

Chapter 4

Honorable Mismatch: Non-Toleration and Teen Developmental Capabilities

Kelly Jordan

American Military University of American Public University System, USA

ABSTRACT

The non-toleration requirement of military school honor codes requiring cadets to report their peers for honor violations is developmentally inappropriate for adolescents in terms of the state of their brain development and emotional maturity because it makes neurological and psychological demands on teens attending military prep schools—many not of their own choosing—that are beyond their developmental and emotional capabilities in several areas. This requirement extends beyond the ken of either the scope of the mission of military prep schools or the neurological and psychological developmental abilities of the adolescent students attending them. Research also shows that it is largely ineffective in reducing honor offenses. To enhance the effectiveness, schools can modify the self-policing aspect by replacing the non-toleration requirement with something more developmentally appropriate while still meaningful, adopt an honor continuum that allows for growth, and implement an honor development approach that contains positive reinforcement and encourages continuous development.

INTRODUCTION

“I will not lie, cheat, steal, or tolerate those who do.” Traditional Military School Honor Code

Writing in an ethical treatise for his son in Greece thousands of years ago, Aristotle advised him that a good character is developed beginning one's early youth by the repetition of many small acts that form habits. Expanding on the notion that one becomes virtuous by the practice of virtue, Aristotle argues that a good character is the foundation of honor in both senses of the word – a good reputation and a proclivity for taking the right actions for the right reasons – which feed off one another. (Aristotle, 1103a24 -1103b21) While decidedly out of fashion in today's parlance and pedagogy, Aristotle's notion

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-6636-7.ch004

Honorable Mismatch

regarding honor is alive and well in some parts of present-day American education, as both the term and notion of honor are still widely apparent in honor codes and honor systems used in portions of the country's educational system.

Standing in stark contrast to the contemporary and more relativistic manner of intentional character development, honor systems use a didactic structure of moral absolutes to focus on emphasizing and inculcating an overall sense of honor – comprised of the attributes of truthfulness, honesty, and trustworthiness – into students. The heart of honor systems are honor codes, which are explicit statements of specific behaviors prohibited within an honor system. Prohibitions against lying, cheating, and stealing are almost universally included, intending to motivate students to avoid engaging in such action so that by repetition, they will manifest habitual behaviors of taking the right actions for the (morally) right reasons. Students are also elected to sit in judgment of their peers accused of violating an institution's honor code as a way of demonstrating ownership of it. Aristotle would not only recognize but also heartily approve of such an approach.

Honor codes and honor systems are used widely in American military schools. Since they are effective ways of appealing to the better nature of students as a foundation of discipline and as a gateway into a community of trust on campus, honor codes are institutionally fitting for schools using a military model of education. The effectiveness of some aspect of these systems in this regard indicate that they have much intrinsic value for the institutions within which they operate because the more mature students are equipped, developmentally and emotionally, to benefit from their demands.

The existing honor systems in American military prep schools arose in the second and third decades of the 20th century and are based largely on the models adopted by military colleges around the same time. Comprised of honor codes, behavioral requirements, and accountability measures, the noble intent for these honor systems is to serve as frameworks for developing character and instilling institutional values in students. Adolescents can understand and adhere to the strictures against lying, cheating, and stealing, and they can also learn to sit in judgment of their peers as elected honor representatives.

For the previous 50 years, however, many/most military school honor codes have adopted a so-called "non-toleration requirement" that forbids cadets from tolerating others who violate such strictures. The formal incorporation of the non-toleration requirement was quite significant in that it made a failure to report an honor violation committed by another/others an honor violation in its own right, transforming what had been an informally accepted practice into a prescribed requirement punishable by dismissal (in some cases).

The non-toleration requirement creates a challenging Manichean dynamic between supporting the ideals of an institution and also demonstrating loyalty to one's peers. Students who are more mature and voluntarily attending military colleges struggle with the demands of this requirement, particularly in practice, and the effectiveness of it illustrates the challenges the experience with it. Without conducting a proper assessment of its developmental appropriateness for adolescents, many military prep schools adopted the non-toleration requirement somewhat reflexively in an attempt to remain congruent with West Point in this important area.

While the idea of setting a very high bar for moral/ethical development is a desirable goal in theory for both secondary and higher-education cadets, the honor codes and systems used to do so must be structured so that they are developmentally accessible and bring out the best in the students to which they apply. In practice, several aspects of the honor codes and systems as currently structured in American military prep schools do not meet this standard, meaning that they are not structured appropriately and

27 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/honorable-mismatch/272918

Related Content

Writing Ourselves Into Existence

(2025). *Narratives of Pedagogical Development and Navigation of Educational Contexts* (pp. 205-210).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/writing-ourselves-into-existence/383790

Ethics by the Book for Now and Always: Educating Future Air Force Officers on Issues of Ethics and Law

Ioanna K. Lekea (2021). *Handbook of Research on Character and Leadership Development in Military Schools* (pp. 93-115).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/ethics-by-the-book-for-now-and-always/272919

Blooming Where We Land: HBCU Writing Programs and Literary Legacies

DuEwa M. Frazier (2022). *Contributions of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the 21st Century* (pp. 130-149).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/blooming-where-we-land/309366

Guidelines for Effective Implementation of the Developing Strategic Learners Writing Approach: The Role of Principals on Sustainable Reform

Zoi A. Traga Philippakos, Ashley Voggtand Linda Grace (2023). *Instructional Leadership Efforts and Evidence-Based Practices to Improve Writing Instruction* (pp. 78-103).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/guidelines-for-effective-implementation-of-the-developing-strategic-learners-writing-approach/332258

Transforming Assessment in Response to COVID-19

T. Dhurumraj, Sam Mabune Ramailaand Ferhana Raban (2021). *Investigating the Roles of School Management Teams in Curriculum Delivery* (pp. 246-265).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/transforming-assessment-in-response-to-covid-19/285762