

# An Evaluation of a Workshop for Parents and Teachers on Character Education

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THE JUBILEE CENTRE  
FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

# AN EVALUATION OF A WORKSHOP FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS ON CHARACTER EDUCATION

RESEARCH REPORT

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# Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues

The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues is a unique and leading centre for the examination of how character and virtues impact on individuals and society. The Centre was founded in 2012 by Professor James Arthur. Based at the University of Birmingham, it has a dedicated team of 20 academics from a range of disciplines including: philosophy, psychology, education, theology and sociology.

With its focus on excellence, the Centre has a robust, rigorous research and evidence-based approach that is objective and non-political. It offers world-class research on the importance of developing good character and virtues and the benefits they bring to individuals and society. In undertaking its own innovative research, the Centre also seeks to partner with leading academics from other universities around the world and to develop strong strategic partnerships.

A key conviction underlying the existence of the Centre is that the virtues that make up good character can be learnt and taught. We believe these have been largely neglected in schools and in the professions. It is also a key conviction that the more people exhibit good character and virtues, the healthier our society. As such, the Centre undertakes development projects seeking to promote the practical application of its research evidence.



# An Evaluation of a Workshop for Parents and Teachers on Character Education

## Research Report

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# Overview

Parents<sup>1</sup> and teachers both have a significant influence on the character development of children and young people, and successful character education requires an effective partnership between them (Jubilee Centre, 2017). The initial report of the *Parent-Teacher Partnerships in Character Education* project identified a communication gap between teachers and parents (Harrison, Dineen and Moller, 2018). This second report details the evaluation of a workshop designed to address this gap.

This report describes the methods employed in developing, piloting and evaluating the *Communicating About Character* workshop. The workshop brought teachers and parents together to discuss a range of moral dilemmas and issues relating to character development. The workshop was piloted with 101 participants (57 teachers and 44 parents) in 11 secondary schools in England. The workshop represents a novel pedagogical approach to enhancing parent-teacher partnerships for the benefit of character development.

The primary aim of this research was to evaluate a method to support parents and teachers to work collaboratively on the character development of 11- to 16-year-olds. The research also sought to understand the key concerns that parents and teachers share about character and young people. The workshop was evaluated using a mixed-methods approach, including evaluation questionnaires and thematic analysis of workshop transcripts.

## Key findings

- The vast majority of teachers (98%) and parents (92%) reported that they would recommend the workshop to others. The most common reason both parents (30%) and teachers (48%) would recommend the workshop was the opportunity it provided to hear different perspectives or views about character and character education.
- Parents and teachers found the use of moral dilemmas to be an effective pedagogical tool to enhance and structure conversations between them on issues relating to character.
- When asked to identify character-related challenges that face 11- to 16-year-olds today, both parents and teachers repeatedly mentioned issues relating to the Internet and social media.
- When asked how they would improve the workshop, 'more time' was the factor most commonly cited by parents and teachers, which suggests that they found the time together (up to 1 hour 30 minutes) to be valuable but insufficient.
- The workshop appeared to be a positive experience for parents and teachers, providing them with the potential to build a positive, collaborative relationship around character education.



<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, the word 'parents' is used to refer to any adult with parental responsibility for a child.

# 1 Purpose of the Report

This report gives an account of the development, pilot and evaluation of a new workshop designed to bring parents and teachers together to talk about the character development of the young people in their care. The report presents the findings from the second phase of a three-year project exploring how parents and teachers can effectively collaborate on character education.

Whilst parental involvement in education more broadly is well researched and linked to a wide range of positive outcomes (Barger *et al.*, 2019; Hattie, 2009; Hill and Tyson, 2009), much less is known about how parents and teachers might work together to cultivate character virtues in children and young people. Parental engagement is typically accepted as an important part of successful character education programmes (Arthur, 2003; Berkowitz, 2011; Harrison, Morrison and Ryan, 2016), but there is little empirical research on how parents and teachers might successfully collaborate in this important endeavour.

The first phase of the research project found that there appeared to be an issue with how parents and teachers communicated their educational priorities to each other (Harrison, Dineen and Moller, 2018). Whilst both parents and teachers stated that they prioritised character over attainment, both groups perceived that the other prioritised attainment (*ibid.*). Building on those findings, the second stage of the project designed, piloted and evaluated a workshop with two main aims:

- To give parents and teachers a dedicated time where they could come together to discuss character and young people
- To support parents and teachers to identify shared concerns about character development in young people



The workshop was evaluated using a participant feedback questionnaire. Researchers also video-recorded and transcribed the workshops to identify any key themes of discussion between parents and teachers. Researchers hoped that the analysis of the data would indicate the perceived effectiveness of the workshop, provide useful feedback for those wishing to facilitate similar workshops and highlight some pressing issues for parents and teachers in relation to character education. Specifically, the workshop evaluation sought to address the following research questions:

**RQ1:** Do participants perceive the workshop to enhance communication between parents and teachers about character?

**RQ2:** What, if any, are the common themes or concerns about character and young people that parents and teachers share?

This report describes the implementation of the workshop, the research methods used in its evaluation and the findings of that evaluation. The findings provide evidence that this format of collaboration between parents and teachers has the potential to support positive relationships in the area of character education.



## 2 Background

The *Parent-Teacher Partnerships in Character Education* research project was conducted in two stages over three years. This report is based on the second stage of that project. The first stage consisted of a survey of 376 parents of secondary school children and 137 secondary school teachers (Harrison, Dineen and Moller, 2018). It found that while both parents and teachers said that they prioritised character over attainment for young people, there was a misperception about what the other group prioritised; although both groups said that they valued character, parents believed that teachers prioritised attainment, while teachers believed parents prioritised attainment (*ibid.*). These findings highlighted an issue around how these groups were communicating their educational priorities to each other and identified time as the biggest barrier to successful collaborative relationships in the interest of character education. The second stage of the project, reported here, sought to address this communication gap and the issue of time by providing a facilitated opportunity for parents and teachers to come together to discuss issues relating to character education.

### 2.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

#### 2.1.1 Character Education in England

This research is underpinned by a virtue ethics philosophy, which posits that the development of good character, and the virtues, is constitutive of the good life. Character, as defined in this research, is the 'set of personal traits or dispositions that produce specific moral emotions, inform motivation and guide conduct' (Jubilee Centre, 2017: 2). According to virtue ethics, character can be improved and developed alongside other approaches through the observation of role models; through the ethos or culture of an institution; and by specific teaching or instruction and/or by autonomous reflection and reasoning (Harrison, Morris and Ryan, 2016; Miller, 2018).

In this report, 'character education' is used to refer to all endeavours to cultivate virtues in children and young people in the interests of

human flourishing and can be understood as a subset of moral education (Jubilee Centre, 2017). Character education is not about 'fixing the kids' irrespective of socio-political or institutional contexts; neither is it about 'fixing the parents' (Arthur, 2003). The present research is concerned with recognising the importance of effective parent-teacher collaboration in the cultivation of character in children and young people.

In recent years, character education has featured prominently in educational policy development in England and is one of the stated priorities of the Department for Education (DfE). The inclusion of character education in the new Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (under the 'personal development' heading) has further cemented its status in English education. Introduced in September 2019, inspectors now judge the personal development of learners in schools by evaluating the extent to which 'the curriculum and the provider's wider work support learners to develop their character – including their resilience, confidence and independence – and help them know how to keep physically and mentally healthy' (Ofsted, 2019: 11).

