Challenging the Status Quo Meaning of Educational Quality: Introducing Transformational Quality (TQ) Theory©

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Dedicated to Maria-Teresa Gomez, my beautiful children Liam and Jessica Barry, my brother Greg Barry and his beautiful family, my mother and father, Sue Wallace, Stevie Vanhegan, Margo Marvin, Frank Ledwith, Jack Whitehead, Robert Pirsig, Paulo Freire, Robert LaRochelle, Ed Duclos, Phil Harak, Coach Jude Kelly, Joe Ehrmann, Mrs. Ward, and Laura Hayes without whom the creation of TQ Theory would not exist and have enriched my life in ineffable ways.

Abstract

Infectious pessimism, widespread apathy, and volatile relationships: This describes the high school culture I adopted as a first time principal at Potsdam High School in rural New England, U.S.A. I conducted a three-year intensive self-study and participatory action research project to develop a school culture of quality and hope. I worked to challenge the status quo definition of educational quality in public education as an exclusionary, elitist, and quantitative concept based in constant interpersonal competition and materialism. Based on the research, I created a new meta-model of quality as a guide to my leadership orientation toward other people and learning called, Transformational Quality (TQ) Theory™. The article, derived from my Ph.D. thesis, describes how TQ Theory influenced my improvement as a school leader, the learning of students and teachers, and transformed the academic and social milieu of a previously failing American high school.

Introduction: Background and Purpose

I am a critical theorist. This means I embrace a healthy balance between intellectualism and social change (McLaren 1989, 1998; Kincheloe and McLaren, 2007; Shor, 1992). I defined intellect as referring to developing the skills and habits of being an effective thinker, problem solver, and having skills and knowledge relevant to the culture one lives within (Gardner, 2000, 1999, 1993, 1991). I defined social change as referring to change that leads our society toward a more pure democratic, fair, just, imaginative and creative, caring, and humanistic way of being (Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, 1988; Dewey, 1938/1997; Frankl, 2000, 1984; Hart, 2001; Kohl, 2004, 1998, 1994; Kohn, 1994, 1986; Kozol, 1991, Noddings, 1995, 1984; Sergiovanni, 1992). The challenge of introducing progressive reform into the American public high school system is a formidable task. It is an institution often fraught with mistrust, power struggles, a rigid system of haves and have nots, and a fanatical embrace of behaviourist and statistical techniques to address learning and discipline (Holt, 1995; Leonard, 1991, 1987, 1978; Postman, 1969; Sizer, 1992; Spring, 1991). I believed in order to successfully influence a school of quality and hope; I needed clarity concerning the meaning of educational quality. Establishing this clarity would facilitate confidence that I was leading the school in the right direction.

As an educator and school leader, I vowed to "walk the talk" of being a critical theorist and take action to convert school from a "place of information" into a "place of transformation" (Freire, 1985, 1970; Hart, 2001; Leithwood and Jantzi, 1990). I aimed to create a constructivist learning (Brooks and Brooks 2003) culture focused on democratic principles. I, therefore, sought to establish a shared agreement about the meanings and dispositions of quality and establish social norms to support the agreement (Habermas, 1984; McCarthy, 1984; Rorty, 1999).

Living Theory

Whitehead and Huxtable explained living theory education research as the:

…inclusion of energy-flowing values in the explanatory principles individuals use to explain their educational influences in their own living, in the learning of others in the learning of the social formations in which they live and work. The process of clarifying the meanings of energy-flowing values as these emerge through practice includes action reflection cycles in which individuals express their concerns when their values are not being lived as fully as they wish; their imaginations generate possibilities for living their values more fully, the chose an action plan and act on it, gathering data to make a judgment on their effectiveness, they evaluate their influence in relation to their values, skills and understandings, they modify their concerns, imagined possibilities and actions in the light of their evaluations. (Whitehead and Huxtable, 2010, p. 9-10)

A living theory research approach demonstrates profound respect for the educational researcher as an agent of educational change and improvement (McNiff and Whitehead, 2009; Kincheloe, 1991). It is research influenced by, but not beholden to, the authority of reported experts and intellectuals and the literature of the past (Moustakas, 1956). I used

the following five step approach to living theory action research advocated by McNiff, Lomax, and Whitehead (2009):

1. *I experience a concern when some of my educational values are denied in my practice.* My concern was my values and beliefs about educational quality were often denied by the implied expectation my role as school principal was to maintain the status quo of educational quality as an exclusionary, elitist, and quantitative concept based in interpersonal competition and materialism.

2. *I imagine a solution to the concern.* I sought to recognize school situations where my values and beliefs about educational quality were being denied by the status quo and influenced others to do the same. Using data from semi-structured interviews, my reflective research journal, the literature, and discussions with participants, I imagined creating a meta-model of transformational quality that represented the collective values and beliefs of people in the school and local community. I searched for an understanding of educational quality that was life-affirming, need-fulfilling and performance enhancing and would serve as a guide for planning, nurturing, and assessing quality in my school leadership thinking, actions, and decisions making.

3. *I act in the direction of the imagined solution.* I initiated school reform in reframing the meaning of educational quality in critical areas where the status quo meaning of quality was notably contradictory of students', staff, and my own values and beliefs.

4. *I evaluate the outcome of the solution.* I looked for contradiction between my "quality" intentions and the consequences of my actions. In order to gather more detailed and personal feedback, I met with a group of three critical friends, a school principal, psychologist, and administrative assistant. The critical friends observed me on a routine basis in my role as principal and their feedback came from their first-hand experience of my leadership. I also met with a validation group of teachers, students, and parents of students twice a month for a year and a half to gather feedback and assess resonance.

5. *I modify my practice, plans and ideas in the light of the evaluation.* Based on the feedback I gathered from validation groups and critical friends, I modified my leadership approach and understanding to limit the contradictions between my intentions toward promoting transformational quality and the consequences of my decisions and actions.

The living theory approach required I produced evidence to demonstrate I had improved my practice as an educational leader for the good of others and this evidence was validated by the people I claimed to have influenced for the better (McNiff and Whitehead, 2009; Reason and Bradbury, 2008 Shacklock and Smyth, 1998; Whitehead, 2010, 2009, 2008, 1989, 1985).

Data Collection Methods and Techniques

I used a multi-method qualitative approach (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Mason, 2002, 1996; Merriam, 2009) for collecting data, featuring: semi-structured interviews, reflective journal writing, resonant action research validation groups, and critical friends.

