Identification of Leadership Characteristics and Styles through Fables and Moral Maxims: A Novel Teaching Approach
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Introduction

Two frogs lived together in a marsh. But one hot summer the marsh dried up, and they left it to look for another place to live in, for frogs like damp places if they can get them. By and by they came to a deep well, and one of them looked down into it. And said to the other, "This looks like a nice cool place. Let us jump in and settle here." But the other, who had a wiser head on his shoulders, replied. "Not so fast my friend. Supposing this well dried up like the marsh, how would we get out again?"…Think twice before you act…The prudent person looks twice before leaping

Fables offer a unique and effective teaching strategy to identify leadership characteristics and styles. For centuries fables were used to convey meaning, translate emotion, convey moral lessons or maxims, and translate knowing.[4,5,23] Leadership is a skill essential for nursing practice and directly related to patient safety, quality of care, increased nurse retention and beneficial clinical outcomes.[5,9,10,24,25] The Institute of Medicine (IOM) proposes "strong leadership is critical if the vision of a transformed healthcare system is to be realized".[9, p.221] The IOM (2011) seminal report, *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health* exerts nursing has an integral role in the rebuilding of the healthcare system.[9] IOM strongly advocates that nurses should be accepted a full-partners with physicians and other healthcare professionals however, "not all nurses begin their career with thoughts of becoming a leader".[9,p.221] Implementation of foundational and situational nurse leadership competencies in nursing curriculum could serve as a first step in the transformation of healthcare.[8] Teaching the importance of leadership in additional to the numerous clinical reasoning and critical-thinking responsibilities necessary for clinical practice can be challenging for nursing faculty. Variations in clinical experience, cultural differences and generational thinking styles within the classroom require an innovative teaching strategy.[13,24]

Objectives

1. Relate behaviors and moral lessons in fables with characteristics of effective leadership.
2. Compare and contrast the various styles of leadership as delineated in the leadership model.
3. Develop instructional strategies incorporating fables with teaching practices to highlight characteristics and moral lessons of leadership as evident by the Lesson Plan.

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this review of the literature is to acknowledge how fables can be used as an effective teaching strategy to analyze concepts, generate self-reflection, and identify effective and detrimental characteristics of leadership to nursing students.

Fables have the ability to bridge student differences improving translation of leadership content.[22,23,24] Since 520 BC, Aesop's fables have transcended time and culture inspiring philosophers and writers.[15,23] Fables represent a narrative form of fictional literature in which animals, inanimate objects, environmental forces such as wind or sun, and anthropomorphisms are used to demonstrate a moral lesson or maxim.[15,21] Anthropomorphism exits when human traits, behaviors or emotions are attributed to non-human entities. Fables are identified by a brief metaphorical narrative format, talking animals that serve as a metaphor for human-beings, and a morally challenging situation with consequences ending with a moral lesion or *word of wisdom*. The teller of the fable emphasizes the moral lesson while the listener translates its' meaning.[15,17,22,27] Within the discipline of nursing, fables serve as an innovative teaching strategy to communicate complex topics.[20,22] Nichols, Bordelon, & Eagerton (2019), implemented a course educating nursing students about leadership ethics using fables to demonstrate leadership skills, expose students to leadership concepts, and introduce the concept of reflection in learning.[20,22,24,28] Grace (2020), a nursing professor, creates uses fables to teach statistics to nursing students. The fable of "*Chicken Little*" emphasizes the importance of evaluating clinical research results.[13] Milton (2006) uses fables to serve as a hermeneutic medium facilitating interpretation and understanding of theories, concepts and beliefs.[21] The metaphorical nature of a fables can create associations and meanings from words or phrases which can be articulated or visualized in unique ways by the hearer.[7,28]

Review of the Literature

Leadership is defined as the process of influencing others to accomplish a mission by providing purpose, direction and motivation, leadership is essentially a catalyst for action.[6,11] Operationally, leadership is defined through the constructs of vision, mentoring and organizational culture. Winston & Patterson, (2017) define leadership as "one or more people who selects equips, trains, and influences one or more follower(s)…in a concerted coordinated effort to achieve the organizational mission and objectives." [30] Lyons (2014), defines leadership in its' simplest form as the ability to *influence*…the ability to motivate others to "work towards accomplishing a vision." [19,28] Sullivan and Garland (2010), surmise leadership requires interpersonal skills as essential to influence others. Carter & Reed (2019), write "leadership grows out of personal characteristics that can be learned and are associated with successful leadership." [8] Lastly, social scientist Kurt Lewin's seminal work analyzing leadership styles is still recognized today.

