Teacher Leadership

By Tami K. Potter

Abstract

The concepts of leading and teaching are so intertwined that every leader is a teacher, and every teacher is a leader. The art of leading students is one of the greatest challenges faced by today's teacher. The process is intensified in a prison setting where the environment for blending leadership practices is complex. Kouzes and Posner's (1995) leadership model served as the foundation for this study which examined the leadership practices of the Educational Programs in Corrections (EPIC) Instructors.

Introduction

"Treat people as if they are what they ought to be and you may help them to become what they are capable of being."
- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

The need for strong leaders in correctional education is great. Public opinion regarding the necessity of college programs in prisons is extremely negative, as witnessed firsthand by this researcher through discussions concerning the research. "This perceived public negativity has been responsible for dramatically curtailing inmate access to post-secondary education during the past few years" (Werner, 1997, p. 42). There are conflicting justifications for educating inmates during their period of incarceration. Linton (1998), State Director of Correctional Education at the Maryland Department of Education, responds to this frequently disputed issue:

> We educate inmates in prison so that they will be something other than inmates during subsequent phases of their lives. Offenders come to prison with much less education than the general population. This lower education level did not compel these persons to commit crimes, but it is a factor in the criminal's decision-making process. It creates a context in which an individual sees limited options, and therefore, does not believe that he or she has much to lose. Also, lack of education often is associated with lack of regard for self, manifested in limited respect for others and institutions (p. 18).

Hackman (1997), a correctional educator, concurs with Linton, "Education is an opportunity for an improved lifestyle. Education is an opportunity to turn a negative experience (incarceration) into a positive experience (rehabilitation)" (p. 74).

Background

The field of corrections is growing rapidly due to increased incarceration rates. In the book, *The Real War on Crime: The Report of the National Criminal Justice Commission*, author Donziger (1996) discusses how this impacts the entire criminal justice system. Donziger indicates that along with the growth in inmate population

there has also been an increase in the number of businesses that serve institutions and benefit from these partnerships (p.31). Correctional education is one such entity impacted by this population increase. "Traditionally an isolated phenomena, correctional education programs are experiencing tremendous growth. Once focused primarily on programming for adults incarcerated in major institutions, correctional educators are now being asked to serve youth and adults in a variety of settings" (Price, 1996, p. 116). Recent changes in the criminal justice system related to prosecuting minors as adults has also affected the type of inmates who will require the educational services provided by correctional educators. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, "the average [state] prison sentence for juveniles convicted in criminal courts was about 9 years; for those convicted of a violent offense, the average prison sentence was nearly 11 years" (Strom, Smith & Snyder, 1998, p. 1).

The Stark Youth Correctional Facility (SYCF), a state institution regulated by the California Youth Authority (CYA), incarcerates inmates up to age 25. CYA recently implemented a policy which mandates offenders either graduate from high school or earn a General Education Diploma (GED) prior to being recommended for parole (Alarcon, 1998, p. 1). Education is viewed as a key component of rehabilitation and, when applicable, inmates should have access to post-secondary education. Involvement in a college milieu is not suitable for every inmate and only a small percentage even partake in a collegiate endeavor. A statistical report from CYA in April 1998, indicated that of the estimated 8,300 wards confined in eleven institutions and four conservation camps across the state, roughly 7% (858) were enrolled in college programs (Alarcon, 1998, p. 4).

College level course work improves cognitive skills, analytical abilities, and critical thinking which may enhance chances for success upon release. EPIC educators are influential in the direction of many inmates incarcerated at SYCF. Leadership behaviors of instructors are of the utmost importance according to Kanter (1983), for they are the change masters influencing the future of these individuals. "Change masters are — literally — the right people in the right place at the right time" (p. 306).

Educational Programs in Corrections (EPIC)
"He who opens a school door, closes a prison."
- Victor Hugo

The University of La Verne, a small, liberal arts institution, has sponsored EPIC since its conception in 1972. The program offers wards at SYCF a chance to pursue a Liberal Arts Degree. In a report to the community, EPIC Director D. Werner (1999) states, "In the course of time the University of La Verne has offered this program, the University has granted nearly 200 Associate degrees and seven Bachelor's degrees. Over 3,000 wards have participated to some degree or another in the college programs at SYCF" (p. 1). Although most wards are not able to complete degree requirements entirely, they leave the institution and continue their studies at other schools (Werner, 1999, p. 1).

