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Chapter 5

Leading for learning: Building on values and teaching expertise to effect change

Kathleen M. Quinlan

In my model of leading for holistic learning in higher education (Quinlan, 2011; Quinlan, 2014)¹, I present three main dimensions of leadership to which educational leaders need to attend: 1) personal characteristics; 2) knowledge of teaching and learning; and 3) organisational conditions. These three dimensions, set within a wider social context, provide a development framework to help academics who are becoming educational leaders. This chapter illustrates and extends this model based on a project documenting the leadership experiences of newly recognised Senior Fellows of the Higher Education Academy (SFHEA)¹.

Overview of the Model: Leading for Holistic Learning

This tripartite model of leading for learning was initially developed based on a review of literature on the elements of leadership shown to create environments supportive of holistic student learning and development in higher education (Quinlan, 2011). Initially, I argued for the importance of knowledge about learning and teaching in leading teaching for learning (Quinlan, 2011; Quinlan, 2014) and later applied the model to explain how programme leaders successfully led the development of two different complex, interdisciplinary master's programmes (Quinlan & Gantogtokh, 2018). In this chapter, I draw out the lessons this model offers for emerging leaders.

First, educational leaders already have their own identity, values and purpose upon which to create a vision for modules, courses or programmes. Through commitment and consistency around those values, they inspire others. It is important to consider how you can draw out the values that are already guiding your practice and use them to support you in acting authentically and intentionally (see Quinlan, in press, for more detail).

Second, effective educational leaders draw on expertise about teaching and learning and a scholarly approach to education to realise those visions with colleagues. If you are reading this book, you likely already have a wealth of expertise in learning and teaching. This knowledge is a vital foundation in educational leadership. Finally, to support planning and implementation, leaders also attend to the organisational conditions in which students and teachers are embedded. This third area is often new for academics shifting into leadership roles.

The Project

This project involved interviewing 15 newly recognised SFHEA about their understanding and experiences of becoming a leader in HE, as well as reviewing documents they wrote about their

¹ Senior Fellows of the Higher Education Academy have met a set of criteria defined by the UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education. <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/downloads/UKPSF%20Dimensions%20of%20the%20framework.pdf> Senior Fellows (Descriptor 3) typically are engaged in leadership activities, influencing others in support of student learning.

experiences. These data sources were read and discussed with two colleagues² alongside the model of leading for learning (Quinlan, 2014) to see how the model works in practice in a typical, contemporary UK university. Based on the data, I wrote short narratives relating to each aspect of the model. The project received ethical approval from the University of Kent (UK) and participants gave consent for their materials to be used under pseudonyms.

I start with a story of Luisa and will return to Luisa's story – and others – during the chapter to illustrate the model (Quinlan, 2011; Quinlan, 2014;).

As you read this summary consider:
Is Luisa a leader? If so, how? Why do you deem her a leader?

Luisa is an academic in a UK university whose specialty is Catalan – a minority European language spoken in Catalonia, a region in northeast Spain. When she talks about her work, one can hear the passion and energy that

underlies her academic practice. She writes: 'My love of languages and my pride in belonging to a very small diaspora (of UK based Catalans) ensure that the students get the benefit of having direct contact with someone who has become an ambassador for her own native culture. This not only offers me the chance to put a stop to the othering of my people, but empowers students to... apply those insights to any other minority culture in which they become interested.' She has published on modern Catalan and Castilian poetry and theatre and its connections with other art forms. As part of this small diaspora of Catalans in the UK, she has also served as external examiner for many of the UK's programmes in Catalan. Over a six year period, she 'organised and motivated a productive staff team' to develop the Department of Hispanic Studies from a language supplier (offering a Catalan options course as part of the Spanish programme) to one that offers its own honours degrees, MA programmes and a doctoral programme. To support that growth, she managed, trained and mentored visiting lecturers funded by the Catalan Autonomous government. She has used her contacts to develop exchange programmes and collaborations with both Catalan and Valencian Autonomous Governments, bring in guest speakers, and organise study tours.

