EMPIRICALLY- INFORMED CHARACTER AND LEADERSHIP EDUCATION

IN FOCUSED HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOMS: 15 YEARS OF

CONSENSUS, DEVELOPMENT, AND EVALUATION

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Character Development & Leadership

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Abstract

This paper consolidates three concurrent programs of study from 2000 through 2015: (1) Scientifically-determined consensus about which character traits are most relevant to the needs of educators and students in the high school setting; (2) Progressive development of a focussed classroom program to teach inculcate and grow character and leadership skills to diverse students in high schools; (3) Efficacy demonstrations of that evolving classroom program. This required the evolution of an assessment instrument specific to the aims of the program. This article concludes with lessons learned and next steps in this program of research.

   Keywords: character and leadership education, high school, adolescents, Delphi method

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Historical Context

Academic consideration of the nature, composition, and development of character spans at least 2,000 years (cf. Wang and his colleagues, 2015). The narrative began with the philosophical discourses of classical philosophers, continued in the scholarship of major theologians, and evolved into a multivariate body of scholarship developed by researchers in social sciences and education (cf. Smith, 2013). Diverse social scientists currently discuss and/or explore a dynamic transactional developmental growth process of specified traits. Although some leading figures (e.g., Josephson, 2015) subsume all taxonomies of character traits under, e.g., *Six Pillars of Character*, consideration of what traits are meritorious, and their developmental trajectories, are now seen as relative to the cultures and subcultures in which they have been embedded (Berkowitz, 2012, and in press; Davidson, 2004; Davidson, Lickona, & Khmelkov, 2008; Ford & Lerner, 1992; Lerner & Callina, 2014; Lickona,& Davidson, 2005). These traits then have been explored with regard to a wide variety of process and outcome variables.

The seminal publication of *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform* (National Commission on Excellence in Education,1983) corresponded to or precipitated multivariate interest in character and moral development within specific educational subcultures, for example preschools (cf., Brophy-Herb, Kostelnik, & Stein, 2001), high

schools (cf., Hoedel, 2003, 2010; Liston, 2012; Lowenstein, 1996), and undergraduate and graduate settings and programs (cf., Smith, 2013). Dependent variables — in fact, covariates (Corrigan, Grove,Vincent, Chapman, & Walls, 2007) — have included social-ization to the school culture, positive and negative conduct, grade point averages, sex-ual promiscuity, and optimism (cf., Corrigan et al., 2007; Lee, 2014a).

Contemporary Challenges in Educational Settings

Contemporary research standards require that specific character traits be com-monly accepted, defined, and their definitions measurable, that is, they should be clear-ly visible in here-and-now human behavior. This is required to enable the necessary replication of findings and valid attempts to extend expectations to additional settings. Nevertheless, these standards have not been met (cf. Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). Evalua-tion of studies and comparisons between them have suffered because of diverse (and sometimes unproven) conceptual and operational definitions of traits with the same names and the absence of suitable control groups. It is not yet clear that there is agreement about what character traits most meet the specific needs of consumers in specific settings, e.g., teachers and educational administrators concerned about the transition of students from middle school to high school, and from high school to college and adult life. Specifically, since the publication in1983 of *A nation at risk: The impera-tive for educational reform,* there have been numerous treatises offering opinions in-formed by historic literature, professional experiences, and personality (e.g., Joseph-son, 2015; Levingston, 2009; Lickona, 1992, Liston, 2014; McKenzie & McKenzie, 2010). These unproven taxonomies have been used to structure interventions in educa-tional settings (cf. Josephson, 2015; Liston, 2012).

If progress is to be made in theory and practice, it is necessary that all researchers concerned with character development situate their expectations and explorations within specific physical and social contexts in which individuals of a specified developmental stage are functioning. It is in the best interests of the field that those who wish to contribute to the body of scholarship exploring character development in high schools — including those who would promote facilitative interventions — arrive at a common taxonomy of relevant traits. These traits need to have commonly-accepted titles and be assessed in the same psychometrically reliable and valid way. That allows findings to be replicated and extended to new settings and populations.

That is why, beginning in the year 2000, Hoedel and his colleagues embarked on the program of applied educational research described in this article, to wit, *relevant character trait development through focussed education in high school classrooms.* Their first step was to scientifically arrive at consensus about what character traits would be most relevant to this specific group of educators and the students under their watch. If such a list of traits were acquired, it could form the core of a standard curriculum to be tested, first regionally, and then disseminated across the United States. On the basis of collaboration with the institutions that used it, both the curriculum, its pedagogical technique, and its outcome evaluations could continually evolve. This paper consolidates three relatively concurrent programs of study from 2000 through 2015: Scientifically-determined consensus about which character traits are relevant to the needs of educators and students in the high school setting; The evolution of of a focussed classroom program to teach inculcate and grow character and leadership skills to diverse students in high schools; Evidence of the evolving program's efficacy.

