

INTRODUCING A SELF-LEADERSHIP-DRIVEN, ACTION RESEARCH-INFORMED, AND CHARACTER EDUCATION-BASED THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATIONAL, IDEOLOGICAL, AND ADMINISTRATIVE BALANCE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

In a variety of ways—e.g. educationally, ideologically, administratively, culturally, and politically—the United States is more divided in 2020 than it has been since 1860. These fractures have negatively impacted everything from political discourse and cultural attitudes to workplace mores and familial relationships. More recently, said fractures have spilled onto city streets and government spaces in the form of radical violence. While the reasons for these divisions are many and varied, they are—like most problems—ultimately impacted by (if not fundamentally rooted in) EDUCATION. This paper introduces a theoretical framework for educational, ideological, and administrative balance in the twenty-first century. Its primary aim is the long-term development of leaders, managers, educators, parents, and citizens who are more educationally and ideologically balanced and, in-turn, more focused on and committed to their own personal and professional growth (and that of their colleagues and subordinates) than they are in political posturing or partisan promotional ploys. This balanced approach is called SELF-ACTION LEADERSHIP, or SAL for short, and is a derivative of Self-Leadership (S-L) and Action Research (AR) Theory. SAL represents a common-sense, character-centric, and heuristic compromise that practical parties on all sides of the current socio-political divide may reasonably embrace and promote for the benefit of rising generations and anyone willing to accept its tenable tenets. The ultimate goal is for SAL curricula to become a unifying, pragmatic go-to tool for leaders and managers of all kinds—including politicians, administrators, educators, and parents—who seek to promote personal and professional growth in (as well as unity among) their constituents, colleagues, subordinates, students, and children.

KEYWORDS: Self-Leadership, action research, character education, Self-Action Leadership

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1. Introduction

America's Civil War of the mid-nineteenth century did not occur overnight; it was decades and even centuries in

the making. Such a dire calamity may have even been beyond the conception of many of the Founding Fathers—who, for better or for worse—determined that solving the “Slavery Question” was, at best, patently premature in the

1790s, and at worst, nigh impossible. While the argument of prematurity may have been contemporarily practical, the utter immorality of the practice ultimately consigned us to a dreadful fate that played out bloodily from 1861-1865.

Ironically, more than 150 years after the close of that ultimate American disaster, the United States is, in some ways, as discontent over issues surrounding race as it was a half-century ago when landmark civil rights legislation first began to be passed into law. And *that* is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg—both politically and culturally speaking. Indeed, you don't need to cite any academic experts to recognize that the U.S. is more divided—or perhaps fractured is a more accurate term—in 2020 than it has been since 1860. Moreover, some “anti-government extremists ... have [even] used the slang word ‘boogaloo’ as a shorthand for a coming civil war” (Jones, Doxsee and Harrington, 2020: 6). Unprecedented far-right radical violence at the U.S. Capitol building on January 6, 2021 and far-left rioting on the streets of major U.S. cities throughout the summer of 2020 are frightening examples of the clear and present dangers posed by extreme factions of these unchecked civil, cultural, and political divisions/fractures.

This is not to say that a “HOT” civil conflict on a large scale is imminent or inevitable. Facts, in fact, suggest otherwise, and demonstrate the disproportionate power that media outlets and social media platforms possess to spawn conspiracy theories and otherwise unhealthily magnify what is actually occurring—bad as things still are in reality. Indeed, despite the recent summer of violence following the murder of George Floyd by police officers in Minneapolis, “the number of fatalities from domestic terrorism today is [actually] relatively low, ... [meaning that] the possibility of civil war ... [remains] negligible” (Jones, Doxsee, Harrington, Hwang and Suber, 2020: 8). Nonetheless, sufficient vestiges of civil conflict presently exist to justify open discussion in addition to immediate and ongoing action aimed at preventing further escalation—an express *cause* underlying *this* presentation.

The time has come to start combating the root and core of this, and other, related problems with more than just empty political punditry and hollow, partisan, media- and social media-driven rhetoric. The front-line “soldiers” in this conflict should not be politicians and pundits, however important their secondary or tertiary role may be in assuaging the

conflict. The front-line soldiers are and must be parents, educators, administrators, and other leaders, beginning at the local level, and particularly in the home. EDUCATION, and more specifically, *Character Education* must play a more active role in the change process. Why? Because as Veugelers and Groot make clear: “The concepts of citizenship and citizenship education are now central concepts in the theory, research, policy and practice of education” (Veugelers and Groot, 2019: 14). Thus, “education has an important task in preparing young people for their participation in society (Veugelers and Groot, 2019: 14). Moreover, as Shields points out: “It ... is idiotic to ignore the dimension of civic character in our education agenda. A thriving nation depends on citizens who [peacefully] participate in governance and civic life. This view has a long and distinguished history” (Shields (2011: 51).

The purpose of this paper is three-fold. First, it reviews the ways in which American culture has become increasingly polarized politically and otherwise in recent years and decades. It accomplishes this by highlighting current factions on the extremes of the political and cultural left and right. Second, it provides brief literature reviews of self-leadership (S-L) (Neck, Manz, and Houghton, 2017) and action research (AR) (Quigley and Kuhne, 1997), in conjunction with a more comprehensive literature review of character education (Nucci and Narvaez, 2008)—three academic fields that serve as hybrid grounding points for the Self-Action Leadership (Jensen 2019a, 2019b)—oriented balanced educational framework to follow. Third, it introduces *that* balanced theoretical educational framework—SELF-ACTION LEADERSHIP—aimed at establishing and promoting greater pedagogical, ideological, and administrative balance in the twenty-first century. This framework is based on the Self-Action Leadership THEORY (Jensen, Neck and Beaulieu, 2015) MODEL (Jensen, Beaulieu, and Neck, 2018) and PEDAGOGY (Jensen, Neck and Beaulieu, 2018) previously introduced in the *Journal of Leadership and Management*.

2. Discussion¹

2.1. The Problem of Extreme Political and Cultural Factions on the Left and Right

The United States of America in 2020 is a deeply divided and frightfully fractured place both politically and culturally speaking. The roots of this divide are many, varied,

¹ Research material and textual content contained in the Discussion and Conclusion portions of this paper represent a re-working of published literature reviews contained in Jensen, 2019b: *Book the Seventh*, Chapters 2–3, pages 381–423, and unpublished doctoral research papers, all copyrights of which are owned by Jordan R. Jensen, lead author on this paper.

and beyond the scope of this paper, the focus of which is to highlight specific examples of this polarization as a preface to posturing a pedagogical panacea to address the problem.

It is important to begin by acknowledging the reality that division has—and always will be—a part of the democratic process. For example, the American sociologist Zachary Neal “has shown that polarization in Congress is not a new phenomenon” (Petersen, 2019: 47). However, Neal has also demonstrated that polarization “has been on the rise since the early 1980s.” The lead author of *this* paper was born just a few months prior to the New Year, 1980. That means that, like the U.S. in the first half of the nineteenth century—which wended its way gradually and continually toward civil war—the U.S. has bit-by-bit *over time* become more deeply divided for the author’s entire life to date, with little contemporary sign of letup. This unremitting and accelerating problem of divisiveness is such that even if the threat of a “HOT” civil war remains “negligible” (Jones, Doxsee, Harrington, Hwang and Suber, 2020: 8), such a threat should be taken seriously enough to proactively produce palpable panaceas both politically and pedagogically speaking.

In approaching the subject of terrorism and violent extremism, it is important—just “to be clear—[that] terms like right-wing and left-wing terrorism do not—in any way—correspond to mainstream political parties in the United States, such as the Republican or Democratic parties, which eschew terrorism. Instead, terrorism is orchestrated by a small minority of extremists” (Jones, Doxsee and Harrington, 2020: 2). However, it is no secret that non-violent political and cultural discourse has grown increasingly vitriolic, demeaning, and even verbally abusive in the media, on social media platforms, and in daily dialogue among both cultural elites and the white- and blue-collar laity. According to Jones, Doxsee, Harrington, Hwang, and Suber: “There [is] growing concern about the threat of domestic terrorism, with extremists motivated by political, racial, ethnic, economic, health, and other grievances” (Jones, Doxsee, Harrington, Hwang and Suber, 2020: 1). While “sixty-seven percent (67%) of terrorist plots and attacks in the United States” were initiated by “white supremacist and other like-minded [far-right] extremists ... there was [also] a rise in the number of [left wing] anarchist, anti-fascist, and other like-minded attacks and plots in 2020 compared to previous years” (Jones, Doxsee, Harrington, Hwang and Suber, 2020: 2). These far-left plots and attacks accounted for “20 percent of terrorist incidents (an increase from 8 percent in

2019)” (Jones, Doxsee, Harrington, Hwang and Suber, 2020: 2).

It is important to note that these numbers do not include the widespread looting, rioting, and other violent far-left protests that sprung up spontaneously during the Summer of 2020 following the death of George Floyd, the shootings of Rayshard Brooks and Jacob Blake, and the acquittal of the officer who shot and killed Breonna Taylor. Nor do they reflect the tragic storming of the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021 by far-right extremists. Rather, these statistics reflect pre-planned attacks and plots uncovered by law enforcement agencies, data points that were then compiled by the CSIS Transnational Threats Project. Jones, Doxsee, and Harrington did, however, add that, “extremists from all sides flooded social media with disinformation, conspiracy theories, and incitements to violence in response to the protests following the death of George Floyd, swamping Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and other platforms” (Jones, Doxsee, Harrington, Hwang and Suber, 2020: 1), which only further enflamed an already incendiary situation.

Terrorist groups on the extreme right usually fall under categories involving racist extremism, nativist extremism, and anti-government extremism (Jackson, 2019). Specific groups include “White supremacist neo-Nazi organizations, such as the Nationalist Socialist Movement, American Nazi Party, Vanguard America, and others” (Jones, Doxsee and Harrington, 2020: 5), such as the Atomwaffen Division (Ware, 2019) and the Three Percenters, “a far-right paramilitary group that advocates gun rights and seeks to limit U.S. government authorities” (Jones, Doxsee and Harrington, 2020: 6). Another far right group on the rise that has recently received a measure of news coverage is the Proud Boys, which “represent a new face of far-right extremism ... that recruits through shared precarity and male grievances” (Kutner, 2020: 23). Tragically, far-right terrorism is on the rise (Jones, Doxsee and Harrington, 2020). In addition to the storming of the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, other recent high-profile acts of far-right domestic terrorism include “Robert Bowers’ attack on the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in October 2018; the mosque shooting in Christchurch, New Zealand in March 2019; and the mass shooting at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas in August 2019” (Jackson, 2019: 2).

