

## **Authenticity in Teaching and Leadership**

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*The characteristics of an effective teacher are often the same as an effective leader. In order to be effective, both teachers and leaders must be able to have an influence and make an impact. Authenticity is using basic morals and applying these to one's position. Authenticity must be displayed because students and employees bring their own unique experiences and expectations to any situation. An effective teacher can use the guidelines presented to effectively communicate to students through authentic behavior. This paper will explore being an authentic teacher, being an authentic leader, and combining teaching and leading for the authentic classroom.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Most people can remember that teacher they really did not like. Dislike for teacher can stem from different things, including the teacher being unfriendly, rude, condescending, or not trustworthy. These same negative characteristics can also cause dislike of leaders. Most people can also remember that teacher or that leader that they really liked, respected, and admired. The characteristics of an effective teacher are often the same characteristics of an effective leader. The common ingredient between great teacher and great leaders is that they both must have the ability to influence others and make an impact on their lives (Quinn & Anding, 2005). If that person is unapproachable and unreliable, why would anyone want to them? Students and subordinates may be forced to comply with their actions, but are they giving their full attention and effort in learning and working?

Finding a good leader is a challenge. The leader should inspire, encourage, and motivate. Putting an ineffective leader in a position of power can cause more harm than good, so it is imperative that the right person is chosen. According to George (2006), those who must make the decision of who will be a leader “fall into the trap of choosing leaders for their style rather than their substance, for their image instead of their integrity.” (para. 1). This paradox causes a bad decision that makes the institution suffer.

Authenticity is a quality that involves basic morals, in particular being true to oneself (Starratt, 2005). Begley (2001) states that authentic leadership is a metaphor for “professionally effective, ethically sound, and consciously reflective practices in educational administration” (p. 353). He sees leaders as knowledgeable, moral, and skillful. George (2006), sees the leader as “being authentic, uniquely yourself, the genuine article. Authentic leaders know who they are” (para. 5). This authenticity should be seen in leaders to inspire others to follow. Authenticity must be prevalent in education, too, because of experiences are value-based. Society acquires a lot of its morals from education (Duignan & Bhindi, 2006).

This article will explore being an authentic teacher, being an authentic leader, and combining teaching and leading for the authentic classroom. In addition to presenting a review of the literature on

this topic, personal interviews were conducted to provide insight into many of the topics discussed. Using a regional university in Texas as a base, recent winners of the University's Teaching Excellence Award (TEA) were asked for interviews. Four of those agreed to personal interviews, and some of their views are presented. The ability of a teacher to be authentic can be explained by defining credibility, finding a style, showing emotion, addressing intimidation, and acknowledging differences.

## **BEING AN AUTHENTIC TEACHER**

Palmer (1998) states that teachers must have an authentic call to teaching. This call comes from within. Palmer stresses that "The inward teacher is a living core of our lives that is addressed and evoked by any education worthy of the name" (1998, p. 31). Part of finding this inward teacher is using critical reflection.

Critical reflection is important to becoming a better teacher (Brookfield, 1995; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; Dirx, 2006). One must reflect to understand how behavior influences classroom learning. Looking at one's own self is not meant to be judgmental, instead it is "open, questioning, mindful, consideration of how we think about ourselves and our teaching" (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004, p. 21). This is reiterated by Dirx (2006) when he states, "Teaching with a sense of authenticity reflects a profound sense of self-awareness and self-understanding" (p. 29). The teacher's character is important in expressing this authenticity.

### **Defining Credibility**

An effective teacher is not only about technique. Good teaching "comes from the integrity of the teacher from his or her relation to subject and students, from the capricious chemistry of it all" (Palmer, 1990, p. 1). Great teachers expect something greater than the average from their students; they expect students to expect great things from themselves (Quinn & Anding, 2005). TEA winner G. Wurtz (personal communication, November 18, 2011) uses this concept of high expectations in his teaching. He states that he "sets the bar high and puts the ball in their court."

A good teacher allows the students see him as something other than the holder of knowledge (Palmer, 1990). A teacher should maintain this credibility throughout the course term. According to Brookfield (1990), student perceptions of credibility are based on the following four behaviors: (1) a teacher's words must match his actions, (2) a teacher must admit his faults and be able to admit them openly, (3) a teacher must be willing to allow students to see him outside of class and office settings (in other words, be a real person.), and (4) a teacher must show respect through active listening of student concerns.

