

Replies

Jason Baehr

Loyola Marymount University

In writing a book about pedagogy, I was (and remain) on thin ice. Yes, I've been teaching for over twenty years. I'm an expert in the philosophical underpinnings of what I was writing about. And, in my work with the Intellectual Virtues Academy of Long Beach, I've had extensive hands-on experience applying virtue epistemology to a secondary educational setting. But I am *not* an expert in educational theory or pedagogy.

I felt this limitation throughout my writing of *Deep in Thought*. It is, then, a great delight to have *real* education experts engage with my work. I'm grateful to my commenters for reading the book so carefully and generously and especially for drawing on their own expertise to refine, extend, and highlight some of its strengths and limitations.

In the response that follows, I'd like to call attention to four key insights from the commentaries. Some of these insights are treated briefly in *Deep in Thought*. Others constitute an important counterpoint or complement to the book's central claims. But all of them, I think, warrant serious consideration by educators seeking to cultivate intellectual virtues in themselves or their students.

“Not my job”

Dykhuis gives expression to a familiar misgiving about the very idea that teachers (especially college and university instructors) should concern themselves with educating for intellectual virtues. She explains that some educators care deeply about student learning but do not see their students' character development as among their responsibilities.

This impression is understandable given familiar ways of thinking about “character education.” Nonetheless, with Dykhuis, I think it's reflective of a false dichotomy. Teaching for intellectual virtues is not (primarily) something that we do *in addition* to teaching for academic content and skills, something that might take a great deal of extra effort or consume precious and limited instructional minutes. Rather, as I describe at some length in *Deep in Thought*, it is a *way* of teaching for academic content and skills.

This is, by my lights, one of the especially attractive things about teaching for *intellectual* virtues as opposed, say, to teaching for moral

virtues like kindness or responsibility. While I think it's a mistake to try to draw a very sharp distinction between intellectual virtues and other kinds of virtues, and while I agree that as educators we should also concern ourselves with our students' moral and civic formation, I can empathize with the math or science instructor who finds herself wondering: "How am I supposed to integrate a concern with kindness and responsibility into my daily focus and activities as an educator, most of which are wholly academic in nature?" It is much easier, however, to imagine how such a person might integrate a concern with virtues like curiosity, open-mindedness, and intellectual carefulness, thoroughness, humility, and courage. This reflects the fact that intellectual virtues are attributes of character necessary for good *thinking* and *learning*.¹ It also suggests the possibility of an approach to character education that is academically focused—that doesn't require *choosing between* teaching for knowledge and skills, on the one hand, and teaching for good character, on the other.

Institutional approaches

In their rich and compelling discussion of intellectual risk-taking and assessment, Clark and Soutter observe that if we are interested in creating conditions favorable to our students' practice of intellectual courage, we must pay attention, not merely to our own pedagogical postures and practices, but also to the "complex, iterative, and interrelated" dynamics between our students and us. Dykhuis takes this a step further, arguing that, in its best and most powerful forms, character education isn't something that happens only in individual classrooms as a result of interactions between teachers and students, but is also supported and nurtured by the surrounding educational environment or institution. Drawing on research in systems theory and traditional character education, she notes that "the best way to influence an individual is to ensure that a concept or cultural value is sustained and encouraged at every level of the system." She concludes: "educating for the IVs seems to require top-down clarity that a primary institutional mission is to cultivate the attributes of lifelong learning. Students and faculty can use this commitment as a guidepost for creating courses, engaging in learning experiences, and holding one another accountable."

I agree with Dykhuis. While my focus in *Deep in Thought* is limited to educating for intellectual virtues in the classroom, I have little doubt about the added value of an institutional commitment to this enterprise. On this point, Dykhuis asks how educators can "start to encourage a whole-system embrace of IVs and influence the culture as well as the individual classroom." I certainly don't have a decisive or exhaustive answer to this

question. But I do have several modest (and defeasible) suggestions. In keeping with Dykhuis's interest, I'll tailor these suggestions to a university context, though I believe very similar recommendations are applicable to most K-12 settings.

- *Move slowly and be patient.* New institutional values and practices don't take root overnight. If we want schoolwide initiatives to be sustainable and integrated into the identity of our institutions, it can be helpful to implement them over a sustained period of time and with considerable patience.
- *Voluntary participation.* University faculty generally dislike being told how to do their jobs. Moreover, the prospect of making adjustments to our deeply habituated pedagogical practices can feel burdensome. Therefore, if a university is interested in encouraging its instructors to better align their pedagogical methods with the aims of intellectual character education, it is probably wisest for this to take the form of an invitation, not a requirement.
- *Strategic framing.* As noted above, teaching for intellectual virtues is primarily a way of (not an alternative to) teaching for academic knowledge and skills. Moreover, it's a way that most thoughtful and conscientious teachers *already* approximate to a considerable degree. It's also a way that speaks to the "hearts" of many educators, as many of us entered the profession hoping to inspire in our students a "love of learning" or to equip them to be "critical thinkers" or "life-long learners," all of which are deeply related to virtuous intellectual character. These and related points should be kept front and center in any effort to enjoin faculty to begin teaching for intellectual virtues in a more systematic or explicit way. Doing so can make the invitation more attractive and less onerous seeming.
- *Flexibility with language and concepts.* As an expert in virtue epistemology, it's easy for me to get fussy about how other people use the language and concepts of intellectual virtue. I often worry that they're conflating virtues or glossing over important distinctions. Over time, I've learned that, if others are going to integrate a focus on intellectual character into their teaching, they need to make it their own, connecting it to and allowing it to inform and reshape their own pedagogical framework and terminology. While thinking clearly and accurately about intellectual virtues is important, some

flexibility in this department can increase our colleagues' willingness to take more seriously the idea of trying to educate for these qualities.

