

RESEARCH CONFERENCE
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Concurrent Session D

Waldorf 5-6

“Authoritative leadership, action learning and student accomplishment” –

Professor Stephen Dinham, ACER.

The Leadership Challenge



Authoritative Leadership, Action Learning and Student Accomplishment: “Expect a lot, give a lot”

Professor Stephen Dinham

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OVERVIEW

- Introduction
- Parenting Styles
- The Research Base
- Four Types of Leadership
- Leadership for Learning Communities
- Conclusion
- Postscript

Introduction

- Vast body of research confirming the importance of the classroom teacher to student achievement
- **Key issue:** how can we improve the quality of teaching and learning within individual classrooms?
- **Two related answers:**
 1. Educational leadership
 2. Teachers' professional learning

Premise

- Educational leadership, like teaching and life generally, is heavily dependent on relationships.

Parenting Styles

- Work of Diana Baumrind on parenting styles
- *Two dimensions underlie parenting style:*
 - **Responsiveness** - 'the extent to which parents intentionally foster individuality, self-regulation and assertion by being attuned, supportive, and acquiescent to children's special needs and demands'.
 - **Demandingness** - 'the claims parents make on children to become integrated into the family whole, by their maturity demands, supervision, disciplinary efforts and willingness to confront the child who disobeys'. (Baumrind, 1991: 62)

Four Parenting Styles

- *Uninvolved* – low responsiveness, low demandingness;
- *Authoritarian* - low responsiveness, high demandingness;
- *Permissive* – high responsiveness, low demandingness, and
- *Authoritative* – high responsiveness, high demandingness.

Authoritative Parenting

“... authoritative parents are high on both responsiveness and demandingness. They are warm and supportive of their children, aware of their current developmental levels and sensitive to their needs. They also, however, have high expectations, and set appropriate limits while providing structure and consistent rules, the reasons for which they explain to their children, rather than simply expecting unthinking obedience.

Authoritative Parenting

While they maintain adult authority they are also willing to listen to their child and to negotiate about rules and situations. This combination of sensitivity, caring, high expectations and structure has been shown to have the best consequences for children, who commonly display academic achievement, good social skills, moral maturity, autonomy and high self esteem.”

(Scott & Dinham, 2005)

Enhancing Student Achievement and Self Esteem

- “We argued that an authoritative teaching style where high responsiveness is accompanied with high demandingness provides the best model for enhancing both student achievement and self esteem, and that a pre-occupation with building student self esteem through a permissive approach in the hope that this will translate into student achievement and development is counter productive.

Enhancing Student Achievement and Self Esteem

We noted recent research where schools that were successful in facilitating students' academic, personal and social development achieved this through an effective balance of focus on student achievement and student welfare, regardless of whether the school might be perceived by others as being either a 'welfare' or 'academic' school, an unhelpful and damaging false dichotomy" (Scott & Dinham, 2005; Dinham, 2005).

Question

- Can the four types of parenting identified by Baumrind be productively applied to educational leadership?

