

RESEARCH REVIEW: 10th YEAR OF CONSENSUS, DEVELOPMENT, & EVALUATION

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This review encompasses three sections. The first involves a Delphi process that was used to achieve consensus on the 17 most important character traits to be taught to a national population of socio-culturally diverse male and female high school students. The next section explores the rationale, history, structure, specific lesson plans, and the diverse methods of implementation of this evolving character development and leadership program (CD&L). It also observes that alignment with ELA and ELD common core standards was achieved as well as goodness of fit between learning styles and curriculum content. The final section examines the efficacy of the CD&L Program over the past decade, considers lessons learned, and suggests the next steps in this program of research.

PART ONE: CONSENSUS

Pro-social character traits have been presented conceptually as part of the identity of large social systems (e.g., Josephson, retrieved 2015), products of ongoing dynamics between systems and the larger systems in which they are embedded (*Ethical Learning Communities*, Lickona, 1992), and attitudes, values, and behavioral tendencies possessed by individuals (*Character Development and Leadership Program*, Hoedel, 2010a). This article is about the last approach. It has to do with teaching character and leadership traits to students directly in focused classes using lesson plans that take into account the participants' socio-cultural contexts (that is, lesson plans informed by gender, grade, and developmental stage, among other variables). Implicit in this approach is that a high dosage is necessary to success (daily or semi-daily).

Statement of the Problem and a Best Practices Solution

Doctor Hoedel has devoted his professional career to constructing an efficient way to teach character education in the 8th through 12th grades, namely, working directly and intensively with young- and middle-adolescents in classes focused on that agenda. These classes take into account the students' socio-cultural identity needs and require them to study themselves as they cope with the complicated and challenging

new world outside their homes (classroom, playground, and community). The core belief is that, if students are immersed in the right curriculum and held accountable for “doing the work” (cf. Mackenzie & Mackenzie, 2010), they will incorporate a process of sustainable personal change.

The First Step: Consensus About What is to be Taught

Be it concept or process, where matters are ambiguous (nuances within and between definitions or delineated parts of complex processes), the Delphi Process (Jenkins & Smith, 1994) is considered the empirical “best practice” to arrive at consensus. “Character” is such a concept; “character education” is such a process.

The first step toward program development and its empirical validation is to obtain consensus among disparate stakeholders about what character education outcomes should be commonly taught. Once educators have a roster of these desirable individual traits, their next step is to determine what specific, easily observed, and therefore *auditable* behaviors reflect the influence of these traits in school and community settings. Subsequent audits might be used to make an “ethical needs assessment” of a population and also to determine the relative success of an intervention (before and after auditing of the participants in comparison with nonparticipating peers).

The Delphi Process is a structured approach to group consensus through successive iterations of culling, comparing, and decision-making by the members of a panel. This panel is comprised of a representative group of content experts who have relevant - and often diverse - opinions and experiences. Recruitment for the current application began in 2001 with national-level character education theoreticians and researchers, and those “in the trenches”, namely, school administrators, teachers, and community mentors (e.g., youth pastors and athletic coaches). Next, those individuals were required to personally compile those character traits that each considered desirable in middle adolescent male and female 8th through 12th graders and relevant to becoming a productive adult. Over the next several years this panel’s sequential tasks were:

- Compile an exhaustive list of seemingly relevant traits applicable to middle-adolescent men and women in the United States.
- Pare this list down to a non-redundant, user-friendly short list capable of being defined by discreet and observable student behaviors, that is, behaviors that can be immediately recognized and tallied.
- Reach agreement on those character traits and attendant behaviors *most important* to academic and social success at the middle-adolescent stage of personal development and that would prepare them to be productive citizens.
- Cull this short-list for the “most important 17” since each of the traits was to be the weekly focus of a school semester.
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All of the traits on the short-list were considered to have important implications for the students once out of school and throughout their individual developmental trajec-

tories. In the decade since this project was begun, additional traits have been considered and have been set aside for further consideration. Many of these are not character traits so much as social competencies (so-called “Emotional IQ”) explored by developmental psychologists (cf., Brophy, Lee, Nievar, & Stollak, 2007).

