Is the transformational leadership model I practice working?

Louise Andrews

Abstract

I aimed to examine my development as a reflective practitioner, how others experienced my leadership style and whether it was effective. I used participatory research methodology and aimed for the findings to be useful to my own development. The research aimed to develop participatory action research methodologies. This method of engaging individuals to share, in their own words, their everyday experiences, offers rich opportunity to create and recreate knowledge about leadership. Transformational leadership, which causes a change in individuals and social systems, seeks to transform the values of others and motivate them to perform beyond their own expectations. I examined whether my practice of this model was effective.
I used narrative story-telling to generate findings. Ethical implications included consent and confidentiality addressed through letters of consent and anonymity in the written analysis. Issues of power imbalances were addressed. There was occasionally incongruence between my stated values and how behaviours were experienced by others; where values were explicit and enacted, the leadership was empowering. Incongruence risked dominating or diminishing others. Reflective practice can better integrate values and behaviours; we must examine how inappropriate actions arising from ill-informed frameworks can be unpicked. Transformational leadership requires values to be enacted with congruence.

Keywords: transformational, leadership, reflective practice, narrative, participative action research.

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Course: NPQICL (MA Education)

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Submission date: 11/01/2013

<u>Assignment</u>

"Developing as a Reflective Leader in an Integrated Setting"

Word count: 6000 words

Actual Word count: 6314 words

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Learning Contract

This learning contract is the beginning of an inquiry into the confusing, tumultuous and enlightening experiences I have encountered since starting the NPQICL. Having been in my role as Development Worker and Deputy Co-ordinator of our Children's Centre for three years, the start of the course was marked for both a need to better understand how I lead our Children's Centre and by the changes I was going through in my personal life; the breakdown of my relationship of nine years, separating and moving house.

My journal reveals that for most of the course thus far I have felt *"lost and not emotionally engaged"* (Andrews, 03/09/2012) and questioned whether I was giving our Children's Centre my full commitment whilst working through the changes in my personal life (Andrews, 17/09/2012; 20/11/2012). My journal exposes that recently I started to embrace the opportunities the NPQICL has given me to develop better personal self awareness; *"being able to reflect…using my brain…I feel more confident…"* (Andrews, 5/11/2012) and refine my understandings of leadership and my own leadership style (N.S. 5.6), which was identified by both my manager and myself as an area for development in my initial self-diagnostic report.

Further areas for development have been highlighted during discussions with my mentor and through reflections in my journal following study days. I have reflected on my growing self awareness, leading me to consider and explore myself as a leader more consciously; *"I get it now, I think I am 'transformational'…we'll see…"* (Andrews, 01/11/2012) (N.S. 1.8, 4.8, 5.6). I have used Schön's 'problem setting' to name things that need tending to and framing them in the context in which this can be accomplished (1983) and Argyris and Schön (1974) to develop critical, self-reflecting leadership using 'double-loop learning'. My experiences of groupwork in the task team during modules 2 and 3 have been varied and at times unpleasant; *"Everyone is beating themselves up…there's no joy here…"* (Andrews, 8/10/12); *"folk started saying 'I don't know you enough'…I want to know if…being here was actually useful!"* (Andrews, 2/11/2012), but which exposes my need to explore both how I lead and how I am

in teams (N.S. 6.1, 6.2, 6.3) and how I understand the potential for conflict in different situations (N.S. 6.6). My learning from module 3 has inspired me to want to develop a greater understanding of my leadership practices, values and vision, which are informed by a legacy of youth work principles around empowerment, transformation and emancipation, and influenced by Freire (1970) (N.S. 4.1, 4.2, 6.2 and 5.6).

Therefore, this inquiry begins by exploring how in-depth reflective practice has advanced a critical self-awareness of my leadership and augmented and mediated the effects of my changing life circumstances on my leadership practice (N.S. 1.8). I also want to examine my challenging experiences of the task team on study days and the contrasts between other teams I am a part of (N.S. 6.1, 6.2, 6.4, and 6.6). Finally, as part of the NPQICL learning community, I want my practitioner research to contribute to a better understanding of 'transformational leadership; undertaking a participative inquiry to examine how my 'transformational leadership' is experienced by my team and the young families we work with (N.S. 1.2, 1.7, 2.10, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.8, 4.10 and 6.8).

Self evaluation of learning using journal

Using Argyris and Schön's theory of 'double-loop' learning (1974) and 'problem-setting' (Schön, 1983), I have developed in self awareness and made attempts to mediate the effects of transitions in my personal life on my professional practice (N.S. 1.8). The development of my reflective practice has been an odyssey of self-discovery, *"trying it out; the person I am, who I was and who I could be"* (Andrews, 05/11/2012; Goleman, 2002) as well as coming to terms with the complexity, variability and uncertainty associated with leadership (N.S.1.8, 3.6, 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6). 'Double-loop' reflection also helped me to become critically aware of the assumptions I have about myself as a leader, congruence in the roles I adopt and the type of leadership I believe I practice (Argyris and Schön, 1974) (N.S. 5.6).

