



Education in Virtues and Education in Competencies: The Case of Educating for Leadership

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Abstract: Is an education centered merely on skills compatible with education in virtues? We propose an interdisciplinary exercise which engages the philosophical tradition of education in virtue in a dialogue with the psycho-educational discourse of competency-based education. We present a theoretical analysis and a proposal for the education of university students in leadership through virtues supported by education in competences. This is an indirect methodology in developing stable personal attitudes and dispositions and a path towards education in virtues and competences with a meta-model of education in leadership.

Keywords: virtues, competency-based education, leadership, Aquinas.

I. Character education and its place in the university

Universities devote a great deal of their efforts to the teaching and dissemination of knowledge, to research, and to professional skills training. These efforts are expected to result in the education for citizenship and service to society. However, universities rarely include character education among their objectives, leaving this to earlier stages of education (Lamb, Brant, Brooks (2021).

Although it is not an express goal of universities, they are in fact important agents in character education. Indeed, one of the original aims of universities was to prepare young men and women of integrity to serve society. The university years have an educational impact that is not limited simply to acquiring knowledge and skills, but shapes students' attitudes, beliefs, and virtues. Thus, any educational proposal or university curriculum implicitly involves education in certain virtues and values.

In this paper we will discuss whether the propose of "education in competences", applied in many universities, is adequate for teaching values and virtues and, particularly, to teaching leadership skills (regarded as a virtue). We will conduct a theoretical analysis of the similarities and differences between virtues and competences, and offer a proposal for education in virtues supported by education in competences. We will then apply this

proposal to university education in leadership. Our work represents an interdisciplinary exercise, engaging the philosophical tradition of education in virtue in a dialogue with the psycho-educational discourse of competency-based education.

We begin by introducing the discourses of education in competences and education in virtues, comparing each approach and presenting a meta-model of university education in leadership. We will associate the competences normally included in leadership training programs with those virtues considered necessary for students to internalize learned competences. We also note specific methodologies that can broaden the approach to education in competences.

II. Competence-based education

The notion of education in competences began gaining importance with the work of Chomsky (1968) on linguistic competence, and especially with McClelland's work (1973) in testing for competence. In the same line, Boyatzis (1982) defined competence as "a set of knowledge, attitude, skills, and abilities that allow for individual excellence in the performance of a certain task or job". For many authors since, competences are considered the personality traits that are causally related to stable and effective behavior, leading to "success" in the performance of a task.

The concept of competences was broadened to include not only specific knowledge or skills, but learning "to be and to live together" as stated in the UNESCO Delors Report (1994). The Tuning Project (Bravo Salinas, 2007) brought this to the European Higher Education Area, facilitating the accreditation of studies between different countries. Since the early 2000's, education in competences has become the foundation of university curricula around the world. For most authors, learning outcomes are viewed in terms of the knowledge, skills and behaviors students acquire (Butova, 2015).

III. Virtue education

Education in virtue has its origins in ancient Greek education (*paideia*), which has influenced the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim educational traditions. Aristotle, in particular, studied human actions and motivations in which virtue (*areté*) is central to the

flourishing of the person (*eudaimonia*). He defines virtues as stable inner dispositions that enable one to act well (*héxis*). Similarly, St. Thomas Aquinas (I-IIae, q55) defines virtue as 'good operative habit'. It should be noted that habit is not simply an outward "good" behavior. Therefore when the behavior is the result of automatism or when the person acts without a good intention, her action is not considered a habit. Habit from the Aristotelian-Thomistic perspective includes a good intention.

For an act to be virtuous (Aristotle, 1985, 1105a28-35) four conditions are required: to desire an end or good (affective foundation), to know what one is doing (conscience, not mere spontaneity), to deliberate and choose the best means to achieve the desired end (freedom in action), and to act decisively to achieve it (effectiveness). A virtuous act involves the exercise of intelligence, will and affect. Will dominates the action with an affective desire to achieve an operable good. This leads not only to an action "well done" but also perfects the subject who acts. The exercise of virtues develops cognitive, volitional, and affective capacities by facilitating new virtuous acts (Aristotle 1985, 1106a15) (Titus, 2017).

Virtue, likewise, is learned and developed through its exercise. The exercise or act is conditioned by virtue: greater virtue facilitates the corresponding act which is never mere automatism as it requires the possibility of responsible freedom. Virtue precedes action and develops through action. In short, virtues are act-based or performative (act-oriented), agent-based or perfective (making those who act better), and reason-based or propositional (with an intention or value as a goal and motivation) (Vitz et al., 2020).