Method

The panel of experts was recruited because of their theoretical diversity and experience with the academic and social challenges of middle-adolescents in the diverse regional environments. In addition, they were passionate about character education for youth. Fortuitously, there was a comparable number of males and females of diverse ages and ethnic backgrounds. These were the members of the Delphi panel:

- An editor of a major academic family science journal.
- The director of character education for a southeastern state, who also worked in the that state’s department of public instruction.
- A leader in the field of character education with a proven track record of transforming school climate and improving the character of students.
- An academic whose entire career was comprised of educational leadership positions at the under-graduate and graduate levels.
- A family and child scientist at a research-intensive land grant university.
- The long-term superintendent of a major school district in a southeastern State.
- A principal of a high school with 30 years of experience.
- The director of an at-risk mentoring program for middle-adolescent youth.
- The director of a state-wide fatherhood initiative with a background in family studies, adolescent development, and family therapy.
- A stay-at-home parent with a marketing degree.
- Two youth ministers.
- Several suburban blue-collar workers.

These individuals remained at their personal headquarters and their work was coordinated by the senior author using individual and conference telephone calls, email and internet conference meetings.

Results

The process required four major iterations. There also were informal conferences to facilitate production and help the panel work together efficiently. For example, the goal of the first iteration was to obtain an “exhaustive list” of character traits. That charge took 9 months to accomplish. As that process unfolded, the panel’s deliberations were informed by the “outside influence” of contemporary character education leaders. These included Josephson (*Six Pillars of Character* and related works (<http://josephsoninstitute.org/sixpillars.html>), Davidson (cf. exposition of “moral character and performance character” in Davidson, 2004), and the pedagogical advice of Bennett (1996), Berkowitz and Bier (2005), Elkind and Sweet (1997), Lickona and Davidson (2005), and Leming (2006). Once compiled, there were more than 100 trait nominations to consider. The author sent this compilation back to the members. He asked them to consider this

large list with regard to redundancy. Many of the traits were synonymous; the connotations of others overlapped. Through this iterative process the list of traits was reduced to 60.

The panel’s third task was to examine the surviving traits and to identify those most amenable to behavioral definitions and therefore capable of being easily assessed. The panelists were asked to take each trait and to attempt to give unambiguous behavioral examples: *“This is what this trait looks like in a middle adolescent socio-cultural context. This is how anyone would recognize it immediately and without doubt.”* The panel subsequently was asked to rate the products of their foregoing process with regard to the singularity and clarity of the behavioral manifestations of each trait. Thirty traits, with their behavioral indicators, survived this process.

Finally, the panelists rated each of these 30 items on the extent to which a trait, with its behavioral indicators, was *a good fit for the planned program of scholarship*. Because the author’s subsequent curricular plans involved immersion in one character trait each week for 17 weeks, he compiled those with the 17 highest ratings. These character traits are given in Table 1. They are not rank-ordered according to their average rating. This listing is how they might fit into a subsequent curriculum (cf. Hoedel, 2010a).

The panel thought that the first six traits might be considered foundational, that is, the floor upon which citizenship could be constructed. The next five traits were the values and attendant skills necessary for positive character growth in the students’ current social environments. The last six traits addressed what good citizenship would look like and be expressed in these students’ futures. In addition to planting and cultivating seeds of character, a premium was placed on demonstrating leadership.

Table 1
Summary of Panel Consensus of the 17 Most Important Character and Leadership Traits to be Taught to 9th through 12th Graders in a High School Class

Character Trait	Average Rating*	Definition in Mid-adolescence	Demonstrated by:
“Foundational”			
Attitude	10.0	Pro-social orientation, affirming belief systems, self-discipline	Optimism; internal causality; pro-social goals
Preparation	10.0	Realistic goals with realistic sub-goals	Articulating pathways to personal goals

