

Educator Leaders: Inspiring Learners to Transform Society by Becoming Architects of their Own Learning

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Abstract

In the evolving global stage, educators are continuously challenged to keep up with the changing expectations and unknown future needs of their students. Educators must engage in professional development and growth through numerous practices, including the pursuit of graduate studies in higher education institutions. Their curiosity, love, compassion, accountability, and eagerness to learn are some of the motivators that drive life-long learners to seek their personal and professional goals. When leaders and administrators support this learning process, they lead their organizations to innovation and change, while building on employee morale, pride, loyalty, and providing guidance towards high performance for their students, educators, and community, as a whole. Meanwhile, educators become teaching and learning leaders inspiring their students to become architects of their own learning in order to transform society and promote justice and fair trade leading by example. Furthermore, it is essential that educational institutions provide a consistent, high-quality academic experience in order for their students to become citizens and leaders of the world, especially given the level and degree of local, national, and global challenges that societies face. This can be achieved through the provision of a holistic, harmonious educational experience, guided by ethical discipline and universal principles and values while attending to students' needs and competencies.

Keywords: Educator-leaders, ethos, holistic education, Morphosis, Teaching, and Learning

DOI: 10.29329/ijpe.2018.157.4

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Introduction

In the continuously changing and evolving global stage, principles, values and ethics are challenged every minute. People in different parts of the world attempt to correlate the current crisis with the insinuation that it is caused by the economic crisis when in reality the critical situations faced by societies are caused by ethical issues. Meanwhile, governments and communities underestimate the profound impact educators make on their students' lives and the long-term effects they have on them. Furthermore, they do not understand that the actual instructional material taught at present will have limited if any applications in the future given the "fast-paced, complex, and multi-dimensional" transformations taking place in today's society. (Gialamas, 2017). Moreover, programs designed by previous century educators seem to be obsolete with reference to the education of tomorrow's global citizens and leaders.

Academic institutions are now faced with the challenge and desire to keep up with the changes by dedicating their resources (time, funds, and personal resources) towards professional development and growth of their educators and institutional leaders (Eryaman, 2017). In particular, how can educators keep up with the changes when the education they received ten, twenty, thirty or even more years ago has no direct relevance to today's complex societal needs? How can they adapt their mentality and practices to today's ever-changing world and tomorrow's unknown needs and expectations? This can occur through the adaptation of change and innovation in life-long learning practices and the creation of new knowledge, to be shared with colleagues and the educational community in general. Life-long learning is a term used quite often but seldom adopted. The reasons to avoid or neglect personal progress or advancement are numerous; limited time, funds, or even apprehension of the commitment. However, most times these are simply excuses. There needs to be a revolutionary change in the mental DNA of an educator in order for him/her to take on this challenge.

This change is a process, most painstaking, resulting in a distinctive transformation for each individual. Meanwhile, there are certain elements often present, which bridge the educator's desires with their pursuit of higher, continuous learning. Educators' engagement, curiosity, love, compassion, empathy, accountability, and eagerness are some of the personality traits that life-long learners ought to have (Bustin, 2014). It is an inner drive that when triggered by external conditions, it stimulates motives directed towards seeking personal and professional development and growth. In addition to the internal drivers, motivators, and external conditions, the surrounding environment plays a significant role in the process. When the institution treats its educators with respect, building on their confidence, pride, morale, loyalty, and security levels, sharing common objectives, mission, and vision, while enhancing collaborative communities, team building, and team learning, the outcome is employee satisfaction and elevated productivity leading to high performance (Senge, 2006; Eryaman & Schneider, 2017). High performance is carried over to their instructional methodologies and outcome promoting student higher and holistic learning.

