Crossroads of Leadership, Ethics, Higher Education, and Worldviews

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Abstract

Strategic leadership deals with, for example, ethical dilemmas. The article addresses differing worldviews in relation to decolonising the curriculum, and how to assist cross-cultural professionals' behavioural learning. Within pedagogics, critical thinking, based on normative rationales, allowing educational interventions, or concepts, other than empirically proven only is revealed. The common denominator of worldviews appears to be virtues. Descriptions of virtues need translation to touch on professionals. A practical intervention is introduced.

Ancient and actual introduction

Mankind appears to have difficulties with peacefully living together. Empires came and often went due to individualistic behaviour (Wiesner-Hanks et al. 2018, 350). Worldviews remain. These have commonalities, like the 'Principle of reciprocity': "Do not do unto others as you would not have done unto you". Or: A ruler has a moral obligation towards his people's well-being. Why? Perhaps to ensure social existence. From ancestry we can learn to the benefit of current needs. This article helps us to address a gap in knowledge on the 'why' and the 'how', with respect to professional reflection, from the fields of theology and philosophy, as well as applied practice of education. The topic is important as it stimulates awareness, and therefore assists educators and learners to professionally reflect from a broader perspective than rationality alone. The article specifically contributes to opening up the mindset towards another perspective on interventions on the level of virtues as a safe reflective learning environment. In this article, from the perspective of 'strategic leadership', the first paragraph provides an introduction to the main question: How can people, having differing fundamentals, learn to cooperate? The second paragraph addresses two perspectives of difference. It touches on decolonising the curriculum, and on critical conceptual normative pedagogics. The third paragraph addresses reflective angles. The next paragraph connects worldviews towards professional leadership and virtues. Finally, a practical intervention combining behavioural competences and virtues is related to strategic leadership. Then, the article discusses

elements addressed, and provides a conclusion, with ideas for future applied scientific research and practice.

Strategic leadership in a strained world

The ruler's moral obligation towards his society's future can be described as part of strategic leadership. Samimi defines strategic leadership as 'functions performed by individuals at the top levels of an organization, that are intended to have strategic consequences for the firm.' (Samimi et al. 2022) Read 'Firm' as organisation too (*comment by the author*). Samimi identifies eight functions: 1. making strategic decisions; 2. engaging external stakeholders; 3. performing human resource management activities; 4. motivating and influencing; 5. managing information; 6. overseeing operations and administration; 7. managing social and ethical issues; and 8. managing conflicting demands (ibid.). One covers ethical issues. Ethical issues one can relate to corporate social responsibility. The United Nations' objective of 'creating a better world' is described by means of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2023). This is fundamental to strategic leadership. Managing conflicting demands needs having analytical tools aiding decision making processes. Tools to assist are present. One, developed by Winkler is the 'Moral Dilemma Analysis Tool' (Winkler 2005, 40–44; Meeuwsen 2022, 82–83). In Appendix A the practical application of the tool is provided. The tool connects three ancient types of ethics: 1. teleological ethics – positive or negative is based on the impact of an act; 2. deontological ethics – calibration by a current standard in relation to a comparable act, and 3. affiliative ethics – the actor's intention is the focal point (Winkler 2005, 40–44). These can be addressed as of Christian-Judaic origin, or ancient Greek origin. A question can be raised: Are these the origins, or offer other worldviews basics too? The question is important as in a global world where people from differing worldviews meet, cooperate, and are to act in line, e.g., with achieving SDGs.

Can people cooperate, while having differing fundamentals? This article provides food for thought on how to connect people not sharing a comparable worldview, while developing positive behaviour. From an educational design research, however, not proven, but allowed perspective (Gravemeijer and Cobb 2013, 107), a 'how to' practical concept is described.

Do we dare to want to do different?

Worldwide people meet in organisations, education, as well as within worldviews. While, being together these people are to study, or to collaborate towards achieving mutual objectives. As origins differ, teamwork is not always easily done. One has to overcome differences, stereotypes, misunderstandings, as well as other expectations. Scientific research provides textbooks on cross cultural communication (Meyer 2014, 10–12). While, as result of past centuries colonisation, colonisers' educational systems can still be present in former colonies (Wiesner-Hanks et al. 2018, 560; Moncrieffe 2022, 4). As a result, current strategic leadership can be more connected to a so-called Western European approach, instead of a more common cosmopolitan perspective. As a result, an international need for decolonising the curriculum, to reconnect, reorder and reclaim knowledge and teaching methodologies that have been

submerged, hidden or marginalised, urges connections to be made with modes of education originating from other worldviews. The idea is to learn from each other's backgrounds for the good of mankind (Moncrieffe 2022, 1–4).

