



Transformative Practice and the Moral Rewards of Teaching

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Abstract

Much of K–12 teaching privileges White, upper-middle-class ways of being, thinking, feeling, and interacting. Integrating arguments from moral philosophy and empirical work on teaching and teacher learning, we (a) conceptualize transformative practice, including its moral rewards; (b) frame teacher dispositional virtues that modify their practice; and (c) identify roles that teacher education and K–12 schools play to support teachers by developing virtue and providing structural conditions for accessing the moral rewards of transformative teaching. We illustrate these points with a scenario of teachers working together to plan, enact, examine, and revise their practice to transform it and conclude with suggestions for teacher education programs and K–12 institutions.

Introduction

Teaching that transforms learning opportunities for students from marginalized communities is more than technical or ideological work. It is moral work in that it requires the exercise of dispositional virtue (Jensen & Edwards, in press; Jensen et al., 2023; Murrell et al., 2010; Osguthorpe, 2008; Sherman, 2006; Thornton, 2006; Warren, 2018) and provides teachers access to deeply meaningful rewards, such as

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professional joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment or a belief in their shared capacity to teach (Santoro, 2011). To explore this claim, we first provide a definition of transformative teaching, followed by an explanation of the role of teacher education in supporting transformative teaching. Our explanation includes a framework of dispositions of a moral educator. Second, we describe the moral rewards of teaching (Santoro, 2018) and illustrate transformative practice through a scenario that highlights the exercise of dispositional virtue and access to moral rewards of teaching. In conclusion, we identify the tasks of schools and institutions vis-à-vis extant research in supporting transformative practice and the aspirational outcomes for such practice.

What Is Transformative Teaching?

The systemic, institutional, and structural elements that reproduce inequity in schools are vast. There are many ways in which classroom structures and processes afford learning and participation for students with privilege while further marginalizing those from oppressed or minoritized groups (Anyon, 1981, 2014; Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Cochran-Smith, 2010; Collins, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lucas & Villegas, 2013; Salazar, 2013; Sleeter & Cornbleth, 2011).¹ They include discarding the everyday languages of minoritized students (Baker-Bell, 2020; Flores & Rosa, 2015), seeing students and families merely in terms of what they lack (Valencia, 1997), maintaining high teacher control (Finn, 2010; Milner et al., 2018; Reeve, 2006), using curricular materials that story students' families and communities as inferior (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020), and many others.

In stark contrast, we conceive of transformative teaching as effective, meaningful, agentic, and moral. Transformative teaching is first and foremost effective. But it is also connected to the everyday lives and values of minoritized students and communities (meaningful), and it fosters choice and expression, as well as productive peer collaboration among teachers and students alike (agentic). It also requires the exercise of teacher dispositional virtue in that it is derived from teacher reflection and decision-making, and it can be defended in relation to what is virtuous, equitable, and caring (moral).

Claims for effectiveness as a feature of transformative teaching are self-evident, but effectiveness is not sufficient on its own. It is very possible for a practice to be effective but unmeaningful, unagentic, and immoral. This claim draws on Fenstermacher and Richardson's (2005) conceptualization of quality teaching; teaching practice can be effective but not necessarily good (in either content or method). For example, a teacher might be forced to adopt a certain curriculum, content method, or teaching strategy by district edict without any time for reflection or shared decision-making (without the exercise of personal agency). That teaching practice might be effective (leading to successful learning), but it might also be disconnected from the lived experience of students (unmeaningful) and immoral in content and/or in method. For the sake of argument, consider the extreme example of a teacher

who teaches her students how to successfully steal a candy bar from the grocery store without getting caught (immoral content) or the teacher who discovers that threatening his students with physical punishment increases time on task (immoral method). The practice might have resulted in “successful” learning outcomes (effective), but neither the content nor the methods are defensible on moral grounds (moral), and there is no attention to the lived experience of students (meaningful). To connect this notion to a more realistic classroom example, consider the direct or explicit whole-group teaching of reading fluency to sixth graders. This whole-group approach might help improve the number of words they read correctly per minute, and the teacher might even find ways to relate reading speed to students’ everyday lives (e.g., reading signs on the freeway as you drive by). But is this teaching practice good or morally defensible for a general education class of sixth graders expected to understand a writer’s point of view, identify main ideas, interpret figurative meaning, or describe how drama in a story unfolds in texts? Once a threshold is attained, greater reading fluency does not lead to greater comprehension, and emphasizing basic reading skill with sixth graders could undermine their analysis and interpretation (Jenkins et al., 2003). Moreover, teacher-centered drill practices without meaning or purpose, regardless of whether they address grade-level learning, are shaky on moral grounds.

