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# **BUILDING A CULTURE OF INTEGRITY IN THE CLASSROOM<sup>72</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

Among other skills that should be possessed by a teacher is the organization of the work in the classroom in which there is cooperation between the entities represented in it. S/He is obliged to provide a friendly and working atmosphere, democratic environment in which the rules in the classroom will be jointly created, everyone will behave responsibly and show mutual respect. Democratic classroom is a place of opportunity and self-initiative among students, willingness and authority, freedom of thought and speech, respect for differences and similarities and the integrity of the person. The integrity is manifested in the willingness to adhere to the values that are most important in life. Integrity is the foundation of character. It is a choice of values and resolution to live by those values that form the character and personality. And it is integrity that enhances all other human values. The quality of the person is determined by how well s/he lives up to the values that are most important. Integrity is the quality that locks in the values and causes to live consistent with them. The emphasis in this paper will be placed precisely on building a culture of integrity in the classroom. It should also be understood as an integral part of the democratic classroom and something that shouldn't be neglected.

**Key words:** *classroom, integrity, culture, teacher, students*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Besides developing the specific skills and abilities, especially in the area of literacy and transfer of knowledge, the school plays an important role in the transmission of culture and traditions of a society. The teacher has a role in the critical appreciation of culture and the assistance it gives to students in order to understand their place in the world of interlocking faiths and beliefs. Experience that students gain when equally valued, when they have the right to their own voice, respect the opinions of others, when they realize that they have their rights and corresponding duties- these are the values that are important for the future. Despite the family, in the classroom students get their first views to the wider community and develop an opinion that can create and maintain throughout life. (Boyle, 1997) The best way for students to learn is when they are placed in a situation to be interacting with others, negotiating, solving problems and thinking about their actions. Positive behavior among students is best developed where the values come from within and are not imposed from outside threats, using authority or promising a reward. (Kochoska, 2007)

The integrity of the person occupies a special place in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is incorporated in the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia. It is one of the major benefits of democracy and requires mandatory compliance of the physical

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<sup>72</sup> Specialized paper



and moral integrity of the person. (Dobri, 2003) Therefore it deserves special attention in the classroom, his existence, compliance and validation in everyday practice.

## **2. DEFINITION OF INTEGRITY**

Integrity is the quality of being honest - having strong moral principles and moral uprightness. It is generally a personal choice to uphold oneself to consistently moral and ethical standards. In ethics, integrity is regarded by many people as the honesty and truthfulness or accuracy of one's actions. Integrity can stand in opposition to hypocrisy, in that judging with the standards of integrity involves regarding internal consistency as a virtue, and suggests that parties holding within themselves apparently conflicting values should account for the discrepancy or alter their beliefs.

The word integrity evolved from the Latin adjective *integer* meaning whole or complete. In this context, integrity is the inner sense of "wholeness" deriving from qualities such as honesty and consistency of character. As such, one may judge that others "have integrity" to the extent that they act according to the values, beliefs and principles they claim to hold. A value system's abstraction depth and range of applicable interaction may also function as significant factors in identifying integrity due to their congruence or lack of congruence with observation. A value system may evolve in a while, while retaining integrity if those who espouse the values account for and resolve inconsistencies. (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, 2015)

"Integrity is doing the right thing even when no one is watching." C. S. Lewis

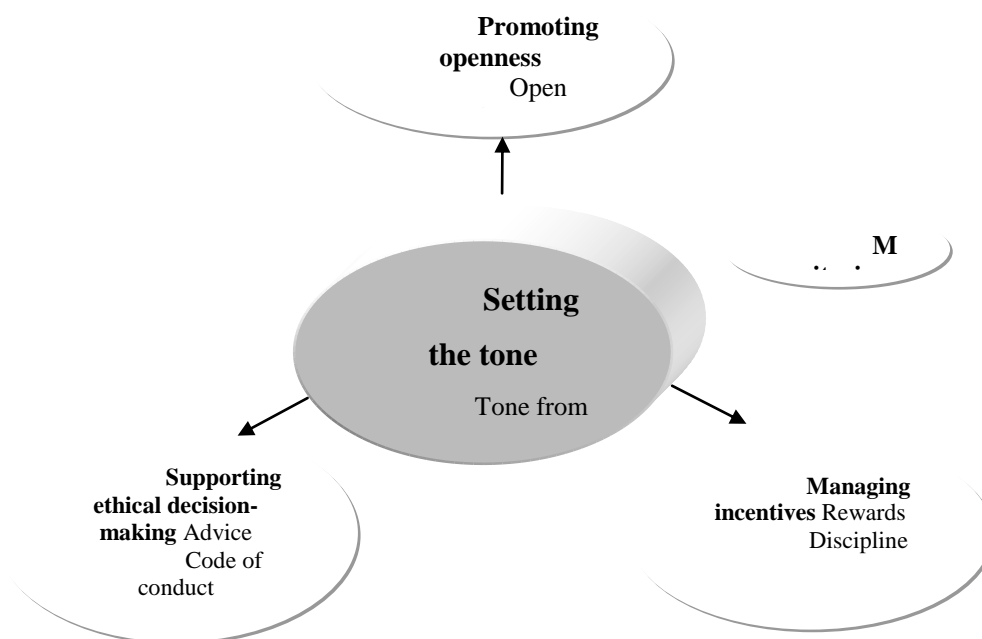
Integrity is holding oneself to a high ethical standard because it is the right thing to do. Integrity is intrinsically motivated. It is self-imposed. (MacLean, 2015)

