Teaching Leadership

by Susan Leshnower

When thinking of leaders, people usually think of those in positions of power, such as political leaders, religious leaders, or student leaders. Yet, leaders can be found in all spheres of life, and leadership behaviors can be learned particularly in a small-group format (Hellriegel, Jackson, & Slocum, 2005). This article presents ideas and exercises to teach leadership skills to gifted students using a small-group format.

So, first let's ask, "What is leadership?" As used here, leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes and outcomes that reflect their shared purposes (Daft, 2007). "Leadership is a social process because it involves interaction with other people" and can be developed by practicing in a safe environment (Van Linden & Fertman, 1998, p. 127).

Now, let's ask, "How do we define gifted students and why should we select them for teaching leadership?" Although there is no single definition of giftedness, we use this definition:

> a "gifted and talented student" means a child or youth who performs at or shows the potential for performing at a remarkably high level of accomplishment when compared to others of the same age, experience, or environment and who:
> 1. exhibits high performance capability in an intellectual, creative, or artistic area;
> 2. possesses an unusual capacity for leadership; or
> 3. excels in a specific academic field. (Texas Education Agency, 1995, ¶ 1)

Because by definition many gifted learners show high capabilities and leadership potential, gifted classes are the right environment for teaching leadership skills. This viewpoint hinges on two observations. First, it is important to our communities that teachers prepare the next generation of leaders, and second, gifted students need challenging learning experiences that instill creativity and critical thinking in them (Glass, 2004). In short, teachers of gifted students can help students develop the ability to relate to others and learn valuable social and leadership skills (Maker & Nielson, 1996).

Figure 1. The Cassatt String Quartet.

Note. Retrieved on July 2, 2007, from http://www.cassattquartet.com/Photos/?id=19. Copyright © 2006 Cassatt String Quartet.

The String Quartet—Learning Leadership in a Small-Group Setting

Because of its small-group structure, a string quartet—a group of four members who play first or second violin, viola, or cello—lends itself naturally to developing leadership behaviors. All four quartet members are considered equal and have to work together to manage conflict, solve problems, and increase learning in order to produce a beautiful performance. This article will use the example of the Cassatt String Quartet, whose members teach leadership behaviors when coaching chamber music. The ideas presented in this example can be adapted to enriched classes such as a choral or theater group, an accelerated math or science project team, or a history project. It is the intent here that these ideas serve as a springboard for gifted teachers to develop other innovative ways to teach leadership.

I will begin with a brief biography of the Cassatt String Quartet, which coaches chamber groups at the college level and in grades 6–12. Many of their students are in gifted and talented programs in their schools.

The Cassatt String Quartet

After two decades, the Cassatt String Quartet plays the masterpieces of chamber music, while commissioning, concertizing, and recording new works from eminent composers. Garnering top prizes at the Fischoff, Coleman, and Banff International competitions, the Cassatt Quartet also won Chamber Music America/ASCAP awards for Adventurous Programming. The quartet has received grants from the Aaron Copland Fund, the Lila Wallace–Reader's Digest Fund, and The National Endowment for the Arts.

Based in New York City, the Cassatt Quartet serves as resident quartet at Syracuse University, where it created the Louis Krasner Graduate String Quartet Program. Summer finds the quartet in residence at Orvieto Musica in Italy and the innovative Seal Bay Festival of Contemporary American Chamber Music. Named three times by *The New Yorker* magazine's "Best Of . . ." CD selection, the Cassatt Quartet records for Koch International label and others. It takes its name from the American impressionist painter Mary Cassatt (Cassatt String Quartet, 2007).

Leadership Behaviors

This article will identify a few key leadership behaviors, explain them, and teach them through two sets of classroom exercises: a musical exercise developed by the Cassatt String Quartet and an educational exercise for gifted students. The following are behaviors and attitudes often associated with leaders (Daft, 2007; Hellriegel & Slocum, 2006):

- creating a vision,
- leader communication,
- leadership and followership,
- creative thinking, and
- trust and teamwork.

Creating a Vision

Leadership focuses on getting everyone lined up in the same direction. In fact, one important aspect of leadership is influencing others to come together around a common vision to bring about a desirable change (Daft, 2007). So, successful leadership begins with a vision—a big picture that reflects a group's shared purpose. And, "vision is a practical tool, not an abstract concept. . . . Leaders who lack vision fail to define what they hope to accomplish" (Senge, 1998, ¶ 14).