Reflective journal writing (Blaikie, 2000; Schön, 1987; Schratz and Walker, 1995) allowed me to map my evolution in understanding the meaning of quality in student and teacher expectations, development and performance. It also served as a record of the decisions I made as the school principal and my theoretical and pragmatic justifications for my decisions (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998; Koutselini, 2008; Shacklock and Smyth, 1998). The research journal was a critical heuristic tool for self-understanding and transformation (Bruner, 1990; Cassam, 1997; Cooper, 1991; Cooper and Dunlap, 1989; Dewey, 1933; Neilsen, 1991; Schmidt and Canser, 2010).

I conducted semi-structured interviews (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Given, 2008) to gain deeper understanding and insight into people's values and beliefs and how they understood, modelled, and categorised quality experiences. I conducted semi-structured interviews at three state high schools in New England, a middle school, and with four graduate education classes at a state college and university which I served as an adjunct instructor of graduate education. I believed it was important to collect data from multiple sources besides my workplace. It allowed me to see the "quality" landscape of the school within the context of the state. Teacher interviews occurred in both focus group and individual interviews. A total of seventy-four teachers from three high schools, thirty teachers from the middle school level, eighty two students from the high school level, thirteen students from the middle level, and seventy five graduate education students were interviewed through purposeful selection. Out of the two hundred and seventy four people interviewed, forty-three people were interviewed on a "one to one" basis and not as part of a focus group. All adult focus group data collection was tape recorded and transcribed by me. All individual interviews were not tape recorded and notes during the interview were taken by me.

The selection process was purposeful as I sought a group of students who represented the full range of the school populace. At Potsdam High School, where I served as principal, twenty-seven students participated out of a school population of three hundred and eleven. At another high school in the State fifty-five students were interviewed out of a population of one thousand five hundred. The thirteen middle school participants came from a school of six hundred. All student interviews were focus group based. Interviews were not audio recorded and I recorded notes during the semi-structured discussions. I discovered many students were uncomfortable with the taping during pilot studies and preferred to not have one present. The data from the interviews was analysed by a seeking the least amount of thematic categories to explain the data and conversation analysis, which included observation of body language, tonality, and pacing. I am a certified practitioner of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) (NLP Comprehensive, 2008). The training for NLP certification included one hundred and thirty hours of residential based instruction in Winter Park, Colorado. The certification course included in-depth instruction and performance based assessment of competently interpreting body language cues and patterns and building values based rapport with other people.

The third data source was action research validation groups (McNiff, 2002; Braud and Anderson, 1998). The validation groups served a twofold purpose: first, as a means to seek validation of my research interpretations and findings and second, as an action planning committee to initiate social change based on their participation in the action research. The committee consisted of twelve to fourteen teacher volunteers and two parents. I also had a student validation group that consisted up of eleven students representing each grade level in the school. I met with the student group once a month and the adult group twice a month over the period of one and a half years. These participants were integral to the research as their input, imagination, creativity, and willing to dialogue about meaningful and challenging issues related to the meaning of quality was invaluable, invigorating, and inspiring.

The last data source was from dialogue with critical friends (Costa and Kallick, 1993). A critical friend is:

> …one or more of the people you are working with. These critical friends should be willing to discuss your work sympathetically. You and your critical friend(s) choose each other, so you need to negotiate the ground rules of your relationship. This person can be your best ally, and you must never take him or her for granted. As well as expecting support from your friend(s), you must also be prepared to support in return. This means being available, even in unsocial hours, being able to offer as well as receive advice, even if it is painful or unwelcome, and always aiming to praise and offer support. (McNiff, Lomax, and Whitehead, 1996, p.30)

I had three critical friends: Jim, a veteran secondary school principal; Vanessa, a school psychologist; and Maureen, a high school administrative assistant. Jim, Vanessa, and Maureen were people I highly respected and trusted and were willing to ask me probing and provocative questions, critique the data, and evaluate my conclusions. As a male researcher, I purposely chose to have two females and one male critical friend to gain a wide breadth of perspectives. Gender influences the way people conceptualise information and observe the world (Lovat, 1992); therefore, I believed it critically necessary to have gender balance.

We spoke once a week for at least a half-hour over the course of two school years about the research. Informing me where they thought I had blind spots in my thinking and when my interpretations of the data resonated with them or not. Due to the varied background of my critical friends, I gained insight from three unique perspectives: a school leadership perspective from the principal, a mental health perspective from the school psychologist, and a behind the scenes perspective of how a school operates from my administrative assistant.

Through triangulation between interview and feedback data, journal entries, and educational praxis, I identified patterns of agreement and disagreement between all the different descriptions and examples of how participants understood, modelled, and conceptualised the meaning of educational quality. I did not consider people's interview responses as right or wrong when analysing the data. All data from participants were considered subjectively true at the time the interviews occurred and were given equal value regardless of the power or social status of each participant. I did this to limit the risk my pre-understanding of, or biases toward, educational quality would invalidate potentially important information.

Issues of Validity and Standards of Judgment

I expect my research findings to resonate with the reader related to universal themes of power, class, and conflict that are inextricably linked to the meaning of quality in education (Apple, 1999, 1996, 1982; Bache, 2008; Freire, 1985; Giroux, 1997, 1983, 1981; Hooks, 1994; McLaren and Leonard, 1993; McTaggart, 2011; Noddings, 2005, 2002). My standards of judgment were my leadership influence regarding improved student achievement and access to education opportunities, improved teacher performance and job satisfaction, and improvement in the life-affirming and need-fulfilling academic and social milieu of the school culture. I also documented how the transformational model of quality I developed helped me to recognise and correct contradictions in my leadership between my behaviour and decision and my educational values and beliefs (Whitehead, 2010, 2008).

Data Description

Self- Study Data

I recorded in the research journal every time I heard the word "quality" referred to in school or at school related functions, i.e. sporting events. The following are examples I recorded that are representative of the data set:

I expect your homework to be quality. Follow all directions and complete it on time. (a high school social studies teacher talking his class, personal communication, March 6, 2006)

I expect a quality effort from all of you. Do your best, work together as a team. We act as one and everyone does their job. (A football coach talking his players, personal communication May 9, 2007)

Quality work doesn't mean you copy a picture perfectly. It is your representation of the picture as you see it using the skills you have learned in class. (An art teacher speaking to her class, personal communication, March 7, 2007)

These kids don't care about quality. They don't listen and don't do their homework. The work they do is sloppy. How do they expect to succeed in life with their attitude? (A teacher speaking to colleagues in the teacher's break room between classes, personal communication, May 29, 2006)

You don't seem to care about the quality of your work so I will for you. You will come home and I will sit next to you until all your homework is done. You will get good grades even if I have to sit in class next to you. Maybe that's the embarrassment you need to start getting good grades. (A parent speaking to her child during a teacher meeting, personal communication, February 29, 2006)

Our number one concern is supporting high quality education. We need quality teachers and classes if we are going to succeed. (A Board of Education member speaking at a meeting, personal communication, March 29, 2006)

