UTILIZING TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP WITHIN NURSING EDUCATION: THE IMPACT ON STUDENT LEARNING AND SUCCESS

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ABSTRACT

Transformational leadership has been proven to not only be effective in organizational settings but also within the educational realm. Nurse educators can use the principles of this leadership model in their practice to enhance student learning and success. Through inspirational motivation, idealized influence, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation nurse educators can find guidance in moving their students forward to achieve the vision they have in becoming a nurse. Working in conjunction with the other three components, each aspect of transformational leadership is discussed in detail as well as how it relates to nursing education.

Key characteristics and strategies for educators to utilize are discussed as well as the phenomenon of academic incivility. Nurse educators are urged to be cognizant of this phenomenon and strategies to prevent and eliminate incivility are also discussed.

Keywords: *transformational leadership, nursing education, student success, student learning, classroom leadership*

INTRODUCTION

At its core, transformational leadership is built on relationships between leaders and followers; it serves to motivate followers to reach for higher ideals and shared visions. Leaders create a safe environment with which to reach for these goals by serving as role models, connecting with their followers, allowing for new and creative thinking, and finding ways to motivate others (Doody & Doody, 2012). This is done using the four key components of transformational leadership: inspirational motivation, idealized influence, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation. As one of the most common and highly regarded leadership models, many have found that transformational leadership also provides the power to shape future leaders (Sherman, 2012).

The nursing profession is in a state of change and is facing some of the greatest challenges it has ever seen. The ever growing and changing needs of healthcare consumers in the 21st century depend on nurses to think critically,

adapt quickly, and stay abreast of new technology and information all while providing safe, effective, and quality patient care. The key to the survival of the nursing profession over the next decade is the ability of nurses to think creatively, use innovation, foster curiosity, and ultimately shape more nurse leaders who will come behind them. This must start within nursing education and this is the charge and challenge of nurse educators today (Hill, 2002; Myrick, 2005).

Using transformational leadership within education has been proven to enhance student learning and success; its four key components working in conjunction with one another to achieve this (Robinson, 2011). With the challenges that lie ahead for nurse educators, the utilization of the transformational leadership model can be used within nursing education to enhance student learning and success. Thereby creating newer generations of nurses prepared to face the challenges of the healthcare arena while also creating future nurse leaders.

It is important to note at this time some special considerations for the purposes of this discussion. First, because the transformational leadership model is being used to discuss student success and learning, instead of discussing a leader-follower relationship, the teacher-student relationship will be the focus. That is to say, the teacher takes the place of the leader; the student takes the place of the follower. The terms teacher and leader may be used interchangeably as well as student and follower. Bolkan & Goodboy (2011) note in their writing that transformational leadership works in the classroom setting much the same as it does within organizational settings. Second, as mentioned above, transformational leadership is built on a shared vision or goal. For this discussion, that shared vision will be the student's successful completion of a pre-licensure nursing program.

INSPIRATIONAL MOTIVATION

The first of the four components of transformational leadership is inspirational motivation. This concept is realized when leaders inspire their followers to create and reach for a compelling vision (Riggio, 2013). This gives followers a strong sense of purpose and helps to propel their motivation forward (Langston University, 2013). Doody & Doody (2012) note that by inspiring and motivating others, passion and enthusiasm are born and also help to push people forward and closer to achieving their ultimate goal. We cannot speak of inspirational motivation without discussing charisma - one of the central ideas of the transformational leadership model.

CHARISMA

Merriam-Webster's (1993) defines charisma as having a charm or appeal, which arouses enthusiasm and excitement in others. Bolkan & Goodboy (2011) define this concept further stating that leaders who possess charisma know the needs and values of those who are following them and can use that knowledge to drive their followers to reach their full potential. Research has shown that leaders who possess charisma earn the respect, trust, and admiration of those who follow

them; this yields followers who are inspired by their leader (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2009).

INSPIRATIONAL MOTIVATION WITHIN NURSING EDUCATION

As discussed before, the shared vision here is a student's successful completion of the pre-licensure nursing program. Hill (2002) states that when one has a vision, it becomes the focus of learning and creates energy. By encouraging students to reach for their vision, nurse educators are creating energy and a motivation within the students.