We build on these ideas to suggest that for teaching to be truly transformative, it not only needs to result in successful outcomes for students but also needs to be meaningful, agentic, and moral (see Table 1). *Meaningful* teaching leads to *relevant student participation* in learning activities and promotes shared accomplishments. Meaningful dimensions of teaching consider how the content and form of classroom interactions resonate with students’ lives—summarized in terms of “connected” and “communal” aspects of teaching (Jensen, 2021; Jensen, Grajeda et al., 2018; Jensen et al., 2021). Connected interactions in classrooms explore,

Table 1
Essential Features of Transformative Practice

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Description of practice</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
Effective	Aligned with appropriate skills, techniques, and methods	Leading to successful learning of curricular content
Meaningful	Connected to the everyday lived experiences and oriented to communal interactions	Affording relevant participation in learning activities and promoting shared accomplishments
Agentic	Derived from teacher reflection and decision-making	Resulting in purposeful pedagogy and durable change
Moral	Defended in relation to what is virtuous, equitable, and caring	Contributing to principled practice and the effectual retention of teachers

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value, and resonate with students' everyday experiences (i.e., routines, practices, interests, relationships, expertise, and values; Baker-Bell, 2020; González et al., 2005; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017; Skerrett, 2020). Communal interactions support student choice and freedom of expression (Adair et al., 2018; Good & Weinstein, 1986; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) and orient students to working and identifying with peers rather than focusing exclusively on individual accomplishments (Greenfield, 1994; Mejía-Arauz et al., 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Tharp et al., 2000; Webb & Farivar, 1994).

Teaching that is *agentic* results in *purposeful pedagogy* (an approach to teaching that is grounded in the practical arguments of the teacher). Because of this rootedness in the experience and practical arguments of the teacher, agentic teaching also leads to continuous improvement of teaching that is *durable* (Gallagher & Cottingham, 2019; Gallimore et al., 2009)—in stark contrast to the fleeting staying power of curriculum and instruction mandates from external forces. Finally, the outcome of *moral* teaching is a *principled practice* in both content and method, providing authentic learning experiences for students and contributing to the *effectual retention* of teachers (Santoro, 2018).

Taken together, these outcomes encompass the type of teaching that helps to dismantle practices that reproduce social inequities in schools by placing maximal demand on the exercise of moral virtue and agency of the teacher. Any given teaching practice can be examined in terms of all four essential features of transformative practice. Practices that fail to meet one or more, particularly in underresourced schools, can be typified as reproductive teaching. Jean Anyon's (1981) work popularized "social reproduction" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) in the context of classroom life. Her work critically examined social class in school structures and classroom processes, such as support for student autonomy (Finn, 2010), that reproduce inequalities rather than transforming them through opportunities for social mobility (Collins, 2009).

In addition to social class, we can think of reproduction in terms of sociocultural differences associated (but not synonymous) with race, ethnicity, immigrant status, language background, and so on (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). For example, comparison and competition in social interactions for learning that stem from individualistic cultural traditions, though common in U.S. classrooms, are not cultural universals (Rogoff, 2003, pp. 227–235). Competitive activities used in classrooms to motivate learning, such as gameshow-like activities for exam review, can be socially reproductive. They center White, upper-class ways of interacting as normative (Salazar, 2018), while undermining activity participation and learning for students from more collectivist traditions (McInerney et al., 1997). Reproductive teaching is disconnected from the lives of minoritized students, positions their everyday language and social practices as inappropriate, centers authority on the teacher, discards values and rich histories of minoritized communities, and emphasizes what students lack (i.e., deficits) rather than their

strengths (Baker-Bell, 2020; Finn, 2010; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Reeve, 2006; Valencia, 1997).

We submit that reversing reproductive teaching practices through transformative practice is an important starting point for a ground-up approach to building equitable schools (Jensen & Valdés, 2021). Our conception of transformative teaching as effective, meaningful, agentic, and moral requires the exercise of agency and dispositional virtue—to connect to the everyday lives of minoritized students, support choice and expression, and foster productive peer collaboration.

What Is the Role of Teacher Education in Supporting Transformative Teaching?

The task for teacher education in supporting transformative teaching is greater than the development of content knowledge or pedagogical skill. Teaching practice that is effective, meaningful, agentic, and moral is contingent on the development and exercise of dispositional virtue. Thus we put forward a framework for thinking about the dispositions of the moral educator in the context of transformative teaching.

