

## Leadership in Child and Youth Educational Settings

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### Abstract

*Comparing diverse types of power within leadership theories, this paper revolved around the referent power, which generates vivacious and indisputable trust, acquiescence, and faithfulness, and is more effective than disciplinary power in child and youth educational settings. It was also demonstrated that referent power is naturally embedded in an interactional approach in which developmental characteristics and contextual factors have main influences in leading child and youth educational settings. Creating a pathway to make interactional leadership approach applicable, a model of cultural proficiency was developed and adopted in this paper for child and youth practitioners and educators. Finally, it was demonstrated that this model can help educational leaders and practitioners to rethink about their biases, exclusiveness, and ethnocentric approach that make their societies culturally destructive, blinded, incompetent, and unprofessional. Some sample strategies to make the model feasible were also suggested in the current paper.*

**Keywords:** Leadership, Cultural Proficiency, Power, Education

### Introduction

Standing in the line of an academic book store and turning over the pages of Northhouse's (2010) book (Leadership Theory and Practice), the key words of the book linked to my knowledge of and experiences in leadership, producing some questions regarding leadership in child and youth multicultural educational settings. What type of leadership is appropriate for such settings? What are the main components of leadership? To what degree leadership is genetic or situational? Does gender determine the different styles of leadership? How practically can leadership be implemented in child and youth educational settings? What type of leadership model is needed to improve a child and youth educational system? Since answers to questions can generate new inquiries through an endless cyclic process of scientific research (Popper, 2005, 1994), I stopped questioning and pursued 'parsimony' as a scientific way (Baker, 2011) to search reliable answers by scrutinizing power as a major component of leadership. Also, the notion of biologism and interactionism was argued to illuminate a pathway in leadership. Then, by focusing on the role of culture in leadership, I introduced an adopted practical model of leadership for child and youth multicultural educational settings.

### *Pseudo-Power versus Real Power*

Since power is a major component of leadership (France, 2008; Northhouse, 2010), it is assumed that the longevity of leadership depends on the kind of power. For example, the legitimate or disciplinary power, which is hierarchically penetrated in each layer of organization manifesting in an organization's policies, materials, and the capacities of employees, is not permanent and long effective (Gary, 2012). This type of power may make the structure of an organization fragile, particularly when any alteration happens in an organization's materials, employees, or its policy. Moreover, the social changes in a society may change the legitimate power of institutions easily.

Regarding child and youth educational settings in which children's mental health promotions are also aimed, educators should not rely on only legitimate or disciplinary power if they want to produce positive and long life

socio-psychological changes for a society. Instead of disciplinary power, the referent power is supposed to be appropriate for child and youth educational settings. This power is defined as “a person’s ability to influence others’ behavior because they like, admire, and respect the individual” (Lunenburg, 2012, p.4). Because this type of power is based on individuals’ personality characteristics such as attractiveness, altruism, modesty, and warmth (Lunenburg, 2012; Nayyeri & Amiri, 2012; Lusk, 2010), leaders with this capacity (referent power) have remarkable influences on children and adolescents. Developmentally, children and adolescents are positively sensitive to the personality features of individuals who display these types of characteristics (Santrock, Mackenzie, Leung, & Malcomson, 2005; Malim, & Brich, 1998; Gillibrand, Lam, & O’Donnell, 2011). The referent power can also generate spirited and incontestable trust, acquiescence, faithfulness, and commitment (Lunenburg, 2012). These features are created through an interaction between students and teachers, in which students tend to have identification with a teacher who has considerable referent power (McCroskey & Richmond, 1983). Thus, a child and youth expert should pay attention to the differences between these two kinds of power. One of the differences is that these are rooted in different resources. Legitimate power is more instructional and disciplinary; whereas, referent power is both situation-based and trait-based. This type of power not only may embody the components of legitimate power, it is also based on cultural interactionism instead of biologism.

