Theories of leadership and self-reflection

Introduction

Contemporary theories in educational leadership suggest that the current understandings of leadership are no longer useful and should be let go as contemporary leadership requires leaders to be " more relational, more sensitive, more empathic, more empowering of others, more open, more communicative and more reflective (Branson (1), 2009, p. 158). Recent research suggests that the key factor and first step to successful leadership is that of self-reflection (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, Walumbwa, 2005, p. 345). The essay analyses, evaluates and synthesizes theoretical understandings that underpin the development of the leadership platform and the personal narrative of self-reflection on the journey to understand the development of self as a leader. Therefore, at times the first person is used to communicate a personal narrative about coming to know myself. It aims to reflect on why I lead, teach and act the way I do.

Intrapersonal knowledge is to be developed through the process of self reflection and then to begin to develop an understanding on the importance of who we are as an individual and how this impacts how we lead and the decisions we make (Norris & Branson, 2015). The platform for leadership will be developed as a Personal Credo Matrix and then be discussed as well as theories and frameworks around the importance of this in the context of educational leadership (Burford, 2019). A personal conclusion from the journey of self discovery which has been supported by academic readings and research will be communicated.

Dimensions of Self and Personal Insights

As a framework to consider and reflect upon the ' Authentic Self' the Branson model was used (Branson (2), 2009). Values for the purpose of this assignment will be viewed as Rokeach defines (as cited in Burford 2019) " an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence". The self –reflection enabled deep consideration into aspects that have contributed to the dimensions of self. Branson states these dimensions as interactive and interrelated; self-esteem, motives, values and beliefs (Branson, (2) 2009, p. 1). His diagrammatic representation of these dimensions highlights the interactive aspect in the formation of Self (Branson, (2) 2009, p. 2). Through coming to understand the inter-related and inter-active self dimensions of self esteem, motivations, values and beliefs leaders can then realise how values influence leadership behaviours (Branson, (2) 2009 p. 1). To uncover your self concept, the following areas need to be reflected upon; defining moments, critical choices and pivotal people (Branson, (2) 2009, p. 4).

In considering these aspects and the impact they have had on my own personal development I was able to identify and critically reflect on how these have shaped me as a person and the values, believes and ethical considerations I view as important. This journey was at times uncomfortable as I had to be honest and true to these experiences and how they have impacted me.

Some of these times were happy and held positive emotions. Others were deeply personal and confronting, impacting me in a negative way. The key values discovered through the Branson model that shape my concept of self

were trust, kindness, courage, humility and compassion. With some values I can pinpoint exact experiences or people that have shaped my values. Others it was a series of situations or decisions that have shaped that value to where it sits with me today. It did give an insight into why I have made the decisions I have in a leadership position. For example my value of compassion is often referred to in my leadership position, which has extended from a defining moment for me when at a young age my father became suddenly ill. The compassion others showed to me at this time has deeply affected me and shaped my

beliefs around this value of compassion.

There has been much research and discussion around the role of self reflection in effective leadership. Branson states that leadership begins with knowing your ' Authentic Self', rather than following a set plan (Branson, (1) 2009, p. 162). In his article *Leadership for an Age of Wisdom* (2009), Branson stated that " honest and courageous self reflection and self inquiry", is the way to improve as a leader (Branson, (1) 2009 p. 163). Further research by Gardner et. al. (2005) discusses the relationship between self awareness through reflection and self acceptance as the key to leadership development (Gardner et. al., 2005, p. 347). Willower supports these views stating that leadership is an " outcome of self knowledge" (Willower, 1985, p. 571). As part of leadership development, self reflection needs to be honest and ongoing.

It allows meaning to be given to our decision making and interactions with others as well as a continual dialogue that allows personal growth (Willower, 1985, p. 584/ 585). The ways to reflect vary and there is no one way that suits everyone or all contexts (Caughron, Antes, Stenmark, Thiel, Wang, Mumford, 2011, p. 355). The act of self questioning will enable the individual to conceptualize events and consider how values and beliefs guide the action (Nesbit, 2012, p. 210). The three approaches of self reflection as described by Nesbit of reflecting alone, reflecting with one other and reflecting in a group provided personal insights into my own style of reflection (Nesbit, 2012, p. 211).

