



EDITORIAL

Character Beyond Competition

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Contemporary educational environments are increasingly influenced by cultures of visibility, measurement, comparison, and performance. Across formal and nonformal educational settings, success is often communicated through rankings, awards, certifications, and other publicly recognizable indicators of achievement. Such developments reflect broader societal tendencies to privilege outcomes that are visible, measurable, and comparable. While these mechanisms may enhance accountability and motivate performance, they also raise important questions about whether educational institutions continue to prioritize the deeper developmental purposes for which they were originally established. Organizations devoted to youth development are particularly vulnerable to this tension because many of their most important outcomes: including character formation, leadership growth, citizenship, service orientation, and moral responsibility, are inherently difficult to quantify and often unfold gradually over time.

Scouting provides a particularly revealing context through which to examine these challenges. Historically conceived as a character-centered form of nonformal education, scouting has sought to cultivate responsible citizens through experiential learning, collective participation, service, leadership, and progressive self-improvement. Yet contemporary scouting increasingly operates within environments where competitive achievement, public recognition, and visible accomplishment serve as prominent indicators of success. The articles assembled in this issue collectively investigate the implications of this transformation. Although each contribution approaches the topic from a distinct theoretical perspective, all converge on a central concern: how can scouting preserve its developmental mission when competitive success increasingly shapes organizational priorities, participant motivations, and educational evaluation?

Educational Purpose and the Risk of Drift

One of the most significant contributions of this issue is its examination of how educational organizations may gradually experience mission transformation under conditions of institutional pressure. The concept of Scouting Educational Drift provides a powerful framework for understanding how competitive achievement can evolve from an educational instrument into a dominant criterion of success. Building upon institutional theory and mission drift scholarship, this perspective demonstrates that educational change often occurs not through deliberate abandonment of values but through incremental adaptations that appear reasonable when considered individually yet collectively reshape organizational priorities.

This argument resonates strongly with broader organizational scholarship. Research has long demonstrated that organizations frequently respond to external expectations by privileging indicators that confer legitimacy and visibility (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Suchman, 1995). In educational contexts, this tendency may create conditions under which measurable accomplishments become proxies for educational quality. The issue's contributions suggest that scouting is not immune to these dynamics. Competitive achievements provide visible evidence of excellence, whereas character development, civic responsibility, and moral growth are more difficult to communicate to external stakeholders. Consequently, organizations may gradually shift resources, attention, and recognition systems toward activities that generate visible accomplishments.

The implications extend beyond organizational strategy. When achievement indicators become dominant symbols of success, participants themselves may internalize altered definitions of educational accomplishment. Such processes raise important concerns regarding the long-term sustainability of character-centered educational missions. The contributions in this issue therefore encourage scholars to view mission preservation not as a static condition but as an ongoing organizational challenge requiring deliberate attention to educational purpose.

Competition as Development or Dominance

A second major theme emerging across the issue concerns the educational meaning of competition itself. Existing scholarship often treats competition as either beneficial or harmful, producing polarized debates that inadequately capture its complexity. The Competition Orientation Framework advances this discussion by proposing that the developmental consequences of competition depend less on competitive structures than on the orientations through which competition is interpreted and experienced.

Drawing upon Achievement Goal Theory (Ames, 1992; Elliot & McGregor, 2001), the framework distinguishes between Developmental Competition and Dominance Competition. Developmental Competition emphasizes learning, improvement, leadership, cooperation, and character growth. Dominance Competition, by contrast, prioritizes superiority, status acquisition, social comparison, and external recognition. This distinction is theoretically important because it shifts attention from competition as an activity to competition as a meaning system.

The broader contributions in this issue reinforce this perspective. Rather than rejecting competition outright, the articles collectively suggest that competitive activities can support youth development when embedded within mastery-oriented climates that emphasize learning, effort, and collective growth. Such arguments align with contemporary research demonstrating that mastery-oriented environments foster deeper engagement, resilience, and intrinsic motivation (Senko et al., 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2020). However, when competitive success becomes the primary purpose of participation, educational objectives may become subordinated to achievement-oriented concerns.

The issue therefore invites a reconceptualization of competition within scouting. The critical question is not whether competition should exist but whether it remains subordinate to educational purposes. This distinction represents one of the collection's most important theoretical contributions because it offers a framework through which organizations can preserve developmental integrity while continuing to utilize competitive activities.

Brotherhood, Identity, and Collective Development

A third intellectual stream within this issue redirects attention from individual achievement toward collective relational outcomes. Contemporary youth development scholarship has increasingly recognized belonging, social connectedness, and identity formation as critical developmental resources (Allen et al., 2018; Lerner et al., 2021). Yet discussions of scouting

often emphasize leadership, competence, and achievement while paying comparatively little attention to the relational foundations that sustain these outcomes.