He's a quality kid. He's smart, a great athlete. I wish we had more kids like this. (A teacher speaking at a meeting, personal communication, March 29, 2007)

She says the work isn't quality! That's ridiculous. I worked hours on this paper. This is an A paper! What does she know about quality. (A student talking protesting a teacher's grade on her paper, personal communication, October 15, 2008)

I also noted examples in school of when I used, thought about, or observed quality during the school day. My research journal revealed I often labelled daily experiences as quality when witnessing students helping each other in class or on the pitch, or witnessing a teacher and a student, or class in deep rapport. I witnessed quality when watching a student give a passionate and knowledgeable presentation in front of their classmates and teacher(s). I noticed seemingly mundane things such as the building feeling comfortably warm on a cold winter day and the fact that classrooms were well decorated and smelled pleasant as quality. I recorded emotionally moving situations such as handing a high school diploma at graduation to a student who I thought may never make it as quality; to a student excitingly telling me what they learned in a class; to creating a successful school budget; to feelings close camaraderie between staff and students.

Semi-Structured Interviews

After interviewing two hundred and seventy four participants, there was an abundance of rich data about people's values, beliefs, and conceptualisations about quality. It was evident there was a mosaic of ways people defined, categorised and experienced quality. For instance, a high school science teacher, Keri, I interviewed stated "Quality is about meeting predetermined standards" (personal communication, September 9, 2008). Jan, a high school art teacher, shared, "Quality is about fully expressing yourself and being who you are. It's about improving the expression of who you are" (personal communication, March 9, 2007). Leandra, a high school guidance counsellor, believed that, "Quality is doing things well without hurting others" (personal communication, February 14, 2007).

A varsity field hockey coach shared with me, "Quality occurs when things click. Like my team. Quality happens when the players are in rhythm with each other and using their skills and strategies effectively. Which is usually done without thinking because you practice so much your body remembers" (personal communication, September 21, 2005).

In a focus group interview of a teaching team at a State public school, I asked the question, "How do you understand and conceptualise the word quality as it relates to American public school education?" (Personal communication, May 9, 2007)

> Quality is about using your imagination and being creative. It is also about meeting a standard, but that's lesser quality in a way, you know what I mean? Quality is beautiful and beauty is different between all of us isn't it. (Theresa, an art teacher, personal communication, May 9, 2007)

> Quality is like a good pair of pants! You know, it fits like it should; it's comfortable when you have the right fit. A good pair of pants, that's it. It's like Theresa said too it's about being creative, not just copying and doing it like everyone else. Not that this is always bad, but it's not always good that's for sure. So I guess I think quality is doing things good… hard to define you know. Something is good and you know it, like my pair of pants example. (Rob, social studies teacher, personal communication, May 9, 2007).

> I want my students to see and feel beyond themselves. You know, if we are reading about the holocaust, I don't want them to just know the dates and the (puts her hands up to denote she is inserting verbal quotation marks) "official story." If they can't transcend themselves they never will get it. They won't know anything; they would just have learned

some ultimately useless facts, if you can even call them that. Quality is about knowing how to do the basics, feel competent about your skills, and seeking to see and feel beyond yourself. You listen, you really hear others. All that comes together to define quality the way I paint it." (Helen, English teacher, personal communication, May 9, 2007)

This small data set I shared with you illustrates the wide range of depth and breadth of people's different understandings of the meaning of educational quality. By the time I was finished collecting data I had hundreds of different stories reflecting people's values and beliefs regarding quality's meaning. The challenge was to create a meta-model of quality that mapped all the various categories of people's understandings, models, and conceptualisations of educational quality into a cogent model of the meaning of quality.

Interpretations of the Data and Creation of Transformational Quality (TQ) Theory

I discovered, after five months of painstaking searching for patterns in the plethora of data that all the data I collected about quality fit into four general thematic quadrant categories: *Biological/ Physical, Psychological/Intellectual, Sociological,* and *Existential*.

Biological/Physical	Psychological/Intellectual
Quality	
Sociological	Existential

Figure 1. Four quadrants of the meaning of quality

Biological/Physical Quality: Quality in this dimension is about sustaining and improving biological/physical health and experiencing desirable biological/physical processes and feelings. It is also about protecting, nurturing, and respecting life, both human and non-human. Biological/Physical quality addresses such questions as: How do I demonstrate care for my own body and respect for the bodies of others? What do I do to experience desirable physical feeling in way respectful of my own body and the bodies of others? How do I demonstrate I understand my own body and my control of it?

Psychological/Intellectual Quality: Quality is about constructing personal meaning from information, having emotional maturity and availability, knowing when to follow directions, empathy, and gaining the knowledge and skills necessary to function effectively in society and feel competent. Psychological/Intellectual quality addresses such questions as: How does what I know help me understand who I am and my position in the world? How do I know I am competent at something? How can I do I show I know the process of being competent at something? How can I improve the view of my community, and the larger world, to make it a better place to live for myself and other people? How do I manage my

emotions and thought process to be a highly functioning human being? How do I achieve authentic happiness? How can I love and find love? How do I establish a life of meaning?

Sociological Quality: Quality is about working effectively with others. It is about showing care for the freedom, safety, and well-being of others. It is being able to know the right time to be a leader, a follower, or be independent. It is about respecting the sanctity of others and respecting the right of people to choose their own identity. In this dimension, the meaning of quality is reflected in being able to establish rapport with a diverse group of people. Sociological quality is an active desire for social justice and equality and addresses questions such as: How do I show others I care? How do I know other people care about me? How do I disagree with others without being disagreeable? How do I show respect for other people's basic needs? How do I find and sustain a sense of belongingness? How can improve my positive rapport the people? How can I make my sense of the world a more peaceful, need-fulfilling, and meaningful place to live? How can I help others and myself improve? How can I see situations from other perspectives so that I can understand the values and beliefs of other people better? How can I improve my sense of "we" in my daily interactions with other people? How can I improve the happiness of others?

Existential Quality: Quality is about people understanding the beauty, pleasure, angst, and cruelty of living in the world and maintaining curiosity in the wonders of being alive while finding meaning in it. It is experiencing the joy and anxiety of being free and accepting responsibility for one's own life. A person experiences his or her unique individuality and respects the right of others to express themselves. Existential quality is gaining knowledge from within our own lives and not from a source outside of the self. The expression of existential quality is evident in an education context when people test their self-produced theories of knowledge though comparing and contrasting it with others through authentic listening and a spirit of willingness to synthesise differing theories when possible. The experience of comparing and contrasting one's own living theories with other peoples' living theories leads to the rejection, adjustment, or validation of self-produced theories of knowledge. Existential quality addresses the questions: "How do I know what I know and how is it meaningful? Whom have I chosen to be and does my identity promote peace, happiness, contentment in my life and the life of others? How do I experience freedom without hurting other? How can I better accept responsibility for my life and improve my skill in overcoming the anxiety of facing uncertainty? How do I improve the milieu of the places I live and work to improve my own and other peoples' sense of hope, meaning, and will to live and succeed? Existential quality, in essence, is about people learning how to be a self- aware and other-aware to improve life.