Drawing on extant scholarship (Borko et al., 2007; Damon, 2007; Diez, 2007; Dottin, 2009; Feiman-Nemser & Schussler, 2010; Murrell et al., 2010; Schussler et al., 2010; Sherman, 2006; Sockett, 2009, 2012; Splitter, 2010; Thornton, 2006; Warren, 2018), we define dispositions as fundamental orientations to self, others, and society that underlie thoughts, beliefs, and actions. Disposition is willingness. It concerns character that leads to action—the process of continual reflection and professional improvement to respond to demanding and dynamic situations in schools and in classrooms (Diez, 2007; Fenstermacher, 2001; Osguthorpe, 2008). Dispositions underlie teachers' content, cultural, and pedagogical knowledge (Borko et al., 2007; Jensen et al., 2023).

The task for teacher education, then, is to foster the development of dispositional virtues that render teaching practices moral (Burant et al., 2007). In this sense, teacher dispositions modify teaching practices. Teachers who engage in such practices are moral educators, not because they teach morality, but because they teach morally (Fenstermacher et al., 2009)—in ways that align with what is good, equitable, and caring. Put another way, we want teachers to embody dispositional virtues like respect and fairness because we want them, for example, to *respectfully* attend to controversial matters in the curriculum and *fairly* grade student work (not necessarily because we want them to teach students to be respectful and fair; Osguthorpe, 2008, p. 296). Moral educators seek to understand themselves, others, and the world around them to care for their students—to meet their personal, developmental, and learning needs.

Framing Teacher Dispositions

We provide a framework for teacher dispositions that sheds light on what it means, in this sense of transformative teaching, to be a moral educator. Following

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Sockett's (2012) delineation of dispositions as virtues, we identify three primary and three intersecting dispositional qualities that moral educators seek to embody. The framework is not meant to be prescriptive, nor do we suggest that it is exhaustive. It is simply an illustration that signals foundational categories and highlights dispositions that emerge from a focus on a transformative approach to teaching that is aimed at overcoming challenges associated with reproductive teaching.

The three primary dispositions are connected to dispositions of character (good), intellect (equitable), and care (caring; see Sockett, 2009, 2012; see also Figure 1). To be *good* is to display the virtues of character that represent a commitment to high personal and professional moral standards of educators. Again, following Sockett (2009), these virtues of character might include self-awareness, trustworthiness, persistence, responsibility, and temperance. To be *equitable* is to embody the intellectual virtues of fairness and open-mindedness that underlie a commitment to appreciating the social positions of oneself, students, families, and communities, as well as examining structures of privilege in society. To be *caring* is to exhibit a commitment to the well-being of students through virtues like kindness, sensitivity, empathy, and compassion.

It is clear from these descriptions that the categories of the framework interact in making application to practice. Thus there are intersecting dispositional virtues that span the categories of this framework. These intersecting dispositions are social awareness, advocacy for students, and meekness (Jensen, Whiting et al., 2018; Jensen et al., 2023; see Figure 2).

The socially aware educator draws on dispositions of being *good* (self-awareness) and *equitable* (fairness and open-mindedness) to understand the social positions of

Figure 1
Primary Dispositional Virtues of Moral Educators

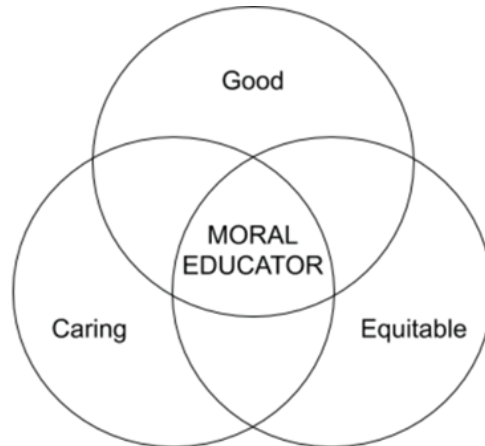
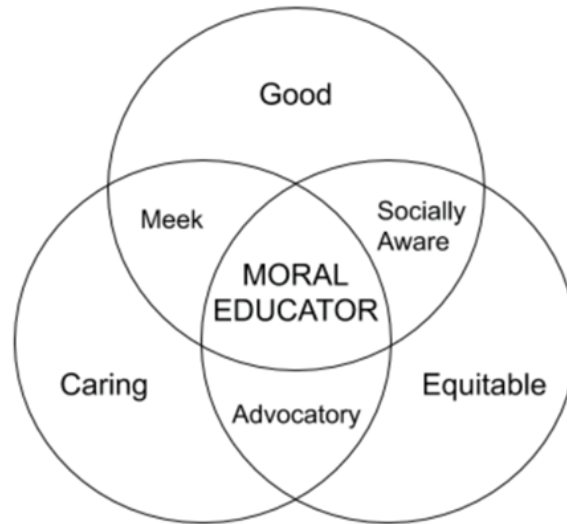