Since the late 20th century, education in virtue has grown, particularly from the perspective of Aristotelian philosophy (particularly in MacIntyre, 1981) and positive psychology (Peterson & Seligman 2004). As a result, proposals for character education and their application in schools (Kristjansson 2019) and the workplace, have gained momentum.

IV. Similarities and differences between competences and virtues

There are remarkable similarities between certain competences and certain virtues. In both cases, they are stable dispositions of character that enable a person to perform with

excellence in different contexts. They are teachable and are developed through practical, reflective, and continuous exercise. Certainly, there are different types of competences and types of virtues: from the eminently technical or intellectual to those of a moral nature. The close relationship between certain competences, as between certain virtues, allows them to be linked together in their exercise. Some may be considered meta-competences or, in the case of virtues, master virtues. Finally, both competences and virtues are acquired abilities developed from faculties which are innate to every human being (intelligence, will, affectivity).

Some authors consider competence a virtue in a broad sense (Morales-Sánchez, Cabello 2015, 165). Although some proposals are limited to educating technical or instrumental competences, the most recent proposals assume the importance of teaching higher intellectual and moral competences which are analogous to intellectual and moral virtues. In these proposals, competences are seen as compatible with education.

While recognizing the clear correlation between competences and virtues, it is worth noting their differences, especially with regards to the intentionality of human action. In the Aristotelian philosophical tradition, virtue involves the intentionality or purpose of the act, something which is not necessarily an aspect of competence. For Aristotle, virtue requires that the person intentionally desires and seeks to realize a good or end (*telos*) (Aristotle, EN 1111b 5-6). Intention comes prior to action and enables an action to be understood (Anscombe, 1957). What makes an action virtuous is, firstly, that it is intentionally ordered to a truly good end. Thus, what is most important is not the execution but rather the intention that defines the action. Evidently, the execution is important and must be oriented to the intention since mere good intentions are not enough. Virtues are not merely the disposition to act, but include desires, values, beliefs, and emotions. Moreover, they require good and right desires for good and right reasons (Alzola, 2012).

Although many theorists of competence education recognize the importance of motives (Spencer & Spencer, 1993), sometimes intentionality is not given a relevant place in it. A theoretical and psychometric approach prevails. With this approach, the conative dimension of the person, including desires, affect and the intentionality of the act, is diminished and the correct performance of specific tasks becomes central. With few

exceptions, competences are seen as neutral, a-intentional or merely instrumental. While efforts have been made to overcome these shortcomings in competence education, in our opinion these remain insufficient. This insufficiency, however, is not found among theorists of virtue education who consider the conative component (Morgan, Gulliford & Kristjansson 2017).

Intentionality is important for education in competences and virtues. Both are taught through their exercise. This exercise acquires a virtuous dynamic through intention, by the desire for a good that is first and foremost affective, although it requires the application of intelligence and will. The person "is not content in acting with projecting and willing the object of his action; he projects it and wills it by reason of a motive" (Finance 1966, 46). Purpose thus becomes desire, a triggering motive that drives the action towards its proper end. Love is then the affective power, arising in response to the call of an end which is recognized as a value. Will is thus moved by good, or a goal insofar as it is judged to be good. Desire is not enough; in order to act competently and virtuously, intelligence, will, and affect come into play, albeit with the possibility of failure or error. It is not an extrinsic action, arising from an external object, since it presupposes an internal principle rooted in nature.

An educational model that omits education in desire and affect will fall short: it will not engage in motivation or will be trapped with a tyranny of emotion and affect which become absolute and separated from their ends. When the person discovers an attractive good (perhaps from a teacher), they mobilizes their intelligence and will to achieve it. It is in this mobilization that virtues and competences are properly developed: they are not a direct objective, but rather an indirect result of the search for a good.

This methodology does not exclude a traditional aspect of education in competency and virtue, that is, habituation through practice, reflection on personal experience and vicarious learning through modelling (Brant et al., 2020). Other forms of education in competences and virtues should also be considered, such as the analysis of personal errors or failures and disruptive encounters that question the 'to be' and 'to do' of others. In the following section, we will offer an example of the application of this methodology.

V. A Case Study: Undergraduate Leadership Education

Education in leadership is a goal of many universities around the world (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Leadership is recognized as an important personal characteristic that positively influences people's performance in a professional environment (Collins, 2005). However, the concept of leadership is ambiguous, and a number of different methodologies have been developed to teach it (Allen & Shehane, 2016).