Defining Leadership

Often we think of leadership in managerial terms and reserve the term 'leader' for people who are in formal positions of authority. In the brief summary above, I have said nothing about Luisa's formal roles. As it happens, Luisa is now the Associate Dean for Education in her Faculty. On the way to this position she served in various other formal leadership roles, both in her department and in her faculty. But her leadership neither rests in nor depends upon those formal roles. Instead, it is rooted deeply in her values, which have motivated her to build relationships, identify and exploit opportunities, and create conditions in which others – both students and teachers – can grow and develop.

Thinking of leadership in managerial terms, many academics distrust the concept and may be reluctant to call themselves leaders. This hesitation seems to be more than mere modesty. Higher education has a tradition of collegiality, self-regulation, and autonomy which is usually set in contrast to managerialism (Tight, 2014), which is rising in higher education (Deem and Brehony, 2005). Leaders

² I thank Julia Hope and Silvia [Colaiacono](#) for sharing their data and insights.

acting as managers who direct others or impose their will seems to contravene these traditional academic values of collegiality and autonomy.

Some formal definitions of leadership and many popular conceptions of leadership also tend to reinforce an impression of a heroic figure at the top, which is far from the traditional 'first *among equals*' conception of academic leadership. Many models of leadership, even those adopted formally by academic organisations, can also emphasise too strongly *planned* change in which leaders are 'driving' toward a clear set of predetermined outcomes. For example, '[Leadership is] Agreeing strategic direction in discussion with others and communicating this within the organisation; ensuring that there is the capability, capacity and resources to deliver planned strategic outcomes; and supporting and monitoring delivery...' (Higher Education Funding Council of England, 2004, p. 35).

The HEFCE definition seems to assume a leader is in a formal role sanctioned by the organisation. In contrast, the notion of 'distributed leadership' focuses on influence and direction (not necessarily with pre-determined strategic outcomes agreed) (Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond, 2001). This kind of leadership, then, also encompasses intellectual leadership, role-modelling, mentoring, advocacy, being a guardian of academic values or an ambassador of the university, which have all been associated with professorial leadership (Macfarlane, 2010). Distributed leaders are people located across an organisation who are having good ideas, engaging colleagues with those ideas, and using networks to stimulate debate and change. Thus, it involves many people interacting with each other, rather than a select few at the top.

Let's look at another definition that stretches this idea of distributed leadership even further. Alis Oancea described her role as a then-Research Fellow coordinating a Research Staff Forum in her department which raised awareness of the career development needs and concerns of post-docs and other early career researchers: 'This work exemplifies "leadership", as research-driven, and built up from the ground. Collaboration, networking, and personal and collective investment of time into championing the relevant issues...are key....In this area of work...aims are open to deliberation, and the grounds for authority are always shifting.' She concludes, 'what seems to matter in such activity is not "leading" people towards given objectives, but: actively engaging with colleagues in a process of critical questioning of common values, customs, perceptions, and evidence; mobilising the knowledge, practices and resources available; and enabling the generation of new and creative developments.' Thus she casts the key activity of academic leadership as 'research-led' and 'actively engaging with colleagues in a process of critical questioning' (Oancea, 2011, p. 4).

Following from the notion of distributed leadership, I define leadership broadly as having a vision and bringing others along toward that vision through a set of actions. In Luisa's case, her vision is to 'put a stop to othering' minority cultures. By rallying others around this inspiring vision, they might, together agree some ways they can realise that vision. Likewise, Oancea also emphasises 'championing the relevant issues'; that is, having and advancing a vision of creating a supportive environment in which postdoctoral researchers can grow and flourish.

In what ways are you exercising leadership in your work?

These inclusive notions of leadership allow us to recast the core parts of academic practice as involving leadership, acknowledging the leadership activities of academics and professional services staff regardless of formal line

management responsibilities or job titles. When researchers write a paper, they are putting out a thesis to be read by others with the hope of influencing future research. Researchers choose the actions for doing so: the research questions, the methods, the process of analysing and interpreting

evidence that provides a thesis or answer to a question. That is, they have a vision and use a series of actions to bring others along with their vision, thesis or conclusion.