The program aligns itself with the mission and philosophy of the University, which emphasizes four areas:
1. Values orientation – The University encourages students to become reflective about personal, professional, and societal values.
2. Community and Diversity – The University encourages students to understand and appreciate the diversity of cultures and also seeks to promote appreciation of biodiversity by helping students understand the impact/dependence of human beings on their environment.
3. Lifelong Learning – The University teaches its students how to learn, how to think critically, and how to access and integrate information in order to prepare them for career and continued personal growth.
4. Community Service – The University believes that service is a primary goal of the educated person. The University therefore encourages its students to experience the responsibilities and rewards of serving the human and ecological community (University of LaVerne, 1998, p. 11).

The University recognizes the educational process is a continuous transformational journey that challenges existing views and changes perceptions of situations. Through education students are able to become better individuals. This ideal holds true for inmate-students enrolled through EPIC. "A willingness to change ... and the desire to pursue education over illegal activity" are elements necessary to begin the metamorphic process (Hackman, 1997, p. 74).

The Effective Teacher Leader
In their book, *Becoming a Teacher Leader*, authors and educators Bolman and Deal (1994) state, "Teachers are among the most important leaders in America. Ask a random sample of adults to name the most important leader they have known personally. Many will immediately talk about a caring and gifted teacher who inspired them in a life-changing way" (p. 9). Teachers have "the ability to see new possibilities and to create new opportunities" which enables them "to discover alternatives when options seem severely constrained and to find hope amid fear and despair" (Bolman & Deal,

1997, p. 380). To be an effective leader in a prison setting, where options are certainly constrained and fear is used as a means of control, is indeed a challenge. Be that as it may, it is one which correctional educators willingly accept on a daily basis.

To survive in such a setting, they have to look beyond the concrete walls and yards of razor wire to objectively view the context in which they work. Unless they can remain flexible and able to see the institution from various angles, they may be unable to deal with the full range of issues they will inevitably encounter (Bolman & Deal, 1997, p. 380). They must believe in themselves, their students, and the value of education because "teaching and leadership are both about infusing life and work with passion, meaning, and purpose" (Bolman & Deal, 1994, p. 3).

Kouzes and Posner (1997) developed "a model of leadership, a route for leaders to follow as they attempt to keep their own bearings and guide others toward peak achievements" (p. 8). The model is comprised of five practices to which all teacher leaders should aspire, each of which is described in the following sections.

Challenging the process.
"Leaders search for opportunities to change the status quo. They look for innovative ways to improve the organization. In doing so they experiment and take risks" (Kouzes & Posner, 1997, p. 4).

The routines of prison life can suffocate creativity and limit thinking. Correctional educators realize it is difficult to change the routine structure of the prison environment. The safety and security of the institution is, as it should be, first and foremost. However, the issue "... isn't whether to have routines but which routines to have." Educators "need to be able to detect when routines are becoming dysfunctional" for students and try to improve them (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 44). Controversial and ethical issues within the institution may be used as learning tools to help students develop critical thinking abilities. "Ethics is complex, with few if any right and wrong answers. The point is to sharpen the students' critical sense so they can see the actions of their friends — and their own actions — in a critical light" (Duguid, 1992, p. 43).

Inmates "interact with outsiders less and less over time and new ideas are cut off" (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 45). This feeling of isolation can occur with correctional educators as well, due to limited interaction with colleagues. Both groups need to "remain receptive and expose themselves to broader views; to update, revise, or replace. Education is a leadership concept: the word education literally means 'to lead from ignorance.' You have to keep adding to your own knowledge and skill base" (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 60).

Inspiring a shared vision.
"Leaders passionately believe that they can make a difference. They envision the future, creating an ideal and unique image of what the organization can become" (Kouzes & Posner, 1997, p. 4).