Argyris and Schön's theory of 'double-loop' reflection (1974) was familiar to me from my youth work background and practice; where 'single-loop' reflection seeks to 'problem-solve' results and return with solutions, 'double-loop' reflection promotes the reflective practitioner to "*experience surprise, puzzlement or confusion…reflect on prior understandings…to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation"* (Schön, 1983, p68). My journal evidences this process of exploring why I acted as I did in different situations, examine what actually happened and in doing so developed questions and ideas about myself and my practice.
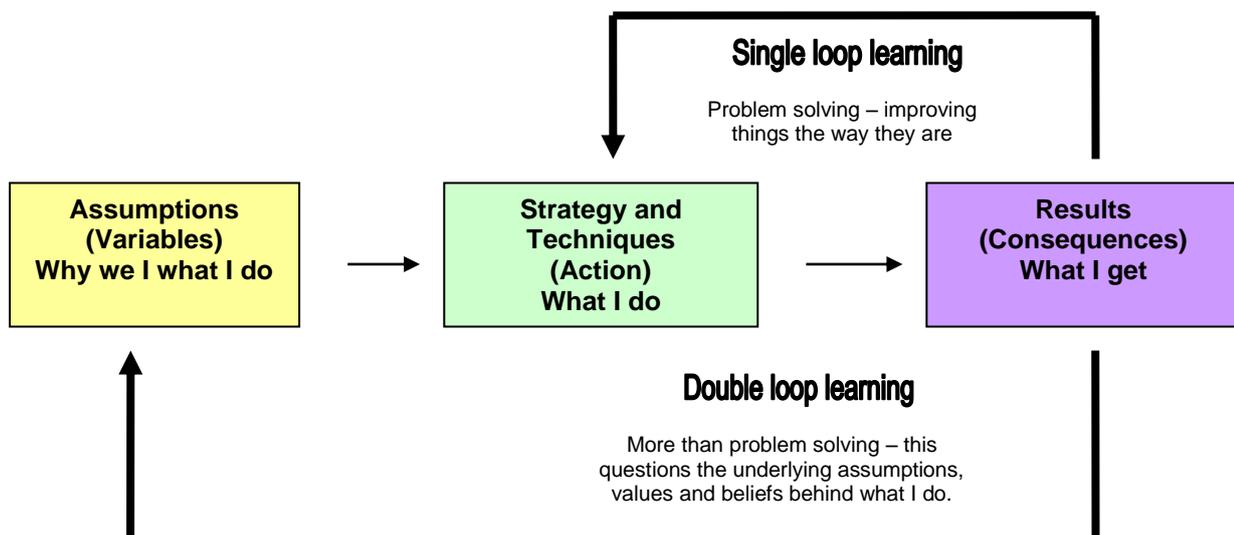
Adapted from Argyris and Schön, 1974

The beginning of my NPQICL journey was difficult; at my first mentor meeting I felt vulnerable and emotional, afraid to disclose my concern that I hadn't been 'present' at work, *"I haven't been there, even when I am there I'm not giving them anything…there's nothing to give"* (Andrews, 03/09/2012). At this, I started crying; the coping strategy I had been using was to *"put everything into a box and sit on it…I want it to go away"* (Andrews, 03/09/2012). My mentor suggested that I 'open the box', 'try to be', seek support from others and consider whether trying to be 'strong' was a genuine role for me at this time and in the future (Mentor notes, 03/09/2012). This became the starting point for me to consider my self-awareness, to consciously name the feelings, situations and circumstances that needed tending to and framing them in ways that meant I could deal with them (Schön, 1983).

Developing self-awareness can be defined as a process of learning about your own feelings, attitudes and values and learning about the effect you have on others (Thompson, 1996; Bolton, 2005). By acknowledging the need to pay attention to my emotional state and 'try to be' rather than hurrying my transition I consciously did something new in my reflective practice – I was honest about my feelings (N.S. 1.2, 1.8). Following the first study day I wrote, *"I'm anxious about tomorrow…they don't <u>teach</u> they <u>facilitate</u>…everything is on top of me like an umbrella of warpy, worried thoughts…"* (Andrews, 17/09/2012). This journal entry became significant, as I addressed two assumptions that were implicit in my reflections; 1) My emotional state affects my perceptions and actions in practice and in my learning, 2) When my energy is low I become a passive participation in my own learning, even though it is not how I learn (N.S. 1.8, 4.8, 5.6).