Left-wing terrorism consists primarily of anarchist organizations, animal rights and environmental groups, and the more recently-publicized group, Antifa:

“Antifa groups have been increasingly active in protests and rallies over the past few years, especially ones that include far-right participants. In June 2016, for example, Antifa and other protestors confronted a neo-Nazi rally in Sacramento, CA, where at least five people were stabbed. In February, March, and April 2017, Antifa members attacked alt-right demonstrators at the University of California, Berkeley, using bricks, pipes, hammers, and homemade incendiary devices” (Jones, Doxsee, and Harrington: 6).

According to Jones, Doxsee, and Harrington “Over the next year, the threat of terrorism in the United States will likely *increase* based on several factors, such as the November 2020 presidential election and the response to the Covid-19 crisis” (Jones, Doxsee and Harrington, 2020: 7). This likelihood is based on the fact that “far-right and far-left networks have [already] used violence against each other at protests, raising the possibility of escalating violence during [and after] the election period” (Jones, Doxsee, and Harrington: 1). Jones, Doxsee, Harrington, Hwang, and Suber have further noted that “far-left and far-right violence [is] deeply intertwined—creating a classic ‘security dilemma’” (Jones, Doxsee, Harrington, Hwang and Suber, 2020: 2) that has arisen because “it is difficult to distinguish between offensive and defensive weapons” (Jones, Doxsee, Harrington, Hwang and Suber, 2020: 2).

Jones, Doxsee, and Harrington point out that events such as the 2020 presidential election and the COVID-19 crisis “are not the cause of terrorism” (Jones, Doxsee and Harrington, 2020: 7). Rather, “they are events and developments likely to fuel anger and be co-opted by a small minority of extremists as a pretext for violence” (Jones, Doxsee and Harrington, 2020: 7). The bottom line is that “tension on both the far right and far left has dramatically risen over the past several years” (Jones, Doxsee and Harrington, 2020: 7), which is obviously an issue that all responsible and concerned citizens are eager to see addressed. The question is: *how* do we as scholars, educators, and leaders best address it?

Jones, Doxsee, and Harrington suggest that politicians and social media companies both have key responsibilities in the arena of combatting terrorism of any kind. But it does not end there. Indeed, “all parts of U.S. society have an important role to play in countering terrorism” (Jones, Doxsee and Harrington, 2020: 8) including EDUCATION, the domain of which this paper is focused. To begin with, and in the spirit of Mohandas Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a collective cultural eschewal of violence of

all kinds must be agreed upon. According to Jones, Doxsee and Harrington (2020):

“Terrorism feeds off lies, conspiracies, disinformation, and hatred. Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi urged individuals to practice what he called ‘satyagraha,’ or truth force. ‘Satyagraha is a weapon of the strong; it admits of no violence under any circumstance whatever; and it always insists upon truth,’ he explained. That advice is just as important as it has ever been in the United States” (Jones, Doxsee and Harrington, 2020: 8).

2.2. A Proposed Educational Solution to the Problem

This paper hypothesizes that the *root* of the deepening divide in the United States lies fundamentally and primarily in EDUCATION (or a lack thereof). We likewise postulate that any potential long-term panacea lies similarly in EDUCATION. Since World War II, academia has seen a growing drift to the political left. In response, media outlets and other organizations on the right have, in recent decades, begun to push back strongly against this leftward educational and cultural drift. Unfortunately, however, this push-back has not served to create greater ideological or educational balance. Rather, it has further enflamed the situation into a passionate and incendiary divide that grows deeper and hotter with every passing year.

It is a self-evident verity that a human being’s beliefs, perspectives, and overall outlook on life is profoundly influenced and fundamentally shaped by one’s experiences *and* education. As such, an underlying premise of *this paper* is that the greatest single thing we can do as citizens, parents, teachers, and leaders is to promote and provide the *kind* and *degree* of education that will lead our children, students, employees, and constituents toward higher levels of citizenship, character, compassion, tolerance, and unity. The question then begs: what *kind* of education could possibly bring about such an idealistic vision, and to what *degree* (regularity, intensity, *etc.*) should it be offered?

This paper argues that the solution lies in offering students—from grade school on up—with a BALANCED form of character education (an Aristotelian pedagogical “Golden Mean”) that is taught early, often, and always. This solution sounds simple enough and sufficiently tenable in theory. However, in actual practice, character education in the United States (in general) is not without its problems, pitfalls, and opponents, which this paper will chronicle, review, and critique.

To illustrate this problem, generally speaking, Ryan recently chronicled the results of a “long-awaited report on the effectiveness of seven of the nation’s most popular and widely used character education programs” and found that, in essence, “none of the programs worked” (Ryan, 2013: 141). According to Ryan, “a fragile flower like character education has little chance to survive in the U.S.’s current education wars” (Ryan, 2013: 141), which are so focused—perhaps overly so—on not just test scores and STEM educational issues, but a range of hot-button issues of contemporary social interest, such as race, gender, culture, and history.

Why has the “Character Education Movement,’ which was started a quarter of a century ago with high hopes, appear... to be grinding to a slow trot?” (Ryan, 2013: 141):

“Could it be that the entire character education movement has been dominated by a flawed understanding of what character is and is not? Could it be that what is being taught in the name of character education in U.S. schools has little to do with human character as it is known “on the street” and has been with us since the time of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle? And, could it be that the army of psychologists and measurement specialists who have been testing for “character” are like hunters armed with elephant guns stalking the tse-tse fly? Or, perhaps stalkers armed with pee shooters hunting elephants?” (Ryan, 2013: 142)

Ryan answers his own question by stating that “the point being labored here is that human character is not mathematics or reading. It rarely can be attributed to a particular program or measured by a test” (Ryan, 2013: 132). Yet the fact remains that character education initiatives must compete with the prevailing pedagogical dogma that values the scientific method and empiricism over all other forms of *knowing*. Thus, cultural forces command that visceral and intuitive elements of one’s nature (i.e. one’s conscience) must bow to the limited epistemological constructs of a calculator. Consequently, students and educators alike become “lost in a sea of empiricism” (Ryan, 2013: 143). As a result, as is maintained by “the French philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882–1973) ... modern education, that is, scientific education, has been all but stripped bare of its ontological content” (Ryan, 2013: 144). In the process, many have forgotten—or failed to admit—that “*life is bigger than logic*” (Schumacher, 1977: 123) and that, to echo Socrates, “the greatest of all arts [is] the acquisition of

self-knowledge” (Schumacher, 1977: 79). In conclusion, Ryan asserts that:

“The true character education of children can only occur when it is linked to their deepest goals and purposes, when it is directed toward the acquisition of virtues (i.e. Aristotelian virtue ethics [Dimmock and Fisher, 2017, p. 49–63], and when it has the support and cooperation of those most responsible for their well being, their parents” (Ryan, 2013: 145).

The educational framework introduced in *this* paper harmonizes with Ryan’s (2013) thematic formula articulated above. Moreover, it seeks to build upon the optimism and enthusiasm of Rose who paints a sunnier picture of the overall state of character education:

“Probably one of the surest claims one could make about how to lead a successful life, in or out of school, is that qualities such as determination, perseverance, self-control, and a degree of flexibility matter a lot. In today’s educational lingo, these qualities get labeled as ‘character’ or ‘social-emotional learning.’ Whatever the label, there is a rapidly growing interest in how to teach character and measure it” (Rose, 2013: 44).

Rather than attempt to produce a theory and model of self-leadership and character education grounded in empirical research, Jensen (2013) took an analytic autoethnographic (Anderson, 2006) approach. His theory and model was therefore constructed out of the totality of his *own* life’s experience in overcoming very real personal, relational, and professional adversity by developing key virtues, making vital cognitive distinctions, and developing relevant behavioral habits all along the way—over a period exceeding three decades (1987–Present). Jensen (2019a, 2019b) calls his theory and model, *Self-Action Leadership*, or *SAL*, and developed it out of the general frameworks of self-leadership (S-L) (Neck, Manz and Houghton, 2017) theory and action research (A-R) (Quigley and Kuhne, 1997) theory.

2.3. The Need for Character Education

“Civilization depends on morality” – *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

“To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society.” – *Theodore Roosevelt*

“Schools today must lead the battle against the worst psychosocial epidemics that have ever plagued the children of

our society ... Schools need programs to protect children against the ravages of social disorganization and family collapse.”² – Perry London

Virtually everyone agrees—at least implicitly—that a need for formal character education initiatives exists in American homes, schools, communities, organizations, and political bodies. The problem is that there is “considerable controversy that swirls around ... [the] meaning [of character education] ... and the appropriate forms of practice that would constitute this area of education” (Nucci and Narvaez, 2008: 1).

Why is character education necessary? Because a variety of research conducted from the 1960s to the present—to say nothing of the avalanche of anecdotal evidence—has confirmed a decline in moral behavior in both adolescents and adults. Increased adolescent recalcitrance and even criminality among American youth are indicative of troubling trends involving high rates of behaviors such as violence, stealing and cheating, peer cruelty/bullying, preoccupation with sex in thought and action (with the undesirable consequences of unwanted teen pregnancies, teen abortions, and sexually transmitted diseases commonly resulting there from) inappropriate language, self-destructive acts, disrespect and disregard for authority, and heightened selfishness and a general sense of diminished civic or social responsibility (Lickona, 1991). Such societal ills, and many others, such as domestic abuse and the dissolution of the family, poverty, sex and violence in the media, drug and alcohol abuse, all contribute to a growing list of societal ills which British and American character education proponents usually present to establish a need for character education in schools (Arthur, 2008).

Dr. Benjamin Spock, of Dr. Spock fame, has said that “schools and educators can play a powerful role second only to the influence of parents in forming children’s attitudes and values. Yet to a great extent our schools are failing us” (Greenawalt, 1996: 1). Moreover, Nucci and Narvaez (2008), emphasize a growing consensus surrounding citizens’ perceptions of schools’ responsibility to play a role in the character education and moral development of students. The problem is not lack of support for the concept, but rather finding common ground regarding the *how-tos* (Berkowitz, 2002).

“There is a widespread agreement that schools should contribute to students’ moral development and character

formation. ... This apparent support for moral education, however, masks the considerable controversy that swirls around the meaning of moral or character education, and the appropriate forms of practice that would constitute this area of education. Some of what is being promoted as moral or character education has little research support, and amounts to no more than slick marketing of the personal intuitions of program founders” (Nucci and Narvaez, 2008: ix, 1).