A teacher's credibility is paramount to ensuring students see the value the teacher has to offer (Brookfield, 1990). Another TEA winner, L. Bond (personal communication, November 17, 2011), believes that many students today feel that learning is a commodity; that they can pay for anything. Some students don't understand the value in a course, but the teacher who has the ability to adapt the course to the students' needs can build in the value needed. According to another TEA winner, Scifres (personal communication, November 17, 2011), if students fail to see the credibility of the teacher, they will not listen. Providing insight into actual experience in the field will help students to believe the teacher really knows what he is talking about. T. Clipson (personal communication, November 16, 2011), another TEA winner, concurs that it is extremely important that student know the teacher's background so that when criticism is given, the students realize that this comes from experience of knowing what is expected outside a classroom.

### **Finding a Style**

There is not one way to teach. Each teacher must bring his own style and personality into the classroom. Cranton and Carusetta (2004) discuss the importance of bringing one's individual style into the classroom. Using professional development literature is important to becoming a better teacher, but one must critically question every aspect of a class to develop a style, communicate effectively, and show ingenuity.

Great teaching involves more than just behavior and techniques, according to Quinn and Anding (2005), it is “about the expression of who we are” (p. 488). Unfortunately, this plethora of teaching styles makes it difficult to discuss methods among educators. It is important to find an approach that values this diversity, “which methodological reductionism fails to do” (Palmer, 1998, p. 12). Scifres agrees with this; a teacher should not copy others because there is more to motivation than methods.

### **Showing Emotion**

Another struggle of teaching is how to transmit the teacher’s knowledge (credibility) of the topic in an understandable mode. But, it is often more than that; teaching is rooted in emotions that stem from the relationships present in the classroom. According to Dirkx (2006), “we in higher education often minimize or ignore the potent emotional context in which our work is embedded” (p. 28). These emotions are important in transmitting this knowledge and how it is received.

TEA Winners provide insight into the use of emotions in when dealing with students. Scifres suggests talking to students at their level and using humor to relieve tension. Bond takes time to know each student’s name and ensures that students know each other, too. She creates many opportunities for students to speak throughout the semester. Wurtz states that “at times my students might find the fact that I am always pushing them to a high standard to be intimidating, but in the end they respond to the challenge and find themselves producing a result beyond what they thought they could accomplish.” Challenging the students in this way instills accountability to take action in their own learning. Wurtz believes that his strong reputation of holding high expectations motivates students to do their best at all times. However, intimidation to extremes can create a threatening environment, so a teacher should use caution with this tactic.

The challenge of emitting credibility can be affected by relationships. Teachers display their morals through actions: showing consideration, planning special activities, avoiding petty gossip, and giving special attention to students. Wynne and Ryan (1997) state “It is still important that students recognize moral gestures and civic actions in their teachers (p. 123). Wurtz states that his students watch him in situations when he deals with colleagues and other students. His morals are reflected in his actions, and they are visible to students. He leads by example and he believes this directly impacts the lives of his students.

### **Addressing Intimidation**

Students can easily feel intimidated by the classroom environment, and this feeling can be stronger if the students are from a historically discriminated group. Class participation can be affected by culture. According to Anderson (1998), “Students struggle with teachers over control and with one another and the dominant culture over issues of identity and status” (p. 591). This cultural power must be understood by the teacher (Starratt, 2005). Teachers must be able to show awareness of students’ needs; the more this can be expressed, the more authentic a teacher appears (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004).

Using the virtue of care and respect, the teacher needs to accept the learner as he is and carefully design the learning experience to meet the students’ needs (Starratt, 2005). As changes have occurred in family lives, sometimes the teacher is the only stable figure. Teachers should create an environment that allows all voices to be heard, and the teacher will gain credibility when he can show empathy through effective listening (Palmer, 1990). Teachers have a powerful impact because they are placed as the designated leader over students (Wynne and Ryan, 1997). Teachers must be objective in their approach to students. All interactions must be unbiased and true understanding of how past experience relate to each person (Moustakas, 1967). Generalizations must be avoided.