Process One: A Scientifically-derived Consensus About What is to be Taught

The first step toward program development with regard to character education and its empirical validation is to obtain consensus among relevant stakeholders, namely, those who have informed interest about character education in US high schools with regard to *what character traits should be commonly taught* given specific *contextual parameters*. Once educators have a roster of these desirable individual traits, they can take the next step of determining what specific, easily observed, and therefore *auditable* behaviors reflect the presence of these traits in school and community settings. Common active agreement about and use of these behavioral indicators are necessary when comparing the histories of participants and nonparticipants after interventions.

Be it concept or process, where matters are ambiguous (nuances within and between definitions or delineated parts of complex processes), the Delphi Method (cf. Turoff & Linstone, 2002) is considered to be the empirical "best practice" to arrive at consensus. "Character" is such a concept; "character education" is such a process. Comparable challenges in related fields of study support the use of Delphi methodology: Participatory action research in public health (Fletcher & Marchildon, 2011); Innovative interventions in education planning (Helmer-Hirschberg, 1966); Financial forecasting (Green, Armstrong, & Graefe, 2007).

Procedures: Method

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. This panel is asked to answer

questions in an interactive process designed to clarify the participants' thinking and to arrive at a commonly-accepted conclusion. The process consists of several rounds of asking questions, summarizing the responses, and returning these summaries to the panel members for further consideration based on the findings to date. Convergence is promoted because common trends are recognized and outliers are conceptually integrated or set aside.Typically the questions are in writing, with a Likert-style format (e.g., "strongly agree… strongly disagree"; "very much alike"… "very much unalike") and opportunity for open-ended commentary. In each subsequent round of questioning, the panel members are given the distribution of Likert scores and transcripts of the commentary. Discussion of disagreements is expected to result in constructive insights (Dick, 2000). Face-to-face interactions often are used to uncover nuances, resolve confusion, and to keep panel members on-task.

Participants.

Recruitment for the current application began in 2001 with a panel of 22 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). These individuals were recognized academics in this area of inquiry, and administrators and teachers at schools who had initially requested such a program. The academics were invited to collaborate and all but one accepted. The administrators and teachers recognized the importance of a "needs assessment" (Soriono, 2013) informed by their professional experiences in their school settings. The participants are described in Table 1.

Table 1

- 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

- Two stay-at-home parents with a vested interest in their children's development

- Two youth ministers

- Six community stakeholders of various educational and vocational levels

Members of the Delphi panel (N = 18; 10 male, 8 female)

Once recruited, these individuals were invited to indicate those character traits each considered "most important" to adolescent male and female 9th- through 12th-graders being successful in school and community. the panel's deliberations were informed by the "outside influence" of contemporary character education leaders. These included Josephson ("Six Pillars of Character", *2015;);* Davidson (cf. exposition of "moral character and performance character", 2004), and the pedagogical advice of Bennett (1996), Berkowitz and Bier (2005), Elkind and Sweet (1997), and Leming (2006). The panel's trait-generation task was in writing. Each panelist was required to provide both a definition and a rationale for the character trait she or he proposed. The resulting list was comprised of 102 traits, but there appeared to be considerable repetition and overlap. This redundancy was reduced by providing the panel members the total list of traits along with their definitions. They first were asked to describe what each trait would look like if it were manifest in clearly observable behavior ("*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").* Next, informed with both the proposed traits definitions and presumed behavioral indicators, the panel rated each trait on a Likert scale ranging from "very much alike" to "very much unalike". The resultant ratings, plus two more in addition (facilitated by conference calls), shortened the list to 32 character traits.

A major contextual limitation was that one trait was to be the focus of each of 17 weekly classroom lesson plans. Therefore, these 32 traits had to be reduced to the 17 traits the panel agreed were the most important to include in terms of the easily observable behaviors associated with them, for 9th- through 12-graders in their high school

settings. The 32 items were returned to the panel members: each character trait, its

conceptual and operational definition, and a summary of why the panelists considered it

important to their respective school missions. The panels next decision-making process

was to rank order the list of 32 traits according to *each's importance to this population,*

in this school setting, with regard to outcome goals, and ease of recognition. The initial

processes had spanned 18 months. This last task required over a year: Four formal it-

erations facilitated by many personal consultations. The latter were needed to resolve

confusion, frustration, and stalemates so that the panel could work together efficiently.

Results.

The resulting character traits character traits are given in Table 2. They are not

rank-ordered according to their average rating. This listing is how they might fit into a

subsequent curriculum (cf. Hoedel, 2010).