To illustrate the practical conundrum surrounding character education in the United States, consider the following anecdote of scholars Goodman and Lesnick:

“At a recent gathering of principals, vice principals, and experienced teachers we asked the following three questions: ‘Are schools in the business of moral education?’ (all hands raised). ‘Should schools be in the business of moral education?’ (all hands raised). ‘Are your schools asking questions about the what and how of moral education?’ (no hands raised)” (Goodman and Lesnick, 2004: p. xi).

This example aptly illustrates a growing consensus (Lickona, 1991; Nucci and Narvaez, 2008) existing among educators and leaders about the perceived value of moral education. In fact, U.S. President Bill Clinton even brought up the topic of character education in his 1996 State of the Union address (Ryan and Kilpatrick, 1996).

In her book, *Character Education*, Holly Salls offers a tribute “to my mother, who taught me to love truth, goodness, and beauty without the help of any theories at all” (Salls, 2007: dedication page). Doubtless, Salls’ conception of a collective visceral consensus that character education *matters*, should be taught, and shouldn’t be overcomplicated, resonates with many. Indeed, many, and perhaps even *most*, people tend to view character education as being commensurate with common sense. Nevertheless, because we currently live in such a complicated world full of ideological divisions, societal factions, and pedagogical disagreements, a number of hurdles must be cleared before character education finds itself *in the* cultural and pedagogical *clear*.

The challenge is not acceding the *need* and *value* of character education. The difficulty lies in determining the *whats* and *hows* of character education’s delivery in a way that brings people together instead of driving them apart. This is because socio-cultural perspectives on the nature of

² Harvard’s Perry London as quoted in: Lickona, 1991.

moral decay in American—and the educational initiatives that should combat it—are, like virtually everything else in 2021, divided between left- and right-wing political ideologies and a host of other cultural and pedagogical fractures. This *Great Divide* poses many challenges to leaders, administrators, and educators desiring to provide and promote character education initiatives in public schools and beyond.

Social conservatives often consider postmodern America to be a place where traditional values have been abandoned, leaving the country in a state of moral disarray. Liberal humanists, on the other hand, are more likely to perceive moral decay as a natural by-product of the rapid contemporary social transitioning extant in our nation, the transitioning of which has aided in some moral improvements in relation to age-old systemic issues such as discrimination based on race, gender, or otherwise (Nucci and Narvaez, 2008).

Another challenge facing moral education as a scholarly topic is that it finds itself in an arena of inquiry far removed from the hard sciences. Indeed, even among the soft sciences, there are perhaps few subjects so significantly tied to the visceral elements of the human heart and spirit as character or moral education. Because the subject deals with human conduct—the basis of all human thought, speech, action, and interaction—it is understandable people will have strong feelings and opinions on the subject. Perhaps this explains why, despite the lack of intellectual and institutional consensus on the *whats* and *hows* of character education implementation, the collective agreement on character education's general importance is alive and well (Nucci and Narvaez, 2008). Thus, we are left with a paradox: a consensus on the topic exists; yet, disagreements about its specifics abound. Shields suggests what some of those *specifics* should involve:

“The goal of education is not acquiring [academic] knowledge alone, but developing the dispositions to seek and use knowledge in effective and ethical ways. ... Unfortunately, we have too often equated excellence with the quantity of the content learned, rather than with the quality of *character* the person develops. ... When character takes center stage, the learning of content becomes infused with both social and existential significance. ... We [therefore] propose *character* as the aim of education. That is to say, developing beneficial and prosocial dispositions should be prioritized over acquiring more and more facts and formulas. ... Education should develop intellectual character, moral character, civic character, and performance character, along with the collective character of the school. ... Isn't that what we want from our education system?” (Shields, 2011: 49).

2.4. Character Education Defined

In scholarly literature, character education (CE) is more commonly referred to as *moral education* (ME) (Nucci and Narvaez, 2008). However, because *character education* is the preferred term in colloquial vernacular (Berkowitz, 2002), and the message of this paper is designed to extend beyond academe to inform the leadership and management of politicians, administrators, educators, parents, and citizens, the former term will be employed in this paper.

What then is character education? And how is it defined? In the New Oxford American dictionary, *character* has to do with “strength ... in a person's nature,” and also includes the insinuation of a “good reputation.” *Education*, on the other hand, is defined as “the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, esp. at a school or university.” Berkowitz defines character as:

“An individual's set of psychological characteristics that affect that person's ability and inclination to function morally. Simply put, character is comprised of those characteristics that lead a person to do the right thing or not to do the right thing” (Berkowitz, 2002: 48).

Lockwood goes a step further to account for the systems within which character education is disseminated:

“Character education is defined as any school-instituted program, designed in cooperation with other community institutions, to shape directly and systematically the behaviour of young people by influencing explicitly the non-relativistic values believed directly to bring about that behaviour” (Lockwood, 1997: 179 in Arthur, 2008: 90).

Some consider character education to be a broad term withstanding a single definition (Jones, Ryan and Bohlin, 1998), such as “leadership” (Neck and Manz, 2010), “management,” or “ethics.” Related terms include: “moral education, child development, social-emotional learning, primary prevention, positive youth development, and youth empowerment” (Berkowitz, Battistich and Bier, 2008: 414). One scholar defined character education as “the deliberate effort to cultivate virtue” (Lickona, 1998: 1). Another describes *virtue* as coming “in the form of core values on which a society depends to persevere” (Edgington, 2002: 113). There is, however, little widespread agreement on precisely what a given list of values should entail. Nevertheless, many such lists do exist, and tend to share thematic similarities. One famous example is the Scout Law, which includes twelve specific virtues a scout should

seek to cultivate. This virtue statement affirms [encourages] that a scout is [should strive to be]: “trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent” (Boy Scouts of America Handbook, 2009).³

In addition to its definitional nuances, character education can also be approached from a variety of different instructional methods. Generally speaking, the term *character education* stands at the forefront of contemporary pedagogical vernacular attempting to describe a host of other sub-topics relating to the teaching and “foster[ing of] good values and character traits in young people,” and are sometimes used in connection with terms such as “moral education, moral development, moral reasoning, values education, values clarification, ethics, *etc.*” (Jones, Ryan and Bohlin, 1998: 2).

Lickona approaches his work on character education by implicitly hypothesizing that certain applicable moral truths exist and are objective. With this belief, he further identifies character as being constructed by virtues. He then classifies virtues as “objectively good human qualities such as wisdom, honesty, kindness, and self-discipline” (Lickona, 1998: 77). Such virtues “are intrinsically good ... don’t change ... always will be virtues ... (and) transcend time and culture” (Lickona, 1998: 1). Moreover, he asserts that the degree to which we acquire and develop virtues will translate into the strength of our individual character. While not everyone agrees with Lickona’s view of moral absolutes, this Aristotelian idea has historically served as the basis of character education initiatives in the West, it being more or less universally accepted that it is difficult (if not impossible) to pursue anything with integrity in the absence of some form of absolute standard against which to measure one’s conduct.

2.5. Philosophical and Psychological Roots of Character Education

2.5.1. Philosophical Roots of Character Education

Wren, credits several specific philosophers whose teachings underpin aspects of contemporary character education theory. From the Buddha and British empiricists Locke and Hume, to Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, and Kant, philosophers from around the world and throughout history have had an influence on moral education by “formulat[ing] the

fundamental developmental idea of human betterness” (Wren, 2008: 11). Despite this caucus of contributions from throughout history, the most ubiquitous influence of all has been the shadow cast down through history from ancient Grecian philosophy. Thus, character education’s *Great Divide* has its roots in the *supposed* classical divergence of Platonic/Socratic and Aristotelian philosophical thought. The former’s dialectic approach values questions and is primarily process-oriented, affirming the concomitant moral complexity and ambiguity of the cognitive-behavioral process that leads to moral thinking, speaking, and doing. The latter’s teleological based approach (Wren, 2008) values answers and is more results oriented, affirming the crucial nature of explicit instruction and habituation in moral matters (Wren, 2008; Arthur, 2008; Carr 2008; Carter, 1984; Sommers, 2002).

Because of these differences, many modern thinkers associate the dialogues of Plato and Socrates with Hall’s (1979) *soft approach*—focused primarily on the theoretical based cognitive element of moral reasoning—while the explicit instructional methods of Aristotle’s virtue-centric methods represent a *hard approach*—focused primarily on the practical, utility-based behavioral aspects of moral development, virtue acquisition, and character formation. This means that for Aristotle, good character is formed through right action; but for Plato and Socrates, good action (or character) develops as a result of right thinking (Arthur, 2008; Carr, 2008).

This *seeming* classical divergence serves as the root of postmodern divisions and discontent over the *whats* and *hows* of character education. But should it? Was Aristotle’s virtue-acquiring approach really so different from Plato and Socrates’ philosophical dogma of dialogue in terms of its intended results? Probably not. In fact, the most accurate way of defining their differences would likely be to describe their seeming divergence as different sides of the same coin. Indeed, they agreed with each other in many regards, and in some ways, their differences have been blown out of proportion by contemporary partisan educators eager to bolster their argument with an infusion of classical Grecian gravitas. Despite such partisan ideological efforts, the bottom line is that as aristocratic members of the ancient Athenian intelligentsia, all three would have placed great value on actively acquiring virtues such as “courage, generosity, honesty, and loyalty.” As such, Plato did not disagree with Aristotle “that character must be actively cultivated in the young” (Arthur, 2008: 81). Moreover, Aristotle

³ “Boy” has since been dropped from the Scouting name, with the recent advent of girls joining the program.

accepted the cognitive component of moral reasoning as a necessary aspect of behavioral habituation. Whether these ancient Greek thinkers would have agreed with contemporary interpretations, magnifications, or diminutions of their work—and the concomitant philosophical dichotomy it has galvanized—is impossible to know (Wren, 2008; Arthur, 2008; Carr 2008; Carter, 1984; Sommers, 2002), but it is reasonable to assume that modern scholars have probably exaggerated the divide in an effort to promote their own postmodern platforms.

Aristotle's classical approach formed the foundation of Western character education traditions for nearly two millennia, and was basically unchallenged until the onset of Rousseau's humanism in the 18th Century (Sommers, 2002). One of the elements of Aristotelian "practical wisdom" (Wren, 2008: 18) involves habituation. "Aristotle went to great lengths to explain how moral teachers—typically parents—should use "discipline, modeling, and consistent repetition to enable learners to acquire the right habits" (Wren, 2008: 20). In light of his emphasis on habituation, it is reasonable to assume that Aristotle held self-control and temperance to be essential aspects of moral training (Carr, 2008). He was also an exponent of the self-awareness and self-leadership required to recognize error and otherwise distinguish right from wrong (Sommers, 2002). While not all of Aristotle's thinking in relation to moral instruction is compatible with the scientific rigor of contemporary social psychology, the common sense components extant in his theories do possess a measure of implied universal ethos. In other words, "that moral virtue is indeed part of the human telos is old news" (Wren, 2008: 21).

