

Final Paper

Using How People Learn Model with Leadership Skills Development

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December 11th, 2000

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Introduction

Leadership is a highly valued characteristic in society. What constitutes a leader is often thought of as an extroverted person, but there are also leaders who are more subtle and less known because of their personalities. Leadership is a high level attribute that can be effected by teachers, parents and other educators. The purpose of this paper is to use lessons in the book *How People Learn* (National Research Council, 1999) to suggest a framework for leadership training for gifted children. We will summarize the Learner, Assessment, Knowledge and Community Centered model for learning environments, and present a review of literature regarding leadership. Following this a model for leadership will be suggested and then we will discuss how the How People Learn Model combines with this to create a new model that can be used to develop a strong curricula for children in the future.

How People Learn Model

The suggested model for designing learning environments includes four perspectives that are crucial in designing learning environments. We will summarize the *How People Learn* descriptions of each dimension of a learning environment and how they interrelate.

Learner Centered Environment: This is an environment that pays attention to the characteristics that a learner brings to the learning environment. This includes their knowledge,

skills, values, beliefs, cultural practices and attitudes. The teacher will attempt to construct a “bridge” between the subject matter and the student based on the student.

Knowledge Centered Environment: The knowledge centered environment helps students become knowledgeable by learning in ways that lead to understanding and transfer using current knowledge to determine the most effective methods.

Assessment Centered Environment: Assessment centered environments are those that allow opportunities for feedback and revision of what is taught and what learning goals are. This should include formative assessment, continuously evaluating what the students are thinking.

Community Centered Environment: A community centered environment involves the classroom, the school, and the larger community of the city, state and even the world. Learning is enhanced by social norms that allow for mistakes and emphasize understanding over just knowing an answer. Connecting outside the classroom refers to the importance of being able to transfer knowledge to application outside the school. Other factors like Television influence students learning. Some in a positive way and some not.

The four perspectives need to be aligned in a classroom. Each overlaps and influences each other – they must be congruent to be able to work effectively - each part of the ultimate environment should have each component integrated into a whole.

Literature Review on Leadership

A literature review on the subject of leadership could take much more space than we have available. In Bass and Stogdill’s work *Handbook of leadership*, there were more than 4,000 references to leadership in a number of disciplines. There are hundreds of vastly different

varieties of definitions of leadership that don't agree with each other (Sarros, 1992; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Atwater, Penn & Rucker, 1991)). Simonton also listed 16 different factors regarding leadership in adults – not consistently relating to leadership (Simonton, 1984). In addition, while there is so much material, leadership seems to be a subject that is studied as a *current skill or state* rather than something developed. In other words, while there are developmental theories of leadership, they are outnumbered by the vast works on leadership “development” which refers to gaining those skills that fit the definition of leadership being asserted. Like love, everyone knows leadership exists, but nobody can define it. That being said, we will attempt to summarize current thoughts on developing leadership skills over a lifetime as it relates to our purposes.

Through time, thoughts on leadership have changed. Not just due to new thinking, but due to the changing world and the societal needs of leaders. Earlier in history, leadership skills tended to be thought of as a matter of birth. Leaders were *born*, not made. This is called the “Great Man” theory of leadership. Kings, queens – those of the correct lineage could lead and others must follow. Learning wasn't a factor (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). Later, as this failed to explain leadership, it was believed that great events made leaders of otherwise ordinary people. As Bennis and Nanus (1985) state: “Presumably Lenin was just ‘milling about’ when a revolution pounced on his deliberations, and Washington was simply ‘on hand’ when the colonies opted for countrydom”. This also was an inadequate explanation.

Current research results in many different views of who leaders are and what that means. All agree that there are different styles and kinds of leaders (Jorstad, 1991). Developmentally, we know that leaders develop early in preschool. This tends to focus on evaluation of peers, more than directing specific activities – sort of establishing a pecking order. At this early age

there is no good research regarding *why* the child with higher leadership tendencies is that way. Some suggest child size (bigger kids are physically stronger) but this isn't a very strong correlation (Fukada, Fukada & Hicks, 1994). In school age children leadership skills seems to be related to self-actualization. Karnes, Deason & D'ilio (1993) found strong relationships between all scales of the Leadership Skills Inventory and a self-actualization scale called Reflections of Self by Youth. This suggests that we develop leadership skills if lower level needs are taken care of (Maslow, 1971).

Leadership in adolescence is difficult to examine. Several kinds of learning are going on at one time during this portion of a person's life. Adapting to the existing social structure, physical appearance, athletic ability, popularity, leadership in school activities are paths to status at this age. (Newman, 1982). Unfortunately, academic achievement has been found to have little effect on status (Coleman, 1961) though we might suspect some cohort effect based on the time of the study. In one study, only 2.5% of students thought academic achievement was important to being in a leading crowd, though 80% thought it important to their future (Friesen, 1968). As one might expect, fitting in is a primary goal in adolescence and therefore has an effect on valued leadership skills (Newman, 1982).

