

Authentic Leadership, Social Cognitive Theory, and Character Education: The Transforming of Theories Into Practices

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Character development must balance academic achievement. International school environments are diverse and multicultural settings, containing a learning-focused culture. This investigation constructs the sophisticated elements of authentic leadership and the complexities of the social cognitive theory as factors that produce a practical approach to character development in international schools. The research referenced solidifies this claim by providing evidence to the significance of this theory-based approach. The purpose of this study is to draw attention to the importance of character development, identify the fundamentals of authentic leadership theory and social cognitive theory approach as they relate to character development, and present a conception on how to promote character development in international schools.

Keywords: authentic leadership theory, social cognitive theory, character education, culture, international school, reciprocal determinism

Theoretical Context

Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura (1978; 1989) derived his social cognitive theory by postulating that learning takes place within an environment where observations can be made through social resources. People learn by watching and then choose to imitate, mutate, or disregard the observed action. This implicitly applies to learning since the triadic relationship between environmental factors, behavior, and personal factors, such as cognitive, affective, and biological events, influences perceptions and actions. This relationship, called reciprocal determinism, utilizes observations as the focal strength that supports the theory.

An observation is critical to learning and modeling behavior. The division of a tetrad elemental process to heighten the effectiveness and pursuit of increased comprehension of modeled behavior was constructed. Attention, being the first element, involves the learner attending to the main parts of the observation in order to influence their sensory capacities, motivation and arousal levels, perception, and reinforcement ability. Then, the learner would retain (retention) the observation through mental, verbal, and physical means. Further, the learner would use motor reproduction to produce the observation through actions in order to physically engage in the observation to form behavior. The final element investigates the motivation level that the learner applies to perform or imitate the observed behavior. Therefore, if a learner is attentive to an authentically performed behavior, then their inquisitiveness will allow the learner to retain the most significant aspects of the

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observation in order to reproduce the demonstrated behavior with the appropriately heightened motivation.

Authentic Leadership Theory

In order to socially learn through observations, the behavior must be modeled authentically. Authentic modeling comes not through performance, but by a deeper, more personal resource. This complex process focuses on qualities and attributes leaders possess that reflect the perception of their trustworthiness as well as the connection they make with their followers (Northouse, 2010). The actions of these leaders are consistent with their beliefs and values which have been developed over time. Positive psychological capacities, moral reasoning, and critical life events, are all factors which influence the decisions and behavior of this type of leader.

Authentic leadership consists of the components of self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency. Self-awareness speaks to the character and beliefs of a leader. Internalized moral perspectives determine how leaders utilize their core ethical values and moral perspectives to guide their actions and behavior, and further connect with their followers. Balanced processing weighs the leader's ability to examine information and gain insight from his/her followers prior to decision-making. Relational transparency gages if the leader is being who he/she says they are while shortening the power distance between leader and follower. Authentic leaders inspire and motivate their followers through the alignment of their actions to their character traits. This unification is based on integrity and responsibility; whereas their strength lies in their ability to empower their followers.

International School Context

The international school community is filled with diverse people representing multiple ethnic groups, religions, nationalities, races, and cultures. Their children are expatriates, cross cultural kids, third culture kids, adoptees, and social-economical elite national students. These students seem to continuously possess advanced social skills and the ability to form friendships, strong self-esteem, linguistic and cognitive flexibility, intercultural awareness and tolerance, advanced capacities for empathy, multiple perspective-taking, communication, acceptance, and open and broad minded attitudes (Langford, 1998; Pollock & Van Reken, 1999; Willis, Enloe, & Minoura, 1994). Therefore, international schools consist of transient multinational and multilingual students, teachers, and administrators, an international curriculum and accreditation, and communicate through English or other languages such as Japanese, German, Spanish, and French.

This extensive amount of diversity swallows the school culture. The culture of a school includes all facets that indirectly and directly affect the intellectual and ethical development of students and staff (Character Education Partnership, 2010). This culture defines interactions, shared expectations, behaviors, values, and decision-making at all levels among and between students and adults in the school. Culture gets at the heart of what a school is and how they know. Culture must be inclusive and measureable in order to assess and improve upon it. Berkowitz and Bier (2005) reported that the work of Kevin Ryan and Thomas Likona for the character education partnerships concluded that character development affects various aspects of the "head" (knowledge, thinking), "heart" (emotions, motivation), and "hands" (behavior, skills). These in turn must compliment the culture of a school.

Character Education

"Intelligence plus character—That is the true goal of education" (King, 1947). Character education

enables students to develop justifications why intelligence is important and how to engage it positively. Knowing how to interact with fellow students, teachers, and family and knowing how to interact within one's community effectively are the goal for character education. Therefore, schools should provide developmentally appropriate opportunities for students. The extent of these opportunities must afford students with sufficient rationale and experience to reflect over differences and varying degrees in behavior that is moral and ethical.