In addition to the prominent place of character education in current education policy, there seems to be a wider, growing recognition that character traits (eg, resilience, self-regulation and gratitude) play a role in enabling young people to achieve a wide range of positive outcomes. These include improved academic attainment (Jeynes, 2017; Benninga *et al.*, 2003), classroom behaviour (Weber, Wagner and Ruch, 2016), health and wellbeing (Snyder *et al.*, 2012), and prosocial behaviour and life satisfaction (Froh, Bono and Emmons, 2010). The widespread consensus on the benefits of cultivating character is further evidenced by the results of a DfE survey of 880 schools in 2017, which showed that 97% of schools surveyed sought to promote desirable character traits among their students (White *et al.*, 2017). A poll by Populus and the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues found that 87% of parents surveyed felt that schools should have

a focus on character development (Jubilee Centre, 2013). A further survey of 2,095 adults, commissioned by the Youth Sport Trust (2020), found that 62% agreed that the wellbeing of students is more important than academic attainment.

Although it is not universally agreed that schools should be involved in character education, and some critics have expressed concerns about indoctrination, it is clear from the Populus survey referenced above that a significant majority of parents believe that schools have an important role in this area. Therefore, it is important that schools and parents find ways to collaborate to develop the character of the children and young people in their care.

#### 2.1.2 Parent and Teacher Collaboration

The link between parental involvement and children's academic success in education is well established, and there is a long history of research in this area (Education Endowment Foundation, 2018). Replicating the results of Hattie (2009), a recent meta-analysis by Barger *et al.* (2019) of 448 independent studies, including 480,830 families, revealed small positive associations between parents' involvement in children's schooling and children's academic adjustment (ie, achievement, engagement, and motivation) that were maintained over time. Parents' involvement was also positively related to children's social and emotional adjustment and negatively related to their delinquency (*ibid.*). This, and other research, makes a compelling case for parental involvement in education (broadly construed).

Although the benefits of parent-teacher collaboration are clear, it seems that current practice in this area does not always capitalise on its potential. Most schools say that they do not have an explicit plan for how they work with parents, and fewer than 10% of teachers have undertaken Continuing Professional Development (CPD) on parental engagement (Education Endowment Foundation, 2018). A survey by Parentkind in 2019 found that even though 76% of parents wanted to have a say on a range of issues at school level, only 50%

of those who had shared their views felt that the school listened to them. Reported barriers to successful parent-teacher partnerships include time constraints, cultural differences and other communication difficulties (Parentkind, 2019; Ozmen *et al.*, 2016). It has been suggested that these barriers may be the result of parents' own negative experiences of school (Hartman and Chesley, 1998), their disillusionment and distrust of teachers (Westergård, 2013) and also of teachers' own insecurities about how to involve parents and their resulting reluctance in doing so (Eldridge, 2001; Denessen *et al.*, 2010).

### 2.1.3 Parent and Teacher Collaboration in Character Education

While there is a large literature base on parental engagement in education broadly, the majority of research focusses on the effect of parental engagement on academic learning (El Nokali, Bachman and Votruba-Drzal, 2010). This may be because typical forms of parental involvement are helping with homework and attending meetings such as parents' evenings (*ibid.*). Parental engagement is considered a crucial characteristic of effective in-school character education programmes (Lickona, 1992; Berkowitz and Bier, 2005; Berkowitz, Bier and McCauley, 2017). There are many examples of individual schools that, anecdotally, use specific initiatives to seek to engage with parents in the area of character education. These initiatives include: a) parent workshops on character education or character-related issues (eg, resilience); b) a termly newsletter focussing on the school's character education initiatives; and c) inviting parents to take part in events with an explicit character education agenda. These events included, for example, a fundraiser or tea party where students served guests that they had invited, in order to show their gratitude. These initiatives, however, were found in individual schools and had been subject to limited or no external evaluation for effectiveness or impact. They also tended to have teachers in a position of authority or expertise, giving advice or information to parents, rather than representing a collaboration between parents and teachers as equals.



## 2.2 OVERALL EVALUATIVE GOALS

The overarching purpose of the research was to explore how parents and teachers might work more collaboratively to develop children's character. Building on the work of the first phase of the research project, which identified barriers and enablers to successful collaboration, this study aimed to pilot a workshop as a tool to promote better communication between secondary school teachers and parents on character. There is no evidence within the UK of any previous work that sought to combine the elements of these aims into a single research project.

Through an evaluative questionnaire, participants were invited to provide individual, confidential feedback, on the perceived effectiveness of the workshop. The researchers also video-recorded the workshops in order to identify some of the key themes that participants discussed.

The goals of the research were to:

- Identify parents' and teachers' common concerns about character and young people that arose in the workshop. The identification of concerns adds further qualitative data to the findings from the first stage of the study (Harrison, Dineen and Moller, 2018) and further explores the barriers and enablers to successful partnerships in character education.
- Evaluate the workshop from the perspective of the participants, so as to enhance communication between parents and teachers about character. This initial evaluation was intended to provide data to ascertain whether or not the workshop was perceived to be a valuable tool for schools to enhance parent-teacher collaboration in character education. The evaluation sought to provide recommendations to schools that wish to conduct a similar workshop or utilise workshop materials in other ways.
- Contribute to theoretical understanding around successful parent-teacher engagement, particularly with regards to character education, and identify some possible barriers and enablers to fostering effective collaborative relationships.



# 3 Methodology

This section of the report outlines the methods used in constructing the workshop intervention, recruiting the participants and the measures used to evaluate the key research aims. The *Communicating About Character* workshop was a newly created initiative for this project. A mixed-method approach of quantitative and qualitative research was undertaken to help evaluate the practicalities of conducting the workshops, as well as the potential benefit that fostering discussions between teachers and parents may have in developing children's character. It was intended that by triangulating the quantitative survey data with the qualitative comments from participants, a richer understanding of engagement during the workshops would emerge (Simpson and Tuson, 2003).



## 3.1 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMMUNICATING ABOUT CHARACTER WORKSHOP

In a DfE report into best practice in parental engagement, Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) argued that the transfer of knowledge and understanding should be a two-way process: from school to home and also from home to school. Therefore, the workshop's activities were designed to be discussion-based, to allow parents and teachers to work in pairs to transfer knowledge and understanding. All of the workshop materials are available to view and download at: [www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/parent-teacher-workshop](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/parent-teacher-workshop)

At the start of each workshop researchers explained to all participants that the aim was to provide an opportunity for parents and teachers to talk about character development in young people. The participants then completed, over the course of 1 hour and 30 minutes, the following three activities:

### Activity 1: Ranking the Virtues

Participants were asked to work in mixed (parent/teacher) pairs for all of the activities in the workshop. They were given nine cards which each had a virtue written on them. They were asked to rank the cards with regards to which virtue they most valued for their children/students (a ranking of one reflected the most valued; a ranking of nine reflected the least valued). These nine virtues were either moral (ie, *compassion; honesty*), intellectual (ie, *curiosity; critical thinking*), civic (ie, *civility; service*) or performance (ie, *confidence; resilience*), and were listed alongside the meta-virtue of wisdom (see *Building Blocks of Character*; Jubilee Centre, 2017: 5).

