

---

---

# Gratitude in teacher leadership

*E.J. (Johan) van Niekerk*  
*Departement Onderwysbestuur en -Leierskap*  
*Kollege vir Opvoedkunde*  
**UNISA**  
*vniekej@unisa.ac.za*

## **Abstract**

*This article contributes on a theoretical level to the debate on the role of gratitude in enhancing leadership. Teacher leadership is used to demonstrate that gratitude in leadership entails Christian leaders showing an all-encompassing response to the functions that leaders need to perform. These functions are derived from the leadership model of Van Niekerk (1995) that serves as the theoretical framework for the discussion.*

## **Opsomming**

*Die artikel lewer op teoretiese vlak 'n bydrae tot die debat rondom die rol van dankbaarheid in die bevordering van leierskapsgehalte. Onderwyser-leierskap word gebruik om te demonstreeer dat dankbaarheid in leierskap 'n omvattende respons van Christenleiers verg met betrekking tot die funksies wat leiers vervul. Hierdie funksies is afgelei van die leierskapsmodel van Van Niekerk (1995) wat as die teoretiese raamwerk vir die bespreking dien.*

## 1. Introduction

Emmons (2004:13) regards gratitude as “a fundamental attribute of human beings and a potential key to human flourishing”. He refers to Soren Kierkegaard who suggested that in gratitude “a person’s relationship to God and others gives birth to a self-awareness that constitute his being”. Research evidence supports the view that gratitude leads to human well-being and improved relationships (Watkins, 2004:167-192; Schimmel, 2004:37-57; Roberts, 2004:58-78; McCullough & Tsang, 2004:123-141; Fredrickson, 2004:145-166; Howells, 2014; Gratitude in Education s.a. [http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/expandinggratitude/gratitude\\_education](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/expandinggratitude/gratitude_education)), that religious gratitude has a robust effect on emotional well-being (Rosmarin, Pirutinsky, Cohen, Galler & Krumrei, 2011), and that leader behaviour has an influence on follower emotions (Hu & Kaplan, 2014:45; Ashkanasy & Dasborough, 2003:19; George, 2000:1046; Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002:3). Bearing in mind that the exercise of influence is the essence of leadership, gratitude will impact on the relationship between leaders and followers, which makes gratitude indeed relevant to the study of leadership (Day & Antonakis, 2012:5-6; Demartini, 2008b:127-144). Moreover, from a Christian perspective, gratitude impacts on the relationship between leaders and followers because the Christian leader’s relationship to God is one influenced by gratitude (Van Niekerk, 2013; 1 Thess 5:18). It is thus important to establish how gratitude can impact on leadership from a Christian perspective. In this article the focus will be on how gratitude can enhance the leadership provided by Christian teachers.

The theme of gratitude has become a topical research theme in the recent past (Emmons, 2004:3-4), and the link between gratitude and leadership has been discussed extensively on the internet

(eg. <https://www.peterstark.com/power-of-gratitude-in-leadership/>; <http://www.stepupleader.com/gratitude-important-leadership-practice/>; <http://www.stepupleader.com/gratitude-transforms-leadership-influence/>).

However, little research has been done on gratitude in the fields of education and specifically educational leadership, especially from a reformational Christian perspective, which is the perspective taken in this article. The first full-length book on gratitude in education was published as recently as 2012 (Howells, 2012); it will therefore be referred to extensively in this article. Because of their leadership position, teachers intensely affect people’s lives (Howells, 2012:70-71), which makes it worthwhile to determine how teacher leadership can be enriched by gratitude. This will be done mostly using ideas from the work of K Howells and JF Demartini on gratitude, despite their non-

Christian perspective.

However, as there seems to be a lack of clarity on how gratitude can be applied to the subject of leadership this article hopes to aid the clarification of this issue on the theoretical level from a Christian reformed perspective. From a gratitude perspective, the question may indeed be asked what it actually is that a teacher as a leader gives in a reciprocal relationship with learners as followers. Gratitude in educational leadership implies giving thanks in some way (Howells, 2012). The question, however, remains to be answered whether it is something as simple as the leader saying thank you or repaying a follower's good deed, or whether it somehow relates to the essence of the leader's task. The researcher will argue that the latter constitutes an acceptable Christian reformed line of thinking on this issue. The researcher is not aware of any other research following the line of argumentation put forward in this article on enhancing the work of teachers through grateful leadership.

