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EDUCATION IS THE MOST POWERFUL WEAPON WE CAN USE TO CHANGE THE WORLD

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ABSTRACT

This article explored the learning experiences of the author’s educational connection perspective; specifically, it identified congruent themes and examined their connective value to individual, cultural, and societal change. Past course work including Transformational Leadership, the Ethical Educator, Creativity, Inquiry, and Innovation, and Quantitative Research Methods all presented corresponding themes relating to methods of creating, comprehending, and cultivating change. The ability to find connections within courses can offer value to possible needed change. It is change which we live by and we need to process those experiences into positive momentum for growth. Four specific themes—compassion, identity, relationships, and truth—present positive learning associations and can offer a connection to change for individuals or groups.

Keywords: compassion, passion, identity, relationships, truth, themes, connection
Following Sorokin’s (1992) concept that individuals learn from their mistakes, her attainment of knowledge and recognition of repeated themes has taken precedence, requiring further attention to their impact on leadership, change, and individual well-being. Specific themes all contribute to the foundation of leadership and how change takes place. Leadership is defined as “a set of practices that enrich the lives of individuals” (Greenleaf Center for Student Leadership, n.d, para 1). Looking at change and how leadership affects those involved can often create discussion about change and its characteristics. When people draw credible, trustworthy conclusions after conducting substantial research, change often occurs through what is called transformative learning. Transformative learning is defined as “the processes of effecting change in a frame of reference” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). Over the past year, the author has made connections through specific characteristics of change and how it takes place. After pondering past coursework and themes which hold the greatest relevance to change, she concluded that compassion, identity, relationships, and truth command the most significant value.

**COMPASSION**

Compassion is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2016) as the emotion of “sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others.” However, when evaluating themes relevant to this past year’s Concordia doctoral experiences, the researcher noticed that “compassion” has other meanings as well. Throughout her time at Concordia, she has developed a compassion for instructional learning and leadership. To explore this we must first craft how compassion is arises: it is driven by passion.

Passion, as defined by Merriam-Webster (2016), is “a strong feeling of enthusiasm or excitement for something or about doing something.” Passion must exist in order for change to
Leaders who possess and exhibit passion often bring about needed change, producing positive effects in cultural, societal, or humanitarian realms. Dewey (1933, qtd. in Mezirow, 1991, p. 19) observed that only when people experience personal connection can a purposeful meaning directly exist. Therefore, individual cognizance matched with dedication must exist if passion is to lead to well-disciplined action and offer relevance to change.

As defined by Hallowell (2011), passion is what people “like to do most, do best, and . . . adds the greatest value” (p. 43). Passion, when evident and exhibited by leaders, will allow supporters to align with change and create stronger connections based on defined senses of individual value. Without individual correlation of likes and dislikes, compassion can and will offer no positive change (Hallowell, 2011). Therefore, through passion the emotion of compassion and its transformative properties become activated, generating an individualistic understanding and involvement in various social arenas.

The world consists of numerous social arenas that offer a multitude of opportunities in which individuals may participate. When compassion is developed, we must choose when and where we will exhibit it. Schools may generate personal passion in a specific subject area, and work environments may fashion compassion through hard work and dedication to creating the greater good in society. Regardless of where compassion exists, it is through the simple task of decision making that compassion can have its greatest impact. Therefore, compassion, when related to participant choices and change, can nurture personal relevance.

When given the optimistic opportunity and prosperous conditions in which people can grow or achieve, they will develop a stronger work ethic (Hallowell, 2011). Nevertheless, regardless of occasion or occurrence, compassion must be felt in order to exhibit necessary change. This emotion could easily lead one to exude a sense of self-pity or remorse for past
occurrences, but compassion does not offer to resolve issues; it only allows for misrepresentation of assumed or possibly identifiable perfection or wholeness. However, Palmer (2004) finds that entirety is not excellence, but an understanding and acceptance that change must occur. It is through this comprehension that one finds the ability to resolve divergence and establish social involvement.

During the past year’s coursework, all of the students had to participate in discussion boards, post their thoughts or learned facts, and respond to peers. Through this connection, all involved were able to notice specific characteristics of each other, thus creating connections in rhetoric, emotion, and experience. In courses such as Transformational Leadership and Leading Organization Change, participants in discussion-board posts formed bonds based on individual student passions. Through these bonds, the ability to recognize what people were compassionate about came to light. These two specific courses alone led to this author’s realization of what she truly wants to accomplish throughout her time at Concordia: the ability to find, develop, and instill compassion when leading and modeling transformation.