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Educators must remain optimistic and believe students will advance intellectually. Students may find their aspirations of success in the classroom are much more difficult to secure than anticipated. Teachers can help to channel efforts in a positive direction by exposing students to new ideas and broadening vision. Educators can "start [students] on a journey of self-discovery, to help them find their own self-worth and their ability to change — a journey that will permanently affect their lives . . ." (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p.98). One EPIC instructor tries to offer a shared vision of what going to college means. "I try to inspire them to think about their own possibilities of going to college ... even though we want to teach the information and the skills in the classes we offer. We are trying to get them to think differently than they normally have in the past about school and about their future" (Instructor 3, 1999).

Enabling others to act.

"Leaders foster collaboration and build spirited teams. They actively involve others. Leaders understand that mutual respect is what sustains extraordinary efforts; they strive to create an atmosphere of trust and human dignity" (Kouzes & Posner, 1997, p. 4).

Students need to feel the contributions they make are important and valuable. They need to realize past and present experiences can be used as positive learning tools. "I tell my students that when they set foot in this classroom, and you and I are working on this stuff together, you have left the Youth Authority. This is now the campus of the University of La Verne" (Instructor 2, 1999). Students should focus on helping each other in a collaborative effort to share resources and information. Inmate-students are frequently challenged by situations beyond their control that may restrict them from obtaining pertinent information, studying, and interacting with student peers. "They just don't have the resources. They don't have a good library, they don't have time, they're very confined in terms of what they can do — their movements are limited. They can't just pop over to the library and look up something" (Instructor 6, 1999).

A trusting environment is also very important in the collaborative process, nonetheless one that is arduous to attain in the correctional setting. Teachers and staff alike are told not to trust the wards. However, as one instructor stated, "I've found this is literally impossible in our situation. To be able to teach, you have to trust who you're working with" (Instructor 5, 1999). Educators can "help to create a trusting climate by the example they set through listening. People listen more attentively to those who listen to them" (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 168). Listening builds trust and credibility in a relationship because it shows interest in the person and validates their being.

Modeling the way.

"Leaders establish principles concerning the way people should be treated and the way goals should be pursued. They create standards of excellence and then set an example for others to follow" (Kouzes & Posner, 1997, p. 4)

"When it comes to deciding whether a leader is believable, people first listen to the words; then they watch the actions. They measure the congruence ... and a judgement of 'credible' is handed down when the two are consonant" (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 211). Students expect instructors to establish a set of universal ideals and values that will be shared and followed by everyone in the classroom. Such principles should be derived from respect, integrity, honesty, and empathy. As one instructor emphasizes, "It's important that those kids see it in front of them. They need a person who does what I say I'm going to do. Modeling for them the language, how to speak, how to present myself, how to think for myself separate from the rest of the gang" (Instructor 2, 1999).

As educators, it is important to regularly examine personal values and attitudes about the teaching process as well as underlying assumptions and principles about learning. Realizing the process of self-examination is never complete, Grasha (1994) explains, "Every time we discover something new about ourselves, there always will be other facets of which we are unaware" (p.122). Continuous self-renewal prevents burnout and encourages dynamic interaction in the classroom.

Encouraging the heart.

"To keep hope and determination alive, leaders recognize contributions that individuals make. In every winning team, the members need to share in the rewards of their efforts, so leaders celebrate accomplishments" (Kouzes & Posner, 1997, p. 4).

Recognizing student contributions motivates them to continue doing well. "There are few, if any, more basic needs than to be noticed, recognized, and appreciated for our efforts" (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 279). Verbal praise is the easiest type of instant gratification to give; yet perhaps the most overlooked. Receiving formal recognition is a positive way to recognize accomplishments. Celebrating in the presence of peers, family, and even correctional staff gives students a very powerful feeling. This type of affirmation is crucial "to the kids at the Youth Authority who have mostly been thrown away, told all their lives what they are not good for, told why they can't do things, and why they don't measure up" (Instructor 2, 1999).

