

Developing Creative Leadership

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PART I

Perspectives on Leadership

Introduction

Most men and women go through their lives
using no more than a fraction . . .
of the potentialities within them.
The reservoir of unused human talent and energy
is vast,
and learning to tap that reservoir more effectively
is one of the exciting tasks ahead for humankind. . . .
Among the untapped capabilities are leadership gifts.

(Gardner, 1990, p. xv)

Aristotle is said to have believed that *from the hour of their birth some are marked out for subjugation and others for command*. In today's pluralistic society, which acknowledges the many types of ability possessed by human beings, the outmoded Trait Theory—the belief that *leaders are born and not made*—has long been regarded as a fallacy.

Early in the last decade of the twentieth century, President George H. Bush began talking about “leadership for a new world order.” With the fall of the Berlin Wall, the division of Yugoslavia, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and other dramatic events, the world was undergoing drastic changes. John F. Kennedy's prophetic statement had come to pass: “It is time for a new generation of leadership to cope with new problems and new opportunities. For there is a new world to be won.” Our national leaders began to recognize new challenges in the need for leadership of a new era. As Alvin Toffler observed, it is erroneous to think that a style of leadership that worked in the past could work in the present, much less the future. Just as the world has progressed from the Industrial Revolution (which Toffler labeled the “second wave” of civilization) to the age of technology (or Toffler's “third wave”), there must be a Leadership Revolution—the development of leadership at all levels: people who think differently, who value and respect diversity, and who are committed to creating a new and different kind of future (Morse, 1991).

It is unfortunate that, while leaders at all levels have cited the need for leadership, the void continues to exist. It is time for our educational systems to fill this void.

Jeanette Plauché Parker

Chapter One

What Is Leadership?

The term “leadership” has been defined in many ways. According to Howard Gardner (1995), President Harry Truman saw a leader as a person who could “get other people to do what they don’t want to do and like it.” Similarly, Eileen Ford, cofounder of the Ford model agency, defines leadership as “the ability to convince people that they want to do what you want them to do as if they had thought of it themselves” (Karnes & Bean, 1993). Leadership guru Warren Bennis sees leadership as “the energetic process of getting other people fully and willingly committed to a course of action, to meet commonly agreed objectives.” He further states that leadership is about “understanding people” and connecting with potential followers, as well as “having a unique vision, making strategic choices, and designing and enabling an organization to get the job done” (Yates, 2002). John Gardner (1990), however, emphasizes that leadership is only one of many roles fulfilled by members of groups, and that the function of the leader is to perform those tasks that are essential for the accomplishment of the group’s goals.

Current theories of leadership tend to lean toward “horizontal” models of leadership—leadership styles that emphasize collaboration and teamwork. Noting that centralized authority cannot adequately meet the leadership needs of large organizations, Gardner (1990) suggests that all individuals must be prepared to assume leadership roles and tasks as the situation dictates. He emphasizes the importance of leadership teams, which tend to foster feelings of ownership and pride in the overall product of their endeavors, and calls to mind examples such as Truman and Kennedy, who surrounded themselves with capable individuals who lent their individual talents for the good of the whole and helped their presidents to become exceptional leaders.

In *Leading Minds* (1995), Howard Gardner distinguishes between direct and indirect leadership. Indirect leaders—the Einsteins, the Mozarts, the Renoirs—are those who lead by example within their specific disciplines or “domains of expertise.” These creative geniuses may never provide *direct* leadership—working with and leading groups in the active pursuit of specific goals; nonetheless they are viewed as leaders in their fields, in that they set standards, by example, for others to follow. Indirect leadership is a highly individual quality; only a small number of persons in a given area of endeavor will demonstrate this type of leadership. Direct leadership, on the other hand, is the task of presidents, CEOs, committee chairs, and others who have the responsibility for leading others in the deliberate pursuit of specific goals. Gardner (1990) further distinguishes between leadership and other qualities such as status (e.g. presidents who were highly intelligent but totally ineffective at leading our nation), power (e.g., dictators such as Adolph Hitler), and authority (e.g., IRS auditors).

It is no longer possible to lead by adhering strictly to the status quo; continuous renewal must take place (Gardner, 1990). To realize this goal, we must act boldly to *escape* the present and look toward the future. It is widely acknowledged that human beings use only a small portion of their abilities, and—according to Gardner—these include leadership talents. Gardner further postulates that *leadership can be taught*—that most of the skills that enable a person to be an effective leader are learned rather than inborn. Although there is unquestionably a dire need to mold attitudes and develop diverse potentials throughout society, we must begin to develop leadership in the early years. It is the moral and professional obligation of schools and teachers to prepare our young people for effective citizenship as society’s future adults. Obviously not all of the current generation of students will become leaders in

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tomorrow's society. But, as Gardner observed, we can produce a "substantial cadre of young potential leaders from which the next generation of leaders will emerge" (p. 162).