In this article, the relation between gratitude and leadership is elucidated from a Christian reformed perspective with reference to the teaching career. In this endeavour three questions are relevant, namely (i) What is gratitude? (ii) What is leadership? and (iii) How can teaching as a career be enhanced by grateful leadership? These questions cover a very wide field of enquiry; the researcher will focus on the essence of the argument advocated in this article.

## **2. Defining gratitude**

Gratitude involves humans in a social relationship with other humans; a relationship of giving and returning thanks for what is received from others. Gratitude for someone or something is the basis for gratitude to the other (Howells, 2012:36; Howells, 2012a:73-74, 75). It involves first, a giver, second, that which is given and third, a receiver (Roberts, 2004:66). The social character of gratitude is emphasised by Roberts (2004:65) who says that gratitude is about "... givers, gifts, recipients, and the attitude of giver and recipient toward one another". Howells (2012:30) goes so far as saying that gratitude is "... an expression of thanks as an acknowledgement of the debt owed to others". According to Howells (2012; 2012a; 2014) a gratitude pedagogy has the potential of restoring authentic relationships characterised by reciprocal giving of thanks in the education context.

The above can also be applied to the reciprocal relationship between leaders and followers (Van Niekerk, 2013; Mat 20:25-28; Luk 22:24-30). Of particular relevance to this article is that gratitude is more than just a positive emotion. It is also a daily practice (that can be applied to leadership), as defined by Howells (2012:38; Emmons, 2004:9):

Gratitude goes beyond an emotion or thought to be something that is actualised in one's daily life through the heartfelt active practice of giving thanks. Gratitude is usually expressed towards someone or something. It is also an inner attitude that can be understood as the opposite of resentment or complaint.

Gratitude as a “heartfelt active practice” brings us closer to a biblical point of departure for the discussion of gratitude in leadership.

Gratitude is expressed in service to God and to our fellow humans (Veith, 2002; *Heidelbergse Kategismus*, Sondag 32-52; Ex 20:1-17; Mat 22:37-40). In this regard it relates to how we fulfil our calling as Christians by giving our talents to serve. It also directly relates to the work we do, which can be described as service to our Creator and His creation. Verster and Carstens (2014:126) succinctly indicate that “humanity fulfils their creational intent and commission through work”. By living, working and worshipping together humanity fulfils its original purpose, thereby spiritually expressing the will and glory of God on earth as the image of God (Verster & Carstens, 2014).

The researcher argues in line with the reformed tradition that our human life in its totality (including our communal life) should be dedicated to fulfilling the will and ordinances of the Creator, and that this be done in gratitude for what we have received (*Heidelbergse Kategismus*, Sondag 32-52; Calvyn, 1984:117-118; Van Niekerk, 2013). Instead of asking what we have received to be grateful for, we should rather ask: What have we not received? From a biblical perspective we have received the totality of creation, our life within creation, our sustenance within creation, and we have been redeemed from the fall into sin through the work of Christ, thereby attaining eternal life in its restored glory (1 Chron 29:11-16; Ps. 50:8-14, 23; Mat 6:25-34; Calvyn, 1984:117-119, 148-149; Smith, 1991:20-21).

Leadership exercised in all aspects and on all frontiers of reality as an essential part of human cultural formation will in this article be viewed as part of our original cultural mandate as given in Genesis 1:28. This cultural mandate encompasses all work and all cultural activity in the widest possible sense to fulfil our calling as grateful Christians who have been redeemed through Christ and to give expression to a redeemed humanity and world (Verster & Carstens, 2014:142-143). It encompasses all offices and leadership positions in which humans may serve, such as those in the world

of work and those outside the world of work, for example, in the sport and church environment, or the 'office' of parent.

From a Christian reformed perspective, gratitude first and foremost implies gratitude to God (even when our neighbour seems to be the origin of the gift that we are grateful for), and when a Christian shows gratitude, in the final instance it implies gratitude to the Giver of all gifts (Leithart, 2014:6-9, 227-230).

### **3. Defining leadership**

Leadership is an extensively researched field (Bass & Bass, 2008). Most of the existing definitions of leadership have in common that leadership concerns influencing followers to reach goals (Van Niekerk, 1995:4; Day & Antonakis, 2012:5-6; Demartini, 2008b:127-144; Harris & Muijs, 2005:15). A definition of leadership from a Christian perspective that embodies the two essential elements contained in most other definitions has been constructed by this researcher, freely translated as follows:

A Christian leader is someone who is placed and used by God in a particular office to influence people to fulfil the cultural mandate within a particular context (Van Niekerk, 2006:97).