### ***From Biology to Interactionism***

The history of trait-based approach in leadership goes back to Galton’s (1869 cited in Zaccaro, 2007) Hereditary Genius; although, Alport’s trait theory (Corr & Matthews, 2009) generated a controversial discourse in which traits were considered as main components of human behaviors and personality. Subsequent to this discourse, the trait approach of leadership was focused on explaining and predicting humans’ behaviors in different situations based on the associations between leadership behaviors and some certain traits such as extraversion (Northouse, 2010). In this approach, researchers tend to explain how well individuals’ leadership behaviors can be predicted based on some certain traits. In contrast, interactionism has revealed that socio-cultural factors play a significant role in the construction of human traits and leadership behaviors (Corr & Matthews, 2009; Northouse, 2010). The logic and the assumptions of interactionism decode the myth of reductionism by which every single behavior is referred to biology or genetics. Based on the logic of interactionism, we can address that individuals were not born with certain leadership traits, but they were born with a capacity or a predisposition by which individuals can learn the different skills of leadership (Imada, Doyle, Brock, & Goddard, 2002).

An example of this is students’ learning of leadership skills through interactional activities such as leadership conferences, mentoring programs, and social skills surveys (Imada, Doyle, Brock, & Goddard, 2002). Through these interactional activities, students can learn how to regulate their interpersonal relationships, to collaborate with each other, and they also become able to show personal decency, and display a sense of responsibility. These findings support an opened pathway through which child and youth experts pay attention to the role of social factors in leadership behavior; although, this pathway is sometimes ignored. For instance, in January 2007, the American Psychologist Journal published a special issue about leadership. This issue contained the most recent theories about leadership (e.g., trait theory, situational theory, and integrative theory) which generated controversial discourse amongst scholars resulted many skeptical articles that were published in the subsequent issues of that journal. Approximately, all articles criticized the orientation and bias of the journal (Chin & Sanchez-Hucles, 2007; Wielkiewicz & SteLzner, 2007). The theme of this critique revolved around some influential issues such as social trends (e.g., feminist and non-business leadership), cultural and other contextual factors that were ignored by some scholars. However, cultural factors and social trends are central to many other leadership theories such as situational, contextual, and path-goal theories in which leadership is viewed as a contextual phenomenon (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Hujala, 2004). The association between socio-cultural determinants and leadership success or leadership skills (Northouse, 2010; Kriger & Seng, 2005) reveals that this relationship is undeniable. Since new era of technology and internet beside the velocity of transportation and immigration have made the interaction of culturally diverse people very proximal, child and youth communities involved in ‘multiculturalism’ inevitably. This issue makes the leadership’s success more complicated. Multicultural societies reflect this complexity from the inside of each contextual layer of society such as schools, child and youth care settings, universities, workplaces and other social-contextual settings.

Leadership in those settings faces new challenges with regard to cultural issues or trends. Therefore, multicultural-based leadership in child and youth educational settings is necessary to be analyzed contextually.

