

SPECIAL ISSUE

ON VIRTUOUS LEADERSHIP, PART 2

Guest Editors' Introduction

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In this second part on *virtuous leadership* we present nine more perspectives, including research findings, program descriptions, and conceptual discussions of important issues related to being and becoming a virtuous leader. Extending the argument of the first special issue, these scholars address a further range of issues to be considered regarding the conceptualization, implementation, and evaluation of virtuous leadership. These include concerns with training educational leaders and educators generally: helping them challenge their unexplored bias and racism, supporting their mindfulness, dealing with their cognitive distortions, learning to embody compassion, developing their intellectual humility, and ability to adapt as leaders. There are also concerns with virtuous leaders' ability to cultivate empowering relationships with teachers as part of their stewardship, supporting teachers in grappling with epistemological questions, and helping educational leaders handle the tension between being virtuous and being effective.

Anna Noble reports research documenting “one principal’s unique approach to creating a common school vision centered around character development as a means by which to generate a sense of community and improve student achievement.” This study explored in detail one principal’s use of adaptive leadership in her efforts to infuse character education into her school. Adaptive leadership is defined as “leadership that attends to changes in people’s beliefs and habits to address challenges and develop new capacities through system transformation.” The author illustrates how adaptive leadership, especially in the context of character development includes “changes in the structure and culture of the school aimed specifically at applying the ethics of critique, justice, and care.” Noble emphasizes the synergy between adaptive leadership, supporting character development among the school community, and generating a shared school vision.

Patricia Maloney and Carol Ann MacGregor present research comparing educational leaders’ approach to character education in

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Journal of Character Education, Volume 17(2), 2021, pp. ix–xii
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ISSN 1543-1223
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charter schools and Catholic schools. Grounded in data from over 200 interviews in 14 Catholic and charter schools across the United States, the authors examine how educational leaders in each of these school types approach character education. Their research suggests that what best explains “differences in approach to goals and outcomes when it comes to creating a good person, and differences in associated day-to-day practice” is the depth of experience of the leadership team. Additionally, they note, how formalized the character education program is in the school community predicts the scope of the intervention.

In her article, Melinda Bier presents arguments that *servant leadership* is the most virtuous leadership approach in current contention. Given that education, as a field, has been in some amount of turmoil, with teachers, specialists, and even principals leaving the field in alarming numbers, a change in leadership approach seems warranted. Starting with the leaders’ sense of noble purpose and relational style of compassionate love, Bier argues that servant leaders develop a cluster of virtues to help them embody servant leadership. The servant leadership model she articulates builds on previous work by van Dierendonck and Patterson (2015). In this perspective, a leader’s sense of compassionate love encourages virtuous attitudes of humility, gratitude, forgiveness and courage that motivate leadership practices of empowerment, stewardship and future-mindedness/foresight. These attitudes and behaviors promote follower’s personal well-being, sense of community, professional productivity and organizational commitment. Unlike other leadership approaches, servant leadership foregrounds not only ethical relationships but empowering and supportive relations. Servant leaders become more deeply involved in the growth of their employees and consider a broader mandate to community well-being than other alternative approaches because it is rooted in a religious and spiritual tradition associated with collectivity, compassion, caring, and enlightened self-interest.

Educational leaders are being increasingly challenged to address their own bad character and that of their school community that takes the forms of implicit bias and/or racism. While racism takes many forms around the globe, there is commonly great inequality between majority and minority communities—evident in differential access to education, healthcare, political voice, criminal justice and the law. Precisely because racism takes many forms, including unconscious bias and false beliefs, educational leaders and educators in general must seek new ways to challenge their own unconscious assumptions and question their traditional ways of doing things.

Toward this end, Cynthia J. Alexander and D. Beverly McKee present the “default to deliberative mode of engagement framework,” or D2 framework “to help users, particularly non-Indigenous students and educators, escape what we call the ‘default mode’ of the persistent colonialism that is embedded throughout health, legal, education and other institutions, as well as in mainstream media systems and other agents of political socialization.” Students are taught to reflect, deliberate, and then to engage—“to apply what they learn in the classroom through individual and collaborative community-based service-learning projects.” This framework is a model “civic engagement endeavor that responds to the challenge of how one can sustain and support the resilience of virtuous citizens who are on a reconciliation journey.”