Rousseau's philosophy challenged the commonly held Western Christian paradigm of a fallen man who must be redeemed. He took an inimical view: that man was innately just and would remain so if left unpolluted from vice-laden sociality. Never mind that "society" always springs forth from individuals. This view led him to disparage Aristotle's age-old model of habituation based on explicit instruction in moral matters (Sommers, 2002). This in-turn accelerated the process whereby the two divergent schools of thought extant today have come to evolve—and become increasingly divisive over time.

2.5.2. Psychological Roots of Character Education

Character and moral education in the psychological realm are rooted in *developmental psychology* (Lapsley, 2008), *cognitive development* (Snarey and Samuelson,

2008), and the methods and theories of sociologist Emile Durkheim (1925) and psychologist Jean Piaget (1932). Piaget's *cognitive development approach* differed from Durkheim's *cultural socialization approach* in that it focused more on the cognitive development of the individual (*ala* Plato & Socrates' "soft approach" [Hall, 1979]), who then retained primary control for one's own moral development along with others one's age through discussions, peer interaction, and other related activities. In this setting, adult instructors play a secondary role in the instruction. *Cultural socialization approach*, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of explicitly teaching moral values and character virtues (*ala* Aristotle's "hard approach" [Hall, 1979]) in more controlled environments where the instructor (parent, teacher, administrator) plays the primary role of teacher and role model who then rewards behavior reflecting that instruction. Cognitive development is more process oriented while cultural socialization is more content based. Both of these methods of character instruction can be found in contemporary approaches to character education instruction (Snarey and Samuelson, 2008).

A discussion of developmental psychology (Lapsley, 2008) in the moral realm should include Augusto Blasi's work on *identity*. In his prolific coverage of the subject, Blasi has addressed a range of sub-topics, including the *moral personality* (Blasi 1984, 1985), *moral identity* (1984, 2004, 2005), *the intentional self* (2004, 2005), *moral character* (2005), and *development of the moral will* (2005) (Lapsley, 2008). Blasi's influential work has drawn fascinating parallels between moral education and self-leadership by "integrat[ing] self and identity with moral rationality and responsibility" (Lapsley, 2008: 37). In so doing, he "has returned long-forgotten concepts to the vocabulary of modern psychology, including desire, will, and volition; and added new concepts, such as self-appropriation and wholeheartedness" (Lapsley, 2008: 37–38). While all of his theories are not backed up by "sustained empirical research" (Lapsley, 2008: 38) the main column of his academic contributions have been supported by key strains of research (Lapsley, 2008).

In addition to Piaget (1932, 1947, 1970), Lawrence Kohlberg is another prominent scholar in the cognitive development tradition (Snarey and Samuelson, 2008). Kohlberg's work grew out of Piaget's. His interest in moral education stems in part from his own reflections—as a Jewish American—on the Holocaust. According to Kohlberg, the Holocaust "is the event in human history that most bespeaks the need for moral education and for a philosophy that can guide it" (Snarey and Samuelson, 2008:

53). Gaining first-hand experience in Europe with the U.S. Merchant Marine at the end of World War II, Kohlberg was able to meet survivors of Hitler's cruel, genocidal barbarity (Snarey and Samuelson, 2008). Later, as a scholar, Kohlberg developed *Six Developmental Stages of Justice Reasoning*, a hierarchical model of moral development. Conceptually reminiscent of Maslow's (1943) *Hierarchy of Basic Needs* and Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell's (2009) *Cultural Proficiency Continuum*, Kohlberg's Six Development Stages "illustrates the potential evolution of moral reasoning toward greater complexity and adequacy. [However], moral stages, for Kohlberg, were not simply moral ideals, ideal types, or virtual models of reasoning, but actual cognitive-development stages in the evolving structure of the social-moral brain" (Snarey and Samuelson, 2008: 59). He and his colleagues later clarified the meaning of his *Six Stages* model by introducing two different moral orientation personality types (Type A [heteronomous] and Type B [autonomous]), an addition which allowed for variations in approach inside a given level within the model (Snarey and Samuelson, 2008). Finally, with a recognition of a group's influence on the moral development of a person in that group, Kohlberg and his colleagues developed a third theory and model based on the moral atmospheres existing at a given time within a group. The model is called the *moral atmosphere model* (Snarey and Samuelson, 2008) and is to a group what the *Six Stages* model is to an individual.

2.6. History of Character Education in the United States and Beyond

"Moral education is not a new idea. It is, in fact, as old as education itself. Down through history, in countries all over the world, education has had two great goals: to help young people become smart and to help them become good. [And] we know that smart and good are not the same" (Lickona, 1991: 6).

"Character education has deep roots in the American public school system" (Arthur, 2008: 86).

2.6.1. Character Education in the West

Character education, in the form of "transmitting values to children" has always existed in U.S. schools (Edgington, 2002: 113). Early American anecdotes of Puritans (and other groups) instituting a values-based pedagogy with the Bible serving as a primary text is historically iconic (Salls, 2007; McClellan, 1999). Indeed, the Colonial Period was not just influenced by religion, it was based on it (Arthur, 2008).

Later, revolutionary leader Thomas Jefferson wrote a legislative bill supporting student instruction in moral principles. Moreover, Benjamin Franklin proposed an outlined curriculum involving the study of ethics. Suffice it to say, "schools in the early days of the republic tackled character education head on" (Lickona, 1991: 6-7) and moral education-based traditions tracing back to Jamestown continued into the early 20th Century (Greenawalt, 1996).

Nineteenth century public schools thoroughly adopted character education through a combination of curriculum, discipline standards, and the modeling of teachers. A concrete example of character education in 1800s America was the widespread use of *McGuffey Readers*, first appearing in 1836, and eventually selling more than 100 million copies (Greenawalt, 1996). In the tradition of utilizing literature to promote character education (Edgington, 2002) "McGuffey used stories, inspirational poems, stirring exhortations, and heroic tales in his *Readers*. As children practiced their school lessons, they also learned the importance of honesty, hard work, self-discipline, responsibility, respect, caring, and citizenship" (Greenawalt, 1996: 3). Modern scholars, such as Carr (2014), have sought to resurrect "the value of literature for moral and character education" in the spirit of nineteenth century *McGuffey Readers*. According to Carr:

"The Aristotelian role of practical reason in the ordering of affect, feeling, or sentiment suggests an important place for narrative and imaginative literature in the cultivation of virtuous character. This idea has been much defended in recent days, perhaps most notably by the virtue ethicist Alasdair MacIntyre, who has insisted that—since human agents understand themselves morally as characters in stories—literature rather than science offers the best insights into moral character and its development" (Carr, 2014: 2)

Before the onset of the 20th Century, and especially before World War II, there was often an inextricable link between character education and a student's formal schooling. Moreover, being familiar with the Bible was often considered a mandatory qualification of teachers in the nineteenth century, and presumably in preceding centuries as well (Jones, Ryan and Bohlin, 1998).

Character education in the twentieth century, and particularly the second half thereof, has been a different matter whereby it has taken a back seat in American public pedagogy for a variety of reasons. "Notable trends [influencing this shift include the] increasing urbanization of society, [the] increasing affluence of American society, and

[the] increasing [of widespread] religious heterogeneity” (Greenawalt, 1996: 3) as well as the rise of the so-called “Nones” (White, 2014) which can refer to atheists, agnostics, and others who identify as religiously non-affiliated. Scholarly influences of this shift included Darwin’s evolutionary theories and Einstein’s scientific *theory of relativity* (Lickona, 1991; Rugh, 1907), both of which led teachers and students to focus more on modern science and less on traditional theology and ancient myth. Rugh (1907) explicitly cited Darwin’s evolutionary theory as having a negative influence on the individual and collective moral compass of mankind. According to Lickona (1991), this was because “that view led people to see other things, including morality, as evolving rather than fixed and certain” (Lickona, 1991: 7; an idea credited to Lickona’s colleague, Professor Henry Johnson of Pennsylvania State University). Lickona elaborated on his point thusly:

“The doctrine of evolution has given us a new mental framework on which to construct our view of life and the world. ... The result is a divided responsibility and a ‘stratified conscience.’ Many a business man has one conscience or moral ideal for his home and church, another for his club, and quite another for the ‘company and its business.’ ... ‘New occasions teach new duties.’ These radical changes ... so greatly affecting the child, demand a correlation and integration of the moral forces, and a reorganization of the school upon a more social, and hence consciously ethical, basis” (Lickona, 1991: 3, 4, 7).

Other intellectual and cultural influences of this shift included *logical positivism* and *personalism*, both of which came of age in the 1960s and 1970s (Lickona, 1991). The former (*logical positivism*) valued logic and science over personal experience and metaphysics. The latter (*personalism*):

“Celebrated the worth, dignity, and autonomy of the individual person, including the subjective self or inner life of the person. It emphasized rights more than responsibility, freedom more than commitment. It led people to focus on expressing and fulfilling themselves as free individuals rather than on fulfilling their obligations as members of groups such as family, church, community, or country” (Lickona, 1991: 9; attributed to Father George F. McLean, secretary of the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, *Catholic University*, Washington, D.C.).

Even earlier than the advent of logical positivism and personalism, Hugh Hartschorne and Mark May conducted a famous study in the mid 1920s wherein they suggested the traditionally perceived link between a student’s character and the formal character education he or she received was tenuous. Academe was open to the studies’ findings (Greenawalt, 1996), although contemporary scholars have been critical of the study on a number of different fronts (Arthur, 2008) (Greenawalt, 1996). Hartschorne and May’s study had the potential to badly undermine traditional character educational initiatives, but it did not terminate it (Arthur, 2008). Thus, up through the 1950s, character education continued to ride the wave of momentum that had bolstered it from the beginnings of American society.

In the 1960s, Louis Raths of Columbia University published *Values and Teaching* wherein he introduced the concept of *values clarification*. “Values clarification contained no requirement to evaluate one’s values against a standard, no suggestion that some values might be better or worse than others” (Greenawalt, 1996: 4), which led scholars to increasingly view traditional values upon a spectrum of moral relativity (Greenawalt, 1996). The purpose of the values clarification concept was to provide an opportunity for young people to figure out for themselves what their values would be without outside interference (Prestwich, 2004).

Despite affirming the decline of character education from the 1960s-1980s, Prestwich (2004) has acknowledged a comeback since the 1980s. Writing in 2004, she said:

“Character education in American schools is experiencing a revival. ...the rise in violent crime and a general feeling by the public that American children suffered a crisis in morals led to a resurgence of character education programs across the nation, with most states either mandating or supporting such education” (Prestwich, 2004: abstract).

