If you had told me a month ago that approaching models of successful leadership at
organizations and companies well outside the purview of K-12 education was relevant to me as a
growth-oriented school leader, you might have been met with some serious side-eye. After all, how can
the successes of Toyota or Whole Foods help inform my actions as a school leader? They deal
with customers and I deal with students and teachers. But there's more than just a surface-level
understanding at play here.

Lead Like Dewey: Interpreting Theory of Practice

Through the Lens of a Professional Philosophy

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Any belief about a leader's attributes is doubled if leaders are trained in ignorance. It is imperative that constructivist
leaders possess strong understandings that are based in solid theory and that they imbue that
philosophy into the values of the organization. This paper will encompass two parts. First, a
discussion of the epistemological theory of leadership followed by an action I have taken that
centers on accountability. Second, I will talk about how my actions tie a Theory of Change project, 20th
that too is a reflection of the Summer Internship and constructivist
leader project within the scope of The Six Secrets of Change (Fullan, 2006), including evidence
at the successes and difficulties.

Part One

The Constructivist Leader (Lambert et al, 2002) opens with a chapter titled,
"Constructivist Leadership: Standards, Equity, and Learning—Weaving Whole Cloth from
Multiple Strands" (Wetherell, 2002, p. 11). In order for that cloth to be as rich and authentic as
possible, one must start with philosophy that underpins all that we as leaders do. Within the translation

LEAD LIKE DEWEY

If you had told me a month ago that appraising models of successful leadership at organizations and companies well outside the purview of K-12 education was relevant to me as a potential school leader, you might have been met with some serious side-eye. After all, how can the successes of Toyota or Whole Foods help inform my actions as a school leader? They deal with customers and I deal with students and teachers, who are not paying for something. My mind was changed completely by Michael Fullan through his book The Six Secrets of Change (2008). I realized that we as potential school leaders have much to learn from the favorable outcomes of any leader that possesses the right set of beliefs and how they are used to shape culture.

Any belief is built on a theory. There are ‘good’ theories, which bolster sound beliefs and equally ‘bad’ ones that are ill informed or based in ignorance. It is imperative that constructivist leaders possess strong convictions that are based in solid theory and that they imbue that philosophy into the values of the organization. This paper will encompass two parts. First, a discussion of the constructivist theory of leadership followed by an action I have taken that connects to constructivism. Rounding out part one, I will talk about how my action is a Theory of Change (Fullan, 2008). Part two is a reflection of the Summer Internship and constructivist leader project within the scope of The Six Secrets of Change (Fullan, 2008), including evidence of successes and difficulties.

**Part One**

The Constructivist Leader (Lambert et al. 2002) opens with a chapter titled, “Constructivist Leadership: Standards, Equity, and Learning—Weaving Whole Cloth from Multiple Strands” (Walker, 2002, p. 1). In order for that cloth to be as rich and authentic as possible, so must our philosophy that underpins all that we as leaders do. “Within the framework
of constructivist leadership, faculties must have the ability to make sense of their unique situation and to develop strategies that fit” (Lambert, 2002). In choosing the theory of constructivism, I am most inspired by the work of John Dewey. In EDA 710, I had the pleasure of reading Dewey’s chapter “My Pedagogic Creed” (2017), in The Curriculum Studies Reader (Flinders & Thornton, 2017). In it, he outlines his five core beliefs on education, school, subject matter [sic], methods, and social progress.

Reading Dewey’s creed was almost like looking at the blueprints of a building being constructed. His creed, originally published in 1897, reads like a foundation for the theories he espoused and the actions that he later took professionally. Like a modern day mission statement, Dewey’s Pedagogic Creed succinctly states the values and aims of his point of view. The mission statement of an organization (business and education) should be the point from which all changes and decisions are made. Whatever term is used; creed, mission statement, or philosophy, they are all a system of beliefs that first establishes then affects the culture of the organization. The culture is the ‘rich and authentic cloth’ made up of the multiple strands of constructivism.