- *Coalition of the willing.* If a university is interested in nurturing a broad and lasting commitment to educating for intellectual virtues, it can be useful to begin with a smaller group of interested and committed faculty. They can “test drive” and refine pedagogical strategies and tactics, tailoring these to their respective programs and disciplines. And their commitment and insights can serve to attract other faculty to the initiative.²

Dykhuis rightly calls for an approach to educating for intellectual virtues that enlists institutional resources and support. The foregoing principles indicate some “bottom-up” ways of approaching these important “top-down” efforts.

Differences across educational levels

In his commentary, Ducharme commends a “more precise exploration” of teaching for intellectual virtues by academic level. The insight driving his discussion is that what it looks like to teach for intellectual virtues—and to be trained or prepared for such—depends in no small measure on how one is situated within the broader educational milieu.

On the point about teacher preparation, Ducharme rightly notes that college and university professors are well-trained in their respective disciplines but may know very little about the specific educational psychology or needs of their students. Because teaching for intellectual virtues can significantly benefit from such an understanding, their pedagogical efforts in this direction may be impaired. By contrast, many K-12 instructors will have taken courses in adolescent or child psychology as a part of their training and are likely to be well-versed in “student-centered” approaches to teaching. As such, they may be better positioned to understand and accommodate the developmental strengths and limitations of their students. However, these teachers may need to work to acquire the kind of mastery of their subject matter that is also an important part of teaching for intellectual character growth. Accordingly, when it comes to supporting teachers' efforts to positively impact the intellectual character of their students, we must take into consideration the kind of pedagogical preparation they have received, which may vary significantly from one educational level to another.

Ducharme also emphasizes that teaching for intellectual virtues may itself look very different from one educational level or instructor to another.

In arguing for this point, he focuses in particular on the practice of modeling intellectual humility for one's students. If I'm a first-grade teacher, what it will look like for me to model intellectual humility may be different from what it will look like if I'm a university professor. Again, I'll want to model it in ways that my students can appreciate and practice. But even within a university setting, what it looks like to model intellectual humility may vary from one instructor to another. If I'm a young female professor, there may be some notable hazards to being especially forthright about the gaps in my knowledge. If I'm a seasoned male professor, such risks may be negligible.³ Ducharme's discussion also suggests that if one is, say, a genuine expert in a given field and is mainly teaching freshman-level courses in this area, then the experience of being caught off guard or of making intellectual mistakes may be somewhat rare. Nevertheless, as Ducharme notes, in cases like this, one may still have an opportunity to model intellectual humility in other ways, for example, by displaying a commitment to lifelong learning, wondering aloud, or carefully and openly listening to one's students.

Ducharme's contribution illustrates a point that is important to bear in mind across our efforts to support the intellectual character development of our students, namely, that the way intellectual virtues express themselves, whether in ourselves or in our students, is highly context-sensitive. Similarly, our efforts to help our students cultivate these qualities may vary depending on the instructor and context in question. These and related points bear further probing and articulation. I'm pleased that Ducharme has already undertaken this important work. His and others' efforts are advancing our understanding of what it looks like to teach for intellectual virtues to the next level of specificity and contextualization.

Teacher formation

At one point or another, all three commentaries call attention to the importance of teachers' own intellectual character development. The kind of modeling commended by Ducharme is possible only to the extent that teachers themselves possess intellectual virtues and can authentically exemplify them for their students. Similarly, to have a good sense of where our own intellectual character can be improved or of what we need to learn to better serve our students, some measure of self-reflection is required. Clark and Soutter note, in a similar vein, that if teachers hope to create suitable opportunities for their students to practice intellectual virtues, they must occasionally "look at their own practices, postures, and classroom community to reflect on ways in which they and the rest of their class might [need to] shift." Finally, as Dykhuis suggests, to make educating for intellectual

virtues a schoolwide priority, universities and other educational institutions must provide instructors with opportunities to learn about this approach and to reflect on and make adjustments to their pedagogical practices.

The key point is that while the ultimate aim of teaching for intellectual virtues may be our students' progress in these qualities, our *own* intellectual character formation and pedagogical commitments also warrant careful and ongoing attention. As with good teaching in general, teaching for intellectual virtues is a deeply personal enterprise, depending for its success, not just on what we do as educators, but also on who we are and what we most deeply value.

Conclusion

I'm mindful that I've said the least about Clark and Soutter's discussion of how we can create classroom environments and assessments that encourage our students to take risks in the service of their own and each other's intellectual growth. The simple reason is that I have little to add to their insightful commentary. Their "Building a Culture of Intellectual Risk-Taking" framework provides a compelling and concrete account of how teachers can support their students' practice of intellectual courage. It is a model of the kind of work educational researchers can do to identify pedagogical practices aimed at eliciting the behavior characteristic of particular virtues in a classroom setting. I'm very grateful to them and to my other commenters for their further development of several of the ideas and suggestions put forth in *Deep in Thought*. I learned a great deal from and am inspired by their contributions.

¹ For a discussion of the distinctions between intellectual, moral, civic, and performance virtues, see Jason Baehr, "The Varieties of Character and Some Implications for Character Education," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 46, no. 6 (2017): 1–9.

² Dykhuis makes a similar point in the final two paragraphs of her commentary.

³ See Amani El-Alayli, Ashley A. Hansen-Brown, and Michelle Ceynar, "Dancing Backwards in High Heels: Female Professors Experience More Work Demands and Special Favor Requests, Particularly from Academically Entitled Students," *Sex Roles* 79, nos. 3-4 (2018): 136–50. This is not to say that intellectual humility is *only* for the powerful and privileged. But how it is best expressed or the exact form it should take may vary along these axes.