

Mary McMahan
Analysis of Personal Leadership Skills
ETEC 660

A path toward leadership has always been part of my future from as young as a junior high student. One teacher in particular made it clear to me that I was a leader and had to make the choice of what direction I would lead my peers. She said I had the ability to keep them on the right path or lead them into trouble. This kind of scared me at the time because I was only 12 years old and didn't want that kind of responsibility. From an early age I have been involved in organizations such as Girl Scouts that developed my leadership skills. As a Cadet and Senior Scout I was involved in the governmental and planning parts of the organizations. Our whole Senior troops was made up of this type of personalities. We were all very goal oriented and needed little adult guidance to plan our activities. Basically, the adult leaders became facilitators who allowed us creative freedom. These adults were my first examples of good leadership traits.

As I was growing up my parents encouraged me to make my own decisions but be willing to live by the choice. They encouraged my involvement in the above organizations. My parents started having problems in their marriage during my sophomore year in high school. This situation

caused me to become more involved in outside activities. Most of these activities challenged my developing leadership skills.

During my college years I continued to stay involved in the same type of organizations. I became active in a service sorority where I planned and executed 3 March of Dimes Walkathons. Alpha Kappa Phi provided many great opportunities to stretch my leadership skills.

It seems that I have always gravitated toward situations that facilitated to need to act in a leadership role. Even when I have tried to stay in my classroom and remain uninvolved in school policy such as the School Improvement Plan or Title I. This has never worked well because the administration has always found ways to draw me into a leadership role. As a teacher, I have been on many building and parish level committees, sponsored 4-H and cheerleading, and worked to mentor new teachers.

It was interesting to take the different self assessment profiles. I agreed with the results on most of them and found some eye opening. In the Problem-solving Profile, the results stated that I preferred direct involvement and experiences. I do love getting into the thick of a problem and working to find a solution. This coincides with my movement toward the Progressivism educational philosophy. I have always preferred to be actively

involved in my learning process. It was difficult to stay interested in classes or jobs that I wasn't actively participating in. For example, I hated working a job that I didn't have to think or found to be repetitive. Challenges have always brought out the best in me.

With the *Big Five Personality* profile I found that the results basically rang true. The first section stated that I tended to be conventional and not always open to new experience. This has not always been true. I feel that with teaching experience and time I have become more conventional. So many trends have come and gone that I am more reluctant to jump on the bandwagon of a new idea.

In the other personality areas I agree that I tend to be well organized, sociable, considerate of others, and generally secure. My security is based on being organized and relationships with co-workers. I have been in a situation where I didn't share the vision of the supervisor and this caused a great deal of confusion and insecurity until I was able to share my vision with others and move away from the negative situation. In the case of organizational skills as I get busier and overly involved I sometimes lose some of the organization skills at a time when I need it the most. This is the situation where I need to be more of a leader and less of a manager. Moving

away from the management tendency and allowing others to be active participants would relieve the stresses that cause me to become less organized and considerate of others.

The Myers-Briggs assessment states my personality type to be INFJ. This is the second time that I have taken this assessment with the similar results. I find a kindred spirit with the description provided. I have always been attracted to others in need. My brother used to call a "bleeding heart liberal" because I tended to defend those in need. I must admit that I have moved a little closer to the center of the continuum. Experiences have changed my perspective.

The results for the *Techno Personality* were mixed. I have the same score in three areas. After reading the description I found it easy to understand the similarity in scores. As a "dreamer" I do love new gadgets or technologies but before I can truly learn to use them I need to find their purpose. I find it difficult to teach other how to use a program or gadget if I am not sold on its use. I agreed with a teacher who came to an *Inspiration* in-service and want me to explain how she would use it in her classroom before she decided whether or not to stay. As a "plugger" I find the need to work at something until I find a comfort level. If I failed to find a comfort

level I usually avoid using the software or hardware. Lastly, as a “techno natural” I do love to use technology. It is not a choice of finding a way to incorporate into a classroom or daily life but a frustration when I am unable to use it on a daily basis. Many teachers see technology as “something” that is extra to do; not a natural part of a successful lesson.

My learning styles profile is similar to ones I have taken in the past. According to the scale, I have a higher preference to visual stimulus but this is not true when it comes to reading comprehension. I will remember more of something that I discuss than just read. This causes me to take notes and sometimes read them aloud to myself. Also when studying for a test or something I need to read orally I practice by reading aloud to myself. Two other strengths that ring true are the active learner and sensing learner. I remember more of what I learn if am actively involved and can relate it to a real world situation. This is probably why I like the hands-on, real world style of teaching.

Lastly, the leadership style profile fits the same traits as many of the other assessments. According to the profile, I am direct, organized, like to control the work of others while keeping the feelings of others in mind.

When looking at my personal leadership traits I find some definite weaknesses. First, I do like to have control of the situation to the point of not delegating responsibility. For some reason I have a problem trusting that someone else will complete the job in a timely manner or in the same way I would do it. This is a weakness that I have been trying to work toward correcting. I need to understand that if a task is completed differently than my expectations it is not necessarily wrong.

Another weakness is to not let myself become more of a manager than a leader. In my need for security I need to allow for change and be flexible. There seems to be more security in the "known" but as a leader I need to allow myself to explore new ideas without the fear that change can ruin everything. The status quo is not always the best strategy.

Looking at the results of the assessment in terms of my personal educational philosophy causes some confusion. Very similar to the conflicting traits of introvert versus extrovert and dilemma between manager and leadership traits I find my educational philosophy caught between two sometimes dissimilar philosophies. This tug of war is between Essentialism and Progressivism.

Essentialism demonstrates my need for a connection between learning and the building on previous learning experience. I believe there are some things all students just need to learn such as multiplication facts. We can make the learning process constructive and fun but in the end sometimes we just have to memorize them for future use. There is a sense of security in the logical thinking and things quantitative. Despite my need for logical thinking I find that students learn best through the construction of their own knowledge. It is like telling a child that the oven is hot. There isn't a real learning experience until the child actually touches the oven and comes to the conclusion it is really hot. Essentialism alone would expect the child to accept the word of the parent and not need to experience the learning first hand.

I have changed over the years from strictly Essentialism to stronger tendency toward Progressivism. In my early experiences I was the knowledge giver and students were expected to accept it as true. It would have been appalling for a student to question me. I did very little group work and relied on the basal texts for all that I taught. Now I hate using textbooks and prefer to have students work on projects with peers. I learned that we don't all "get it" with the lecture, practice, test method.

This should have been obvious to me since I always hated lecture classes in high school and college and love class that I became an active participant.

When relating my educational philosophy to my leadership style I discover that it is the Progressivism that allows for the teacher/leader to take on the role of facilitator. I want the students and adults that I attempt to lead to be active participants in the process and not only take away learning experiences but share experiences.

If I keep moving on this path, I will hopefully leave my Essentialistic tendencies behind and move toward Reconstructivism. This has already begun because as a facilitator I should also be guiding or motivating others to be not only problem solvers but critical thinkers. The traits that surface in the assessments let me know that I am on the right track. I can and want to take a leadership role in education today and tomorrow.