This “revival” spoken of by Prestwich is accounted for in part by the burgeoning trend in the 1990s and 2000s of state legislatures mandating that public schools include elements of character education in classroom instruction. According to the *Character Education Partnership: Leading a National Call to Character* (CEP)’s website (www.character.org) “Thirty-six states have laws that specifically mandate or encourage character education.”⁴ Seven more states have shown at least some measure of support for character education, but have not yet passed legislation to mandate it.

⁴ See: <http://www.character.org/charactereducationlegislation>.

This leaves only seven states and the District of Columbia, and among these states, all but Massachusetts, Nevada, and the District of Columbia have language inscribed in state code implicating their support for character education instruction (on some level) for either students or teachers.

Character education has been mandated in the State of Georgia since 1991 (Greenawalt, 1996: 7). Current legislation dates back to 1997 and can be found in the Official Code of the State of Georgia. This paper's lead author had opportunities to observe character education first-hand while living and working (teaching) in the state of Georgia in 2003, and again from 2006-2009. He first observed and participated in Georgia State Character education initiatives as a volunteer guest character education speaker at *Lassiter High School* in Marietta, Georgia during the fall semester of 2003. He observed it again as a substitute teacher at *Kincaid Elementary School* in the spring of 2009. Detailed reports and analyses of said initiatives are available in Jensen (2013) and Jensen (2019b).

2.6.1.1. Recent Trends

While an implicit solidarity and widespread concurrence on the need to make character education a greater priority in our schools clearly exists, views regarding the specific ways and means in which the task should be undertaken are much more divergent and varied (Prestwich, 2004). Furthermore, some who do concur with its importance are unsure of how to proceed. For example:

“In a survey of over 280 teachers, preservice and those already in the classroom, over 75 percent believed that character building should be part of public school education (Mathison, 1998). Yet, of those who claimed to be supporters of character education, 65 percent were unsure of how to put it into practice. A typical comment across the country is, We think we *need* to do it, but we're not sure of *how* to do it” (Edgington, 2002: 113).

Soft-liners in the *American Civil Liberties Union* (ACLU) worry about religion (specifically Christianity) returning to state-run schools in the guise of character education. On the other hand, many hard-line Christians, already angered by movements of increased secularizations in the school, are likewise wary of public schools trying to inculcate values primarily belonging in the domains of church and family (Ryan and Kilpatrick, 1996). Hard-liners Ryan and Kilpatrick are pessimistic about any

kind of realistic conjugal relationship occurring effectively between schools and character education—with its historical religious traditions. They label multiculturalism, criticism from outside the schools, and political correctness as just some of the obstacles facing character education implementation in public schools. With a tone of crestfallen disconsolation, they opine: “It's time to face up to [the] fact [that] character education in public schools doesn't have a prayer” (Ryan and Kilpatrick: 20).

Since the 1960s, cognitive development theorists have had a degree of influence in the way character education has been implemented in schools and classrooms. This influence has seen a student's autonomy for self-direction rise while adult supervision has been criticized. While some methods advocate a stricter adherence to research-tested programs (Narvaez, 2005), others in the traditionalist approach favor the methods proscribed by writers such as William J. Bennett (1991) of *The Book of Virtues* fame, Ryan (1996), and Kilpatrick (1992) which methods incorporate “direct teaching and close guidance of the young” (Arthur, 2008: 92). Others have developed additional methodological frameworks (or lists) that suggest which virtues and/or moral principles or moral philosophies could/ought to be taught, and how (Arthur, 2008). There are many documented systems and many more undocumented systems. For example, while the State of Georgia mandates⁵ that character education be taught in its States' schools, and while it even defines an explicit list of character attributes to be focused on, individual schools, administrators, and educators maintain a large degree of autonomy to determine how they will comply with the legislative mandate. Therefore, the ways and means of implementation vary from school to school. While a comprehensive and detailed overview of character education-based packages, initiatives, trends, and pedagogies is outside the scope of this paper, it is worth providing a summary of some of the existing programs and areas of emphasis.

2.6.1.2. Academic Approaches and Areas of Emphasis

A wide array of character development foci can be found in a recent anthology of published scholarship in the field of moral education (Nucci and Narvaez, 2008). These foci represent some of the hot topics and issues accompanying contemporary dialogue on the topic. Subjects in this quasi-comprehensive manual include the following: developmental discipline (Watson, 2008), social interdependence

⁵ This information (§ 20–2–145). Georgia's comprehensive character education program mandate can be found in the Official Code of the State of Georgia (§ 20–2–145), found online at <http://www.lexis-nexis.com/hottopics/gacode/>.

(Johnson and Johnson, 2008), social and emotional learning (Elias, Parker, Kash, Weissberg and O'Brien, 2008), peer relationships and social groups (Horn, Daddis, Killen, 2008), social cognitive domain theory (Nucci, 2008), the positive youth development in the U.S. (Catalano, Hawkins and Toumbourou, 2008) learning to serve and the moral and civic effects of that service (Hart, Matsuba and Atkins, 2008), the development of character as it relates to sports (Shields and Bredemeier, 2008), the contribution of the community to character and moral development (Lies, Bronk and Mariano, 2008), the *Just Community Approach* (Power and Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008), constructivist approaches to moral education in early childhood (Hildebrandt and Zan, 2008), media and prosocial behavior (Hogan and Strasburger, 2008), the issue of teacher education as it relates to character and moral education (Schwartz, 2008) and promoting a professional pedagogy through the practice of ethical teaching standards (Campbell, 2008).

2.6.2. Character Education in the East

Unlike Western character education practitioners, East Asians (like Western academics) use the term “moral” instead of “character” to refer to education in the moral domain. A Japanese group has even coined a catchy portmanteau to describe the hybrid topic that conflates morality and psychology, thus producing the new term: “moralogy” (Berkowitz, 2002: 44).

2.6.2.1. The Confucian Ethic: Moral Education in East Asia

While the reception and implementation of character education around the world varies, it is particularly embraced in East Asian cultures, where instruction in character-based virtue is integrated holistically throughout entire countries. There, societies as a whole value character education well beyond the walls of the home or school. In the East, families, schools, and organizations alike place high value on the individual character ethic as a means to promote collective virtue and a just and safe society. The roots of this collective value placed on character goes back over 2,500 years to the philosopher Confucius (551–479 B.C.), whose teachings remain deeply imbedded in the cultures and societies across East Asia despite religious heterogeneity extant in those countries (Reid, 1999; Greenawalt, 1996).

According to Reid:

“Just about anywhere you go in China, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan, Thailand, *etc.*, you find

moral instruction right before your eyes—often in letters (or characters) ten feet tall. Acting on what appears to be a pan-Asian conviction that there can't be too much of a good thing, these countries are constantly preaching values, morality, and good citizenship to their citizens in the form of slogans, posters, billboards, advertisements, and TV commercials. Thus it was that within three minutes of our arrival in Asia we saw a big banner in Narita (Japan) Airport: “Enjoy Your Stay in Japan, but Please Observe the Rules” (Reid, 1999: 166–167).

Other advertisements that Reid noticed in his time in East Asia included framed signs put up by KMT [national railroad of Malaysia] that said: “Have a Safe and Pleasant Journey, in the Spirit of a Caring Society.” Another, on a bridge in Seoul, Korea read: “Join Together to Maintain Moral Values!” (Reid, 1999: 167)

This cultural permeation of character development is also deeply rooted in Japanese and other East Asian schools. Reid's two daughters experienced this first hand in attending a public Japanese elementary school, Yodobashi No. 6:

“The strongest lesson our kids took away from that Japanese school was ... the teaching of moral lessons: community virtues, proper social conduct, appropriate behavior as a member of a group. ... Moral education was (considered) much too important to be left to parents, or churches, or Boy Scout troops. It was a job for the whole society to engage in. And this is what the schools do, to this day, in East Asian societies. ... There is no conception in East Asia that music and math belong in schools but moral values do not. Learning to do right is considered just as important as learning to add right” (Reid, 1999: 129, 143).

Reid elaborates further on the value his daughters' school placed on this kind of moral instruction:

“Many teachers wrote the goals for the day on the blackboard each morning before class. The interesting thing was that most of these goals said nothing much about academics. They were about building good citizens. ... Our kids learned some Japanese, some math and science, some music (but) they also learned ... working hard, following rules, respecting authority, taking responsibility, and getting along with the group. These moral lessons ... are so important to Japan—and to every other Confucian society—that they don't stop when school ends. ... they keep teaching you this stuff forever” (Reid, 1999: 144, 152).

One of the most telling consequences of this cultural phenomenon is its correlative (if not causative) link to crime rates, which are impressively diminutive in the East when compared to its Western counterparts, and especially the United States.

“The rates of murder, rape, kidnapping, assault, mugging, robbery, and theft in almost all Asian countries are vastly lower than the comparable rates in most of the rest of the world. In the late 1990s, the United States experienced a fairly remarkable drop in rates of violent and property crime; murders in the United States, for example, dropped from about 25,000 annually in 1993 to 19,600 in 1996. But even at these reduced levels, the per capita rates of violent crime in the United States are ten, twenty, and in some cases one hundred times as high as those in the nations of East Asia” (Reid, 1999: 8).

In addition, drug use and divorce rates are much lower than in the United States, most children live in two-parent (mother and father) homes, and East Asian students routinely score among the highest in the world on academic test scores (Reid, 1999). It is evident—to say the very least—that from a character education standpoint, Westerners have a lot to learn from their fellow global citizens in the East.

2.7. Character Education’s Ideological Divide in Academe

2.7.1. Secular Progressive

“Myopia is a great human achievement.” – Robert E. Carter

Lawrence Kohlberg summed up the derision of secular progressives toward traditional conservatives when he once referred to Aristotelian theories of character education as a simplistic “bag of virtues” (Carr, 2008: 100; Snarey and Samuelson; 2008: 57; Carter, 1984: 108). Nash (1997)—a vocal soloist in the Kohlberg choir—and less diplomatic in his disapprobation of the *Other Side*—“believes that most models of character education are deeply and seriously flawed, authoritarian in approach, too nostalgic, pre-modern in understanding of the virtues, aligned to reactionary politics, anti-intellectual, anti-democratic, and above all dangerous” (Arthur, 2008: 89).