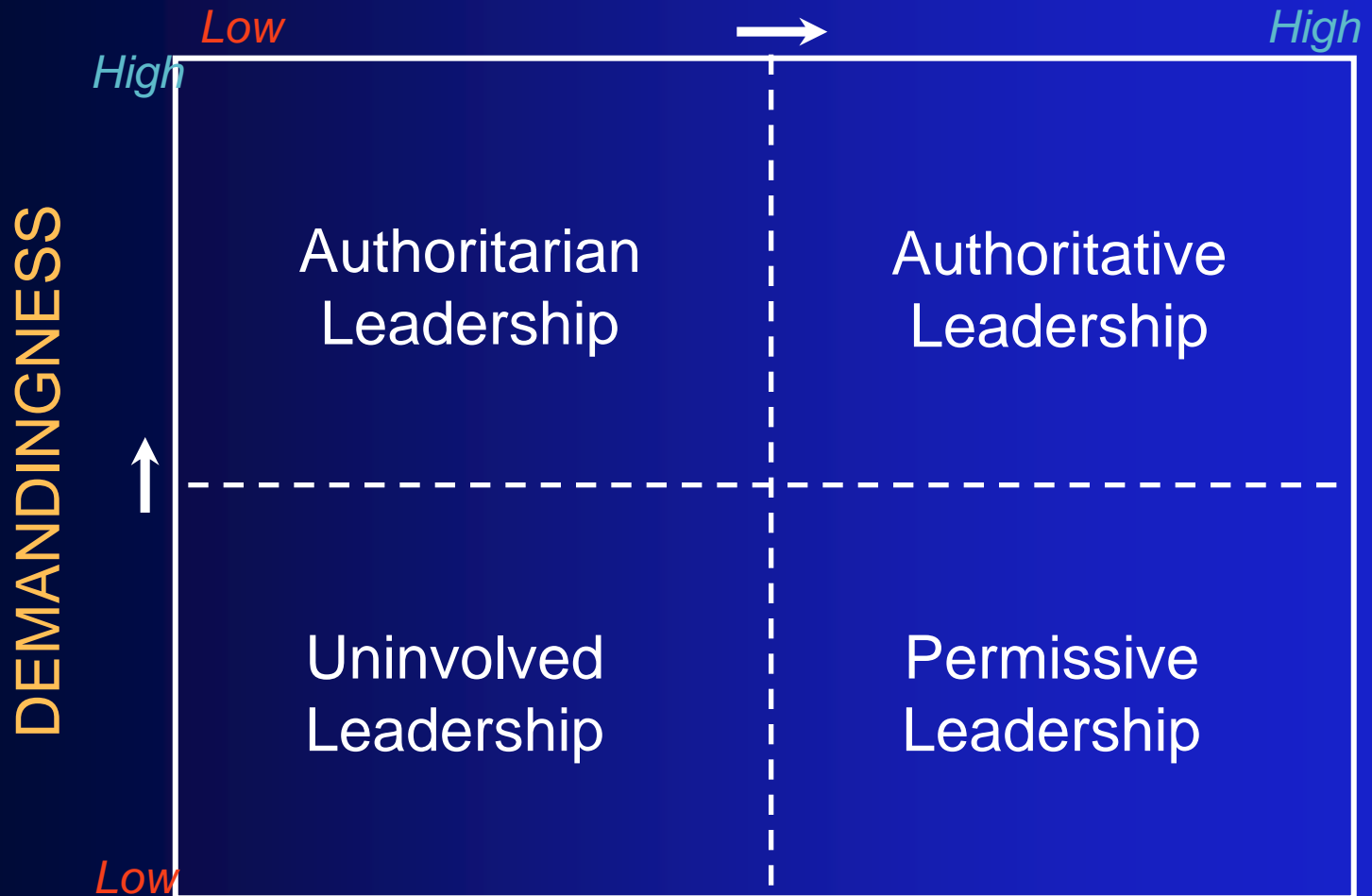
The Research Base

- Study of Successful NSW HSC Teaching (Ayres, Dinham & Sawyer)
- AESOP: Study of faculties and teams achieving exceptional educational outcomes Years 7-10 (UWS, UNE, NSW DET)
- Study of a primary school where boys outperform girls (Dinham, Buckland, Callingham, Mays)
- Evaluation of AGQTP Action Learning for NSW DET (Aubusson, Brady & Dinham)

Four Types of Leadership

- *Uninvolved* Leadership
- *Authoritarian* Leadership
- *Permissive* Leadership
- *Authoritative* Leadership

RESPONSIVENESS



1. Uninvolved Leadership

- Low responsiveness and low demandingness
- May be an efficient administrator
- Staff left to own devices; little control or direction
- Feedback (positive and negative) lacking
- Students perceive as remote
- Standards and expectations unclear and possibly too low

...Uninvolved Leadership

- Inconsistency, uncertainty can lead to confusion, conflict (Balkanisation, Groupthink) and poor performance
- Insufficient attention to key functions (planning, policies, recruitment, induction, systems, communication, evaluation)
- Organisation is reactive, drifting, sinking
- Other leaders and groups may attempt to keep afloat, or push in other directions

2. Authoritarian Leadership

- High Demandingness, low Responsiveness
- Obedience, compliance, respect, status - for position rather than person
- Tend not to negotiate
- Focus on procedures rather than people
- Feedback to ensure control and authority
- Standards and expectations can be high, reinforced by extrinsic mechanisms
- Control at expense of flexibility

