



The Fundamental Process of Leadership in the Classroom

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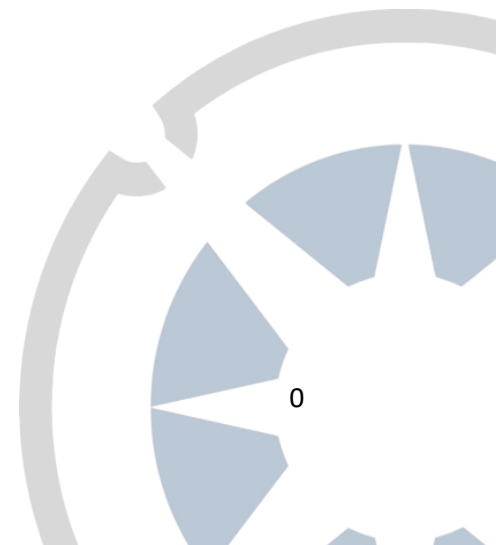
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Abstract: What exactly does the mantra about ‘all teachers being leaders in the classroom’ really mean? We argue that leadership is a process where one person exhibits at least one virtue with more excellence than she would have exhibited if she had conformed to convention. With this definition of leadership, we elaborate a case study of an elementary school in the United States of America whose unique approach transformed the leadership of the school and grew to influence over 7,000 schools in 50 countries.

Introduction

What exactly does the mantra about ‘all teachers are leaders in the classroom’ really mean? To understand the answer to this question, one must examine the process by which one person can transform how another person or group of people thinks, acts, or organizes (Burns, 1978). We define transformation as qualitative change, which means replacing one belief with another, one action with another, or one accepted way of behaving with another. Transformation is not what scholars currently study when they study transformational leadership (see Bass, 1985). In fact, transformational leadership research seldom examines change at all.

This was not the case when transformational leadership first entered the social sciences. In fact, when Burns (1978, pp. 433-434) introduced the idea, he defined transformational leadership as the process in which leaders “appeal and respond to the needs and other motives of would-be followers for ... the achievement of real change in the direction of ‘higher’ values.” Much of Burns’ theory is still relevant to the question of how one individual can inspire transformation in others’ beliefs, actions, and ways of organizing. For example, Burns argued that scholars “cannot identify discrete steps in the [transformational leadership] process” (p. 439). In contrast, we show that it is possible to identify meaningful steps if we clarify the boundaries and target of transformational

leadership. He also argued that transformational leadership requires insight into higher values, where the height of values was defined by highly criticized theories (Kohlberg & Kramer, 1969; Maslow, 1943). We replace these theories with virtue ethics (Aristotle, 1985; MacIntyre, 1981), which is a more rigorous moral philosophy. Overall, these changes help us to better explain what makes values “higher,” why teacher leaders need moral insight and growth, why transformational leadership is uncommon, when and how transformational leadership can explain change in students, and why transformational leadership is foundational to character development.

To make these contributions, we draw ideas from research on virtue ethics (Aristotle, 1985), but we also retain ideas from existing research on transformational leadership, literature that compares management with leadership, and related leadership literature. In our definition of leadership of teachers, we use five criteria to distinguish transformational leadership from other forms of influence: (1) the teacher’s mental model of leadership, (2) the teacher’s adoption of an overarching framework of virtue principles in their teaching, (3) the teacher’s modeling of the virtues with more excellence than she would have exhibited if she had conformed to convention and the other-praising emotions that inspire one to follow, (4) the engagement practices of teachers that invite students to apply the virtues in moments of choice, and (5) the manifestation of the virtues in the behaviors, habits, and lives of the teacher’s students.

In other words, by utilizing this definition of leadership, we elaborate the process by which teacher leaders help accelerate the character development of students. Teachers who see the leadership potential of their students, who model for and engage their students in the virtues with excellence, and who transcend convention will inspire their students to live and lead their lives with the virtues. We provide strategies and examples to illustrate ways in which teachers can transform not only the classroom experience, but the students they teach.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The five elements of a teacher's transformational leadership deserve further development. These elements are fundamental to the transformation of character in the classroom, first the teacher and then the student.

Mental model of leadership. The conventional view is that leadership is a position—the few, the elite, the CEO, the president, the boss, the person with formal authority and power. Transformational in the classroom leadership assumes that leadership is a choice. It is primary greatness. It is character imbued with the virtues of a flourishing life. And because leadership is a choice, as a teacher, it is a profound shift to see the potential of *every* student to be a leader—to discover and develop their unique gifts and capacity and to use them to serve and lift others. When I see the inherent worth and potential of each student, when I am looking for their strengths and gifts, my leadership role as a teacher is to inspire the student to discover their worth and potential and to catalyze the release of that potential.