Figure 2
Primary and Intersecting Dispositional Virtues of Moral Educators



oneself and others as well as the structures of privilege in society (Garmon, 2004; Schussler, 2006; Silverman, 2010). The advocacy educator draws on dispositions of being *equitable* (fairness and justice) and *caring* (kindness and compassion) to go out of their way to make schooling more meaningful for all students (Banks & Banks, 1995; Mills & Ballantyne, 2010; Ramirez Wiedeman, 2002; Villegas, 2007). And the meek educator draws on dispositions of being caring (empathy and kindness) and good (curious, teachable, and even-tempered) to learn about student differences and persist through ambiguity and discomfort to understand and help students, their families, and their communities (Dee & Henkin, 2002; McAllister & Irvine, 2002; Milner, 2007; Rychly & Graves, 2012; Sleeter, 2008; Warren, 2018). In this sense, meekness is not weakness but strength—critical for transforming teaching. Pettigrove (2012) characterized meekness as moral fortitude and self-control to speak up for truth and justice without speaking down—“as is clear from the examples of Lincoln, Gandhi, and King, each of whom displayed the virtue of meekness at the same time that they resisted” (p. 355). Rather than being prescriptive or exhaustive, our framework highlights how dispositions orient moral educators to disrupt oppressive and pervasive teaching practices that reproduce social inequities in schools. This disruption is the result of transformative teaching that is rooted in the exercise of moral virtue and agency.

The Moral Rewards of Teaching

Teaching that is grounded in the exercise of virtue not only leads to positive outcomes for students—through learning opportunities that disrupt inequities—but also results in positive outcomes for teachers. Namely, teachers are able to access the moral rewards of teaching. This claim relies on the work of Doris Santoro (2011, 2018), who articulated an important distinction between teacher burnout and teacher demoralization, arguing in the latter that “the problem is with the conditions of the work rather than with the teachers themselves” (p. 13). This emphasis on the working conditions for teachers represents an important shift from a traditional focus on teacher dispositions and virtue, arguing for more attention to the practice of teaching and the goods internal to those practices:

Good teaching depends on a practice of teaching, rather than solely on an individual teacher’s virtues. So, the good of good teaching hinges on a community of practice in which teaching takes place. The moral rewards of teaching are located in this tradition and community of practice. (p. 8)

The combined philosophical and empirical work that encompasses this distinction attends meaningfully to the ways in which teachers might understand their dissatisfaction as demoralization (instead of burnout) and, consequently, become remoralized by “reestablish[ing] the moral rewards of their work without compromising their core values and ideals about teaching” (p. 10).

Following MacIntyre’s (1981) seminal work on virtue, these moral rewards are internal to practice and based primarily in relationship to students and a collaborative community of educators. The innumerable rewards, varying from teacher to teacher, include increased self-efficacy and fulfillment, enhancement of common cause among collaborating teachers, a sense of noble purpose, genuine satisfaction with practice, authentic student participation, and meaningful relationships with students (e.g., Grossman et al., 2001).

The moral rewards of teaching are undermined by a culture of high-stakes accountability focused narrowly on the “effectiveness” of teaching techniques. Indeed, high-stakes culture erodes teacher agency, creativity, and professional community (Ravitch, 2016), which teachers rely on to teach with moral virtue—in ways that access the moral rewards of their craft and fuel satisfying collaborations among colleagues to continuously improve (Gallimore et al., 2009). Santoro (2011) concluded that “teacher attrition [should be understood] from the perspective of whether teachers find moral value in the actual work they are asked to perform” (p. 3).

We extend this work in two ways. First is by reinforcing that moral rewards of teaching are internal to the practice of transformative teaching practices. Thus structural conditions of teacher collaboration (e.g., Nelson & Slavit, 2008; Vangrieken et al., 2015; Vescio et al., 2008) greatly impact teachers’ ability to achieve those goods. Second, teacher collaborations to transform their practice are enhanced by the exercise of teacher virtue. Following MacIntyre’s (1981) seminal work, the

present argument rests squarely on three connected claims. First is that teaching is, indeed, a practice:

By a “practice” I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (p. 175)

Second is that there are external and internal goods related to such practices:

External goods are therefore characteristically objects of competition in which there must be losers as well as winners. Internal goods are indeed the outcome of competition to excel, but it is characteristic of them that their achievement is a good for the whole community who participate in the practice. (p. 178)

And third is that access to these internal goods is acquired through the exercise of virtue: “A virtue is an acquired human quality, the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods” (p. 178).

