

Can a teacher become a *mentor- leader*?

Becoming an effective leader is a goal, a duty, a challenge. And for many person is an **opportunity**.

At school...

More and more frequently, students ask to be actively involved, since they feel the need to be **involved**. In the school environment, people expect to use their skills. Any teacher has to be able to create alignment between teaching and student's enthusiasm.

- Observing effective leaders at school, it emerges that what they have in common is their commitment in **getting to know** their students very well and in spending some time to motivate and coordinate them.

- Since students are different and the operational contexts and goals continuously change, effective leaders have to be able **to be flexible, learn to have multiple behaviours, be able to go beyond their personality** and enrich their qualities, thus avoiding to let their instinct lead them to delegate or to centralize, or to be strict or too easygoing.

Leadership can be built on three pre-conditions:

- The leader **spend** some time in individual and group relations with his students.
- Students know they **can talk** to him/her.
- The leader **makes decisions** even when s/he is “not sure”, s/he takes on the **responsibility** of risking to be wrong. Students have a reference points that can influence their behaviours; they always know what are their leader’s expectations.

The leader is able to face directly his students, giving continuous and prompt information on:

Communication:

- School's goals and development;
- The role people have in achieving goals;
- Requested performances;
- Fulfilled performances.

Vision:

- The leader can see how things are and how they are going to/should be.
- The leader puts his Vision into Goals:
 - performance goals (which outcomes must be achieved);
 - goals of sharing (what people have to know);
 - relationship goals (how people should behave to each other, to him, to the rest of the company).

Relationship:

- S/he creates a trusting relationship based on sincerity and transparency;
- S/he listens;
- S/he arouses interest, lets students grow, gives motivations;
- S/he faces misunderstandings;
- S/he acknowledges his mistakes and, therefore, s/he is willing to change his choices, opinions, attitudes

The Teacher is the leader of the classrooms

The literature on this topic defines leadership through the following factors:

- Abilities/capabilities: intelligence, intuition, intellectual flexibility, creativity
- Motivation to succeed: technical competences, education, physical pleasantness;
- Responsibility: self-confidence, initiative, constancy, optimistic view of the future, competitiveness;
- Participation: activism, sociability, cooperation, humour.

“Leadership styles”

- Managerial:
 - clear guidelines
 - negative and corrective feedback
 - acts quickly
 - works well during times of crisis
 - doesn't involve others

- **Authoritative / Influential**
 - motivates students by increasingly delegating
 - defines a clear view and a specific action plan for his organizational field
 - lets students feel involved in school goals
 - can be a source of inspiration

- **Fatherly / Cooperative**
 - cares about promoting friendly relationships among students
 - doesn't put much emphasis on instructions, goals, and performance standards
 - useful when the school brings very stressful times
 - builds consensus and participation
 - motivates people and involves others

- Participatory / Educational
 - calls his students to participate in making decision
 - motivates students by giving the chance of affecting organizational choices
 - improves the performance
 - builds up confidence

- The goal of a teacher who wants to become a leader is **self-knowledge and self-awareness** of one's leadership style. Only through the knowledge and the awareness of one's dominant style it will be possible to keep under control its negative effects and improve the positive ones, also through blending with other leadership styles which are more suitable to a given situational context.

What steps can make a teacher leader?

- Resource Provider
- Work with students
- Learning Facilitator
- Catalyst for Change
- Learner
- Roles for All

Who is the mentor?

A good **informal relationship** creates a good school climate and brings a positive result in the student's path of study, and it helps to contrast early school living, too.

To **create a positive and collaborative atmosphere** in the classroom is crucial to build strong links between teacher and students. The teacher have to become a guide for students, a special person that will accompany them on a path of life as well as of study; the teacher must be seen as a mentor.

During the process of mentoring, an experienced person (**the Mentor**) gives his/her experience and expertise to a less experienced person. The student receives support in personal and professional development. The mentoring relationship is voluntary and limited in duration (usually one year). A mentor is always focused on the person and her/his personality. He supports the student in his career, individual growth and maturity. He is an expert in life experience.

To become a mentor, you must have some qualities and / or basic skills, for example:

- Be a good listener
- Be trustworthy
- Be able to take the positive aspects
- Demonstrate to believe in others
- Know how to send positive messages
- Be able to encourage the undecided
- Be cautious in the face of negative challenges
- Be able to participate in the success of others
- Know how to control anxiety.

Keywords:

motivation

listening

encouragement

To have any chance of success when you guide another person, you must be able to earn his/her trust and respect. This means that the "motivator" must become a confidant.

So who is a good mentor?

- He is a good listener.
- He is a person who knows how **to listen** in a sincere way,
- He is ready to listen the problems and concerns of others, without blame or judge.