

# Literature Review – Developing Leaders of Character

Dave Jones

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The mission of the United States Military Academy as stated below is to develop leaders of character for our Army and Nation. To do this, leaders at West Point have set out to create an environment where character and values are understood, adhered to, internalized and modeled, by cadets and faculty alike. In fact, the phrase “develop leaders of character” has been adopted by each of the other four Service Academy’s after West Point’s lead in the 1990s. West Point has been indirectly focused on this objective since its beginning in 1802, since the founding of the Academy. The specific focus of developing leaders of character has been the catalyst in all aspects of the Academy, from the curriculum, the military culture, the physical education program, and of course, the development and incorporation of the Honor Code and System (formalized in 1922, redeveloped in 1977), and the more recently developed Respect Program (developed in 1994, and formalized in 1998) which centers on the “golden rule.” All staff and faculty assigned to West Point are held accountable to both directly or indirectly contribute to the Military Academy’s mission of developing leaders of character. All other missions are secondary!

## ***The Mission of the United States Military Academy***

***To educate, train, and inspire the Corps of Cadets so that each graduate is a commissioned leader of character committed to the values of Duty, Honor, Country and prepared for a career of professional excellence and service to the Nation as an officer in the United States Army.***

***The West Point Environment.*** The concept of character development at West Point is closely related to Lawrence Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development. At West Point, key components include: know the Academy standards and values (education and experience), adhere to the Academy's standards of conduct (behavior and military bearing), believe in and profess the standards and values (attitude and integrity), and lead in the development of character in others (leadership, role modeling and mentoring), (Marrella, 2009). This is the environment at West Point which both directly and indirectly provides cadets opportunities to learn, understand, practice and internalize values and guiding principles that are inherent at the Academy and in the US Army. This environment is created in part by a combination of the following concepts, areas, or elements:

- 1) Character is inherent in the emphasis of West Point's Motto – "DUTY, HONOR, COUNTRY" - a motto that our Army and Nation have informally adopted.
- 2) The broad liberal education based curriculum at West Point provides all cadets the opportunity to think critically, reason creatively, and develop and challenge their own sense of right and wrong, by discussion, mentoring, active role modeling and practice.
- 3) West Point Leader Development System. This system defines the environment at the Academy addressing both how we do what we do, and why we emphasize the set of moral ethical and principle standards that we do as a Corps of Cadets and Staff and Faculty, collectively and as individuals.
- 4) The Concept of Officership – Leadership, Character and Competence are key and essential ingredients in preparing cadets to lead in the Profession of Arms.
- 5) A Corps of Cadets who strive to understand, adhere to, and lead and internalize both Honor and Respect Systems and Codes.
- 6) Illustrations within the Physical Development curriculum that emphasize both mental and physical toughness, while accentuating character in sports in every facet of the program.

- 7) Practice in leadership, character development and role-modeling through leading discussions, leadership positions, and active problem solving (in a military environment) through education, curriculum, practice, application, and 360 degree assessment.
- 8) Activities that provide leadership opportunities, and further development of one's self- concept, and serve to develop one's own sense of enduring moral values.
- 9) An organizational culture where Honor and Respect, the Academy's bedrock values, are followed, revered, practiced and actively discussed and internalized as Institutional and personal guideposts in all we do.
- 10) An environment in which leadership and character development are emphasized and reinforced by a select faculty who is committed to "coaching, teaching and mentoring" cadets, especially in the area of character, while being held to the highest ethical standards themselves as role models for all cadets.
- 11) A Character Education Curriculum specifically focused on small level candid and open discussions about challenging ethical decisions, developing, and assessing an organizational moral culture, and accountability which serve to focus and develop each cadet's personal value set, directly and indirectly impacting one's thoughts, words and actions. (The PME2 Program)
- 12) A culture that embraces change for the good of the organization and continual learning, growth and assessment.
- 13) A culture in which the entire community values leader and character development above all else, 24-7.

So with this being the primary focus, that which is valued and evident in all aspects of the environment at West Point, this Literature Review will focus on applicable and generally accepted moral developmental theories that reinforce or refute West Point's approach in "developing leaders of character." The intent is to inform the reader of those theories and accepted practices in the field that most apply in the Academy's mission. It is expected that we can better understand our responsibilities as the Academy's staff and faculty mentors in

contributing to the Academy's mission if we understand what the literature offers in character and moral development. I intend, in this effort, to briefly describe each of the main theories/theorists and then offering some insights as to their applicability within the Academy's structure and environment. (I intend to illustrate examples of how West Point either currently applies these theories, or could in fact benefit from these accepted theories if applied.)