Teachers in HE have authority, often making choices about who to teach, what to teach and what not to teach, how to teach it, what assessment standards and criteria to set and how to assess whether students have met those standards. Teachers are – whether they are aware of it or not – role models for their students. Day after day, teachers stand up in front of 30, 50, 200, 500 young people who are in critical stages of building their own identity. Teachers show students new perspectives on the world and teach them new ways of making sense of that world. Thus, teachers are necessarily leaders, having an influence on many others.

Across their roles, academics have a vision, invite others to share that vision, and work toward it through a series of actions. Those actions are likely to involve, as Oancea (2011) argues, quintessentially academic activities such as critical questioning, and mobilising knowledge and other resources to generate something new.

Leadership actions also take place at various levels. One can exercise influence at the micro level through, for example, leading a class seminar or chairing a meeting with colleagues. At the meso level, one can design curricula for a whole module or course or lead orient other members of the teaching team to the module or course goals. Or, at a macro level, leaders might influence a whole school, faculty, university or field. Thinking about leadership at multiple levels also helps broaden the definition of leadership.

Model of Leadership for Student Learning

In this section, I walk through a model of educational leadership (see Figure 1) I developed from a synthesis of research on leadership, particularly in higher education (Quinlan, 2014; Quinlan, 2011).

- Insert Figure 1 here -

In the centre of the model is the goal of student learning. Learning in this model is used in its broadest sense: not just acquiring knowledge or building skills but helping students in their process of becoming as a person, building their own sense of identity and purpose. I have called this learning holistic student development (Quinlan, 2011). The model represents the three foundational pillars for enabling this kind of holistic student learning in higher education. These three pillars are situated, of course, within wider external conditions.

Personal Characteristics: Leaders' Values, Vision and Authenticity

I start here with the leader as a person. Academic work is a highly values-based activity (Harland, 2008; Quinlan, 2016; Quinlan, 2019), so our actions as researchers, teachers, mentors, and leaders are based in our values, which are central to our identity and serve as guiding principles in our life (Schwartz, 1994). These values underpin our sense of purpose, allow us to create visions as leaders, and fuel intentional, sustained, autonomous commitment.

This sort of intentionality and authenticity is also vital in bringing people along willingly. No matter where leaders are situated in the organisation, they must be credible, demonstrate clarity of values, build unity of vision among the community and hold these values intensely themselves (Kouzes and Posner, 2011). In higher education, academics most value personal integrity and trustworthiness in their leaders (Bolden, Petrov, and Gosling, 2008). Fullan and Scott (2009, p. 102) concluded 'the ideal way to change a culture is for a critical mass of key leaders – centrally and locally – to intentionally model in their daily behaviours the attributes and capabilities they want the university to develop.'

So, how can academics clarify their own values so they can authentically and intentionally lead with that sense of purpose? Emotions provide us with a good compass (Quinlan, 2019). Values and emotions are closely related insofar as positive emotions arise when people are able to act in accordance with their values to fulfil a moral purpose and negative emotions arise when people are thwarted from pursuing what matters to them. Emotions also play an important role in motivating people to act morally (Prinz and Nichols, 2010, 5). Thus, academics can look at aspects of their academic practice and consider emotional episodes, asking, 'what makes me angry or resentful?' 'What makes me excited, proud, triumphant, fulfilled?' These feelings are clues to uncovering the values and purposes that motivate us. Looking back at Luisa, we hear her love of languages, her conviction about being a 'cultural ambassador' and her appreciation for the richness of minority cultures.

Reflect on emotional episodes in your practice to uncover your values. Why did you feel that way? What values were being fulfilled or thwarted?

Catherine is another example:

Catherine becomes excited as she talks about the importance of experiential learning as a way of supporting students' transformative learning. She has implemented a programme in criminology in which students learn about criminal justice in a local prison, alongside classmates who are prisoners there (15 university students; 15 inmates of the prison). It is structured as an exchange in which both students and inmates learn from and with each other. She talks animatedly about how students' conceptions of the criminal justice system are challenged by listening to inmates' experiences of and perceptions of the system. For Catherine, it is this process of seeing a social institution from another perspective that enables students to change. Prisoners are not just numbers or passive objects of public policy but are able to formulate critiques of the system in which they are caught. The programme treats them as experts from whom traditional students can learn. Their humanity is restored.