To highlight the importance of these claims, consider this final point: that the goods internal to the practice of teaching are achieved only through the exercise of virtue. That is, they are not achieved simply by engaging in certain types of practices or pedagogy. For example, teachers might engage in a practice related to providing instructional scaffolds for all students in the classroom (e.g., adequate response time, rephrasing questions, timely hints/cues). In a *technical* sense, this practice suggests merely that the teacher employ appropriate wait time, restate the question in multiple ways, and then provide some hints along the way. However, in a *moral* sense, this practice requires the teacher to provide meaningful opportunities for every student to respond, rephrase questions in ways that connect the questions to students’ diverse life experiences, and provide hints that leverage teacher–student relationships and motivate students to persist in responding. In other words, in a moral sense, this practice suggests that teachers exercise dispositional virtues, particularly those related to equity and care.

In the technical sense, the goods related to this practice are primarily external—an increase in student test scores, resulting merit pay for teachers, and so on. In the moral sense, the goods related to this practice are primarily internal and related to teacher outcomes: there is an enhancement of common cause, an increased sense of fulfillment and efficacy that has various possible sources (including strengthened relationships of care with students), authentic and enthusiastic participation, and a recognition from students that they are seen for who they are and the strengths they bring to classroom life.

In this way the goods associated with any practice might be external, internal, or both. But the achievement of goods internal to a practice is accessible only

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through the exercise of moral virtue. Thus it is important to identify those virtues or dispositions that, when exercised, provide access to the internal goods.

Moreover, from the standpoint of teacher education, it is important to help teachers access these moral rewards by systematically supporting their agency and purposeful collaborations to exercise virtue. In addition, it is critical to understand that there are moral rewards associated with the exercise of virtue that go beyond the development of virtue itself. For example, the teacher who exhibits a virtue of care, such as compassionately helping a struggling student learn, can become more compassionate (the development of virtue). That teacher might also help students perform better on standardized tests, increasing student achievement (accessing a good *external* to practice). But the exercise of virtue—in this case, compassion—also provides the teacher access to the moral goods *internal* to this practice, namely, elevated satisfaction with a job well done; heightened fulfillment that stems from strengthening a caring relationship with a student; increased collective efficacy with teacher colleagues derived from shared effort; and magnified common cause that follows from equitably attending to the experiences, identities, and needs of a marginalized student.

To extend this point from a different perspective, consider the same student outcome *without* the exercise of compassion. In such a case, the teacher might show up for work, go through the motions of a lesson plan (taught the same way, numerous times, over many years), observe some students struggling to understand the content, make an attempt to address any misconceptions or misunderstandings, and then leave the students to work through additional problems on their own to complete some long overdue grading of papers. In this case, the teacher recognizes that there are students struggling with the concepts, but there is no compassionate response, on the part of the teacher, to their struggle. The struggling students end up mastering the content on their own with the help of other students. The lesson plan objective is achieved. In this way, the teacher accesses a good external to the practice (student achievement, high test scores, even merit pay, perhaps). But, without attributing student learning to the teacher's compassionate efforts to help, it might be difficult for the teacher to feel a sense of increased satisfaction, enhanced efficacy, or magnified common cause. Such internal goods are accessible only through the conscious, recognizable, agentic exercise of virtue. Thus, again, it becomes paramount to identify those virtues or dispositions that, when exercised, provide teachers access to the internal goods of those practices.

Illustrating Transformative Practice

To illustrate these points, we provide a scenario of transformative practice, highlighting effective, meaningful, agentic, and moral criteria. Though brief, this scenario demonstrates the primary and intersecting dispositional virtues of moral educators and suggests how transformative practice leads to moral rewards that

follow from such teaching. As a research methodology, scenarios can generate actionable conclusions, identify novel lines of inquiry, challenge common assumptions, and highlight the critical role of context (Ramirez et al., 2015).

Scenario on Information Writing

Josh Hampton teaches fourth grade at Woodson Elementary in San Jose, California. All students at Woodson receive free or reduced-priced lunch, and 85% are Latinx, some from immigrant homes and others not. The other 15% of students are White, non-Hispanic, Vietnamese American, or of mixed race/ethnicity. Josh, an eighth-year African American teacher from Los Angeles, meets weekly with the other two fourth-grade teachers at Woodson to plan lessons and examine student work to determine learning standards they will focus on.