Regardless of which theory or definition we espouse, we must acknowledge that leadership involves both conceptual knowledge and skill. If we are to maximize the leadership potentials of our gifted youth, we must identify those concepts and skills and seek to develop them through appropriately differentiated strategies. In reviewing the research on leadership, I find a clear dichotomy for classifying leadership skills; as with most other areas of education, these skills can easily be grouped into two broad areas or domains: cognitive leadership and affective leadership. The brief discussion that follows summarizes the traits, concepts, and skills that comprise effective leadership in these two essential domains.

COGNITIVE LEADERSHIP

Creative and Critical Thinking

When I was preparing for my doctoral comprehensive examination, one professor gave me a take-home question, forewarning me that he did not know the answer! The question, which sounded rather simple at first glance, was, "Is creativity a cognitive process?"

Having cut my gifted education teeth on the concept of hemispheric laterality—the theory that logic is controlled by the left side of the brain and creativity by the right—my first impulse was to answer *no*. However, as I researched the cognitive psychology writings of Dewey, Ausubel, and others, I became convinced that creativity was indeed a cognitive process. It is not within the scope of this book to explore this argument to any depth; however, it was this research that motivated me to classify creativity along with logic under cognitive leadership.

A brief glance at the problem-solving process will show that it requires alternating between convergence and divergence (see, for example, Treffinger, Isaksen, & Dorval, 1994). Logical thinking is required when analyzing the facts of a situation and diagnosing the nature of the problem—the problem-finding step that is so essential to good problem solving. It is also used in the process of evaluating alternatives generated through brainstorming, and in creating the final plan for solving the problem. Creative thinking, on the other hand, is essential to produce innovative ideas and to complete the "troubleshooting" that must precede the actual implementation of a solution. Contrary to popular opinion, logical thinking and creative thinking actually complement one another!

Some leadership characteristics that are related to creativity include **visualization** (not only having insight, innovative ideas, and vision, but also being able to communicate the vision and to visualize its realization), **ability to withhold judgment** (resisting temptation to evaluate ideas before examining them, and openness to new ideas), **flexibility** (the ability to adapt to changing circumstances—an essential characteristic of an effective leader), **resourcefulness** (knowledge of human, technological, and economic resources that are available for help in solving problems), **willingness to take risks** (the ability to think divergently and give up the status quo through a commitment to productive change), and **problem-solving ability** (the ability to identify and solve problems in both creative and logical ways). Karnes & Zimmerman (2001) cite the ability to solve problems creatively, and effective problem solvers must be able to think divergently with a long-term perspective, having the ability to see where their solutions fit into the larger context of real life.

Futuristic Thinking

Alvin Toffler, author of *Future Shock* and *Third Wave*, cited a need to develop in our future leaders a "future-focused role image." Frequently, gifted children—particularly those from economically disadvantaged homes—have difficulty imaging a positive future for themselves. A positive future image is essential for potential leaders. While the attitudinal aspect of the future-focused role image may be

considered affective, the development of that attitude through future problem solving and other future studies techniques is decidedly cognitive.

Knowledge and Skills of Search

The preceding discussion presented three types of thinking that are essential for effective cognitive leadership—creative thinking, logical (or critical) thinking, and futuristic thinking. John Dewey is said to have remarked, “We can have facts without thinking, but we cannot have thinking without facts.” As teachers, we must acknowledge that the knowledge explosion has made it impossible for us to recognize—much less know or teach—all the facts that today’s students will need as tomorrow’s leaders. But without a thorough understanding of a situation, a leader cannot be effective. No one can know everything, but much can be gained through efficient skills of search. As a background for any effective effort, a leader must possess above-average intelligence and a broad knowledge about many subjects, with a firm grounding in the disciplines.

AFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Affective leadership depends on the possession (and/or the development) of affective skills that facilitate the accomplishment of the tasks for which leaders are chosen. Essentially, affective leadership can be divided into three components: personal attributes, interpersonal communication skills, and decision-making skills.

Personal Attributes

While most thinking people see the fallacy in Aristotle’s Trait Theory, it is apparent that certain personal attributes contribute to one’s effectiveness as a leader. Perhaps the most important of these attributes is a belief in oneself. As Martin Luther King, Jr. observed, we must first teach students to believe in themselves (Gardner, 1990). Other important attributes that can be developed are enthusiasm, genuineness, independence and self-directedness, and task commitment. Leaders must be willing to take risks and become pioneers. To become pioneers, they must be self-confident, assertive, and dynamic. Also essential are goal orientation (with the ability to evaluate on the basis of realistic goals), organizational skills, and an almost fanatical drive for quality.

Interpersonal Communication Skills

Piaget observed that very young children are egocentric, viewing the world as if they were at its center. On the basis of his developmental theory, social education begins with the family, branching out gradually to the neighborhood, the community, the state, the nation, and finally the world. So it is with interpersonal communication. Until self-understanding is established, the individual cannot reach out to (much less communicate effectively with) others.