Participants were then prompted to discuss these virtues with regards to: a) 'What type of person do you want your child/students to become?'; b) 'How do young people develop good character?'; c) 'Whose responsibility is it to develop character in young people?'; and, d) 'How could you support young people to develop good character?' Working in pairs, or small groups, parents and teachers were asked to reach an agreement or compromise about the relative importance of each virtue

and to discuss what virtues they believed young people needed. An earlier phase of this study showed that, when asked individually, both parents and teachers ranked moral virtues as the most important, although parents believed that teachers viewed moral virtues as the least important (Harrison, Dineen and Moller, 2018). The aim of this activity was to enable parents and teachers to identify their shared priorities and perhaps address some of the misconceptions found in the earlier study.

### Activity 2: Opportunities for Character Development

Participants were asked to discuss in pairs, or small groups, and then as a whole group: 'What opportunities are there for students to develop their character: a) in the school day? and b) outside of the school day?' This discussion was intended to enable participants to explore the roles they have in developing young people's character. The exercise was designed to be reflective, enabling both parents and teachers to identify opportunities for character development and the processes surrounding how character is formed.

### Activity 3: Moral Dilemmas

Moral dilemmas have long been used not only to assess moral judgement and reasoning (Piaget, 1932; Kohlberg, 1981; Arthur, Walker and Thoma, 2018), but also to develop these skills (Blatt and Kohlberg, 1975; Lind, 2006). Building on the use of moral dilemmas in previous Jubilee Centre studies (eg, Arthur *et al.*, 2015; Arthur, Walker and Thoma, 2018; Harrison and Khatoun, 2017), participants were presented with two moral dilemmas, which had been designed by the research team for the workshop (Appendix 1). Participants discussed the dilemmas in parent-teacher pairs or small groups, and then as a whole group. Researchers drew on their experience as classroom teachers to design dilemmas that were relevant for both parents and teachers. The first dilemma referred to a daughter accepting a school librarian position that clashed with a maths revision lesson. The second dilemma concerned a student sending aggressive and unpleasant messages via social media to another student, and how a third student, who witnessed the



messages, should respond. Participants were asked to discuss: a) 'How would you respond in this situation?'; b) 'What do you see as the main conflict in this scenario?'; and c) 'Which virtues are relevant to this situation?'. The purpose of the dilemmas was to stimulate conversation and draw out different approaches to, and possible tensions within, these situations.

‘A CHILD EDUCATED ONLY IN SCHOOL IS AN UNEDUCATED CHILD.’

 George Santayana

### 3.2 RECRUITMENT AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Full ethical approval was obtained from the University of Birmingham's Ethics Committee prior to the study commencing. The researchers used a convenience sampling approach to recruit 11 secondary schools from across the North, Midlands and South of England. The researchers contacted all schools, via email and telephone, to explain the details of the workshop and to obtain institutional-level consent from a person of authority in each school. In accord with practical guidelines (Krueger and Casey, 2014), schools were recruited until a critical mass of data was deemed to have been obtained. Ten schools in this study were state-funded. Of these, nine were non-selective academies, and one was a selective grammar school. The study also included one non-state funded independent school. Each participating school was co-educational with the exception of one, which was an all-girls school. The majority of schools in this sample were non-faith schools. One school had a Catholic foundation and ethos recorded, and another had a Christian foundation but no religious ethos recorded. Further details of the participating schools are available in Appendix 2.

Once school leaders had consented to take part, opportunistic sampling was used to recruit teachers and parents who were willing to attend the workshop and participate in the

research. Participants were fully informed about the study and written consent was obtained to illustrate their willingness to participate. Participants were made aware, prior to committing to participate, that all workshops and discussions would be video recorded for analysis; these videos included audio recordings of all the discussions between participants in regard to the workshop activities and were treated confidentially. Furthermore, all participants were informed that they would be asked to complete a short survey at the end of the workshop and were instructed that they did not have to complete any question they did not wish to answer.

### 3.3 RESEARCH PROCEDURES AND MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENTS

#### 3.3.1 Workshops

The same two principal researchers led each workshop. The workshops were conducted in a quiet, enclosed room situated within each respective school (ie, a classroom, school library, or training space). A total of 101 participants took part in the workshops, of which 57 were teachers and 44 were parents. Each workshop was scheduled for a duration of 1 hour and 30 minutes. A structured schedule, which included a series of discussions and activities for participants to complete, was designed to guide each workshop. The video and audio recordings of each workshop enabled the research team to gain valuable qualitative

data by observing participants' interactions and discussions. Video recordings were used to allow the researchers to revisit conversations and comments made during the workshop.

#### 3.3.2 Survey

At the conclusion of every workshop, participants were asked to complete a survey which was administered in a hardcopy format. In total, 94 participants completed the survey (teachers = 42; parents = 52), and participants had as long as they wished to complete them. The survey was divided into three distinct sections:

##### i) General Demographic Characteristics of Participants.

##### ii) An Evaluation of the Workshop:

- Participants were asked to indicate on a five-point scale if they found the three activities included in the workshop to be useful, ranging from one (*useless*) to five (*very useful*)
- Participants were asked to indicate on a five-point scale how they found the general discussion topics within the workshop, ranging from one (*useless*) to five (*very useful*)
- Participants were asked whether they would recommend the workshop to other teachers/parents and encouraged to indicate why
- Participants were asked what changes could be made to improve the workshop and when the best time to run the workshop would be



### iii) An Evaluation of the Moral Dilemma

#### Activity:

- Participants were asked to indicate on a five-point scale if they found the two moral dilemmas to be realistic, ranging from one (*very unrealistic*) to five (*very realistic*)
- An open-ended question was used to ask participants if they found the moral dilemmas helped them to reflect on the character of their students/children and, if so, how
- A final open-ended question asked whether participants found the moral dilemmas helpful in structuring conversations between parents and teachers

### 3.2.3 Participant Demographics

Demographic data relating to the teachers and parents that completed the survey is presented below.

#### i) Teachers

- There was an even split in the number of male (50%) and female (50%) teachers
- Over half of the teachers were between 35 and 44 years of age (52%), 19% were between 45 and 54 years, 12% were between 25 and 34 years, 10% were over the age of 54, and 7% were between 18 and 24 years
- Teachers' ethnicity covered White Caucasian (89%), Asian (2%), Black-African, Black-Caribbean or Black British (2%), or other multiracial ethnic backgrounds (7%)
- Many of the teachers held pastoral roles within their respective schools, including senior leadership positions (29%), heads of particular year groups (14%), form tutors (36%), and other (12%); 9% had no pastoral responsibilities or left the question blank

#### ii) Parents

- The parent sample predominately consisted of mothers (83%) with a smaller proportion of fathers (11%) and grandmothers (6%)
- In regard to age, 60% of parents reported being between 45 and 54 years, 25% were between 35 and 44 years, 11% were over the age of 54, and 4% were between 25 and 34 years
- In relation to the age of their children, 71% of the parents had a child in Years 7 to 9 (ie, 11 to 14 years old), 52% had a child in Years 10 or 11 (ie, 14 to 16 years old), and 12% had a child in Year 11 or above (ie, 16+ years)
- 8% of parents reported they had children who were entitled to free school meals
- 77% of the parents reported they had obtained a higher education qualification

### 3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis was conducted in two distinct phases. The first phase used the video recordings to address the first research aim: to identify any common concerns for parents and teachers about character and young people that arose in the workshop. In total, the researchers facilitated 11 workshops, ranging between 49 to 89 minutes in length. These workshops were video-recorded, transcribed and coded for themes through NVivo Software. The transcript analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach, which consists of becoming acquainted with the data, producing initial codes, exploring for themes, reviewing these themes through the re-examination of the data and, finally, designating and defining themes.

