



Leadership in heterogeneous educational institutions

Alessandra Sannella

University of Cassino and South Lazio e-mail: alessandra.sannella@unicas.it

Doi: 10.2478/gssfj-2022-0011

Abstract

The article substantiates the need to form the strategic competence of future teachers in postgraduate education. The authors formulated the concept of "strategic leadership competence of a future teacher" and presented the components and indicators of the competence. The effectiveness of the curriculum "Pedagogical management and management in modern school" developed and implemented in the educational process in forming the competence of strategic leadership of a future teacher is proved. Confirmation is maintained by the presented results of the study, which showed positive dynamics in the level of the researched competence formation.

Keywords: leadership, role, group, education

1. Introduction

This work aims to analyze the concept of leadership through the fundamental theoretical tools of a sociological matrix, including the concept of group and role. These concepts, which for sociological science are guiding concepts, can make the person exercising leadership recognize how to improve performance within a group. Knowing how to analyze the concept of the group and the function of the role within this is very important to exercise leadership and facilitate collective learning, especially within the digital society, where there is severe difficulty transforming the information, we receive (infodemic) into knowledge.

The needs of contemporary societies require the need to initiate leadership development models starting from gender equality to promote social justice. Therefore, it is essential to develop a favourable climate for social innovation within educational contexts, enhance the skills present in the various work environments, optimise the organization, and achieve objectives for improving the workgroup participants' quality of life. An essential element for contemporary society is the ability to analyze innovation phenomena in light of a transdisciplinary approach that knows how to combine different knowledge and skills to face new challenges. The objective is to emphasise the relationship between the object of study, leadership, and reference context with which to relate. Developing leadership is necessary to overcome the old paradigm of modern science, which sees the 'principle of isolation and separation in the relationship between the object and its environment' (Morin 1977: p.365), identifying, instead, a leadership connected

to its environment through experiential and transdisciplinary magnifying glasses. The process of acquiring leadership skills for teaching and training is linked to the possibility of concretising the reference context; the next phase consists of carrying out an analysis of the context in which we find ourselves operating; finally, we can recognise the methods that will allow us to face or apply the skills acquired. Therefore, the possibility of developing leadership is the possibility of adequately knowing the concept of the group within which we act the role, within which we can develop our professional skills and, finally, an adequate method, which is not a valid formula for everything: however, it is an approach that can help us to develop our professionalism better. In particular, the present work will focus on gender and leadership to build a critical analysis of gender and training leadership; learn about the innovative methodological approach to gender leadership. Finally, as a case study, we will analyse the program of Lund University (AKKA), created to increase gender leadership policies by developing the individual's competencies and not personal characteristics.

2. The group a little community

To analyse the concept of leadership, we will use two guiding concepts of sociology: the *group* and the *role*, to outline the function that adequate leadership can have. In this perspective, it is essential to analyse concepts that refer to the reciprocity of individual behaviours with those of the group. The guiding concepts represent functions of the society and have a bridging role, of 'interpreters' for the organised structure, both concerning the context and the historical period of reference. The classic definition of the group's concept indicates any social formation where there are two or more people, in a small and limited number, who meet to allow knowledge and recognised themselves among the group members. Groups are based on, more or less, intense communication processes; they are characterised by instrumental, affective or moral interests deriving from one or more qualities in common such as the profession, the kind of work the sector, a place of employment, religious or political affiliation, economic status feeling belonging to a business or an idea. (Gallino 1978-2004: 331).

Living in groups, associations, and organizations constitute a pervasive aspect of the life of human beings. We can briefly recognise the group in different categories: primary-secondary; formal-informal; spontaneous - finalised; open-closed; public-secrets. First, we will deal with the definition of a primary group (Cooley 1909). Its main feature is the interaction of face-to-face relationships, the limited number of components, and affective relationships. The classic example of this type of group is the family, school and peer group, or the central socialization agencies where the personality is formed.

In the group "secondary", the members are more numerous; they have asymmetrical positions and do not have direct personal relationships. In this case, the assumption of the group structure is bureaucratic, and the group tends to be hierarchically ordered. The characteristic of a secondary group is bureaucracy, which guarantees the group's continuity, the desirable fair treatment between the members, and the common interest. Within the secondary group, informal groups are formed, contrasted by formal groups (Ferrarotti, 1986).

A brief examination is necessary to identify the strategic role that a leader can have within the group and the knowledge of the reference context's components.

This vision of the secondary groups is fundamental for analysing the role of a specialist in group management and for the possibility of implementing one's leadership in the best possible way. The awareness of the group within which we work also means acquiring different skills to deal with work situations or solve problems. When there is significant leadership in the group, the leader can work with the groups to encourage positive motivation to resolve any conflicts that may arise and facilitate communication between the members. [Encyclopedia of Sociology 1997. Vol. 2: 1115]

Consider that people present themselves within a group in such a way as to be recognised by it and thus be more visible. The same principle applies, for example, to conflicts in a workgroup. A person can likely focus more on what image to give to the group than on solving a problem. In this case, the leader's role is fundamental to converge conflicting opinions, encourage the whole group to achieve a common goal, and exercise one's leadership.