Prior to the NPQICL I assumed that being a leader meant I had to be 'strong' and interpreted this as 'keeping a lid' on my feelings. However, one of my values as a leader is 'emotional presence', as being numb to the emotional aspects of our work can lead to families believing we have little commitment to them and can undermine positive attitudes and team spirit (Bolton, 2005) (N.S. 4.1, 4.2). Argyris and Schön (1974) call this an 'espoused theory', a usual way of behaving

in certain circumstances that I communicate to others. During my reflections I can see that there has been an incongruence between the roles I portray and expectations of myself and others (Andrews, 05/09/2012). For example, *"I couldn't visit a family today. M (ex-partner) moved out yesterday…I didn't want to let the family down, because I wouldn't be concentrating on them, but I didn't go. The FSW went instead and I was given a hug!"* (Andrews, 22/10/2012). I was surprised at the ethos of support at our Children's Centre, later reflecting *"as a leader, I know I say one thing and try to do it, like us being supportive to one another (staff team) like we support the families, but it took me aback when they offered support and I accepted it.. I need to do as I say a bit more…"* (Andrews, 24/10/2012) (N.S. 6.6, 6.7, 6.8). This was something of a revelation to me, that how I convey what we as a Centre and team do, what I would like others to think of me and how I act don't always match (N.S. 4.2).

In examining the congruence between my thoughts and actions I questioned closely my initial passivity in the learning process and expectations of the NPQICL. One of my principles as a leader is that my staff team and families should not need to be passively filled with 'knowledge', rather, they have experiences and knowledge that could and should be used in learning (Freire, 1970; Knowles, 1970) (Andrews, 06/09/2012) (N.S. 1.8,4.1, 4.2). This is similar in principle to the theory of 'andragogy'; that adult learners begin their journey seeking truths and hoping to be *given* the knowledge they lack; despite perceiving themselves as autonomous and independent adults (Allman, 1983; Knowles, 1970). The start of this type of learning is marked by disorientation for the learner and only later do learners find 'mutual enquiry' with facilitators and appreciating the value of their prior experience a rewarding experience (Knowles, 1970; Allman, 1983). I have examined my 'espoused theory' around this principle; *"they don't <u>teach</u> they <u>facilitate</u>…"* (Andrews, 17/09/2012) implicitly exposing my assumption at the beginning of the NPQICL that my own experiences had little value in learning about leadership, conflicting with a deeply held principle. I can see how this reflects the beginning of the 'andragogy' process, but can also be attributed to my emotional state; the feelings of loss and confusion in my personal life meant I was not motivated to face challenges in my

learning (Thompson, 1996). However, during a later study day I reflected, *"I was shaking when I presented our model of leadership. It was nervous excitement… I got what we were doing and it was ace!"* (Andrews, 01/11/2012). This was at a point when I felt more 'emotionally present' and started to take genuine pleasure in the 'mutual enquiry' of leadership learning (N.S. 4.1, 4.2, 6.2, 5.6).

I found it challenging getting to the point where I was 'emotionally present' and 'got' what the NPQICL was about. I am a collaborative learner by nature and began the course with high expectations of the experiential learning opportunities that small-group work would offer me. From my youth work training and practice I understand Tuckman's stages of group development – forming, storming, norming and performing (2010, 1965) – and how it can be used to describe how people work together in groups. I have an in-depth knowledge of the purposes and possibilities of group-work; how groups are a central feature of society, permeating and mediating our existence; and how groups may offer an integrating experience, connecting experiences, offering a sense of belonging, equality and the opportunities for help, support, solutions and strategies that complement professional development (Doel and Sawdon, 1999; McCaughan, 1980) (N.S. 6.2, 6.4, 6.5).

My experiences of the team task group are significant for the frustrations I felt following almost every task. The first task (negotiating groundrules) I found challenging; *" They agreed some red card thing if we step out of line rather than actually communicate…when I said it should be fun she (group member) slapped me down"* (Andrews, 18/09/2012). The 'red card' system was abhorrent to me; I believe group-work offers exciting opportunities to use 'dialogue' as a means for transformation, characterised by humility, faith, hope and critical thinking (Freire, 1970). Furthermore, the 'red card' system failed to identify what was likely to lead to conflict within the group (Scott-Ladd and Chan, 2008). On reflection, I see I distanced myself and called them 'they' during the crucial 'forming' stage of the group, and felt I did not belong to the group (Andrews, 23/11/2012) (N.S. 6.6). My emotional state at this point may have played a part; I wanted to *enjoy* the process, and be genuine. The genuine me uses a lot of humour in my personal

and professional life. Indeed, my manager commented *"Your team is always laughing…the families are laughing…"* (Andrews, 13/11/2012); I *enjoy* being myself with my team. In feeling 'slapped down' at the suggestion that group-work should be 'fun', I felt devalued as a group-member and that a central aspect of my personality was irrelevant. Foot (1997) suggests that the use of humour is vital, as catharsis and as a way of discovering the attitudes, motives and values of others. In disregarding the role of dialogue and humour, I felt that the group did not appreciate the exciting potential on offer for us to develop authentic self-awareness, transform ourselves as leaders, and change the way we work with our teams and families in practice (Miller, Brown and Hopson, 2011) (N.S. 6.1, 6.2, 4.3).