Character Trait	Average Rating*	Definition in Mid-adolescence	Demonstrated by:
Perseverance	10.0	Macro and micro steadfastness in school	Records of lateness, absences, completing assignments, preparation for tests; concern about grades
Respect	10.0	Good social judgment and deference to peers, educators and self	Civility of behavior and words: Positive and negative behavioral incidents
Honesty	10.0	Building a reputation for respecting the truth as well as demonstrating it	Caring about and obtaining high reliability ratings by teachers and peers; The relative absence of lying, cheating, and stealing.
Integrity	10.0	Developing personal values	Owning thoughts, actions, and consequences; internal causality
“Skill acquisition”			
Courage	9.8	Effective handling of peer group pressure; Defending beliefs and values	Names skills for resisting negative peer pressure; constructive arguing in class
Appreciation	9.8	Recognizing role models & understanding their significance in your life.	Admires specific role models from curriculum, school, community; Identifies with model
Composure	10.0	Effectively dealing with anger and aggression	Lack of citations, number of positive and negative instances
Empathy	9.8	Building positive communicative skills	Demonstrates active listening (listen, clarify, confirm, accept multiple realities)
Gratitude	9.8	Recognizing and feeling grateful for external resources	Finds and uses external resources; Asks for help; Expressing thanks
Compassion	9.8	Recognizing and caring about the inequalities of life	Addressing incidents of bullying; helping, not hurting, potential targets
“Positive futures”			
Tolerance	10.0	Demonstrating tolerance for diverse populations	Accepting multiple realities; Negative reactions to out-groups v. inclusion
Sacrifice	9.8	Puts welfare of others ahead of self	Names as important value; Incidents of altruism and volunteering

Character Trait	Average Rating*	Definition in Mid-adolescence	Demonstrated by:
Loyalty	9.8	Sustaining long-term relationships	Number of friends and length of friendship; Longest time held job; Longest time in romantic relationship; School pride
Responsibility	9.8	Cultivating employability in the workplace	Showing initiative, being present and on time, completing assignments, grade-point-average
Leadership	9.5	Becoming a leader	Expressed desire to lead, take charge; resist peer pressure
			*Standard deviations < .5

Discussion

There was much basic agreement among the panelists by the time that the proposed traits reached the final stage. Certain traits did not make the final list simply because the number of usable weeks in a semester was limited and the proposed character education curriculum presupposed immersion in only one trait each week. Moreover, in debriefing sessions, traits with high average ratings were eliminated because each was too difficult to define uniquely in discrete, observable behavior (e.g., “humility,” “civility,” and “good judgment”). Some popular traits struck the panel as more elementary-school-oriented than high-school-appropriate (e.g., “compassion” replaced “kindness”).

In Table 1, some traits appear to be synonymous. One such pair is “integrity” and “honesty”. However, the panel decided that each was unique. Integrity was defined as the extent to which an individual experienced the self as value-laden and one’s own. Honesty was considered concern for truthfulness in one’s thoughts, responses, and behaviors, that is, the relative absence of lying, cheating, and stealing. Another apparently synonymous pair might be “appreciation” and “gratitude”. In this pair the panelists wished to distinguish between recognizing, understanding, and accepting the value of role models in their socio-cultural worlds as opposed to being aware of, valuing, and inclined to use these positive resources in their lives.

Subsequently, panelists and consumers have suggested other traits that were not considered in the first study, e.g., traits that are the opposite of “apathy” (considered by all to be “Public Enemy # 1” in grades 8 through 12). Such antitheses might be “grit”

and “determination”. Some panelists have regretted the absence of “fairness”. They were not convinced that it was embedded in “honesty”.

For the past decade the 17 traits have been at the core of an evolving character education curriculum (see Hoedel, 2010a). There has been a feedback loop between consumers and the author and his panelists. This has been informed by student self-reports and open-ended commentary at the completion of their participation. Because the Character Development and Leadership Program has been a program-in-process, the author and his panelists have been using this consumer feedback and community consultation to inform future evolutions of the program.

PART TWO: CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Having described the process of acquiring *what* should be taught to *whom* (namely, 8th through 12th grade students), how that might best be accomplished is the next consideration. Key structural elements of the CD&L Program have evolved based on continuous feedback across the last decade from stakeholders and the outcome studies summarized in Stage 3. These elements clearly differentiate the CD&L Program from other programs in the field. Moreover, the iterations of reviewing and renewing resulted in multi-faceted presentations designed to effectively interface with diverse student learning styles. Feedback from stakeholders also has resulted in an increasing alignment of CD&L content and processes with the ELA and ELD common core standards.