Meanwhile, talent management is enhanced, identifying skill and knowledge available and applicable to the needs of the institution, at present and in the future, as they arise. Moreover, learning becomes contagious, spreading within and across the institution transforming it into a learning institution promoting the shared mission and team learning. The entire process follows the ripple effect attracting students who recognizing their instructor's thirst for "morfosis" cannot remain indifferent, as well as colleagues identifying the beauty that the combination of teaching and learning reveals and promotes. Thus the educators' model is adapted by students' seeking to adopt the exemplary they look up to. Educators become Teaching and Learning Leaders inspiring their students and younger generations by example (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, & Wright, 2014).

What is gMp

The **global Morfosis paradigm (gMp)** has been founded by Dr. Stefanos Gialamas in the quest towards a holistic education compatible to the ancient Greek educational paradigm, including principles, values, and virtue in the education of young learners. It has been embedded in ACS Athens School's daily practices and procedures. This paradigm promotes strategic approaches, innovative methodologies, and a leadership philosophy that guides educational institutions in its adoption and implementation (Gialamas, 2015). gMp is a holistic educational model relevant to all teacher-learners who seek to advance, as well as expand their knowledge and experience for their personal growth, in addition to the quest on motivational procedures and practices directed towards the younger generations, composing their students.

The Global Morphosis Paradigm (gMp) is a dynamic 3-dimensional model consisting of 3 inseparable, interconnected and interrelated components. These are the "Morfosis" Educational Philosophy, the i²Flex Delivery Methodology and the "Aristeia" Leadership approach (Gialamas, 2015). gMp is relevant to all teacher-learners, who seek to advance, as well as expand their knowledge and experience for their personal and professional growth, in addition to the motivation of the younger population, composing their students. Morfosis is the consistent, high quality, an academic experience aimed towards the students of today who are the citizens and leaders of tomorrow.

Educators have the responsibility to provide their students with a holistic, meaningful, harmonious educational experience, guided by ethical discipline and universal principles and values. Holistic is defined as the understanding and successful combination of the academic, emotional, physical, intellectual and ethical components to ensure a healthy and balanced individual. Meaningful refers to being in alignment with the individual's principles and values as well as his/her personal and professional goals. Moreover, education ought to be meaningful in relation to the students' dreams, strengths, capabilities, desires, and talents. Harmonious refers to the conception that all human dimensions, such as emotions, intelligence, and intellect must be in harmony. Ethical discipline is guided by ethos which is the essence and the focus of integrity. It refers to the individual's conscience and his/her acting upon higher intent guided by what he/she knows that is moral, virtuous, and noble. (Gialamas, 2017; Gialamas, Pelonis, & Medeiros, 2014). Moreover, Morfosis is the consistent, high quality, academic experience aimed towards the students of today who are the citizens and leaders of tomorrow. Educators are exposed to the responsibility to provide their students with a "meaningful, holistic, harmonious educational experience, guided by ethical discipline and universal principles and values" (Gialamas, 2015).

i²Flex Delivery Methodology is a constructivist blended teaching methodology which integrates independent, inquiry-based, flexible face-to-face learning that is meaningfully supported by educational media and technology (Gialamas & Avgerinou, 2016). "Aristeia leadership is the continuous act of effectively engaging all members of an organization, or community, as well as utilizing their differences, their authentic energies, creative ideas, and diverse qualities primarily for the benefit of their constituencies. It is comprised by three interrelated, inseparable and interconnected components: the establishment of an Authentic Leadership Identity (ALI), the creation of a Collective Leadership-Partnership Approach (CPA), and Service to Humanity (Gialamas, Cherif, Pelonis, & Medeiros, 2016; Gialamas & Pelonis, 2017).

Service learning, internships and civic responsibility acts of kindness are significant learning experiences designed and delivered by educators. However, the gMp model provides a holistic educational experience intended for educators and students, as it embraces academic, social, and personal growth and advancement. Specifically, gMp empowers students to become architects of their own learning while undertaking responsibility for their actions and initiatives. In particular, students decide on the initiative to be undertaken, plan for the most efficient, effective and purposeful execution, while delivering the initiative, reflects upon it, and assess its effectiveness. For example, students at ACS are responsible for designing and implementing a learning program for unaccompanied refugee children in Greece. In particular, they analyze the academic level of the

refugee students, develop a meaningful curriculum, and design appropriate delivery approaches. An example of a delivery approach is a hybrid program during which refugee students meet with ACS Athens students for seven hours on Saturday mornings and 2-3 times every week through webinars.