In his esoteric *Dimensions of Moral Education*, Carter wrote a critique of Kohlberg’s work wherein Kohlberg

himself authored the forward. Carter, a self-labeled metaphorical ophthalmologist diagnoses the “critically philosophical” (Carter, 1984: 3) (aka *soft-liners* [Hall, 1979]) as being intellectually myopic (desirable in his view) while labeling some (aka *hard-liners* [Hall, 1979]) to have, or *think that they have*, 20/20 vision (potentially dangerous in his view). He extols the virtues of “intellectual myopia” (an inability to clearly see the absolute truth of a matter) and “philosophic humility” (presumably a contrite state of human accession towards one’s inability to accurately decipher absolute truth) while implicitly castigating the naïveté of those with absolutist positions on moral instruction (Carter, 1984: 3). According to Carter, 20/20 vision in regards to the *whats* and *hows* of moral education is, if not impossible, at least highly unlikely. Says Carter: “If you must settle for less, then the excitement and pride come from seeing less poorly, less confusedly, and therefore less prejudicially. Education’s greatest achievement is myopia, and philosophy is myopia’s chief trustee” (Carter, 1984: 4). Carter’s line of thinking states: “moral autonomy requires that you find out for yourself what is right and what is obligatory. Societal laws, other moral codes and pre-dispositions, and so on must all be submitted to this critical inquiry” (Carter, 1984: 67–68). Moreover, he cautions against what he calls “passive acceptance” (Carter, 1984: 9) of any declaration of truth just because someone or some entity says it is truth. The key is engaging in “well-thought-out perspectives on values and ethics” (Carter, 1984: 11), including perspectives you may not agree with. He cautions against accepting or rejecting any statements of morality just because someone or some entity says you should, a notion that hearkens back to Emerson’s claim that “nothing is at last sacred except the integrity of your own mind” (Emerson in: Ziff, 1985, p. 178).

2.7.2. Traditional Conservative

“A positive aspiration and effort for an ethical-moral configuration of our common life is of overriding importance. Here no science can save us. I believe, indeed, that overemphasis on purely intellectual altitude, often directed solely to the practical and factual, in our education has led directly to the impairment of ethical values.”⁶ – Albert Einstein

Sommers describes the weaknesses she sees in Rousseau’s philosophy as it relates to character education:

“Progressive educators who follow Rousseau are at pains to preserve the child’s autonomy. They frown on old-fashioned

⁶ As quoted in Sankar 1992; *Reflections on Values* page preceding *Dedication*.

moralizing, preaching, and threats of punishment, regard such methods as coercive, and believe instead that children should discover for themselves, by their own rational faculties, which actions are moral. This laissez-aller policy abandons children to their fate. The purpose of moral education is not to preserve our children's autonomy, but to develop the character they will rely on as adults. As Aristotle persuasively argues, children who have been helped to develop good moral habits will find it easier to become autonomous adults. Conversely, children who have been left to their own devices will founder" (Sommers, 2002: 34).

Kristol (2002) voices a similarly stark rebuttal to Nash (1997) and Carter's (1984) liberal-progressive ideology regarding character education, and cogently sums up the perspectives of many on the political, cultural, and religious right. In a poignant opprobrium, he declares acute distaste for what he sees as the lack of moral substance of progressive agendas in the moral domain. According to Kristol, the current quagmire over the *whats* and *hows* of character education are outgrowths of the secular progressive (or liberal humanistic) agenda that he goes so far as to label "the official religion of American society today, compared with which all other religions can be criticized as divisive and parochial" (Kristol, 2002: 175). For Kristol, secular progressives put more emphasis on the process than on the final result. In so doing, they ultimately demonstrate an "unwilling(ness) to establish defining limits to the idea of a moral person" (Kristol, 2002: 174). Kristol calls the debates over *whats* and *hows* "interesting" and "odd" (Kristol, 2002: 174), and compares it to a gardening manual that explains how to grow things but prefers not comment on whether a rose is more desirable than a cocklebur or a pile of rubbish:

"Different gardeners have different ideas, of course; but there is a limit to this variety. The idea of a garden does not, for instance, include an expanse of weeds or poison ivy, and no gardener would ever confuse a garden with a garbage dump. ... We are, as it were, gardeners with all the latest implements and technology, but without an idea of a garden" (Kristol, 2002: 174).

He goes on to harangue the philosophy of Rousseau by pointing out that the "religion" of liberal humanism places more "faith" in human nature's capacity to *naturally* become "flowers" instead of "poison ivy" or "weeds," than in the far more predictable processes of nature itself (Kristol, 2002: 174). Kristol further argues that the moral neutralism of some institutions "robs" those institutions—over time—of their "popular legitimacy," (Kristol, 2002: 175)

and that efforts to subvert such developments often lead to public pandering based on "popular agitation," and "the passing fancy of intellectual fashion," (Kristol, 2002: 176) which, while it might buy time for those in power, does not solve the fundamental problems of causation—and may ultimately undermine the viability and/or existence of the institution. He extols the premise that with "rights" come "responsibilities," and yet, when it comes to the responsiveness of institutions, too many are incessantly "hacking at the branches" of problems while simultaneously failing to strike any real blows at their "roots" (Thoreau, 2001: 62). In the process, they sometimes enact measures totally unrelated to the problem in a stealthy strategy aimed at quelling the cries of the discontent while simultaneously distracting them from the true source of that discontent. Along the way, their approval ratings may go up, but their "moral legitimacy" (Kristol, 2002: 179) is compromised. Kristol adds to his discussion the topic of moral authority (Covey, 2004) stressing that when an educator fails to clearly identify his or her moral intentions, and when he or she doesn't know the moral direction they desire to direct students they serve, such a state of moral groundlessness inevitably undermines "legitimate authority" (Kristol, 2002: 181). In summary, Kristol does not mince words in his counsel to all educators and would-be educators:

"Who is going to answer the questions about the meaning of our individual and collective lives? ... Ours is indeed a bewildered age. I would say this: If you have no sense of moral authority, if you have no sovereign ideas about moral purpose, you ought not to be educators. There are many technocratic professions in which, for all practical purposes, the knowledge of means suffices, but education is not one of them. An educator who cannot give at least a tentative minimally coherent reply to the question, "Education for what?" and who cannot at least point to the kinds of persons a good education is supposed to produce, is simply in the wrong line of work" (Kristol, 2002: 181–182).

2.8. Bridging the Gap by Meeting in the Middle

Carter states that the purpose of philosophy is to continue to "search for better and more adequate answers" (Carter, 1984: 9). The question to such a purpose, however, eternally begs: how does one know what is "better" or "worse" if one is not measuring it against at least some semblance of an absolute standard? Logically speaking, there must be an absolute (or at least a perceived or presumed absolute) upon which to base any deviational judgments upon. Otherwise, from what *point* are you deviating? If

this is so, what point of reference is the “moral myopic” judging from in order to define these various shades of myopia, and in distinguishing between better and worse sight, what standard is she using to make said distinctions? How does he know it is better? And what makes her an authority on the subject?

It would seem as though Carter accedes—at least implicitly—that absolute truth exists when he explicitly states that “the only limits to complete understanding of nature, both the world’s and our own, are time and human ingenuity” (Carter, 1984: 111). However, he clarifies this statement by acceding certain limits of human reason, writing that: “reason can only yield objective knowledge within the limits of agreed-upon premises and within consciousness” (Carter, 1984: 112). Durkheim on the other hand seems to favor Carter’s initial point when he wrote that, “there is nothing in reality that one is justified in considering as fundamentally beyond the scope of human reason” (Durkheim, 2002: 4).

As the literature review above makes clear, a strident divide exists between the liberal-progressive and traditional conservative viewpoints, both theoretically speaking and with regards to the practical *hows* and *whats* of character education. Taken to extremes, the issue of character education becomes a divisive dichotomy of polar opposites. In such extremes, secular progressives completely remove God and religion from the equation, reject Aristotelian (2002) principles of explicit moral habituation and Durkheim’s principles of “cultural socialization” (Snarey and Samuelson, 2008: 56), and vehemently oppose any form of virtue development through repetition. Given enough time to germinate and grow, such an extremity would almost certainly give rise to either anarchy, communism, or some frightful amalgam of both. On the other hand, extreme traditional conservatives would remove the separation of church and state, re-introduce religious scripture as primary texts, and quell all dissent along the way. Given enough time to germinate and grow, such extremities are apt to put a curricular “cult” back into the culture, thereby wending down the slippery slope to religious fanaticism or even fascism.

Does the current divide in American character education mirror the kind of extremes described above? Are we already in the midst of a strident civil war that unequivocally pits Socrates, Rousseau, Piaget, Kohlberg, Carter, and liberal humanists on one side of the battlefield and Aristotle, Kant, Durkheim, Kristol, and traditional conservatives on the other? While there is ample anecdotal,

cultural, and journalistic evidence to suggest things are increasingly headed in the direction of deeper, wider, and more vitriolic divisions and extremes, hope remains for the possibility of bridging the gap. To animate that hope, there must be strong, persuasive, and principle-centered theory, practice, and leadership to entice extreme factions to return to a more balanced middle ground. Fortunately, there is ample anecdotal (if not empirical) evidence to suggest that the majority of voices do not lie in either extreme, but rather constitute a compelling and significant “Silent Majority.” Moreover, a degree of overlapping among the two extremes already exists. Literature tempered with the voice of reason—fusing together practical elements from both the left and right and then melding it together in a way that best helps children, adolescents, and other citizen-students—can already be found on both sides. For example, Lickona operates primarily from a more conservative viewpoint on character education. Yet he cites the cognitive-developmental work of Piaget, and also explains how to conduct “dilemma discussion(s) in the classroom” (Lickona, 1991: 242), crediting Kohlberg in the process. Aristotle believes in habituation through repetition, yet he simultaneously extols cognitive development—a principle that actually precedes habituation in his “four areas of practical wisdom” (Wren, 2008: 18). Likewise, Kohlberg’s support of the *Just Community* (Power, Higgins and D’Alessandro, 2008) was an outgrowth of his synthesis of the work of Piaget and Durkheim. Kohlberg had initially dismissed Durkheim’s work, but opened himself up to it later on when he came to see the value of cognitive developmental processes occurring within a context of social culturalization amalgamated with democratic ideals. In fact, all three of his major models contributed to the scholarship on the topic and are representative of this synthesis (Snarey and Samuelson, 2008).

It is true, generally speaking, that the left is more concerned with processes, while the right focuses more on results. However, this certainly does not mean the left could care less about results, or that the right views processes as superfluous. Both sides make valid points; both sides can produce reasonable arguments; and both sides can back up at least some of their positions with sound logic and well-researched scholarship. As such, the best possible solution is not to eradicate one or the other, but to harmonize BOTH ideologies in a principled manner that effectively capitalizes on each other’s strengths while minimizing each other’s weaknesses.