I discovered subcategories of meaning within each quadrant of quality's meaning: *common* and *meta-normal*. The subcategory of "common quality" in each quadrant of quality's meaning deals with fitness for purpose or meeting a predetermined standard. The "meta-normal" subcategory of quality's meaning dealt with understandings of quality that transcended meeting a predetermined standard in each quadrant of quality's meaning: These consists of the three further subcategories: *transcendent, transpersonal and ineffable*. The following illustration shows how I perceived the categories within each quadrant of quality. Important to note are the dotted lines making up the circle as they portray the idea quality experience is fluid and open and is not necessarily restrained to any one category at any one time. It is an open system, not a closed and bounded system.
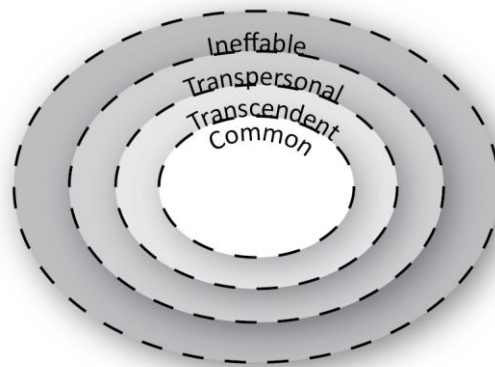
Figure 2. Dimensions of Quality Experience in Each Quadrant of the Meaning of Quality

The three subcategories are further detailed in the following figure below with quotes from participants to illustrate examples of meaning:
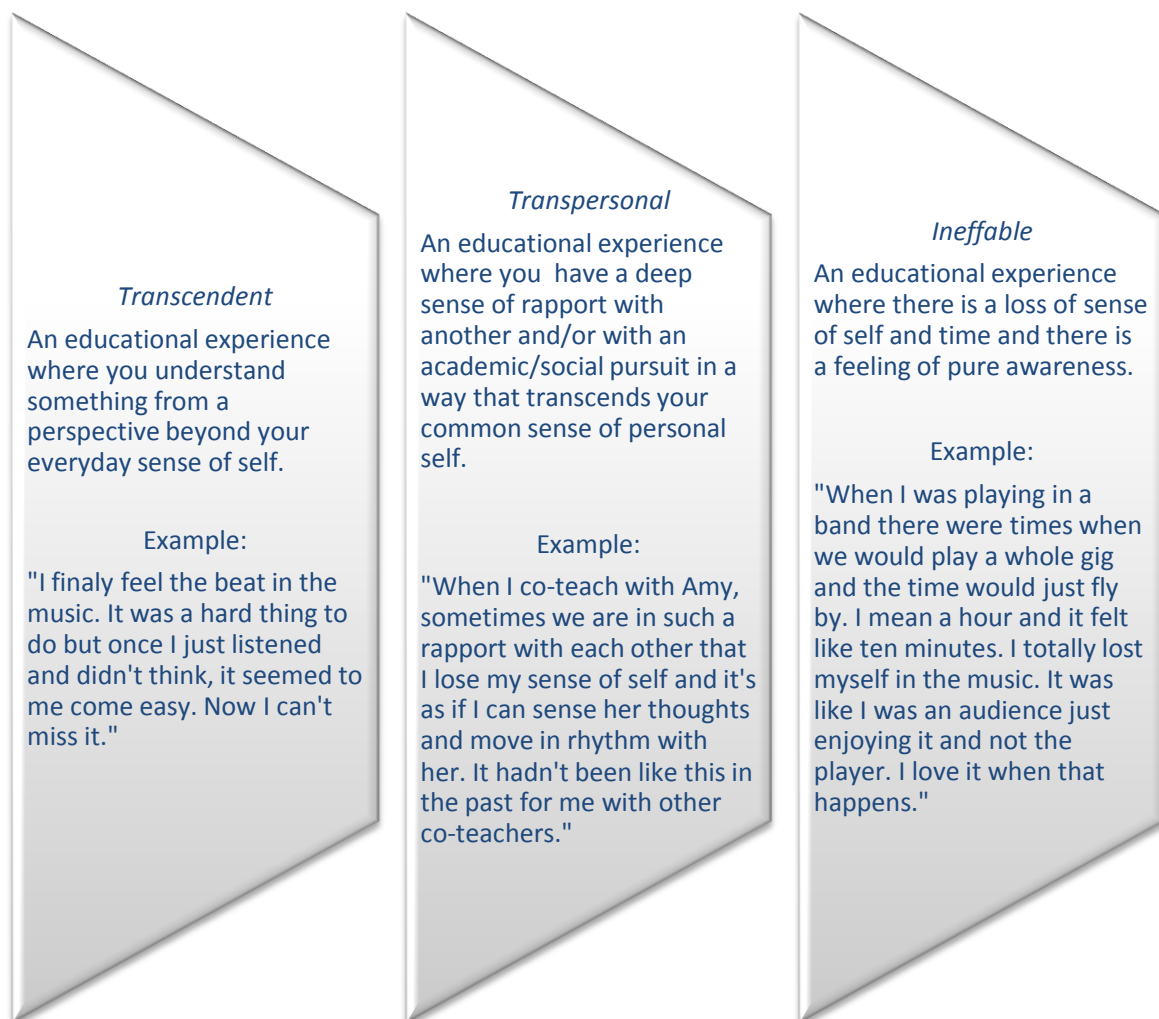
Transcendent

An educational experience where you understand something from a perspective beyond your everyday sense of self.

Example:

"I finaly feel the beat in the music. It was a hard thing to do but once I just listened and didn't think, it seemed to me come easy. Now I can't miss it."

Transpersonal

An educational experience where you have a deep sense of rapport with another and/or with an academic/social pursuit in a way that transcends your common sense of personal self.

Example:

"When I co-teach with Amy, sometimes we are in such a rapport with each other that I lose my sense of self and it's as if I can sense her thoughts and move in rhythm with her. It hadn't been like this in the past for me with other co-teachers."

Ineffable

An educational experience where there is a loss of sense of self and time and there is a feeling of pure awareness.

Example:

"When I was playing in a band there were times when we would play a whole gig and the time would just fly by. I mean a hour and it felt like ten minutes. I totally lost myself in the music. It was like I was an audience just enjoying it and not the player. I love it when that happens."