Compassion intensifies its involvement when one constructs individual emotional ties towards specific behaviors (Hallowell, 2011). Compassion is a positive emotion those in leadership roles can use to exhibit increasing social comprehension, thus affecting society. Compassion creates drive within those participating in order to ignite cultural change, leading to more advanced commonly shared interests. Through Creativity, Inquiry, and Innovation, the author found compassion when examining her kindheartedness, thus allowing for personal change in emotions, feelings, and thoughts. As a result, her behaviors matured, she redefined her lesser sentiments, and strengthened her actions and ability to create and lead change based on passionate displays of learned understandings from failed experiences. Therefore, through
reflection on past experiences, she was able display her individual passion, exhibit mutual
compassion, and demonstrate her true identity, which was in need of change.

IDENTITY

Identity is defined as those characteristics that distinguish a person or group from others
(Merriam-Webster, 2016). Identity is something we all encounter and struggle with from time to
time when searching for who we truly are (Nass & Yen, 2012). Because of this struggle, identity
is often lost within oneself, giving rise to a sense of emotionless involvement. Identity itself
defines who we are as people. It is those characteristics that define individualism, its exhibition
to society, and—most important —how individuals are perceived by groups. Because of the
faces people parade for public view, it is here where the search for connections begins.
Therefore, it is through identity that relationships to specific cultural or societal change occur.

Identifying with a specific culture or society reveals connections based on similar values,
beliefs, moral attitudes, or behaviors (Mezirow, 2000). During the Ethical Educator course, a
rejuvenation of religious learning commenced within the author’s soul. As research progressed,
she developed bonds between peers as she explored her identity and personal commitment to
Christ. A church is the body of Christ, but it is those who make up that church who are Christ-
like in identity, who define the Church and what it stands for. Sometimes torn by emotions of
commitment, the author found this course offered a better understanding of her identity and
relationships to those sharing connections regarding Christ, morals, and beliefs. As those
connections strengthened, the author’s individual character grew as well, allowing God to again
take sovereignty over her life.

Connections strengthen through identification and self-determination when persons find
power or determination to create positive change within a group. Borgmann (2010, p. 5) notes
that this “self-determination or autonomy is definitively a moral and mark of contemporary ethics.” Those same ethics, whether moral, biased, or religious, offer self-actualization and increased ethical identity, making people potentially stronger leaders in whatever venues they enter. One example of this ethical identity could be found in our Ethical Educator course, where we read Bonhoeffer’s (1995) assertion that “Faith alone sets up a new foundation, and it is that new foundation alone that justifies being able to live before God” (p. 121). The concept of faith, established as a homogeneous belief within a group, allows individuals to identify themselves with and to others.

Identity of self is what allows us to become relatable to others. Evident through our behaviors, our acknowledgement and acceptance of beliefs outline who people are while crafting their distinctive personalities. The course on Creativity, Inquiry, and Innovation allowed for reflection on past experiences and their outcomes; learning from mistakes produced a stronger personal identity. Quantitative Research Methods allowed for a personal exploration of identity through developing questionnaire surveys that offered insights into who and what people are. Qualitative Research Methods likewise illuminated participants’ identity based on individual feelings based on their perspective. Awareness of one’s perceptions, and developing the ability to identify with others’ temperaments, fostered lasting relationships based on distinguishable traits. Identifiable personalities allow people to form groups through bonds based on similar values, preferences, and opinions. Such characteristics offer a definition of how people become acceptable to society; therefore, knowing and exhibiting personal identity defines how and on what grounds relationships are created. Willard (n.d.) believes are people products of their society; ironically, it is through involvement with others that people define or come to understand their distinct personal identity. This understanding offers continuous evaluation of
uniqueness, specific settings, and relationships, creating positive individual value. Complete identity is an “understanding that only comes from the inside, from the understanding one already has” (Willard, 1999, para. 10). Therefore, the natural inquiry process leads people to find communal distinctions between each other, making individual identity the basis of how relationships are formed.

**RELATIONSHIPS**

Relationships are created through shared experiences with others of similar or different identities. Hallowell (2011) believes that interpersonal relationships are “the only thing that really matters in life” (p. 81). Given their importance, it is therefore no coincidence that relationships are considered a form of continuous learning. Schmuck, Bell, and Bell (2012) explain that we learn from our experiences and also from reflecting on the meaning of those experiences. It is through gaining knowledge that relationships grow and become strong connective bonds. These connections guide people toward their individual self-justified and publicly accepted identity. Also woven through relationships are the common ideas, beliefs, or morals utilized in forming identifiable relationships with others.

Relationships must be based on a multitude of individuals with relatable identities and various opinions who are able to reach cohesive conclusions. If individuals are able to adapt their thinking to that of the group with openness and can accept the validity of others’ thinking, relationships can and will flourish. Relationships may be positive or negative in nature; however, it is primarily the positive aspects of one’s relationships that increase individuals’ self-concept and promote growth.