Inspirational motivation also entails 'raising the bar' for students, or setting high expectations. Again, this inspires and motivates students to rise up and meet that bar: an accomplishment that instills pride and creates even more energy to fuel their journey towards their vision (Doody & Doody, 2012). Robinson (2011) also speaks to goal and vision setting when she notes that this has a substantial impact on student learning outcomes. A student's work becomes centered around their vision increasing the focus and energy put towards their work. People will commit to visions and goals that are important to them and that they believe are attainable. Pursuing their goal allows a student to have an active role in closing the gap between achieving their vision and their current reality (Robinson, 2011).

IDEALIZED INFLUENCE

In his book, Maxwell (2007) writes of the "laws" of leadership; he states that above all, leadership is the ability to influence others. In its simplest form, idealized influence is being a positive role model for followers. What results from this are admiration, respect, confidence, and trust that followers feel towards their leader (Doody & Doody, 2012; Riggio, 2013). The influence a leader has by being a role model for their followers can have a profound impact when reaching toward a shared vision. Again, this translates into the educational realm when discussing the teacher-student relationship.

IDEALIZED INFLUENCE WITHIN NURSING EDUCATION

When nurse educators engage in and reach toward the same vision students have, student performance will improve substantially. This is achieved by serving as role models for students and it underscores the educator's commitment to helping their students achieve their vision – successfully completing their nursing program. When students see that commitment, this builds credibility and research has shown that people will always prefer follow a credible leader (Quin, Deris, Bischoff, & Johnson, 2015).

In a study conducted and authored by Linden, Ohlin, & Broden (2013), the relationship between nursing students and their role models or mentors was studied. The focus of the study was to find the correlation between the role model relationship and student learning outcomes. The authors found that students benefited from the relationship both personally and professionally; they also note

that the relationship facilitated learning, which had a positive correlation to student's success within their program of study.

INDIVIDUALIZED CONSIDERATION

Personalized support is the foundation of individualized consideration. In this component of transformational leadership, leaders take into consideration the strengths, weaknesses, goals, and visions of each follower. While each follower is treated differently, when this component comes into play each follower is also encouraged to reach his or her full potential (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2009; Doody & Doody, 2012).

Central to this component is also the concept of empowerment. By looking at each follower as an individual, leaders are able to give him or her the resources and tools they specifically need. This is underscored by Shanta & Eliason's (2013) definition of empowerment: developing and building one's potential and abilities by providing the needed resources, tools, and environment to reach one's goals. Doody & Doody (2012) take this definition even further noting that empowerment involves leaders who demonstrate how much they value their followers. This can be demonstrated by involving followers in planning, which promotes the opportunity to grow, learn, and develop.

INDIVIDUALIZED CONSIDERATION WITHIN NURSING EDUCATION

A more lengthy discussion of this component is warranted as research has proven that individualized consideration is a major determinant of student learning and success. Nurse educators can bring this concept into their practice by giving students a personalized education. Showing students that they are seen as individuals with different needs, strengths, and weaknesses will help to personalize their learning experience and invite them to be more involved in their learning. When students feel involved in their learning, they become more engaged and ultimately will have a greater outcome with learning and success. This can be achieved both inside and outside of the classroom. Within the classroom, material can be presented in a way that students find interesting and engaging. Outside of the classroom, instructor availability and accessibility has been reported to demonstrate to students that instructors are open to spending time with students to aid them in their learning. (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2009; Bolkan & Goodboy, 2011).

Providing positive, personalized feedback to students and remembering where students have come from is yet another important way for nurse educators to show individualized consideration. Consider the following examples: "*Great response to classmates' posts*" or "*Great response to your classmates' posts! You've improved your writing style and use of APA format over the last few weeks. Great job, keep it up!*" In the first example, although positive, there is no personalization of feedback; the second example gives positive, encouraging feedback as well as some individualized comments. The student is encouraged and motivated to keep up the good work and to reach for more (Daniels & Goodboy, 2014).

Research conducted with students to ascertain elements and characteristics of educators who demonstrated individualized consideration the following were found to have a direct impact on student learning and success: a teaching environment that is interactive, teachers that students feel cares for them and their learning, flexible scheduling and assignments, growing relationship between student and teacher, knowledge of student learning preferences and characteristics, trustworthiness, teacher accessibility, open communication lines, and advising students on personal, professional, and academic issues (Daniels & Goodboy, 2014; Robinson, 2011).