Based on the Western epistemological principles of the Enlightenment within which proven research results appear key, other approaches may be under pressure. In educational sciences, in pedagogics, the fundament of proof, as a consequence of the Enlightenment is present. In line with decolonising the curriculum one can argue that other ideas are applicable. Within educational design research un- or not fully proven, however, critically discussed designs, are executed in educational practice (Gravemeijer and Cobb 2013, 73–75). Therefore, gradual proof, like 'learning-by-doing', and 'learning-by-reflection' is present. In pedagogics a recent tendency appears, that by means of critical thinking, based on normative rationales, one can allow an educational concept, other than empirically proven only (De Muynck and Kunz 2021, 40–41). The word 'critical' is related to the Greek word *krinein*, and touches on to distinguish what is essential (ibid., 49). While 'normative' is related to pedagogic sciences as widely recognised as a discipline that sets a standard or indicates what is normal and expected. This refers to the need to give direction to action, while linked to worldviews (ibid., 42; Ensie 2023; Encyclo 2023). The approach is known as 'conceptual-normative pedagogics' (De Muynck and Kunz 2021, 41–43).

Clockwise triangular thinking and connecting

De Wit describes the paradox of logic and intuition (De Wit 2020, 61–63). A manager's intuition is developed by gaining experience. However, during decision making on strategic issues, a bias based on inefficiency, unreliability and impression can occur. Then, explicit rational analysis is preferred (ibid.). A need to 'feel' intuitive thinking is linked to rational thinking (ibid.). This link can distinguish between fantasy and reality (ibid.). Intuitive thinking uses the brain's unconscious part of implicit information. Information comes forward, and later is linked with justification by logic, explicit information. Strategic subjects need more innovative and creative thinking to counter old-fashioned cognitive maps. Logical and intuitive thinking are difficult to blend within one person, and can lead to opposition. The paradox is its contradiction, as both are required for strategic leadership.

Can this be overcome? Being aware of the paradox, and the requirement of using both within strategic thinking is first. Second is assistance by systematic meaning-oriented reflection, like: 'MORe3.1.2' (Meeuwsen 2022, 81). However, 'Where to start the back-and-forward step-by-step method?' To counter preference of logic first, 'Clockwise learning' is applicable. This method was developed to help young people who have problems with reading, spelling and mathematics. 'Clockwise learning' is related to children's natural thinking system, being visual, and learning by 'doing'. These children process information differently from anti-clockwise learning. The latter is more based on listening and reasoning. 'Clockwise Learning' improves learning outcomes, and social and emotional problems (Rechtsomleren 2023). The reflectional order becomes: 1. 'Inspiration', sudden thought, 2. 'Intuition', implicit information, and 3.

Logic, justification, using explicit knowledge. These three are thought over within a comprehensive 'Perception', fundamental to the next steps of 'Wanting', and finally 'Doing'. In Appendix B the practical application of the tool is provided.

Connecting worldviews and educational views

The common denominator of worldviews appears to be virtues (Chun 2005; Dahslgaard et al. 2005). Dahslgaard revealed a similarity of six core virtues: courage, humanity, justice, temperance, transcendence, and wisdom. 'It means that the motives, the powers, the reactions, and the being of man are gathered at any given time into a characteristic whole by a definitive moral value, and ethical dominant, so to speak' (Guardini 1967, 4). 'Virtue is also a matter of our attitude to the world.' (ibid., 6) The universal nature of virtues allows, within educational concepts, approaching learners originating from different worldviews in both a legitimate, and ethical equality.