It is also important to recognize later life also has many leadership examples. As Schaie and Willis (1996) point out, many leaders in their field made their contributions at a very late age. They present these examples, to name a few:

Person	Age	Accomplishment
Wilhelm Wundt	88	10 volume Treatise on Social Psychology
John Henry Comstock	71	Introduction to Entomology
Asa Gray	77	Elements of Botany
Popes	Over 60	Leaders of the Largest Church in the World
Ronald Regan	Old	President of the United States
Benjamin Franklin	78	Bifocals (among other things)

This demonstrates that there are leaders even at advanced ages. Both leaders in a *field* where they may or may not lead other people directly, and people who lead and manage many people (Shearring, 1992).

Other literature suggests that leadership is related to developing the ability and drive to overcome adversity. People who are comfortable with adversity and have a high resilience are more likely to take risks and achieve. This is not necessarily something developed over a lifespan, but it may be related to opportunities for adversity and success in overcoming them (Stoltz, 1997).

In conclusion, while there is some information on leadership at different stages in life, there are many factors influencing the fact that there is not much available literature on this skill developed over the lifespan. These factors include: little agreement on the definition of leadership, cohort effects on what leadership means, but I feel that the strongest difficulty

revealed by the research is that there are different *values* on what leadership is in each group (leaders in pre-school are different from leaders in adolescence). This is the most difficult factor to isolate. Leadership changes over the lifespan – so how do we measure it. Is it the same skill – it appears not to be? Is it just manifestation of self-actualization? In effect, this means that longitudinal study of leadership is a difficult process at best. Firstly, to define leadership consistently, next to measure it. For our purposes it appears that instead of picking the *right* leadership ideas, we must agree that they are all right and represent different paths to leadership and, just as importantly, each path may result in different types of leadership.

Our Leadership Model

From the above it is clear that our model cannot satisfy all of the available literature on leadership. For our purposes, we can suggest some preferred paths to take. Firstly, we want our model of leadership to be consistent with good mental health of the child. Next we want our children to develop compassion and concern for others and the community (i.e. we don't want to develop leaders like Hitler or Reverend Moon). Lastly, we want our model to be robust enough to carry the child through their life – it would be preferable that the skills developed would be applicable at all ages (in the appropriate context). I would like to suggest a list of nine leadership skills that we can use in this manner as a starting point for our discussion:

Leadership Skill	Continuum		
	Child (less developed)	To	Adult (mature)
Vision	What do I want to be when I grow up	What do I want to be when I graduate	What do I want my life to be like
Communication	Simple skills	Interpersonal Skills	Speaking in public
Trust	Being Honest	Making friends	Developing relationships
Integrity	Choosing right over wrong	Doing what you say you are going to do	Living your life according to your values
Work Ethic	Going to school each day	Working well under supervision	Working without supervision
Planning	Keeping track of homework	Time management	Planning according to overall vision
Innovation	Creative drawing	Synthesis	Breakthrough
Improvement	Learning in school	Self directed learning	Lifelong Learning
Self Concept	Innate and based on others positive communication	Based on others and achievements	Internally based

This is not to suggest a final or even complete model, only a working prototype. This could be a starting point for developing curricula that, as applied, refines and evolves this model.

Synthesis of the Model with How People Learn Knowledge

Now that we have the Leadership Skills defined, we can combine them with the How People Learn information. Using the above model for a starting point, we can develop a five dimensional system for developing curricula for each leadership skill:

- ☐ Leadership Skill (the continuum from younger to mature)
- ☐ Learner Centered (the learner determines their location on the continuum)
- ☐ Assessment Centered (assessments are used to determine starting point, interests and re-evaluation of location on the continuum)
- ☐ Knowledge Centered (knowledge required to develop the skill moving forward on the continuum must be based on the above)
- ☐ Community Centered (the community is both acting and taking action upon the learner)

This can be applied to each of the nine leadership skills and we can develop and assessment and curricula system for all of them.

Example

We can work through one example as a beginning. Our focus for the example is on the leadership skill Vision. Assessment and exercises can help to determine the learners' placement on the continuum from *having no idea what they want to do with their day* to *what they want to do with their life* and *what that might be*. One activity that can be used as a start is the future day or perfect day visualization, where we used a guided visualization to facilitate an image of what a perfect day is for them. Depending on the above, there are a variety of possible ways to refine a child's vision and determine what they will have to do to move toward it. If it's a teenager and they have a good idea they want to work as an accountant, they can investigate what that career is like and what they need to do to be able to do it. Lets say it's an 8 year old and they see themselves as pro basketball player. We may focus on the vision of going to college (to play ball) and include education in their vision while respecting their desire to be a pro athlete. This is

a learner-centered environment. Working toward helping the student understand the ways to move toward their vision is part of the knowledge centered environment – based again on their vision. As we would work through the theme *Vision* we would also want to continually help assess and refine the students personal vision. Community centeredness of this environment means that different visions are respected and that the effects are related outside the classroom. Our teenage accountant can be learning how accountants work in the world and what they can effect. In total, the four dimensions of the environment and the dimension along the *vision* continuum results in a good learning experience.

Conclusion

Our model suggests a possible framework for developing curricula to facilitate development of leadership in children. Our model for leadership is not “in stone”, but it is presented as a starting point for further development. Despite the fact that literature is widely varied on the subject of leadership, we would like our model to attempt to develop leaders that are mentally healthy, have compassion and concern for others and carry through to adulthood. Hopefully the combination of the How People Learn model, the leadership model, and effort toward developing curriculum for children can result in developing leadership in gifted children in the future.

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