Catherine is expressing a powerful vision not only for education, but for how the prison system might work, which is revealed when we listen, not just to her words, but to the feelings of excitement and pride in which her words are wrapped. Both Luisa and Catherine are examples of how a deep love of their subject, what Anna Neumann (2006) called 'passionate thought', compels their actions.

Academic values, while seemingly individual, are often tied to disciplines, which have their own values embedded in them (Quinlan, 2016), as reflected in the UK's Quality Assurance benchmark statements for each discipline. Like the proverbial fish who doesn't know what water is, these values are often tacit for academics. It can be useful to discuss these benchmark statements across disciplines to expose what is special about a given field and to help in articulating these implicit values.

In articulating values, educators can also turn to various frameworks of professional ethics, such as the UK Professional Standards Framework (UK PSF) (Higher Education Academy, 2011), the Staff and Educational Development Association Professional Development Framework and Values (Staff and Educational Development Association, 2019) or the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education's ethical principles (1996). In fact, formal recognition through the Higher Education Academy, which has become increasingly popular not only in the UK, but other parts of the world, requires engagement with the values stated in the UK PSF. These value statements are necessarily broadly defined so as to address teaching in a wide range of disciplines and institutional contexts. As such, they are unlikely to have the power or immediacy that internally generated, personalised

statements of values are likely to have (Quinlan, in press). Nevertheless, one's personal purposes can often be fit into or matched to the more generic frameworks of professional ethics. In Catherine's case, her motives, though expressed in different language, are clearly consistent with 'promoting participation in higher education and equality of opportunity for learners.'

What are you most passionate about in your teaching, research or service?

Instructional Leadership: Knowledge of Learning and Teaching

Having a passion, a purpose, or a vision is foundational. But effective implementation to support students' holistic learning and development also requires knowledge about learning and the teaching methods that support student learning and holistic development (see Quinlan, 2011).

In the primary and secondary school leadership literature, scholars have debated which leadership types produce enhanced student outcomes. A transformational model of leadership, emphasizing personal characteristics such as those in the previous section, is assumed to work by creating positive relationships and environments (Leithwood, 2008). In contrast, instructional leadership focuses on instruction itself more than people and relationships (Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe 2008). A meta-analysis of 27 studies showed that the instructional leadership model is three to four times more effective than the transformational model (Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe 2008). Educational improvement is most likely to occur when department heads get involved in instructional development activities alongside teachers in their schools, taking part in professional development opportunities, visiting classrooms and reviewing data about student performance. Therefore, to create an environment for student learning, educational leaders need to understand something about learning and teaching and must work alongside other members of the team, especially those who are closest to students, reviewing data and evidence and learning and supporting teachers in implementing solutions that address performance gaps. While necessary, it is not sufficient just to be a credible person with an inspirational vision (Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe 2008).

Ned provides a good example of applying best practices to design an innovative teaching approach, illustrating an instructional leadership model (Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe, 2008):

How are you building on what is known about promoting learning?

Ned is a historian who led the redesign of a second year undergraduate course in American Studies. A major challenge of American Studies is making it truly interdisciplinary. He explained a process of backward educational design which started by thinking about what is core to American Studies, clarifying the key learning outcomes: 'I think in terms of what American studies should be delivering, so students working with skillsets in different disciplines in film, music, history, literature'. He framed his job as module leaders as 'trying to blend those [different disciplines] together effectively within the confines of a 12 week term'. Continuing through backward design, he noticed that there had been an over-reliance on traditional essays and, 'there hadn't been a lot of creative thinking or application of best practice in terms of mixing up the assessment or assignment balance'. He introduced new assessments focused around 'reputations' in which students chose an American person or place and used multiple sources to explain