### ***Culture and Multiculturalism***

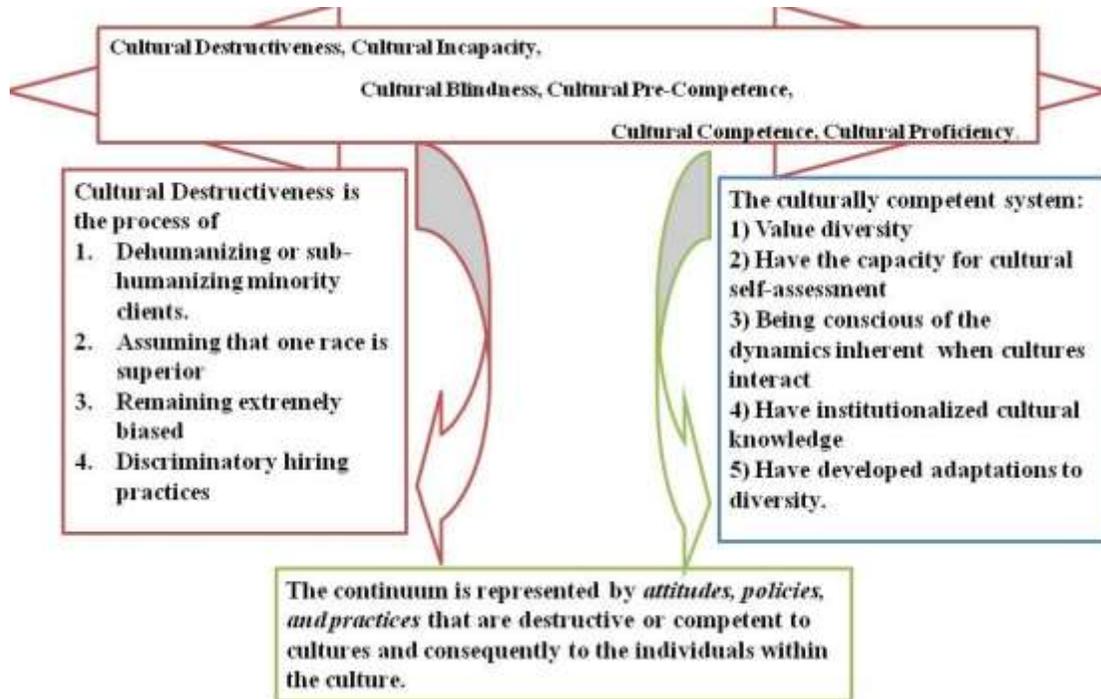
The definition of culture in scholarly perspectives created many debates (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). Culture is defined as “a set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next” (Matsumoto, 1996, cited in Savicki, 1999, p. 241). In a similar way, culture is characterized by “an acquired and transmitted pattern of shared meanings, feelings, and behaviors that constitute a distinctive human group” (Kluckhohn’s, 1951 cited in Ayman & Korabik, 2010, p. 158). Scrutinizing these definitions reveals that culture implies on a set of (different or similar) attitudes, values, ethics, meaningful collective behaviors, traditions, rituals that all differentiate a group of people who possess them and transfer them to next own generations. Apart from visible features such as country boundaries, cultures have invisible components that differentiate societies around the world. These components act to some extent complexly when many diverse cultures coexist serenely and justly in a single society (Jacobs, 2008). Focusing on these complex components, most multicultural societies set their policies on inclusiveness and the plurality of ethnocultural traditions. Most characteristics of multicultural societies can be summarized in egalitarian values, diversity, critical inclusivity, and pluralism. In these kinds of societies, leaders encounter more complicated roles as they work within more diverse cultures in sub layers of a society such as child and youth educational settings or mental health care.

### ***The Goals of Leadership in Multicultural-Contextual Perspective***

The nature of child and youth multicultural, educational settings enforce leaders to eliminate ethnocentrism and to increase isomorphic attributions as two major aims (Ayman & Korabik, 2010, p. 160). In the first goal, leaders encounter with people’s cultural assumptions in which one’s cultural values are preferred to other’s cultural values. Since this preference provides complex conditions by which other cultural values may become more marginalized, leaders pursue these goals seriously. The achievement of an isomorphic goal can reduce biases and struggles ‘in group’ and ‘out group’. Transforming the atmosphere of work settings from exclusiveness to inclusiveness helps leaders to provide all members of child and youth organizations with more isomorphic attributions. Providing similar assessment for all members, reducing cultural biases, decreasing feministic and masculine views, and other circumstances can help leaders to reach an organization’s outcomes with minor conflict. In addition to these central goals in multicultural settings, leaders should pay attention to in group and out group cultural dynamics, and also to the members’ cultural sensitivities in team work. For example, physical distance between leaders and members has different meanings in various cultures (Savicki, 1999), and it creates different cultural sensitivities. Thus, in working with cultural diverse employees (e.g., emigrant children and adolescents) in one organization, leaders will face practically sensitivity as a group dynamic which generates different expectations in followers. With regard to these sensitivities, multicultural educational settings can be assessed as an opportunity that increase leader’s awareness of members’ capabilities. To reach these goals a cultural proficiency model (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989) was developed in the current paper, and it can be used in educational and mental health systems. Through this model, not only the sensitivities will be appreciated, the diversities of cultures are also seen as the rich resources of leadership.

