SMA's Book Club Discussion Guide

Ender's Game

(July - October 2016)

This discussion guide is intended to support SMA Dailey's Book Club. The Book Club is designed to provide junior leaders guided opportunities to engage with their Soldiers on Army Profession concepts by discussing literature featuring subject matter across many genres. For that reason, it falls in the Not in My Squad toolbox. The SMA will schedule book club discussions into his troop visits, allowing for a common conversation about leadership and the Army Profession among the enlisted force.

The guide is separated into several topic areas with suggested questions and supporting information to facilitate a small group discussion on the topic. The page numbers referred to throughout this guide are based on the Second Tor Teen Edition of the book, dated 2013; page numbers will be different for different editions of the book, but chapter references should be the same regardless of edition.

Ender's Game has received some of the highest honors for science fiction writing. First published by Orson Scott Card in 1985, *Ender's Game* is an endearing novel with widespread appeal and has been used as a teaching tool in both military academies and universities. *Ender's Game* offers lessons in a wide range of leadership and ethical topics.

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Leading a Facilitated Discussion

Leaders are responsible for training their Soldiers to high levels of competence, developing their character, and inspiring commitment to our shared identity as trusted Army professionals. An effective method for professional development is the reading and facilitated discussion of stories in a small group setting. In this case, the story is a work of fiction, "Ender's Game." The novel presents a group of participants with problems, dilemmas, and conflicts to identify and discuss. By sharing ideas, values, and principles related to the story, you can begin to assess your subordinates' understanding of professional concepts and develop their character, competence, and commitment.

This discussion guide provides questions by topic area along with amplifying information to support discussion. There are numerous techniques you can use to facilitate the discussion. You should be the source of questions. Ask both general and direct questions. Actively listen, choose speakers, follow up you questions with pertinent feedback on answers, challenge the assumptions of participants to bring out alternative viewpoints, and sustain the discussion. It is vital to guide the conversation and ask the right question at the right time, not forcing the questions or treating them as a checklist. Try to shape the conversation without allowing your personal opinion or bias to impact the outcome or stifle discussion of alternative viewpoints. You can concentrate on one topic area of interest by guiding the discussion or allow the participants to take the discussion into numerous topic areas.

Some recommended best practices include:

- Prepare in advance; decide how you will organize and guide the discussion, but be prepared to go in other directions depending on the flow of the discussion
- Arrange the classroom so everyone can see the face of the other persons
- Start with open-ended questions; minimize the use of yes/no questions
- Call on different people; get everyone involved in the discussion
- Actively listen in order to connect one participant's ideas with another
- Paraphrase; check your understanding and the participants
- Redirect inaccurate or incorrect statements to the class for correction
- Have the participant elaborate to explain why they believe something to be true
- Encourage participants to back up their statements with facts from the book
- Keep the discussion going without interjecting yourself as the authority

The goal is to assist your Soldiers and Civilians to become Army professionals who think critically, creatively, and ethically about what they do. For more information and example videos on facilitating discussions, visit the CAPE website at: http://cape.army.mil/facilitator.php

Topic: The Army Ethic to include Army Values

The Army Ethic is the heart of the Army and the inspiration for our shared professional identity as trusted Army professionals. It motivates our conduct and binds us together in common moral purpose. (Reference ADRP 1, The Army Profession, see Figure 2-4).

1. Do you see evidence in the book of a shared ethic or moral principles? Explain.

While there are examples of individuals exercising moral principles, there does not appear to be a shared ethic. In fact, there appears to be a shared culture of "win at all costs." You can expand the conversation to compare and contrast the environment and culture in the book with that of the United States Army subject to time available.

2. When Ender is transferred to Rat Army, his new commander (Rose de Nose) sets an expectation that "winning is more important than anything." (Ch 8, p. 135) Do you agree with this statement? Does winning at all costs justify ignoring moral principles and values? Why or why not?

You will hopefully get answers aligned with the Army Ethic: it is important to accomplish the mission, in the right way (right = ethical, effective, and efficient). However, some may provide a different perspective because the human race is presented with an existential threat by the "buggers." This logically leads to the follow on question #3.

3. The human race is presented with an existential threat from the "buggers," or at least they believe this to be true. In this dire situation, do the ends justify the means?