Research Design

This exploratory study combined qualitative and quantitative research methods for a distinct triangulation approach. The qualitative data were gathered via confidential personal interviews, which contributed to the breath and depth of the information gathered. Instructor's offered insight into personal experiences, attitudes, and beliefs that pertain to leadership and teaching. The quantitative portion used the LPI survey instrument, a standardized numeric rating scale questionnaire designed by Kouzes and Posner (1997). The frequency of practices and the dominant practice were of interest because leaders generally "do not use one pure style, rather, they choose elements or behaviors of

different styles in various combinations and degrees" (Love, 1991, p. 38). Dominant Leadership Practices are identified and compared by Self and Observer ratings in Table 1.

Similarities and Differences

Table 1
Identified Dominant Leadership Practice

Instructor	LPI-Self	LPI-Observer
I-1	INSPIRING	ENABLING
I-2	ENABLING	ENABLING
I-3	INSPIRING	INSPIRING
I-4	CHALLENGING	MODELING
I-5	ENCOURAGING	ENABLING
I-6	MODELING	MODELING

Similarity of responses showed that half of the Self and Observer scores were consistent with each other in identifying Dominant Leadership Practices. Ideally ratings should be in alignment, but not identical. One way a leader builds trust is through consistency of actions. In reference to consistent responses, one instructor states, "I think it's just my behavior. I have my standards and I try to comply with them myself. I try to set a good example. I always make my standards clear. I'm pretty up front about it and I think everybody realizes that" (Instructor 6, 1999). Another instructor responds, "I am who I am and my values had been shaped long before I got to the program" (Instructor 2, 1999).

It is interesting to note the Observers rated four instructors highest in the area of Enabling. According to Kouzes and Posner (1997), enabling is synonymous with the following behaviors: develops cooperative relationships, listens to diverse points of view, treats people with dignity and respect, supports other people's decisions, lets people choose how to do their work, and ensures that people grow in their jobs. Although significant in any classroom, interpretation of the data indicates these behaviors have even greater value in prison education. Such activities allow students to feel as though they are in control of their surroundings, a sensation rarely granted in prison. "Lack of control is one of the most difficult things about people getting out, because essentially they exist in a situation which leads them to believe that they're not in control, and for a very long period of time" (Instructor 1, 1999).

Variations between Self and Observer responses may be attributed to the difference in perceptions related to the meaning of the questionnaire statements and scoring scale, frequency of contact, and familiarity with Observers. As one instructor notes, "We have various times that we do different things in a classroom, and especially in our jobs. We're really very flexible, and we do things as necessary" (Instructor 5, 1999).

Most Important Practice
Instructors were directed to read a brief definition of the Five Exemplary Leadership Practices and choose the

one they felt was most important. The researcher was interested if a correlation existed between the practice identified as most important and the Self and Observer-identified Dominant Leadership Practice. Table 2 displays the results.

Table 2
Most Important Leadership Practice

Instructor	Most Important Practice	Consistent with Self/Observer
I-1	CHALLENGING	Neither
I-2	ENABLING	Both
I-3	INSPIRING	Both
I-4	CHALLENGING	Self
I-5	ALL	Unidentified
I-6	MODELING	Both

A distinguishable pattern emerges when comparing Table 1 and Table 2. The three instructors who were consistent in Self and Observer scores for Dominant Leadership Practices also consecutively matched it to the practice they felt was most important. For example, with regard to Instructor 6, Modeling is identified by both Self and Observer as the Dominant Practice and also selected as the Most Important Practice.

Another interesting observation is that Instructor 1 indicated Challenging the Process was most important. However, this does not match with the Self or the Observer-rating. Instructor 1 speculates the inconsistency may be because "the system is so resistant to change, that nobody thinks the system can do anything. I would say for example that challenging the process is most significant, but probably the most difficult. It's also the one I am least effective at" (1999).