...Authoritarian Leadership

- School may be orderly, well run with delegation, reporting, accountability
- Can be high degree of dependency on the leader
- Untapped potential; staff and students can be infantilised
- Some will appreciate strength and direction of the authoritarian leader, others will feel stifled and frustrated

3. Permissive Leadership

- High Responsiveness, low Demandingness
- Good people skills, open and responsive to needs of others
- Spend time being available, seeking input, building consensus
- Planning and decision making can take some time; may find it difficult to be decisive
- Staff and students allowed a fair degree of latitude

...Permissive Leadership

- Lack of direction, accountability, organisational looseness
- Trust and leeway may be exploited
- May be reluctant to intervene or confront; small problems can grow
- Standards and expectations can be unclear, contradictory, too low
- Some staff will flourish, others will drift
- Schools may be happy, sociable, at expense of progress.

4. Authoritative Leadership

- High responsiveness and high demandingness
 - Best aspects of authoritarian and permissive leadership
- Warm, supportive, sensitive to others, inclusive
- Good listeners, networkers
- Personal qualities admired, respected
- Clear, high expectations of themselves and others

...Authoritative Leadership

- Sets an example: 'Give a lot, expect a lot'
- Knows when to consult and when to be decisive, courageous
- Places teaching and learning at the centre of the school; pupil welfare underpins academic success
- Seeks to develop competent, assertive, self-regulated staff and students

...Authoritative Leadership

- Clear, effective, consistent policies and procedures
- Timely, effective feedback, good and bad; people 'know where they stand'
- Practices distributive leadership
- Strong emphasis on professional learning; models for others
- Strong, clear vision for school

...Authoritative Leadership

- Bias towards innovation, action, experimentation, 'permission to play'
- Empowerment; trust, potential recognised, released; strategic, pragmatic; contagion effects
- Evaluation, evidence, planning, action
- Change used to advantage, rather than reactive, defensive
- Leadership sustainability, succession, facilitated.

THE CASE STUDIES: HOW IS A LEARNING COMMUNITY DEVELOPED AND SUSTAINED?

- **Authoritative leadership** was a feature of the case study projects
- Authoritative leaders place a high priority on creating **learning communities**: change what people know, what they can do, how they think
- **Action learning** was a feature, especially under the AGQTP

How Is a Learning Community Developed and Sustained?

- The Learning Communities examined in the case studies were developed and sustained through:
 - *Focus on Teaching and Learning*
 - *Individual and Collective Belief and Support*
 - *Problem Solving*
 - *Internal Expectations and Accountability*
 - *Leadership and Outside Influence*
 - *Overall Dynamics*

Focus on Teaching and Learning

1. Learning communities have a focus on learning and a desire to learn about learning; there is use of pedagogic terminology, models and theory, coupled with a conscious effort to de-prioritise administration and management and re-prioritise learning within the group.
2. Members of learning communities see themselves and their students as going somewhere, with learning being an on-going process; learning becomes contagious, with others catching the 'bug'.

Focus on Teaching and Learning

3. Within the group there is recognition that it is necessary to change the way people think if there is to be change in how they act, and thus learning, reflection and questioning are important.
4. Members of the group are concerned with establishing and maintaining upward, continuous cycles of improvement; they are not satisfied with the *status quo*.

Individual and Collective Belief and Support

1. Group members possess and demonstrate belief and respect for their profession and discipline; they believe in, even love their area and communicate this to others.
2. Members of the group pay attention to social maintenance, trying to make their school, department, or faculty a 'good place' (MacBeath, 2006); members care for each other and their students as people and social and professional relationships are important.

Problem Solving

1. There is an emphasis on problem or issue based learning and recognition of what is important, with dialogue around identified issues and potential solutions.
2. Experimentation, risk taking and innovation in teaching and learning are encouraged and are a feature of learning communities; there is questioning rather than acceptance of constraints.

Problem Solving

3. Teaching and learning are context and person specific, with efforts to contextualise and modify as necessary externally derived solutions or approaches.
4. There is on-going reflection on and evaluation of existing and new measures within the learning community, coupled with data-informed decision making.

Internal Expectations and Accountability

1. The group creates a climate of high expectations and professionalism which members rise to, not wanting to let anyone down, not least students.
2. Members of the group empower each other to take the lead in learning, in turn enhancing individual and group leadership capacity and effectiveness.
3. Accountability is to the group, more than to externally imposed accountability measures; group accountability and self-accountability are powerful influences on the learning community's ethos, and action.