Figure 3. The Meta-Normal Dimensions of the Meaning of Quality

The following is an example of how I incorporated all the data into a cogent conceptual explanatory framework. I have included quotes from participants as examples of how statements were categorised in the framework.

Table 1.   Explanatory Framework of the Meaning of Educational Quality

Living Dimension	Field	Sub Fields	Quality Statement
Biological/ Physiological	**Common ("fitness for purpose")**		**"In quality my body feels great. Everything is in tune" "Quality: I'm comfortable with my body"**
	Metanormal	*Transcendent*	"Quality is when I seemingly leave my body and watch it work. It's a great feeling."
		Transpersonal	"It's as if our bodies come together on the field. We each feel where each other is going" (reference to field hockey).
		Ineffable	"I have had amazing quality experiences with my dog. We understand each other at a level I can't describe. Unless you have a dog you have been close to, you won't know what I mean.
Intellectual/ Psychological	**Common ("fitness for purpose")**		**"I'm thinking clearly. Quality is when I'm not distracted and focused on the task at hand"**
	Metanormal	*Transcendent*	"I sort of watch my mind work. When I'm having a quality experience I don't so much think as I watch myself, allow myself to think freely."
		Transpersonal	"Quality happens when I am working well with my partner. Together we want to good and we know, without telling each other, that we really want to help each other."
		Ineffable	"I can't explain it… how quality feels when You're in the boat. The harmony is so amazing there are no words for it. Your mind meshes with the experience. The experience of perfect rhythm and harmony and in a way you're still thinking, but you're not controlling it and what you're thinking, there really are no words for. It's kind of weird."

Living Dimension	Field	Sub Fields	Quality Statement
Sociological	**Common ("fitness for purpose")**		**"You get along with others in quality"**
	Metanormal	*Transcendent*	"During a baseball game at the stadium it gets so loud the sound carries you away. You lose yourself for a moment in the thrill of the moment. It's a great experience. What going to the game is all about."
		Transpersonal	"When I am working with a student and it is quality we really connect. It is not so much me teaching him as it is me watching him learn and guiding him in the best paths or choices. We become partners in the experience of learning."
		Ineffable	"Concerts are quality to me. When it's a quality show, the music is happening and everyone is sort of into the whole scene. You can feel the whole crowd come together. That's what a quality show is like. It's a powerful thing; you know what I mean."
Existential	**Common ("fitness for purpose")**		**"Quality happens when I experience quiet. It's a meaningful experience. It puts me back in harmony."**
	Metanormal	*Transcendent*	"I left my body during the game. The whole thing play was quality. One instance I was in our end of the field and the next I was scoring a goal. Right after a goal everything was normal again. It was like I tapped into something for that play. Wow, It was great!"
		Transpersonal	"My goal is for students to connect themselves with their art. However, I also want them to express themselves to others through their art. Quality is doing both."
		Ineffable	"During mediation I experience quality in a way I can't express in words. It is a source of freedom. It keeps me balanced in a way I can't express in words."

The new model I coined *Transformational (TQ) Theory* and it conceptually looks like the following figure at this point.
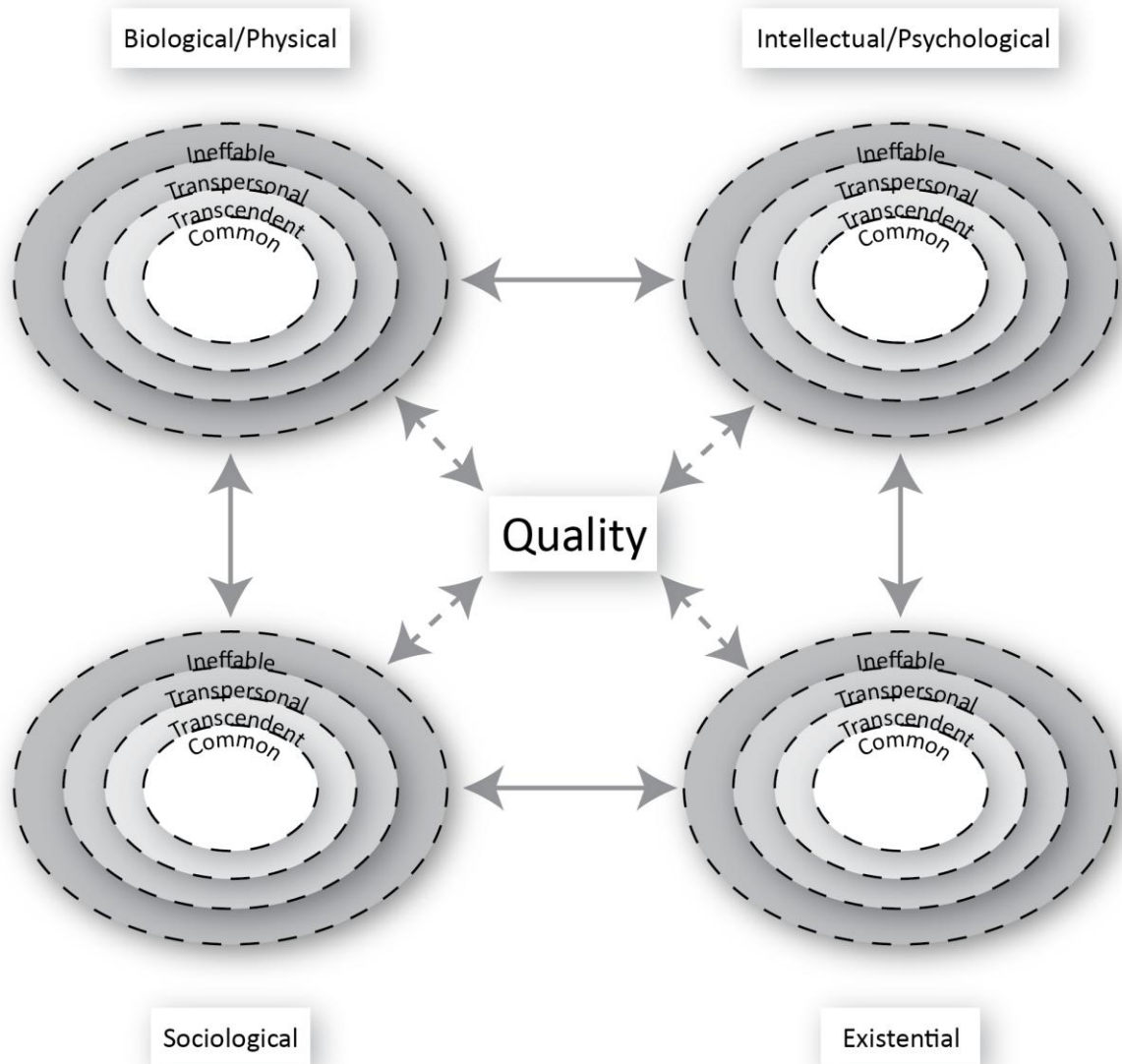
Figure 4. Transformational Quality (TQ) Theory

I could more accurately, identify and assess where a person sought quality most often and where quality had been ignored and required attention by using the model. Furthermore, I could better identify contradictions between my quality intentions and the consequence of my actions. This explanatory model served as an excellent and innovative new way by which to understand quality. I then looked through the data to help me find a way to successfully navigate using the map. After all, the map is not the territory and I needed to know more about the territory of quality to effectively use the map. I searched through the data and discovered eight behaviours which helped people and me successfully navigate optimal ways to initiate, discover, and promote educational quality.