This definition covers all human leadership offices emanating from our cultural mandate. In this article only the office of teacher will be discussed as an example of a particular office in which leadership can be enhanced by gratitude.

How do leaders exert influence? Research into existing leadership theories and models and general leadership literature by Van Niekerk (1995; Van Niekerk, 2006; Van Niekerk & Van Niekerk, 2013) has brought to light that leaders influence followers (influence being the essence of leadership – see above definition) in the long term by creating conducive circumstances in which they may excel, and developing and empowering them to do so. They exercise leadership in specific contexts and influence followers daily with due cognisance of their own leadership characteristics, as well as the characteristics of their followers and the situation in which leadership is provided (Van Niekerk, 1995; Van Niekerk, 2008; Van Niekerk & Van Niekerk, 2013; Blake & Mouton, 1964; Blake & Mouton, 1965; Fiedler, 1967; Hersey & Blanchard, 1969a; Hersey & Blanchard, 1969b; Hersey & Blanchard, 1972a; Hersey & Blanchard, 1972b; House, 1971; Lickert, 1961a; Lickert, 1961b; Lickert, 1967; McGregor, 1960; McGregor, 1966; Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1958; Tannenbaum, Weschler & Massarik, 1961; Vroom & Yetton, 1974).

The contextual situatedness of leadership in the above definition is thereby acknowledged. In this article this will be the theoretical framework of effective leadership (Van Niekerk, 2013) in order to provide a gratitude perspective on these long term and situational leadership dimensions.

Unfortunately there is a dearth of literature on the relation between gratitude and leadership that follows an approach similar to the one in this article, which is rather unique. This is especially true about literature focusing on teacher leadership and gratitude; the research reported here therefore relies heavily on the reflective approach to the topic of gratitude in teacher leadership, as adopted by the researcher in writing the article.

#### **4. Gratitude in teacher leadership**

The best way for a leader to show gratitude is to be a good leader, which implies that the leader will perform the above-mentioned leadership tasks well. Gratitude shown in this manner is not limited to words, but is translated into action and links gratitude to the essence of leadership. It provides a framework for the investigation of answers to the problem statement already presented in the introduction to this article: How can teaching as a career be enhanced by grateful leadership?

#### **5. Promoting circumstances in which learners can excel**

Teachers are involved in an important task, namely that which is encompassed in the concept educative teaching. This implies that teachers are not only involved in the mechanical teaching of subjects, but that they also educate or exert influence on learners in their teaching (of subjects) to prepare them for their calling in the world as part of the encompassing calling of humankind to fulfil the cultural mandate (Dreeckmeier, 2005:50-51; Stoker, 1997:17-33; Fowler, 1987:6-9; Aros, 2015:18; Aros, 2012:10). As such, educative teaching lays the foundation for all professions and the world of work. Christian teachers play an immensely important role in the huge human development project.

According to Dooyeweerd (1963:55-96; 1968) development originates from the labours of human theoretical thought which is grounded in presuppositions of a religious nature, thus presuppositions have a supra-theoretical character. He also refers to these as religious ground motives, which are the ultimate

drivers of human cultural development in history. Ground motives attain influence in human development when a common belief of a religious nature arises; gains socio-cultural power in history and subsequently influences the course of cultural development.

In the view of the author Christian teachers can consciously position themselves as leaders in this project with a sense of gratitude. When teachers are able to see their task of educative teaching as part of the encompassing human development project in history, thereby answering the call to fulfill the cultural mandate, they can attain true vision. What some people consider a humble career becomes saturated with meaning when this vision is embraced. Teaching loses its job character, becoming an inspirational calling. This encompassing, inspirational vision can bring gratitude in the heart of a Christian teacher, thereby inspiring him or her to give of their best.

Gratitude and inspiration work together when teaching becomes a calling. Gratitude opens up the heart of a teacher to teach and to educate with enthusiasm and inspiration, which is a hallmark of true educative teaching (Demartini, 2006:23-25, 111; Demartini, 2010:183-184; Dreeckmeier, 2005:67). Humans are moved by emotions (Goleman, 1996:6); thus when the heart of a teacher is energised by gratitude, the minds of learners are moved in the learning process. A teacher's emotions (gratitude and enthusiasm) will assist in communicating the vision to followers, as gratitude provides a direct link between leaders and followers that changes everything else, *inter alia* feelings, words and behaviours (Howells, 2012:85-87; Fredrickson, 2004:145-161; Ashkanasy & Dasborough, 2003; George, 2000). It positively affects the way the leader communicates the vision that teachers and learners are working to realise.