In recent years, the team has struggled to teach writing. Some students write “at grade level,” while others struggle to produce a single sentence, which teachers have attributed to challenges with basic reading skill (e.g., decoding, fluency). To teach students informative/explanatory writing in the previous year, teachers gave students a topic (e.g., endangered whales, American Indian tribes), related texts, and a graphic organizer to identify details and facts and to organize main ideas, topic sentences, and concluding sentences. The teachers found that students who already wrote well enough did fine with the task, while those who had not produced much writing in the past wrote a few bulleted ideas on worksheets but did not find the activity particularly meaningful.

After several months of concerted effort to make home visits and meet with students’ parents and others in the community—learning what his students know and do outside of school (e.g., car mechanics, gardening, dog care, soccer, floral arranging)—Josh feels that students will get more out of the writing activity if essay topics came from the students and their lived experiences rather than from the teachers. He presents the idea to his teacher colleagues in a grade-level meeting. One teacher is reluctantly willing, and the other likes the idea, so the team agrees to focus together on explanatory writing on topics that resonate with students’ everyday knowledge and experience. In coming days, during writing time, students share information about each other—family relationships, activities, routines, domestic roles and responsibilities, interests, hobbies—to generate topics. They work with the teacher to identify relevant texts that highlight pertinent details, facts, and definitions; generate main ideas; and write several “flash drafts” of their essays, reviewing and editing one another’s work.

At the end of the 3-week unit, Josh and his team, including his reluctant colleague, are amazed by what the students produce, including students who struggled in the past to generate a single sentence. Analyzing student work in their planning meeting together, they are particularly impressed by the words and phrases (e.g., “also,” “another,” “and so,” “even though,” “but”) students used to connect ideas

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within categories of information. Concluding statements in their essays are personal and summarize main ideas well. Teachers are even more amazed by students' level of enthusiasm and satisfaction with their final drafts. In one class, students ask the teacher if they can share their essays in a read-aloud activity with each other. All teachers decide that this is a great idea.

In this scenario, Josh's willingness and initiative to learn from students' daily lives precipitated a transformation in the way he and his fourth-grade team instructed informative/explanatory writing. His willingness to go out of his way to learn about his students generated curiosity in his colleagues, as well as an increase in their solidarity with each other and with their students. They found energy and fulfillment in the ways their students, especially those whom they felt had not demonstrated much effort in past activities like this, valued the writing activity as personally meaningful.

Transforming Practice Through Dispositional Virtue to Access Moral Rewards

Josh's initial way of teaching writing was "reproductive" in that it supported participation and learning primarily for students from more privileged backgrounds. He transformed his practice by connecting writing activities with what his students knew, did, and identified outside of school and later provided meaningful opportunities for students to work together and make decisions about the content of their essays as well as how they would share them afterward with each other. These forms of teaching depended on Josh's exercise of dispositional virtue. In making home visits, Josh demonstrated a willingness to position himself as a learner from his students (meekness), to take responsibility for his teaching, and to persist with his approach despite skepticism from a teacher colleague (good). His commitment to help students whom he felt had not demonstrated much effort in past activities is evidence of his commitment to understand students on their terms to afford meaningful participation in academic activity (advocacy). His willingness to go out of his way to learn about his students can be described as kind, empathic, and compassionate (caring).

Exercising these virtues made it possible for Josh to experience the moral rewards of teaching. Taking responsibility and persisting in his approach increased Josh's sense of professional efficacy and fulfillment. His equitable efforts to help students who had not demonstrated much effort (in his view) resulted in authentic student participation and enhanced common cause among teacher peers. His willingness to go out of his way for students gave rise to more meaningful connections with students, who, as a result, discovered intrinsic value in the writing activity. These moral rewards are available to Josh because of his exercise of virtue.

This scenario illustrates how teaching that is effective, meaningful, and moral (transformative) requires the exercise of teacher virtue and agency. Such teaching

practice gives teachers access to the moral rewards of teaching and leads to meaningful and lasting pedagogical change. If these claims have merit, then the tasks for teacher education, as well as for policy makers and school leaders, to provide “moral support” are significant. In Josh’s experience, the structural conditions that enabled him within his school to exercise virtue, transform practice, and access rewards included a regular time and place to work with teacher peers to plan and study their lessons, to analyze student work together, and to reason through and make decisions for themselves about their teaching (Gallimore et al., 2009). Without these conditions, transforming practice or accessing moral rewards would not have been possible (Nelson & Slavit, 2008).

