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Differential Assessment and Development of Character

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Historically, Dewey believed that moral education and character development could not be separated from the school curriculum. Rather, it should be delivered through every aspect of school life (Dewey, 1909). Nowhere is that more apparent than at the college level where students are making moral choices on a daily basis as they enter the time of adulthood free of parental supervision.

Increasingly, society is demanding that character be integrated into the curriculum at all levels, including college. For example, according to a study conducted by Boston University Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character (1999), over 90% of deans and directors of teacher education programs across the nation supported the teaching of core values. Unfortunately, while there was overwhelming agreement concerning need for character education, over 81% of respondents reported being unable to adequately address the issue of how to do it.

We have seen many programs that purport to promote character. Usually the programs that are K-12 oriented target specific character traits upon which they focus their efforts. However, Ryan (1996) suggested that the moral values and ethics we want students to learn should be taught by matching the topic and level of intensity to the students' developmental levels. We have taken a different approach in that we have clustered character into four areas, which we believe are most useful for development and corresponding strategy implementation, particularly at the collegiate level.

The four areas we have chosen are workmanship, relationship, self-control, and empathy. It is our belief that these are the four components from which character emanates. We also maintain that these four areas grow in a developmental fashion. Knowledge and identification of such growth are essential for guiding and coaching students to higher levels of character.

Workmanship is composed of the character attributes that are exemplified in hard work, perseverance, diligence, and others that are necessary for achievement and performance.

Workmanship traits are also critical for success in this age of high accountability in the academic setting and subsequently in the work place.

Self-control is composed of characteristics that are exemplified by one's ability to restrain one's self in the face of adversity, frustration, or desire for gratification. The traits of being respectful, equitable, and humble adaptive are examples of self-control.

Relationship is characterized by ones ability to make friends and to work cooperatively with others and can be exemplified by friendliness, cooperativeness, and diplomacy. While competence is important, it is often poor relationships that result in failure, dropping out of school, or losing a job.

Empathy is the ability to put oneself in the shoes of others and to feel their pains and joys. This trait cluster is exemplified by such characteristics as compassion, mercy, tolerance, and accessibility.

Our approach to character is based on the assumption that character is demonstrated by the way one handles the daily affairs of life. Managing one's affairs ranges in experiences from the mundane to the difficult such as owning up to one's mistakes and standing up for a friend. For the purpose of this article, we have selected only five behaviors in each of the four clusters that college personnel would identify as needing work or indications of character weaknesses. (Figure 1) More behaviors can be added by those experienced with students.

Relationship		Self-Control	Empathy	Workmanship
1.	Listening to others	Accepting Limits	Appreciating Feelings	Being Diligent
2.	Telling the truth	Dealing with Anger	Forgiveness	Being Punctual
3.	Making and Handling Complaints	Taking Responsibility	Compassion	Producing Results
4.	Apologizing	Handling Peer Pressure	Equitable Trust	Giving Directions
5.	Including Others	Handling accusations	Tolerant of differences	Being Flexible

Figure 1

The purpose of this article based on identified character issues such as the ones described in (Figure 1) is to develop a conceptual framework that leads to a systematic process of choosing intervention strategies that will promote good character and behavior.

The Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1980) and the Levels of Motivation developed (Selig & Arroyo, 1996) offer a significant step in the right direction and should be beneficial to college personnel. We will combine the Theory of Reasoned Action with the Levels of Motivation to provide a systematic process to determine the reasons for behavior and to establish strategies that have a high potential for success.

The Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975) predicts behaviors based on the assumption that human beings are quite rational and make systematic use of the information available to them. Ajzen and Fishbein argue that people consider the implications of their actions before they engage in them. A person's intention is a function of two factors: one is personal in nature and is the person's attitude toward the behavior. The attitude toward behavior simply refers to the person's judgment that performing the behavior is good or bad for that person. The other factor related to a person's intent is the person's perception of the social

pressure (normative) put on the individual to perform or not to perform the behavior. The key in predicting what the ensuing behavior will be is the relative importance of the attitudinal and the normative factors as determinants of behavior.

The Theory of Reasoned Action does not include many determinates of behavior, such as personality, sex, social class, etc., in predicting behavioral intention. Ajzen and Fishbein (1975) acknowledge that other factors are related to behavioral intention, but they do not consider those factors integral to the theory and consider them external variables. External variables will have an effect on behavior only to the extent that influence the determinates (or functions) of that behavior. Certainly, knowledge of external variables can enhance understanding of a given behavioral phenomenon. The theory deals mainly with those factors that intervene between external variables and behavior. The validity of the theory depends not on support for hypothesis concerning the effects of external variables but on empirical support for the relationship of the two determinates of attitude and social pressure. The Theory of Reasoned Action has been researched extensively with adults and has been validated regularly over a period of fifty years.