This concern appeared strongly in my reflections following the team task where we were instructed to give feedback to one another. *"What a bunch of arse! I suggested different ways we could give feedback, and folk started saying 'I don't know you enough'...I don't want platitudes or* <u>nice</u> *comments; I want to know if sharing of myself, being here, was actually useful!"* (Andrews, 02/11/2012). I perceived this as a wasted opportunity for learning about how I am in a group and for the group development. When the group came back together later I commented, *"We did a SWOT analysis. SWOT! Comments like 'some people dominate' are utter crap. Do they mean* <u>I</u> *dominate?"* (Andrews, 02/11/2012) (N.S. 6.6). I later discussed this with my mentor, as it was still at the forefront of my mind. She suggested that I was feeling frustration more acutely because of the changes I was making in my life and a new 'emotional presence' on study days (Mentor notes 05/11/2012). I went on to reflect on this experience with my LLG, both commenting, *"it must be tough trying your hardest and getting nothing back…we appreciate you!"* (Andrews, 20/11/2012) (N.S. 1.8). I reflected on my expectations of this task, actions taken within the group and my reaction afterwards. I found it uncomfortable, and realised that I am unsettled when delving into my own emotional responses; I am often reluctant to consider them at anything beyond a superficial level (Andrews, 16/11/2012 and Thompson, 1996). Further reflections show that up until this point "*It was taking up all my energy putting everything into a box and sitting on it, I've popped the lid off and*

I'm just going with it…" (Andrews, 02/11/2012). However, I had not discussed my personal transition with the group and was therefore unrealistic in expecting them to recognise or celebrate the changes that were taking place in me (Andrews, 28/11/2012). This led to a stark realisation; a transition *was* taking place and I was no longer the emotional mess I was at the start of the course. I desperately wanted feedback to check out whether this *'new me'* is the *'real me'* (Andrews, 6/11/2012) (N.S. 4.7).

In conclusion, my NPQICL journey has been marked by my personal transition and a mismatch of expectations and experiences; leading me to develop recognition of the style of leadership I believe I practice (N.S. 1.8, 5.6). As stated in my learning contract, this self-evaluation aimed to examine how in using 'double-loop' reflection I have learned to 'just be', and developed the self-awareness to begin exploring assumptions I have about leadership, group work and learning (Argyris and Schön, 1974) (N.S. 1.8, 4.8, 5.6). I used 'double-loop' reflection rather than Kolb (1984), which seeks to address 'failures'. Nevertheless, 'double-loop' reflection has its limitations; in framing and reframing problems to inform actions it doesn't seem to account for inappropriate actions arising out of ill-informed frameworks, such as my 'warpy thoughts' and emotional distress (Andrews, 12/12/2012). My learning contract also set out my need to use 'double-loop' reflection to identify how my values of experiential and collaborative learning, key principles of 'transformational leadership' and my other values influence my leadership style in practice (N.S. 4.1, 4.2, 5.6). My research project is therefore to examine whether I am a 'transformational leader', focussing on *"Is the transformational leadership model I practice working?"* (N.S. 1.8, 4.1, 4.2, 5.6)*.*

Research Activity - *"Is the transformational leadership model I practice working?"*

Introduction

Transformational leadership can be described as an approach that causes a change in individuals and social systems; it seeks to transform the values of others and motivate them to perform beyond their expectations whilst being committed to equality, empowerment and collaboration (Freire, 1970; Kaark, 2011). This enquiry, *"Is the transformational leadership model I practice working?"* emerged following reflections on my practice and development in my theoretical knowledge. It sought to examine how my leadership is experienced by the team I lead and the young families I work with and to examine how my leadership could be improved in the future (NPQICL Booklet 18) (N.S.1.8, 4.1, 4.2, 5.6)*.*

Adopting a participatory action research methodology, I used narrative story-telling groups as the main method of data collection; I aimed to create a collaborative and participative paradigm in which to explore my leadership style and how it is experienced by others (Reason, 1994; McDowall Clark, 2012). I also conducted an in-depth interview to corroborate and support the validity of my findings.

This enquiry revealed that sometimes my transformational leadership style works and sometimes not; when my values are explicit in my behaviour my leadership is authentic and transformative (N.S.1.8, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3). However, my values and behaviour are not always congruent, opening up potential for oppression rather than transformation (N.S. 1.7, 1.8, 4.2). In exploring these experiences of my leadership I have identified the need to develop my self-awareness and different aspects of my leadership in order to become an effective transformational leader (Dionne *et al*, 2004).

Context

My research project, *"Is the transformational leadership model I practice working?",* came out of a growing self-awareness around leadership styles and what leadership entails. I came to the NPQICL with ideas about leadership 'qualities' but my learning led me to an understanding of how I could better articulate the leadership style I have naturally adopted; *"it's about empowerment, collaborating and team work, trust...its about making changes to the way we work and for young parents to change their own lives..."* (Andrews, 10/10/2012). I identified my leadership style as 'transformational'; I am ideologically committed to challenge and support my team and the young parents we work with to think about their own lives, recognise what is holding them back and to take actions that create new situations and changes for the better (Freire, 1970).