What role does vision play in a string quartet? Students who see the big picture when tackling a piece of music reach deep inside themselves and set their goals at higher perfor-

mance levels. In preparing for a concert, the Cassatt Quartet encourages their students to create their own vision for the performance (Cassatt String Quartet, personal communication, July 15, 2006).

One effective tool for teaching students to create a vision for their performance is to use stories. Telling stories is a powerful way to relay a message because a story evokes both visual imagery and emotion, which helps listeners connect with the message and the key values (Daft, 2007). Cassatt Quartet members tell students the adage of the three stonecutters: the first stonecutter says, "I'm cutting stone." The second says, "I'm carving a cornerstone," and the third stonecutter says, "I'm building a concert hall." The third has a vision. Then students write their own vision statement. "We ask them where they want to go—a performance for the school orchestra, a music camp, a competition, or Carnegie Hall?" (Cassatt String Quartet, personal communication, July 15, 2006).

How can vision fit into a gifted science class? Teachers might ask student groups to draw a mental picture of the world in the future in terms of technology. As a result, the students' vision energizes and motivates them toward the future and provides them with meaning for their science project (Daft, 2007). A vision also serves the purpose of developing critical thinking skills because students enlarge their own experience as they look into the future, and by teaching thinking skills, teachers help students become better critical thinkers (Johnson, 2001). Finally, vision provides gifted students with a challenge that requires them to give their best effort.

One example of including a vision in a science class is the following science project. ExploraVision is a national competition that provides an opportunity for students to compete for their school as members of a project team.

Do You See the World Differently?

> Do you wonder how our world will change? What everyday things could be like in the future? If you find yourself pondering the "how and why" now and the "what if" of tomorrow, then enter the 2008 ExploraVision Awards competition, sponsored by Toshiba and administered by the National Science Teachers Association for the last 15 years.
>
> Here's the challenge: Pick and research a technology, then explore what it could be 20 years from now. Are there problems modern technology has yet to solve? Are there practical solutions to everyday problems we've yet to consider? Imagination is crucial for this competition. Your wildest ideas could better civilization as we know it. . . . (ExploraVision, 2006, ¶ 1–2)

Leader Communication

Good leaders have a vision, and they know how to communicate it—not just facts or pieces of information but the big picture. Good leaders also want communication to flow in all directions, from leader to follower and from follower to leader. In other words, good communication means open communication. By establishing open communication, asking questions, actively listening to group members, and using dialogue, leaders become good communicators and the group acts in a way to achieve the vision. Nonverbal communication also develops leadership by allowing group members to interpret signals and messages through body language such as eye contact, upper body movement, or a nod (Daft, 2007).

How does leader communication take place in a string quartet? In their own rehearsals and when coaching student quartets, Cassatt members explore one another's musical ideas in a spirit of open mindedness, without diminishing conflicting views (Cassatt String Quartet, personal communication, July 15, 2006). They use dialogue, which is a sharing of ideas, body language, and active listening. A dialogue can lead to effective decision making and consensus (Hellriegel & Slocum, 2006). For instance, a dialogue about the musical ideas of a piece leads to a goal for a performance. Then, by experimenting with the proposed musical ideas, the group moves toward consensus in a very democratic manner and ultimately decides upon a performance strategy (Cassatt String Quartet, personal communication, July 15, 2006).

In the following exercise, students use verbal and nonverbal communication in their quartet. Having observed the Cassatt Quartet's communication process, the students imitate it by discussing and agreeing upon a musical idea and then experimenting with it by playing or singing. Hearing a phrase before playing it helps students decide whether to retain the musical idea or try something else. In playing a piece several ways, students learn to become active decision makers, and find greater satisfaction in the chamber music experience. Cassatt members make sure that the feedback to their students is supportive and constructive, so that students feel energized, not discouraged (Cassatt String Quartet, personal communication, July 15, 2006). Nonverbal communication among quartet members is called *cueing*. Players synchronize their body movements, moving together on each beat to work out

the tempo together. Cassatt members demonstrate a cue, then the students join them, and once mastered, the students repeat the exercise without assistance. (Cassatt String Quartet, personal communication, July 15, 2006).