Now more than ever, there is a need to focus on providing a consistent, high-quality academic experience for our young people. The local, national, regional, and global challenges are very visible and intense. Social, economic, and ethical struggles are making people skeptical, concerned, and sometimes fearful (Gialamas, 2015). Educators and administrators must provide young people with a meaningful, holistic, harmonious educational experience, guided by ethical discipline and universal principles and values. We believe that the global Morfosis paradigm is necessary now, more than ever, in order to inspire young people to transform the world by becoming architects of their own learning. To accomplish that, we need to redefine several concepts such as “education”, “educators”, “teaching and learning” and finally “shaping the character” of a student (Gialamas, 2015).

How gMp inspiring Educators to become Teaching and Learning Leaders for the benefit of their students

“Children are great imitators. So give them something great to imitate”. Students, more than ever need the guidance and support of the people they spend the most time with; their educators. Educators are called upon to carry out a multi-level mission; facilitator, educator, mentor, guide, supporter, role model, advisor, confidante, and inspirational leader. Therefore, they need “leadership by example” and educators have such an opportunity or calling to do this. Although service learning, internships and civic responsibility as acts of kindness are significant learning experiences, they do not provide a comprehensive teaching and learning experience. On the other hand, the gMp model provides a holistic educational experience intended for educators and students, as it embraces and encourages academic, social, and personal growth and advancement.

In the challenging times that mankind is experiencing, students need to be motivated and guided. They need to be led rather than managed. Classroom management is a term tending to be obsolete taking into account the multiple drivers influencing student learning. Students ought to be approached holistically, providing them with multi-faceted education adopting Aristeia leadership approach while promoting values and excellence in academics and character. Aristeia leadership is combined with the i²Flex model of education merging multiple instructional methodologies in pursuit of high-quality educational practice designed for students. These practices can be designed, developed, and enhanced when educators advance and progress, on a personal as well as, professional level.

Providing students with a holistic approach to education enriched with passion, ethos, and empathy, prepares them to be fully functional and independent in the demanding societies they are growing in. Having a well-rounded, holistic education provides them with the bedrock necessary to challenge the given infrastructure of the modern society. They become fully equipped and prepared to be architects of their own learning. Furthermore, their educators, as teaching-learning mentors and leaders promote the quest for knowledge and the magic that pursuing it, entails.

Particularly, a first manifestation is the Youth-to-Youth program which is designed for 42 unaccompanied minors from different origins and backgrounds. These students meet with 42 ACS Athens students once a week face-to-face and 2-3 times weekly through webinars. ACS Athens students design the learning and instructional methodologies while planning activities to engage the refugee students in academics, sports, and arts while building on skills such as computer usage, professional dress code and etiquette, and so on. Through this process, the refugee students are equipped with skills, tools, and knowledge that prepare them to be integrated into the educational system in Greece and abroad. Meanwhile, ACS Athens students become architects of their own learning while they plan, design, and implement educational, social, and emotional strategies for their peers. gMp is manifested in the Youth-to-Youth program through the holistic practice's building on the student's intellectual background while embracing the students in the emotional and physical groundwork through the arts and sports. Moreover, the ethical foundation is enhanced through the awareness of equity, respect, and appreciation for each other.