### ***Cultural Proficiency Model***

Cultural proficiency model (Cross et al., 1989) consists of rational-objective processes within a cultural spectrum to transfer children’s care settings from being cultural destructive to be cultural proficient. In this model, it is expected that a child and youth educational or mental health setting should pass six stages to become a culturally competent system. These stages were portrayed on one spectrum (Figure 1).

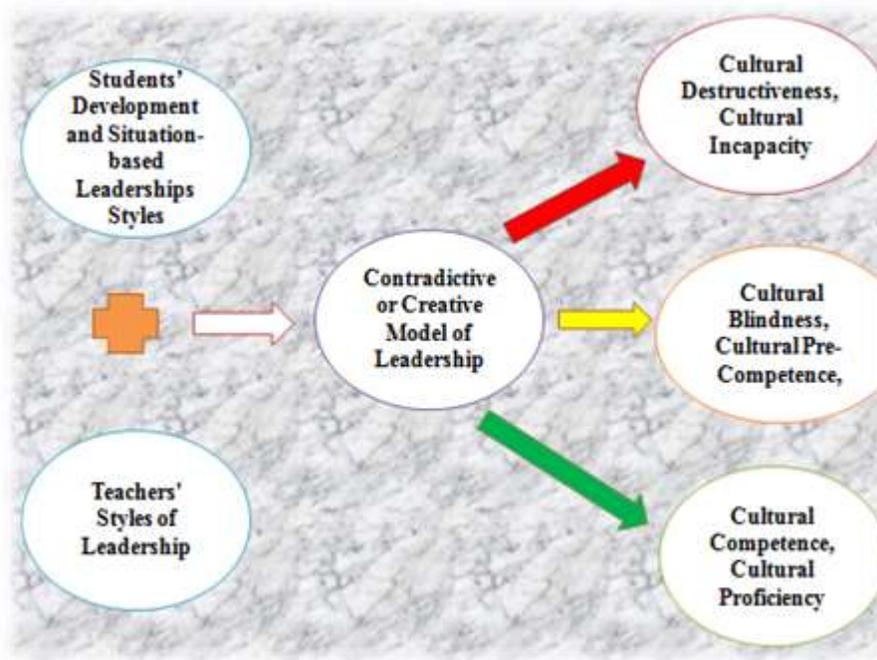


**Figure 1: Cross' (1989) Model of Cultural Proficiency (Adapted for This Paper)**

Based on this model, leading child and youth educational agencies toward a culturally competent system is a leaders' main goal or responsibility. To achieve this goal, educational leaders should first concentrate on three major constructs including *attitude, policy, and practice*. Then, they should attempt to make these constructs congruent based on competent characteristics including acceptance and respect for difference, continuing self-assessment regarding culture, careful attention to the dynamics of differences, continuous expansion of cultural knowledge and resources, and a variety of adaptations to service models in order to better meet the needs of minority populations (Cross et al., 1989). Additionally, leaders should reduce ethnocentrism and replace it by collectivism in a rational way. Although the cultural proficiency model is enough feasible, I introduce the following steps to crystallize the pathway through which educators and mental health practitioners may use this model in their organizations.