My role in our Children's Centre is Development Worker. We are a small team; me, a co-ordinator, family support worker, administrator and part-time teacher. We are unique; the only Children's Centre in the UK designated a 'Young Parents Children's Centre' and only working with young families where the parent has had their first child by the age of nineteen. All our work is outreach and community-based; we have an office in Tipton (Sandwell) and our reach area is the whole of Sandwell Borough. I facilitate groups, supervise family support, produce young parent-specific information, and lead on consultation and information sharing (amongst many other things!). I came to this role via a secondment from Sandwell Youth Service (I was Senior Youth Officer in their Teenage Pregnancy Team), completing a large scale consultation with teenage parents on the need for a Young Parents Children's Centre in Sandwell, which has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in Europe (DCSF, 2007a). This consultation project culminated in the formation and designation of 'Young Parents Services' as a phase three Children's Centre in October 2010.

The dominant view of young parents presented by the media, policymakers and, sadly, many of the professionals/ agencies they encounter is concerned with them being a 'problem'; for themselves, their children, professionals, and society

itself (Alexander, Duncan, and Edwards, 2010). I fundamentally disagree with this viewpoint; as a child of young parents I do not believe the negative outcomes for children of young parents are inevitable, as a practitioner I am committed to anti-oppressive practice and crucially, I believe young parents should not be positioned as passive objects of 'intervention', they should be active subjects in their own lives (Andrews, 26/11/2012; Alexander, Duncan and Edwards, 2010). My vision as a leader is for our Centre to challenge these dominant views and how they are enacted by professionals and experienced by young families. Our Centre works with the most vulnerable young families; those who historically refuse or disengage from universal services, like education, health and Children's Centres and those experiencing myriad social issues around housing, poverty, domestic abuse and lack of support. My concern coming into this research project was about how and if this vision was being realised; was my transformational leadership style working?

Methodology

As a leader in our Young Parents Children's Centre, my work is underpinned by values from which derive an ethical, democratic stance and methodological approach. In seeking to appraise my current leadership practices and its effects, I wanted this enquiry to empower my team and the families we work with and to be 'transformational' in itself (McDowall Clark, 2012). Fundamental to my epistemology is a commitment to employ a methodology that recognises the importance of dialogue and critical reflection with all participants. Using participatory action research to co-construct knowledge around my transformational leadership methods I aimed for myself, the team and young families to have a better understanding of how we work and could develop in the future. Furthermore, in co-constructing this knowledge with the team and families, it would be valid, meaningful and transferable; useful for me, the research participants and the wider leadership learning community (Pascal and Bertram, 2012).

I chose to use a participative action research methodology as its key features complement my own principles well; 1) in living an experience we are better able to understand it; individuals experiences and knowledge are valued – *"Young parents should be active subjects in their own lives…"* (Andrews, 26/11/2012); 2) It aims to empower people to construct their own understandings using their own experiences – *"individuals are the experts in their own lives…"* (Andrews In Mentor notes, 03/09/2012). Using orthodox research methods like interviews with fixed and open-ended questions, focus groups or questionnaires might have alluded to the research being about answering a set hypothesis. I wanted a method that would allow me to explore transformational leadership with an open mind; I was not sure where this research would take me or the participants or any firm idea about what the results would reveal (MacNaughton and Hughes, 2009). I also wanted to use a creative method that was situated in the everyday lives of my participants, that would allow them to reclaim their own stories and feel empowered whilst sharing their experiences of my 'transformational leadership' (Reason, 1994). Therefore, my research method was facilitation of group narrative storytelling; with my team at our Children's Centre and with a young parents group I facilitate, guiding the discussions with open ended questions (Appendix 1).

This method raised some ethical concerns around issues of consent and confidentiality. To ease my apprehension about imposing meanings and influencing responses during the narrative storytelling groups I refrained from sharing *my story,* and used open-ended questions and prompts to maintain discussion (Punch, 1994; McDowall Clark, 2012). To address the potential power imbalance between myself as researcher and my participants (who may have felt pressure to participate) I sought informed consent to co-operation before the storytelling group sessions (Appendix 2) and checked with individuals if they were still happy for their contributions to be used following groups (McDowall Clark, 2012; Scott-Ladd and Chan, 2008). Participants have the right to know what they are consenting to; the lack of clear aims inherent in a participative action research project were addressed by asking participants to contribute to an enquiry rather than describe specific things I wanted to do within the research (MacNaughton and Hughes, 2009).