3. Awareness of the role

The concept of role represents one of the 'guiding concepts of sociology. In particular, the lemma, in its etymological root, can be traced back to the Latin term *rotolus*, which represented the plot that the theatre actors had in Roman times. This, therefore, represented a kind of 'social representation'. We can especially consider the role: «Role theory concerns the tendency for human behaviours to form characteristic patterns that may be predicted if one knows the social context in which those behaviours appear. It explains those behaviour patterns, (or roles) by assuming that persons within a context appear as members of recognised social identities (or positions) and that they and others hold ideas (expectations) about behaviours in that setting» [Encyclopedia of Sociology 1997: 2415].

This articulated concept can only be described if we can outline the very concept of society. For example, the role of the teacher can be played by transmitting the knowledge and principles of the social structure within which he lives; however, it will be necessary to 'adapt' the role to the reference context or the type of teaching. Therefore, it is essential to consider the concept of role, starting from the general lines, the more profound meaning valid for each group, community or society of reference. Therefore, defining the role is necessary to outline the society that includes the various roles. However, when we think of society, we think of Russian, Moldovan, American, and Italian society, or existing realities, but we also mean a general attempt to understand all the cases. To arrive at a synthesis of the discourse, which is undoubtedly very broad, it will be good to identify, among the various authors of classical sociology who have given a useful definition to our discourse, we can R. K. Merton, who thus defines the role: «A conception basic to sociology holds that individuals have multiple social roles and tend to organise their behaviour in terms of the structurally defined expectations assigned to each role» (Merton 1949 p. 110).

However, each individual covers a set of roles (e.g. child, friend, colleague, teacher, etc.), and it is for this reason the concept of role in a sociological sense has a connotation that brings us back to the activity of actors on stage. To this is added Goffman's proposal in the research that we can identify between the strict sense, that is, the social position of the individual concerning society, and the performance of the role, that is, the behaviour held by the person who plays that role. Recognition of the role is essential in leadership management to recognise ourselves in the group and understand the group's vision (Goleman, 2017).

4. The difference in leadership

As emerges from the literature on the subject, higher studies on leadership began around the 1940s, with the threefold and well-known distinction made by Kurt Lewin concerning group dynamics and the role of the three leadership styles: the authoritarian, the democratic and the "laissez-faire". Unfortunately, these discussions primarily focused on the male gender, and reflections on female leadership were rare. Fortunately, the analyses have evolved to reach today's societies where reflection on leadership and gender is at the centre of many studies. However, the approach derived from classical studies has generated distortions, albeit with little difference. Gaps have also been created in the investment of studies for women. As shown by the data of the World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*, in 35 countries, gender parity in education has been achieved, but some developing countries still have to close more than 20% of the gaps. 10% of girls aged 15 to 24 are illiterate, with a high concentration in developing countries (Fig.1).

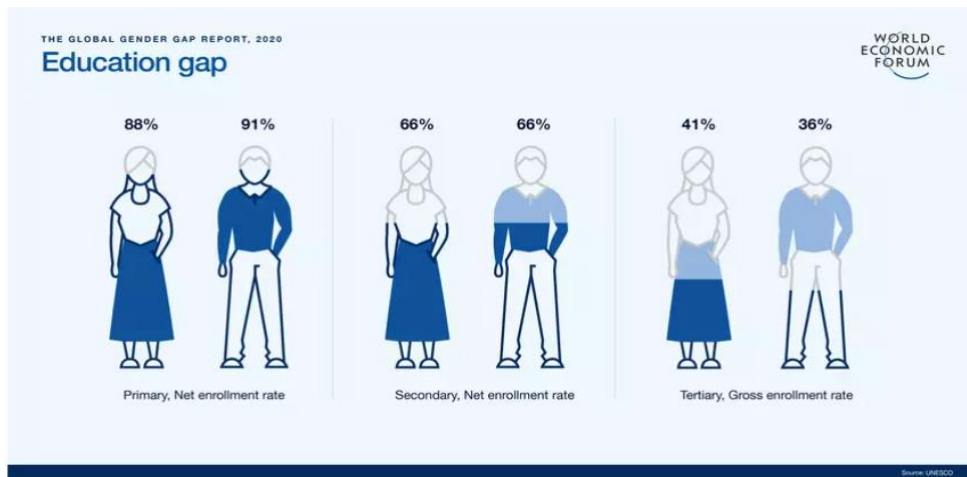


Figure 1 Education Gap [Source: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2021>]

Although we have noticed an essential progression in international education, there is still much work to be done on an international scale, and the role (social spaces) that women can have in different societies must change. As is well known, there are still many barriers that do not allow

an adequate leadership progression. Accessing gender equality also means paying more attention to the rebalancing of responsibilities and careers in family care and paying more attention to changing gender dynamics prevailing in the workplace. Of an adequate recognition of the role by the different groups within which we act our life.

Some indicators are fundamental for good leadership, such as responsibility, integrity, reliability, optimism, adaptability and humility. These values are to be considered 'neutral' values, i.e. not related to gender roles and are essential for the role of leader. However, Gutek and Morasch argued that gender roles often influence leadership roles because, as Ridgeway points out, gender provides an "implicit background identity" relevant to leadership¹.