At the first stage, it is necessary to focus on the rational-objective components of an educational system and three major constructs including attitude, policy and practice. This specific attention should be based on children's and adolescents' developmental characteristics, their cultural sensitivities and appropriate situations such as classroom or playground in which children and adolescents actively interact with their peers, teachers, staff and other members. The reason for this consideration is embedded in the skill and situational theory of leadership (Northouse, 2010). According to this theory "each stage of development is an extended period of skill acquisition characterized by children acquiring new competencies, integrating them with others, and transforming them into more efficient, generalizable, higher-order skill" (Corsini, 1999, p. 906). Additionally, educational practitioners should realize that in each educational situation children and youth have their own styles of leadership (Mawson, 2010). Therefore, educators should create balance between their styles and students' styles of leadership to achieve the aims of cultural proficiency model. Basically, these styles of leadership are also situation-based, age-based and to some extent gender-based. In her study on leadership styles in boys and girls aged between 3 and 4 years old, Mawson (2010) demonstrated that boys' play is very hierarchical structured with the dominant boy using a very dictatorial approach to maintain his control of the play scenario. This control was established through a mixture of aggression and intimidation. Leaders tended to be bigger and more aggressively oriented than the other boys. The main characteristics of boys' leadership styles were the use of "loud voice, repeated demands, exclusion from the play episode, standing over the others, and physical struggle" (p.118). In contrast, girls use more cooperative style of leadership in their collaborative plays. They exercise in a more benign and directorial manner rather than what was for boys'. The leader in girls' play used more positive response and suggestion instead of commanding voice or manner.

This example shows the role of developmental and physical influences on cooperative activities. Mawson (2010) also demonstrated that when the situation was changed from single gender collaborative play to mix-gender collaborative play the style of leadership altered. In this new situation boys tended to modify their dictatorial roles and accept the girl's roles as leaders. Mawson's (2010) research shows that any leadership model for child and youth educational settings should be developmental and situation-based. Therefore, teachers or educational leaders always face two major phenomena: 1) Students' personal styles of leadership, which is shaped by developmental characteristics, situational factors and cultural properties, and 2) their own styles or models of leadership. The contextually junction of these styles can create a contradictory or creative model of leadership in any single educational or mental health setting (Figure 2).



**Figure 2: The Effects of Leadership Styles on Cultural Proficiency**

After determining an appropriate situation based on children's and adolescents' developmental characteristics and the determinants of social situations, the leaders (teachers or mental health practitioners) should determine and pursue the following steps:

- 1) Providing task structure
- 2) Focusing on real (interactional and referent) power (e.g., careful attention to the dynamics of cultural differences in sharing tasks to distribute power)
- 3) Making real or objective goals (e.g., acceptance and respect for cultural differences)
- 4) Developing strategies to provoke the subordinates' motivation to engage the task and goals
- 5) Providing opportunities for common participation in making decision
- 6) Giving and receiving feedback and continuing self-assessment regarding cultural differences

These steps provide leaders with enough power, potential and opportunity to make their leadership strategies rational-objective. Choosing number 3 and 6, I portray a sample map to facilitate leadership. This map is focused on children and youth motivation (subordinates' motivation). In this instance, child and youth practitioners should determine their subject, goals and strategies (Table 1), and then assess the effectiveness of their strategies.

**Table 1: A Sample of Motivational Strategies for Subordinates (e.g., Students) Adapted from:**  
<http://www2.honolulu.hawaii.edu/facdev/guidebk/teachtip/teachtip.htm#motivating>

	Motivational Strategies for Subordinates (e.g., Students)
<b>Leader:</b>	Teacher, principal or others
<b>Time:</b>	At the beginning or in the middle of class
<b>Goal:</b>	Leading students to optimize their attitude toward the environment, teacher, subject matter, and self
<b>Motivational Strategies</b>	<p>As a leader you can use the following motivational strategies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Make the conditions that surround the subject positive (e.g., using the dynamics of cultural differences such as making an appropriate relation between the subject and cultural factors by making visual examples).</li> <li>2) Positively confront the possibly erroneous beliefs, expectations, and assumptions that may underlie a negative learner attitude.</li> <li>3) Reduce or remove components of the learning environment that lead to failure or fear (e.g., cultural acceptance and respect to differences to prevent student of being marginalized)</li> <li>4) Plan activities to allow learners to meet esteem needs.</li> <li>5) Increasing the domain of autonomy by adding choices to the situation to be chosen</li> </ol>
<b>Assessment</b>	Qualitative or Quantitative Assessment