Regardless of curriculum intentions, children watch how teachers and administrators address conflict, behavior, social issues, and concerns and collaboration at school among students and the adults first observe character education. Authentic engagement provides motivation for students to adopt and modify their behavior to include that which was modeled. Educators and researchers continue to find that academic success is intrinsically linked to behavior success (Colvin & Fernandez, 2000; Kern, Choutka, & Sokol, 2002; Witt, VanderHeyden, & Gilbertson, 2004). When positive behavior encompasses a school, the culture of the school increases its focus on learning. Teachers spend more time in teaching, extending, and enriching learning opportunities. Students will spend more time being engaged in learning as well as optimizing their options to utilize pro-social character development.

This development would have to be fused with the curriculum to maximize the effort for character education implementation. In class connections of character, traits to curriculum provide foundation for academic progress. A systematic approach shows how character development can positively affect all learners then provides the blueprint on how to interact within their communities.

Transformation to Practice

The social cognitive theory and the authentic leadership theory can be explicitly transferred from theory to practice in the form of character development. International schools attract diverse and experienced professionals from all over the world. The prestige of the student body, salary and benefits, level of collaboration, school resources, and professional development opportunities, gives competitive advantages to the international school to seek out high quality professionals that match their school's culture. The more authentic the professional (faculty or staff) is, the more authentic their behavior is. Diversity celebrates multiple examples of the same trait observed. An international stage provides this interaction to thrive, unraveling behavior that is synonymous to the observed behavior, but modeled variously. Then, the modeled behavior can be cognitively examined (personal factors), reproduced (behavior), and experienced (environmental factors) in the school community.

Implementation is critical for effective character education. All members of the school community, to ensure successful implementation, must conduct this task. The transient nature of the people (students and adults) of international schools can negatively impact the full implementation and fidelity of a particular program.

Banks (2011) revealed that 82% of surveyed teachers from four international schools in Bangkok, Thailand, were not involved in the implementation of the character development program at their school. Annual attention must be given to support the effort of character development through a campaigned buy-in, a leadership committee, continuous professional development, and assessment of school culture. Banks (2011) developed the "Who Are We & How We Know" (see Figure 1), character education implementation model to incorporate character education systematically into the curriculum and everyday life of all school stakeholders. The model includes six functions in a circular rotation, which suggests the annual attention needed to sustain

the effort. The components include:

(1) Function 1—Who We Are Now: Understanding Ourselves. The purpose of this function is to identify strengths and weakness of the current character development effort in order to decide what areas will be selected for improvement;

(2) Function 2—Who We Want To Be: The Ideal School-Community. The purpose of this function is to identify the ideal characteristics of the ideal school by defining character and establishing core ethical values;

(3) Function 3—How We Plan To Be: Developing the Intervention. The purpose of this function is to develop a plan of action that will progress the school-community towards the ideal condition;

(4) Function 4—What We Will Do: Transforming School Culture. The purpose of this function is to activate the plan constructed in function three;

(5) Function 5—How We Know: Formative and Summative Evaluations. The purpose of this function is to measure and evaluate the progress made from;

(6) Function 6—Learning More About Ourselves. The purpose of this function is to identify professional development needed to increase comprehension of established goals.

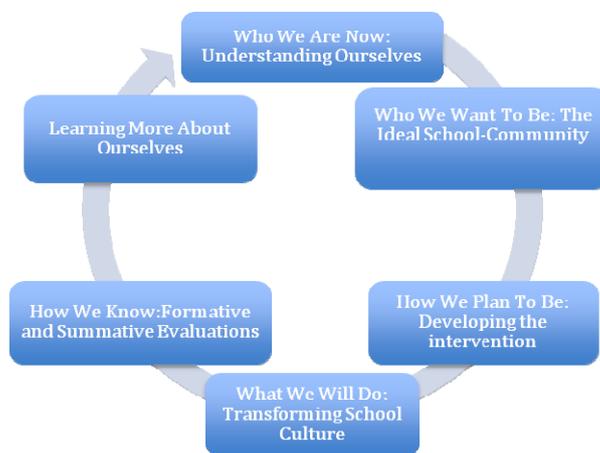


Figure 1. “Who Are We & How We Know”: An implementation model for character education for ISAT middle schools.

Conclusion

The social cognitive theory is a psychological theory that describes the three-way relationship between personal factors, behavior, and environmental factors. Only when an authentic example is provided for observed modeling can the reciprocal approach be used to experience and reflect on the process. Character education is a proper child development field in which these two theories can transform from theory to practice. Character development for international students needs an implementation process that is conducted accurately and faithfully. The “Who Are We & How We Know” model for implementing character education provides guidance to stay consistent with the fidelity of the character development process.

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