It is insightful to start the literature review by offering some thoughts from Aristotle, (Nicomachean Ethics). Briefly, ethical theories and explanations from Aristotle's perspective fed off of Plato's works. His works are widely accepted as the most historically important philosophical ideas that future theories would be impacted and often based upon. Aristotle offered 10 books where he we laid out his ideas about one's pursuit of happiness and being just. Within his books, his themes provide the basis for his ideas about happiness and what is just, as well as offers a major argument that one internalizes what is just and good mostly through his or her practice of such virtues, defining happiness, the aim of ethics, characterizing excellence of character or moral virtue, moral virtue as a conscience choice, justice and fairness, intellectual virtue, impediments to virtue are just some of the many valuable topics Aristotle addresses in his volumes.

In all, Aristotle offers us many insights about developing leaders of character. First, his basic list of virtues provides a well thought out and balanced coverage of what one should adopt in becoming a moral leader. Aristotle strongly theorized that what we practice we become. Our habits drive who we honestly become. Good stable character is what is yielded from a commitment to, a following of, and an internalization of our values, (Aristotle). At the Academy, much effort is devoted to creating an environment where values are understood, emphasized, witnessed, and indeed cherished. Practicing what "right" looks like, certainly is the intent of our

Honor and Respect Systems, in hopes that cadets will better understand the value of these principles, and their inherent responsibility to follow, internalize, and live these values in word and deed, and equally important, to lead others in following and internalizing these same institutionally valued high ethical standards. As future leaders of character work to decide the leader that they wish to become, the institution, West Point, helps them with defining Officership, their future profession, and to better understand the accepted ethical standards that they will be held to as officers in the US Army. Certainly, the Army's Core Values help them in identifying what the institution values and expects of their leaders, but also US Code, Title X addresses "Exemplary Conduct" clearly articulating exactly the moral character that the military Officer must internalize and exhibit and the stated expectation that it is one's duty and responsibility to take action if a moral-ethical shortcoming exists. A clear understanding of these principles and responsibilities are paramount and practice of these principles exists continually throughout all aspects of the four year West Point experience.

Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development are easily adapted to the environment at West Point. In general, the Academy moral development approach follows Kohlberg's theory. The basic approach West Point uses follows his stages fairly cleanly: Know the standards, adhere to the standards, believe what you are following, and lead others to better understand, follow, and internalize the standards. The common and accepted idea at the Academy is "Know, Adhere, Believe, Lead." Kohlberg, who's foundational work begins with principles offered by well-known psychologist and theorist, Jean Piaget, suggests that it is not enough for someone to just be taught virtues, or moral principles, it is critically important that the educator understands where the individual is in his/her thinking and moral cognitive reasoning. He describes his levels as pre-conventional, conventional and post conventional. Within each of these levels, the author

has developed several stages that describe where a person's moral reasoning is. As it relates to cadets, conventional and early post conventional stages accurately capture where most cadets' moral maturity lie. Understanding where a cadet's social-moral maturity stage/level is certainly allows a mentor to challenge the cadet's thinking and cause him/her to think critically and develop over time, thus as Kohlberg suggests, leads one to a higher stage, or a deeper more sophisticated way of working through moral-ethical reasoning. Finally, Kohlberg suggests that it is not enough to just discuss moral dilemmas to energize growth and learning. An organization or mentor must create activities, involvement, volunteerism, and community outreach as ways to develop an individual's sense of his or her place, contribution and purpose and he/she learns, grows and develops morally as a person of character, (Kohlberg, 1971).

Robert Kegan offers another approach in moral development that informs our study of "developing leaders of character". He too, suggests that people develop morally in stages. Based on how a person reasons through a moral-ethical problems can illuminate their cognitive and moral development stage. Again, why they do what they do, the intent behind the thought and action are critical. Most children follow a rule or principle to avoid getting in trouble, this stage follows a mentality of "me first and me only" stage. Following rules and principles because that is what others would expect us to do follows the consequences stages. The next stage addresses the rules and expectations of being a good citizen. We follow the rule because the law says to follow it, and that is the right thing to do. The final two stages really address a higher order thought process that most never achieve, which is following universal principles, doing right because it is the right thing to do in the very truest sense, without necessarily considering the law or written principles of a community, government etc, (Kegan, 1982).

