

# Keynote speech: Cultivating civic character through service to others in disrupted times

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Contemporary democracies seem beset by various tensions and issues that raise significant questions about the fundamental features of democratic life and which, in turn, place serious pressures and responsibilities on educators. Such concerns include increased political polarisation, fake news, a deterioration in the tone of political discussion, a “retreat” to privatised interests, and the persistent and often pervasive injustices experienced by/within communities. Each of these concerns detract from the health and viability of a citizenry committed to the common good. Yet amidst these very real challenges, many educators and young people are engaged in deliberate and intentional efforts to foster more hopeful and compassionate forms of democratic engagement – forms which bring citizens and communities together in conversation about what it means to be a good society and to live a good life. In this context, this presentation will focus on the cultivation of ‘civic character’ through education. More specifically, it will set out – through a combination of conceptual analysis, empirical data from educators and young people, and examples of practice in schools – a conception of civic character through service to others as a hopeful, compassionate and socially engaged way of being through which young people can respond (and oftentimes are responding) to the aforementioned concerns and through which a greater and more inclusive sense of the common good might be fostered.