

Leadership in Academic Institutions; Preparing Students Holistically for Life: Matters of the Heart and Mind

Alessandra Saxⁱ

American Community Schools of Athens

Stefanos Gialamasⁱⁱ

American Community Schools of Athens

Abstract

Students spend most hours of their day within Academic Institutions in their classrooms and/or after school and weekend activities. They are able to acquire knowledge and skills needed to be academically, socially, emotionally and physically well. All of these factors contribute to holistic growth and development. However, social and emotional intelligence are key ingredients to an individual's ability to adjust and interact with others in rapidly changing societies. Therefore, the experiences that students have with their administrators, teachers, peers and parents, while at school are essential to the holistic development of one's academic, social, emotional skills and interpersonal relations. The authors define *holistically*, as the development and growth of students: intellectually, socially, emotionally, physically and ethically. The following discussion points to the importance in fostering social-emotional intelligence in all stakeholders alike, in the school-setting and in finding an equilibrium in authentic leadership by demonstrating agility with school policies and processes when one's wisdom and genuine care can prevail; thus referring to matters of the heart and mind. Therefore, the authors are addressing the fundamental question, What type of institutional leadership does an academic institution need in order to prepare students holistically for life and to develop them to become tomorrow's leaders?

Keywords: international schools, globalization, change facilitators, school principals, leadership styles, emotional intelligence, DiSC Model of Behavior, holistic development

*“Kindness is the ultimate gift, in like it fits all and everybody loves it when we exchange it”-
Gialamas*

ⁱAlessandra Sax, Ph.D., Counselling Psychologist, American Community Schools of Athens, Greece

Correspondence: saxlanea@acs.gr

ⁱⁱStefanos Gialamas, Ph.D., President of the American Community Schools of Athens, E-mail: gialamas@acs.gr

Introduction

“You can never be great at anything unless you love it”- Angelou

“Education is the kindling of a flame not the filling of a vessel” –Socrates

“We must prepare our students to navigate their life ship in the ocean of future uncertainties”-Gialamas

In an ever-changing world, with globalization on the rise, human beings endure more and more stress in their work, family and everyday life experiences. As individuals progressively have less and less time to spend and interact with others personally. Additionally, due to external stressors, the need to feel connected, valued and supported holistically (i.e. cognitively, physically, socially and emotionally) is great and thus individuals must be nurtured in professional settings, particularly in academic environments.

International academic institutions must value the diversity of culture and should be respected by all stakeholders. However, regardless of the differences in how one understands his or her experiences and values, the uniqueness of every individual must be solidified with one universal element that unites us all: genuine caring and love. Professional boundaries among administrators, school leaders, faculty, parents and students must be authentic and provided with genuine care and love; where one’s wisdom may bi-pass processes and policies (Gialamas, 2014).

By providing firm boundaries with care, and appropriate guidance, Greenberg et al. (2003) suggested that students accomplish meaningful results in their academic progress. Social-emotional learning engulfs the process of developing fundamental social and emotional competencies or skills (Zins & Elias, 2006). These skills enable children to manage their emotions, experience empathy, develop positive relationships, make good decisions, and conduct their own behaviour ethically and responsibly (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, 2003).

Greenberg et al. (2003) also suggested that children who are socially and emotionally competent tend to be more happy, confident and equipped with strong interpersonal skills across various contexts and roles. Hence: support the importance of social and emotional learning, as an intrinsic aspect of children’s academic learning and performance, motivation to achieve and overall holistic well-being.

Academic institutions that practice fostering holistic development (social, emotional, physical and cognitive balance): 1) enhance children’s meaningful connections to others in the school environment, 2) enhance children’s sense of competence as learners and 3) promote a sense of autonomy and self-direction that are associated with positive school attitudes and overall healthy functioning both in school and society (Baker, Dilly, Auperlee & Patil, 2003).