Groups that have been marginalized in the past are more like to feel threatened in a school environment. This makes the struggle for authenticity even harder. Many teachers have felt these same feelings when interacting when their own sources of authority. In this, Grimmatt and Neufeld (1994) state that this “struggle for authenticity represents a daily grappling with dilemmas of practice and is continually reconstituting itself” (p. 6). Teachers should use their own struggles to relate to students. This is where emotions can be used to understand student perspectives (Beatty, 2000). Scifres uses this

perspective. When interacting with students, he feels it is important to admit when he does not know the answer. He is honest and lets the students know that he is learning, too.

### **Acknowledging Differences**

According to Brookfield (1995), it is important to understand the different ways that students learn and what their expectations are in order to build a connection. Understanding past experiences and how they affect each learner is learned from direct interaction between the student and the teacher (Moustakas, 1967). In Brookfield's classes students are required to use a journal to discuss their views of weekly classroom experiences. Brookfield then uses class time to address issues that students write about. This activity helps to build the authenticity of the teacher. This authenticity demonstrates the teacher's trustworthiness to the student (Brookfield, 2006).

Everyone can be guarded when being critiqued, but teachers must learn to realize that student feedback is the best for improving teacher performance. And, according to Wiggins (2010), a teacher can show authenticity by actually reading and acting on feedback during a time when it can have a direct affect on the person making the comments. Therefore, it is in the teacher's best interest to gather such feedback often during the course. Moustakas (1967) discusses the importance of confrontation, which is a meeting to resolve conflict or controversy. In this, Moustakas states, "Paradoxical as this seems, only when persons can openly disagree, if this is the reality of their experience, is it possible for them to establish genuine bonds" (1967, p. 23).

In Brookfield's (2006) perspective, "If the teacher is effective, it is because she combines the element of having something important to say, demonstrate, and teach with being open and honest with students. The former quality is that of credibility, the latter the concept of authenticity" (p. 5). Grimmitt and Neufeld (1994) introduce a term called authentic motivation of teachers that strives to use intrinsic motivation. This leads to doing what is right and important for the learner in all situations. As they state, authentic motivation "is moral; it is caught up in a struggle to do what is necessary and of value, not just for the organization nor just for oneself, but ultimately in the important interests of learner." (pp. 4-5).

Many of society's values are based from the educational system. According to Brookfield (1990), "The problem with pursuing authenticity and credibility ... is that the actions associated with these ideas often seem contradictory. In pursuing one you risk threatening the other." (p. 175). For example, emphasizing one's credentials can be viewed as arrogant; however, failing to acknowledge it can lead to diminished credibility. Understanding the differences that each student brings to the classroom is one way to build authenticity.

## **BEING AN AUTHENTIC LEADER**

The need for effective leaders is essential in all fields: government, business, and education. Credibility is lacking in most facets of organizations, so there is widespread distrust of all leaders, regardless of industry or field (Starratt, 1993; Duignan & Bhindi, 2006). Understanding morals, creating a style, showing one's true self, building trust, and balancing life are essential to being considered as authentic.

### **Understanding Morals**

According to Duignan and Bhindi, (2006), "In order to become an authentic leader, it is important to know where one stands on important moral and professional issues and then act accordingly" (p. 199). The moral leader must be prepared to make a decision and persevere when a challenge presents itself (George, 2006). The leader must be objective and know his authentic self. Values originate from one's own experiences, but it is also derived from groups, organizations, and cultures which will vary for each person. Therefore, leaders must "establish a balanced appreciation of the relationships among personal values, professional values, organizational values, and social values" (Begley, 2001, p. 356).

It is important to create systems that help build processes that encourage leaders to use moral and ethical judgments in their decision making (Duignan & Bhindi, 2006). Hodgkinson (1991), states

“education as a moral force, will ensure that the struggle for survival is worthwhile as it provides purpose and meaning to our existence” (p. 202). According to George (2006), “The test of authentic leaders’ values is not what they say but how they act under pressure” (para. 10). Actions will tell the truth behind the person (Starratt, 2005).

An authentic leader acts within his own values to work toward a high degree of agency to make right and ethical decisions (Hannah, Lester, & Vagelgesand, 2005). However, which are the values that are considered right (Begley, 2001)? Although values differ between individuals, society creates these norms and impresses and pressures on others help to guide actions. Leaders must be good moral agents to display the values expected.