Throughout this process the act of writing and then talking with another proved to be the most successful way for me to further develop my understandings. I found I needed the quiet time and space of writing and internal reflection to come to a place of acknowledgment. But to consolidate or understand inconsistencies I needed to talk to one or two trusted others to uncover my true understandings. Nesbit suggests the use of a reflective journal for leaders and I can see the true benefits of this approach (Nesbit, 2012, p. 212). He also found that reflecting in a group provides the most interpersonal learning (Nesbit, 2012, p. 212). I can also find value in reflecting in a group in a school context when striving for common outcomes.

The concept of personal values predicting and guiding leadership behaviours and decisions or ' values-led principalship' has been further examined by Branson in the article *Exploring the Concept of Values-led Principalship* (2005, p. 16).

Here Branson explores how the behaviours and decision making of principals is influenced by personal values. He listed ideals about what contemporary leadership should encompass, noting values informed as a key factor (Branson, 2005 p. 18). Similarly Begley (2006) proposed three prerequisites for leadership which included self knowledge along with moral reasoning and sensitivity towards others (Begley, 2006, p. 570).

The time for personal reflection revealed more than anticipated. It has given an insight as to why I value what I do and how this has come to be. It became very apparent that having a strong sense of self is the first step in the development of leadership attributes (Gardner et. al., 2005, p. 348). The process has re-enforced the importance for me as a leader to act with integrity and to stay honest and true to what I believe and value. I also view this now as a way to build credibility so others can see me as I truly am. I have developed awareness about the influence my values have on my intentions and behaviours.

Leadership Platform; The Credo and Personal Insights

Appendix One: Personal Credo Matrix

Once these personal values had been established using Branson's framework of Authentic Self (Branson 2009), a personal Credo as a leadership platform was then considered. A Credo has the purpose of unpacking beliefs around the values that have been revealed through the authentic self framework.

It aims to align goals and decisions with acting in an ethical way and continuing to be true to who you are (Burford, 2019, PowerPoint slide 53). Research and academic study have revealed how a Credo contributes to effective leadership. Burford's Taxonomy for Moral Literacy (Burford, 2015) builds a framework that shows the importance of character rather than characteristics in the role of leadership (Burford, 2015). This taxonomy identifies three layers that impact and interact with each other. The ' interior' consists of the moral and personal purpose. I identified this with the Branson model I had engaged in and the Credo I was developing. The second layer was that of ' function' with professional and organisational purpose. Here I identified with my school context and the culture that exists. The third area is that of ' environment' which comprises of public and cultural purpose. With this level I identified the CEM and government requirements on a professional level. (Burford, 2015).

The development of my Credo was a challenging one (Appendix 1). Although the Authentic Self framework as outlined by Branson had uncovered what my values are and why they have been shaped as they had been, it was thought provoking to consider my beliefs around these values. It took time to unpack my thoughts around each value and to truly consider each belief at its very core. I did wonder at times why people or experiences affected me the way they did and were my responses reasonable or why did even respond that way. In his article Branson also considered this stating how self reflection can be challenging and the importance of being kind to yourself (Branson (2), 2019, p. 3).

This was reassuring and refreshing allowing me to accept my feelings and place them in a given context. It also re-enforced that I was aware that I viewed my values as a compass to guide my everyday life. (Burford, 2019 EDLE681).

The metaphor of ' heart, head and hand' as discussed by Burford and Sergiovanni assisted to clarify my own understandings of a Credo. (Burford, 2019 & Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 19-20). The metaphor re enforced and clarified the idea of a Credo as a way to characterize decision making. Sergiovanni uses the ' heart' as a metaphor for individual values and beliefs. He also states that the heart shapes the head and the hand.

The ' head' represents the ability to reflect on a situation, thinking and personal or professional values. Finally Sergiovanni suggests that the ' hand' is seen as the action and the ability to make a decision that is in alignment with personal or professional values and beliefs (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 19-20). Burford also uses this metaphor and relates it to the characters in the Wizard of Oz, highlighting how interaction between the ' heart , head and hand', is vital in the decision making process of a leader (Burford, 2019).