Gialamas (2014) stated “we need to engage the minds of students, staff, faulty administration, parents and friends of an academic institution with the underlying commitment to serve the family, community, the nation and the world”. “Innovation and authentic leadership approaches are the enabling objectives to provide students with a unique, meaningful, high-quality, holistic educational experience. Students will then use their academic knowledge to exercise wisdom in their decision making as they become the keepers of the future of the planet”. Furthermore, Gialamas (2014) stated “that if educational institutions are to teach and inspire students to develop wisdom to transform static academic knowledge into social, ethical, economic, environmental intelligence, then the sustainability of quality of life can be greatly improved for people around the globe”.

Emotional Intelligence

“One has to work with love and love one’s work”-Sax

“The most precious gift we can offer to anyone is our attention”-Thich Nhat Hanh

“Educators every day, guided by wisdom, must travel often the 16 inch journey, from their mind to their soul”-Gialamas

Early attachment theories postulated that safe and secure attachments of the infant with his/her caregiver, fosters healthy interpersonal relationships all throughout the life cycle. Bowlby’s (1969) attachment theory suggested that when a mother nurses/breast feeds her baby and has other intimate interactions with the infant, her system becomes flooded with oxytocin, a calming feel-good hormone. This exact hormone counterbalances cortisol (a stress hormone). Oxytocin being essential to bonding between caregiver as the infant’s behaviour causes oxytocin to be released in the verbal “Aah” moments of the adult. This is miraculous behaviour on part of the infant, in having the innate ability to seek out adults who will be their nurturers in order to survive (Bennis & Thomas, 2011 as cited in the Harvard Press).

If we make the parallel assumption for students; if their teachers and administrators can be connected to one another by something so beautiful and simple as a “feel-good” hormone (oxytocin), the will to go on in life during trials and tribulations, to find a meaning, balance and pride in one’s achievements, personally and professionally will thus take precedent. How then can parents, teachers, administrators and students foster a relationship/bond full of oxytocin?

Research refers to Emotional Intelligence (EQ) as playing a central role in nurturing personal and professional relationships. Three major clusters of skills are described: 1) individual character skills, 2) emotional skills and 3) social skills. Goleman (2011) and his colleagues researched how emotional intelligence operates in the work setting and examined its affect on effective work performance, specifically in leaders (Goleman as cited in the Harvard Business Review on Leadership, 2011). Furthermore, Goleman stated (2011) that great leaders are distinguished from good ones in that they entail five essential skills of emotional intelligence. These skills include: 1) self-awareness (awareness of one’s strengths and weaknesses, drives, values and impact on others), 2) self-regulation (the ability to control and redirect disruptive impulses and moods), 3) motivation (accomplished achievements), 4) empathy (the understanding of others personal and emotional life experiences) and 5) social skills (the building of rapport with others in order to guide them in the desired directions (Goleman as cited in the Harvard Business Review On Leadership, 2011).

Moreover, the hallmarks of the above mentioned EQ skills are outlined by Goleman (2011) as the following: a) self-awareness; self-confidence, realistic self-assessment, self-deprecating sense of humor, b) self-regulation; trustworthiness and integrity, comfort with ambiguity, openness to change, c) motivation; strong drive to achieve, optimism and commitment to one’s organization, d) empathy; expertise in building and retaining talent, sensitivity to cross-cultural issues, service to clients/customers, e) social skill; effectiveness in leading change, persuasive, expertise in leading teams (Goleman, 2011, as cited in the Harvard Business Review On Leadership).