Gifted students also can use a dialogue to develop their communication skills. Teachers can briefly explain the elements of a dialogue—asking questions, seeking meanings, bringing together different perspectives, and examining ideas (Hellriegel & Slocum, 2006). In particular, questioning is a learning tool that improves a student's communication abilities and leads to a free flow of ideas. For a gifted student, active questioning results in a more positive attitude about oneself and school (Johnson, 1995). Finally, students talk to one another, make interaction a legitimate vehicle for learning, and learn to view each other as sources of ideas and information (Maker & Nielson, 1996).

The following exercise assists students in developing the leadership behavior of good communication.

Developing Communication Skills

> The teacher begins the exercise by laying the ground rules: all ideas will be respectfully considered and probed through questions which will, in turn, stimulate critical thinking about a problem. "Students will identify a problem found in the newspaper (i.e., problems also might be taken from the school, community, or classroom). In small groups, students formulate questions, generate solutions, pick the best solution, refine and embellish it, then present their solutions to the class. Examples of problems: How can we reduce crime in our neighborhood? How can we prevent teenage smoking? How can we make the lunch line go faster? How can we solve the fighting that is happening on the playground? How can we come to a consensus on an issue?" (Johnson, 2001, Thinking Skills Embedded Into a Social Studies Unit section, ¶ 11)

Leadership and Followership

As stated above, leadership is a *people* activity. This means that leadership involves both leaders and followers. In fact, followers are an important part of the leadership process because all leaders sometimes serve as followers. Individuals shift in and out of leadership and followership roles at different times (Daft, 2007). Then too, the personal attributes that are desirable for a leader, such as trustworthiness and a strong sense of responsibility, also are desirable for an effective follower. So, at the core of the leader-follower relationship is a mutual exchange of *influence* to bring about change (Hellriegel et al., 2005). A string quartet or any small group can offer each member the chance to serve as a leader and a follower, and, in shifting roles, group members learn to take responsibility—a fundamental leader behavior. Leaders make a real difference in the world when they act as change agents and take personal responsibility (Fullan, 2003).

In the following exercise called Follow the Leader, the Cassatt Quartet teaches students to assume both leader and follower roles.

The Cassatt members select "Folk Tune and Fiddle Dance" by Percy Fletcher. Typically, the first violin leads a string quartet, but in this piece the second violin is the leader. This exercise teaches quartet members that whoever assumes the leadership role can be a change agent because change is as simple as choosing a different tempo. All four members of the quartet—first violin, second violin, viola, and cello—take turns at setting the tempo.

- Various tempi are listed on the blackboard.
- Each player picks a tempo and leads the quartet.
- Each player then takes a turn as leader for the selected tempo.
- Students repeat the process for each tempo, communicating the tempo clearly.
- At the end of the exercise, the group members vote on the tempo they like best for their performance.

This exercise also can be used with a choral group, letting the altos begin and having the sopranos, tenors, and basses follow the lead. Then, on another song, the tenors begin and the other three parts follow. All parts can take turns leading while the other parts follow (Cassatt String Quartet, personal communication, July 15, 2006).

Similarly, in a gifted class, students can learn and practice the skills of leadership and followership. In the following exercise, the leader is the interviewer and the followers are those being interviewed, and all students will play both roles. This exercise also reinforces the communication skills of dialogue and active listening mentioned above. The interview (Manley, Smith, McMinn, & Prévost, 2006) takes place in a French class but English, journalism, or history also may be suitable classes in which this activity can be used. To begin, the teacher should explain the leader-follower relationship stated above.

French Interview

> In a small group, one student interviews the others in French

or another foreign language. Each group member takes turns asking and answering questions. For beginners, the teacher gives the interviewer a list of questions and the respondents a list of logical answers from which to choose. For intermediate students, the interviewer writes the questions and the respondents answer logically. Each student who leads the interview can change the questions, the vocabulary, or the grammar.

Interviewer: Vous êtes combien dans ta famille? (How many are there in your family?) Tu as des frères ou des soeurs? (Do you have any brothers or sisters?) Combien de neveux as-tu? (How many nephews do you have?) Combien de nieces? (How many nieces?) Comment s'appelle ta mere? (What is your mother's name?) Quel âge a-t-elle? (How old is she?)