Virtue. Leadership begins when one person exhibits at least one virtue in action (see Figure 1). A virtue is a standard of moral excellence such as responsibility, courage, integrity, compassion, or ambition (Aristotle, 1985). We can understand and assess the ethics of the virtues that people exhibit by using virtue ethics, a theory from moral philosophy (Sandel, 2010). The excellence with which a person exhibits a virtue depends on how closely that person's actions come to the ideal pattern for that virtue. For example, Quinn and Worline (2008) describe courage as a pattern of action in which people confront pressure, danger, or risk in a way that seeks to achieve a constructive outcome, and Dutton and her colleagues (2006) describe compassion as a pattern of noticing, feeling, and trying to relieve suffering. However, the ideal pattern for a given virtue manifests differently in each circumstance. For example, the courage to run into a burning building involves different behaviors from the courage to question the strategy one's boss is proposing, even though both involve confronting risk in constructive ways. Further, a person can exhibit more than

one virtue in a single action, as when a doctor exhibits candor by telling a patient his cancer is likely to be fatal, but also kindness by doing so with words and emotions that show how much she cares. Finally, there are hundreds of virtues, but many of these virtues overlap conceptually. For example, kindness shares more in common with compassion and love than it does with courage or honesty. Therefore, scholars often focus on a small list of theoretically or empirically distinct virtues (e.g., Crossan et al., 2017; McCloskey, 2006; McGrath, 2015).

Convention. Virtue alone is not sufficient to initiate the leadership sequence. The virtue must be exhibited with more excellence than the person would have exhibited if she had conformed to convention. A convention is a socially-accepted pattern of activities that people take for granted as the only, the best, or the ethical way to act in a given situation (e.g., Colyvas & Jonsson, 2011; Gersick & Hackman, 1990). Conventions may be norms, routines, policies, procedures, institutions, traditions, strategies, and so forth. Because conventions are patterns of activities, people repeat the same set of activities when they participate in a convention. Because conventions are social, people who participate in the convention have the same or similar expectations about how these activities will be performed, and the performance of those activities tends to be interdependent, or to require coordination. Because conventions are taken for granted, people tend to assume, and not to question, that this arrangement of activities is the only, the best, or the ethical way to perform them.

Virtues are exhibited in action, so conventions, as a pattern of activities, tend to exhibit relevant virtues to some degree (MacIntyre, 1981). For example, a pre-operative procedure for a surgery may exhibit some degree of compassion, reliability, or patience. Because this way of enacting compassion, reliability, and patience is taken for granted, it is unlikely that people think much, if at all, about the virtues they exhibit. Thus, if everyone on the surgical team exhibits the same level of compassion, reliability, and patience that they always exhibit, there is no deviation from convention. Also, because the convention is taken for granted, no one is likely to notice that

any virtue has been exhibited at all, even though some degree of virtue is being exhibited. According to the definition we are proposing, leadership begins when a person exhibits a virtue with more excellence than she would have exhibited if she had conformed to convention. This level of excellence is a deviation from convention that, by definition, violates others' expectations and thus has a chance of eliciting other-praising emotions from others.

We suggest a negative relationship between convention and excellence in leader virtue. This is because action that exhibits more virtue than a person would have exhibited if they had conformed to convention implies a deviation from convention, and people expect to be judged, punished, ostracized, or rejected when they deviate from convention (Garfinkel, 1967; Van Dyne & Saavedra, 1996). Action that deviates because of exceptional virtue may be less likely to lead to judgment, punishment, ostracism, or rejection than action that deviates from convention in other ways, but these negative outcomes are still possibilities even when a person's action exhibits excellence in a virtue. After all, it can be annoying or even offensive when someone violates expectations that we take for granted, and inconvenient or even damaging to have a person with whom you are interdependent to alter their behavior (e.g., Toubiana & Zietsma, 2017). Given how fundamental people's need to belong is (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), even the anticipation of potential judgment, punishment, ostracism, or rejection can be powerful disincentives.