The concept of Brotherhood Capital addresses this limitation by reconceptualizing brotherhood as a collective relational asset generated through shared identity, mutual trust, collective responsibility, and commitment to common values. Drawing upon Social Identity Theory and Identity Leadership Theory, the framework demonstrates how competitive intensity may influence social comparison processes, identity fragmentation, and collective cohesion.

This perspective offers an important corrective to achievement-centered approaches to youth development. Educational communities do not simply produce individual competencies; they also generate social environments that shape how individuals understand themselves and relate to others. Strong collective identities foster trust, cooperation, resilience, and commitment to shared goals. Conversely, environments dominated by comparison and rivalry may weaken the social foundations upon which developmental experiences depend.

The emphasis on brotherhood also expands contemporary understandings of educational success. Rather than viewing developmental outcomes exclusively through individual achievement, the issue encourages scholars to recognize collective relational assets as educational achievements in their own right. Such an approach aligns with emerging scholarship emphasizing belonging and social integration as central components of thriving educational communities.

Reimagining Success Through Character and Self-Development

Perhaps the most integrative theme emerging from this collection concerns the need to rethink how success itself is defined and evaluated. Several contributions challenge the assumption that educational accomplishment should be measured primarily through comparative performance or visible achievement.

The concept of Self-Referenced Development proposes an alternative developmental logic in which individuals evaluate progress relative to their own previous levels of competence, leadership, character, and contribution rather than through interpersonal comparison. Rooted in Self-Determination Theory and Positive Youth Development, this perspective reframes educational success as developmental movement rather than competitive superiority. Such an approach aligns closely with scouting's historical emphasis on continuous personal growth and self-improvement.

Complementing this perspective, the Character Achievement Framework advances a multidimensional conception of achievement encompassing integrity, responsibility, service, leadership, brotherhood, and self-development. By repositioning character formation as the central indicator of educational success, the framework challenges dominant assessment paradigms that privilege medals, rankings, and competitive outcomes.

Together, these contributions provide a compelling critique of performance-centered educational cultures. They suggest that developmental success is often expressed through sustained patterns of growth, contribution, and moral commitment rather than through isolated moments of competitive accomplishment. Such arguments resonate strongly with contemporary character education scholarship, which emphasizes flourishing, virtue development, and long-term personal growth as fundamental educational outcomes (Berkowitz, 2022; VanderWeele, 2022).

Importantly, these frameworks do not reject excellence. Rather, they redefine excellence in developmental terms. Achievement becomes meaningful not because it establishes superiority over others but because it reflects increasing capacity for responsibility, service, leadership, and contribution.

Understanding the Scouting Paradox

The final contribution to this issue provides a broader synthesis through the concept of the Scouting Paradox. This framework addresses a fundamental question underlying all the articles: what happens when competitive success and educational success diverge?

The Scouting Paradox Framework introduces the notion of Educational Displacement, describing a process through which educational objectives gradually become subordinated to competitive priorities. Drawing upon Achievement Goal Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Experiential Learning Theory, and Positive Youth Development, the model explains how increasing competition pressure may trigger motivational climate shifts that ultimately constrain opportunities for character formation, leadership development, cooperation, and service learning.

The significance of this framework lies in its ability to integrate the issue's diverse contributions into a coherent explanatory narrative. Educational drift, dominance-oriented competition, weakened brotherhood, excessive social comparison, and narrow achievement metrics may all be understood as manifestations of a broader process through which educational means become mistaken for educational ends. The paradox emerges when organizations become increasingly successful according to competitive indicators while simultaneously becoming less successful according to their foundational educational purposes.

Reclaiming the Meaning of Educational Success

Taken together, the articles in this issue challenge scholars and practitioners to reconsider the meaning of success within scouting and other character-centered educational organizations. Their collective contribution lies not in rejecting competition but in demonstrating the conditions under which competition either supports or undermines developmental purposes. Across diverse theoretical traditions, a common message emerges: educational excellence cannot be reduced to visibility, rankings, trophies, or comparative superiority. Rather, it is reflected in the cultivation of character, the strengthening of brotherhood, the preservation of educational mission, and the continuous development of young people as capable contributors to society.

At a time when educational institutions increasingly operate within cultures of performance and comparison, the frameworks presented in this issue offer a valuable intellectual foundation for reimagining developmental success. They remind us that the most meaningful achievements are often those least visible to public recognition: integrity strengthened through experience, leadership exercised in service to others, belonging forged through shared identity, and personal growth measured against one's own evolving potential. In reaffirming these principles, the contributions collectively advance a vision of scouting education in which character remains not merely an outcome of participation, but its enduring purpose.

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