how it gained its reputation: '[students] can pick individuals, you can pick famous presidents or unknowns, you can pick places like the Grand Canyon or Wall Street and you can get students to think about how their reputations had evolved. And in the process of doing that, almost inherently, you have to access different disciplines and different media [ensuring] the teaching can be genuinely cross-disciplinary.' He goes on to acknowledge that he was asking a lot, not just of students, but of colleagues, 'by insisting that the lecturers and the seminar tutors have to fully immerse themselves, they can't just straightforwardly teach their discipline and then claim that the students are being inter-disciplinary.' 'You're constantly in this dance of trying to cajole people, seduce people in to kind of co-deliver a module'. He set up the module so that each lecturer, regardless of discipline, had ownership of that week' and then he then 'really work[ed] hard with them to make sure that that week is inter-disciplinary and that that the readings are appropriate and that we're not submerging students in material.'

Ned used a process of backward instructional design, transforming the assessment requirements to leverage changes in teaching and learning. He then worked intensively alongside teachers to help them re-align their teaching with those outcomes and assessments, creating a truly interdisciplinary experience. In sum, to enact their values, educational leaders need knowledge of teaching and learning.

Creating organisational conditions

The third dimension of the educational leadership model focuses on creating organisational conditions for these kinds of rich teaching methods to flourish. While the second dimension focuses on specific teaching practices that promote learning, this third dimension shifts to the organisational environment within which that teaching and learning occur.

For this final dimension of the model, there is more research on the macro level of university leadership than there is at the meso (programme) level. Based on case studies of universities where holistic student learning is a central purpose, Braskamp and his colleagues (2006) found that there was intentionality in aligning culture, curriculum, co-curriculum and a sense of community. In terms of culture and community these campuses had a strong sense of shared, institutional mission evident in the repetition of key phrases across the whole community to describe who they are and what they do such as, 'Enter to learn, depart to serve', 'We exist for students and for learning', 'Living and learning in community' and 'We challenge and support our students.' These campuses also promoted culture and community through programmes of induction and ongoing professional development for academics and by structuring learning environments to promote interactions among students and between students and staff both in and outside of classes. Curricula offered learning experiences such as first year seminars or final year projects or seminars. The co-curriculum was designed to support students to engage in supplemental or non-credit-bearing activities that connect and extend their classroom learning.

There is less research on programme leaders and course or module leaders, where many educational leaders in higher education begin their leadership journeys. In the example above, Ned created organisational conditions through the way he designed the 12-week course. He structured it so that each lecturer had ownership of a week-long unit and charged them with addressing educational outcomes he had set. This structure promoted buy-in by enabling each academic the freedom and creativity to design something that respected their expertise, while also contributing to larger course aims.

As Ned's case suggests, the line between instructional leadership and creating organisational conditions blurs as one gets closer to the coal face of teaching. Nevertheless, this dimension of the model prompts one to think not just about the design of teaching as experienced by students, but also of the ways design features are experienced by members of the teaching team. Ned might have used other structures, such as team-teaching throughout each unit, to ensure interdisciplinary learning experiences. Instead, he designed this particular structure to build buy-in of colleagues through week-by-week ownership, while concentrating minds on a common set of interdisciplinary learning outcomes and assessment tasks. As such, he was manipulating the organisational conditions of teaching, not just the curricular design for learning.

In a study of interdisciplinary master's programmes in a research-intensive university in the UK (Quinlan and Gantogtokh, 2018), successful programme leaders created organisational conditions in a variety of ways. They lined up and supported the right people to lead particular modules and courses, set up communication structures, encouraged pilot studies and created forums for sharing the results of those pilots, created forums for cross-course collaboration and professional development, sought evidence on what was working, and, when matters couldn't be resolved by consensus, they took difficult decisions. They worked very hard at creating a 'learning culture' within their teams, taking a non-defensive attitude, involving all staff and emphasising collaboration and human processes. So, at the meso level in a research intensive, collegial university with new programmes, a key role of leaders was to create the organisational conditions that would support teaching and learning innovation (Quinlan and Gantogtokh, 2018). These leaders, though, were in the position of creating entirely new courses. Thus, they were working with relatively blank sheets of paper and were also supported strongly by heads of departments who had invested a great deal in the success of those new courses.