Students who have character issues are likely to make judgments based on the two determinates of attitude toward a behavior and social pressure just as does the rest of society. The issue faced by students with character issues is that many of their attitudes regarding whether a behavior would result in a positive outcome is based on:

1. Lack of knowledge of appropriate behavior
2. Lack of Pro-social skills
3. Inability to think and respond beyond an initial emotional reaction.

These deficiencies result in students having defective attitudes toward a behavior and deficient understandings of social acceptability (Cox & Gunn, 1980). The combination of the two results in students often being described as self-absorbed.

An example of the Theory of Reasoned Action in a school setting with a character deficient student would be how the student arrives at a decision to steal an object from the classroom. If the student determines that stealing the object would achieve his or her goal of obtaining the object, then the student must determine if that strategy will be acceptable to those who are influential in the student's life. The student weighs the impact of the action, stealing the object, based on two factors: 1. Will it meet my needs and result in a positive outcome, and 2. will it be acceptable to other people of significance. If the attitudinal perception that stealing is an appropriate path is stronger than the social pressure to avoid stealing, the student may choose to steal the object. If the influence of the social pressure is stronger, the student may decide to find another way to obtain the object or may decide that the social factors are so strong that they preclude the student from continuing to consider the theft. Behavioral intention, according to the Theory of Reasoned Action, is determined by the relative importance of the two determinates and the assessment the student makes in determining whether to engage in a behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

Character problems are a result of students not following the accepted norms of a school or community setting. Application of the Theory of Reasoned Action in a college setting assumes that the social pressure determinates are the prevailing norms of the college. Sometimes the two are complementary. Students with the most challenging, counter-productive and asocial behavior are influenced more by errant personal attitudes toward a behavior and less by the social norms of a school or institution.

College personnel are able to determine if behavior is primarily influenced by personal attitude toward a behavior or by the social pressure of a particular normative group (e.g., peers, professors). They understand that the two determinates represent a continuum of intention. Additionally, there is mounting evidence to conclude that students engage in certain inappropriate behaviors to serve one of the five functions. The following list is helpful to the professional in understanding the functions that are useful in determining the purpose behind a behavior (Gable, Sugai, Lewis, Nelson, Cheney, Safran & Safran [1998]):

1. Access attention from adults, peers, or both (Lewis & Sugai, 1996b).
2. Access internal or external stimulation (O'Neil, Horner, Albin, Storey, & Sprague, 1990).
3. Avoid interaction with adults, peers, or both (Shores, Gunter, Denny, & Jack, 1993).
4. Avoid tasks or responsibilities (Dunlap, et al., 1993; Hendrickson, Gable, Novak, & Peck, 1996).
5. Access tangible objects or preferred activities (Lewis & Sugui, 1966b).

Knowing the functions students use to achieve their aims allows for more precise understanding of why behaviors occur and begins to provide some understanding as to why certain strategies might be effective.

While the Theory of Reasoned Action is helpful in understanding the intentional behavior, inappropriate behavior, it is too general to use in determining specific strategies for intervention. If combined, however, with the Levels of Motivation construct (Selig & Arroyo 1996), it can be used to determine intention, resulting behavior, and effective strategies for character development.

Selig and Arroyo (1996) developed a Levels of Motivation system for understanding behavior similar to the Theory of Reasoned Action. Levels of Motivation outlines four stages

that a person passes through on the way to more productive and socially appropriate decisions.

The four stages are:

1. The self-absorbed stage: This stage is primarily an egocentric stage where the individual engages in those behaviors that he or she believes meet his or her needs and desires with little thought and/or understanding given to how that will impact others.
2. The approval stage: This stage is still very egocentric but includes a need to be approved by those in authority, resulting in a greater consideration of others in choosing behavior and greater adherence to following accepted school norms.
3. The interpersonal stage: This stage is reflected by an adherence to established norms and standards and a desire to be seen as a participating member of the group.
4. The others oriented stage: This stage reflects an individual who is able to step outside his or her own needs and desires and chooses to behave in a manner that will create an ideal and just environment.

This theory of motivational development is adapted from Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1968) and has been utilized extensively by Selig and Arroyo in field-testing their strategies. The results, although primarily narrative in nature, are supportive of their theory.

The Theory of Reasoned Action and the Levels of Motivation can be blended together since either balance personal attitudes with those attitudes influenced or dependent upon social norms as a means of determining behavioral intention. Levels of Motivation provide a method to determine where a student is along a continuum and suggests appropriate strategies to accompany the stage of the continuum (Figure 2).