The Eight Behaviours of Transformational Educational Quality: The C.A.P.A.C.I.T.Y. Model

The explanatory model of TQ Theory described the landscape of the meaning of quality with depth, breadth, and specificity. In order to understand how to best navigate through this landscape as a leader, I gleaned from interview data and my reflective research journal eight quality behaviours for improving my capacity as a school leader to influence quality learning and experience. I represented the eight behaviours in the relevant pneumonic acronym C.A.P.A.C.I.T.Y.[1]

Care for Others

System of incentives, rewards, and punishments as ways to motivate people to behave, get along with others, and accomplish tasks was not usually affiliated with participants' understanding of quality. Participants often stated when they were treated in a quid pro quo manner, "this for that", it diminished their potential for quality (Bache, 2008; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, 1998; Hamilton, 2001; Frankl, 2000, 1984; Freire, 1998, 1970; Glasser, 1998, 1992; Leonard, 1991; Maslow, 1987, 1968; Merton, 1981; Pirsig, 1974; Rogers, 1980).

For instance, Seth, a high school senior, stated:

You know pizza is cool as a class reward and I won't turn it down. Maybe, now and then, I'll work for a prize, but not usually. The prizes in school just don't seem worth the work. I don't like being fooled anyways. I usually work a little harder for a teacher who is cool though. You know a teacher who doesn't talk down to you and cares. (Personal communication, January 10, 2006).

Gary, a high school science teacher, said:

I just want to teach. Connect with kids, help them succeed and feel good about who they are becoming. Principals and superintendents seem to forget why we are here. It is reform after reform, new program after new program, and the same rhetoric we are improving quality and, in the end, basically everything stays the same. Except that teachers are exhausted from all the paperwork, time, and training that led to nowhere. But we have to do it if we want to work here. If an administration really cared about quality, they would show more care toward people, not programs and numbers." (Personal communication, May 3, 2007)

Caring rapport with other people was repeatedly professed by participants as a key behaviour conducive to educational quality. Most participants said when they felt "used" or "manipulated" by someone else, they found it difficult to achieve or want to pursue quality.

The data showed that participants believed the potential for quality was higher when people worked together for a common purpose, goal, or interest. Participants consistently spoke of caring for others and oneself as part of their understanding of quality. Showing care

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[1] C – care for others, A – autotelic, P – prepared, A - alliance with others, C – choice, I – I/you-us, T – training, Y – yearn to succeed.

was often defined as *listening*, *being empathetic*, and *taking action to make things better*. The ability to meet one's own needs and the needs of others were posited as critical to achieving quality (Glasser, 1999, 1998). Participants clearly professed a belief that quality in public education involved more than intellectual and physical development. Equally important was a sense of caring about the well-being of others, establishing rapport, and forging peaceful relationships (Goleman, 1997; Krishnamurti, 1995; Nodding, 2005, 2002, 1995; Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Nelda, Dutton, Kleiner, Lucas and Smith, 2000).

Autotelic Action

Autotelic is defined as, "having a purpose in and not apart from itself" (Merriam-Webster 2006). My reflective journal and data from participant interviews consistently showed that autotelic behaviour was considered a quality inductive behaviour. Csikszentmihalyi (1993) identified five ways people foster being autotelic and these aligned with the data I collected about people's understanding of how to achieve quality:

- Setting goals that have clear and immediate feedback.
- Becoming immersed in the particular activity.
- Paying attention to what is happening in the moment.
- Learning to enjoy immediate experience.
- Proportioning one's skills to the challenge at hand. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 178-79)

Students said quality most often occurred when they weren't bored, overly anxious, or fearful. School management, teachers, and community members concurred; however, not to the same degree. There was a stream of belief within teachers, management, and in the community that students perform at a higher level if they are to some degree fearful of consequences and experience the anxiety of possible failure. There was also the general belief that being bored is something students need to get used to because, as a community member said, "in life many things are boring, waiting in line, stuck in traffic on the highway, for example. It's boring and if students don't get used to dealing with it, they won't function well in society" (personal communication, September 11, 2006). There is potential wisdom in both views using TQ Theory as a model for understanding educational quality.

Prepared

I interviewed a two time National Football League Super Bowl champion to talk about his understanding of quality. He believed passionately preparation was a core value of quality. Overwhelmingly education staff, prospective teachers, and school authorities shared with me a preparation was highly valued as a condition to achieve, recognise, and assess quality. The only exception to this was from the student population of interviewees. Students who struggled in school often professed preparation overrated. They saw preparation as relevant to the teacher's desires and not to them successfully learning. The following quotes were typical from struggling students I interviewed:

> Some teachers think bringing a pencil to class is a huge deal. They believe I can't do quality work unless I come with my plan book and pencil. It's stupid! I can borrow a pencil and I

don't need a plan book I can remember in my head. Can you believe my math teacher takes points off my grade every day I am not, in her world, prepared. It's a joke. (Student A, personal communication, March 16, 2005)

All my teacher seems to talk about is being prepared. I am prepared, but not in the way he wants it. He says I have to have my textbook and I say it is too big to carry around. I can read on with someone else. What's the big deal. (Student B, personal communication, March 3, 2006)

I got a C- on my report card for English. That's a great grade for me. That's quality to me. But, my teacher puts next to my grade the comment, "unprepared for class". What's her problem? I earn a good grade and my parents are on me because the teacher puts a bad comment. How about, Good job Ken. Nope, she focused on me not having a pen and pencil for class and not on how good I did. This school is a joke. (Student C, personal communication, May 4, 2006)

Students, in regards to quality outside of the classroom, uniformly talked about the importance of preparing for sport competitions, school plays, and musical concerts to get quality results. The disagreement students had about preparation seemed to emanate from being punished for lack of being prepared in the classroom. As a school leader, I learned from this finding that teachers could reframe this issue by having students learn organically that being unprepared rarely resulted in quality. Eliminating the "point deductions" and "negative comments" and focusing on creating a learning environment that inspired students to be prepared was more likely to harmonise educators and struggling students understanding of quality.