Maryann Krikorian argues for a “contemplative leadership approach that may best serve new generations of educational leaders and promote positive mental states,” thereby improving the educational experience for all involved. The author references the history of Western thought privileging abstract reasoning, with one of its consequences being that “overemphasis on objective dogma may orient individuals to reason and presuppose in terms of binaries—right or wrong, success or failure, worthy or unworthy.” These and other “cognitive distortions,” Krikorian argues, lead to rising stress, anxiety, and depression in society,

highlighted among college students. She argues that educational leaders must help rebalance expectations on students, what we mean by “success,” and what we value most. One area is in how we talk about intellect. She argues that: “A multifaceted notion of intellect, grounded in emotional intelligence theory, may positively impact Western culture by helping educator preparation students develop mental resources and personalized strategies to cope with the demands of their lives in an effort to calm anxieties, decrease stress, boost creativity, and enhance feelings of acceptance.” The other pressure point the author focuses upon is how we can support a mindset of greater equanimity among educators and students. Krikorian presents exercises educational leaders and other students of mindfulness can use to hone their attention, listening, and self-compassion.

Benjamin C. Ingman and Christy McConnell note that “Character education and environmental/ecological education are not often discussed in the same circles of discourse” though, as they demonstrate, there is a natural synergy. There is overlap, specifically in the centrality of integrity and care in both ecological mindedness and discourse of moral and character development. In addition, in previous studies the authors found that “teachers view ecological mindedness as relevant for schools in terms of content, engagement, and students’ lives; ... and as a form of character education.” Their findings show “the potential of transdisciplinary inquiries such as this” to sensitize and engage students both in terms of academics and character. The authors point out that many contexts can be occasions to teach character, and that character is necessary for engaging academic subjects as much as inquiry regarding moral questions. They conclude: “Indeed, the very notion that educators can serve the role of virtuous leaders of character development regardless of the systems in which they reside raises new possibilities concerning the theory and practice of character education and virtuous leadership.”

John Banja argues that the kind of people we are, and the kind of people we assist our students in becoming is of central concern to virtuous leadership. The author reviews claims that current college students are more narcissistic than previous generations, and entertains the possibility that faculty may bear some responsibility for this trend. For example, some instructors, especially ones in business management programs, “are raising acute concern over the ways business schools are reinforcing narcissism in the classroom.” Further, Banja notes that research suggests “some faculty display a marked indifference toward students scoring high in narcissism (e.g., arrogance, a sense of entitlement, and close-mindedness) but low in humility (e.g., other-regard, emotional regulation, and open-mindedness).” Attempts to inculcate general humility in students is probably beyond faculty capability, the author concedes, suggesting instead that educators focus on a more manageable *intellectual humility*. Banja explores ways to model intellectual humility, such as in making class interactions “a learning alliance of the teacher and the students,” inviting other faculty who model intellectual humility to speak in your class, modeling how you receive feedback from students, and letting students do more of the teaching. Using case studies can contribute to intellectual humility, Banja notes, by reminding teacher and student that contexts are complex and many relevant parts of the equation may be unknown or even unknowable.

Mark Piper argues that “the qualities that make one morally virtuous and the qualities that make one an effective leader are not infrequently at odds with one another,” posing a particular problem for virtuous leadership. Leaders work within two constraints that “sometimes make adherence to moral norms an impediment to the effective achievement of their responsibilities.” The author describes these constraints as: (1) unfortunate but undeniable facts about human nature we are often willing to lie, cheat, and steal to further our interests; and (2) the fact that leaders have a

responsibility to the organizations they lead, to “manifest partiality in relation to their Concerns.” Piper addresses arguments that approaches to virtuous leadership are undermined by this admission of partisanship. The author argues that a full appreciation of the risks involved, “combined with an understanding of the prudential benefits of virtuous leadership, should forestall hasty decisions to give the ascendancy to efficiency over virtue when they conflict.”

Aaron Zimmerman addresses the epistemological responsibilities of educational leaders, arguing leaders have a unique responsibility to take *epistemological* virtues seriously. Epistemological virtues come into play in “the manner in which knowledge and truth are discussed,” and so are central to education. For example, epistemological questions include “How do we judge whether or not something is true?”, “Who serves as the arbiter as to whether or not something is true?”, or “How do teachers manage the ethical implications of their epistemological authority while teaching?” Zimmerman argues that “it is incumbent upon educational leaders to have a deep interest in epistemological concerns” for without that “it is unlikely that the teachers and students under their leadership will develop an appreciation for the ethical implications of

knowledge.” The author notes the epistemological implications for issues such as environmental sustainability, interracial relations, and gender equality—all hot button issues of interest to youth. “Thinking critically about what we believe to be true (and why we believe it to be true) is, therefore, no less than a moral responsibility” Zimmerman concludes. Three epistemological virtues that need to be present in the school culture are discussed in more length: open-mindedness, commitment, and reflection. Zimmerman argues that the literature leads to one conclusion regarding epistemological issues and virtuous leadership—“If an educational leader is to cultivate a school where open-mindedness and commitment are valued, then educational leaders’ themselves must serve as exemplars of these virtues.”

The editors hope that you enjoy this extended discussion of virtuous leadership in educational settings, and that this contributes meaningfully to the field.

REFERENCE

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