Like human development, interpersonal communication skills are hierarchical—they must be developed in sequence. The first stage in this development is **self-awareness**, built through self-exploration and reflection as the individual begins to understand self. Until self-understanding is achieved, **self-confidence** will not develop. Abraham Maslow saw self-actualization as the ultimate goal of human effort, and Lawrence Kohlberg placed human actions on a continuum of moral development. “Self-actualizing” persons would likely be operating at Kohlberg’s highest level of moral development, motivated by an inner locus of control, acting from their own motivations rather than worrying about other people’s judgment. Self-confidence must be achieved before one can begin to reach out to others.

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Gardner (1990) has observed that leaders not only must have confidence in their own ability but also must be able to communicate that confidence. In the words of Clarence Randall (1964), “The leader must know, must know that he knows, and must be able to make it abundantly clear to those about him that he knows.” Carl Rogers, well known for his work in the area of humanistic psychology and education, pointed out the importance of **empathy** and genuineness. It was probably Rogers from whom the gifted education movement took its emphasis on the teacher as facilitator. The effective leader must be willing to listen and respond to the concerns and needs of others. Until empathy is achieved, the **ability to communicate with others** will be stifled. Leaders must respect and encourage others, inspiring confidence in their effort to lead the group in the right direction and facilitating the group process without dictating. Finally, when the ability to communicate effectively on an interpersonal level is achieved, people can be **empowered** to make decisions and solve problems. Groups that are empowered by their leaders feel significant in their group roles, accept failures as learning experiences, see their work as exciting and important, and consider themselves part of a community (Bennis, 1989).

Other qualities and skills that are essential in developing effective interpersonal skills are the ability to delegate responsibility, manage the work and time of others, and facilitate teamwork. The leader must be able to motivate others, to foster creative production, and to respect diversity among the members of the team.

Decision-Making Skills

Finally, effective leaders must possess decision-making skills: high moral and ethical standards and the courage to stand up for their convictions, the willingness to accept responsibility, the judicious use of authority, and the ability to evaluate—at the appropriate time. Leaders must be decisive and able to reach both rational and creative solutions, to earn and be able to hold the trust of others. Finally, the effective leader must have a strong motivation to excel.

LEADERSHIP IN GIFTED EDUCATION:

The Leadership Training Model

Early in my career as a gifted education specialist, I concluded that leadership development should be the major goal of programs for our “brightest and best” youth. Warren Bennis (1989) maintained that even though President Jimmy Carter had “more facts at his fingertips than almost any other president,” he “never made the meaning come through the facts.” According to Bennis, leaders must “communicate their vision”—make their ideas real to those they lead. Ideas that are not understood will not be supported. In Bennis’s words, “. . . no matter how marvelous the vision, the effective leader must use a metaphor, a word, or a model to make that vision clear to others” (p. 14). Our brightest youngsters have the intellectual potential to be our most effective leaders; however, much human talent remains undeveloped. It is therefore critical for our schools to develop the latent potentials of our gifted students. It is also essential that we strive for **integrative** leadership—leadership that blends cognitive skills and knowledge with affective traits and processes. Only by using an integrative approach to leadership development can we hope to produce gifted leaders for the future of our nation and “the new world order.”

Suzanne Morse (1991) pointed out that “Our world is so complex, interdependent, and interrelated that the old paradigms of singular leadership will not work and cannot work. Just as the world moved from the industrial revolution to the technological, there must be a leadership revolution” (p. 3). I believe that Morse’s contention applies to gifted education as well. Programs for gifted and talented youth utilize a wide variety of models; however, if we are to prepare tomorrow’s leaders for the twenty-first century, we must develop **new** paradigms. In his prophetic book *Third Wave*, Toffler (1980) observed that

today's educational systems are a throwback to the industrial revolution, when the primary goal of schools was to prepare people to work in factories! We are no longer in an industrial revolution; we are immersed in the "third wave" of civilization—the age of information and technology. What worked in the past will not work for the future. We *must* develop new paradigms if our world is to succeed. As Torrance observed,

Democracies collapse . . . when they fail to use intelligent, imaginative methods for solving their problems. Greece failed to heed such a warning by Socrates and gradually collapsed (1962, p. 6).

On the basis of the research on leadership, I have proposed a model for development of "integrative leadership" in the gifted and talented. The *Leadership Training Model* (1983, 1989) identifies four primary components of leadership within cognitive and affective structures—*Cognition* and *Problem Solving* on the cognitive (perhaps "left-brain") side, and *Interpersonal Communication* and *Decision Making* on the affective ("right-brain") side. The section that follows discusses these components in some detail and presents suggestions and strategies for utilizing the model as a foundation for gifted programs.

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