Leadership Characteristics

Within healthcare, transformational leadership is cited as the most effective when evaluating healthcare quality, patient safety, nurse satisfaction-retention, and patient care outcomes.[8,9,12,29] Khan, Nawaz, & Khan, (2016) state "transformational leadership engages interactions with both the follower and leader based on common values, goals and beliefs…impacting performance and attainment of goals." [16] The ability to empower and work with others, show empathy, communicate effectively, demonstrate critical-thinking and utilize reflection are essential behaviors and characteristics for transformational leadership. The fable of *The Animals and the Plague* offers a unique perspective to leadership and group dynamics.

Transactional leadership is demonstrated by transactions between a leader and followers for a higher purpose.[14,25,29] The leader sets a goal and uses motivation, performance review, contingencies and reward to achieve the purpose or goal. The ability to communicate effectively, set clear expectations, and motivate followers characterize this leadership style.[26,29] However, since this leadership style emphasizes purpose over subordinates loyalty to the organization is often lacking; this is portrayed in the fable *The Wolves and the Sheep*.[12,14,16,29] Transformational and transactional styles differ in many ways however, the setting, purpose, and context should be considered.[3, 8,14]

Laissez Faire leadership is characterized by avoidant behavior, indecisiveness, and inactivity as demonstrated by the fable *The Bat the Birds and the Beast*. This leadership style shifts power or responsibility to the follower. This transient "shift of power" may appear to be transformational however it lacks structure and direction. Overtime, this lack of structure neglects the growth of the followers contributing to job dis-satisfaction and inefficiencies. In short, lack of effective leadership characterizes this style.[14]

The Full Range Leadership Model

The Full Range Leadership Model by Avolio and Bass is a general leadership theory operationalizing the concepts of transformational, transactional, and Laissez Faire leadership. The Multifactorial Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was created to measure an individual's leadership preference. [10] The model classifies leadership on two ranges from effective to ineffective and passive to active.[1,2] Transformational leadership consists of 4 factors : a charismatic leader that is highly respected by followers (idealized influence), inspires confidence among the followers (inspirational motivation), stimulate participation and innovation (intellectual stimulation), and develop relationship while expressing concern for followers (individualized considerations) [14,16,29] Transactional leadership is expressed in two forms of management by exception either through active or passive actions. The management by exception styles, active and passive, tend to confront the subordinate when performance or standards have not been met.[10,14,16,29] The performance-based standard use of contingency reward may motivate subordinates but does not build organizational loyalty. Lastly, unskilled, apathetic and passivity exemplify Laissez Faire leadership. Depending on organizational structure, qualifications of the followers, and duties this may be effective however as a leadership style and within the literature it is not recommended. [10,14,16,29]

In conclusion, fables represent a tale from the past from which new and personalized meaning can be learned based on the individual's values and belief. Fables are powerful possessing the ability to unite listeners around moral and value-based concepts stimulating open discussion and reflection. This innovative approach to teaching leadership concepts could transform nursing, leadership and healthcare.