When, 'virtue is a matter' (ibid.), an expression of our attitude to the world, then behaviour will show this. Showing behaviour is described by McClelland's Competency Ice-Berg Model. The most conscious ones: experience, knowledge, and skills, are those above the waterline, the visible tip of the iceberg. Whereas, the less conscious or unconscious ones, like social role, self-image, traits and motives, are submerged (Hay Group 2021). Competency is defined as 'any characteristic of a person that differentiates levels of performance in a given job, role, organisation or culture' (ibid.). Intervening is connected to above, and below the waterline.

An audience to educate is not only directed by means of structures and systems. Another angle is professional culture, stimulating vision and leadership, while being in connection to developing strategy. By making use of educators' vision and personal leadership, they become engaged, and own and feel responsibility. Based on quality of professionals, their cooperation, positive influence towards development of their organisation is stimulated (Both and De Bruijn 2020, 19–20).

Information on virtues (Dahslgaard et al. 2005; Guardini 1967; Havard 2007; Pieper 2004) can be used for preparation of educational concepts. To do this, one needs to connect with the target audience. This can be done by using the language and professional interest of their sectoral backgrounds. The descriptions of worldviews' comparable virtues need translation to touch on professionals' zone of proximate development (Vygotsky 1978, 86).

The higher education sector uses SEEC credit level descriptors 5–8 (SEEC 2021). These are: 5. Associate Degree, 6. Bachelor (Undergraduate), 7. Master (Graduate), 8. Doctoral. According to SEEC:

> Credit level descriptors are a useful reference point for anyone with a responsibility for benchmarking, contextualising and credit-rating learning, whether this learning derives from within or without a formal curriculum. Their considered use aids consistency and transparency of expectations and outcomes for all parties: higher education providers, practitioners, employers, professional bodies and learners (ibid., 4, 27).

These are grouped by: a. cognitive skills, b. practical skills, and c. behaviours and values: "The application of knowledge and understanding provide the basis for the development of many of the other skills and attributes in the descriptors" (ibid., 9–10). Based on descriptors, an educational interventionist can design new(er) education concepts while using descriptors.

Educational design, an intervention

An example of a new(er) educational concept is a textbook aimed at educational leadership in the Netherlands: *Onderwijs vraagt leiderschap!* (Education requires leadership!; Both and De Bruijn 2020). In this paragraph it is used as an educational concept connecting virtues and professional behaviour.

The textbook introduces eight behavioural aspects. These are used among four levels of professionals. They are part of an organisational pyramid. In contrast to a normal pyramid, it is turned upside down (Both and De Bruijn 2020, 173–175). The lowest stage of educational professionals to support and facilitate the level above, is the tier of Board of Governors (1), then followed by Managing Director (2), Heads of Departments (3), and finally Educators (4). In the end all four tiers, aim at the final top layer: being those who learn, students, pupils, etc. Designed for each of the four tiers, 'scans' assist their levels of understanding on how they regard their practice connected to the eight behavioural aspects (ibid., 213–227). These are: 1. Have a collective ambition, 2. Inspire, 3. Communicate, 4. Be clear about outcome and provide feedback, 5. Have an assertive performance, 6. Be a heat shield, 7. Have an authoritative but serving and humble attitude, 8. Direct flow.

During masterclasses, as an interventional concept, learning outcomes can be realised: a. aimed at each of the four tiers; b. introduction of theory per behavioural aspect, as addressed in *Onderwijs vraagt leiderschap!* (Education requires leadership!); c. small group meaning-oriented reflective learning (Meeuwsen 2022, 81); d. using behavioural aspect dedicated case studies; e. connected to relevant virtues (Theme Centered Interaction; Kaiser 2018, 191–207); f. 'transfer learning'; and ensuing in g. 'thrill' (sensation, auto-motivation) of participants (Hattie and Donoghue 2016).

Keys for development of these concepts are: a. SEEC descriptors; b. zone of proximate development; c. conceptual-normative pedagogic, but critical mind-set; and d. evaluative learning-cycle, e.g., Deming's PDSA Cycle (Plan-Do-Study-Act) (The W. Edwards Deming Institute 2023), and to be critically used.