Thus, there are many approaches to teaching leadership and few reliable and valid instruments for its measurement. Often, educational goals are both unattained and unverified while certain competences which are important in the professional sphere, such as teamwork, effective communication or conflict resolution, are not always applicable in the university environment (Brant et al., 2020).

Our proposal for education in leadership assumes that leadership requires specific competences that attain vigor and meaning insofar as they are oriented towards the good, towards an intentionally good action or towards the forming of, sustaining, or preparing for a relationship.

a. Conceptualization of leadership

We have defined leadership as "the act of guiding others towards a common goal" (López & Ortiz de Montellano, 2021). Thus, leadership is first and foremost an action, and specifically the action of guiding others towards a shared objective or goal. As an act it is linked to certain personal capacities or potentialities that are developed and perfected through their exercise. Contrary to the possible suspicion, based on negative experiences, that guiding is a form of manipulation or instrumentalization of others, we maintain that it is something good, a perfection (in Aristotelian terms). However, guiding others is not exclusive to a few, but rather a human experience or action we all perform to some extent or in certain circumstances when we are called to assume a leadership role. It is important to learn how and when to lead others. It is also important to learn how and when to follow others. Indeed, these two learning processes go hand in hand. In both cases a common good is sought: service to the community, an activation or mobilization of resources towards a common goal.

This conceptualization of leadership has four fundamental characteristics. First, leadership is action; a movement or a process whereby people deploy their abilities to achieve a goal. Second, leadership is relational; it is an interaction between two or more people. Third, leadership is individual; that is, exercised between individuals rather than collectively. Fourth, leadership is free and intentional; that is, human action moved by an apparent good, or *telos* in Aristotelian terms (Aristotle, 1985 1098b33; 1994 1048b18). This is an Aristotelian understanding of human action and, in our opinion, is broad enough to encompass various contemporary notions of leadership.

b. Meta-model of leadership

Using this notion of leadership, we have analyzed the proposals by Hershey and Blanchard (1969), Blanchard (2019), Greenleaf (1977) and reviews by Cabezas Guerra (2016), Sonnenfeld (2012), George (2003) and Walumbwa et al., (2008), Barsh et al., (2009), Barsh et al., (2010), Burns (1978), Kouzes and Polsner (2017). From these we have drawn the most significant elements and aspects of education in leadership. An analysis of the various theories, and the measurement instruments that support them, shows that while these models address appropriate traits and behaviors within a professional context they do not suggest how leadership may be taught to and exercised by university students. Leadership must be conceptualized within the university context for the development of a model for the evaluation of leadership throughout a student's university career.

Table 1 shows the itinerary used to configure our meta-model:

<i>Educational domain</i>	<i>Cardinal Virtue</i>	<i>Main faculty</i>	<i>Specific virtue</i>	<i>Educational axis</i>	<i>Description</i>
Understanding reality	Prudence	Intelligence	Right judgement	Sight	Look at reality without distortion
				Deliberation	Weighing up actions for improvement
				Action for change	Imagining and articulating future scenarios
Relationship with others	Justice	Will	Service	Inspiration	Inspiring others to do good
				Harmonization	Integrating the participation of others
				Accompaniment	Illuminating and sustaining on the path
				Commitment	Engaging and sustaining commitments
		Affectivity			

Dedication to the task	Fortitude and Temperance		Magnanimity and Humility	Resilience	Maintaining stability in the face of difficulty
				Self-Mastery	Responding to emotional stimuli

Table 1. *Meta-model*

This meta-model incorporates behaviors identified in different leadership models with common foundational elements but with different names and approaches. For example, some models speak of commitment, others of involvement, others of the leader's passion, but, essentially, they refer to the dedication of the leader in executing the actions for which they are responsible. Based on our definition, and within the university context, there are three broad aspects of leadership skills: understanding reality, relationship with others, and dedication to a task. In each of these aspects, we recognize the competences typically developed in leadership programs. For 'understanding reality', we included critical thinking or problem-solving skills; for 'relationship with others' we included effective communication or conflict resolution; for 'dedication to a task' we included focus or time management.

In order to move beyond competence education, we identify three teachable axes in each area linked to specific virtues. This is the fundamental thesis that we propose on this paper: when developing student competences with a view to their future leadership role, rather than merely "making them competent", we must attempt to lead students to reflect on and seek a good, so that each competence is "woven" into a network of virtues that will support their leadership. These virtues will provide vigor and meaning to leadership competences (Serrano, 2017).