Origins

The program of scholarship described in this paper began in 2001 in response to an informal request for proposals by a high school principal in a southern state. Specifically, students were making poor choices and getting into serious trouble in school and the community (considered to be *character* deficits) and upperclassmen were no longer constructively mentoring underclassmen academically or socially (aspects of *leadership*.) The request was to provide an innovative semester course that “instilled character and leadership” to a mix of high school “needers” and “leaders”. It strove to target the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development of its participants by engaging them in ways that were relevant and of high-interest to them. As a graded for-credit course, it would also be academically challenging – requiring reading, writing, second-order thinking, and oral presentations. Seventy-five students voluntarily enrolled, with approximately 20 selected each of the next four semesters. The curriculum subsequently became a living document: Its development has continuously been informed by educational research and the participant observations of current and former inhabitants.

Through a process of continual feedback, certain lessons were learned from the first students onward.

- Students responded much better when a consistent and predictable format was presented, (i.e., students knew what to expect on a daily basis and could prepare for it).
- The content had to relate to the student's experiences. It needed to challenge students to examine their own lives in a variety of ways.
- Since students have different learning styles, the lesson plans needed to engage those learning styles.
- Students wanted to be active-learners. They wanted to participate in discussions, writings, and video analysis.
- Students lacked a fundamental understanding of who and what is a "role model".

Accordingly, such lessons informed the structure and content of the curriculum. They are in accordance with contemporary educational research that has uncovered the classroom management practices of highly effective high school teachers (e.g., Anderman, Andrzejewski, & Allen, 2011; Corso, Bundick, Quaglia, & Haywood (2013).

Curriculum Structure

To ensure the content was meaningful and of high-interest, each character trait was paired with a topic. For example, perseverance was taught in the context of "The Importance of Education," and responsibility was taught in the context of "Employability and Workplace Skills". Stakeholders agreed that these topics were something students "are dealing with," "will be dealing with," or "should be dealing with."

Each day of the week was provided a heading. These headings provided consistency for the teacher and the students. Participants knew what to expect and when to prepare.

- *Ethical Monday*
- *Character Movie Tuesday*
- *Role Model Wednesday*
- *Leadership Thursday*
- *Assignment Friday*

Housed within each day of the week were a set of 10 consistent lesson plans. Each week had an identical — and therefore, predictable — pedagogical format template. For example, Figure 1 illustrates what this template looks like when applied in Week 3. The following paragraphs document the 10 lesson plans and how they fit into the format.

Lesson Plan 1 – Quotation Exercise (Ethical Monday). This is an informal, low-stress way to introduce the trait and topic. Traits are defined and quotations from both historical and anonymous individuals are provided. Students provide short-answer responses about the context and meaning of the quotation, followed by classroom discussion.

Lesson Plan 2 – Ethical Dilemma (Ethical Monday). Real-life scenarios are used to challenge students to contemplate choices, options, consequences, different points of

view, etc. to help them with critical thinking skills and judgment. Students provide written short-answers and then participate in debate/discussion.

Lesson Plan 3 – Lecture (Ethical Monday). Students receive weekly direct instruction and collaborative question prompts from research-based lectures supported with curriculum-provided Power Points, visuals and handouts.

Lesson Plan 4 – Character Movies (Character Movie Tuesday). Students view, discuss and debate selected scenes from appropriate popular movies that embody the featured character trait. Verbal and/or written responses to follow up questions challenge students to critically analyze these video segments from multiple points of reference.

Lesson Plan 5 – Role Model Readings (Role Model Wednesday). A textbook has been written which provides the biographies of 17 role models who exemplify each of the 17 traits covered in the curriculum. Each week students read a 10-page biographical narrative about a historical or contemporary person. Chapter quizzes and discussion questions spur in-depth analysis of each featured role model.

Lesson Plan 6 – Community Role Model (Role Model Wednesday). Understanding that “true” role models reside in the students’ community (i.e., lived in the same neighborhoods, graduated from the same schools, and looked like the students), community leaders are brought into the classroom each week to reinforce the importance of the character traits covered in the class. The speakers tell personal stories, provide life lessons, and encourage students to reach their full potential.