## **3. THE IMPORTANCE OF INTEGRITY**

Integrity is an idea that already has great importance in a democratic society. Perceived problems of integrity and ethical culture are very common in many areas and also in the classroom. There is, however, apparently a widespread perception that students are lacking in the kind of culture that is conducive to behavior with integrity. Therefore it is important to put an emphasis on the creation and building of such a culture in the classroom. A strong ethical culture is also essential for motivating the students in the right way. Productive relationships between students within the classroom and out of it rely on trust, and a lack of trust can be poisonous to student's motivation. Working in pleasant atmosphere with a good ethical culture is motivating both at the level of day to day study. It feels good to work and study in the classroom which you know will treat you fairly and will not pressure you to act unethically and at the level of the wider context within which that work sits (it feels good to be in the place whose aims and values you endorse). There are also a number of good reasons why integrity specifically is a useful focus for the students.

Integrity is distinctive from ethical behavior. There are many reasons why one might behave ethically. For example, there might be a threat of punishment, or a promise of a reward, to keep one in line. But following one's self-interest in this way, even if it results in ethical behavior, is not integrity. Integrity is an aspect of character that leads us to develop deeply-held ethical commitments and to act on them consistently. People with integrity will, tend to behave ethically not only when it is in their own interest, narrowly construed, to do so, but also when it is not. Emphasizing integrity, encourages students inclination to act on principle, and to take others' interests into account.

The diagram below summarizes the elements of the framework for integrity and shows how the framework fits together. (Macintosh, 2014)



Picture 1. Elements of the framework for integrity

Probably the two most powerful tools at classroom disposal are the teacher's tone and his/her efforts to promote an open culture. Using these tools makes it much more likely that the classroom as a whole will be successful. Teachers that take integrity seriously will take steps to help individuals with the process of ethical decision-making and seek to support students in acting on their decisions. He should also promote openness among students. The aim is to create an environment in which open discussion of issues is encouraged. However there will always be situations in the classroom in which students do not feel able to raise issues openly. Particularly where the issue involves specific people, there can be the fear of reprisals or more subtle negative repercussions for speaking out. In such situations, the teacher is the one that should encourage his students to talk openly and friendly about all the issues concerned. The importance of openness to the integrity in the classroom is a counterbalance to the idea that consistency is all that matters. If it involves the use of power and efforts to keep students under control, especially if it means silencing dissenting voices, then it does not serve integrity. A classroom with integrity is one that promotes the kind of culture which encourages students to voice concerns and in which ethical matters form part of the everyday conversation.

The single most important quality someone can ever develop that will enhance every part of his life is the value of integrity. Integrity is the core quality of a successful and happy life. Having integrity means being totally honest and truthful in every part of life. By making the commitment to become a totally honest person, it means doing more to ensure the success and happiness in life than anything else someone can ever do.

Integrity is a value, like persistence, courage, and intelligence. It is a choice of values and resolution to live by those values that form the character and personality. And it is integrity that enhances all other human values. The quality of the person is determined by how well she lives up to the values that are most important. Integrity is the quality that locks in the values and causes to live consistent with them.

Integrity is the foundation of character. A person who has integrity also has an unblemished character in every area of his or her life. One of the most important activities

that can be engaged in is developing the character. And one of the best ways to develop the character is by consistently doing the same things that a thoroughly honest person would do in every area of his or her life.

The integrity is manifested in willingness to adhere to the values that are most important in life. It's easy to make promises but often very hard to keep them. But every time we keep a promise that we've made, it is an act of integrity, which in turn strengthens the character. As we act with integrity in everything we do, we will find that every part of our lives will improve. We will begin to attract the best people and situations into the life and become an outstanding person as well as a success in everything we do. (Nikitina, 2015)

There are many reasons why *integrity* should be at the first place for every teacher. Here are some of the main:

1. Trust- if you are a person that has integrity, your personal relationships and professional relationships will be genuine and the people around you will know they can trust you with anything.
2. Responsible- if you have integrity, people will give you higher level responsibilities because they know and feel like you will always do the right thing.
3. Respect- if you stand up for doing the right thing, people at times may not always agree with what you do, but they will have a great respect for you, that you stand up for what you believe in.
4. Authentic- with integrity, you are looked at as real person, someone with class. People with high integrity never have to look over their shoulder for anything they've done. They can feel good about the choices they make. (Smart Chic)