Leaders may also pay attention to the inner layer of components of leadership styles. For example, the expectation of feedback in leader-member relationship is an inner layer of motivation. Feedback is as an important characteristic of leadership that is closely related to motivation. Although feedback is defined as a process of receiving responses from others (Corsini, 1999), it is well explained by Cerrato (2002) as “[a] cooperative way of exchanging information about the efficiency of communication” (p. 101). Since any kind of communication consists of two major elements including individual and information, feedback is seen as a mutual process rather than unilateral process. This process is a ‘motivational process’ that creates power and enhances the quality of communication to reach goals. Assuming leadership as a process of communication between the leader and subordinates (referent power), feedback not only determines the quality of communication, it also predicts the probability of leadership success. In this regard, we face two important questions: How and what kind of feedback can determine and predict the quality of leadership especially in child and youth educational settings? Supposing feedback is the entire information that is transferred between correspondents, the Center for Teaching and Learning at The University of Minnesota (2011) listed the following authentic characteristics of feedback to make it constructive: Feedback should be descriptive rather than judgmental, specific rather than general, focused on behavior rather than the person, oriented to help rather than to hurt. It also should be actively sought by the teacher, includes an amount of information that does not overload the teacher, focus on "what" or "how" (observed behavior) not "why" that it involves inference and motives bringing resentment instead of learning. It should be also clearly communication-based and observation-based, thus any constructive criticism can be justifiable.

In addition to these conditions for feedback, child and youth mental health practitioners and educators should consider the following points:

- 1) Since children less than 10 years old are in the process of development of self-regulation (Carver, & Scheier, 2001; Cheyney, Wang, & Bettini, 2013), they can rarely delay their desire of gratification. Therefore, giving them feedback must be prompt or well-timed.
- 2) Children who are in operational stage of cognitive development need more real and objective feedback rather than subjective. For example, giving them praise or embracing them after innovative work is more effective than verbal feedback.
- 3) Effective feedback is a kind of response that matches children needs
- 4) Receiving feedback from children and embodying them in the communication with children can improve the quality of leadership. The ‘one-minute paper technique’ (Lucas, 2010; Gray & Madson, 2007) can be applied in these settings such as class, meeting or team work to receive feedback.

- 5) Using participative style of leadership will provide an informative and caring atmosphere for both children and practitioners.

### Conclusion

The dynamics of social science leads scientists to explore, capture, characterize and explain leadership within theories. Leadership theories are unavoidably diverse because these are directly related to explaining and leading human multidimensional behaviors. Humans' multidimensional behaviors do not permit child and youth experts to focus on one exact leadership theory to draw an objective portrayal of relationship style between leaders and subordinates. Therefore, each theory per se is acknowledged, but using leadership theories is conditioned by one principle: 'asking right questions about leadership theories and their capabilities'. Focusing on trait theory or situational theory of leadership as an example, the right question is not which leader with which trait is perfect, but the right question is "[...] under what conditions does leadership matter"? and "[...] how do leaders' personal attributes interact with situational properties to shape outcomes"? (Hackman & Wageman, 2007 p.44). Hackman and Wageman (2007) demonstrated that asking right questions will solve many problems that lead us to make wrong decisions. This paper added another right question to this discourse. That was, which applied model of leadership is the most appropriate for child and youth educational and mental health care settings within a multicultural society.

It was demonstrated that the application of leadership theories in child and youth multicultural educational settings is possible by paying attention to the rational-objective components (capabilities) of the cultural proficiency model. Since the bridge between theory and real life is made by 'model' (as a representation of system's function), child and youth experts should design an applied model based on rational-objective components of theories. One important point in designing models is the interactional style between leaders and followers. This relationship is not unilateral and up-down way, but it is a mutual and cooperative way in child and youth educational or mental health settings. The roles of leaders can include the follower's role because "leaders also are followers and followers also exhibit leadership" (Hackman & Wageman, 2007, p.45). This principle (cooperative relationship) stresses on receiving and giving feedback as an efficient mechanism to lead any kind of organization. Ignoring subordinates' feedback can ruin the strategies of leadership in even one simple class at school or university. One of the simple consequences of feedback for educational leaders is to rethink about their biases, exclusiveness, and ethnocentrism that make their societies culturally destructive, blinded, incompetent, and unprofessional.

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