Alliance with Others

Participants uniformly spoke of the importance of bonding or connecting with other people as an important behaviour of quality in teaching and learning. Often teachers spoke of quality as a sense of "being one" in the classroom, students saying a sense of friendliness between classmates and teachers and students, and parents saying quality involved feeling as if teachers were partners in their child's development. The behaviour of alliance with others was seen as important to participants to feel safe and belong. Quality is unlikely consistently achievable with others when a person feels unsafe or alienated (Bennett-Goleman, 2001; Goleman, 1997; Hart, Nelson and Puhakka, 2000).

Choice

The behaviour of choice was the least popular of the eight behaviours of educational quality; however, was a notable pattern in the data. Teachers, parents, community members, and school officials demonstrated a restrained belief that choice was a necessary behaviour of quality in a public school context (Kohn, 1993).Though a slim majority believed choice was an important behaviour of quality; a notable number believed providing students' choice was the reason for a fledgling American public education system. These participants referred to "traditional" education beliefs that students should be well behaved, quiet, and do what they are told to do. These participants perceived students as ideally

having a minor role in choosing the content and context of their learning. The only sense of choice these participants saw as necessary were students choosing elective classes.

Interestingly, these same participants when asked about the importance of choice in their job uniformly believed there was a close relationship between choice and quality. I, therefore, interpreted "choice" as an important behaviour of quality. It is important to note in relation to the teacher-student relationship, there existed participants who disagreed with my inclusion of this behaviour in my development of TQ theory.

"I -You/Us" orientation

As discussed in chapter two, Martin Buber (1958) professed we should strive for "I-thou" relationships. These are relationships based on treating others as mutually important and deserving of respect (McTaggart, 2008a, 2008b). As such, I don't objectify you, or try to manipulate you for my own gain. The aim is to talk with people, not at people and to respect the interconnectedness of all life (Capra, 1996). In "I-It" relationships, I objectify and manipulate you for my own gain. I don't see you; I see what you can do for me.

The data revealed participants consistently supporting the idea quality was often a result of what Buber called an "I-thou" orientation toward others. I made a modification to Buber's "I-You" construct, based on the data, to more accurately reflect the belief of partici-pants. Participants posited an "I-You/Us" behaviour was equally important when working in a group setting, assess, and/or recognise quality. Interestingly, participants' stated that "I-You/Us" behaviour was more rare than common in their experience of public school.

Training

The word training wasn't explicitly used across the data set of participant interviews. Synonyms of training were, such as: coach, shape, practice, instruct, develop, steer, and readying. The behaviour of training aptly encapsulates the concept. Participants believed quality required training that resulted in increasing a person's achievement level and poten-tial for success. Training for training sake was bemoaned by all participants. All participants believed training had to have a clear goal and focus to maintain a person's interest and willingness to expend effort. Training, therefore, is behaviour of quality when it increases a person's achievement level, potential for success, and has clearly defined goals and focus. Training in school is not only to become competent in academics; it is equally important to become competent in our everyday thinking and behaviour as citizens of a democracy.

Yearn to Succeed

Yearning to succeed was the most popular behaviour of quality participants spoke about. Participants spoke of a close relationship between quality and having an intrinsic desire to succeed. The common categorical belief of participants was that "raw talent" was not enough for consistently attaining quality. Students talked about how they knew some-one who was really good at something and became average because they did not try hard or

did not care to practice. Teachers talked about the importance of intrinsic motivation and the desire to succeed for student to attain quality. School officials spoke about quality as requiring a desire to succeed in the face of leadership challenges that sometimes seemed insurmountable. Clearly, people highly valued the importance of intrinsic motivation and a yearning to succeed and believed quality was best achieved through this behaviour.

Integrating the explanatory model of quality I created with the eight behaviours of quality, represented by the acronym C.A.P.C.I.T.Y., resulted in what I coined, Transformational Quality (TQ) Theory. The following is an illustration of the theory in its totality:
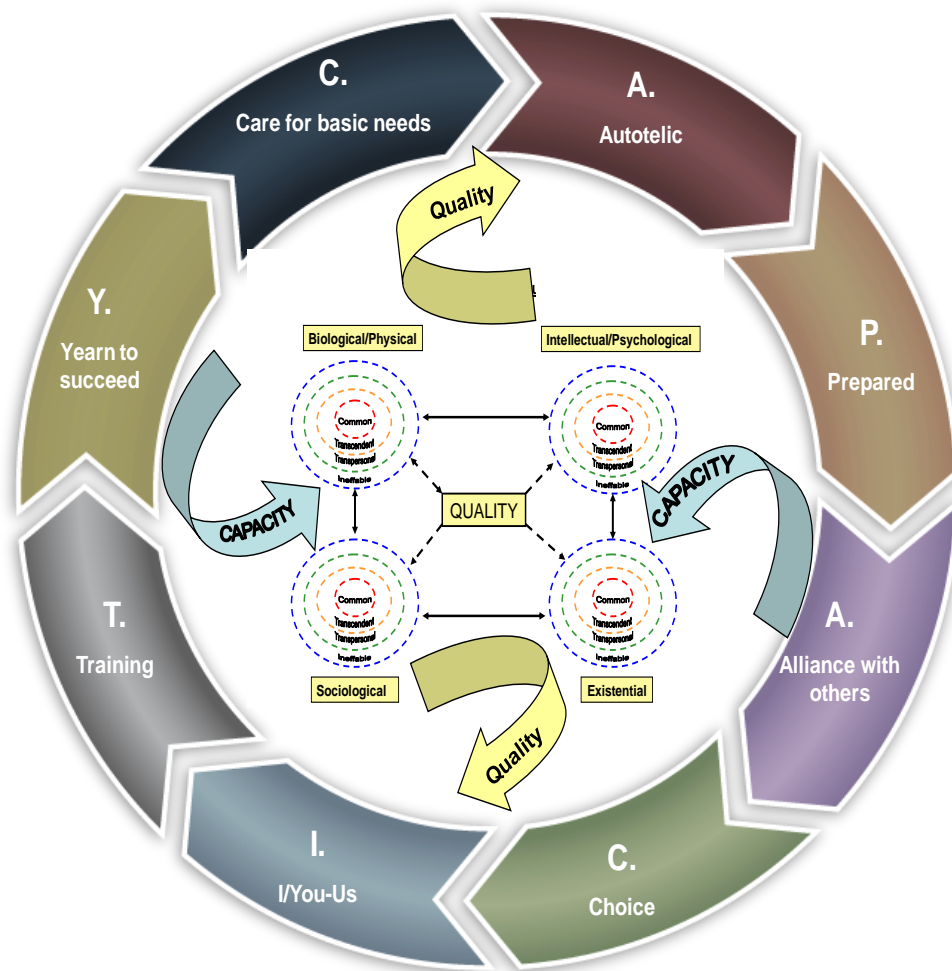

Figure 6. Transformational Quality (TQ) Theory: Complete Model

Evidence of TQ Theory Effect on School Culture at Potsdam High School

I incrementally shared the TQ model with staff, students, school officials, and parents as we worked together to transform the school culture. I had regular meetings with people regarding how we could more fully address a transformational understanding of the mea-

ning of educational quality in school. I urged people to think of solutions to quality problems we had and to recommend ideas to solve these problems. As a result of most people working together with a unified transformational understanding of quality's meaning, and using behaviours that promoted quality, we successfully transformed the curriculum, pedagogy, sport programs, and school climate in a short amount of time of two years.