#### **4. THE CLASSROOM CULTURE**

Culture plays a special role in the blossoming of life and in upholding peace, progress and prosperity in society. (Peace, 2011) Among other things, culture is also present in the classroom. To what extent it will be present depends on how it is practiced and confirmed by the entities involved in the teaching process. The main carrier of this task is the teacher in cooperation with his students. A classroom culture of trust and acceptance is the foundation for establishing an environment in which students are empowered and comfortable with: providing feedback to continuously improve classroom teaching and learning, learning from mistakes to enhance achievement, aiming for "stretch" goals to maximize their potential. (Montgomery County Public School, 2010)

Building a culture in the classroom can begin with creation of appropriate rules therein. The most effective classroom rules are those that:

- Are based on values such as dignity, safety, belonging, kindness and accountability
- Help a young person feel valued, protected, nurtured and empowered
- Are mutually written and agreed upon by teachers and students
- Are referred to again and again throughout the year- as a living statement that guides all interpersonal interactions rather than as an irrelevant piece of art hung on a wall.

Phrases used in the classroom between students and between teachers and students also play a very important role in building a culture in the classroom. The messages that adults communicate have a way of becoming internalized as part of a child's own inner voice. More efficient than a lecture and has more impact than a finger- wagging warning, positive classroom phrases play a powerful role in preventing cruel behavior among young people. These consistently-used messages shape the classroom's culture and impact the way kids think about themselves in relation to others.

Effective modeling techniques of classroom cultures are champions of the underdog and standard bearers of acceptance. Effective modeling techniques of classroom cultures are champions of the underdog and standard bearers of acceptance. They use a model of kindness and inclusion in all of their interactions- especially the ones that are most challenging. This is how their students move beyond the lip service of wall art and actually live the values of their classroom culture. When every action, every day is shaped by norms of kindness, dignity, safety, belonging, and accountability, bullying behavior never has a chance to take root. When the conflict is managed with dignity, young people learn that kindness matters. (Whitson, 2014)

## **5. BUILDING A CULTURE OF INTEGRITY IN THE CLASSROOM**

Children are not born with integrity or the behaviors we associate with it like honesty, honor, respect, authenticity, social responsibility, and the courage to stand up for what they believe is right. It is derived through a process of cultural socialization- influences from all spheres of a child's life. In their school environments, students acquire these values and behaviors from adult role models and peers, and in particular, through an understanding of the principles of academic integrity. When students learn integrity in classroom settings, it helps them apply similar principles to other aspects of their lives. Academic curriculum is constantly updated to meet the increasing demands of a changing knowledge society. (Price-Mitchell, 2015)

Teachers who transform lives understand not only how to teach curriculum, but also how children develop into capable, caring, and engaged adults. They see beyond quantitative measurements of success to the core abilities that help students live healthy, productive lives.

Integrity is part of the model designed for engaging families, schools, and communities in the principles of positive youth development) because integrity is the basis of social harmony and action. Despite societal forces that test integrity, children deserve a world that values truth, honesty, and justice. Linked by research to self-awareness, sociability, and the five other abilities on the compass, integrity is one of the 8 Pathways to Every Student's Success. (Price-Mitchell, Edutopia, 2015)

Integrity is the ability to act consistently with the values, beliefs, and principles that we claim to hold. It's about courage, honesty, and respect in one's daily interactions and doing the right thing even when no one is watching. Integrity is also an essential to the proper exercise of individual responsibility.

Children's integrity can be shaped by treating them with respect and dignity, and listening to their feelings and concerns without judgment. When we praise students for demonstrating their values, beliefs, and principles through actions, we remind them of their value as ethical human beings, beyond a grade or test score. (Price-Mitchell, Edutopia, 2015)

Marilyn Price- Mitchell suggests that integrity can be gained through cultural socialization, so it is all of our responsibilities to help teach and guide young minds to be of strong moral character. She listed 5 ways to increase integrity in the classrooms.

1. Infuse integrity into classroom culture
2. Develop a moral vocabulary
3. Respond appropriately when cheating occurs
4. Use quotes to ignite meaningful conversations
5. Help students believe in themselves (Price-Mitchell, The Digital Student Summer 2015, 2015)

The development of culture of integrity in the classroom begins with establishing a culture of acceptance and trust. To do this, the teacher needs to:

- encourage students to participate and engage in process thinking

- model acceptance and respect as students offer ideas to improve the classroom culture or learning system
- act upon students' suggestions to reinforce the value of student input (Montgomery County Public School, 2010)

A true teacher is one who respects the democratic principles and promotes a culture of integrity within his classroom. Building a culture of integrity in the classroom is a long-term process and one that requires attention to the detail of how techniques are implemented. Teacher should pay attention to the individual techniques within their framework for integrity, but also to the framework as a whole and the way the techniques relate to one another. Above all, integrity produces integrity. Teacher, who expects his students to display integrity, must display integrity in his interaction with them also. (Macintosh, 2014)

Without acceptance and trust, students' energy may be diverted from learning to self-protection. A trusting environment empowers students to become accountable for their own learning and the learning of others. Learning accountability will prepare them for lifelong achievement and taking responsibility in the workplace in the future.

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