In order to evaluate the workshop, descriptive statistics from participants' survey responses were commuted using Microsoft Excel and SPSS statistical software. The percentage of responses to each survey question was calculated to give a proportional representation of how participants perceived each aspect of the workshop. These percentages were also supported by qualitative responses provided in the open-ended survey questions and from general discussions within the workshop.

### 3.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

There are several principal limitations with the research, concerned with the sample and the research instruments. The study utilised convenience sampling in order to recruit participants, and therefore the data is likely to contain some bias; the findings cannot be generalised to the whole population. Schools that were contacted already had a relationship, or familiarity with, the Jubilee Centre, and so were probably more acquainted with, and committed to, the principles of character education than other, similar schools. The survey was based on self-report which, as a data-collection method, has inherent risks of bias, and responses may have been influenced by social desirability or a desire to please the researchers. Furthermore, answers given in surveys are easily influenced by respondents' mood and the questionnaire design, among other factors (Lambert, 2012). Although the surveys were deliberately kept short (14 questions in total), it is possible that the responses were affected by respondent fatigue that occurs when participants become tired of the survey task, resulting in a deterioration of the quality of the data (Lavrakas, 2008). Furthermore, as the workshop was delivered at different sites, on different days and at different times, it may not have been experienced consistently by all the participants.

As the research project was conceived as a pilot study, it was not deemed necessary to randomise or use controls, although these should be undertaken when considering a more advanced and stable intervention.

“TO DEVELOP THE CHILD INTO A MAN OF WELL PROPORTIONED AND HARMONIOUS NATURE, THIS IS ALIKE THE AIM OF PARENT AND TEACHER.”

 Herbert Spencer

# 4 Findings

The findings relating to each of the two overarching research questions are reported below.

## 4.1 RQ1: DID PARTICIPANTS PERCEIVE THE WORKSHOP TO ENHANCE THE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND TEACHERS ABOUT CHARACTER?

After completing the workshop, the vast majority of teachers (98%) and parents (92%) reported that they would recommend the workshop to others. Participants were given the opportunity to explain their reasons for recommending the workshop. When their comments were analysed for themes, the most common reason for recommending the workshop from both parents (29%) and teachers (48%) was the opportunity to hear different perspectives. A teacher stated that:

*It is both enlightening and reassuring to explore the similarities and differences in both experiences and viewpoints of character between teachers and parents.*

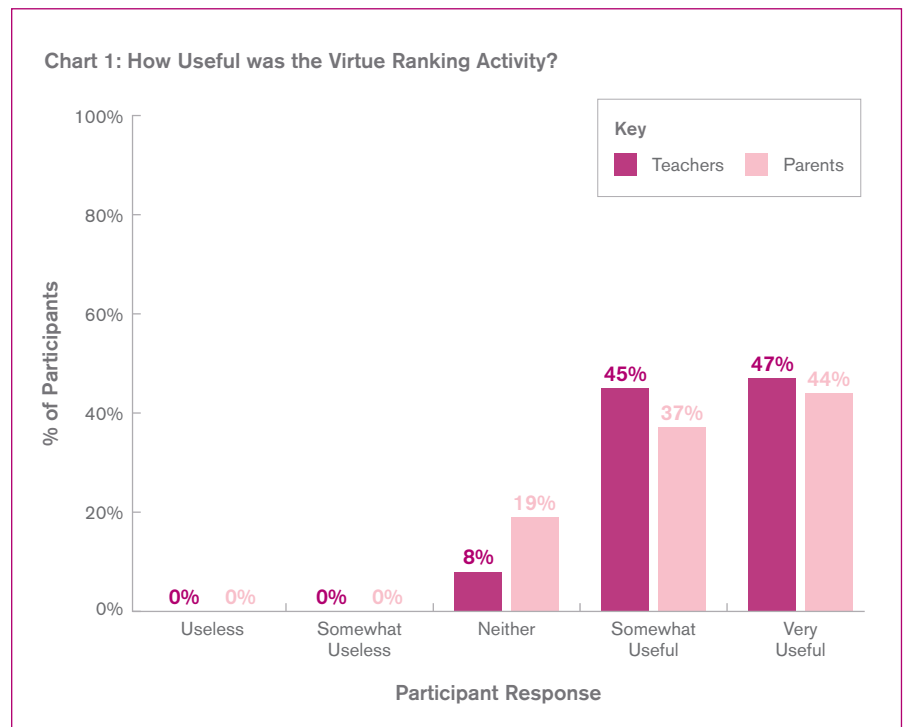
Similarly, a parent wrote that:

*It is an opportunity for everyone to give their viewpoint which may or may not be different to others so it is an ideal situation to discuss this in a non-judgemental environment and to consider the reasons of actions and decisions of others.*

In contrast, 2% of teachers and 6% of parents indicated they would not recommend the workshop to others. Reasons for this included that discussing moral dilemmas, which only involved a few students, did not allow them to sufficiently explore whole-school initiatives. A teacher stated:

*[I] was really hoping that we would look at developing character in a wider setting rather than specific to very individual settings which impact on just one or few individuals.*

Parents and teachers were asked to rank the different activities in the workshop on a Likert scale from 1–5 on their perceived usefulness. The results from the virtue ranking activity are shown in Chart 1. The results referring to moral dilemmas will be covered separately.



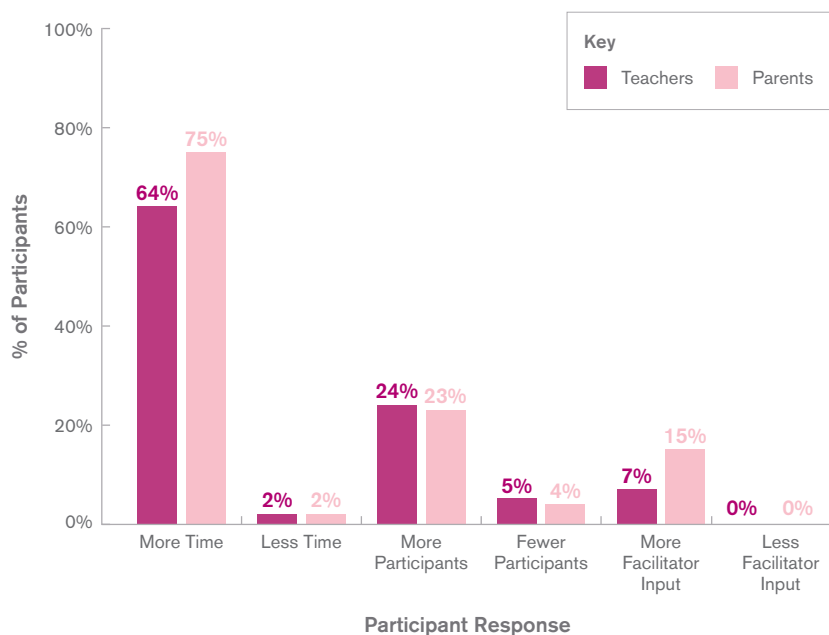
As shown in Chart 1, 92% of teachers and 81% of parents rated the virtue ranking activity as either 'very useful' or 'somewhat useful'. When researchers asked participants to state which character virtues their teams placed highest in the ranking activity, the transcripts showed that resilience was most commonly at the top. This was followed by confidence and then compassion and honesty. Several groups justified the decision to put resilience as the most important on the basis that it enabled the development of other virtues, particularly confidence. Similarly, when other participants narrated confidence as the highest ranked virtue, they tended to state that it was either closely linked to, or could enable, resilience. When participants were asked to report which virtues they ranked lowest, they tended to refer to wisdom and service. Wisdom was the virtue most commonly ranked lowest, and this decision was frequently justified on the basis that it comes naturally with age or was the result of other virtues. For example, one teacher said:

*It's because you normally get wiser when you get older.*

Other participants narrated that service was lowest ranked because it was also reliant on having other virtues.