Leadership and Outside Influence

1. Leadership outside and within the group is important in stimulating and facilitating the learning community.
2. While learning communities can develop without stimulus or action from above or outside, assistance, guidance, resources and encouragement from others within and in some cases outside the organisation can facilitate the learning process.

Overall Dynamics

1. Time, place, space and language are important elements in creating a learning community.
 2. Overall, what seems to work most effectively is a combination of external understanding, advice, assistance and recognition, coupled with a focus on internal issues, with teacher and group learning to address these through empowerment and with internal action and accountability.
- See Dinham, S. (2007). 'The Dynamics Of Creating And Sustaining Learning Communities', *Unicorn Online Refereed Article 43*, Australian College of Educators.

Conclusion

Michael Fullan (2001: 5):

“... we have found that the single factor common to every successful change initiative is that relationships improve. If relationships improve, things get better. If they remain the same or get worse, ground is lost. Thus leaders must be consummate relationship builders with diverse people and groups - especially with people different than themselves.”

Conclusion

Authoritative leaders are 'relationship' people, able to 'read' and respond to others. They understand people and they understand change, which they help others to appreciate and to come to grips with. They are authentic leaders, in that they model those qualities, attributes and behaviours they expect of others.

Authoritative leaders rely more on moral than positional authority, and influence more than overt control. In their relationships with teachers and students, authoritative leaders balance a high degree of responsiveness with a high degree of demandingness.

Conclusion

In many of the schools visited as part of the research projects cited above the most telling indicator of the power of authoritative leadership – exhibiting both high responsiveness and high demandingness - was that faculties and whole schools had been turned around with commensurate improvement in student performance indicators.

Schools and faculties formerly in decline were now thriving with school leaders having to cope with a new problem of excessive demand for limited student places. In other cases, new leaders took schools and faculties that had plateaued at an acceptable level of performance to higher levels of achievement.

Conclusion

To offer a cautionary note, the *ÆSOP* study - which examined faculties and teams achieving outstanding educational outcomes in Years 7-10 in 38 NSW public schools - found that the turning around and lifting up processes can take around six to seven years to accomplish, although some improvements can occur almost immediately.

Conclusion

Those looking for and advocating quick fixes for struggling schools need to consider the intense, coordinated effort and teamwork under authoritative forms of leadership that such improvement entails.

However, the evidence is clear that it can be done. As one participant commented in the AESOP study:

- *“in this school we make plans now, not excuses”..*

Postscript - Education Since the 1960s

- In the early 1960s education generally was characterised by high demandingness and low responsiveness, i.e., the relationship between schools and students was typically **authoritarian**.
- A wave of social change saw pressure to make schools more responsive to students and their needs.

Postscript - Education Since the 1960s

- However, *demandingness and responsiveness were falsely dichotomised*
- Greater responsiveness was thought to require less demandingness, and thus the relationship between schools and students became more **permissive** as demandingness decreased and responsiveness increased .

Postscript - Education Since the 1960s

- This false dichotomy and others (knowledge/skills; subject content/process; academic/welfare; competition/ collaboration; student centred/teacher centred; 'sage'/ 'guide') has resulted in many of the problems we see in schools today, e.g.,
- Disengagement, low expectations, behavioural problems, role conflict and ambiguity, social determinism/stigmatisation, under-achievement, abrogation of teacher responsibility, fear of 'competition', learning must be 'fun', grade inflation

Postscript - Education Since the 1960s

- When such problems occur, there is a tendency to conclude that responsiveness has not gone far enough and is being hindered by too high demandingness.
- Thus, problems are further exacerbated

Postscript - Education Since the 1960s

- Some who speak out about this situation are seen as traditionalists or part of a 'back to basics' movement, i.e., seeking more authoritarianism.
- However, *the best teachers/leaders and schools today exhibit both high demandingness and high responsiveness*, i.e., the relationship between schools, teachers, leaders and students is **authoritative**.

Contact Details

Email: dinham@acer.edu.au

Phone: 03 9835 7463

Research studies cited: *(see paper)*

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Keynote Address 2

Professor Elizabeth Leo
University of Dundee, Scotland

*“Take me to your leader: Leadership
and the future”*

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Afternoon Tea

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