I planned safeguards to protect the privacy and identity of my participants with an assurance of confidentiality, both in the letter of consent to co-operation (Appendix 2) and in discussions with participants after group sessions. To ensure that no participant suffers harm or embarrassment as a consequence of their participation, pseudonyms shall be used and identifying information omitted during the analysis. A further ethical consideration using this method, which seeks collaboration and empowerment, is trust. I conducted my research only with those I already have a good relationship with; I was conscious I needed to have a good level of acceptance and identification with groups. I chose a young parents group that I have been facilitating for six months to participate and only those who attended regularly were invited; this was to ensure that all participants felt equally able, confident and safe in the narrative storytelling group (Punch, 1994; MacNaughton and Hughes, 2009).

Two narrative story-telling groups were facilitated during this research; one with the four staff members from our Children's Centre, the other with six young mothers at a young parents group located in a supported housing accommodation project. A narrative interview was also conducted with the Children's Centre Central Team manager using the same open ended questions used in the narrative story-telling groups, to corroborate and support the validity of the findings (NPQICL Booklet 18).

Analysis of evidence and discussion

In using narrative story-telling as the main method of my research project I created a collaborative and participative paradigm in which to make sense of my own leadership style and how it is experienced by my team and the families we work with (McDowall Clark, 2012). For my participants, narrating and telling the story of their experiences of my leadership was to 'create the story', making it coherent to themselves and me, and in turn using the past to construct the

present and inform the future, of both my leadership and our Centre's aims (McCormack and Pamphilon, 2007).

As a transformational leader I have a clear vision about what I want our Centre to achieve (challenge dominant views about young parenthood; support young parents to be subjects in control of their own lives…) informed by my principles. I believe my team is committed to achieving that vision and works with young families to share it. Through narrative story-telling, I sought to discover how, as a leader, I inspire and motivate, intellectually challenge and give consideration to my team and the young families I work with (Strang, 2005; Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999). The questions I asked during discussions were based on these factors of transformational leadership theory, but encouraged participants to explain the 'what, how and why' of my leadership, making visible and naming the complexities of their experiences (Reason, 1994).

In the analysis of the narrative stories of my team and young parents, many themes emerged. I have chosen to look at two that I feel demonstrate how my leadership 'works' and which provide opportunities for me to further develop. The first concerns how I inspire and motivate others; my values and vision are identified by my team and young families I work with and are emulated by both. The other theme concerns the individual consideration I give to team members and young parents; my high standards and expectations are experienced as challenging by my team yet supportive and encouraging by young families.

The first theme emerging from my findings concerned how those I lead understand and emulate my values around empowerment and self-efficacy (Andrews, 10/10/2012). The concept of empowerment cropped up frequently during the story my team told of completing a youth work qualification last year. They discussed how they felt youth work had been brought into our Centre, and how it had changed the way they work with young families:

> *"A: …like we did the youth work course and now we know what you know…and are empowered to empower young people!"*

> *"B: We believe in young parents. We are the best at doing what we do…these young parents don't go <u>anywhere</u> but they come to my group...it's because they know that we won't tell them what to do, we want to empower them."*

This story was significant in revealing how I support my team in their growth, independence and empowerment as practitioners. The story exposes an initial dependence on me as a leader to offer guidance and expertise, however, this dependency lessened as team members developed their own skills to work successfully with young families (Kark, Chen and Shamir, 2003).

The young parents shared a story similarly exploring their empowerment; of preparing a first birthday party for one of their children. The party took place three months after the group had formed and none of the parents had ever thrown a party before. They discussed their pleasure at the success of the party:

> *"J: We decorated the room and chucked all the poor toys away…it was lovely in here…"*

> *"K: …we made the food and played games and you didn't have to tell us what to do…"*

The story revealed that the group had developed a collective efficacy, conceptualised as an individual belief that efforts in preparing and holding the party demonstrated successful 'task' achievement. This can be described as empowerment, as individuals took steps to influence positive outcomes (threw away broken toys and decorated the room) and believed in their own capacity to perform activities with skill (made party food without prompting) (Kark, Chen and Shamir, 2003). It is significant that during this story the young families referred to

not needing to be told what to do, implying that they had previously depended on me as facilitator to offer guidance when they faced new challenges.

By reflecting on these stories, I have revealed charismatic and influential aspects of my leadership, particularly in early stages of engagement with both my team and young families (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999). Crucially, they reveal that dependency on me as a leader is transient, leaving individuals feeling empowered and with a sense of efficacy (N.S. 2.1, 6.5). In my first mentor meeting I described my leadership as *"believing that people can do it for themselves, they don't need me they might just need a few pointers…"* (Mentor notes, 03/09/2012). I feel that my team and the young families I work with also share this value, and that my style of leading in this respect is working. By seeking to empower others through believing in and promoting their own abilities, developing their efficacy, I demonstrate that individuals experience my leading as effective and congruent with my stated values and vision (N.S. 4.1, 4.2, 4.3). Furthermore, in empowering individuals I work with I believe I go beyond merely broadening their scope for participation, rather my transformational style of leadership has the possibility to be motivating, enabling and support those I lead to new realisations about their own potential (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999) (N.S.1.8, 2.1, 4.1, 4.2, 6.2, 6.5).

