Periodically, students challenge some of these practices, attesting that they are being treated unfairly. Rather than take seriously these students’ concerns and use the interaction to improve her understanding of her students

and consider adjusting her practices, the teacher’s arrogance prevents her from being open-minded.

Teachers who exhibit intellectual cowardice are unwilling to reconsider certain valued beliefs or understandings in the pursuit of the intellectual good. They fail to be open-minded because of fear of opening up their commitments to revision, especially when these commitments are important to their identities. Imagine a novice teacher who is motivated to treat all his students fairly and to improve his knowledge and understanding of his students, the community and school context, and his field. At the same time, he has strong unexamined attachments to some views about the community where he is teaching, views that form an important part of his identity. As he interacts with his students’ parents and the broader community, he has the opportunity to reconsider these views, to be open-minded. However, he is afraid of opening up these views to examination and exhibits intellectual cowardice.

These two examples are intended to illustrate how consideration of the internal conditions necessary for success in possessing or following through on the motive associated with a particular intellectual virtue may help us to build more robust conceptions of the virtues of teachers, identifying their relationship to other virtues as well (e.g., intellectual humility and intellectual courage).

Thus far, we have considered the motives of open-minded teachers and the internal obstacles that may challenge their open-mindedness. Turning to the external conditions that impede or support teachers in enacting open-mindedness allows us to introduce the importance of social context as well as individual responsibility. Teachers’ success in being motivated to give due regard to new information in order to improve their knowledge and understanding and in following through on this motive depends in part of the context in which they are working. We can consider context, for example, at school and system levels. Relevant questions include: Do school policies limit teachers’ control over pedagogical content or methods in ways that undermine open-mindedness? Do system-wide assessment policies promote closed-minded practices over open-minded ones? Do professional codes of conduct limit teachers’ interactions with students in ways that prevent open-minded engagement? By taking seriously the external conditions that support teachers in developing and exhibiting virtues that advance educational aims such as social justice, we can prevent a virtue ethics approach to teacher ethics from ignoring the role of context and the ethical responsibilities of other actors in education systems.

Conclusion

Hytten (2015) initiated a valuable way forward in developing an ethics of social justice educators, drawing on virtue ethics. I have added support to this effort by arguing that a virtue approach to ethics of teaching is in fact compatible with giving due regard to the role of social context in teaching. I then proposed a refined framework for considering the virtues of teachers, one that asks us to identify virtues relevant to teaching within the broad categories of intellectual and moral virtue. For any potential virtue of social justice educators, we should then consider (a) its characteristic psychology, (b) its relationship to the aim of social justice, and (c) both the internal and external conditions for its success.



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