Influence of the Correctional Environment
The description of the work setting with respect to students, classroom atmosphere, and instructor role in the environment reveals an amazing congruity of responses. All instructors indicate they enjoy interacting with the students and describe them as bright, creative, and interesting. Students are characterized as highly motivated with "a more positive and appropriate attitude" than other university students (Instructor 3, 1999). The exceptional character generalizations of students intrigued the researcher, as these are the same students who were unable to adhere to traditional public institution expectations prior to incarceration. One instructor offers the following explanation, "They're scared they're not going to get it all. They really want to succeed. They're convicted felons ... that's very hard to overcome" (Instructor 3, 1999). Furthermore, the students are in a very structured environment that may enable them to focus primarily on school, rather than be challenged by negative societal forces previously encountered.

Additionally, because the program has limited enrollment, participation selection criteria established by the prison is undoubtedly rigorous. "The count right now

is 1,400. Out of that there are 50 to 75 total in the college program, which includes the 30 or so kids that are preparing to get into the program. That's a pretty small number out of the total population. You're dealing with the guys who are at the top of their form as far as the institution is concerned" (Instructor 2, 1999).

The classroom atmosphere is described on two levels — physical and psychological. Physical structure, equipment, and materials are depicted as being "a teaching nightmare" (Instructor 4, 1999). Most instructors provide all their own materials, primarily due to cost and unavailable up-to-date textbooks. Without fail obstacles are taken in stride and viewed as a rewarding challenge.

The overwhelming psychological description of the correctional environment is confining, oppressive, and repressive. "It's not the most comfortable atmosphere ... seeing guards outside your room preparing for a riot, walking in formation and practicing with their batons and shields like they're attacking someone" (Instructor 5, 1999). It is compared to the military, another rigidly controlled institution. Teachers react to this type of setting in a variety of ways. "What you have to do is kind of put your own mind into a different situation every time you walk in there. I've gotten used to seeing young men handcuffed and taken away by uniformed guards. That bothers me because I think I've come to accept it, that it's just the way it is here" (Instructor 5, 1999).

Instructors view their role in this situation as a nurturing one in which they fill more roles than they would in a traditional teacher-student relationship. They may act as a surrogate parent, a counselor, and a friend. "Students come to class with a lot of baggage. From previous educational experiences, from previous experiences in general, and from previous experiences of incarceration" (Instructor 1, 1999). In their position it is possible to "lift the oppression somewhat, to allow [students] to feel like they are in a different world. To allow them, well enable them, to realize that there are other ways of being them in that situation." The instructor continues by describing a scene outside the classroom window, "There were birds' nests, and the little birds — the baby birds — were every so often opening their mouths to be fed. This reminded me what I was there for, to feed our baby birds, our prison birds, our jail birds!" (Instructor 5, 1999).

Conclusions
Although EPIC faculty do not see themselves as leaders per se, inferences drawn from the data overwhelmingly indicate all five of the leadership practices are used to expose students to a variety of perspectives from which to learn. Each instructor offers a unique fusion of wisdom, experience, and sincerity to ensure students' success in the program and in life. The instructors have found something that truly matters to them, and their passion for teaching thrives despite the oppressive environment in which they teach; these are qualities of leaders.

The researcher recommends this study be used as a catalyst for correctional educators to participate in research of their own, to "prescribe what should be studied within their field" (Luna & Price, 1992, p. 118). The researcher also recommends further research be conducted to ascertain how leadership practices affect student performance and suggests further exploration of teacher-student relationships with respect to leadership.

Final Thought
"Remember one thing... Everyone's different. A big part ... is caring enough to find out what really matters to others" (Bolman & Deal, 1995, p.85).
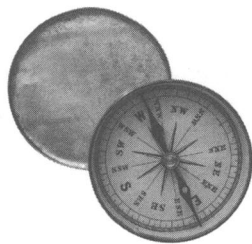
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Biographical Sketch

Tami K. Potter has worked in the Criminal Justice arena for eight years in various capacities: Probation, Parole, Treatment, and Detention. She is currently with San Bernardino County at West Valley Juvenile Hall, a maximum-security facility that incarcerates juveniles processing through the adult court system. She also teaches in the Correctional Science Department at Chaffey College and will pursue doctoral studies in the near future. Please forward questions or comments to: tpotter10@aol.com or c/o WVJH, 9478 Etiwanda Ave., Rancho Cucamonga, CA 91739, (909) 899-4376.

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