Lesson Plan 7 – Basic Skills (Leadership Thursday). Practical and essential skills are provided for each module to help students become successful in school and beyond. Almost all of these skills are behavioral in nature, so differences can be observed immediately.

Lesson Plan 8 – Blog (Leadership Thursday). An on-line blog provides a positive, negative, or controversial current event related to character and leadership. An overview and a link to a short news video is provided along with the blogger’s (JMH) perspective. Follow up discussion questions seek to inspire students to contemplate the importance of character and leadership in today’s society.

Lesson Plan 9 – Leadership Principles (Leadership Thursday). Virtual lectures on 17 leadership principles are provided on the website by various leaders. Students will learn what are meant to be timeless leadership principles that will help them become successful in school, career and their personal lives. Discussion and social media questions accompany each principle.

Lesson Plan 10 – Expository Writing Assignment (Assignment Friday). Students write expository or persuasive essays about core beliefs and character related issues.

This serves as a final academic written assignment that students will present in a formal oral presentation to classmates.

Figure 1
Lesson Plans Template, Week 3 (“Perseverance”)

Word of the Week: Perseverance

Quote of the Week: “I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed.” (Booker T. Washington)

Points of Emphasis:

1. Help students understand why it's very important to do well in school and graduate.
1. Compare and contrast the demands of education now vs. the early 1900's.
2. Challenge students to implement study skills into their homework routine.
3. Challenge students to commit to the 6-week academic challenge.

Ethical Monday:

4. Present an overview of the week by showing the Week 3 Power Point presentation.
5. Direct students to complete quote exercise and follow with a discussion.
6. The ethical dilemma is geared around high school dropouts.
7. Lecture on the importance of education. Many people tell students to stay in school, but they don't tell them why.

Character Movie Tuesday: Rudy

Role Model Wednesday: Quiz and discussion on Chapter 3 - Booker T. Washington. Be sure to emphasize the importance of perseverance during the discussion.

Leadership Thursday:

Week 3 Skill: Study Skills

Week 3 Speaker: _____

Week 3 Leadership Principle: The Misperceptions of Leadership

This lecture is located at www.characterandleadership.com. Click on the Leadership Principles Button.

Assignment Friday: Today's work force requires more skills and education than ever before. Yet, three out ten students drop out of high school. 1) What profession would you like to work in when you grow up, and what kind of education do you need to obtain that job? Note: do not list professional athlete, singer, actor or other long-shot dreams. 2) If you were the principal of this school, what specific steps would you take to keep students from dropping out? 3) What was the most challenging experience you ever had in school? What did you do to persevere through that experience?

ATTENTION: Be sure to check www.characterandleadership.com and click on the blog button to view the weekly post. Dr. Hoedel puts links to current events, provides commentary and asks discussion questions. To receive notifications about blog posts, instruct students to “follow” us on Twitter@CDandLeadership and use #CDandL or “like” our page on Facebook at Character Development & Leadership. Students are encouraged to provide respectful comments in and outside of class.

Learning Styles

These 10 lesson plans align with the diverse learning styles of students (see updated review in Moussa, 2014). Through the use of didactic lecture (leadership principles), reading (role model readings), writing (writing assignments), video (character movies), small (blog posts) and large group discussion (ethical dilemmas), oral presentation (writing assignments), and behavior modification (basic skills), students are able to grasp the concepts of character and leadership in a multi-dimensional fashion. In 2014, this course was modified and expanded to instruct students using a 100% online platform (e.g. schools using one-to-one laptops, virtual or distance-learning modalities).

ELA & ELD Common Core Standards

The Common Core Standards have been adopted by most states (cf. Common Core Standards, 2015). Therefore, English teachers from a large western state were charged with assessing and aligning this program with both ELA and ELD standards (see www.characterandleadership.com/alignment for details). At the conclusion of a 6-month process, the panel agreed that the CD&L Program supported:

- 80% of the ELA College & Career Readiness Anchor Standards
- 75% of the 8, 9 & 10 ELA Speaking, Listening, Reading & Writing Standards
- 60% of the 11& 12 ELA Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing Standards.

This alignment has allowed secondary schools to use this program to receive English credit and many schools now take advantage of this dual feature of teaching pro-social values and improving English proficiency (cf. Character Development & Leadership Program, 2015a).