At West Point, cadets enter the Academy and are exposed to the Honor and Respect Codes, most have come from a high school environment where cheating is the norm (over 80% of HS students admit cheating in HS). When they arrive at the Academy they are expected, even required, to follow the Cadet Honor Code “A cadet will not lie, cheat, or steal, or tolerate those who do.” To many New Cadets this is a daunting standard, and they fear its potential to keep them from successfully finishing the four year experience. This fear, for many Cadets, is a reality and certainly not overstated. Some cadets, not all, gradually over time, develop a better understanding and begin to follow but not yet internalize the principles of being honorable. Again, some cadets just ensure that they do not cross the line, and violate the Honor Code, but follow it to ensure that they do not get separated from the Academy. Some cadets will come to understand and internalize the intent and value of living honorably, being truthful, fair and respectful. Kegan’s stages of moral development serve to inform the mentor on where a cadet is, and provide insights on how to challenge his/her thinking and energize critical thinking and creative reasoning in moral development. Our environment, PME2, mentoring both in and out of the classroom, sponsorship, coaching and Officer Representative duties provide us many opportunities to develop cadets throughout their experience at the Academy.

Edgar Schein provides some useful insights about organizational culture and what insights it provides when assessing at an organization’s moral and ethical climate. Identifying an organization’s guiding principles, espoused values and corps beliefs provides much insight about an organization’s make up, as well as, an insight about what it is leaders and members value and believe. However, it is not just a list of values, principles, or guiding rules that capture the make-up of a unit, but the actions of that organization and its leaders that reflect or refute those values, principles and beliefs. Not only what is said but what actually occurs or is displayed that reflect

the true moral make up of an organization. He challenges his readers to look for artifacts that reflect an organization's culture and finally suggests that we should look at that which surprises us as observers looking into the make-up of an organization, (Schein, 1992). West Point's core values and guiding principles are clearly stated, and reflected in our emphasis of character development.

The West Point Leader Development System is a community-wide concept that incorporates not only the development of our cadets, but that of our rotating and permanent faculty, as well as the Community at large. Cadets, staff and faculty and the community are all explicitly expected to adhere to the principles of Duty, Honor, Country, and follow the tenants of the Cadet Honor and Respect Programs. It is not only each member's role and responsibility but it is a priority for each and every faculty member to know, adhere, believe and lead in these espoused values and charged to "coach, teach, and mentor" cadets at every opportunity. The question is often asked of each and every faculty member is "what are you doing to develop leaders of character today?" or "how are you personally developing Cadets today?" Schein's insights about creating an environment where values are in the center, and are emphasized and espoused directly links to what United States Military Academy works to develop.

Carol Gilligan provides yet another perspective in moral and ethical development. Her research efforts are focused on potential differences in the way boys and girls, men and women cognitively reason, and develop morally. Gilligan challenged much of what Kohlberg offered, stating that his research was bias and focused mainly on male subjects. Her works suggest that not only moral judgment but morality in caring played heavily on moral development in men and women. She suggests that while Kohlberg emphasized moral judgment as a measurement of



moral development in mostly male subjects, the moral care factor, predominant in females, should also be an evaluated and valued factor in assessing moral development in people.

Her work is valuable to consider at the Academy from the standpoint of our male and female cadet population, as well as, and understanding of the demographics in the Army Officer population to which these cadets will soon join. Gilligan really addresses emotional intelligence, and the necessity to understand that morality is demonstrated in many different ways, in both men and women. Gilligan provides us insights to better understand and develop our cadets in both moral judgment and moral reasoning considering the care factor. (Gilligan, 1992). As we consider the attributes that we value in our leaders, judgment, integrity, respect, humility, caring, compassion, and passion all make the list.

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Annotated Bibliography

**Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. New translation by Robert C. Bartlett, and Susan Collins. University of Chicago Press, USA, 2011.**

Seen as one of the most significant historical philosophical works, Nicomachean Ethics provides context from the European Middle Ages, and is considered one of the most insightful of medieval philosophy and is referenced by many in modern philosophy. The study of virtues and virtue ethics by Aristotle addresses moral, political, philosophical, and religion perspectives to define what is good, and what drives good people to do good, and gain happiness. He describes ethics, and suggests that actions, through mentorship, develop good habits, which develops over time to ones character. It is not enough to just express what is good, just and right, but one must practice and over time internalize what is good and just to be happy. In 10 books, Aristotle defines his philosophy about virtue ethics. This deep philosophical discussion certainly has value at the Academy as we explore the Cadet Honor and Respect Principles, look to impact character education in PME2 and throughout the curriculum, in the Intellectual, Military, Physical and Moral-ethical dimensions.