You have a great idea for innovating teaching in your programme, department, or Faculty. What systems, processes or procedures need to be changed (or worked around or through) in order to implement it? Is the perceived barrier *really* a barrier?

Creating supportive organisational conditions may be more difficult in environments where one is trying to make a change in an existing course, in situations that are bureaucratic and tightly constrained, or where the leader does not already have the official sanction of leaders higher up in the organisation. In these cases, leaders' autonomy is more restricted, making it more difficult to manoeuvre. It may be more of a case of 'working with' and 'working around' organisational constraints than designing new organisational conditions. For example, Ross discussed bureaucratic constraints at some length in his interview.

Ross is an academic in political science who has held a variety of service and leadership roles in his department, including Director of Education. He has designed an innovative, award-winning module on resistance that asks students to experiment with acts of resistance. He applies his disciplinary expertise to an analysis of the higher education context, expressing commitment to resistance in his educational leadership role. He observes that over the past 20 years, 'there was a change of culture in higher education'

from a group of colleagues working together in an 'insular' environment to being 'providers of services where we have customers and clients and targets and so on and are subjected to all kinds of audits...I think in terms of leadership, I've always tried to as much as possible to hold onto the old values.' He wishes he had developed more 'self-understanding' as a young teacher, rather than being 'so overwhelmed by short-term targets and aims which were externally given, and maybe not particularly meaningful'. In mentoring junior colleagues, he now aspires to help them gain greater control over their personal development as teachers and scholars. He reflects on how he might harness and direct younger colleagues' personal aspirations and ambitions, turning their complaints about the system into action, sometimes through forms of creative resistance. He explains that because the bureaucratic system emphasises technicalities, such as submitting the right form to the right place to the right deadline, that, there's 'a huge space for creative subversion. Because as long as you fill out the form correctly, you can pretty much do what you want.' Although it requires work, effort and a bit of courage to experiment within those bureaucratic boundaries, 'there's really no excuse for not looking for these opportunities'. In short, he sees room for manoeuvring within organisational constraints and his job as looking for ways to exploit that wiggle room.

In another example of exploiting the spaces-in-between, Luisa, who is on a teaching-focussed contract rather than a teaching and research contract, is not expected or supported to do research as it is traditionally understood. She agreed to these contract terms on the condition that she would still be able to take study leave. However, when she then applied for study leave to do some research overseas, her request was denied. She felt as if she was working in a no-win situation. However, when she reframed her study leave to show the benefit to her *educational* role, the study leave was then granted. While this example may not be 'subversive' it involved seeing opportunities within organisational constraints.

Wider environmental context

Ned's case example highlights that much of what leaders do in higher education depends upon the larger context in which they are operating. Highly managerial and marketised university contexts can sometimes create value conflicts for individual academics, making it more difficult to develop academic identities (Archer, 2008; Clegg, 2008). This model of leadership (Quinlan, 2014) does not deny these wider contexts; rather, it focuses on how leaders can exercise agency and increase their spheres of influence within their wider contexts. Reflecting on one's core values (Quinlan, in press), together with critical analysis of those contexts, can help identify wiggle room within organisational rules. Grounding oneself in one's own values and purposes, while building knowledge of teaching and learning, also enables educational leaders to take actions that challenge those rules and constraints.

Conclusion

In sum, this model of educational leadership (Quinlan, 2014) presents three main spheres that emerging higher education leaders can focus on developing: themselves, their knowledge of learning and teaching, and a critical and creative approach to setting up organisational conditions that facilitate movement toward improvement. The narratives in the chapter show how these three dimensions play out in practice and offer points of departure for readers to reflect on their own practice.

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ⁱI have concentrated on educational leadership in explicating this framework. However, the same general categories might be easily adapted to research leadership by shifting the focus from instructional leadership to research leadership. The central aim then shifts from holistic student learning to high quality or impactful research. Exploring this application to research leadership is beyond the scope of this short chapter.

Figure 1: Dimensions of Educational Leadership (Adapted from Quinlan, 2011)