The answer is located in Aristotle’s principle of the *Golden Mean*, which defines the “mark of virtue” as “the

median” between “excess and deficiency” (Aristotle’s, 2002: 21). According to Carr:

“The most theoretically promising prospect for a satisfactory practice of character education lies in further refinement of that basically Aristotelian conception of character ... [including that] practical wisdom ... characterized by Aristotle [which promotes a] median avoidance of excesses and deficits of affect and/or appetite” (Carr, 2014).

In Aristotle’s (2002) classical view, one can have too much, or too little, of anything. The goal in pursuing virtue is therefore to find the balance between extremes. In so doing, “situational factors” (Bass, 2008: 52) may require the exercise of some flexibility in one’s approach (*soft approach*) but we can still begin with a foundation that is built upon certain absolutes (*hard approach*). We can then build together upon the common belief embraced by both sides that every human being possesses agency and an innate existential value and worth that is equal to every other human being. Or, in the words of Euclid’s first axiom: “Things that are equal to the same things are equal to each other.” This universal respect for *every* human mind, heart, and spirit—including each individual’s agency—is a fundamental loadstar to which all reasonable and fair human beings should be able to collectively “hitch [their] wagon” (Emerson, 1888: 29). Thus, our greatest hope for character education in America and throughout Western Civilization is to support Hall’s (1979) “Middle Way,” and embrace Aristotle’s (2002) “Golden Mean” by eschewing extremes, bridging gaps, and humbly meeting in the middle—for the benefit of our children and our children’s children. It is in a good-faith effort to *do* something substantive about this issue—rather than merely muse upon it intellectually, converse about it textually, or pontificate about it on the airwaves or social media—that we introduce a concrete and practical pedagogical proposition (solution).

3. Results

The Self-Action Leadership (SAL) THEORY (Jensen, Neck, and Beaulieu, 2015), MODEL (Jensen, Beaulieu, and Neck, 2018) and PEDAGOGY (Jensen, Neck and Beaulieu, 2018) published previously are rooted in self-leadership (S-L) (Neck, Manz and Houghton, 2017) theory and action research (AR) (Quigley and Kuhne, 1997) theory. Since the SAL framework for educational balance in the twenty-first century—the *new framework introduced in this paper*—is an outgrowth of the SAL theory, model, and pedagogy previously published, it bears briefly reviewing S-L theory and AR theory as a preface to introducing a new SAL-oriented model.

3.1. Self-Leadership and Action Research Reviewed and Synthesized into Self-Action Leadership

The power and influence of self-leadership theory (Neck, Manz and Houghton, 2017) lies, in part, in its capacity to spawn derivative and hybrid theories and models with similar potential to positively influence individuals and organizations to “perform in desirable ways” (Houghton and Neck, 2002: 672) and otherwise get results through “the use of specific sets of behavioral and cognitive strategies” (Neck and Houghton, 2006: 270). Recently, such a THEORY (Jensen, Neck and Beaulieu, 2015) MODEL (Jensen, Beaulieu and Neck, 2018) and PEDAGOGY (Jensen, Neck and Beaulieu, 2018) were introduced into academe. This new construct is called Self-Action Leadership (Jensen, 2019a, 2019b), or just SAL for short. SAL is a derivative of self-leadership (S-L) theory (Neck, Manz, and Houghton, 2017) and action research (AR) theory (Reason and Bradbury-Huang, 2008), making it a derivative hybrid of two related, but distinct theories.

Thematically speaking, SAL theory is congruous to both S-L theory (Neck, Manz and Houghton, 2017) and AR theory (Quigley and Kuhne, 1997), and as a hybrid-derivative of both, strategically incorporates key components of each. SAL mirrors S-L in its focus on the leadership of self to get results. It reflects AR in its commitment to a four-step, cyclical process (Quigley and Kuhne, 1997) of personal problem solving.

SAL distinguishes itself from AR in its focus on the individual. Whereas AR initiatives typically occur in group or organizational environments—and especially in pedagogical settings—SAL, or more specifically (in this case) SAR (Self-Action Research), focuses on the individual. This appropriation of AR is appropriate since, as Beaulieu (2013) has asserted, AR does not always have to be “accomplished through a collaborative process” (Beaulieu, 2013: 29). It can also be conducted “alone as an independent process” (Beaulieu, 2013: 29). Jensen, Neck, and Beaulieu (2015) define Self-Action Research, or SAR, as “Action Research applied by, to, and for the self to gain self-awareness, aid self-improvement, and solve personal problems” (Beaulieu, 2013: 29: 22). The SAL THEORY (Jensen, Neck and Beaulieu, 2015) and MODEL (Jensen, Beaulieu and Neck, 2018) provide a comprehensive roadmap whereby individuals can, over time, achieve a positive and productive upward spiral of Existential Growth, which is defined as: “the growth, progress, and maturation of one’s holistic potential” (Jensen, 2019a: 4), or more specifically as: “the holistic

(spiritual, physical, mental, emotional, social, ... moral, [financial, and constitutional]) growth of personal character, capacity, and integrity” (Jensen, Neck and Beaulieu, 2015: 15).

SAL distinguishes itself from S-L in a variety of ways. First, its theory and model are distinct (from S-L), concrete (specific), and original constructs rooted in atmospheric, astronomical, and construction science and metaphor. Secondly, SAL is a conscience-centric construct that explicitly delineates a difference between “right” and “wrong” in a general, moral sense. While S-L theory suggests this point by discouraging its practitioners from using S-L cognitive and behavioral strategies to pursue ethically unpalatable or dangerous moral behavior, the theory itself does not make the point explicit (Neck and Manz, 2010). SAL, on the other hand, “draws a moral line in the sand by mandating that those practicing its precepts pursue ends that contribute to the long-term well being of self *and* all others whom one’s thoughts, speech, and actions may impact” (Jensen, Neck and Beaulieu, 2015: 15).

The following question naturally arises from this moral mandate: “*WHO* draws the moral line in the sand?” In other words, *who* gets to *be* the arbiter of what is and is not moral? The answer to this question is, in part, found in the description of the “moral line in the sand” itself, which explains that “those practicing [SAL] pursue ends that contribute to the long-term well being of self *and* others” (Jensen, Neck and Beaulieu, 2015: 15). Jensen (2019a) sheds further light on this issue by introducing two additional theoretical constructs. The first postures “Truth” as the nexus of a Venn diagram where empiricism (science/logic), historicism (past experience) and visceralism (conscience) harmoniously converge. Jensen (2019a) refers to his second and related construct as a self-action leader’s “Command Center” (Jensen, 2019a: 318). The aim of a SAL Command Center is to collectively utilize four (4) different elements of one’s human nature (spiritual/visceral, cognitive, social, and emotional) in a balanced way to objectively arrive at correct moral decisions. In the practical application of one’s Command Center, an individual is encouraged to seek guidance continually from one’s conscience (not to be confused with religious dogma or cultural tradition), which serves as a metaphysical “North Star” in decision-making exercises.

Conscience is the indispensable Self-Action Leadership cement that adheres and galvanizes self-leadership

characteristics such as vision, discipline, and passion into structures and achievements that last. Without the aid of conscience, self-leaders gamble on their future results – even if they possess ample quantities of vision, discipline, and passion. [But] add the epoxy of conscience to the right mix of vision, discipline, and passion, and, barring some unforeseen tragic accident, injury, or illness that precludes your efforts moving forward, lasting success is virtually guaranteed” (Jensen, Neck and Beaulieu: 15).⁷

3.2. Questing After Balance: The Self-Action Leadership Educational Framework

Self-Action Leadership (capitalized to differentiate it from its forerunner, self-leadership), or just SAL for short, is the name of a new THEORY (Jensen, Neck, and Beaulieu, 2015), MODEL (Jensen, Beaulieu, and Neck, 2018) and PEDAGOGY (Jensen, Neck, and Beaulieu, 2018) recently introduced into academe. SAL comes conveniently packaged for the home, classroom, or workplace in a scholarly (yet still highly readable) two-volume textbook (Jensen, 2019a, 2019b) spanning 1,300 pages filled with over 800 external citations, many of which come from peer-reviewed academic journals. This “ready-for-delivery” pre-packaged character education manual is secular in nature, and thus appeals to liberal *soft-liners* (Hall, 1979) by upholding the separation of church and state in public school character education initiatives. On the other hand, it appeals to conservative *hard-liners* (Hall, 1979) by insisting that certain metaphysical absolutes *do* and *must* exist in the moral realm for the same reason that certain physical absolutes *do* and *must* exist in the scientific realm. For without an absolute, there is no basis of reality upon which to judge deviations from the absolute. It further holds that said absolutes are self-evident due to the endless anecdotal proofs that exist in the form of predictable consequences which follow given human actions and habits *over time*. Lastly, it seeks to balance out the hard-line Aristotelian quest after the concrete development of specific virtues with a soft-line Platonic/Socratic quest after theoretical and process-oriented dialoguing processes. It accomplishes this through defining, explicating, and otherwise coaching students to develop specific, universal, and self-leadership-oriented virtues (such as: integrity, self-awareness, humility, self-discipline, diligence, consistence, persistence, *etc.*)—HARD-LINE APPROACH—while concurrently providing extensive journal prompts/questions extant throughout the texts

⁷ See also: Covey, 2004: chapter 5.

which invite and encourage students to think deeply about and critically discuss the material in both an objective (scientific) and subjective (personal) sense in a never-ending attempt to introspectively discover its full meaning across an endless array of possible real-life situations and circumstances—SOFT LINE APPROACH.

In short, SAL provides a theoretical and pedagogical *BALANCE* between far-right and far-left ideological extremes in an effort to reunite Americans (and other global citizens) of all racial, cultural, political, economic, and religious backgrounds on those shared values emblazoned in the United States' Declaration of Independence and Constitution; namely: *Life, Liberty* (agency), *Equality, Natural Law, Human Rights, Civil Liberties*, and *the Pursuit of Happiness*. This comprehensive curriculum can be used in schools, organizations, homes, and nations everywhere in an effort to spawn greater educational balance, political unity, and cultural harmony *everywhere*. Rather than sowing discord, violence, and unrest by gravitating toward extremes, the SAL THEORY (Jensen, Neck and Beaulieu, 2015), MODEL (Jensen, Beaulieu and Neck, 2018) and PEDAGOGY (Jensen, Neck and Beaulieu, 2018) establishes a positive, creative, and productive middle ground represented by an Aristotelian *Golden*

Mean in an attempt to generate personal progress and growth in pursuit of collective cooperation, synergy, unity, and peace.