Discussion

Strategic leadership comprises of, among others 'managing social and ethical issues', and 'managing conflicting demands' (Samimi et al. 2022). This leadership is related to the United Nations' objective of 'creating a better world' (United Nations 2023). Dealing with ethical dilemmas can be handled by means of systematic approach, like the 'Moral Dilemma Analysis Tool' (Meeuwsen 2022, 79, 82–83). People can cooperate, albeit having differing worldviews. Pedagogics shows that by means of critical thinking, based on normative

rationales, one can execute an educational concept other than the empirically proven (De Muynck and Kunz 2021, 40–41). Approaches of logical and intuitive thinking are difficult to blend within one person, and can lead to opposition, although both are required for strategic leadership (De Wit 2020, 61–63). A systematic meaning-oriented reflection technique can practically assist: i.e., 'MORe3.1.2' (Meeuwsen 2022, 81). To counter preference of logic first, a 'Clockwise learning' reflective order is asking oneself reflective questions originating from: Inspiration, via Intuition to Logic, etc. (Appendix B). The educator, as critical conceptual-normative pedagogue, uses an active and reflective learning approach, towards 'transfer learning', realising his self-motivational 'thrill' (Hattie and Donoghue 2016).

A common denominator of worldviews appears to be virtues (Chun 2005; Dahslgaard et al. 2005). Universal virtues allow approaching learners originating from different worldviews in both a legitimate, and ethical equality. Virtues are related to behaviour shown. Intervening needs to be connected to both above, as well as below an ice-berg's waterline, the less conscious or unconscious factors (Hay Group 2021). Professionals are to be stimulated on vision and professional leadership (Both and De Bruijn 2020, 19–20). Descriptions of worldviews comparable virtues need translation to touch on the zone of proximate development (Vygotsky 1978, 86). The higher education sector uses SEEC credit level descriptors 5–8 (SEEC 2021). Educational interventionists are to design new(er) educational concepts using descriptors.

One of the newer concepts makes use of a textbook within professional development of the educational sector in the Netherlands: *Onderwijs vraagt leiderschap!* (Education requires leadership!; Both and De Bruijn 2020). While using the textbook behavioural aspects and virtues are brought together, per organisational level, by means of didactic learning cycle taking the target audience of professionals as the focus.

Conclusion

Actual strategic leadership invites us to dare to 'create a better world', while having to deal with: 'managing social and ethical issues' and 'managing conflicting demands'. This can be achieved by systematically using a clockwise critical reflection using a comprehensive combination of inspiration, intuition, and logic. The worldviews' common denominator of virtues can assist to bridge cross-cultural differences, and provide an answer to 'decolonising the curriculum', within a safe learning environment. Inside educational concepts virtues need translation to the zone of proximate development of target audiences. SEEC credit level descriptors provide an educational interventionist assistance to design educational concepts to approach a particular audience.

One concept is based on a Netherlands professional educational level textbook, offering possibilities of interventions connected to worldviews virtues and behavioural aspects: *Onderwijs vraagt leiderschap!* (Education requires leadership!; Both and De Bruijn 2020). Whereas, for another sector a comparable textbook is available: *Zorg vraagt leiderschap!* (Medical care requires leadership!; Both and De Bruijn 2015). Perhaps it is time to offer other sector-related versions in English, and other languages too.

Having practical translations of virtues into behavioural aspects to assist educational concepts may be helpful, while, creating within a safe learning environment an even more common worldviews virtuous language. By doing so, we assist 'creating a better world' by means of educational concepts, connected to decolonised theological and philosophical perspectives.

Appendix A – Moral Dilemma Analytical Tool (MDAT)

Seven basic principles

1. Mapping interests of all those involved.
2. Discuss, have a dialogue with others; offering differing angles.
3. Execute a total analysis before deciding; do not jump to conclusion.
4. Avoid fallacies, e.g., 'Everyone does it anyway'; 'We had no choice', 'It is an incident'; 'We do obey the law'; 'Business is business'; 'It is a matter of survival of the fittest'.
5. Use the principle of reciprocity: 'Do not do unto others as you would not have them do unto you'.
6. Use the principle of universality: 'Same decision in comparable situations'.
7. Reason from the perspective of three types of ethical principles:
   A. Teleological ethics or 'Impact ethics', positive or negative is based on the impact of an act;
   B. Deontological ethics or 'Ethics of principle', calibration by the current standard in relation to this or a comparable act;
   C. Affiliative ethics, the actor's intention is the focal point.

Six steps to take

The order shows a kind of hierarchy, and describes interests in a constrained manner.