In accordance with Kathryn et al. (2017) "*Gender is one such variable that must be examined with regard to optimizing leadership effectiveness. The topic of gender and leadership deserves serious and thoughtful consideration and discussion because of professional, political, cultural, and personal realities of the twenty-first century. Women and men have been, are, and should be leaders. Gender must be considered to determine how each leader can reach maximum potential and effectiveness.*"

As we know, education offers many advantages and a desirable awareness of one's role in society. Therefore, the proposal with which to observe an innovative gender perspective considers elements of social evolution. Also, following the European Union and the OECD documents, we can seize the possibility of producing innovation processes of leadership in an ecosystem and gender key. For e.g. An important date presented by the OECD in *Fast Forward to Gender Equality: Mainstreaming, Implementation and Leadership* (April 2019) highlights how women's caucuses play a crucial role in supporting gender equality as effective actors to integrate gender issues into the political cycle, create solidarity among parliamentarians and help ensure that gender equality (OECD 2019: 176).

Consequently, this can evolve contests where the developmental characteristics of gender leadership can be the educational systems of organizations with adequate management. In this perspective, it is essential to manage institutions, groups and individuals by finalizing education to increase skills, individual and collective learning by enhancing gender competencies: e.g. hospitality.

5. Case Study

An added value to our speech can be the analysis of the program used by the University of Lund in 2004 that we can use as an interesting case study. An Integrated Gender Leadership Program (AKKA) has created at this Swedish university. Within this program, leadership is understood as something that can be learned and developed. The program focuses on the skills of the individual and not on personal characteristics. This program is the key to change that can occur if we change the reference paradigm and act to the reference group.

¹ <https://www.intechopen.com/books/gender-differences-in-different-contexts/gender-and-leadership>

We identify the importance of this innovative program in having anticipated, by almost ten years, the analysis of the structures that have developed gender leadership on the border. The University of Lund asked some elementary but fundamental questions, such as: Why are there so few female leaders at Lund University? How does gender operate in academic culture? What are the effects of gender structures on academic organization and activities? How is leadership gendered? Last but not least, the critical question is whether men and women enjoy equal opportunities and conditions at university? These kinds of questions, results of which in AKKA Vitbok's published², have created to change the structures that generate discrimination such as class, ethnicity, and gender through the intersectional understanding of the concept of gender. Therefore, the case study is attractive to our attention because it creates a programmed structure of gender leadership analysis and because this reflection comes from a university. Although higher education is structured to develop the student's critical spirit, this does not always happen. Students find themselves unprepared to think critically, which leads to less effective leaders in the world of work³.

6. Conclusion

For a more conscious leadership, the involvement of the entire group must take place under the cross-disciplinary ethos (ἡθός) between different areas and on multiple levels. The sociological perspective can analyze social and structural influences on human behaviour at the individual, group and community levels.

In the globalized and interconnected world, we live in today, leadership in the teaching has become more than just a process of acquisition of knowledge and skills and personal development. It now plays an important role in learning about global topics, addressing existing and future challenges and raising awareness to cope with them.

“Leaders need to have both practical and working knowledge specific to their role as well as leadership competencies. Leadership competencies include management skills, critical thinking, decision making, problem solving, emotional intelligence, relational skills, and the ability to influence other people”⁴.

In order to enhance the development of skills and teacher leadership training, it is therefore essential to develop an adequate analysis of the group and one's role within it. Suppose 'complexity' is a distinctive feature of the contemporary society to which the individual belongs.

² <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/good-practices/sweden/akka-leadership-programme>

³ Flores, K. et al. (2012), “Deficient critical thinking skills among college graduates: Implications for leadership”, Educational Philosophy and Theory, Vol. 44/2, pp. 212-230, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2010.00672.x>

⁴ <https://www.intechopen.com/books/gender-differences-in-different-contexts/gender-and-leadership>

In that case, as described by Edgard Morin, teacher leadership training represents the interpretation of societies capable of producing more and more equity and social justice.

References

- Encyclopedia of Sociology* (1997), Vol. 4: pp. 2415.
- Ferrarotti F., (1986), *Manuale di Sociologia*, Laterza, Roma-Bari.
- Flores, K. et al. (2012), “Deficient critical thinking skills among college graduates: Implications for leadership”, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Vol. 44/2, pp. 212-230, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2010.00672.x>
- Global Gender Gap Report 2021* <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2021>
- Goleman D. (2017), *Leadership that gets results*, Harvard Business School, Harvard.
- Morin E. (1977), *La méthode. La nature de la nature*. Seuil, Paris.
- Merton R.K. (1949; rev.1968), *Social Theory and Social Structure. Toward the Codification of Theory and Research*. Free Press. NY.
- OECD (2019), *Fast Forward to Gender Equality: Mainstreaming, Implementation and Leadership*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/g2g9faa5-en>.
- Kathryn E. Eklund, Erin S. Barry, Neil E. Grunberg (2017), “Gender and Leadership” in <https://www.intechopen.com/books/gender-differences-in-different-contexts/gender-and-leadership>