
THE LIFEWORLD OF LEADERSHIP: CREATING CULTURE, COMMUNITY, AND PERSONAL MEANING IN OUR SCHOOLS

THOMAS J. SERGIOVANNI, JOSSEY-BASS PUBLISHERS, 2000.

Reviewed by Kathleen Bergen

This book describes a particular view of effective leadership and the environment that must be cultivated to support its positive effects. Sergiovanni's extensive knowledge and experience in the field of school leadership lend credibility to this unique perspective, holding the reader's attention long enough for the merit of the proposed model of leadership to become apparent. Sergiovanni contends that the lifeworld of a school must be the primary focus of the decisions made by its administrators while the systems world, one in which management techniques and goals dictate action, plays a peripheral role. "Culture, meaning, and significance are parts of the 'lifeworld' of a school" (p. 4). Sergiovanni declares that the values and general culture of the school should reflect those of the parents, students, teachers, and local community. Although this idea is not new, some of the suggested applications of this belief, as well as the philosophical framework, push the description of leadership past the realm of empty buzzwords into a model necessitating deep, radical change.

The first three chapters describe a school culture worth working toward. The author lists specific critical components of effective school cultures and cites examples of administrative decisions both conducive to and destructive of such communities. Although the first example of an effective school may strike many educators as too idealistic and too risky, it challenges our concept of effective schools. The detailed descriptions of the principals, teachers' attitudes and behavior, and students' reactions are inspirational. In these chapters, Sergiovanni writes about the factors that contribute to a school's character and how this character, with all of its contributors and effects, will determine the school's success. One of the critical components of an effective community, detailed by the author, is uniqueness. He successfully argues that this trait connects community members, committing them to their commonly owned goals and values.

In chapters 4 through 6, Sergiovanni provides a vision of community as a "powerful antioxidant that can protect a school's lifeworld, ensuring that means will serve the ends rather than determine them" (p. 59). This community is held up as the catalyst for determining school standards and methods of assessment. One of the key points is that the school's own students, parents, and teachers, along with the local community, are best equipped to

decide upon relevant standards and accurate methods of assessment. In this model, an outside template for assessment is considered ineffective, a direct contradiction to the current trend of nationalizing school standards. The plans for layered standards and holistic assessment are explained in detail, and there is also a small role for state and federal standards. Their inclusion is inconsistent with Sergiovanni's plan to keep school control in local hands and allow the teachers and administrators the freedom and trust to be most effective.

In chapter 8, teachers are acknowledged as the primary agents in school improvement. The author provides examples of the varied metaphors used to describe the role of a teacher but does not subscribe to any one of them completely. Instead, Sergiovanni insists upon the empowerment of teachers as a crucial step in the creation of successful school communities. He declares that "we have underinvested in teaching and overinvested in management of teaching" (p. 124). Sergiovanni calls for teacher development to address three dimensions of professional expertise: the application of general principles, deliberative action within the individual's context, and the combined use of knowledge of general principles and personal experience to make effective decisions.

The final chapters of *The Lifeworld of Leadership* acknowledge that "deep change involves changes in fundamental relationships, in understanding of subject matter, pedagogy, and how students learn, in teachers' skills and behavior, and in student performance" (p. 145). Sergiovanni identifies six forces as necessary to implement the core changes: bureaucratic forces, personal forces, market forces, professional forces, cultural forces, and democratic forces. The examples of these forces, as described in the book, would all play a role in affecting major changes in the lifeworld of a school, but fall short of providing detailed, practical information to a teacher or administrator.

Sergiovanni provides an ideal model for effective leadership in schools through the development of a community united by self-determined goals, methods, and tools of evaluation. Although the practical implementation of such fundamental changes would be difficult and require a long process of changing attitudes and actions, the positive effects on students' development, the school community, and the larger external community would be immeasurable.

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