Human life is threatened by the anticipation of war with the "buggers," a technologically advanced, insect-like species that has previously conducted two invasions against humanity and threatened to annihilate the Earth. Population control on Earth is strictly enforced. People do not have freedom to practice religion. There is extensive government spying into the private lives of young children. The International Fleet asks children to leave their parents and serve as soldiers, just as they are entering school. Some will argue that when your very existence is at stake, you must take any means necessary to preserve the human race. Others will argue, in hindsight, diplomacy might have worked and that all life, not just human, is worthy of respect. In the story, humans resorted to fairly extreme measures that would not be acceptable under normal circumstances: forcing children into warfare; lying to the children about simulation versus actual combat; and xenocide.

4. After his fight with Bonzo Madrid, commander of Salamander Army, Ender tells Bean that Bonzo "fought with honor" whereas he [Ender] "fought to win." (Ch 12, p. 261) Who fought the right way? As a Soldier, do you ever want a fair fight with the enemy?

This question will probably get diverse answers. Bonzo fought with honor because he kept it one on one. This is a fight, in a school environment, between peers. Ender, similar to his experience as a younger child fighting Stinson, felt the anger of his opponent was such that he could be killed. He also knew he was undersized and understrength against his opponent. He needed to end it quickly and decisively. When you ask about a soldier and an enemy, it is interesting how you will get much more agreement that we want to overwhelm the enemy with advantages in capability and capacity. It draws interesting parallels to the existential threat question above.

5. Bonzo is the second child Ender killed (Stinson Ch 1, p. 38), yet the adults keep this information from him. Even after Ender shares his suspicions and nightmares with him, Mazer continues to delude him, telling Ender that it was just a dream. (Ch 14, p. 329) Do you think it was right to not tell Ender the consequences of his actions? Why or why not?

Some will argue it was necessary to keep Ender focused on the mission. Others will cite it as a breach of integrity that showed a lack of confidence in Ender's resilience further eroding mutual trust in the end.

6. At the end of the book, Ender is mortified that he has committed xenocide. He finds a queen's cocoon and takes measures to establish a safe way to bring the alien species back. Why do you think Ender does this? Do you agree with his decision? Why or why not?

One of the moral principles of the Army Ethic is "in war and peace, we recognize the intrinsic dignity and worth of all people, treating them with respect." Ender was unaware that the simulations were real until he had destroyed the alien home world. He looked at this alien race as beings with intrinsic dignity and worthy of being saved. Ultimately, the adults lack the honesty and transparency to tell Ender that he is fighting a real war against the buggers, deluding Ender into thinking that he is playing against Mazer Rackham. Ender lives with the regret of making maneuvers that he never would have made if he had known that real lives were at stake, to include killing an entire alien species.

Topic: Character, Competence, and Commitment

Character, competence, and commitment are the certification criteria for trusted Army professionals as described in ADRP 1, *The Army Profession*. Army professionals who consistently demonstrate these criteria develop mutual trust within cohesive teams.

1. What positive examples of character, competence, and commitment are demonstrated within the book?

Character – Ender teaching his peers in free play despite risk; Ender rejecting Bonzo's orders to stop practicing in free play (Ch 7, p. 121); Dink Meeker's leadership by example in trying Ender's ideas despite the protest of others; Ender's candid communication with superiors.

Competence – Petra's marksmanship; Dink's leadership ability in developing Ender; Ender and many of his peer's development over time to be able to engage and defeat the "buggers" despite being vastly overwhelmed in numbers; Mazer Rackham's skill in understanding and defeating the enemy.

Commitment – Ender's commitment to training and the mission often at the cost of his emotional and physical health; Ender's caring for his subordinates, wise use of his team leaders, and trust building.

2. Who displays a conspicuous lack of character, competence, or commitment? What are the impacts?

Character – Ender's brother, Peter, seems to have poor character. He is extremely competent and committed to his own vision, but his lack of character degrades the trust of his brother and sister, although his sister seems to harness Peter's strengths for some good later on in the book. Bonzo Madrid also would seem to display poor character resulting in a lack of trust and cohesion within Salamander Army.

Competence – Rose de Nose seemed to lack competence even describing himself as "the personnel officer who hired God" when referring to Dink Meeker (Ch 8, p. 135) and discouraging learning. The impact was only Dink's toon seemed to be effective during battle.