The other theme that emerged during my analysis of the narrative stories and the interview conducted with the Children's Centre Central Team Manager concerned the individual consideration I give as a leader to members of my team and young parents that I work with. In the interview with the Children's Centre Central Team Manager, he recounted his story of our last SEF, and the efforts I put in to make sure the SEF reflected the past year's achievements:

> *"Q: You have clear standards and pride in your work…but you rarely accept anything unless it is perfect. Are you being fair with what you expect of the team? Do you expect perfection from the young parents?"*

This reveals several key issues about my leadership that need consideration. The first is that in setting such high expectations of myself and others I am clearly not promoting shared, attainable goals with my team – going against key elements of transformational leadership (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999). In not being 'fair' I may even cause harm to my team and be acting immorally. Furthermore, I have questioned whether I am genuine in my leadership and the principles I believe I espouse.

The young parents narrated a story about the first time they had run the group themselves, and where I became a participant in their group:

> *"G: I did about weaning…I 'googled' some of it because I didn't*
> *know and I made the leaflet and you said it was really good…"*

With young parents, I enact my principles of humility (I don't believe I have all the answers), faith (confidence in others), hope (opportunities for achievement that are real) and solidarity (working together) (Miller, Brown and Hopson, 2011) and they are experienced as genuine by the young parents. I can be seen here as giving individual group members consideration, helping them to identify and develop strengths and being attentive to their concerns, offering reassurance but not controlling their actions (Dionne *et al*, 2004). However, when my staff team narrated their story about the SEF, a contradiction in the consideration I give them and how far my standards control their actions was exposed:

> *"B: You gave me some of the SEF to do and it helped me…but*
> *you try to do it all yourself"*

> *"C: Your standards are just too high…with the families,*
> *whatever they do you're pleased with but with us…"*

This exposes a clear need for me to apply the same consideration I have for young parents to my staff team. True transformational leadership is authentic and true to itself, it is characterised by moral and ethical standards that influences the motivation and satisfaction of those I lead (Strang, 2005). My leadership of the staff team does not always do this and must.

By reflecting on these stories I can identify that in having such high standards of my staff team but achievable expectations of the young families I lead I am not acting in a way that is congruent; I have been inauthentic, and as such cannot be said to have lead 'beautifully' or been genuinely transformative at all times (Ladkin, 2008; McCormack and Pamphilon, 2007). In reflecting, *"I've started to lower my expectations…if I set the bar lower then I exceed my expectations…win-win!"* (Andrews, 17/10/2012), I have already begun the process of addressing this incongruent aspect of my leadership (N.S 1.8, 4.2). On further reflection, the conflict in expectations identified in these stories may be explained in part by my previous assumptions that leadership is about being in charge and directing others. I can see that the transformational leadership I believe I practice is still in development, and I must review and reconceptualise my perceptions of leadership and what a leader does. It is only by demonstrating faith in my staff team and in the inherent capabilities they show in naming the realities of their situations (including my oppressively high standards) that I will be able to claim that my transformative leadership style is starting to work (Freire, 1970).

Conclusion

The findings of my enquiry into *"is the transformational leadership model I practice working?"* has raised the consciousness of the participants and me about my leadership style and how it is experienced by others (N.S. 4.1, 4.2, 4.3). It also provided me with evidence of how areas of my leadership need to be reflected upon and improved; fundamentally the findings suggest that sometimes it works and sometimes it does not. The areas that work tend to be when the values I have are explicit in my behaviour as a leader and are authentic; where I

have persuaded others on the merits of an issue and their relevancy, individuals feel their benefit and are 'empowered' (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999) (N.S. 1.8, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3). However, my transformational model of leadership cannot be said to work when my values and behaviour are experienced as being incongruent by my staff team. In setting unattainably high standards I risk controlling, dominating and diminishing the liberty of my team, which is oppressive rather than transformational (Dionne *et al*, 2004) (N.S. 1.7, 1.8, 1.9, 4.2, 4.3, 5.6).

These findings were generated using two narrative story-telling groups and an in-depth interview, using semi-structured questions to maintain discussion (Appendix 2). I chose this method in order to explore the lived experience of my leadership by others; so those participating could find ways of telling and reclaiming their experiences (Reason, 1994) (N.S. 2.1, 2.5, 2.8, 4.1). The close account of my participants' experiences of my leadership gives credibility to my findings and utility in the development of my leadership (Pascal and Bertram, 2012). However, I found I needed to conduct an in-depth interview to corroborate these stories as I was concerned that they focussed very closely on the contexts in which they were shared and failed to fully demonstrate how I 'cause' transformation (Pascal and Bertram, 2012). Furthermore, the stories generated far more data than is possible to discuss here, and many examples of the successes of my transformational leadership have been omitted in favour of identifying areas that do not 'work' that I may utilise in my leadership development; the results and discussion are therefore biased in favour of my ongoing development rather than reflecting the full reality of individuals experiences (Reason, 1994) (N.S. 1.8, 4.7, 5.6).