INTELLECTUAL STIMULATION

Intellectual stimulation refers to a leader's urging for their followers to think 'outside the box', to learn new skills, propose new ideas, and to utilize their existing knowledge to learn and to grow on a cognitive level. Essentially, encouraging education and learning. Followers are also encouraged to question ideas and processes and then to question if there is a new, innovative, or better way to do things (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2009; Doody & Doody, 2012).

INTELLECTUAL STIMULATION WITHIN NURSING EDUCATION

Expounding on the concepts discussed above, nurse educators are in the perfect position to intellectually stimulate students. Encouraging students to think critically and independently will also teach students to be self-learners (Myrick, 2005), a skill that is a necessity within the nursing profession. By encouraging independent thinking and learning, students are challenged, become excited about their learning and are more apt to become engaged in the learning process promoting intellectual and cognitive growth. Promoting class participation through interaction, using humor, and relating material to student's lives and nursing practice also encourage student engagement. Nursing students often perceive a gap between what they have learned in class and its relationship to clinical practice. Giving students a context with which to use their new found knowledge will allow them to utilize that knowledge within the clinical setting, solidifying what they have learned (Daniels & Goodboy, 2014).

It is also important to mention that while expanding a student's knowledge is vitally important to the learning process, it is essential for the educator to expand their knowledge as well. One cannot teach what one does not know, and so the same principles that are applied to student's learning, the educator can also apply to their own learning (Robinson, 2014). Along the same lines, Doody & Doody (2012) note once a student gains new knowledge, encouraging them to share that knowledge with other classmates helps to solidify what the student has just learned while also helping other students' intellectual growth.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

In Robinson's (2011) book entitled *Student-Centered Leadership*, she stresses the importance of a comfortable and safe learning environment. She notes that

without a physically and emotionally safe environment, little to no learning will take place and teaching will be futile. She urges and charges educators across all sectors to be diligent in creating a safe and comfortable learning environment for students.

Unfortunately, woven into the fabric of nursing is an ugly thread of incivility between nursing colleagues. Shanta & Eliason (2013) discuss that with the changing face of healthcare and nursing education, there has been a marked increase in the presence of incivility in nursing classrooms. This phenomenon is known as academic incivility and is defined as disruptive or rude behavior that causes physiological or psychological stress for those affected by it. Students' ability to critically think as well as the quality of the educational experience are also significantly impacted. It is essential to add this to the discussion as it can have a significant impact on the intellectual stimulation of students leading to poor learning and outcomes. While there is much to discuss on this phenomenon, it is too much to take on for the purposes of this discussion. A brief overview of academic incivility, its negative impact on student learning, and effective ways to approach it will be enough to suffice its purpose for this discussion.

Academic incivility creates major barriers for students and teachers alike. It is not just students who are affected by this behavior, but educators as well, occurring between students, students and educators, or between educators. What is even more concerning is that this behavior and its negative impact extend beyond the classroom and into the clinical setting. Its victims are left feeling helpless, belittled, traumatized and powerless (Shanta & Eliason, 2013).

The best strategy to prevent this behavior is to strictly enforce conduct and discipline codes, both among students and educators. Griffin (2004) also suggests cognitive rehearsal and role-play, which will help educators and students learn how to deal with this experience should it arise. When academic incivility is present, effective communication and conflict management skills are necessary for both parties in order to work through the situation. Educators and students alike should never turn a deaf ear or blind eye to such disruptive behavior as it can easily have an exponentially negative impact on others (Shanta & Eliason, 2013).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Transformational leadership has been proven to be an effective model of leadership for several decades. It gives power to shape future leaders within the nursing profession, and is directly linked to student learning and success within the educational realm. Nurse educators are in a position to make a significant impact not only in the lives of their nursing students, but also within the profession itself. When used in nursing education, one will find that all four components of the transformational leadership model work in conjunction to enhance student learning and success. Students learn, become successful, and simultaneously the future leaders of nursing are born (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2009; Daniels & Goodboy, 2014; Myrick, 2005).

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