



HighLight Key – Stewardship

Education needs to inculcate an attitude of responsible stewardship with regard to resources, finance and responsibilities on a personal level and with regard to responsibility as an employee and to citizenship in the wider community.

Whether it's a class textbook issued at the beginning of the year or a pupil lending another a ruler, pupils are regularly asked to steward various goods in their daily life. This key describes an approach to the world around us that a school can model and seek to inculcate in its students. Simply, a steward is someone who takes care of something which belongs to someone else, originally the 'keeper of a house'. Stewardship then is the expression of an ethic of care towards the things which we receive, for a time, in trust and for which we are asked to give an account. We may be asked to give an account to various others, be it parents, teachers, a community or public, or to past and future generations.

A stewardship approach can be contrasted with an ownership approach which says that goods belong to me and are mine to do with as I will. The ownership view does not recognise any authority (save themselves) to which they need give an account. This view turns other people and things into a resource for my benefit; they become means to the ends of my choosing.

A popular caricature of the ownership view is Veruca Salt, from Roald Dahl's, 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' who sings among other things:

*"I want the world
I want the whole world
I want to lock it
All up in my pocket
It's my bar of chocolate
Give it to me now*

*I want today
I want tomorrow*

*I want to wear 'em
Like braids in my hair and
I don't want to share 'em"*

The ownership view expresses a possessive desire to acquire and attain and may be willing to dispossess others to achieve this. It is essentially self-regarding and self-serving. This attitude can be seen in colonial endeavours, historically and today and in the actions of a pupil taking something from another or in monopolizing certain resources or spaces (toilets or areas of a playground for example) in the school. It may also be seen in the teacher who talks about 'my pupils' and whose achievements are celebrated as his own.

The stewardship approach, however, does recognise that there are others who can legitimately call us to account and are themselves held to account, though they may do so imperfectly or with imperfect motives. This stewardship can operate at a number of scales:

- Caring for our self and receiving care from others (thinking about our body, mind and spirit)
- Caring for goods or finances we receive
- Caring for those with whom we have relationship (such as family, our neighbour, our co-worker or classmate) and the stranger
- Caring for our local environments (homes, communities, workplaces, region)
- Caring for the ecological environment and in the broadest sense, 'the Earth'.

The stewarding approach then can apply to a number of different kinds of things: knowledge, wealth, skills, relationships, material things, environments. What stewarding looks like maybe different in each case but in its broadest sense will be characterised by a cultivation which seeks a sustainable fruitfulness. This might mean seeking knowledge and trying to put it to good use, or cultivating a richer friendship or thinking about how our work could be done more effectively for the common good. People may also disagree about what this looks like in practice and we need to think about wise decision making (see the key 'Wisdom') as we face choices, not simply between use and misuse but also between different good choices. It requires wisdom to know how to proceed.

Here is an example about paint in a school classroom. Misuse of the paint given by the teacher might be to shower the paint over a classmate or drop it on the floor. Whether it is intentional or by accident the paint has been misused as it won't be able to be used for the Art project and will need to be cleaned from the person or the floor. However, context matters here as what is misuse in one setting might be right use in another (such as paintballing!). Similarly, when thinking about the environment we may think that conservation or protection is the only right way of expressing care. But again context matters. Think for example of a child being given paints in an Art class and him

returning them unused. Is this an example of good stewardship? Not necessarily, as they were not put to the use intended for them. However, thoughtful use may mean using less blue paint so that a classmate can paint the sky on their painting. This shows awareness that the resource may be finite and an awareness of how his actions affect others' ability to achieve their creative goals.

We could express this difference between use, misuse and non-use in this way:

	Use	Misuse	Non-use
Characterised as	Cultivating, Creative, Productive/Fruitful	Destructive, breaks relationships of trust	Conservation and protection

In a stewardship view because relationships of trust are involved where there is misuse two different kinds of problems have occurred, both of which will need to be addressed. When a textbook is torn, a ruler lost or page scrawled on there is a material and a relational problem. There is a material problem because someone must bear a cost. That is the cost to replace or restore the item or to experience loss because it cannot be. In addition, there is a relational problem because trust was broken. When calling one another to account we need to make room to address both of these kinds of brokenness (see 'Behaviour Management' key for more on this).

In this paper, we have understood stewardship as the expression of an ethic of care towards the things which we receive, for a time, in trust and for which we are asked to give an account. It is characterised by a cultivation which seeks a sustainable fruitfulness and as there is more than one way this could take place it requires wisdom to know how to proceed. Where a school seeks to inculcate this key one of the things teachers will do is call pupils to account for the use of what is entrusted to them. At the same time, they will help pupils understand that teachers and the head teacher are also asked to give accounts. This includes how the teachers care for their pupils and help them come into a 'greater sustainable fruitfulness', or to put it another way, to achieve, but not at the expense of wellbeing or character. In calling one another to account we recognise that we deal with the brokenness of misuse and of trust. A teacher will want to give room for dealing with the fallout from the material issue and in the relationship.