Adding value through relationships is done through connections because of their ability to create a positive influence. Connections are the bonds an individual feels that promote
positive energy and potential growth (Hallowell, 2011). That same positive energy is what drives individual and societal change. This being understood, experience determines both positive and negative relationships that create changes in behavior. Without positive relationships, individuals are left to flounder in their own self-indulgence, unable to procure what value relationships offer: that is, the necessary development of knowledge through emotional experiences with others, which in turn create societal norms.

Societal norms pertaining to relationships influence outcomes. If outcomes do not exist within the coherency of a group establishing change, those norms are bound to fail. Borgmann (2006) believes “people have to discover the ground on which to build structures that naturally and continuously support fidelity and fortitude” (p. 113). Norms that present adversity make relationships grow, thus creating stronger bonds for future positivity. Educating people about possible optimistic potential thus creates stronger relationships. Schmuck et al. (2012) argue that what is needed is “an educational system which has the ability to improve its own group process to depend on the amount of tension its participants feel about how they are working together” (p. 58). Such tension can promote awareness that an individual or group is not making adequate progress or growth toward change.

Change is the result of evaluating numerous conclusions and determining which resolution best fits the problem (Fullan, 2011). It is the revealing of those disagreements within relationships where change ultimately occurs after careful, respectful consideration of bonds created and openness to others’ expressed opinions. Although West (1994, p. 109) asserts that “no one alone can save the nation or world,” it is the attempt at finding commonality within relationships that leads to optimistic change. Therefore, it is through relationships grounded in
positive cultural norms that change occurs, hence offering truth in identity and the relationships people experience.

**TRUTH**

Truth defines our very existence. It is through truth that persons live and offer value to experience, thus making truth the foundation of personal integrity. Truth therefore fortifies character, disallowing misguidedness. It can also be said that, with the establishing of individual truths, each person allows self-determination to exist, hence defining character and behavioral identity. Bingham (2010) believes people are imperfect without their own association of truth. Adler and Gorman (1952) define truth as the congruence of a group’s propositions or judgments with facts, and note that truth offers insight into distinctive ethical integrity and characteristics. So, believing truth to be a building block of these traits, this writer has concluded that truth itself must be the foundation of behavior in all who possess knowledgeable worth.

Truth as a foundation may take many forms, but has one simple defining moment: its realization. Too often, people go through life only to discover that what they thought to be true is not. Truth involves learning to be attentive to one’s experience, developing an awareness of one’s surroundings, and possessing an understanding of the impact and potential consequences of outcomes. Knowing how, where, and when truth can create an impact in the world is the real power of truth itself.

The power of truth offers value to any situation. Knowing truth itself and where it can add value only increases the opportunity for truth to grow and become principle. In the realm of change, without truth there is no value in change: change itself must be presented with truth if change can occur. Deaner (1994) offers characteristics of truth and how it becomes relevant to change. Based on ideas of reason for participation, ethical value, and shared power, added value
becomes impossible should one of these three standards be lost during the search for truth and value. Those areas in which personal connections flourish must be represented by truth, for without truth there is no permanent, relevant connection between individuals.

**CONCLUSION**

As an educational professional, I recognize that behaviors must be positive in order to create encouragement in the environments one participates in. Also, without ethical standards, such as those learned in the Ethical Educator course, which instill specific moral beliefs that lead and create leaders in others, relationships will not flourish. I have had to confront some hard truths about myself, but doing so has led to self-knowledge and personal growth. Also, knowing my individual identity has allowed new relationships to develop and prosper over the past year. Knowing who I am has offered me a chance to change into who I want to become.

Over the past year, many themes have been presented during my studies to add to my understanding of education in connection to change. After much personal debate, I have determined that the themes of compassion, identity, relationships, and truth hold the most precedence to connection throughout my studies. In order for individuals to feel compassion, they must first have passion; in order to fuel passion, experience and comprehension must be embraced if change is to become possible. Compassion underpins personal identity; people who are grounded in compassion and self-knowledge are able to offer themselves in a holistic and valuable way to others individually or in groups. It is that sense of identity which connects people with others, producing strong relationships that must be nurtured as individuals and groups evolve. Through the combination of relationships and self-evaluation, people define and institute truths that promote the development of principles based on the moral and ethical values that society lives by.
In conclusion, as I considered the main themes of the past year, the following simple connection emerged and has become visible to me: Without compassion there can be no identity; without knowledge of self, no correlation can be found with others; without others, no individual truths can be established, thus leading to an unidentifiable, disconnected loneliness in which change will not and cannot occur. In contrast, the compassion felt, identity developed, and truthful relationships formed during my education and experience working in the academic arena have garnished my personal growth, thus rekindling my desire to enhance cultural wisdom, improve societal judiciousness, and generate positive change in the world.
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