Leadership Styles

“The positive mindset is the foundation of an authentic, and innovative leadership” – Gialamas

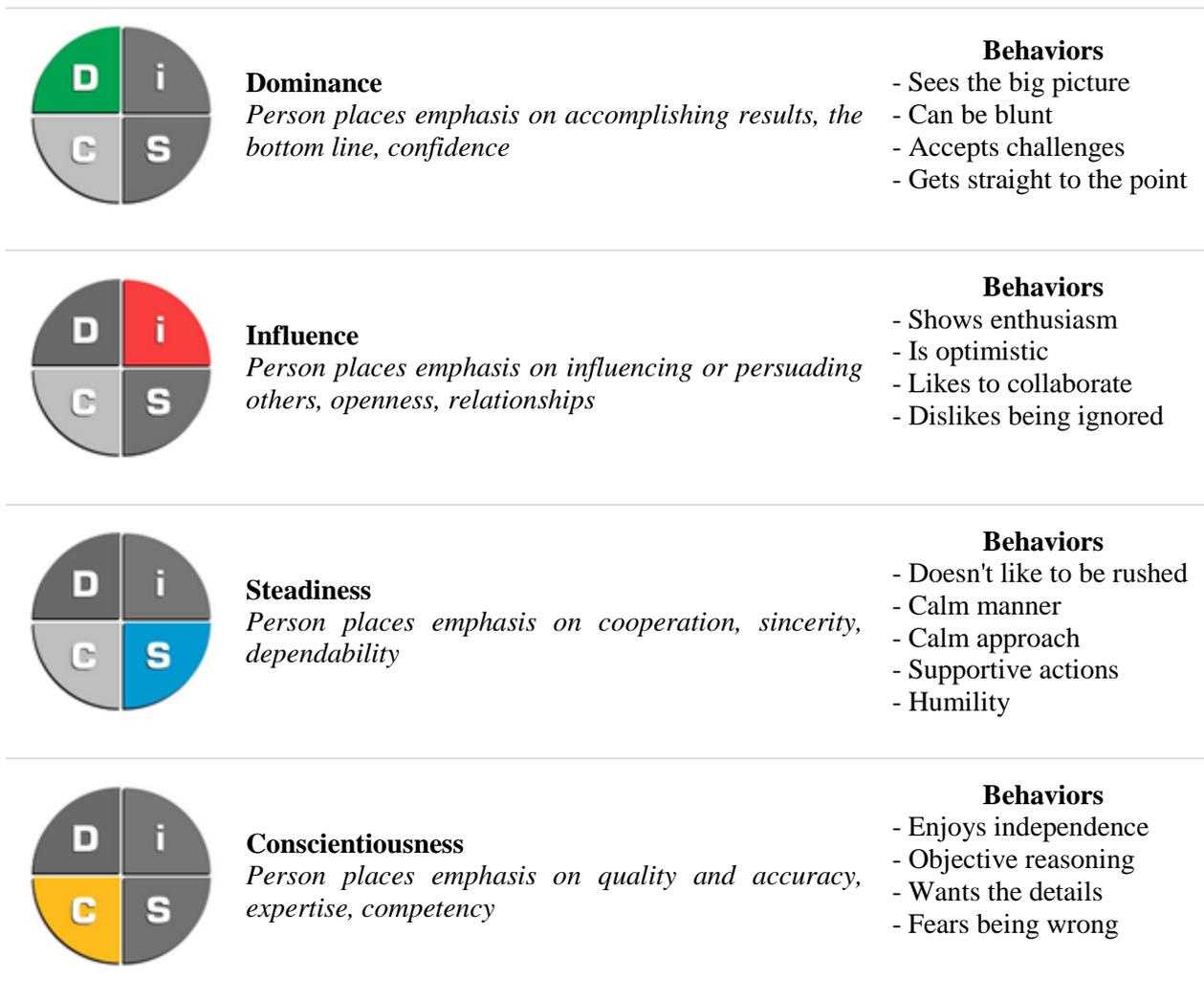
According to Hall & Hord (2011) effective leaders acknowledge that their individual behaviors are important factors to the formation of their overall styles. Behaviors can be described as a leader’s everyday actions, as style represents the overall tone and pattern of a leader (Hall & Hord, 2011).

The DiSC Model of Behavior first proposed by Marston (1928), stems from his original theory on how normal human emotions lead to behavioral differences among groups of people and how an individual's behavior may change over time (www.discprofile.com). Marston's (1928) deep understanding of the interaction between individuals and their environment emphasized his model for human behavior which has been followed ever since in professional leadership settings (Source: "The DiSC® Indra® Research Report," published by Inscape Publishing, 2003).