Central to Constructivist Theory is that humans construct knowledge and meaning from their experiences. In order to construct knowledge, much reflection is necessary. With this in mind, reflective practice is the action I take from this theory. I do this by reflecting on who I am as a teacher, learner, and a leader. I ponder my own beliefs in light of those three distinct states of being. I realize that they are interrelated and encompass some of the same beliefs. I have written my own pedagogic creed with one foot in the present, one foot in the future, and eyes toward the past. To learn is to reflect.

Reflective practice is a theory of action (Fullan, 2008, p. 9) for a few reasons. Reflection is a theory that, according to Fullan, ‘travels well’ (2008, p. 1). It can help to “guide the
understanding of complex situations and point to actions likely to be effective under the circumstances” (Fullan, 2008, p.1). Second, leaders who are reflective are thoughtful, and good leaders are thoughtful. They use their theory of action to govern what they do while being open to surprises or new data that direct further action (Fullan, 2008, p. 8). Last, reflection is open ended. It can be done in multiple ways and can be personalized. Reflection on practice leads to better teaching, learning, and leading and enriches culture. This is key because as Fullan states, “you can borrow or steal a technique, but never a philosophy or culture” (2008, p.16).

Part Two

To connect the two sections, I must point out the similarities between Dewey’s Pedagogic Creed and Fullam’s The Six Secrets of Change (2008). They both include sets of beliefs and form a basis for what one does and why one does it. I have had two amazing leadership experiences, a Summer Internship at P.S. 78, and constructivist leader action research project. This section deals with the ways in which the Six Secrets (Fullan, 2008) were evident in both of these activities.

Secret One: Love Your Employees

One of my major responsibilities this Summer was to coordinate mandated student portfolios for grades 3-5. The Six Secrets were evident in the care that I took to meet with mandated teachers on a regular basis and support them as they compiled evidence for their students’ portfolios. I held a meeting, sent memos, and popped in to make sure they understood the parameters, which were newly created this year. “One of the ways you love your employees is by creating the conditions for them to succeed” (Fullan, 2008, p. 25). I think I did just that.

During my action research, I tried my hardest to get across to my collaborators that the Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) program we were working on had equal importance to all parties
involved. It was just as important for teachers as it was for students, and given the proper environment, the school culture would have been positively affected. Fullan (2008, p. 26) refers to the work of Sisodia, Wolfe, and Sheth (2007). *Firms of Endearment*, by stating, "When these authors claim up front that no stakeholder is more important than any other, they are getting to the core of Secret One."

**Secret Two: Connect Peers with Purpose**

I tried my hardest during my internship to rally my colleagues around the fact that careful attention to instruction and evidence collection would facilitate a thorough review and possible promotion for the mandated students. I tried to create a higher purpose to collectively bind colleagues to admin and one another. This is referred to as the We-We Solution in Six Secrets (Fullan, 2008, p.49).

The environment in which I completed my action research was not optimal, but within the group of teachers that were assembled to participate in the study, norms were set and the action was set in motion. According to Fullan (2008, p. 52), at this point one should trust the process and the people in it. I was able to do that to a point, but I was not entirely trustworthy of the administration or the culture of the school at large. This made Secret Two hard to realize in this instance. *The "people in the process" was really your team. Were you able to trust them?*

**Secret Three: Capacity Building Prevails**

My intentions during my action research prove that my heart was in the right place. I aimed to build capacity among my colleagues, but their morale was so low. I am afraid that the effect was not optimal. I found a video of Michael Fullan discussing capacity building on Vimeo (Fullan, 2018) and he referred to it as something that increases the individual and collective
effectiveness of a group to be able to raise the bar and increase student achievement. The overarching leadership made that difficult.

During my internship, I cultivated the talents of the faculty by building on their strengths as much as I was able. Fullan suggests, “you are much better off hiring for purpose and for potential—potential to learn on the job, both individually and with others” (2008, p.71). I did not hire them, but I worked with them to increase the capacity for the greater good.