1. What is the moral problem? What situation or behaviour is disputable, whether being morally right or wrong?
2. Who are the stakeholders and what are their interests? Is it: a. Isolated self-interest or egoism; b. Included self-interest; related to general moral principles, e.g., 'justice'; c. Interests of others, e.g., charities, or d. General interest of society as a whole?
3. Which different courses of action are present?
4. Which interests are affected positively or negatively?
5. Which standards or values are at issue in the case?
6. Balancing of interests and conclusion:
   A. Which interests are more important, and why?
   B. Am I using fallacies?
   C. What conclusion do I draw related to the dilemma?
   D. Can I defend my conclusion based on:
      a. The three ethical principles?
      b. Principle of reciprocity?
      c. Principle of universality?

Derived from and based on Winkler (2005, 40–44)

Appendix B – Reflection by steps on 'Past' ('Did'), and 'Future'('Do') – 'MORe3.1.2'

Reflection by steps on 'Past' ('Did'), and 'Future'('Do') – 'MORe3.1.2'
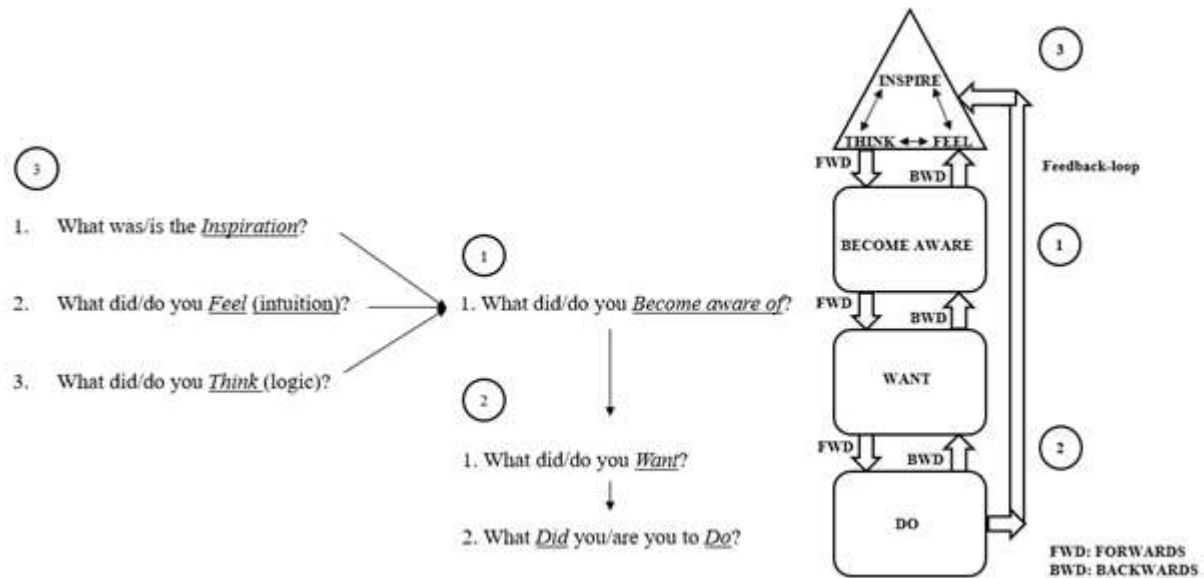
Revised from, and based on Meeuwsen, 2022, 81

Two stages: 'Past' & 'Future', i.e., 'Did' and 'Do'

1. One looks at what one 'Did' and reflects on the 'Past' activity. Appear steps 3, or 1, or 2 less clear, one goes backwards (BWD). When aspects are clear, one goes forwards (FWD) again. This BWD and FWD, is like an 'Elevator', until reflection on the 'Past' is concluded. Then, learning is at hand.

2. While one was reflecting on the Past ('Did'), a learning path towards the Future ('Do') commences. With respect to what one wants to 'Do' in the 'Future', steps 3, 1, and 2 are taken. When less clear, use the 'Elevator'. Finally, what to 'Do' in the 'Future' becomes clear.

The feedback-loop on 'Past' & 'Future', i.e., 'Did' and 'Do', continues.

Derived from, and based on Meeuwsen (2022, 81)

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