Respondent 1: Nous sommes quatre dans ma famille. (There are four in my family.)

Respondent 2: J'ai deux frères. (I have two brothers.)

Respondent 3: Je n'ai pas de neveux. (I don't have any nephews.)

Creative Thinking

One of the best ways for leaders to influence followers to bring about change and move them toward the vision is to create an environment that generates new ideas and nourishes creativity (Daft, 2007). In fact, many of the behaviors that enhance leader communication also foster creativity such as acknowledging, listening to, and being respectful of the unusual questions students ask, as well as their unusual ideas and solutions (Torrance & Goff, 1990).

Although there are numerous definitions of creativity, here we consider creative processes that have four characteristics. First, they involve thinking or behaving *imaginatively*. Second, this imaginative activity is *purposeful;* that is, it is directed to achieve an objective. Third, these processes must generate something *original*. Fourth, the outcome must be of *value* in relation to the objective (Promoting Creativity in Education, 2006, ¶ 16).

In a string quartet, playing creatively makes a world of difference in the achievement of a beautiful, emotionally moving concert. The Cassatt Quartet emphasizes creativity to keep students from simply performing each and every piece of music in the same way.

To encourage flexible and creative thinking, the Cassatt Quartet teaches students to adapt their playing to different musical scenarios and connect seemingly unrelated ideas. And, the more connections made between seemingly unrelated concepts and the more perspectives offered on a problem, the more likely the possibility of a creative solution (Dahl, 1999).

- *Descriptive Words*. Students think of words that describe a musical passage. With the composer's markings kept in mind, students avoid words such as *slow*, *fast*, *soft*, *loud* in favor of descriptive words like *melancholy*, *joyful*, and *rustic*. Students suggest words, implying different characters, and then play the passage to relay each character. This exercise helps students crystallize their thinking pattern.
- *Pictures*. Visual images expand sound possibilities and colors: The image of a sunset or of water flowing evokes different moods. A visual image can be tied to a specific bow stroke (Cassatt String Quartet, personal communication, July 15, 2006).

Opportunities for creative behaviors lie within the gifted classroom. Whether it is an enriched English, math, or art class, teachers can make assignments that call for original work, independent learning, self-initiated projects, and experimentation. Using curricular materials that permit one thing to lead to another and activities that make creative thinking rewarding, the classroom can be a laboratory for creative learning. Gifted teachers can encourage students to test their ideas by communicating them to others and by giving students credit for their ideas (Torrance & Goff, 1990). In the following exercise, students in a French class let their imaginations run wild as they travel to southern France and keep a journal of their experiences.

Another Country. . .
Another Culture

Imagine that you and a few friends have the opportunity to spend some time in Nice on the Côte d'Azur. Take a moment to look at the following Web sites to see what types of activities will be available to you during your stay. When you're finished, make a note of some of the things you'd like to see or do while you're there.

http://www.cote.azur.fr

http://www.nicetourism.com/FR/som.html

http://www.oldnice.com

(Manley et al., 2006, Chapter 2, ¶ 1)

- Things I'd like to do in Nice. Be sure to mention why these things are of particular interest to you—you can even say it in French. Example: Je voudrais visiter le musée Matisse parce que j'aime regarder des œuvres d'art (I

would like to visit the Matisse Museum because I like to look at works of art; Manley et al., 2006, Section 1).
- Write a paragraph on the following topic in your journal: Use your imagination and pretend that you were born into another culture or at another period of time (Maker & Nielson, 1996).

Trust and Teamwork

The final leadership behavior addressed here is trust, which is an essential ingredient of teamwork. Leaders create a climate of trust based on mutual respect and caring (Kouzes & Posner, 2003), because the heart of collaboration or teamwork is trust. An old saying sums up these thoughts: "The power of the wolf is in the pack. The power of the pack is in the wolf." Cohesiveness is a vital ingredient of teamwork because it reflects shared commitment and the team members' feelings toward one another (Hellriegel et al., 2005).