Modes of Implementation

The CD&L Program was initially taught as a stand-alone for-credit course on a block (90 minute) schedule. While the “weekly format” hasn’t changed, approximately 40% of the 1,800 schools nationwide do not use it in the original manner (Character Development and Leadership Program (2015c). For example, hundreds of schools use this in a homeroom format, extending the 180 lesson plans to cover 3 or 4 years of instruction without redundancy. Some choose to integrate this program in already existing classes, such as JROTC, Health, Physical education, and Business and Career Management. Some schools prefer to focus on seniors, some on at-risk freshmen, and some as a high school elective. Some schools require their students to take the course as a requirement for graduation. In contrast, some school districts prefer using the CD&L Program in a middle school setting. From its inception schools have had the freedom to choose how to implement the CD&L Program in order to meet their unique goals and objectives. Ironically, while facilitating its acceptance, this freedom of implementation has presented challenges to its mission of empirical development and validation. These program evaluation challenges will be discussed in the final section.

PART THREE: ONGOING EVALUATION

Since 2001, over 1,800 schools from all 50 states have participated in the evolving Character Development and Leadership Program, 2015b). Many of these have voluntarily participated in process and outcome evaluation, and the results have been used to continuously modify the program. In this section the findings to date are summarized. This compilation is timely. There may be a sea change occurring in contemporary character education. These predicted changes involve diverse on-line materials and distance learning. Outcome results from the emerging on-line programs will need to be compared to those based in traditional classrooms.

Beyond the continuous adjustments informed by program administrators, staff, and students, outcomes assessment was in place from the beginning (see Hoedel, 2003, 2005). These are compiled in Table 2. In the first years (2001-2003) there was only one class each semester for two full years. Eighty-three 9th- through 12th-graders comprised the first four classes. This was a school where 73% of the student body received free or discounted lunches. A typical breakdown of the classes were 70% African American, 25% white and 5% Hispanic. At that time, two hundred-seventy dependent variables were tracked by collaborators at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. A pre- and post-program test design compared participating students to an equivalent group of non-participating students. That data set is no longer available. However, the program developers recorded outcomes of the most urgent interest to the school system administrators: Tardies and absences from school, in-school suspensions, incidents of bullying toward peer male and females, and drug-use. All of these decreased at the same time that grade point averages (GPA) increased. These changes were statistically significant and were much greater than any positive changes in the comparisons groups. In fact, the comparison groups demonstrated an *increase* in absences and in-school suspensions over that same period of time. Therefore, the desirable outcomes were associated with participation in the CD&L Program.

Table 2. Summary of CD&L Program Outcomes Research to Date

		Participants: In all cases socioculturally diverse	Control group	Statistically significant changes attributable to CD&L participation
2001-2003	CD&L Developer; UNCG	83	Yes	Compared to control group, decreases in tardies, absences, in-school suspensions, and peer aggression; Increased GPA.
2004-2005	CD&L Developer	825 9 th graders in 11 high schools	Yes	Compared to control group, better attendance, fewer in-school suspensions, increased GPA, and increased passage of 9 th -grade EOC.
2006-2008	Weikert	2,632 9 th -12 th graders from 72 schools	No	Significant positive self-reported changes in 3 of 4 anti-social and 3 of 5 pro-social clusters of attitudes and behaviors.
2009-2010	Weikert	1344 9 th -12 th graders from 34 high schools	No	Significant positive self-reported changes in all 4 anti-social and 2 of 5 pro-social clusters of attitudes and behaviors.
2012-2014	Lee	1574 9 th -12 th graders from 34 schools	No	Significant decrease in absences, tardies, fights, and suspensions. Overall positive changes in pro-social attitude and behaviors but not evenly across the expected clusters.
2013	Neiderhouse (hybrid)	10 male and females in 11 th and 12 th grades.	Yes	Substantial decrease in detentions and suspension; little or no change in control group.

