

Leadership Educator Personal Philosophy Statement

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When my sister and I were kids, we began to enjoy playing board games with my parents. As expected with any new board game player I did not have the necessary skills to win. Interestingly, I won much more frequently than my skills would have predicted. As I won, I grew confident and my interest in board games grew. The more I played, the more I learned. The system of identifying as a board game player, having the skills to effectively play, and winning were indelibly linked. It was not until years later when my father quickly and cruelly beat my sister and me at a game of Risk, that it was revealed my parents had been taking it easy on us all those years.

For a moment, it might seem like my parents were not preparing us for the “real world” by reducing barriers to our success we would otherwise be sure to encounter. I challenge that notion by instead presenting their actions as those of leadership educators. I believe my parents’ choices were made in an effort to build our self-efficacy by enacting mastery experiences with verbal persuasion. Letting us win and congratulating us had a direct relationship with our desire to want to engage in future play, much like leadership educators enabling the development of leader efficacy and the likelihood of future leadership endeavors.

Beyond leader efficacy, my parents engaged multiple components of the Leadership Learning Framework. By engaging us in active gameplay, by letting us at times watch them play (often the first round of a new card game), and by leading discussions after we played about what did and did not work, we were experiencing the board game parallels of Leadership Knowledge, Leadership Training, Leadership Engagement, Leadership Observation, and Metacognition. And while less directly experienced, I believe Leadership & Leader Development, were often a product of playing (ex: ethical development –abiding by the rules, not cheating, etc.).

As to the notion of Culturally Relevant Leadership Learning and my parent's status in the above story as culturally competent leadership educators, I believe their positionality in relation to my own (acknowledging parents as the first socializing force), allowed them to craft a more relevant pedagogy for myself. The dismay that my mother experienced years later when I came out as bisexual, is explained by the same feeling a leadership educator may have when recognizing their pedagogical approach was limited by a significant cultural oversight.

I strongly believe that interactions with our parents are the first experiences many of us have with leadership educators. But this supposition also suggests that leadership educators are themselves leaders, since parents are often portrayed as leaders. As I reframe my conceptualization of a leader, as a person who increases the capacity of others (inspired by transformational leadership), I find no disagreement between leader and leadership educator identities. "Leaders inspire others to lead," is a phrase I have heard before and I believe it captures the leadership educator/leader relationship perfectly. When thinking about leader generativity, leadership education immediately comes to mind. Leadership educator identity should not be separated from leader identity, rather it should be seen as a stage in the identity development process. Perhaps then more accurately the phrase should be "Generative leaders/Leadership educators inspire others to lead."

I see myself as this generative leader/leadership educator, focusing on increasing the efficacy, identity, and capacity of leadership learners. The students I interact with are much like my sister and me, playing games for the first time – wanting to be successful in order to keep developing their skills. At the same time the students are personally and culturally very different than my sister and me; I acknowledge the importance of identity and culture in leadership learning. I believe that knowing my own identity will help me learn from others in a

sentipensante pedagogical manner (teacher/learner), in turn allowing me to adapt my leadership educator framework, so that it remains culturally relevant for those who are different from myself.

Cultural relevance and identity are complicated. Each of us carry a myriad of different intersecting social identities that inform the way we learn about and engage in leadership, and even two people with a list of similar identities will have very different lived experiences. Acknowledging this means that leadership education requires bravery, that calls on us to embrace the challenge of crafting a more inclusive leadership framework for the students and communities we serve. Our goal should be that all students see themselves represented in leadership theory and leaders. I believe representation is strongly related to efficacy through vicarious observation. Returning it to my earlier story, even when I did not win when we played board games, because I saw myself represented by my parents, I was able to internalize the victory as if it were my own.

My reflection on the role of my parents as leadership educators in the context of board games occurred nearly two decades after we began playing games together. In twenty more years, my reflection will likely include a discussion on the role of my student affairs faculty members in the establishment of my leadership educator professional identity. Metacognition and leadership development take time. So, I close with a reminder to my future self, reading this reflection. The grace I take, is the grace I give: It took me 26 years and significant personal reflection to arrive here, and while this destination (leader and leadership educator identity) within the larger leadership process may be the same, our individual journeys to this point differ as much as our lived experiences.