**Arthur, James. *Of Good Character Exploration of Virtues and Values in 3-25 Year Olds*. Imprint Academic, Philosophy Documentation Center, Charlottesville VA , 2010.**

The focus of the author is to explore “values education” in two specific ways. First, to provide research results in the area of moral education and character education. Secondly, the author attempts to clearly define common terms that are often misunderstood. For West Point, this

provides some great insights about character education as it pertains to curriculum, environment, self-exploration, surrounding oneself with others that have similar values, the educational environment through college, the impact of volunteering and religion and community.

**Damon, William. *Bringing in a New Era in Character Education*. Hoover Institution Press Stanford California, 2002.**

Character Education in schools is the focus of this book. The Author provides direction, strategies, and examples for the need and value of character education in our schools.

Applicable at all levels, his examples provide rich and insightful tools for educating parents, teachers, administrators and students. In essence, he advocates creating an environment where character is valued and energized, and he effectively offered many approaches that have been successful across the United States.

**Dillon, Robin S. *Dignity, Character and Self-Respect*. Rutledge, NY, 1995.**

This collection of essays provides valuable insights about several topics applicable to the Academy. Topics include: individual personal dignity, personhood, and personal rights, servility and self respect, and protest, self-esteem, self respect, and autonomy in theory and practice. The Corps of Cadets' Respect Program is specifically geared towards respect to all regardless of race, creed, religion, gender or background. This collection of essays addresses individual and collective efforts to better understand theory, and practical application in areas relating to the Respect Program that apply at the Academy and service as an Officer in the

United States Army. Much emphasis is development and understanding at the individual level, but also for leaders in preparation of leading soldiers in the US Army.

**Kegan, Robert. *The Evolving Self*. President and Fellows of Harvard College, USA, 1982**

Based on works of other notable social psychologists, including Piaget, Kohlberg, Gilligan and others, the Author presents his theory of human development which includes six primary developmental stages. Within these stages of development, the second stage, according to Kegan, includes understanding others perspectives as at least existing, still centered around self and one's own ego, in the third stage, the values, rules and norms of others helps shape one's actions. In the fourth stage, one's actions are now much more interrelated to that of others, community and conscious interaction. Following the rules and higher order of the community becomes more influential and impactful than just acting in one's own interests. The fifth and six developmental stages reinforce individual responsibility, self-police, intrinsic motivation, and commitment to higher order standards and principles of behavior. Kegan attempts to define how humans make meaning of their lives, and answer that which motivates what we do. Leaders and mentors at the Academy can greatly benefit from understanding and applying Kegan's stages of development in their own moral and ethical development as well as application with the Cadets that they coach, teach and mentor.

**Kidder, Rushworth M. *Moral Courage*. Harper, NY, NY 2005.**

Essentially a guide book, the Author has produced a book that directly addresses the topic of moral courage in light of business corruption, issues with religious leaders, student cheating, and domestic violence, providing insight through important concepts, offering various skills, tools,

and approaches to identifying, addressing and working through difficult moral and ethical dilemmas. Topics include Standing up for Principle, moral and physical courage, recognizing risk, applying values, enduring hardship, learning moral courage, and practicing it in the public sector.

**Killen, Melanie and Smetana, Judith. *Handbook of Moral Development*. Psychology Press, NY, 2006.**

Theoretical, Research heavy and Academically rich material. Another amazing resource for educators and scholars in the field of Moral Development and Character Education. This volume of 26 essays includes research, application and theory. The Edition includes discussions about moral development stages and structuralism, Social Domain Theory and Social Justice, Conscience and Internalization, Empathy, Emotions and Aggression. This volume is a great resource for those who plan, resource, develop moral development curriculum or programs for a college or organization, or are otherwise responsible for integrating Moral and Ethical Development.