For example, teamwork is usually presented as a competence that can be taught through a didactic exercise oriented towards participation in a common effort. Those who work in a team collaborate, listen, and act in order to work effectively. Teamwork, according to the meta-model we are presenting, is a competence in the area of relationships, its teachable axis is harmonization. Harmonizing a team is much more than making it effective, it requires an explicit identification of the shared goal or good for the team and for each of its members, and the commitment to actions that lead to the fulfilment and flourishing of the team as a whole. The challenge is for students to mobilize around the search for a common good which will produce teamwork (competence) as an expression of the virtues of justice and humility. The goal of the student is not to develop their

leadership skills, or even their virtues, but rather to seek a common good for the group in which they have a leadership role. Virtues and competences, indeed all education, are the indirect result or the effect of this search (Spaemann, 2003).

c. Leadership competencies and virtues

In Table 2, we have associated fundamental virtues to be cultivated in education in leadership in each area and a set of teachable axes:

<i>Educational domain</i>	<i>Cardinal Virtue</i>	<i>Specific virtue</i>	<i>Educational axis</i>
Understanding of reality	Prudence	Right judgement	Sight
			Deliberation
			Action for change
Relationship with others	Justice	Service	Inspiration
			Harmonization
			Accompaniment
Dedication to the task	Fortitude and Temperance	Magnanimity and Humility	Commitment
			Resilience
			Self-Mastery

Table 2. Association of fundamental virtues to educational axis

We propose, therefore, to cultivate eight virtues as a supporting framework for the leadership skills of university graduates: four specific virtues (judgement, service, magnanimity and humility), and the four cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance). We believe that fortitude, temperance, magnanimity, and humility sustain the person in their leadership role, which unfolds through virtuous action in understanding reality and relating to others.

The evaluation of leadership skills is a challenge. It should include not only manifest competence but also foundational virtues. Assessing or measuring virtues is difficult as it involves the consideration of personal intentions.

As mentioned above, good behavior is not enough to infer virtue; it must involve motivation, deliberation and reflection. Moreover, evaluation can interfere with the educational process and the development of virtues by leading the person to become overly concerned with achieving a level of performance in certain virtues rather than focusing on the good they hope to achieve by the exercise of these virtues. The most

recent research recommends using qualitative methodologies that complement quantitative ones (e.g. observation, narrative resources or interview) and measuring constellations of virtues rather than isolated ones (Wright, Warren, Snow 2021).

Our proposal considers the use of quantitative and qualitative instruments for the measurement of virtues and competences at the start, middle, and end of undergraduate studies. We consider "performance tasks" to be preferable to self-perception tests because they reduce bias. The result of the assessment would allow the students to know their competence profile and reflect on how they are developing their leadership skills in service of their community or group. Students would be given feedback through an interview with a professional (and accompanying teacher).

VI. Conclusions

Our proposal is different from but does not oppose education in competences and virtues. It proposes that the person exercises competencies with good intentionality on the basis of virtue. In fact, education in virtues entails education in competences, because the virtuous person is not satisfied with simply desiring or wanting the good but will seek to achieve it with competence. Likewise, education in competences entails an intentionality, even when not openly expressed.

Within the realm of leadership education, competences and virtues are necessary for good leadership. To educate in leadership, one must educate (volitionally, affectively, and intellectually) in the intentionality of the good, as well as the means for its proper execution. Virtue can be considered a broader construct than competence: it includes the willingness to perform well with good intentionality. Therefore, we can conclude that leadership is not only a competence but a virtue, grounded in the intention to seek the common good, including the good of the group being led, and which, with a proper understanding of the context, seeks and executes the best actions to achieve it.

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, the end, while the last element in execution, is the first element in intention (I-IIae, q1). Virtuous intentionality commands and moves competent action. In our case, virtuous intentionality leads to the competent exercise of leadership. Indeed, virtuous action implies not only good intention but also good execution. The first

thing executed will be the specific task to achieve a goal; competences will be exercised, not as a previous step but in parallel to virtues. In this way, a constellation of virtues is developed that sustains and strengthens competences.

We have presented the general outline of a model of leadership education. This model needs to be validated within different cultural contexts and instruments to measure it must be developed. Finally, new teaching methodologies which favor the acquisition of virtuous competence among university students need to be developed, implemented and validated.

VII. References

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