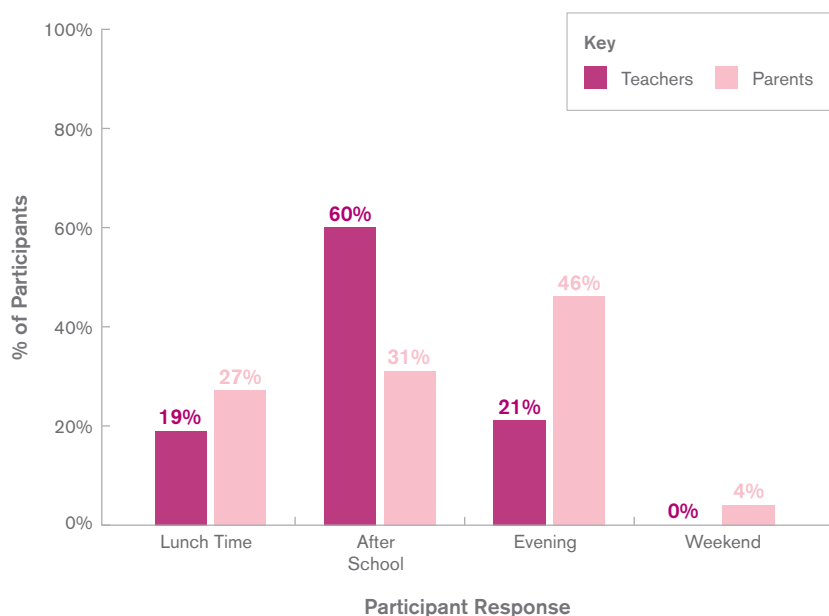
All participants rated all other activities in the workshop as either 'very useful', 'somewhat useful' or 'neither'. No participants described any of the activities as 'useless'. Teachers found the 'general discussions' and the 'ranking of virtues' activities more useful than the 'explanation of character'. Parents found the 'general discussions' the most useful and the 'explanation of character' was the least useful.

Chart 2: How Would You Improve the Workshop?



Participants were asked what they would change to improve the workshop, and the results can be seen in Chart 2. They were given six options and asked to tick as many as were applicable. They were also given the option to specify other factors that they would change. Both parents and teachers predominantly suggested that more time would improve the workshop. The workshops were scheduled to last for 1 hour and 30 minutes, which was agreed by the schools and participants prior to deciding to take part. For teachers and parents, the second most common improvement was more participants. The number of participants in the workshops varied from five to 17, with mixed ratios of parents to teachers. The average number of participants was nine. There was disparity between the number of parents and the smaller number of teachers who wanted more facilitator input.

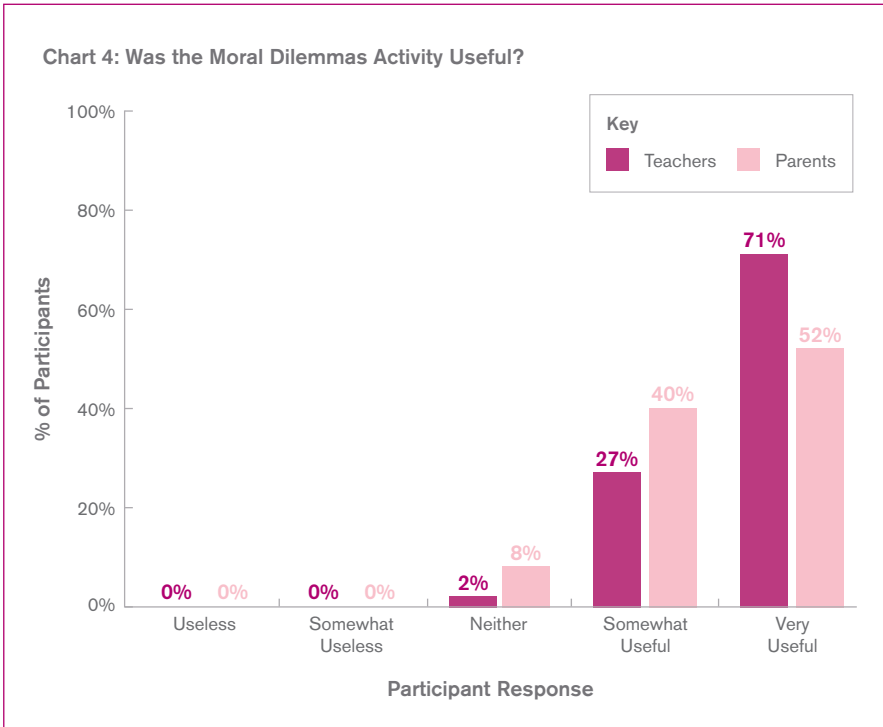
Chart 3: What Would the Best Time for the Workshop be?



When schools agreed to participate in the research project, they were asked to select a time that was convenient to them and which would enable them to recruit sufficient numbers of teachers and parents to participate. Three of the workshops (27%) took place during the school day, seven of the workshops (64%) took place immediately after school and one (9%) took place in the evening. In the questionnaire, participants were asked to choose the best time for the workshop. They were able to select multiple options. As can be seen in Chart 3, the majority of teachers felt that after school was the best time for the workshop. By contrast, the majority of parents felt that evening was the best time for the workshop. This divide was reinforced when participants were invited to make 'other' suggestions, with one parent suggesting 'school holidays' and another suggesting 'weekday evenings', while a teacher suggested 'anytime in school' commenting that:

*Contributions are more positive when not giving up your own time.*

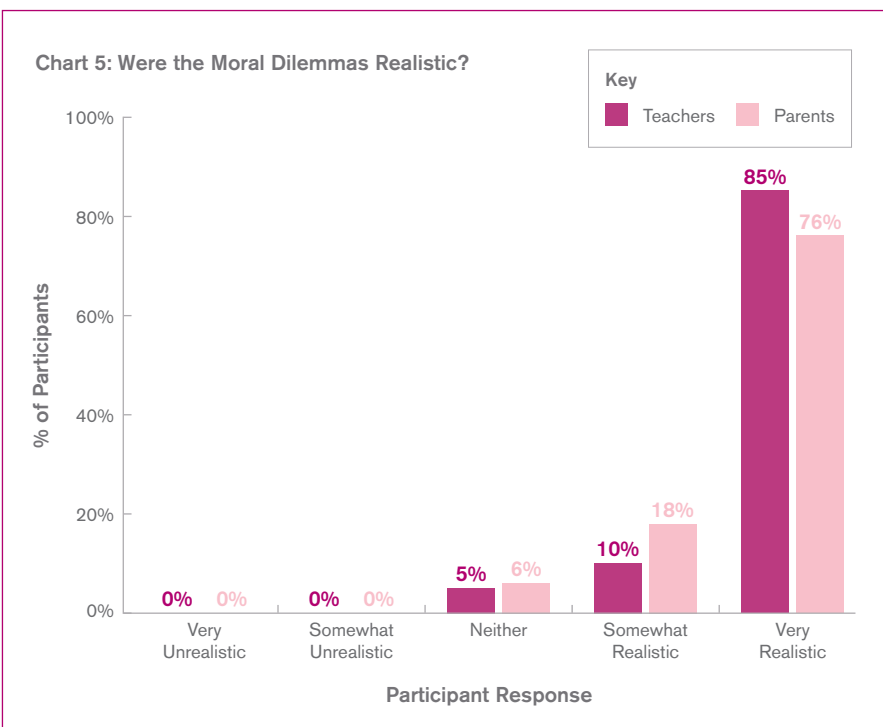
4.1.2 Feedback on Moral Dilemmas Activity



Of all the workshop activities, the moral dilemmas had the highest percentage of teachers (98%) and parents (94%) rating it as 'very useful' or 'somewhat useful' (Chart 4). The majority of both parents and teachers felt that the moral dilemmas presented and discussed in the workshop were 'very realistic' (Chart 5).

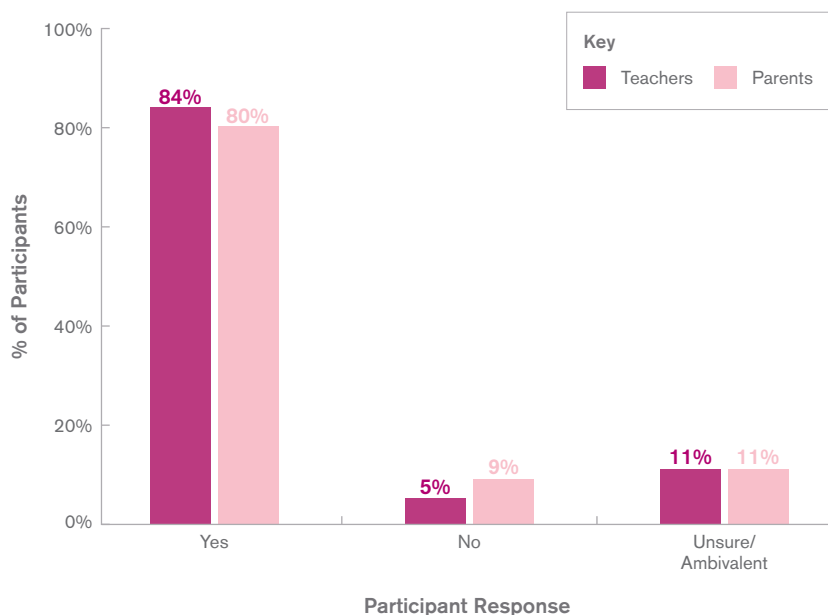
“UPON THE SUBJECT OF EDUCATION, NOT PRESUMING TO DICTATE ANY PLAN OR SYSTEM RESPECTING IT, I CAN ONLY SAY THAT I VIEW IT AS THE MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECT WHICH WE AS A PEOPLE CAN BE ENGAGED IN.”

 Abraham Lincoln





**Chart 6: Did the Moral Dilemmas Help You Reflect on Children's Character?**



As can be seen in Chart 6, 84% of teachers and 80% of parents gave affirmative answers to the question of whether the moral dilemmas helped them to reflect on children's character; 16% of teachers and 20% of parents gave negative answers or were unsure or ambivalent. This was an open-ended question which allowed participants to explain their answers, if they wished. Among teachers, there were a number of positive comments focussing on how the dilemmas had helped them to develop a better understanding of the lives of students and to see dilemmas from their perspectives. For example, one teacher stated that:

*Yes, thinking about the dilemmas they face between loyalty versus honesty is very helpful. We forget the influence of peer pressure as we grow older.*

Parents, however, predominantly commented on how the relevance of the moral dilemmas helped them to apply them to their own children. For example, one parent stated that:

*Yes, as they were realistic and we have been in similar situations and probably will be again.*

Among teachers who responded negatively, one teacher commented that:

*We already do reflect about students all the time.*

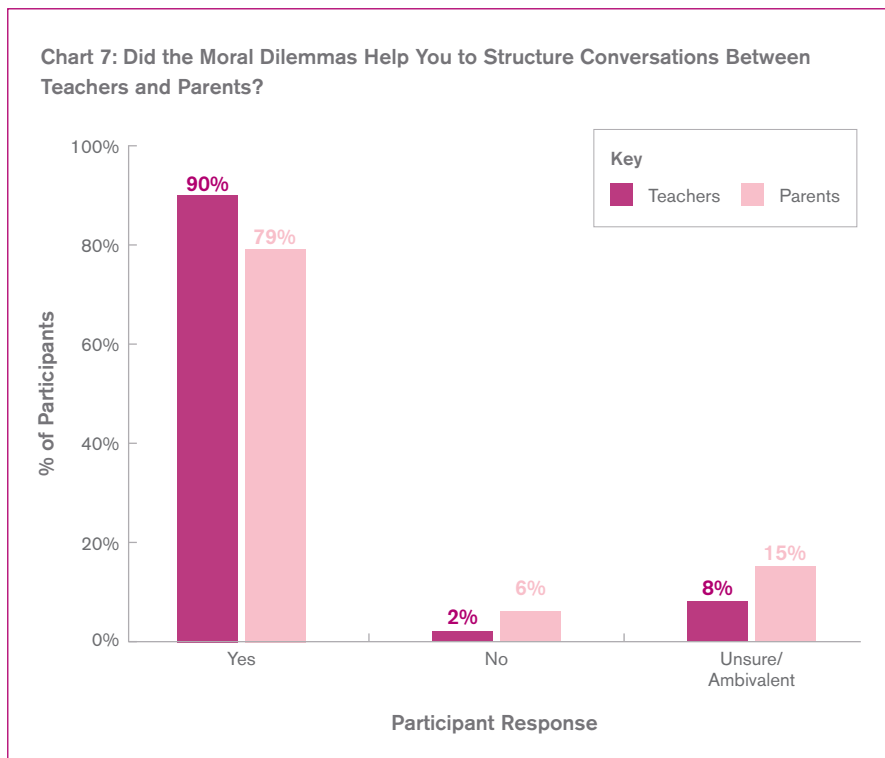
Another teacher stated that:

*I think students are facing bigger issues.*

A parent suggested that:

*A wider cross section of parents would provide a broader view.*





As can be seen in Chart 7, 90% of teachers and 79% of parents gave affirmative answers to the question asking them whether the moral dilemmas helped them to structure their conversations. Parents were less positive than teachers, with 10% of teachers and 21% of parents giving negative, unsure or ambivalent answers. This was an open-ended question, which allowed participants to explain their answers, if they wished. A significant number of participants who responded positively mentioned that the moral dilemmas allowed teachers and parents to share their different perspectives and approaches to a dilemma, which was beneficial for both parties. For example, one teacher stated that:

*[Discussing the moral dilemmas] helped as we were able to discuss from one side then the other and impart views and ideas on an equal footing.*

Both teachers and parents also felt that the moral dilemmas provided a good starting point from which conversation could develop. For example, a teacher wrote:

*[The moral dilemmas were] a starting point but conversation developed from there.*

Two parents mentioned that they felt they needed more time, with one parent writing:

*Not really, maybe due to short time, we could only restrict to the point of discussion [sic].*

#### **4.2 RQ2: WHAT, IF ANY, WERE THE CONCERNS ABOUT CHARACTER AND YOUNG PEOPLE THAT PARENTS AND TEACHERS SHARED?**

The second research question was addressed by analysing the transcripts of the workshops. Three key questions are considered in turn: 1) What character-related challenges did teachers and parents perceive young people face today?; 2) What opportunities did teachers and parents perceive there to be inside and outside the school day for students' character development?; and, 3) How did teachers and parents respond to the moral dilemmas in the workshop?

##### **4.2.1 What character-related challenges did teachers and parents perceive young people face today?**

During general discussions in the workshop, there was a consistent theme that social media is the greatest character-related challenge faced by young people today. Several specific challenges relating to social media were mentioned by both parents and teachers, including: cyberbullying, the pressure to conform to unrealistic images, fake news, trolling and the fact young people may be judged later in life on comments made online as a teenager. Participants identified both resilience and critical thinking as key virtues necessary to deal successfully with the challenges of social media. One parent explained:

*I think it's extremely hard to be young today... they have social media thrown at them. Random posts sent to them, fake news. In these phones they have access to the world. They don't access them very well, they get confused ... but that can be their basis, their education in life.*

A second challenge, referenced in five workshops, was the academic pressures associated with school. One teacher commented:

*They have the academic pressures... that can make a difference, a huge difference to their lives, and they spend the majority of their time here.*

This sense of increased academic pressure, or expectation, for this generation was mentioned by both parents and teachers.

#### **4.2.2 What opportunities did teachers and parents perceive there to be for students' character development inside and outside of the school day?**

Participants were asked about what opportunities they thought were available for students' character development both inside and outside of the school day. In terms of opportunities for character development, teachers predominantly focussed on opportunities within the school curriculum, such as assemblies or PSHE lessons. One teacher stated:

*Assemblies often have a moral message... bullying... gossip amongst girls... I think the explicit moments in the day, SMSC day, or lessons where you can teach those ethical issues.*

Teachers in five schools also mentioned the importance of the relationships between staff and students as opportunities for character development. One teacher summarised this by saying:

*I think from a teaching perspective, the development of character can come in moments. The way they are treated and welcomed.*

Parents' answers were more diverse and included clubs outside of school, routines or expectations such as doing chores, and opportunities within school, including being a member of a student council. In five

schools, parents mentioned extra-curriculum opportunities including the Duke of Edinburgh Award. One parent said:

*My daughter just did the national citizenship thing, [NCS], over summer... it should be mandatory in a way, because it was amazing. She found it hard, character building.*

In four schools, parents mentioned the importance of encouraging children in order to develop their character, which perhaps relates to the emphasis on confidence as a character virtue. A parent stated:

*It's almost about praising good character that you encourage students to develop that and respond in the right way.*

#### **4.2.3 How did parents and teachers respond to the moral dilemmas in the workshop?**

The final stage of the workshop involved parents and teachers being presented with two moral dilemmas, in which they were asked to discuss how they would encourage a student to act in a particular scenario.

The first dilemma involved Emily's commitment to a volunteer role as a librarian, versus the option of dropping out and attending an extra maths revision session. In all 11 workshops, parents and teachers reported that completing the library volunteering, to which Emily had committed, was important, as referenced by one parent:

*We were talking here about the importance of commitment, if you've signed a permission slip... we should as parents encourage our children to go as opposed to the maths... what are we teaching, that you can drop out of things?*

Though the importance of commitment to volunteering in this scenario was a primary response from teachers and parents, the importance of supporting students in the academic curriculum was also acknowledged, as explained by one parent:

*As a parent I am all about commitment, you have to go, but I was a teacher in my former life, and she needs maths support, here.*

The second dilemma highlighted a clash of virtues between Daniel's loyalty to friends and being honest in relation to an incident of online bullying. The participants in the workshop identified this clash of virtues, as illustrated by a teacher:

*You have a young man... who's stuck between loyalty to his group... trying to fit in as a young person [and] honesty, doing the right thing, looking after someone else.*

Parents and teachers also highlighted a number of tensions for Daniel in dealing with this dilemma, including the nuances of mediating between the virtues and the challenge of building empathy and compassion for the victim in the scenario.

The wide-ranging discussions around these moral dilemmas highlighted the challenges that both parents and teachers face when encouraging young people in developing character. One aspect of the discussion focussed on the motivations of parents and teachers in encouraging Daniel and Emily to take certain courses of action. Another aspect was more pragmatic in nature and concerned practical steps the students could take to resolve the dilemma and, in doing so, develop their character.

# 5 Discussion

The findings reported above provide some interesting insights into parent-teacher collaboration in the area of character education and the potential usefulness of a focussed workshop. This section discusses the most compelling findings.

## 5.1 TIME FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT CHARACTER

There have been several studies which have suggested that time is a significant barrier for effective parent-teacher communication and collaboration (eg, Hornby and Blackwell, 2018; Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems, 2003; Williams and Sanchez, 2013). Furthermore, in the initial stage of this research project, both parents and teachers reported that 'lack of time' was the biggest barrier to a positive relationship between them in the area of character education (Harrison, Dineen and Moller, 2018). Therefore, it was hoped that providing a dedicated time to talk about character would support the development of positive relationships between parents and teachers. Based on the questionnaire responses, teachers, in particular, seemed to appreciate the time to talk to parents outside of the traditional avenues of parents' evenings or progress meetings.

When asked how they would improve the workshop, 'more time' was the factor most commonly cited by parents and teachers, which suggests that they found the time together constructive, but felt that there was more to be gained through further discussions. The workshop lasted for 1 hour and 30 minutes, which included completing the questionnaires. In light of this it would be useful to ascertain what workshop duration parents and teachers would prefer. It is unclear whether one longer session or several shorter sessions over a longer period of time would have been preferable, and this would be a fruitful avenue to explore in future evaluations.

Although both parents and teachers wanted more time in the workshop, there was a notable difference between teachers' and parents' preferred time of day for the workshop. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the evening was the most common preferred time for parents, followed by after school. The majority of teachers, however, stated that after school was their preferred time. This suggests that time is one area of tension in parental engagement with schools. Parents who have commitments including work and childcare may find it easier to engage with schools in

the evenings. Teachers, for whom parental engagement is part of their job, may want to fulfil this role within their normal, working hours.