Furthermore, Marston (1928) theorized that the behavioral expression of emotions could be categorized into four primary types, stemming from the person's perceptions of self in relationship to his or her environment. These four types of behavior were coined by Marston (1928) as: 1) Dominance (D), 2) Inducement (I), 3) Submission (S), and 4) Compliance (C) within a two-axis plane framework (Source: "The DiSC® Indra® Research Report," published by Inscape Publishing, 2003).

Then first dimension of the two-axis plane refers to a person's perception of the environment; specifically, whether it is perceived as favorable or unfavorable. The second dimension refers to the person's perception of his or her own power within the environment; specifically, whether they view themselves as more powerful or less powerful than the environment. Masterson's model progressively developed over time and resulted in referring to the four types of behavior as: 1) Dominance (D), 2) influence (i), 3) Steadiness (S), and 4) Conscientiousness (C) (www.resourceunlimited.com). See below the following description of each of the four behavioral types (www.discprofile.com).

Figure 1: DiSC Explanations



Change Facilitator Styles of Academic Institution Leaders

“The institution’s leader defines and establishes the routines, opportunities, interactions, expectations, language, vision and the cultural forces of the institution he leads”-Gialamas

“Calling- people view their work as an end in itself, their work is fulfilling not because of external reward but because they feel it contributes to the greater good, draws on their personal strengths and gives them meaning and purpose. Unsurprisingly, people with a calling orientation find their work more rewarding and that is why they are generally more likely to make a difference in their organizations, in the community and society in general”-Gialamas

Literature indicated in studies on school principals’ three distinct styles of change facilitators. These styles are: a) the initiator, b) the manager and c) the responder (Hall & Hord, 2011). Leaders who are initiators have clear and strong held visions about their schools and how they should be. These types of leaders are passionate about their schools, are motivated to make their schools better and make decisions based on what they think will be best for students, by listening to all parties involved (Hall & Hord, 2011).

Initiator leaders push their teachers, students, parents and personnel to support the things they believe will help students learn, teachers teach and move the school forward. Although these leaders may push their faculty, they also listen, question and analyse what they and others do. This way, initiator leaders can reflect on what others have told them in regards to emerging issues or tasks and are focused on curriculum, instruction and assessment. These leaders are prepared to anticipate alternative responses in what may need to be employed (Hall & Hord, 2011).

The second leadership style is the manager approach. These types of leaders are organized and efficient and skilled in the way they run their schools. They focus on formal policies, rules, and procedures (Hall & Hord, 2011). Manager leaders are not quick to respond to change initiatives as this allows time for the principal and teachers to learn about the proposed change and to prepare for efficient implementation (Hall & Hord, 2011). They are organized and provide resources to the staff. Manager leaders do many things by themselves rather than delegating tasks to others. They are also more demanding of themselves than others, as they rather do the bulk of the work correctly, as to avoid having to make corrections at a later date (Hall & Hord, 2011).

Lastly, the responders approach to leadership focuses on what is happening in the present in their schools. They do not have visions of what schools should be like in the future. Instead their attention is on present concerns, feelings, and perceptions. Responder leaders spend time on the phone and e-mailing other administrators. Their pattern of talking is chatty, social and they want everyone to be happy. Responder leaders are open to others taking the lead and delay making decisions on their own (Hall & Hord, 2011).

Gialamas (2014) suggested that leadership approaches should be described as meaningful and holistic. This type of leader is committed to serving mankind with compassion, is emotionally and socially competent and guided by ethics, principals and values (Gialamas, 2014). Additionally, Gialamas (2016) has further postulated another type of leadership referred to as “Aristeia” which is defined by three essential components: 1) the establishment of an Authentic Leadership Identity (ALI), 2) the Creation of a Collective Leadership Partnership Approach (CPA) and 3) Serving Humanity. In the first component, Authentic Leadership Identity (ALI) Gialamas (2009) points to the importance of “knowing oneself” dating back to Socrates (469-399 B.C.) and more recently, Adler (1870-1935) (Gialamas & Pelonis, 2009).