3. Can an ethical leader or follower maintain their character in an unethical environment? Give an example from the book to support your position.

It is very difficult according to most behavioral psychologists. Most of the children comply with the negative norms in the poor ethical environments within Salamander and Rat Armies. However, Ender does provide several examples of rising above the negative climate.

One example is how Ender responds to learned behavior. During the flight to the Battle School, COL Graff isolates Ender from his peers by calling him out as the "best in the launch." (Ch 4, p. 62-67) COL Graff and the battle school staff continue to intentionally isolate Ender to test his resilience and push his limits. This becomes a learned behavior for Ender. When Ender becomes an Army commander, he targets and isolates Bean in a similar fashion to how he was isolated by Graff. He then feels regret and resolves to take Bean under his wing. Ender is an authentic leader who develops his own values and stays true to them. He has the strength of character to break from past behaviors. He asks himself, "Why am I doing this? What does this have to do with being a good commander...? Just because they did it to me, why should I do it to him?" (Ch 10, p. 198-199 and 204-206) Often negative behavior is learned and perpetuated until it becomes an entrenched part of the culture. Ender shows us an alternate path is possible through strength of character.

Another example was how Ender stood up for his principles and appropriately pushed back at the order of leader Rose de Nose not to use his desk to complete homework, which Ender felt was unreasonable. Ender sized up the weakness of the leader, and knew that his superior was not trained in personal combat and wasn't capable of hurting Ender if he voiced his beliefs. Ender had the self-confidence to act on his principles, rather than stepping away from his values and going along with the status quo (Ch 8, p. 139).

Topic: Leadership

ADRP 6-22, Army Leadership, describes a leadership requirements model with attributes (what a leader is) and competencies (what a leader does) necessary for leaders to provide the purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission. (Figure 1-1)

1. What leadership competencies did Ender demonstrate to develop a cohesive team? Which of these competencies are most important to you as an Army leader?

Some examples include:

- Develops others. Ender gets to know his people and develops them. He doesn't simply bark orders or lead though fear and intimidation. Instead, he develops relationships and gains respect from his soldiers. They trust their commander as a friend and respect him as their leader. "Ender did not go to classes that afternoon. He lay on his bunk and wrote down his impressions of each of the boys in his army, the things he noticed right about them, the things that needed more work." (Ch 10, pg. 206)
- Builds trust. Good leaders know their people. Ender trusts his team. He gives them tasks that each member can fulfill well. He finds ways to connect with them. People feel valued and empowered when they know they are contributing to the overall success of the team. "They also knew that Ender trusted them to do as they judged best when he gave them no orders. If their style of fighting were not right for the situation they were placed in, Ender would not have chosen them for that assignment." (Ch 14, pg. 317)
- Creates a Positive Climate. Ender creates a climate where the team is encouraged to be creative and adaptive. Team members are allowed to think outside the box, be innovative, and communicate openly.
- Extends influence beyond the chain of command by challenging the status quo. Ender challenged his superiors to be better. Ender respected those in authority over him, yet he voiced his expectations that they needed to be better. He asked questions that challenged the views of the leaders who blindly followed orders.
- Leads by example. Ender does not stand back and let his soldiers do all the fighting. He shares hardship with those he commands. Ender lives with, eats with, and goes into battle with his men. This is leading by example.

2. What leadership attributes did Ender possess or develop over time? Which of these attributes are most important to you as an Army leader?

Some examples include:

• Empathy. Ender's most distinguishing leadership characteristic is his compassion for his team and even his enemy. A good leader *cares*. Empathy is the bond between leaders and followers, and it is what allowed Ender to truly understand the emotions,

perspectives and concerns of both his followers—and his enemy. "In the moment when I truly understand my enemy, understand him well enough to defeat him, then in that very moment I also love him." (Ch 13, 279).