In the 2004-2005 school year, 28 of 74 participating high schools submitted outcomes data. Four additional high schools agreed to provide a comparison group. A total

of 825 9th grade students from rural and inner-city high schools in a southeastern state completed the CD&L Program course as part of a freshmen academy. They completed surveys at the time of the CD&L Program's beginning and ending. Their schools collected official office data on attendance, suspensions, grade point averages and End of Course Tests (EOC, *No Child Left Behind*; see New America Foundation, 2014). In fact, the CD&L students had an attendance rate of 96% compared to an 89% rate for students who did not take the course. Students who took the CD&L course also improved their group's average GPA from 2.1 in the 8th grade to 2.4 in the 9th grade. In contrast, the average GPA of the comparison group decreased from 2.4 in the 8th grade to 2.3 in the 9th grade. Moreover, the students who took the CD&L course were put in in-school suspension an average of 1.2 days during the semester they took the course, whereas freshmen who did not take the course were put in in-school suspension an average of 1.9 days in the same semester. CD&L participants also performed better on the two academic assessments (EOC, English and Math) administered under *No Child Left Behind*. The previous year only 45% students of the 9th-graders had passed their 8th grade English EOC test and only 25% passed their 8th grade math EOC test. The next year, after participating in the CD&L Program, 71% of the students passed their English EOC test and 47% passed their math EOC test. Finally, in their self-report surveys upon completing the CD&L Program, participants demonstrated increases in pro-social attitudes and more incidents of pro-social behavior in their schools and communities.

From 2006 to the present date, annual or biennial research outcome studies have been completed by CD&L personnel and given to the participating schools as technical reports (see Weikert, 2006 through 2010, and Lee, 2014a). For these reports outcomes were assessed using only the standardized self-report survey completed at the beginning and end of participation in the CD&L Program. Students were asked the frequency of undesirable school behaviors (truancy, lateness, cheating, stealing, theft, and substance use). They also indicated the extent to which they were informed by pro-social attitudes and character traits, and engaged in prosocial acts (standing up for a beleaguered student, resisting peer pressure, demonstrations of altruism, and so on). Finally the students indicated the extent to which they predicted the learned character traits would be connected to success in their present and future lives, including their academic progress. *Review of these self-reports suggested that they were credible. Both the "before" and "after" surveys consistently contained many revelations of substance use, theft, cheating, and bullying. Many students also made very bold statements about their teachers, their classmates, the class, the textbook, and their participation. Moreover, although student feedback has predominantly been positive over the years, there has always been a smaller-but-outspoken chorus of negative voices (about 10-15% annually).*

CD&L Programs in each of these years uniformly obtained what appeared to be statistically-significant decreases in undesirable behaviors and the predicted increases in pro-social behavior and attitudes. However, there were no comparison groups. Therefore the students' self-described changes in their attitudes and behaviors during that academic term could not be firmly attributed to the specifics of CD&L Program participation. After all, the students were 6 months older at the end of their CD&L participation

and some changes could be the result of developmental maturation. It also is possible that the positive changes were not because of the program content, but because the students were being observed (the so-called “Hawthorne Effect”).

A small study (Neiderhouse, 2013) integrated the CD&L curriculum into a service-learning course format. Ten male and female 11th and 12th graders were considered “behaviorally at-risk” because each had at least 10 detentions and/or one suspension the prior semester. These students enrolled in the semester-long class. Ten equivalent students did not and thereby provided a comparison group. After the course, an audit of school disciplinary records indicated that course participants had a substantial decrease in detentions (before, average 7.8 per student; after, 2.8) and suspensions (before, average 1.2 per student; after, 0.1). Prosocial attitudes and goals were discovered to be pervasive when qualitative analysis was made of interview data, written self-descriptions, and other products produced in the course. In contrast, the disciplinary records of the comparison group did not show any positive changes.

Lessons Learned

From the beginning the CD&L Program of scholarship has been consistently exploring what is needed to instill character development and leadership traits in U.S. middle and late adolescents. Therefore, formal and informal feedback from the stakeholders and participants has guided its evolution. Although the quality of the research has varied over time (for example, sometimes using only self-reports and not having comparison groups), the data obtained thus far suggests that the CD&L Program proponents are on the right track.