The results of using TQ theory as a guide for my leadership decisions and actions resulted in notable transformational changes at the high school I was principal. In my first two years, we accomplished impactful changes to improve student learning and access to education opportunities, teacher performance and job satisfaction, and transformation of the academic and social milieu of the school:

- We tripled the amount of advanced placement courses offered which allowed students to gain college credit in certain high school classes and save money for future college expenses. The courses chosen were selected by students and teachers, and any student willing to give effort in a course was allowed to enrol. Previously, a teacher had to recommend a student for the class. Teachers also received extensive training to improve their capacity to diversify learning experiences and improve formative and summative assessments of learning.
- We created mixed ability grouping for all ninth grade student classes. Before, the school used to divide students into four different non-mixed learning groups for classes: Advanced Placement, honours, college-preparatory, and basic skills (non-college prepatory). The previous two years 49% of ninth grade students failed at least one class. After six months of using mixed ability grouping for instruction, only one student had a failing grade in a class.
- We started a Gay/Straight Alliance group as students, gay and straight, believed it helped students to feel part of something meaningful that would promote acceptance in the school.
- Thanks to teachers, coaches, students, and the superintendent, we were the first school in New England to pilot "Coaching for Life" in both the classroom and on the pitch, a national initiative founded by former National Football star Joe Ehrmann. Mr. Ehrmann worked in person with our students and staff to help us improve everyone's focus on raising healthy men and women on and off the pitch.
- Senior students proposed a relaxation lounge to alleviate student stress and promote conversations between students and we created a successful one.
- We initiated a school media studies program, a women's studies program; created teacher and student advisory groups to help govern the school; and started a classroom parent volunteer program.
- With the support of the school superintendent and school coaches, I initiated the process of changing the athletic league the school sports teams competed. Our school was small, three hundred and ninety seven, and we competed against schools with a thousand-five hundred students. Our sports team were uncompetitive and the morale was low. Instead of accepting the status quo, the school changed leagues and there was fair and balanced competition. This move was initially unpopular with a notable group of people. It was rare for a school to initiate a league change and successfully be able to join another league. Committed to having our student-

athletes be involved in quality competition, we overcame all obstacles to successfully create a quality sports program.

Exposing Contradictions in My School Leadership Using TQ Theory

TQ theory also helped me to understand contradictions between my leadership intentions and the empirical consequences of my decisions and actions. I had, at times, mistakenly believed that my intentions of promoting quality were congruent with the people I worked. After creating TQ theory, I realised I had sometimes failed to recognise where other people's categorical quality needs were and to demonstrate quality behaviour congruent with meeting another person's needs.

I also at times had ignored abiding by the eight, C.A.P.A.C.I.T.Y. behaviours of quality. When I acted without taking into account other people's values and beliefs they perceived change to the status quo I advocated as threatening. When this occurred, efforts to enact successful change most often failed. In using TQ Theory as my philosophical guide, I came to realise that I had contradicted my values and beliefs numerous times over the first two years of my principalship. I realised at times when I dealt with difficult people, I fell into an authoritarian mode of leadership and did not take the time to listen. This authoritarian posture rarely led to quality and often led to negative impacts on the school culture. Examples of negative impacts from my contradictory leadership behaviour included: A student dropping out of school and the unexpected early retirement or resignation of numerous teachers and one popular athletic coach. In these situations, I felt justified to take a firm stance. After creating TQ Theory as my guide, I realised my error was not because I took a firm stance; it was not taking the time to authentically listen and seeking ways to help people learn from their mistakes and improve while feeling supported. I had failed to assume a posture of transformational quality and it negatively affects human lives in the school. TQ Theory illuminated weaknesses in my school leadership that needed to be addressed. I improved on my weaknesses and worked to improve my capacity as a more life-affirming, need-fulfilling, and performance enhancing leader who helped other people improve.

The Potential Significance of My Creation of Transformational Quality (TQ) Theory

As a professed critical theorist and humanistic leader, I created this theory so I could, "walk the talk" of liberation, freedom, and respect through the concept of educational quality. The education research literature has a paltry amount of formal Ph.D. action research based on school leaders who problematized their own practice and examined contradictions between their practice and beliefs and values. Contrarily, there is a notable depth of living theory action research conducted by teachers at the Ph.D. level (McNiff and Whitehead, 2009; McNiff and Whitehead, 2009, 2005). There is also a dearth of educational leadership research focused on the nature of transformational quality in American public

high schools; rather, the vast majority of research is focused on the perceived correlates of quality, i.e. grades, ranking, standardised test scores, and awards. I looked at the concept of educational quality in an original way because I synthesised ideas about it that had not been put together before into a cogent model of understanding and used it successfully in professional praxis. This study, therefore, is a unique and potentially significant contribution to the education literature concerning school leader action research and transforming the understanding and modelling of education quality in public education.

Thoughts about the Impact in Creating TQ Theory

Creating and using TQ theory had a profound influence and impact on improving my awareness of my leadership influence in creating a school of transformational quality and hope. It facilitated understanding of my decision making process at the level of sense and soul (Wilber, 1998) and improved my skills of empathetic listening, awareness, and being present in the moment. Most notably, it challenged me to be a more need-fulfilling, just, and caring school leader who acted with sensitivity to the values and beliefs of other people.

I was a transformed leader and human being because of the journey taken in creating TQ theory. I more fully realise the influence and impact my existence has on other people: on their learning, sense of meaning and worth and being cared about. I am more attuned to my responsibility of transforming the social formations of the places I work and live to be life-affirming, need-fulfilling, and performance enhancing environments.

I conclude the chapter with the graphic I made into a badge I wore to remind me to embrace the behaviours of transformational quality and to understand where other peoples', and my own, quality needs are and how I can best meet them.

Figure 7.   Quality badge

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