

Artefact 6
Argument Paper
Democratic Leadership as the Foundation for Inclusive Education
MDDE 631: Inclusive Leadership and Practice in Education
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Summary

I had two major questions that I revisited throughout my MAIS journey, the first was about the role of emotions in learning, and the second was about the relationship between democratic leadership and inclusive education. In my studies (MAIS 642, MAIS 644, EDST 646, and MDDE 631) I addressed and interrogated my own leadership style. Doing deep self analysis and looking back at my 20 years of professional experience, I concluded that I am a democratic leader. It was important for me to analyze my own leadership style because it helped me understand why and how I do the things that I do. By confronting perceived weaknesses within this leadership style, I will be able to address them before they become a problem. Understanding what leadership style my teams prefer will be helpful in the future. I know I am a strong democratic leader as I have addressed all aspects of my personality through the lens of this leadership style.

I chose this paper as an artefact because it investigates myself as an Educator. I interrogated democratic leadership style to approach inclusive learning practices helping me to expand my role as an educator - a major goal of my MAIS degree. I now have the skills to articulate my leadership style in any professional role that I embark on. I learned that this leadership style may not be “the best”, but it is the one that fits my personality. I know the limitations of the style and I have the knowledge to address and overcome them.

I enjoyed the work that I did in this class and in this research, but looking back, the class was centered around school leadership. I think that if I had focused my studies on workplace learning this paper would have been even more successful. There are many overlaps between school leadership and corporate learning leadership, but there are also many differences, and I did not address them in this paper. This creates a challenge for me as I will have to continue to research through lived experience and academically.

One important thing that I learned through this paper was to connect with subject

matter experts that study democratic leadership in the workplace. I have now attended several webinars and am in constant communication with some of my favorite authors via LinkedIn. One major change that I noticed from my undergrad to my master's degree is that many of the theorists that we discuss are currently practicing, and now that the digital world has made it easier to connect with one another, I feel like I can reach them on a more personal level. This was a highlight and a revelation to me as a student.

Democratic Leadership as the Foundation for Inclusive Education

Introduction

The connection between leadership and inclusivity is an important one; Leadership methodology that mirrors inclusive practices is vital to increasing the ways in which schools, teachers, and students can adapt to inclusive practices. Inclusivity depends on creativity and collaboration. Inclusive practices in education begin with an analysis of the inclusive methodology that already exists within that school; research suggests that most schools already have some knowledge of inclusivity and inclusive practices which facilitates a broadly shared starting point (Ainscow, 1999). Educational inclusivity has to do with participation and achievement of all students, it encompasses more than simply focusing on one group of vulnerable learners (Ainscow et al, 2003). Collaboration is essential to the development of inclusive practices, it requires a process of improvisation as teachers respond to all members of the school community including the students, parents and other teachers. Teachers need to have a positive view of “differences” within their student population, and amongst each other; pupils who do not fit into existing expectations can be seen as offering challenges that invite further improvisation - their differences are a positive challenges for the teachers to explore. I believe strongly in democratic leadership as it is the key to inclusive education because it calls on all group members to take a participative role in the decision-making process. According to theorist John Gastil (1994), democratic leaders rely on group decision making, active member involvement, and a system of honest praise and criticism and a degree of comradeship.

Democratic Leadership

I believe that the leadership theory that best reflects my values is democratic leadership. This theory is centered around collaboration, as leaders seek feedback and input to make decisions, they like to listen to a range of options and believe that everyone's thoughts are valid. Democratic leaders like to test ideas with their followers and give space for these ideas to be explored, scrutinized, and analyzed. Implementing a risk/benefit approach is important as it ensures that the feedback from followers is beneficial to the group. Democratic leaders must ideally delegate many decisions to their followers – exemplifying a decentralized approach of power and authority; leaders are still accountable for their decisions but have presented the proof they need to support their decision to stakeholders and bystanders alike. This type of leadership is centered around building and cultivating relationships with their followers. The gap between leader and follower is not as obvious as with other leadership styles. Democratic leaders tend to be more approachable and react more spontaneously, cultivating mutually beneficial relationships. The strengths of this leadership style include the tendency to make high quality, informed decisions, leading their followers to be more creative as they are encouraged with space and time to test out their ideas.

My background is in museum development, I am often brought into an organization to make major changes to their service design model. It is important for me to convince members of the team that I have the skills and the knowledge to carry forward a successful project from planning to implementation. Although democratic leadership is not the type of leadership that I would instinctively choose, it is the

leadership that best fits with my personality. Believing in fairness, in inclusivity and in equality, I have suffered from imposter syndrome - being part of a team that has a strong shared vision and understands my reasoning helps to counter these feelings. For me, democratic leadership practices help me ensure that I am on the correct path, supporting my team members by reinforcing my respect for their beliefs, and it lets me know that we have reached agreement in the decisions being made.