- Discipline. Ender was disciplined. "He had to have discipline, and that meant demanding-and getting-quick, decisive obedience. He had to have a well-trained army, and that meant drilling the soldiers over and over again, long after they thought they had mastered a technique, until it was so natural to them that they didn't have to think about it anymore." (Ch 10, p. 204)
- Confidence. Although Ender lacked self-confidence initially, he had enough selfconfidence to admit to others what he didn't know—and wanted to learn. Ender initially presented himself to Dink Meeker, toon leader in the Rat Army, as "pretty inexperienced" although Ender could have highlighted the many emerging skills he possessed. (Ch 8, p. 136) Ender had the self-confidence to admit that he didn't have extensive knowledge of the battle game, but he wanted to learn. Dink was able to build Ender's self-confidence through honest, straightforward feedback on Ender's emerging strengths as well as his weaknesses in the battle game. By telling Ender that he believed in him, Dink had a powerful effect on Ender's self-confidence.
- Resilience. As a leader, expect challenge up to and beyond your breaking point. Ender was constantly being challenged and pushed to his limits. He took challenges as an opportunity to build his skills, and then he used his skills to benefit others. Ender was able to stay grounded and persevere despite increasing stress and complexity because he had a purpose (beyond ego), support group, and horizon. Ender's purpose was saving humanity. He needed the support of his sister, his few earned friendships, and the coaching of mentors to feel connected and sane. Ender knew he was training toward a goal; but he doesn't make it unless the timing is pressed to him. How often has the sight of the finish line driven us to carry on?
- Mental agility. Ender was constantly given a set of problems. He was forced to confront bullies, defend his team in an ambush, and play a game that could have disastrous consequences. Ender is constantly thinking ahead, to end not just that fight, but all future fights. Ender keenly observes others to understand their feelings, strengths, and weaknesses. From the moment he realized that the "Enemy's gate is down," Ender was a master tactician on the battlefield. He could analyze the situation and plan battlefield maneuvers. He had the ability to look at the situation and analyze how it would play out. Ender had the ability to study his enemy and to know the enemy's weakness. Ender is further developed by his teacher at Command School, Mazer Rackham, to understand things like "only the enemy shows you where you are weak...only the enemy shows you where he is strong." (Ch 14, p. 304).
- Innovation. Ender thought outside the box. He changed the game, the rules, and ultimately the outcome. Ender took risks and was rewarded for his innovative decisions. Ender had the mental flexibility to see benefit in the most unlikely maneuvers. "There may be a time, thought Ender, when this is exactly the strategy I'll need—forty screaming boys in an unbalancing attack." (Ch 10, p. 200). His innovative approaches gave him a battlefield advantage against enemy armies that relied on traditional formations—only rarely did Ender use a traditional maneuver. He

also encouraged others to develop new ideas. He said to Bean, "I want you to try things that nobody has ever tried because they're absolutely stupid." (Ch 11, p. 236)

3. Give examples of transactional and transformational leadership from the book? Which type of leadership do you find to be more effective in the US Army?

In transactional leadership, the leader motivates the follower to comply in exchange for reward or punishment. Self-interest dominates. Do this because I will reward you for it. If you do that, I will punish you for it. Transactional leadership examples include:

- After Ender breaks the arm of a boy during the launch to Battle School, COL Graff tells the other boys: "when I tell you Ender Wiggin is the best in this launch, take the hint, my little dorklings. Don't mess with him. Little boys have died in Battle School before. Do I make myself clear?" The focus is on compliance – don't mess with Ender or you'll get hurt. (Ch 4, pg. 65)
- When he is assigned to Salamander Army, Bonzo Madrid gives Ender instructions to stay out of the way in training, enter the battle four minutes after everyone else and not draw his weapon or fire. Bonzo is looking merely for compliance not commitment to a cohesive team. (Ch 7, p. 111).

Transformational leaders understand their followers, communicate a vision, and empower their followers to take prudent risk and disciplined initiative in a way that is committed to the group-interest. Transformational leadership examples include:

- When assigned to Rat Army, Dink makes Ender part of the team and even adopts ideas from Ender that aren't initially liked by the toon. As they work together they see the value in the new ideas and became committed for the good of the toon. (Ch 8)
- The way Ender develops his Dragon Army in Chapter 10.

In general, you need to have both forms, but transformational is more effective in the long term in building a cohesive team built on mutual trust.

4. Give examples from the book of formal power versus personal power? Which type of power do you find to be more effective in the US Army?

Formal power can include coercive (threat of punishment or adverse action), reward (incentivizing compliance), and legitimate (position of authority). Personal power can include expert (recognized for experience, skill or knowledge) and referent (being trusted and respected). Leaders can temporarily succeed with formal power, but it takes personal power to truly build mutual trust and respect between leader and follower.