**Secret Four: Learning is the work**

Barring a toxic environment, the action research intended to provide learning in context for the teachers involved. The action of learning about and practicing SSR was done through the teacher’s work with the students and one another. Rather than professional development, I saw it more as professional learning. This speaks directly to Secret Four.

Although my time at the internship was brief, from my first interaction with the staff, I asserted my love for curiosity and learning. Being the reflective person that I am, I asked teachers with whom I cooperated to reflect on my work with them and their own work in creating the portfolios. Their feedback about themselves and me were enlightening and will help inform the work I do going forward.

**Secret Five: Transparency Rules**

By transparency, Fullan meant openness about results (2008, p.99). During my action research, my team and I were very transparent in discussing the problems that we might face and how the surveys and research should inform our best ways of moving forward. It was used as a tool for improvement by laying all the cards on the table, so to speak, so that we would be best informed on how to proceed.
Proving how reciprocal the Six Secrets are, the action I took in Secret Four is represented here. By asking teachers to appraise their progress over time in regard to portfolio creation and listening to their feedback and helping them to assess their own personal and organizational goals (Fullan, 2008, p.103), I demonstrated...

**Secret Six: Systems Learn**

During my internship, I had many duties but the one that I was given totally responsibility for was the moderation of portfolios for participating school principals. I took into account all of the possibilities for what could go wrong, made choices and decisions based on what I did know and also what I did not know. Leaders need to convey confidence about the future even though they are not (should not be) fully certain (Fullan, 2008, p.117).

As far as Secret Six goes in regard to my action research, I cannot say that my previous school had much in the system to sustain learners so I cannot provide any evidence for this secret. Learning was not held in any regard beyond the testing grades and this research was done across grades K-2.

I might have used the Six Secrets more during my internship in regard to an issue with one of the teachers with whom I cooperated. Mr. Harrison is a second year teacher and had some trouble keeping to deadlines and standards for his portfolios. I gave my bi-weekly reports to my AP and he was not happy. He reprimanded the teacher and wound up giving him an unsatisfactory rating for the summer. I was against the idea of giving him a U. Had I known that the AP would be so punitive, I might have been more stringent in my appeals for their timeliness and accuracy. I felt that this affected Secret Five, Transparency Rules. Had I known about this book, I would have a more impassioned appeal to the administration for leniency.

*Could you have provided more support? Maybe helping him develop personal/professional strategies for meeting deadlines?*
During my research at my previous school, I lacked the trust in my administration and my colleagues to a degree to really connect with them and make the project a true success. To this end, I had a great struggle in Secret Two. I had a marked struggle in all concerning my action research, but it is hard to imbue a purpose where little purpose exists system-wide. It was an eye-opening experience about what not to do as a leader.

Hindsight being 20/20, my use of the Six Secrets adds to the success of my experiences as action researcher and intern in many ways. I have strong convictions and beliefs about education and leadership and it was refreshing to know that many of the secrets outlined in this book were not a secret to me. It was getting across to me the fact that I could look at organizations outside the realm of education as role models. That for me was the biggest secret reveal and a true watershed moment. The Six Secrets let me know that I on the right track and that true buy-in is possible.

The absence of the Six Secrets made my realization that something was wrong take all that much longer. I spent seven years spinning my wheels, wondering why my initiatives and projects I was bringing to the school were going unnoticed and unappreciated. I really thought it was something I was doing wrong. The realization that the culture and environment at large would never be changed by me was jarring but also wake-up call to move on. And I have.

In this paper, I have reflected on theory, the actions I have taken that connect to those theories and what makes it a theory of action. I then discussed how the Six Secrets were evident through two leadership experiences, where I could have used them, how they added to my success, and how the absence of the Six Secrets contributed to difficulties. I will take my creed and my Six Secrets and I will go forward with a passion and zeal to lead like Dewey.
References


Bravo on correct references!

The paper is well done—clear, specific, relevant, and features your own voice in a personal tone

A+