Criticisms of democratic leadership [SB2] include a negative view of its decision-making process- some democratic leaders are called out for finding challenges in making quick decisions. When there is a negative member among the team, they may bring the team down further at a much faster pace than with other leadership styles. These leaders are often seen as more feminine as they are interpersonally oriented, whereas more masculine leadership styles tend to be task-oriented and autocratic (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Although I personally do not see a preference between these gender dualisms, some may favor the masculine leadership style and may perceive it as being more successful.

I have worked in highly creative organizations, where having the time and space to test out ideas was an integral part of the job. I have since taken some of these creative endeavors to other organizations where they did not value the time it takes to explore and find correct decisions leading my success as a leader to waiver. I have been accused of not being able to make decisions, relying too much on my team, wanting to be everyone's friend. As I mature and analyze other leadership styles, I am finding that there might be better ways to lead a team, but my personality still fits best with this leadership style. Understanding the perceived negative aspects of this

leadership style will help me address them and overcome them. For example, the constant need to check in with team leaders may come across as a sign of weakness, I see this as finding and developing proper applications of the various strengths of the team as individuals and as a group.[SB3]

Inclusive Education

Validity of democratic leadership in inclusive education

Democratic leadership is closely related to distributed leadership, and both are often defined collectively. They have emerged as an alternative to charismatic leadership which portrays talented characteristics of a single figure, one which persuades or directs followers towards the goals or the success of the organization (Woods, 2005). Democratic leadership is believed to have a more positive influence on student outcomes [SB4] compared to traditional top-down leadership styles (Bell, Bolam & Cubillo, 2002, Silins & Mulford, 2002). Democratic leadership demonstrates a respect for what it means to be human: to want a common good, and for each individual to act accordingly in the direction towards this good (McClain, Ylimaki & Ford, 2010). If it is done correctly, democratic leadership can create an environment in which people are encouraged and supported in an open-hearted way (Woods, 2005). I believe in education and learning, and I treat my co-workers and my followers as if we are all learners. Learners are able to achieve their full potential through being guided by the information that we gather collectively - informing the direction of leadership, thus providing a convincing example of where democratic leadership can particularly thrive.

Democratic leadership is concerned with meaningful participation and decision making to establish conditions for respectful relationships, collaborative associations and, active cooperation. It enables the formation of social, learning and culturally responsive educational organizations, in part by employing strategies for achievement, enabling particular conversations and struggling to determine what is needed when, and how to get there in specific situations by developing a politically informed commitment to justice for all (Gale & Densmore, 2010). It is also necessary to state that “democratic leadership entails rights to meaningful participation and respect for and expectations toward everyone as ethical beings” (Woods, 2004, p.4).

Democratic leadership includes a sense of what it is to be human; this leadership style is not confined to a small minority, it develops opportunities for all team members to take initiative and responsibility, for each member to seek out the greater good and for respecting diversity. The power is dispersed among participants, all of which share in discourse to complete an activity (Woods, 2005). Democracy is about liberty and about belonging, seeking our potential as human beings, engaged in the search for a unity that encompasses diversity and differences alike (Woods, 2005). I find that democratic education exemplifies its true validity in how it strives towards true inclusivity. Since democratic leadership is about distribution of power, it aims to create an environment where people are encouraged and supported in finding truths about the world, including values and ethical rationality- part of this includes searching for the human good (Woods, 2005).

Democracy is more than a set of individual guarantees of majority rule, it is a respect for collective projects that can reconcile the assertion of personal liberty with the right to identify with a particular social, national, or religious collectivity (Woods, 2005). This notion of democracy and inclusion can be applied equally among school administrators, teachers, and the larger school community as a whole. Social justice is a major component of democratic leadership, when people act collectively through civil society and act within institutions in ways that are morally obligated to create economic and social conditions where everyone is able to participate and work towards their human potential (Woods, 2005).