ACS Athens students learn by serving humanity and carrying out good deeds. Meanwhile, educators inspire their students by educating them holistically, while offering the unaccompanied minors the chance to dream. The philosophy that ACS Athens supports and encourages, inspired the Shapiro Foundation, a foundation focusing on “improving the lives of the world’s most vulnerable populations” (TNH, 2018, para. 11). A significant outcome and manifestation of the Youth-to-Youth program is the Shapiro Foundation’s announcement that for the academic year 2018-2019, they will offer eighteen scholarships to unaccompanied minors to attend ACS Athens academic program, taking Youth-to-Youth to a next level. Meanwhile, teaching and learning are further developed through holistic processes. Students engage and participate in an academic environment, which is based on kindness, through their academic lessons. Subjects, such as mathematics, inspire students to engage in creative processes through which they are exposed to the curriculum in a harmonious and holistic manner.

A second manifestation is the Elderly Home Initiative which is designed and carried out in the Middle School. Middle School students under the supervision of their advisors visit elderly people who are Alzheimer’s patients during the school day, to spend time with them. Students become architects by designing approaches which they sense that will make sense to the elderly people including music, art, and games. Students have expressed their gratitude upon their return. Moreover, they stated that they experienced contentment realizing that they had brought happiness to the elderly people. Both manifestations are examples of gMp practices, which encompass meaningful, harmonious and educational experience, guided by ethos. The Global Morphosis Paradigm as conceived by Dr. Stefanos Gialamas, is the quest towards a holistic education, including principles, values, and virtues in the education of young learners. It has been embedded in ACS Athens School’s daily practices making the tri-fold model an undoubtedly powerful, meaningful, and purposeful tool in the hands of educators and administrators.

Manifestations

Teaching and learning is a passion. It is a pursuit driven by curiosity and deep eagerness towards significance and excellence. The more advanced the level of the quest, the higher the enthusiasm to accomplish it. Meanwhile, the inner drive and external motivators are further enhanced by progress and accomplishment. When the educator’s attempts and practices are welcomed and celebrated by the administration, peers, and professors, while the process and success are achieved, the hard work becomes less painful and the long hours become a quest for further achievement enhanced by more intense dedication. The process is continual and inexhaustible. As long as there are learning and accessibility to resources, there is an incentive and an inspiration for advanced education and higher achievement.

An educator who is a social constructivist teacher recognizes the significance and priority to give voice and stimulus to students. Educators ought to actively listen, engage, and find ways and practices through which they can motivate students to become active learners and achieve the highest of their potential. Professional development paves the journey, which leads to new, interesting, and engaging methods to promote knowledge, information, and learning. Once teaching is combined with the pursuit of continuous learning on behalf of the educator for the benefit of the students and their development, the outcome is Morphosis. The exchange of knowledge, expertise, and insight lead to the scholarship of teaching handed over to tomorrow’s global citizens of the world while preparing them to make a transformational impact on the world.

Meanwhile, the educator-learners’ achievements drive him/her more intensely in an attempt to be adaptable to student needs and competencies. Furthermore, having the capacity to update knowledge on new instructional methodologies and meaningful didactic tools provides alignment of the person with the professional. The appreciation of the students for their accomplishments provides a strong incentive to strive for excellence. The support from administration and colleagues enhances the passion for the realization of her objectives and goal. In the meantime, the deep need for learning provides the path towards completion of the learning process and achievement. It seems that teaching

and learning becomes a practice driven by a continuum attracting educators to become Teaching and Learning leaders for their benefit as well as, their students. In the process, colleagues and peers are attracted in a contagious manner. The exchange of knowledge and expertise leads the educator to the scholarship of teaching through the pursuit of higher education and degrees.

Conclusion

Today, more than ever, we need educator-leaders who will be empowered to undertake new leadership roles, open new knowledge paths, create unique opportunities, and lead their learners with ethos. These learners must be prepared and guided to become architects of their own life structure, poets of their own life poetry, and cultivators planting their own life tree under which their children, grandchildren, and the children of other people will sit to reflect while writing their own life's journey manuscript. All of these begin with the educator leader; a leader who will transform the world for the benefit of all people, but mostly for the less privileged human beings.

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