It is the process of understanding one’s world view; origins, experiences, attitudes and beliefs that assist in developing not only life choices and approaches to living but also for defining a leadership identity (Gialamas & Pelonis, 2009). Gialamas (2009) further stated that by “knowing

one”, the creation of a leadership vision and definition of its educational philosophy would guide and fuel holistically, healthy leaders thriving to serve humanity.

Parallel to one’s holistic health, Gialamas (2009) stated that one’s principles (specific ways of behaving) and values (standards of actions and attitudes deep in one’s heart and mind that shape our world view and interactions with others) must also be identified in order to ensure that one’s vision is attained by aligning both personal and professional goals through the holistic approach (Gialamas & Pelonis, 2009).

In the second component, Collective Leadership Partnership Approach (CPA), Gialamas (2009) suggested the establishment of this type of leadership includes six components. These six components are the following: 1) a partnership based on common principles and values that are both personal and professional, 2) a distribution of authority and decision making, 3) an outline of the type, magnitude and areas of authority, 4) a plan providing support and encouragement of team members in using their decision making authority, 5) a commitment to continuously reflect on components of the partnership, in order to adjust them, and 6) a dedication to inspiring the members of the leadership team to replicate this model within their teams. With this component of leadership (CPA), a comprehensive support system is in place to ensure that the institution is functioning at its’ highest level of achievement and that members of the leadership partnership share the vision of the institution and are committed to striving towards reaching common goals (Gialamas & Pelonis, 2009).

In the final component, Serving Humanity, Gialamas (as cited in Gialamas & Avgerinou, 2016) discussed the importance of leaders’ commitment to social change. Such social change is fundamental in that human welfare needs are at the forefront for implementing practices in both small and large communities, that make a difference socially, economically and environmentally (IISD, 2014). Additionally, we would like to believe that by being committed to such change as described above, leaders are also contributing to improved mental health of human beings as well, as relational connections are developed through the provisions of such social service.

As George, Sims, McLean and Mayer (2011) stated, authentic leadership begins with a journey of understanding one’s self and that it is the individual’s experiences that ground a context of one’s life story providing inspiration to have an impact in the world. Authentic leaders exemplify their passions, practice values consistently and most of all, lead not only with their cognitive abilities but also with their hearts. By doing so, authentic leaders are able to establish long-term, meaningful relationships and through self-discipline are able to achieve results; achieve results in truly knowing who they are (Sims et al. 2011, as cited in the Harvard Business Review on Leadership).

Conclusion

“A leader must be the source of kindness, ethos, authenticity, intelligence, creativity, wisdom and happiness” –Gialamas

If a meaningful and holistic leadership, defined by Gialamas (2009) as ‘Aristeia’, is to be implemented in a school system, all members should feel supported that they can express their concerns and ideas freely and that decisions are made carefully in ample time. Leaders promoting educational change respond to the human as well as the tasks aspects of their schools, with emotional competence. Being visionary, believing that schools are for learning, valuing human resources, communicating and listening to personnel, being proactive and taking risks are common to successful leaders of educational change.

Taking all of these aspects into consideration, school leaders can continue to progress and develop individual leadership styles, as well cultivate their team members into becoming the best professionals that they can be. Additionally, all stakeholders of the institution granted they internalize meaningful and holistic leadership, will be better equipped to cope with continuous changes in life during times of increased globalization; socially, emotionally, physically and cognitively (<http://www.sedl.org/change/leadership/character.html>).

“Our prime purpose in life is to help others and if you cannot help them, at least do not hurt them”-Dalai Lama

“The calling for leading in education is to prepare tomorrow’s leaders with ethos, and to make the world a better place to live- in particular for less fortunate people”-Gialamas

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