Discussion

The claim that transformative teaching grows from attending to teacher dispositions depends heavily on opportunities schools and districts afford teachers to exercise their agency to learn in and from their practice to improve it (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005; Gallimore et al., 2009; Garet et al., 2001; Kennedy & Gallagher, 2019; Neri et al., 2019; Ronfeldt et al., 2015). Not only did Josh (in the preceding scenario) take initiative to work with colleagues to plan and study their practice to transform it; they benefited from a series of structures and processes set in place to support ongoing, purposeful, and data-driven inquiry with their teacher colleagues. Evidence suggests that institutions bear significant responsibility in supporting teacher wondering, collaborative planning, pedagogical reasoning, and developmental try-outs in classroom practice for continuous improvement (Butler & Schnellert, 2012; Horn et al., 2017; Lefstein et al., 2020; Nelson, 2009; Saunders et al., 2009, 2023; Vangrieken et al., 2015).

Supporting the exercise of teacher agency to develop key dispositional virtues to learn in and from their practice to improve is consistent with a “situative and sociocultural” view of teacher learning, described by Russ et al. (2016) as “embedded in physical and social systems, spread over time and space” (p. 403). Structural conditions for this approach include (a) small groups of job-alike teachers engaged in joint inquiry and (b) a willing and capable peer facilitator. Processes include (a) cycles of planning, implementation, analysis, and revision of teaching practice to (b) accomplish a clear goal within teachers’ daily practice.

We provide four recommendations for school institutions and teacher preparation programs to provide the support teachers like Josh need to transform their practice together and access the moral reward of teaching.

Recommendation 1: Provide Enabling Conditions

Job-alike teams (by course, subject, or grade level) are critical because they allow teachers to address common instructional problems in similar contexts (Borko, 2004; Garet et al., 2001; Goddard et al., 2007). This enabled Josh in the preceding

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scenario to exercise his ability to think deeply about and plan with his colleagues for writing instruction connected to students' lives. Without a shared teaching context, discussions in team meetings drift into broad discussions unrelated to the task of improvement (Gallagher et al., 2019; Nelson & Slavit, 2008). Cohesion and solidarity of the team ignite teacher initiative and enthusiasm to learn to improve when members plan and teach lessons together to solve a common problem (Gallimore et al., 2009).

Josh also took initiative to facilitate inquiry within his school-based team to improve together. The role of peer facilitators is to frame inquiry for the team, preserve a shared instructional focus, and encourage and affirm team efforts until their shared goal is attained (Andrews-Larson et al., 2017; Feiler et al., 2000; Kennedy et al., 2011). Peer facilitators “are uniquely and credibly positioned to model intellectual curiosity” for fellow teachers, precisely because “facilitators try out in their classrooms the same lessons as everyone else” (Gallimore & Ermeling, 2010, p. 2). Peer facilitation engenders a sense of communal trust and shared moral purpose within the team (Kennedy & Gallagher, 2019; Muijs & Harris, 2003).

Recommendation 2: Support Collaborative Processes

Plan–do–analyze–revise (PDAR)² cycles of collaborative inquiry are foundational to teachers' exercise of agency to transform their practice (Saunders et al., 2009). In such cycles, the premises of the practical arguments in the minds of the teachers are elicited for analysis by self and others, as well as reconstructed through deliberation (see Fenstermacher & Richardson, 1993; Saunders et al., 2023). In planning, teachers prepare to teach a lesson and identify aims and predictions that guide lesson design. In the doing stage, lessons are enacted, and teachers gather data (e.g., logs, classroom video, peer observation, student work samples) for later analysis. Peer classroom observation can be especially powerful. The purpose of observation is to support colleagues rather than to evaluate or judge one another. In analysis, teachers interpret implementation data in the context of their predictions; in the reflection stage, they revisit and revise aims and predictions for the next improvement cycle.

Institutions support teacher agency to improve practice within PDAR cycles through well-designed protocols that propel the teacher inquiry process (Little & Curry, 2009; Segal et al., 2018; Strahan, 2003) and keep their inquiry “close-to-practice” (Gallimore, 2014). Inquiry protocols prompt contributions of knowledge, creativity, and related skills of each team member to the improvement effort. They propel joint improvement by bolstering teachers' collective sense of responsibility for student learning (Louis et al., 1996; Muijs et al., 2004). Inquiry protocols orient the team to establish goals, plan lessons, develop assessments, and make data-based decisions together. In a quasi-experimental study, Saunders et al. (2009) found that using inquiry protocols was crucial in the efficacy of grade-level teacher meetings,

thereby increasing student achievement gains in Title I schools at a faster rate than in comparable schools.