Developing a Credo helped me to consider my core values and made me re-assess my own values and motivated me to consider how this has and will impact my decision making and leadership behaviours. In doing this I came to understand myself in a way I did not expect. At times confronting, I found myself coming back to each idea on several occasions and at completely unexpected times.

The process was rewarding and I can clearly see the benefits of developing this platform as part of my leadership development. I have come to understand myself in a way I did not know before. I have accepted that self knowledge and self clarity derived from my life story impact the way I see the world and the decisions I make. I have also grown to understand how my values have been influenced by experiences, people and choices I have made at times throughout my life. Additionally my values and ethical beliefs drive the decisions I make, becoming a moral compass that surrounds my actions as a leader (Norris &Branson, 2015).

These understandings I have developed have been supported by the work of Branson and Burford and other research articles I have engaged with. To then further explore these as beliefs with ' ought' and ' ought not statements' and to consider the evidence around these cemented for me how and why these are integral components to the leader I will become (Burford 2019). I found conflict when investigating the Frame Analysis Theory, as I questioned whether the decisions I make were only because of what I actually did take notice of (Levin, Schneider, and Gaeth, 1998). On further reflection and research I was able to see the benefits of this theory in relation to a school context where a decision needs to be made in terms of benefits over losses. It raised the issue of culture and context as a leader and the interaction between my personal credo and that of the school (Levin, Schneider, and Gaeth, 1998).

It is necessary for educational leaders to take the time to reflect on their own values as a way to develop an understanding of self.

The Burford Credo Model is one way to investigate and reflect on what a value is to you as an individual (Burford 2019). Once these values have been established through the Branson Authentic Self model (2009) the individual can then examine what they believe about that value. Finally, if you value it and believe it, it needs to be considered when contemplating decisions that need to be made in positions of leadership. This is to examine what it would look like, sound like and or be. Clearly this demonstrates how " leadership is a values based experience" (Burford, 2019, EDLE681). Defining my personal values has assisted in defining my unique leadership style. Through the process of self reflection I realised what values I consider to be most important and the underpinning beliefs to these values. The development of a personal Credo is a way to assist educational leaders to identify what underpins their beliefs that can determine the way they make decisions on a daily basis. It also assists to align their personal values to the context of their setting (Burford 2019).

The idea of Self-Directed Leadership Development (SDLD) also has wider implication in Human Resources as discussed by Nesbit in his research article *Role of Self Reflection* (2012). Although it has the challenges of being dependent on self motivation and personality dispositions to maintain the momentum of self learning, it does provide a way for individuals to continue to develop awareness of their competency including strengths and weakness (Nesbit, 2012, p. 206). The SDLD framework requires critical self reflection skills that need to be understood and awareness around emotional reactions to feedback (Nesbit, 2012, p. 207).

But this model and the Daudelin (as cited by Nesbit, 2012, p. 210), four stages of reflective analysis highlight the importance of ongoing self questioning and reflection as a way to improve self, and understand events in relation to your personal beliefs, which may also change over time (Nesbit 2012, p. 210). There are many frameworks that leaders are able to work through as a form of reflection. As I reflected on both positive and negative experiences I have been able to deepen my understanding of myself as a person and how this influences my leadership. The Credo matrix is also a way to be reflective on my own values and beliefs and that of the school context to see if these align. This should enhance by ability to work through challenging situations and strengthen my leadership capacity. (Burford, 2019).

Conclusion:

This process has revealed to me that " leadership is a value based experience" (Burford, 2019). It is clear from this personal journey that I believe leadership begins with understanding the story of your life. It is to reflect on your personal narrative and experiences, not just the facts that give meaning and a deeper purpose. Your authentic self is one of courage, honesty and vulnerability. This self knowledge and self clarity is derived from your life story. In creating your own personal Credo statement is to create a springboard for enactment. A Credo is a way to critically reflect on your personal values, beliefs, philosophies and assumptions. Begley's statement " Leaders should know their own values and ethical predispositions, as well as be sensitive to the value orientations of others" (Begley, 2006, p. 575) resonated with my thoughts as I further developed my understandings

around knowing yourself to understand your behaviours as a leader. I found the experience a way to take a step back and examine what values are important to me and how this would look at its best.

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