The students, who first meet as peers in the Battle School, must socially construct leadership roles prior to being given positional power by teachers in commanding an army. The system of tracking everyone's battle performance and standings supports both formal and personal power: formal in that you will be rewarded with or excluded from leadership positions based on the standings; and personal in that those standings usually reflect the most skilled children. The most skilled children tend to rise to the top as toon leaders and are eventually appointed in formal positions as army leaders. However, some children advance and lead through coercion and their formal power without having much personal power, like Bonzo Madrid. Personal power is a far more challenging power to obtain, especially referent power. Certain children, like Ender and Dink, develop this referent power over time as they demonstrate the character, competence, and commitment that builds mutual trust and respect with the other children. By the time they advance to command school, Ender's peers will follow him without question out of reverence.

In contrast, the adults hold traditional leadership roles in which authority and power are derived from their position, rather than their leadership ability. The adults use coercion, reward, and manipulation. The students are a means to the adults' ends of winning the war. The teachers' use of formal power for manipulation combined with a lack of transparency creates an indelible breach of trust between the generations. Dink tells Ender the teachers are the enemy rather than the "buggers." (Ch 8, p. 143)

Ender also uses threats and coercive power over Bonzo, telling him "If you try to control my free play, I can get you iced." (Ch 7, 122). While Ender has no formal power, he has informal power because Bonzo believes that Ender has the ear of school leaders.

Topic: Mission Command.

IAW ADP and ADRP 6-0, Mission Command is the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander's intent. Six principles of Mission Command are: build cohesive teams through mutual trust, create shared understanding, provide a clear commander's intent, exercise disciplined initiative, use mission orders, and accept prudent risk.

1. How does Ender employ mission command in his development of Dragon Army and the battles against the "buggers?"

When he attained formal authority, Ender acted on his vision and values in bringing the group together and was keenly aware of the group dynamics and bonds that were forming among the children. Ender was successful in creating a shared sense of purpose among his team. Ender was future-focused in his vision for how his army should function, which gave him a strategic advantage within the Battle School because he trained his army according to how they would need to perform in battle. He knew the strengths and weaknesses of team members so that he could deploy them according to their strengths.

Disciplined initiative: "he trained his toon leaders to use their small units effectively in achieving limited goals. Unsupported, alone, on their own initiative." (Ch 11, 212); and "All the soldiers knew what was happening, but tactical decisions were entirely up to toon leaders." (Ch 11, 215)

Mutual trust: "he would sometimes give them orders that made no sense to them; but they, too, learned to trust Ender...They also knew that Ender trusted them to do as they judged best when he gave them no orders." (Ch 14, p. 317)

Shared understanding and prudent risk: When fighting against Rat Army, knowing the enemy was encircling their door, Ender created shared understanding about building groups of four with one soldier serving as a shield and then took prudent risk that the technique would work. (Ch 11, p. 231-232)

Ender was able to skillfully command a fleet by recognizing the individual strengths and weaknesses of the squadron leaders. Each squadron leader had their own realm of leadership, acting intelligently and independently and bringing their own knowledge into the situation. Ender provided overall strategic direction and oversight, uniting everyone in working toward the same goal. By using a transformational leadership style, in which leadership was co-constructed and shared, Ender was able to defeat the buggers, whose unitary leadership and thought was vested only in the queen. In this way, humans won the war because they recognized the contribution of many minds—not just one.

Topic: Human Dimension.

1. Was self-awareness a strength or weakness for Ender? Explain your response.

It was both a strength and weakness depending on the aspect being considered.

Ender was aware of his own strengths entering battle school. He knew he could break the code of computer games, and this self-assessment enabled him to challenge older, higher-ranking boys to a game—and then win against them—which helped Ender to establish a reputation. He made use of his skills to break the clique that excluded him. He figured out how to send messages under the name of a new user (i.e., "God"). The messages made fun of the clique leader (Bernard) and weakened the strength of the clique by attracting some of the followers to his side. More importantly, he used his strengths in mutually beneficial ways to build bonds between himself and others. Ender offered to give Alai the secrets to his security system after Alai messed with another student's files and knew the student was out to get him. Ender's empathy and offer to use his computer hacking talents to assist with Alai's plight built a lasting bond of trust between them. (Ch 5)

Ender was less aware of his own emotional and physical needs. His incredible drive and motivation to win became his greatest liability. He consistently gave his all in every battle game practice session. He gave up opportunities for rest and relaxation in favor of scheduling additional practice sessions with children from other armies, maintaining a physically demanding schedule that few others could match. Colonel Graff consistently advanced Ender early from one stage of Battle School to the next, which created tremendous physical pressures from less preparation and psychological pressures from isolation.