### **Creating a Style**

There is not one way to lead. Each leader will bring his own style to the leadership position as stated by Evans (2000), “authentic leadership is highly personal and therefore can take many forms” (p. 301). A style that works in one situation can be ineffective in another (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1979). Theory X’s authoritarian idea and Theory Y’s democratic management styles can both be effective for leaders, and Quinn and Anding (2005) give an example of this. A teacher-centered, Theory X teacher/leader can be effective because students know exactly what to expect; whereas a student-centered, Theory Y teacher/leader can also be effective because students feel a sense of empowerment. Beatty (2000) sums this idea up with the statement, “closed and open, authoritarian and transformative, leaders with various styles get results” (p. 336).

### **Showing One’s True Self**

Nobody is perfect, and not being afraid to show this is another trait of an authentic leader. Duignan and Bhindi (2006) state that “authentic leaders are aware of their own limitations, are tolerant of imperfection in others, and help others learn, grow, mature, and succeed” (p. 206). When showing these weaknesses, the leader creates a connection that actually creates more trust and empowers others (George, 2006).

An authentic leader does not dictate compliance; instead he will inspire others and challenge those who do not follow. Savviness is seen as the ability to solve problems and find practical solutions (Evans, 2000). However, according to Begley (2001), observable behaviors do not always accurately reflect the leader’s values. This idea is reinforced by Anderson (1998), “leader authenticity is obtained when principals practice what they preach” (p. 588).

Authentic leaders tend to shy from the public spotlight. According to Moore (2008), an authentic leader should act as though their reward is their service. However, they “desire to know privately that they left a tangible, lasting mark” (p. 181). This can be attributed to self-fulfillment.

### **Building Trust**

Effective leaders must inspire trust. This can be earned by honesty, consistency, and confidence. To inspire innovation, one must have trust, which leads to authenticity as a leader by showing integrity and savviness (Evans, 2000; Evans, 2010). He states (2000), “Integrity is a fundamental consistency between one’s values, goals, and actions” (p. 289). This can be shown by commitment through action.

According to Duignan and Bhindi, 1996), “Truth is the foundation for trust. And trust is the principal building and bonding force for all organizations” (p. 195). Effective leaders must consistently show their trustworthiness through their actions. If workers do not trust their leaders, they cannot be expected to excel.

### **Balancing Life**

An effective leader must learn to balance work and home life. A savvy school leader will recognize when it’s time to reevaluate this balance. According to Evans (2010), “They’ve learned that you must take care of yourself so that you can take care of others” (p. 110). Because of an intense pride in their work, effective leaders continue to overburden themselves with work, creating more work for themselves.

## COMBINING TEACHING AND LEADING IN THE CLASSROOM

There are three essential characteristics to becoming an authentic leader: some leadership characteristics cannot be taught, leaders must be resilient, and authentic leaders must base their decisions on their core values (Evans, 2000). These guidelines can be transferred to teachers to build their leadership skills. Essentially, teachers are the leaders in the classroom, and they must have the ability to use resources to effectively motivate and lead students toward a better understanding of course content. Building authenticity into teaching styles is just one way to do this. Brookfield (1990) gives steps to take to build trust in students' perceptions:

- Don't deny your credibility
- Be explicit about your organizing visions
- Make sure your words and actions are congruent
- Be ready to admit your errors
- Reveal aspects of yourself unrelated to teaching
- Show that you take students seriously
- Don't play favorites
- Realize the power of your own role modeling (pp. 165-172)

According to Duignan and Bhindi (2006), authentic teacher-leaders are "aware of their own limitations, are tolerant of imperfection in others, and help others learn, grow, mature and succeed" (p. 206). A leader can be compared to a philosopher and person of action, using ethics in all their dealings (Hodgkinson, 1991; Duignan & Bhindi, 1996). Using savviness, an effective leader in the classroom will learn to accept the uncertainties and adjust their behavior to fit the needs, all why "leading from strength, clarifying their core commitments, [and] fostering recognition" (Evans, 2010, pp. 109-110).

### Leading Democratically

Leading in a classroom can follow democratic leadership ideals that promote participation. According to Anderson (1998), "participation is authentic if it includes relevant stakeholders and creates relatively safe, structured spaces for multiple voices to be heard" (p. 575). Students can use their voices to promote their ideals for classroom discussions. This form of participation allows for historically under-represented groups to have their say in the classroom. This in turn leads to "more equal levels of student achievement and improved social and academic outcomes for all students" (Anderson, 1998, p. 575).