## 5.2 PARTICIPANTS ATTENDING THE WORKSHOP

In total, 101 participants took part in the workshop across 11 schools. Schools were able to recruit participants for each workshop, suggesting that there is sufficient interest from parents and teachers to run workshops of this novel nature. The numbers in the workshop varied from five participants to 17, so it would be difficult to suggest an ideal, or average, number. When there was an imbalance of teachers and parents (ie, normally more parents), parents commented that they wanted more teachers in order to hear their viewpoints. Through questionnaire comments, some parents highlighted that they felt that they were not the right target audience, and that a 'more diverse' range of parents was needed. Although there were equal numbers of male and female teachers, it is notable that only 11% of the parent participants were male. Schools were responsible for recruiting participants, so they were not a representative sample. In order to recruit participants, most schools gave an open call to parents, and therefore positive responses tended to be from parents that were already engaged with the school in some form. As very few teachers in the UK have undertaken CPD on parental engagement (Education Endowment Foundation, 2018), it might be necessary to extend such CPD opportunities and include advice on working in partnership with harder-to-reach parents.



‘CHILDREN HAVE NEVER BEEN VERY GOOD AT LISTENING TO THEIR ELDERS, BUT THEY HAVE NEVER FAILED TO IMITATE THEM.’

 James A. Baldwin





### 5.3 VIRTUES PRIORITISED BY PARENTS AND TEACHERS

Working together on the virtue ranking activity forced parents and teachers to come to a consensus, making it difficult to tease out potential similarities or differences between their responses. When participants were asked to state which character virtues they ranked as most important however, the transcripts showed that resilience was the most likely to be placed at the top, suggesting a consensus across schools and perhaps between parents and teachers. Resilience was followed by confidence, then honesty and then compassion, suggesting that the performance virtues, followed by the moral virtues, were deemed to be most important. A previous study by the Jubilee Centre found that, when asked to rank eight virtues, teachers predominantly placed resilience at the top, while parents ranked honesty as most important (Harrison, Dineen and Moller, 2018). Those findings show similar priorities to those evidenced in the workshop, although, due to the nature of the workshop activity, it was not possible to differentiate between parent and teacher prioritisation.

### 5.4 THE USE OF MORAL DILEMMAS TO DISCUSS CHARACTER

Of all of the activities in the workshop, the moral dilemmas had the highest percentage of teachers and parents rating it as 'very useful' or 'somewhat useful', suggesting that participants found them to be an effective tool to prompt discussion about character. Moral dilemmas have long been used not only to assess moral judgement and reasoning (Piaget, 1932; Kohlberg, 1981; Arthur, Walker and Thoma, 2018), but also to develop these skills (Blatt and Kohlberg, 1975; Lind, 2006). However, no literature was found during searches that used moral dilemmas to stimulate conversation between different groups. The positive response in the workshops indicates that this may be a fruitful avenue for future programmes and research.

### 5.5 OPPORTUNITIES FOR AND BARRIERS TO CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

When asked to identify particular challenges that face young people today, both parents and teachers repeatedly mentioned the Internet and social media. This concern

regarding social media reflects the findings of an earlier parent poll conducted by the Jubilee Centre, which found that over half of parents surveyed agreed that social media 'hinders or undermines' a young person's character or moral development (Morgan, 2016).

In terms of opportunities for character development, teachers predominantly focussed on opportunities within the school curriculum such as assemblies or PSHE lessons. Teachers also mentioned the importance of the relationships between staff and students as opportunities for character development. The importance of relationships and more explicit activities for character education has been emphasised by numerous researchers and authors (Arthur, 2003; Harrison, Morris and Ryan, 2016; Lickona, 1999; Ryan and Bohlin, 1999; Berkowitz, Bier and McCauley, 2017). Parents' answers were more varied, with some focussing on extra-curricular opportunities. More research is needed to determine what character education approaches parents think are the most effective, and whether these complement or differ from those prioritised by teachers.



# 6 Conclusion

The findings of this study present evidence that a workshop of this nature is a beneficial experience for parents and teachers, though they should be treated with a degree of caution due to the limitations of the evaluation. In light of these findings, this section makes recommendations that are intended to support schools in implementing, or further developing, collaborative parent-teacher partnerships in character education.

Educators are encouraged to:

- Consider the central role that parents play when developing a vision for character education and related activities, and detail how the school will engage with them. Different parents may need different approaches or strategies. These different engagement strategies should be evaluated for success.
- Consider the timing of any event they plan for parent-teacher collaboration; time remains a barrier to successful parent-teacher relationships in character education, so the timing of any event, eg, a workshop, is important.
- Consider the use of moral dilemmas as a way of exploring issues of character with parents and teachers.

Recommendations for future research:

- The use of moral dilemmas to facilitate discussion about issues of character with parents, teachers and students together is a potentially fruitful avenue for further investigation
- The difference between parent- and teacher-approaches to specific moral dilemmas facing students will allow greater understanding of the motivations and reasoning that each group employs
- The potential for character education initiatives with parents to increase parental engagement in school more broadly should be investigated
- Specific interventions which aim to improve parent-teacher collaboration in character education require further trials

‘CHILDREN ARE APT TO LIVE UP TO WHAT YOU BELIEVE OF THEM.’

 *Lady Bird Johnson*



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# Appendices

## APPENDIX 1: MORAL DILEMMAS

### Moral dilemma 1

Your daughter (Emily) in Year 7 applied to be a volunteer school librarian and was excited when she was accepted for the position. There were lots of applications! You have both signed a permission slip saying that Emily will commit for one term. She attends three times and then says that she cannot be bothered anymore. There is a revision session at the same time that she says will help her with maths, which she is finding hard. What do you do?

### Moral dilemma 2

Daniel is part of a Snapchat group with a bunch of friends in his year group at school. The focus of the group is usually on the recent football results and multiplayer games they are all playing online. More recently a new student called Jeevan has been added to group and a number of Daniel's friends have started to post unpleasant and aggressive messages towards Jeevan. They have also made their identities anonymous using a new feature of the Snapchat app.

## APPENDIX 2: CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

School	No. of Pupils in School	School Type	Gender of Pupils	Urban/ Semi-Rural/ Rural	Faith/ Non-Faith	Ofsted/ISI Status	Number of English as an Additional Language (EAL) Pupils	Number of Special Educational Needs Pupils	Number of Students on Free School Meals
A	1,469	Academy converter	Mixed	Semi-Rural	Non-Faith	Good	Below average	Above average	Below average
B	1,049	Academy converter	Mixed	Urban	Non-Faith	Good	Below average	Above average	Below average
C	1,390	Academy converter	Mixed	Urban	Non-Faith	Good	Below average	Below average	Below average
D	1,137	Academy converter - Grammar School	Mixed	Urban	Non-Faith	Outstanding	Below average	Well below average	Well below average
E	1,445	Academy sponsor led	Mixed	Urban	Christian foundation, no ethos recorded	Good	Below average	Above average	Above average
F	570	Academy sponsor led	Mixed	Rural	Non-Faith	Not yet inspected	Below average	Above average	Above average
G	1,111	Academy converter	Mixed	Urban	Non-Faith	Requires improvement	Below average	Above average	Above average
H	1,172	Academy converter	Mixed	Urban	Catholic foundation and ethos	Good	Below average	Below average	Above average
I	525	Academy sponsor led	Mixed	Urban	Non-Faith	Good	Well above average	Below average	Above average
J	837	Academy converter	Mixed	Urban	Non-Faith	Good	Below average	Above average	Above average
K	998	Other independent school	Girls	Urban	Non-Faith	Excellent - ISI	Well above average	Well below average	Well below average

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