Cassatt String Quartet members describe themselves as independent, yet collective. "We are a team, and we share leadership roles. As team members, we are both mutually and individually accountable; our vision is a team vision, and our goals are team goals (Cassatt String Quartet, personal communication, July 15, 2006). To make the student quartets function as a team, Cassatt members assign specific tasks in preparation for a concert.

Small actions imbue students with team spirit and sense of ownership and pride in their ensemble. In preparation for a performance, many non-musical tasks have to be carried out to make the performance a success. Student quartet, theater group, and choral group members must work together as a team in order to build an audience for their performance. To communicate about the production, students must assign and complete the following tasks:
- design, produce, and distribute flyers and posters;
- write public-service announcements;
- place concert information on school and community Web sites;
- secure program notes;
- prepare and print the concert program;
- write a press release for the local newspaper;
- write a story about the concert in the school newspaper; and
- invite special guests like the school principal.

Team members understand that the more effectively they work together, the better the performance will be (Cassatt String Quartet, personal communication, July 15, 2006).

When developing trust and teamwork, other leadership behaviors like having a vision and communicating it come into play. For example, teamwork helps develop skills in cooperating, influencing, and motivating others. Team activities also develop problem-solving skills because students use reasoning and analysis to suggesting alternative actions (Maker & Nielson, 1996).

A gifted teacher might demonstrate how vital trust is to teamwork by having one student fall backward and trust that the team members will catch him or her. Students will learn how to work together in a positive manner to achieve a shared goal—getting out of jail—an activity that is described below.

Getting Out of Jail

Get your team out of jail ASAP! How do you do it? Get as many keys as possible by completing the Crystal Maze type challenges, collecting keys and solving the clues. Your team must be fast and work together to solve all the puzzles, challenges and tasks because if you don't win you don't escape!

After an initial briefing each team (4–6 people in each) is allocated their challenge book. This contains information on the 3 parts of their mission. The first part is a series of photos which the teams must find the location of and then answer the relevant questions. Part two sees the teams solve a number of clues which will lead them to various parts of the jail to find the solution to the riddle. For the final part the teams must complete 6 challenges in the jail, these are all fun and non-strenuous. Bonus keys are also scattered around the jail. (The Adventure Agency, 2006, ¶ 1–2)

Another excellent way to develop teamwork and critical thinking skills is the use of a role-play or simulation. In the following simulation of the French Revolution, several groups of students must trust each other and work as a team in order to advance their divergent goals. For instance, the royalty, the clergy, and the nobles want to keep their privileges in society, and the bourgeoisie and the peasants want to take these privileges away. This enjoyable leadership exercise lends itself to a gifted history class, a French class, or a theater class.

In *Liberté: A Simulation of the French Revolution*, students are grouped as royalty, clergy, nobles, bourgeoisie, or peasants. Students keep balance sheets of the "Revolutionary Influence Points" they gain or lose through researching historical roles

and responding to unexpected events (represented by historical bulletins that change financial, social and political status) that push the participants toward revolution and the Reign of Terror (Brasefield, 1970).

Students identify what happened in each interaction, analyze why the events happened, and generalize about how they can apply what they have learned to new situations (Graves & Graves, 1990).

Conclusion

Although some would argue that there are natural leaders, the underpinning assumption here is that leadership activities develop leaders—in other words, leaders are made, not born (Hellriegel et al., 2005). The other assumption is that leadership training should be added to the gifted curriculum.

Why is this so? The field of gifted education has been a true laboratory for many innovations. The goal is to infuse exemplary learning and teaching opportunities into existing school frameworks because every school has students who possess the highest potential for advanced-level learning, creative problem solving, and the motivation to pursue rigorous and rewarding work (Renzulli, 2005). Many researchers in the field of gifted education have shown that gifted students may fall short of their potential, or worse, lose interest in school altogether if they are not sufficiently challenged. The key lies in providing a range of activities that allows gifted students to display their fullest abilities (Glass, 2004).

Adding leadership training to a history project or theater group can offer gifted students a highly challenging learning experience. Once students recognize and utilize these leadership skills, they can transfer them to other academic areas like a math team and nonacademic areas of life such as a community volunteer group or a job. In this way, leadership training offers two benefits: First, it can differentiate the curriculum for gifted students, and second, it can help prepare the next generation of leaders, for many of the leaders of tomorrow will come from the gifted classrooms of today. GCT

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