The panel thought that the first six traits might be considered foundational, that

is, the floor upon which citizenship could be constructed. The next six traits were fo-

cussed on the skills necessary for positive character growth in the students' *current* so-

cial environments. The last five 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 leadership development.

Table 2

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	Behaviors Indicating the Presence or Absence of trait
"Foundational"			

Character Trait	Average Rating*	Definition in Mid-adolescence	Behaviors Indicating the Presence or Absence of trait
Positive Attitude	10.0	Pro-social orientation, affirming belief systems, self-discipline	Optimism; internal causality; pro-social goals
Preparation	10.0	Priorities with realistic sub-goals	Articulating pathways to personal goals
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	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	Positive communication skills	Demonstrates active listening (listen, clarify, confirm, accept multiple realities)
Gratitude	9.8	Feeling grateful for external resources	Finds and uses external resources; Asks for help; Expressing thanks
Compassion	9.8	Concerned awareness of peer victimization	Addressing incidents of bullying; helping, not hurting, potential targets
"Positive futures"			

Character Trait	Average Rating*	Definition in Mid-adolescence	Behaviors Indicating the Presence or Absence of trait
Tolerance	10.0	Demonstrating tolerance for diverse populations	Accepting multiple realities; Negative reactions to out-groups v. inclusion
Service	9.8	Puts welfare of others ahead of self	Names as important value; Incidents of altruism and volunteering
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 an internalized set of values that guides decision-making processes. 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.

The reader will appreciate that this consensus list of traits includes both "moral" and "performance" character traits (cf. Davidson, 2004). The importance of both categories has been argued compellingly and empirically demonstrated in high school students (Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

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", "desire", 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, 2010). 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.

Process Two: Curriculum Development

Having described the process of acquiring *what* should be taught to *whom* (namely, 9th 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 below 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. In addition, feedback from stakeholders relative to program funding led to 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 2000 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" in a mix of academically and socially challenged high school students. 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 for 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 students' 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. The structural changes also were 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; Berkowicz, 2009; Corso, Bundick, Quaglia, & Haywood (2013).

Curriculum Structure

To ensure the content was meaningful and relevant to the students' lives, each character trait was paired with a weekly topic that directly related to the students' immediate and future development. 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 week focussed on a specific character trait. Within that week each day had 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 describe the 10 lesson plans and how they fit into the format.

Ethical Monday, Lesson Plan 1: Quotation Exercise*.* 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 re-

sponses about the context and meaning of the quotation, followed by classroom discussion.

Ethical Monday, Lesson Plan 2: Ethical Dilemma. 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.

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

Character Movie Tuesday, Lesson Plan 4: Character Movies. 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.

Role Model Wednesday, Lesson Plan 5: Role Model Readings. 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.

Role Model Wednesday, Lesson Plan 6: Community Role Model. 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.

Leadership Thursday, Lesson Plan 7: Basic Skills. 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.

Leadership Thursday, Lesson Plan 8: Blog. 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 (developer, Joe Hoedel) perspective. Follow up discussion questions seek to inspire students to contemplate the importance of character and leadership in today's society.

Leadership Thursday, Lesson Plan 9: Leadership Principles. Virtual lectures on 17 leadership principles are provided on the website by various leaders. Students will learn the key components of timeless leadership, which will help them become successful in school, career and their personal lives. Discussion and social media questions accompany each principle.

Assignment Friday, Lesson Plan 10: Expository Writing Assignment. 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:
• Help students understand why it's very important to do well in school and graduate.
• Compare and contrast the demands of education now vs. the early 1900's.
• Challenge students to implement study skills into their homework routine.
• Challenge students to commit to the 6-week academic challenge.

Ethical Monday:
• Present an overview of the week by showing the Week 3 Power Point presentation.
• Direct students to complete quote exercise and follow with a discussion.
• The ethical dilemma is geared around high school dropouts.
• 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:
Skill: Study Skills
Speaker: _____
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 up-dated review in Moussa, 2014). Through the use of didactic lecture (leadership princi-ples), reading (role model readings), writing (writing assignments), video (character movies), small (blog posts) and large group discussion (ethical dilemmas), oral presen-tation (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).

Alignment with ELA & ELD Common Core Standards

The Common Core Standards have been adopted by most states (cf. Common Core Standards, 2015). Current and potential users of the CD&L Program have ob-served that, if its curriculum were structured to meet both ELA and ELD standards, it could serve a dual purpose, namely, teach pro-social values while improving English proficiency (cf. Character Development & Leadership Program, 2015a). This dual fea-ture was achieved by a panel of English teachers from a large western state. 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 many secondary schools to use the CD&L Program to receive English credit while also getting financial support.

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, Heath, Physical education, 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.