Other-praising emotions. Emotions are brief, targeted, largely automatic responses to specific experiences that involve appraisals of a situation accompanied by physiological activation in the body that generates a positive or negative subjective feeling (Thoits, 1989). Other-praising emotions are a class of emotions in which people appraise others in positive ways and feel positively toward them as a result (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). Examples of other-praising emotions include elevation, reverence, awe, gratitude, admiration, or inspiration. Each of these emotions involves distinct appraisals, feelings, and responses tendencies, but the appraisals are positive and oriented toward other people, the feelings are positive, and the associated action tendencies typically involve

prosocial actions. For example, elevation involves appraising others to have exhibited moral excellence, involves feeling warm and uplifted, and leaves people wanting to be morally better (Haidt, 2000). Gratitude involves appraising others to have done something beneficial for oneself, feelings of wonder and appreciation, and a desire to improve relationships (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). Awe involves appraising something to be vast, involves feelings of rapture, connectedness, contentment, smallness, and neglect of day-to-day concerns, and drives people to update their worldview to accommodate the perceived vastness (Keltner & Haidt, 2003). The “something” that is vast could be physical, such as the night sky, but could also be someone’s actions, ideas, or accomplishments. Inspiration involves an emergent awareness of circumstances or possibilities that people appraise to be better than the current or expected situation, and which seems to occur without application of one’s own will. It involves feelings of transcendence and a tendency to pursue the perceived possibilities (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). Reverence and admiration (scholars use admiration to define reverence and vice versa; Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Conger, Kanungo, & Menon, 2000) both involve appraising others as accomplishing, or of being able to accomplish impressive things, feelings of exceptional respect or esteem with some degree of surprise, and a tendency to want to be near and, if possible, to imitate those toward whom they feel reverence or admiration.

Specifically, people feel other-praising emotions when they appraise another person to have done something positive (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). It is the psychological state and physiological reaction that occurs with such an appraisal. In turn, this same psychological state and physiological reaction propels people to actions such as striving to be morally better, improve relationships, accommodate, pursue perceived opportunities, and imitate. These action tendencies make such action more likely, and these actions can all be considered ways of following.

Following. Following is the degree to which people obey, imitate, or act in ways that are complementary to the leader’s initial action. People obey when a person asks them to do something and they positively respond. People imitate when they try to emulate what another person is doing.

People act in complementary ways when they do things that help another person achieve their goals. Other-praising emotions tend to inspire people to follow because people who feel inclined to accommodate or improve relationships tend to obey the requests of those who exhibit exceptional virtue, people who feel inclined to imitate are more likely to imitate, and people who are inclined to strive for moral improvement, pursue new opportunities, and improve relationships tend to act in ways that complement the actions of those whose toward whom they have these feelings. Their following may occur with varying levels of intensity. For example, in their behavioral support for change scale, Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) suggest that following can range from active resistance and passive resistance (which are the opposite of following) through compliance to commitment and even to championing another person's course of action. Most importantly, the inspiration to follow a one who models excellence in virtue creates an opportunity to point another to the power of the virtue and to inspire them to live it—to discover that the power, the joy, the fulfillment lies in living the virtue, the principle.

Leader in Me: An Illustration of Transformational Leadership at Scale

In 1999, Muriel Summers, the principal of A.B. Combs Elementary, was told by her superintendent they would be shutting down her underperforming public magnet school in Raleigh, North Carolina. She was new in her job and persuaded him to give her one week to come up with a turnaround plan that she hoped would convince him to keep the magnet program going. He reluctantly agreed.

During that week she interviewed many parents and teachers and asked them what they want most for their children. She also interviewed business owners in the community and asked them: "What skills and traits do you need most in those you are hiring that you are NOT seeing in the young people coming out of our school system?"

The answers were consistent. They were concerned about how unprepared many young people are to compete, contribute, and innovate in the global economy. One business leader "handed over a list of the top 10 Qualities & Skills Employers Seek." The list included: "communication skills (verbal and written),

honesty/integrity, teamwork skills, interpersonal skills, self-motivation/initiative, strong work ethic, analytical skills, technology skills, organizational skills, creative minds.”

The more leaders she interviewed, the more Muriel noticed a compelling alignment between the qualities the business owners said they needed most and the leadership principles she had recently been taught by Dr. Stephen R. Covey, author of the international bestseller, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.



A bold idea emerged that she shared with her teachers: What if we adopted as the primary purpose of our school to develop leaders—children of character and competence who discover and develop their gifts and skills and use them to serve their families, communities, and society? What if we use The 7 Habits as our “operating system,” our common language and framework?

The idea excited and unified the faculty and staff. She presented the plan to the superintendent. Surprised and inspired, he agreed to give them one year—with no extra funding and no extra people

They went to work. Teachers, administrators, and staff were trained in The 7 Habits. They started applying the principles at home and at school. They formed a leadership team. Teachers integrated the principles into their lesson plans in every subject, placing visual reminders in the classrooms and school hallways. Each child was given a leadership role based on interest and talent. Students and teachers set personal, academic, and school-wide goals and tracked progress toward achievement.

Transformation followed.