Recommendation 3: Exercise Teacher Agency and Virtue

Thus the responsibility for transforming teaching practice is shared (Neri et al., 2019). It is not accomplished without supporting agentic learning for teachers within job-alike teams in ways that provide for the elicitation and reconstruction of practical arguments. For transformative teaching, school leaders should place maximal demand on teachers' agency, and teachers and teacher educators need to place maximal demand on dispositional virtue. We submit that sustained reorganization of schools to provide support of this kind disrupts reproductive teaching by affording both students and teachers greater access to the "goods internal to practice" that lead to transformative teaching and learning (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 178).

We characterize this assistance as "moral support." It is not lost on us that a lay use of "moral support" suggests the provision of encouragement without substantive, tangible resources or physical effort. In our experience, the attention paid to the moral work of teaching in teacher education is of this kind—merely lip service to the importance of teacher agency and dispositional virtues—in contrast to the extensive support rendered in the name of developing content knowledge and methodological skill (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013). However, the type of moral support that we argue for entails much more than the recitation of platitudes related to high ideals and noble purposes that we strive for in the education of minoritized children and youth. It suggests serious attention to the moral work of teaching by teachers, teacher educators, school leaders, policy makers, and others—the type of attention that contributes to disrupting social reproduction in public schools through transformative practice by moral educators, who are supported in exercising virtue and agentially revising their teaching through practical argument.

Moral support in teacher preparation programs requires making explicit the dispositional virtues they seek to develop in candidates and aligning these virtues with course learning outcomes and materials, as well as programmatic assessments (Jensen et al., 2023). In our experience, decisions about dispositional assessments in teacher preparation are too often concerned with the technical and bureaucratic (perhaps in response to accreditation requirements), instead of the moral and purposeful—particularly in relation to meaningful alignment and program coherence (Schussler et al., 2008).

Moral support from school leaders comes primarily by protecting times and places for grade or content-area teacher teams to regularly plan, analyze, and revise their practice together (Gallimore et al., 2009) in ways that support the reconstruction of their practical arguments (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 1993). School administrators work with team facilitators in instructional leadership teams to develop clear and coherent goals to transform practice (Spillane et al., 2004).

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These goals aspire to teaching practice that is effective, good, and meaningful. School leaders support teacher agency by monitoring progress toward goals and offering additional materials to support teacher teams to achieve their goals.

Researchers are tasked with developing and testing materials to support teacher agency to develop dispositions to enact transformative practice. Formative observation systems of transformative teaching in classrooms, for example, can streamline collaborative teacher learning (Jensen et al., 2021) by providing rich concepts and direct data (field notes, scores) on teaching practices, as well as protocols to guide teacher inquiry across PDAR cycles (Saunders et al., 2009). Other support materials include teacher learning curricula, lesson frames, illustrative videos of transformative classroom lessons, illustrative teacher inquiry videos, teacher learning progressions, or case studies of teacher learning teams.

Recommendation 4: Policies and Programs

Finally, policies and programs that provide moral support for teachers are desperately needed. Historically, policy efforts to build equitable schools are top down (e.g., court rulings, high-stakes testing) rather than ground up (i.e., support teacher learning; Jensen & Valdés, 2021). Though unintended, this disregard for teacher agency results in the demoralization of teachers (Santoro, 2018)—constraining their agency and devaluing the primacy of developing dispositional virtues. States and school districts place maximum demand on teacher agency through coherent and aligned structures, strategies, and supports for teacher teams to develop virtue and discover the satisfaction of learning in and from their practice together to transform it (Gallagher & Cottingham, 2019; Resnick, 2010; Stein & Coburn, 2008).

Conclusion

In sum, for transformative teaching and learning to occur, teachers and teacher educators need to engage in practice that is not only effective but also meaningful, agentic, and moral. Sustained reorganization of schools to provide support of this kind disrupts reproductive teaching by affording both students and teachers greater access to the “moral rewards of teaching.” So, coming full circle, why do we want teachers of good moral character and disposition? Because we want them to transform the world in which we live—to disrupt social reproduction. These are ambitious reasons with equally grandiose outcomes, but, at the very least, they suggest a purposeful direction for teachers, teacher educators, school leaders, and policy makers that points us to the high ideals and noble purposes we hold for the education of the young in our society.

Notes

¹ We use *minoritized* rather than *minority* because even though most U.S. students of color comprise numerical majorities in the schools they attend, their everyday knowledge,

experiences, practices, and identities are not positively reflected in curricula and instruction. Thus, in many cases, ways of being, interacting, and learning for students of color (and others from marginalized communities) are “minoritized.”

² Various labels are used to characterize these stages. Most trace their origins to W. Edwards Deming’s plan–do–study–act framework for organizational improvement (Langley et al., 2009).

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