Good teaching involves many conversations to allow for input from all stakeholders. Good leaders understand this and know that they should use this, too. According to Palmer (1998), "They lead from the same model we have been exploring for teaching itself, creating a space centered on the great thing called teaching and learning around which a community of truth can gather" (p. 160). A teacher-leader can ensure there are open spaces for communication to occur. To help promote conversations that lead to participation, Scifres believes that teachers should reveal their own weaknesses and show some vulnerability to help earn respect. Students should be able to see the teachers as a real person.

### Inspiring the Love of Knowledge

Much like the goal of the organization leader is to motivate employees to work toward a common goal, the goal of the teacher leader is to instill a desire to continue lifelong learning. A positive relationship between teachers and students is necessary to increase student knowledge beyond the basics to allow students to learn through trial and error (Evans, 2010). This focus is on the journey of the education process, not a final destination.

An authentic relationship must be built between teacher and student that includes "a relationship of mutuality and reciprocity, where levels of self-disclosure are both possible and honored" (Starratt, 2007, p. 169). Good teachers have the capacity to create a web of relationships between the teacher, the subject,

and the students. This leads the students to learn to create their own webs of relationship in the world for themselves (Palmer, 1998). This will help inspire life-long learning.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Authentic leadership helps subordinates to increase their power; this power then acts like waves in an organization to affect power relationships in other areas (Anderson, 1998). Being authentic is not a convenience characteristic – one that can be used when it fits the moment. Instead, a teacher/leader must constantly work to develop being authentic (Cranton & Carusetta, 2001). Numerous stories have been told of teachers that have made a lasting difference in a student's life. Moustakas (1967) describes this “we know from adult reports in later life that many individuals have singled out the experience with a teacher as the turning point toward increased self-esteem, creative accomplishment, originality, and effective living” (p. 224). Wurtz shares a recent account of a student sending him a random text message thanking him for being a great teacher – years after graduating and becoming a teacher herself.

Palmer (1990) discusses having the courage to teach. He sums up the issues presented here for authentic leadership in the following statement, “Good teaching requires courage -- the courage to expose one's ignorance as well as insight, to invite contradiction as well as consent, to yield some control in order to empower the group, to evoke other people's lives as well as reveal one's own” (p. 15). This is re-emphasized by Palmer (1998) with the premise that teaching is a result of the individual identity and integrity of the teacher.

There are many sources on authentic leadership and authentic assessment in schools, but few that directly appeal to teacher personalities in the classroom setting. This is reflected in Cranton and Carusetta (2004) when they discuss the move toward standardization, “Authenticity in teaching has been a relatively neglected area of study,” (p. 21). The Teaching Excellence Award winners were used as primary sources to add insight into the values presented in research. Since teachers are the direct connection to student learning, they must show their genuine spirit to helping students learn. This is especially true in higher levels of education as more students begin to question authority. As more faculty members model authenticity, student learning can increase – an important goal of higher education.

In a rapidly-changing world, business leaders must be knowledgeable about how to manage this change and its effects. Change can be created, sustained, or managed by effective communication (Ford & Ford, 1995). Communication skills are essential to instill the importance of change and move beyond the status quo. Communication provides a sense of urgency and instills a motivation to act (Denning, 2005; Gilley, Gilley, & McMillan, 2009).

Communication is just one step in the change process. According to Ford and Ford (1995), “In the absence of communication there is no intentional change and no intentional change process.” (p. 560). Further, “Motivating employees and providing effective communications are highly and significantly associated with effective implementation of change” (Gilley, Gilley, & McMillan, 2009, p. 88). For business educators, this is especially useful as they are challenged by both students and society. In order to do this, we must find a way to reach the student to instill this importance. Being an authentic teacher is an essential step to reaching students.

A more extensive study should be conducted to find out what specific characteristics are sought by students. It would be interesting to find if these are the same characteristics that educators hope to exhibit. Further study would gather more data on the characteristics and compare these two groups. Based on the different personalities presented here, this would prove to be an interesting comparison.

In the interim teacher/leaders should continue to communicate with students while also seeking feedback to continually improve the student/teacher relationships. If this open communication occurs, it is likely to improve student engagement and performance. The suggestions by Brookfield can be useful in improving this dialogue.

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