- Student confidence increased.
- Discipline problems and bullying decreased significantly.
- Students took ownership of their learning and thrived in the opportunity to lead in many roles in the classroom and school traditionally held by teachers and administrators.
- At home, students would do their homework before playing, and started cleaning their rooms and helping with chores around the house without being asked.
- Students spontaneously taught the leadership habits to their siblings and parents.
- Students used the habits to solve arguments at home and on the playground.
- Students organized and led service projects to help those in need in the community.
- Parent and teacher engagement increased.
- Teachers rediscovered their purpose, their reason for becoming an educator; they focused on seeing the unique talent and potential of each boy and girl and dedicated themselves to releasing that potential.
- Students started planning and setting goals for future education and careers.
- Academic scores increased, with the percentage of students passing grade-level tests going from 84% to 97%.

In 2006, A.B. Combs Elementary was named the #1 magnet school in America. Educators from around the world started visiting their school. With guidance and support from A.B. Combs, schools started implementing the same leadership model in their schools, with very similar results.

Eventually the requests for visits and implementation support overwhelmed the school. Muriel eventually said to the leaders of FranklinCovey Co., “Thank you for letting us use your intellectual property, but

this is killing us. We are a school, not a global training organization. It is your moral imperative to take what we have done and create a system that would enable any school in the world to do what we have done and improve upon it. So FranklinCovey formed a team of educators and experts to create the training, materials, coaching, online community, and support system that would empower schools wanting to implement the process. Leader in Me launched in 2008. Today, the Leader in Me framework has become an integral part of over 7,000 schools in over 50 countries. And most schools have experienced very similar results.

The Leader in Me movement in primary and secondary education has emerged as a highly influential system for developing deep character and leadership in children and youth. How do you explain its transformational, scaling, enduring quality? In it we see the following five areas, each aligned with the five fundamental properties of transformational leadership. The 7 Habits are one, arguably powerful and distinct, framework of virtues being applied with success at scale, and worthy of study and attention. But for educators generally, powerful, universally applicable principles can be applied to achieve transformational leadership in the classroom:

1. The fundamental view and purpose of education. Rather than education being solely or primarily about academic preparation in the core disciplines, Leader in Me focuses on the development of the whole child—body, mind, heart, and spirit—a person in whom we see great inherent worth and potential, with unique talents and gifts to be drawn out. This approach aligns with Socrates' view: "Education is the process whereby the ability to lead a good life is acquired."

2. The mental model of leadership. Rather than leadership being a position and about the few, Leader in Me sees potential to lead in every child and sees leadership as a choice. A leadership role is given to every child and youth based on their interests and talents. They form a purposeful identity that "I am a leader." They own and thrive in responsibility. With opportunity and affirmation, some of the biggest troublemakers become the most positive influencers on peers.

3. The model of change and influence. Rather than relying on and waiting for change to occur in systems, Leader in Me says, "Change begins with me. I model the change I hope to see in my students. Teachers and administrators learn The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: they work hard on becoming models and examples of the principles in their personal, family, and school lives. They seek to take responsibility and initiative rather than react and blame others and outside circumstances; they develop a clear sense of purpose and life priorities; they put their priorities and purpose first; they respect others and

respect differences in the opinions of others; they strive to listen deeply to understand others first and make a practice of listening first for understanding before making their point; they develop creative, third-alternative solutions to their toughest challenges, and do it with others who see things differently; they try to renew themselves physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually each day rather than giving in to the burnout that comes from being addicted to urgency.

4. Turning students into teachers. Rather than teachers being at the directing center of learning and of the classroom, Leader in Me has teachers share many teaching and administrative roles in the classroom with students who thrive with the trust and opportunity. Teachers ask students powerful questions that inspire students to constantly share insights with fellow students and to spontaneously teach parents and siblings the principles they are learning. Parent-Teacher Conferences are transformed into Student-Led Conferences, where students present to their parents their Leadership Notebooks and Portfolios that show their personal and academic goals, show their performance and goals, show their performance gaps, and present their plans for adjusting the focus of their learning and actions.

5. Ubiquitous integration. In contrast to siloed teaching in the subject disciplines, Leader in Me is integrated, like an operating system, into the teaching of every subject—literature, math, science, music, art, etc. The principles are integrated into every project, are posted in classrooms, the hallways, the playground, and the athletic field. They are featured in assemblies, morning announcements and school news shows. When fights and arguments break out on the playground during recess, rather than “solving the problem” for the students or sending them to the principal’s office, students are reminded they know the leadership habits and are invited to go sit on a bench and use them to communicate and work out a solution to their differences. Within minutes they’ve used the habits to work out a solution that is far better than the teacher or principal would have created. Constant engagement and life application, in every possible setting, weaves these habits into a cord of the habits and character of a leader.

This continuous, sequential, application of principle or virtues is a compelling manifestation of the quotation by Ralph Waldo Emerson: “Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny.”

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