The Full Range Leadership Model
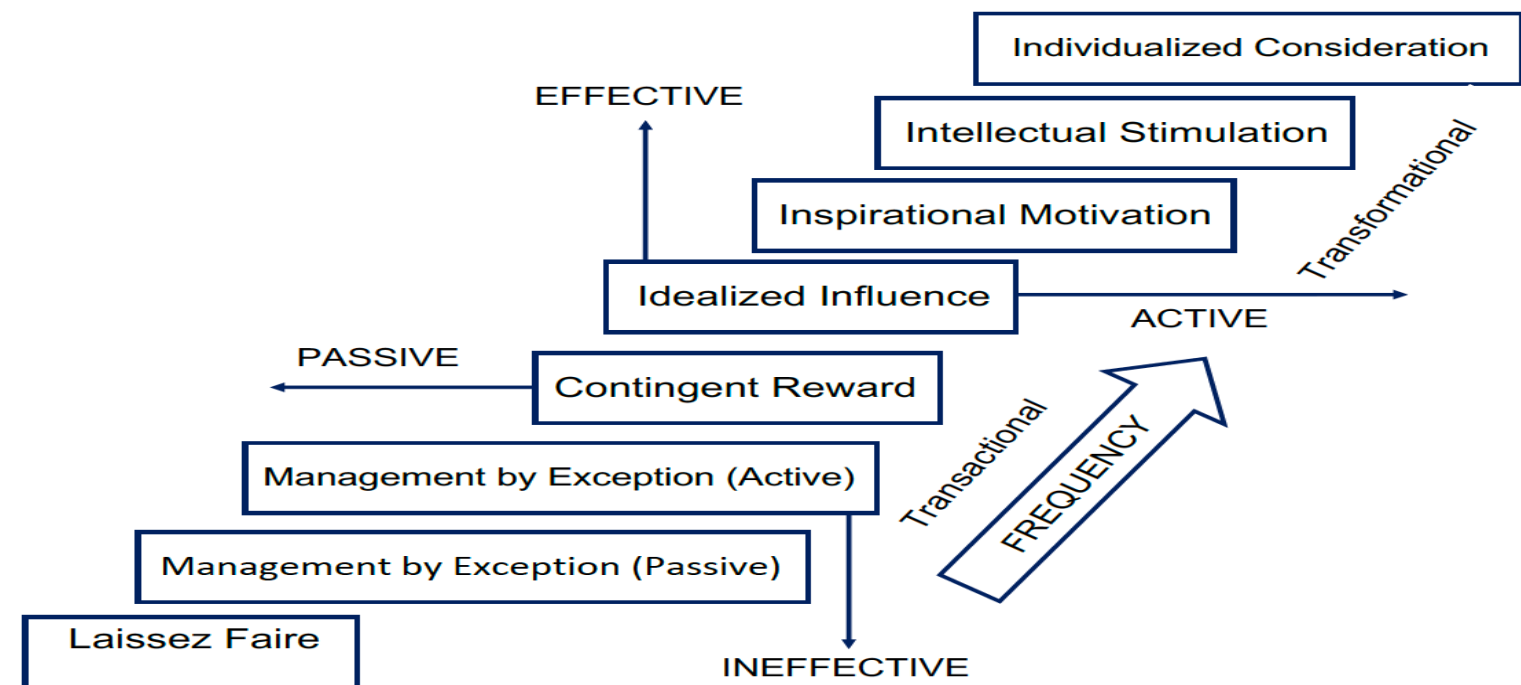
Lesson Plan

Table of Fables Associated with Leadership Characteristics

Fable & Moral Lesson	Leadership Characteristics	Leadership Theory	Leadership Style	Resources
The Animals and the Plague Moral lesson: The weak are made to suffer for the misdeeds of the powerful.	Visionary Motivating Deceit Persuasive	Transformational	Transformational	Merrill, K.C. (2015. Leadership style and patient safety Implications for nurse managers. *The Journal of Nurse Administration*, 45(6), 319-324.
The Shepard's Boy Moral Lesson: Liars are not believed even when they speak the truth	Dishonesty Duplicity Purpose loss			
The Hare and the Tortoise Moral Lesson: Plodding wins the race	Persistence Arrogance Charismatic Inspirational			
The Wolves and the Sheep Moral Lesson: Do not give up friends for foes.	Reward Loyalty +/- Disrespect Allegiance	Transactional	Transactional	Gallagher-Ford , L.& Connor, L. (2020). Transforming Healthcare to Evidenced-Based Healthcare: A failure of leadership. *Journal of Nursing Administration*, 50(5), 248-250.
The Young Crab and his Mother Moral Lesson: Do not tell others how to act unless you can set a good example.	Lead by example Hypocrisy Subordination			
The Bat the Birds and the Beast Moral Lesson: He that is neither one thing or the other has no friends.	Indecisiveness Passiveness Awareness lack		Laissez- Faire	The American Journal of nursing (2020). Learn to manage yourself. *The American Journal of Nursing*, 120 (2) 68-71.

1. Create learning objectives for the leadership content.
2. Determine if dyads, triad or small group seminar format will be most effective.
3. Select a fable to pair with either a leadership article, reading or case study.
4. Consider open-ended structured questions to facilitate content for discussion and reflection.

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Full list of references available on request