By reflecting on my participants identification of incongruence in my leadership style I am aiming to adopt an attitude of understanding and re-creation in myself (which is also a significant part of my personal transition), with the hope of integrating my reflections with action in practice (Freire, 1970) (N.S. 1.8, 4.4, 5.6). I need to address my intrinsic motivations, how they affect my expectations of myself and how this 'leaks' out in my leadership; by becoming self-aware I have begun this process. I also need to practice equitable relationships with my team as I do with young families. I believe this enquiry has revealed that I have

practiced aspects of transformational leadership successfully, but it is inconsistent and under-developed at present. I understand how it should work, the key for me is to develop my self-awareness and use reflection to put my understanding and self-knowledge into practice (N.S. 1.8, 5.6). I have some way before I can describe my transformational leadership as 'working' successfully, but I feel this enquiry shows I have the potential to be transformational.

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Narrative storytelling group – question guide

Is the transformational leadership model we practice working for the families we work with? How is it fed down?
Opening: Thank you very much for agreeing to be take part in this discussion today. I am very grateful for your help! Today we will be talking about how you feel I work as a 'leader'. I will be asking you some questions and asking you to share your stories. I am not looking for any 'right or wrong' answers; I want you to share your stories. I will start by asking a question, and I might ask you to explain bits of your stories so I can understand them better.

The discussion should last about half an hour, maybe a bit longer. Could we please turn our phones off so we are not disturbed? I will be making some notes as you share your stories; please tell me at any point if you'd like to stop, that's not a problem. Any stories you share here will be treated in confidence; I will be using your stories in a write up but you and your contributions will be make anonymous.

Before we start, have you got any questions you'd like to ask? Are you ready to begin? Thank you.

	Questions	Prompts
Idealised influence	1. Can you think of a time when I have asked you to do something I wouldn't do myself?	What did you do? Can you tell me a bit more about that…
	2. Can you describe a time when you knew what I stood for?	What was that like…
Inspirational motivation	3. Ca you share a story about when my enthusiasm was infectious?	So do you mean… Can you give me an example…
	4. Can you share a story about a time when you feel like I have inspired you?	What do you mean specifically by…
Individual Consideration	5. Can you tell me about a time when I cared about your needs or listened to your concerns?	
	6. Can you tell me a story about a time I encouraged you to do something that I could have done myself but that you did, and how it helped you?	
Intellectual Stimulation stimulation	7. Can you share a story about a time you have been creative?	
	8. Can you think of a time where I have questioned the way you think about something, like your life?	

Letter of consent to co-operation

Hello,

This letter is to give you some information about a research project I am doing to find out about my 'leadership'. As I work with you, I am interested to find out *your* feelings about my leadership. I am asking a few people to take part in the research, which I will write up as part of a qualification I am studying for in Children's Centre leadership.

The Research Project – What's it all about?

I will be asking you, as part of a group, to share your stories about how I have inspired, motivated, challenged or supported you. I am not looking for any right or wrong answers. I want to find out about your experiences. It is important for me to find out about your point of view and about your feelings.

Although you will be sharing your stories in a group, it will be in a group of people you already know and are friends with. Your stories and anything else you say will be confidential. I will be writing up the results but your name and specific parts of your story that might identify you will be disguised so that you cannot be identified.

Who am I asking to take part?

I am asking members of the young parents group who attend every week to take part in the group. This is because I know you already and believe you have lots of stories you could share with me!

I am asking our Children's Centre staff team to take part too.

What am I asking you to do?

If you agree to take part, I will be asking you to share your stories of my leadership. This will be done in a group. I will be asking you some questions to prompt you, and you will share stories about your experiences.

What will happen to the information given?

I will be using your stories to help me look at my 'leadership' and how I can be a better leader in the future. I will be writing up the results up for the course I am studying. I will be using my notes for this. If you would like a copy of my notes I can arrange this for you up until January 2013, after this time my notes will be shredded.

<u>Please remember:</u>

- It is entirely your decision to take part.
- You don't have to give a reason if you don't want to take part.
- Your written consent must be obtained before the group can take place.
- Your stories will be confidential and any names will be changed to disguise your identity.
- If you have any questions, or would like some more information before agree to take part, I would be very happy to meet with you.

Thank you very much!

Louise Andrews

Feel free to contact me:

email address: *louise_andrews@sandwell.gov.uk*

phone: *07813319510/ 0121 521 1544*

Name _____

I agree to take part in this research project with Louise Andrews.

I understand that I do not have to take part if I don't want to, I can stop at any time and I do not have to give a reason.

I agree that my stories can be used by Louise Andrews in the write up of this research, so long as my name and any identifying information has been disguised (made anonymous).

Do you agree to take part in this research?

Signed _____   Date _____