Ender didn't know how to sustain himself over such long periods of stress and selfsacrifice. At several points in time, Ender drove himself to the point of psychological burnout and physical exhaustion. This also carried over to his awareness of other's needs. He pushed Petra and several other squadron leaders past their limits during the fleet battles to a point where they were broken and never as effective again (Ch 14, p. 327-328 and 330). Ender was pushed to the outer limits of his physical, mental and emotional endurance in the war against the buggers. Ender helped the International Fleet win the war, and then slipped into a state of extreme exhaustion and apathy in a near vegetative state. (Ch 14, p. 344).

2. Why are social skills important for leaders? Give an example from the book.

The ability to read the social cues, rules and norms of people, teams, and organizations can be important for leaders in motivating, building trust and cohesion, and influencing others through negotiation and shared goals.

Ender showed social intelligence when he creatively broke up a clique led by Bernard in his landing group. In environments like the Battle School, where group identity is strong

and group cohesion is high, an individual who is most prototypical, or representative, of the group is often selected as the leader. Ender was not prototypical. He was younger and smaller than the other children. It would be harder for him to be accepted by the group and advance to leadership status. Ender quickly found that Bernard had formed a clique which excluded him, and he needed to overcome the challenge of social exclusion and work against prototypical norms for Battle School leaders.

He also shrewdly used a rule to his advantage—free play was free. No rule could be made against it. Bonzo had blocked Ender's growth and development, refusing to permit him to practice or battle with his own army. Ender overcame this obstacle by using a rule to his advantage and offering additional practices to launches, placing himself in a self-created leadership position. Ender was a credible leader, maintaining a steady practice schedule, sharing new skills and enhancing the abilities of all involved.

Ender underestimated the importance of Bonzo's cultural values after Ender's army won against the Salamander army despite being at a disadvantage. Ender was outraged with the teachers because it hadn't been a fair fight. He challenged his youngest child to publicly state what Bonzo should have done to win. As a result of his Spanish cultural norms, Bonzo felt Ender violated his honor, reputation, and dignity. Petra and Dink correctly read the situation and warned Ender, but he continued to misinterpret the situation, naively believing that the teachers would never let anything happen to him, resulting in grave danger and a fight that turned deadly.

3. Why is emotional control important for leaders? Give both positive and negative examples of emotional control in the book.

Followers will look to their leader as an example in a crisis. Leaders who understand their emotions and are calm in a storm will gain confidence, trust, and respect from their followers. As a result, the unit will be capable of succeeding even when at a numerical or tactical disadvantage.

Positive examples: Ender's control during the battle against Rat Army despite knowing Rat Army was given an unfair advantage; Ender's control during fleet battles against the buggers despite overwhelming numerical disadvantage.

Negative examples: Ender does have an emotional breaking point, particularly in situations that go against his values of fairness and justice. Ender perceived that his transfer to Salamander army was unfair and begins to cry, an emotional display that goes against the culture of the school. Later on as a commander, after two emotionally draining battles and a deadly fight with Bonzo in the same day, Ender was unable to manage his emotions effectively. He gave in to exhaustion, fear and anger with a defensive, emotional outburst and complained to authority figures about the injustice and unfairness of the situation.

In contrast, other youth lose emotional control due to changing group dynamics and loss of stature. When it came time to choose their launch leader, Alai was selected and

Bernard sulked, angry at the changing leadership dynamics. Although Petra is similar to Ender in demonstrating a strength of emotional control in dealing with the ongoing bullying due to gender differences and abuse from authority, she demonstrates a lack of emotional control—and grace—at the loss of stature when she loses to Ender in battle. Petra shows her fury by rejecting Ender for a time, although the bonds of friendship eventually win out.