However, those chosen to evaluate its outcomes must apply more rigor to the task. Assessments by the students themselves will always be crucial. These surveys indicate the extent to which they themselves are trying to internalize the desired traits. Nevertheless, evaluations need to consistently include academic and disciplinary records in order to determine what extent the participants’ actual behavior matches their professed beliefs as well as the short-term behavioral outcomes desired by teachers and administrators. Moreover, attributions of positive outcomes can only be attributable to the CD&L Program if non-participating students do not demonstrate these changes. This is accomplished with well-conceived comparison groups.

After careful review of the data from 2012 to 2014 CD&L Program stakeholders determined that several process factors must be addressed. First and foremost, the diverse schools are using the CD&L Program in diverse ways with diverse students (c.f., Hoedel, 2015c):

- It is being used in private and public high schools, middle schools, and alternative schools.
- It is being taught as a stand-alone class in character and leadership education. But it also is being taught as a:
 - Freshmen (9th grade) academy (very popular)
 - Vehicle for ELA and ELD English

- Elective leadership course
- Class for at-risk students
- Senior-level capstone course
- Home room
- Setting for in-school suspension

The goals and processes of these different innovations overlap or differ. The students may differ widely in their perception of the class, motivation, academic assets, social norms, and learning styles. In short, efficacy assessment must differ depending on intentions for the class and its enrollment. For example, members of an elite capstone leadership class presumably are more academically and socially mature than at-risk students in the same school. There may be little “room to grow”: They already may take pride in their GPS, be future-oriented, and disinclined to disruptive academic misbehavior. They start out with high scores and end with them. In addition, when the enrollees of these elite classes are grouped with 9th graders and/or at-risk students, group averages reduce the opportunity to discover meaningful changes in sub-groups.

Clearly, it is time to shift from “all schools” aggregate reports to assessments that compare and contrast changes within and between program contexts, participant variables, and curriculum and classroom structural factors. At issue is what can be predicted to most efficiently and firmly obtain specific outcomes for a specific group of students. For example, classroom structure - e.g., detailed use of the textbook, being held accountable for work - and how authority is exercised can be expected to influence outcomes in mandated correctional classes (e.g., Sprick, 2013). On-line materials and a more relaxed teaching style may suit “leadership academies” and senior capstone courses.

A second assessment concern is a corollary of the first. If social scientists are to assess the effects of a program, that program must not differ from person to person, context to context. Future studies should compare schools that implement this program in similar ways, that is, one study of schools that implement program as a class with at-risk freshmen and another study that isolates schools that use this in a homeroom format for the entire school. This requirement stands in opposition to those who market programs while assuring that its consumers can adapt it as it suits them to do so (e.g., Neiderhouse, 2013). In the trade, programs such as the CD&L Program are called “manualized programs” because an operations manual designates how they are to be conducted. The extent to which consumers in fact faithfully follow the procedures (administering the program, assessing its value) is called “treatment fidelity” (cf., Lee, 2014b). In the 2012 -2014 surveys the students’ written commentaries indicated substantial diversity in how the curriculum was taught: Some used the textbook; others did not. Some used multi-media material; others were free-flowing and open-ended. In some classes the students were held accountable for work; in others they were not. Clearly there needs to be more collaboration between the CD&L Program developers and its users with regard to quality control.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, historically the CD&L Program has enjoyed a positive and enthusiastic collaboration between its developers and its consumers. As the collaboration continues the developers of the CD&L Program and its consumers will benefit if they keep the above three assessment concerns on their CD&L dashboards: The clarity provided by comparison groups, keeping evaluations linked to specific formats (e.g., leadership vs disciplinary classes), and program fidelity. Because the CD&L Program is a living and evolving process embedded within and transacting with complex larger systems (education, community), these assessment goals are aspirational. That is what makes them a “dashboard” item, to wit, something on which to keep an alert eye.

This paper narrates the logical first steps in evolving a program of scientifically-based pedagogy. It has employed best empirical practices to achieve consensus about what character traits should be cultivated in contemporary middle adolescents. It has acquired a somewhat uneven but consistent program of outcome determination. It has created and sustained a continuous feedback loop between program developers, evaluators, and consumers. The ongoing mission remains the evolution of a character education program for middle adolescents in their schools that not only is student-friendly, but also is informed both by theory and empirical data. Moreover, as Lickona and Davidson (2005) observed: Sometimes “data leads to ... grounded theory”.

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