SELF-ABSORBED	APPROVAL ORIENTED	INTERPERSONAL LOYALTY	OTHERS ORIENTED
1. Often responds from an egocentric perspective	1. Desires frequent approval particularly from power figures	1. Accepting of rules and responsibilities	1. Encourages and serves out of concern for others
2. Attempts to operate free from constraints or rules	2. Shows sign of practicing behavioral constraint	2. Judges others on the basis of what is right and wrong	2. Has a strong sense of self-control, patience, perseverance, initiative, and resilience
3. Requires immediate gratification	3. Demonstrates some ability to balance personal needs with group needs, but not consistently	3. Strives for competence within a social context	2. Demonstrates an obligation to one's group or class without expectations of reciprocity
3. Has difficulty with perseverance toward norm accepted goals	4. Interest often maintained by social rewards	4. Seeks recognition by earning respect for accomplishments and good behavior from peers and significant adults	4. Perseveres because of belief that the activity is meaningful or simply the right thing to do regardless of future personal benefits

Figure 2

There is a presumption in Selig and Arroyo's theory (1996) that behavior progresses in terms of appropriateness along the continuum. In reality, there may be instances when it is appropriate for students to behave in a way that is not consistent with the norm of the college. For example, a student who is being bullied by a student may have the need to act in a non-normative (i.e., protect self through fighting) way to avoid being beaten. In general, students engage in more appropriate behavior the further they are along the continuum.

The characteristics of the four levels enable one to determine from behavior exhibited the motivational level of functioning. Motivational levels may vary depending on the situation and the student's ability to feel competent in the setting. Selig and Arroyo (1996) identify the following characteristics: (Figure 3)

SELF-ABSORBED	APPROVAL ORIENTED	INTERPERSONAL LOYALTY	OTHERS ORIENTED
1. Supervise closely and provide continual guidance	1. Provide opportunities for recognition	1. Emphasize student's goals and aspirations	1. Supervise minimally
2. Define expectations clearly and precisely: limit alternatives	3. Praise and encourage achievement promptly	2. Encourage cooperative problem solving activities and group activities	2. Set goals cooperatively
3. Provide tangible rewards for achievement	3. Provide moderate supervision	3. Provide less correction and more information	3. Present problems and elicit solutions
4. Clarify and explain goals frequently	4. Communicate need for improvement not perfection	4. Communicate personal respect, validate student ideas and thoughts	4. Engage in discussions regarding validity of values and standards
5. Teach the skills needed to master new materials in small steps or units with specific deadlines		5. Allow input about rules and expectations	5. When correction is necessary, allow student to devise a solution and a means of remedy

Figure 3

Professors need to be able to choose from a variety of intervention strategies (Charles 1981; Curwin & Mendler 1988; Jones & Jones 1986; Wolfgang & Glickman 1986). Authorities recommend a variety of approaches from a counseling approach to a behavior modification approach, whereas others require a more logical problem-solving orientation. Still others use approaches involving rules reward and punishments (Charles, 1981; Harris & Associates, 1993). Selig and Arroyo (1996) included over forty intervention strategies in their system. The current practice of a best guess strategy in choosing intervention calls out for a more systematic approach in determining intervention strategies. The Selig and Arroyo system provides such a methodology. The strategies recommended have been categorized according to their degree of intrusiveness in the college setting. The more intrusive strategies are utilized for students who

exhibit the lowest levels of motivation and the least intrusive are recommended for the higher levels of motivation. For the purpose of this article, only five strategies have been selected for each level of intervention. The least intrusive strategies are usually found as standard operating procedure for a successful academic and social environment. Strategies have been developed for each of the four stages to assist in determining helpful strategies when a skill issue is involved:

(Figure 4)

PREVENTIVE STRATEGIES	LIMIT SETTING	REINFORCEMENT OF LIMITS	CONTROLLING STRATEGIES
1. Ignoring behavior	1. Disguising directives	1. Self-disclosure	1. Role playing
2. Asking adult questions	2. Describing character as it occurs	2. Asking what questions	2. Problem-solving
3. Probing for values	3. Reflecting verbal responses	3. Interpreting others' behavior	3. Requiring a plan for improvement
4. Introducing role models	4. Directive deduction reasoning	4. Journaling	4. Social skills training
5. Asking knowledge or comprehension questions	5. Probing for motives	5. Guided inductive inquiry	5. Exclusion for limited periods

Figure 4

Implementation of The Theory of Reasoned Action and the Levels of Motivation theory begins with an assessment. Utilization of the blended theories enables college personnel to make a judgment as to the reason for the behavior of the student and the level on which a student is operating. It is then possible to select a number of appropriate strategies from the list provided and to establish a plan of implementation.

The choice of strategies is narrowed substantially by matching strategies proven successful with certain levels of motivation. The selection success of strategies within a level is increased further if careful attention has been given to the function that the observable behavior serves.

CONCLUSION

Differentiating procedures for intervention is an important aspect in the effectiveness of promoting character. This article has attempted to present a Theory of Reasoned Action combined with Levels of Motivation that leads to effective character promotion based on a differentiated process of choosing intervention strategies. The application of the system can be used by educational professors, advisors, and administrators. It could also be used in group problem-solving and decision-making sessions concerning student character development, thus leading to attainment of academic achievement and social goals.

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