PROCESS THREE: EMPIRICAL SUPPORT

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 vol-

untarily 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 3. In the first years (2001-2003) there was only one class each semester for two full years. Eighty-three 9th- through12th-graders comprised the first four classes. This was a school in which 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. The program developers recorded outcomes of the most urgent interest to the school system administrators: **Tardies, 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 changes in the comparison 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 3. *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 at-risk high school students	Yes	Compared to control group, decreases in tardies, absences, in-school suspensions, and peer aggression; Increased GPA.
2004-2005	CD&L Developer	825 9th graders in 11 high schools	Yes	Compared to control group, better attendance, fewer in-school suspensions, increased GPA, and increased passage of 9th-grade EOC.
2006-2008	Weikert	2,632 9th-12th 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 be-haviors.
2009-2010	Weikert	1344 9th-12th 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 be-haviors.
2012-2014	Lee	1574 9th-12th 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 11th and 12th grades	Yes	Substantial decrease in detentions and suspension; little or no change in control group.
2014-2015	Lee	999 9th-12th graders from 32 schools	No	Significant decreases in all 6 antisocial school behaviors: absences, tardies, theft, fights, suspensions, and cheating; and plagiarism; Moderate increase in all prosocial behaviors, e.g., demonstrations of positive values, "Emotional IQ, and optimism in pursuit of mainstream goals.

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 8_{th} grade to 2.4 in the 9_{th} grade. In contrast, the average GPA of the comparison group decreased from 2.4 in the 8_{th} grade to 2.3 in the 9_{th} 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 8_{th} grade English EOC test and only 25% passed their 8_{th} 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, 2008 through 2010, and Lee, 2014a, 2015a). For these reports outcomes were assessed using a standardized self-report survey completed by participating students at the beginning and end of their CD&L Program. There were 87 items in this self-report. They were taken from those observable behaviors originally provided by the Delphi panel (see column three, Table 2). In this self report students indicated 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. There-

fore 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 participa-

tion. 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 ser-

vice-learning course format. Ten male and female 11th and 12th graders were consid-

ered "behaviorally at-risk" because each had at least 10 detentions and/or one suspen-

sion the prior semester. These students enrolled in the semester-long class. Ten equiva-

lent students did not and thereby provided a comparison group. After the course, an au-

dit of school disciplinary records indicated that course participants had a substantial de-

crease in detentions (before, average 7.8 per student; after, 2.8) and suspensions (be-

fore, 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-de-

scriptions, and other products produced in the course. In contrast, the disciplinary

records of the comparison group did not show any positive changes.

A final word about the student self report. A decade has passed and, at consumer

request, over the years some items have been deleted from the original survey, some

reworded, and some added. Prudence dictates a thorough psychometric review of the

survey. Lee (2015b) therefore compiled and statistically explored all of the students' self

reports from academic years 2012-2014. There were 4,331 surveys from 73 sociocul-

turally diverse schools across the nation. Fifty-one percent of the students were female

and 49% male. Confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the contemporary instrument

remained structurally sound. Cronbach's alpha was .82 for the entire survey. Nine

oblique factors were identified, matching the identities predicted by the developers.

There were three additional factors with inconsequential loadings; Each accounted for

less than 1% of the variance in the overall data. there also were 12 non-performing

items included within the nine major factors. A revision was in order. The three under-

performing factors and their items were eliminated. The 12 non-performing items also

were deleted. Five new (experimental) items were added. This revision, titled the *Stu-*

dent Self Report Survey (SSRS), is being used for Academic Year 2015-2016 and its

internal and external validity will be explored when those data are available.

Lessons Learned

From the beginning the CD&L Program of scholarship has been consistently ex-

ploring what is needed to instill character development and leadership traits in U.S.

middle and late adolescents. Therefore, formal and informal feedback from the stake-

holders 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 pro-

ponents 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, 2015b):

- 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 courses

  - Elective leadership course

  - Class for at-risk students

  - Senior-level capstone course

  - Home room/advisor approach

  - 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. Since they already may take pride in their GPA, are future-oriented, and disinclined to disruptive academic misbehavior, there is little "room to grow". They start out with high scores and end with them. In addition, when the en-rollees 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 vari-ables, and curriculum and classroom structural factors. At issue is what can be predict-ed to most efficiently and firmly obtain specific outcomes for a specific group of stu-dents. 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 out-comes in mandated correctional classes (e.g., Sprick, 2013). On-line materials and a more relaxed teaching style may suit "leadership academies" and senior capstone cour-ses.

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 (e.g., on-line format, in a homeroom) to similar students (e.g, 9th-graders considered to be at risk in their transition to high 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.

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.

CONCLUSION

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 focussed classrooms for contemporary 9th-through 12th-graders for mainstream success. It has acquired a somewhat uneven but consistent program of outcome determination. It has created and sustained a continu-

ous feedback loop between program developers, evaluators, and consumers. The on-going 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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