There have been three major trends in educational policy since the 1960s: first was innovation and professional freedom, then came educational prescription, followed by a balance of professional autonomy with accountability. Unfortunately, these methods have become increasingly bureaucratic and quantitative in how they recommend that schools become inclusive, differentiated, and democratic learning communities that place responsibility before accountability and have sustainable leadership practices (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

Practicality and Usefulness of democratic leadership in inclusive education

Members of schools that work collectively as a team in decision making, implementation, and the monitoring process have a sense of ownership and this sense of ownership is shared among all school members (Delgado, 2014). Democratic schools tend to have an easier time coping with challenges because they exceed the capabilities of individual leaders through the participation of all school members; shared

collective and democratic leadership approaches have been addressed as the most effective approaches for providing opportunities to lead and manage change and school improvement (Delgado, 2014). Democratic leadership is also about cultivating independence, it calls for individuals to seek with one another the truths that render life and learning meaningful (Woods, 2005). Each individual brings their own strengths and knowledge to the team. Democratic leadership promotes respect and diversity and looks to reduce cultural and material inequalities - the very acts of discussion and participation are in themselves a democratic act.

Democratic leadership enables change in educational performance and organizational culture (Avissaret al, 2017). In this context, distributed leadership is asserted to expand the boundaries of leadership beyond those in formal leadership positions and challenge hierarchies in school organizations. It is also indicated that distributed leadership is effectively performed in schools where an atmosphere of trust, collegiality and cooperation exist. Indeed, the schools in the communities with democratic values and devolution of power will provide a sound footing for the adoption of distributed leadership (Saadiet al, 2009)

Democratic leadership based on the philosophical tradition of Dewey's pragmatism cultivates "an environment that supports participation, sharing of ideas, and the virtues of honesty, openness, flexibility and compassion" (Starratt, 2001, p. 338). Indeed, democratic leadership implies that school principals are responsible to build educational organizations around central democratic values such as supporting equity and social justice, as well as encouraging these traits in the wider community. It emphasizes social justice, dignity, rights and welfare of minorities and all individuals in

the school. Democratic leadership requires a value base of leadership practice and the processes creating or sustaining social justice, empowerment, and community (Harris et al., 2007; Møller, 2003).

By means of balancing power and trust in leadership and management areas of the school, empowerment can be achieved, which in turn creates a stimulating learning environment where students develop as citizens (Harris, et al., 2007). Democratic Leadership creates an environment in which people are active contributors to the creation of the institution, its culture, and its relationships. The organization then works to recognize and enhance this by encouraging the dispersal of leadership among democratic leaders (Woods, 2005).

Why is this better than other perspectives?

I have an affinity for democratic leadership because it aims to create an environment where people practice ethical rationality through dialogue and creativity; democratic leadership both facilitates and exercises deliberation (Woods, 2005). Throughout democratic leadership and participation, the aim is to create an environment in which people are empowered and enabled by the institutional, cultural, and social structures of the organization; it contributes to the learner's and other's growth towards human potential (Woods, 2005). Democratic leadership works to increase the reach of learning by creating a culture of shared responsibility and leadership in schools (Louiset al, 2010). When compared with other types of leadership, Kurk researchers found that authoritarian leaders offer clear expectations about how, when and what will be done with minimum input from group members. Laissez-faire leaders offer little to no

guidance, leaving the decision making solely on the group. Democratic leaders offer guidance to group members and encourage participation and involvement in the decision-making process - as expected it was found to be the most effective of the three leadership styles regarding motivation, engagement, and inclusivity (Louiset al 2010). Gale & Densmore (2010) found that democratic leadership is concerned with meaningful participation in decision making, therefore building respectful relationships, collaborative associations, active cooperation enabling the formation of socially intelligent, learning focused, and culturally responsive educational organizations. This happens because democratic leaders employ strategies for achievement, enabling conversations and determining what is needed to develop a politically informed commitment to justice for all (Gale & Densmore, 2010).

Principals from schools that demonstrate democratic behaviors use cooperative relationships and shared decision making for the goal of school improvement (Adeyami & Adu., 2013). Through democratic leadership, schools can overcome achievement gaps and move towards a basis for creativity and sustainability, ecological survival and fundamental human rights (Rawson & Richter, 2000).

Conclusion

Democratic leadership can be described as relating to the intentional formulation of values, vision, and policy in schools. It is instrumental in the development of inclusive education because it is at its core ethically transformational - it communicates a shared vision of being moral, raising aspirations and motivating a community (Woods, 2005).

The way that leadership demonstrates its shared values is mirrored in the way in which those shared values are demonstrated among the school population. If inclusivity is a core value of leadership, then it will be demonstrated as a core value of the school administration and policies, ensuring that students are active members of their community. The role of school leadership should be centered around supporting educational quality development which begins with teacher learning, generating knowledge about the needs of the students (including their inclusivity needs), and creating and articulating shared values. Following Dewey's (1916) notion that schools have a key role to play in helping pupils develop the critical abilities they need to question the society they live in, creating their own essential tools for developing and maintaining a functioning democracy..

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