The goal of the SAL Theory, Model, Pedagogy, and Textbooks is not to create moralizing drones, or worse (right-wing terrorists) in the image of extreme and unyielding hard-liners. Nor is it to spawn anarchic “ne'er-do-wells,” or worse (left-wing terrorists) who seek to undermine the very structures of civilization. Nor is it to propagate any more “mainstream” partisans and pundits who, while refraining from violence, still contribute to the derisive and divisive rhetoric and tone that has sown so much disagreement, discord, and discontent throughout the United States and beyond in recent years and decades. Rather, it is to develop high functioning student-scholars and professional practitioners who are well equipped to become productive agents of positive change *because* they are independent, free-thinking, and creative on the one hand (*soft-liners*), yet concurrently disciplined, courageous, hard-working, and honest (*hard-liners*) on the other. In the process, students and professionals everywhere who participate in SAL education, training, and mentoring will come to value the absolute necessity of acceding certain absolutes, while remaining completely free to pursue their own unique

A Theoretical Framework for Educational Balance in the 21st Century

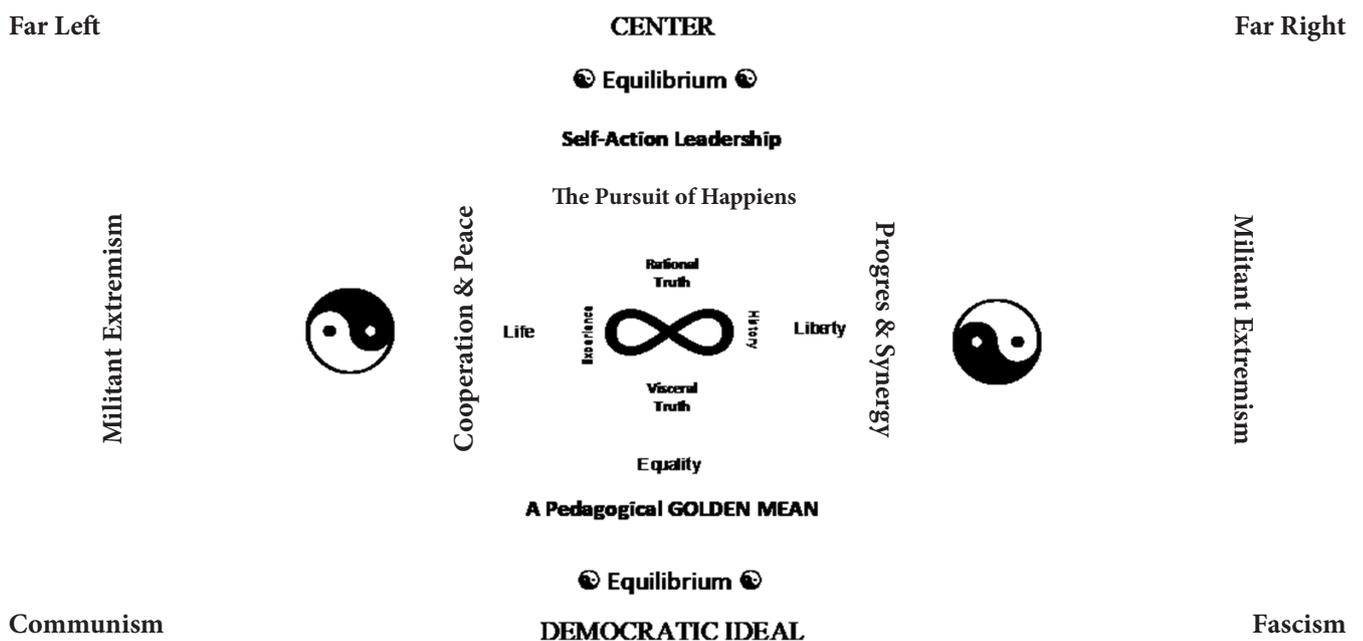


Figure 1. The Self-Action Leadership theoretical framework for pedagogical balance

voice, vision, mission, and passion in life. Equipped with an undeviating and intractable knowledge of the physical fundamentals of science and success, they will thus be empowered to pursue that cornucopia of physical and meta-physical opportunities available only to those who are *both* intellectually grounded in natural law and free to pursue one's own pathway within a fundamental framework governed by those laws.

4. Conclusions

4.1. A Peaceful Revolution for Pedagogical Change

The most penetrating question of all never ceases to beg: what of the children? Amidst the bonanza of bloviations on both (all) sides, do the students we all *claim* to want to educate, assist, mentor, and support get lost in the shuffle? Do the interests of the students themselves get sacrificed on the altar of endless scholarly dicking and media punditry over what is in the best interest of those children (and the sometimes selfish interest of the adults who shepherd them)? To any clear-eyed educator, the answer to these questions is obvious. The time has come to end the division and fractures and start unifying around a mutual dedication to the well-being of the children. To accomplish this, an educational revolution must occur. Not a violent revolution designed to coerce educators to think and feel a certain way against their will; but a peaceful revolution borne of logic, persuasion, common sense, and unfeigned compassion and tolerance for each other. As the authors of this movement, we have no illusions regarding the difficulty of the task that lies before us. It has taken 70 years to arrive at the current crisis. Anyone who believes its reversal will take any less than 15-20 years is naïve. Nonetheless, we remain committed to our task, and like the courageous signers of the Declaration of Independence, pledge ourselves wholeheartedly to the work, publicly profess our willingness to humbly submit ourselves to the task that lies before us, and in the process, dedicate our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honors upon the altar of our children's future by focusing more honestly, fully, and authentically on their education.

4.2. Ongoing Dilemmas and Future Research

One of the challenges that character education faces today—and will continue to face in the future—is properly equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills they need to be effective purveyors of character education. Many teachers do not receive training in this area unless they specifically attend character education conferences,

or obtain it through local grass roots program initiatives. Moreover, there are many different opinions on how teachers should be prepared to teach character education—much like there are many different opinions on how to teach character education to students (Schwartz, 2008). This is just one of many differences of opinions that will have to be effectively and moderately bridged in coming years and decades if character education is to effectively meet the needs of students and parents. Our recommendation is for leaders and administrators everywhere to embrace the balanced pedagogical approach championed in this article by providing comprehensive (and ongoing) Self-Action Leadership training to teachers *prior* to their providing the same instruction to students.

4.3. A Call for Courage and Compassion

Practically speaking, how will we go from where we are to where we are capable of going with regards to character education? How can an educational administrator like Alan Pardeon, Dean of the State University of New York in Potsdam, rectify the reality facing educators in his state, who harbor the following legitimate concerns about the subject?

“A lot of teachers are scared of this area. They're afraid of taking on vested interest groups. They worry about the legal aspects. Can somebody take them to court if they don't like the way the teacher is teaching values? Whose values should they teach? And where does God come in? Will you have some people on your neck if you mention God and other people on your neck if you don't?” (Lickona, 1991: 37).

The answer to this question is *simple* in theory, but quite *difficult* in practice. The answer is to continually commit to the personal and interpersonal exercise of COURAGE combined with COMPASSION and TOLERANCE. In the end, the only thing that will bring about real change is for real leaders, administrators, and educators to step up and take a stand in promotion of balanced forms of character education curriculums—like Self-Action Leadership—while concurrently prioritizing the absolute importance of consistently treating every student with dignity, respect, and kindness, while preserving each student's agency all along the way. All it will really take is a little (and in some cases, a *lot* of) courage from individual leaders and administrators who possess the power and influence to champion this new approach. Over time, as more persons with power come on board, it will become progressively easier and educationally en vogue until, at some future point, there may actually be positive cultural pressure to *not get left behind*

in what we predict is destined to become *the* most prominent and promising educational development of the first half of the twentieth century—a bona fide disruptive innovation (Christensen, Horn and Johnson, 2015) in the classrooms of the West, and beyond.

Do YOU possess the power to begin making this change in your nation, state, organization, school, or home? If so, we invite you to join us in making balanced character education programs pedagogically popular in your home, classroom, school, district, organization, state, or nation. And if you are not currently in possession of the formal power to do so, we invite you to contact and otherwise creatively lobby those who *are* in an effort to persuade them to act on your behalf. Together we can change education in America. And in the process, we can change America itself (and the world-at-large)—into a better, brighter, and bolder example of goodness, virtue, positivity, progress, prosperity, and peace. There is no greater mission than the quest to educate our youth in those principles and practices that will empower them to live safe, free, prosperous, and peaceful lives of productive contribution to their families, communities, organizations, states, and nations. Join us, and together we will change the nation and world and turn it into the incredible planet it is capable of becoming by the year 2050—and beyond.

And what exactly are we capable of becoming by the year 2050? Covey (2004) points out that the Industrial Revolution brought about an increase in human productivity (production) by a factor of 50 times over the Agrarian Age that preceded it. Covey then boldly stated his conviction that the Information Age has the potential to increase human productivity *another* 50 times over gains made in the Industrial Age. At first glance, this may seem far-fetched—just as a similar prediction by an earlier industrialist might have *seemed* to someone still steeped in an Agrarian Age paradigm. Nevertheless, we believe Covey was on to

something in making such a bold prediction. Aside from the technical, mechanical, communication, and travel wonders unfolding in the Information Age, we believe that a significant variable determining the prescience (or lack thereof) of Covey's prediction will hinge upon the *quality* of individual citizens who operate within our new Information Age. And the quality of individual citizens will depend largely upon the quality of the education—and more particularly the character education—they receive.

One hundred and ten (110) years ago, in his famous “Citizenship in a Republic” speech delivered at the Sorbonne in Paris, Theodore Roosevelt stated that in a republic, the “Quality of the Individual is Supreme.” We agree. However, quality individuals are not merely *born*; they must be *made* through education, habituation, dialogue, and other intellectual and behavioral refinement and polishing processes. And such habituation cannot be coerced; it must occur willingly. As such, a true and balanced character education star is needed to which we as individuals and organizations can collectively “hitch our wagon” (Emerson, 1888: 29). Perhaps Self-Action Leadership is that STAR. We invite you to carefully investigate for yourself the legitimacy (or lack thereof) of its candidacy for just such a position. If, after being weighed, measured, and tested it turns out to be worthy of said post, we suggest it can indeed influence the 50-times productivity increase predicted by Covey. And the result will be a movement with the potential of influencing human progress and affairs on par with the Italian Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution, and the Information Age.

Perhaps the suggestion of such a profound and transformative shift sounds naïve and hyperbolic, to say the very least. Maybe we *are*; and maybe it *is*. But we'll never know if we don't try. As Steve Jobs once quipped: “The people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are [usually] the ones who do.”

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