

Chapter 11

Humble Credibility: Examining the Role of the Facilitator in Leading Transformational Change and Empowering Professionals

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ABSTRACT

A community of practice (CoP) is a vehicle for bringing in participants to learn and grow with each other. When combined with intentional facilitator moves that consider content, process, structure, and conditions, an intentional learning community (ILC) is created. ILCs go beyond learning to transforming practice. Beyond the transformative power of CoPs and ILCs, the role of the facilitator is key. A truly transformative learning experience requires a leader with humble credibility. This chapter will examine and explore the role of a humble, credible leader and how these dispositions are key in engaging and sustaining powerful team interactions and work to increase organizational capacity and empower the workforce.

INTRODUCTION

It is Sunday night in late May 2020. We are in the middle of a lockdown due to Covid and the news is sharing the terrible murder of George Floyd. My “Sunday Scaries” are not due to the fact that I have to go to work the next morning, but due to being a part of a world that is physically and emotionally sick. Instead of dreading going to work, I am actually looking forward to being among my peers to unpack these terrible events. My team meets on Mondays and I put aside the agenda I had designed the previous week and open up the space to engage in a courageous conversation of what just happened (School Reform Initiative, 2014). I opened up the space for our team to discuss in light of the current realities:

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What are they thinking? How are they feeling? What are they believing? We don't have answers, we just have a space to critically unpack a transformational event and listen to each other's hopes and fears.

The authors during this time, worked for an institution of higher education providing high-quality professional development to early care providers and educators. The team focused on designing and facilitating job-embedded professional development. Communities of Practice (CoP) and coaching were the vehicles used to empower educators to improve their teaching and learning. During the beginning of the pandemic, the work shifted (notice we didn't say pivot). We couldn't have our upcoming face-to-face trainings. We used our meetings to collaboratively problem-solve how we were going to move our trainings from face-to-face to virtual settings. We tuned our agendas and explored virtual alternatives using engaging protocols. We utilize School Reform Initiative (SRI) protocols in our trainings. They consist of structured ways to engage participants in collaborative conversations (SRI, 2014).

We were there for each other at a professional and personal level. There were many unknowns, and people were just exhausted. As the leader of the early childhood team during the early months of COVID-19, I realized we needed time to intentionally balance work and mental well-being. I didn't have answers; I didn't have cures; I just had the insight to provide the team space to heal, repair, and be mindful of their well-being. We had Covid buddies to check in on each other; we created lists of things we needed; we depended on each other. I looked forward to having my team by my side because I felt strength in the unity the team provided.

While my team was strong and supportive, I saw how many educators were leaving the field, especially in early childcare. Employment dropped in early care settings from 1.05 million employees in February 2020, to 680,000 in April 2020. In other words, 360,000 jobs were lost during the pandemic. As of November 2022, we were still at 92 percent of the February 2020 numbers (Crouse, Ghertner, & Chein, 2023). The entire education field is facing a staffing crisis (Pendola, Marshall, Pressley, & Trammel, 2023). Teachers who had been teaching for decades are leaving the field in record numbers. The wealth of knowledge that is leaving with them is immeasurable. Colleges are also suffering from a shortage of teachers entering their programs. We are undergoing a crisis in recruiting and retaining educators.

There have been many incentives in order to attract and attempt to retain teachers. Teachers are receiving bonuses and loan forgiveness to encourage them to enter or stay in the field (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2021). Funds are being disseminated to support increasing teacher compensation. With all these extrinsic motivations, we are still in a staffing crisis. Classrooms are empty in child care centers. Parents need to get back to work but are on waiting lists to get their children to childcare centers. How are we going to take care of the workforce behind the workforce? Our community needs a strong child care and educational system to not only prepare children to excel in school, but to be able to go back to work and support a growing economy. Extrinsic rewards can only move the needle so far. What truly supports teachers in wanting to enter and remain in the education field are strong working conditions that take into account a positive work environment. Creating positive working environments sets the conditions of trust and safety and helps motivate staff to be engaged and joyful. Teachers need to feel supported in their learning and professional development. As leaders, we need to intentionally create spaces for teams to feel valued and heard. Leaders need to be constantly ensuring that their staff/team feel safe and valued in their working environment, and at the same time provide support and guidance. These two skills take into account being humble and credible. Leaders who invite the voice of their staff/team and provide time and space for them to engage as a community as they tackle critical issues result in teachers who are intrinsically motivated and empowered in their field. The disposition of being a humble, credible facilitator is paramount in moving professionals from awareness to transformative change. A

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