**Lapsley, Daniel and Narvaez, Darcia. *Moral Development, Self, and Identity*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. Publishers, Mahway NJ, 2004.**

This book is a consolidation of fourteen perspectives on Moral development from a philosophy and social psychology perspective. Moral Cognition, development of one's self-identity, and moral personality inform the conversation that occurs in the accompanying essays. Moral and character development it is suggested are formed through cognition, emotion and behavior within an individual. Self understanding and action based on basic moral commitments accepted within a community help an individual form their moral identity and shapes moral conduct. This

book captures the work and research of several scholars currently in the field in Higher Education. This book is especially beneficial for the reader to better understand how one develops his or her morality, self-identity and formulates their personal understanding of what is right.

**Marrella, Len. *In Search of Ethics- Conversations with Men and Women of Character*. DC Press, Sanford, Florida, 2009.**

In this delightful collection of celebrated stories from men and women who come from many different backgrounds, and social economic statuses. Their stories range from business challenges, to education reform, to rags to riches, to ethical dilemmas in sports, to commanders leading corps. The author captures the essence of what it means to be a Leader of Character. The Author is a West Point graduate and is able to showcase the Academy for all that it represents, and the focus on leadership and character development throughout his interview with 14 highly successful people of character.

**Matousek, Mark. *Ethical Wisdom- What Makes Us Good*. Doubleday NY, 2011.**

Addressing Ethics from philosophical, psychological, scientific, and spiritual perspectives provides the reader a unique opportunity to compare and contrast that which makes people good. Through emotional story telling the author approaches so many different subjects involving human interaction and morality. Subchapters include: Venus and Mars, Emotional Intelligence, Ends and Means, Game Theory, Altruism, Us vs. them, and the Holy Question. This unique book shows ways to bridge these important topics through story telling all while approaching the topics from several different perspectives.

**Nucci, Larry P. and Narvaez, Darcia. *Handbook of Moral and Character Education*.  
Routledge, NY, 2008.**

Impressive volume for professors of Higher Education and Scholars. This volume of thirty writings from SMEs in the field addresses the historical, philosophical and Methodological perspectives and foundations; draws applications to the school and specifically classroom environments; and then addresses moral and character application beyond the classroom.

Superb resource for those wishing to better understand moral and Character Education and more importantly apply these insights in and out of the classroom in a school environment to enrich the learning experience for both students and Educators.

**Schein, Edgar. *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, USA, 1992.**

In this rich text, Edgar Schein outlines those characteristics in better understanding and assessing the culture and climate of an organization. Much energy and emphasis is focused on the identification and application of an organization's guiding principles. Schein suggests that is much more than we say what we are all about, and our guiding values and principles but it is in the organizations structure, culture, action that say it all about the true character of an organization. He spends time focusing on artifacts, indicators of an organizations true culture, values and beliefs. Finally in studying or better understanding an organization, one should consider surprises that emerge in observing an organization to find out the true make up of an organization. These may yield some unique reinforcing or extinguishing characteristics of the organization. This is a very valuable book to read when attempting to better understand the true

make up of an organization like West Point, the Corps of Cadets, or a Department within the Academy.

**Smagorinsky, Peter and Taxel, Joel. *The Discourse of Character Education- Culture Wars in the Classroom*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. Publishers Mahway, NJ, 2004.**

The author explores two different regional approaches to values and character education in the United States. One of these approaches emphasizes an authoritarian view that students are indoctrinated into the values system of the organization that holds these values. The other approach works to establish an environment where the organizational values are developed and enacted and focus on the discussion of morality rather than that an indoctrination of the organization's held values. This book is valuable in higher education with an integration and application of valuable aspects of each approach provided. The Academy certainly provides aspects of each approach—articulating the ethical standards that are expected of the organization (that being the Academy and Army) with emphasis on the Profession of Arms, while still devoting much resources, energy and mentorship on open discussion to help cadets better understand their own values set, decision making process, and ample opportunities to explore, apply, test and reflect.

**Snyder, Don and Matthews, Lloyd J. *Forging the Warrior's Character: Moral Precepts from the Cadet Prayer*. Jerico LLC, Oregon, 2007.**

With the West Point Cadet Prayer as a spring board of discussion, the authors provide insight on what makes a warrior's character from different disciplines, researched and just asserted and from various religious perspectives as well. A unique blend of moral development theory and practical application at West Point and within the religions offered at the Academy using the



West Point Prayer, authored in 1918 as a start point. The first of three parts addresses the role of character development at West Point, the second, the role of character development in Military leadership and the third part, is interfaith perspectives of character development. Directly applicable to West Point, the Army in collective efforts to develop leaders of character.