When teaching is done with vision and inspired by gratitude, ideal circumstances are created by the teacher in which learning can flourish. The opposite is also true: visionless, apathetic teaching demoralises the learners and stunts learning (Coetzee & Jansen, 2007:2-3,18). A known truth about humans is that the quality of human involvement (in the grand project of cultural development) is determined by that which inspires humans (Demartini, 2010). If teachers are inspired by the gratitude emanating from their Christian faith, this will impact on their teaching and on the learners' learning. Demartini (2002:158) says that one's vitality and energy relate directly to one's vision, which resonates with the argument above. He also proposes that a clear vision brings a message that will filter through to followers (Demartini, 2008b:93). This is a powerful message for Christian teachers who need to clarify their vision in the class in terms of detailed

work objectives and lesson aims pertaining to their educative teaching task (Dreeckmeier, 2005:77-87).

Demartini (2002:92-97; 2008b:93; 2010:195-196) propagates that one's vision should be bigger than the sphere one wants to influence and says that the breadth of one's vision determines the effect that one has on the world. He further states that one grows when one serves a cause greater than oneself and one's resources also grow as one grows and one's vision expands. Viewed from this perspective, as well as a Christian perspective on the importance of a teacher's task (Aros, 2012), teachers have an important, expanding calling rather than a narrow and limited vision and sphere of influence.

Vision should be aligned to the leader's values, in other words, to that which the leader regards as valuable; otherwise it will remain a fantasy (Demartini, 2008b:xiii; Demartini, 2010:196). Values determine the culture, atmosphere or climate in which the teacher in conjunction with the learners realise the vision. In contrast to a toxic classroom culture rooted in ingratitude and characterised by resentment, complaint, dissatisfaction, blame, entitlement, bitterness, rejection and negative communication and relations (Howells, 2012:99-104; 2012a; 2014), a classroom culture with conscious gratitude at its core will impact positively on communication, relations, emotional climate, work ethic and discipline.

It is the task of the leader to bring the gift of values that will lead to a culture that is conducive to accomplishing the vision. The following list suggests some teaching and learning (pedagogic) values (Van Niekerk, 2015:70-72) that a Christian teacher may subscribe to in an attempt to build a classroom culture conducive to learning:

- Each learner has unique talents and challenges that need to be taken account of in the teaching and learning situation (Dreeckmeier, 2005:71-72).
- Progress should be measured against prior achievement and a learner's inherent ability, and not through comparison with others (Aros, 2012:31-32; Dreeckmeier, 2005:50-51; 138-140).
- Motivation is enhanced by linking teaching and learning to what teachers and learners intrinsically value most (Dreeckmeier, 2005:65-67).
- The level of development at which learners function is the point of departure in presenting materials to learners (Dreeckmeier, 2005:71-72).
- Focus and concentration is essential during teaching and learning (Howells, 2012:126-129).
- Repetition (in its various forms) is the foundation of retention.



- Management of emotions and stress promotes optimal learner productivity (Coetzee & Jansen, 2007:2-3, 18).
- A pedagogy of gratitude enhances both teaching and learning (Howells, 2012).

Implementation of these pedagogic values can go a long way in building a sustainable conducive climate in which learning can thrive.

Using as an analogy a group of teachers' vision of a school with gratitude at its core, as communicated to Howells (2012:151), the researcher compiled a list of features of a classroom with gratitude at its core:

- Constant flow of giving and receiving in the learning process.
- The students and teacher feel equally and genuinely valued by each other.
- Words used and tone of communication are positive and both teacher and learners are confident and skilled at expressing complaints in proactive ways.
- Learners are engaged in learning.
- Learners give/contribute to their learning situation.
- Materials are treated more preciously.
- Education is valued.
- Time is not wasted.
- The class feels more cohesive and supportive.

One could indeed typify the above as indicative of a good classroom culture or atmosphere. The teacher has an important role in establishing and maintaining a classroom climate with gratitude at its core in an attempt to provide optimal circumstances for learning. A teacher should practise gratitude first before learners will follow this learning strategy, as there will be a close correspondence between the teacher's and the learners' practice. Gratitude built on mutual action and understanding through shared lived experience between teachers and learners in class, provides a direct connection between them. Bonds of mutuality and trust are established through gratitude between giver and receiver in the education situation in classrooms (Fredrickson, 2004:157, 159; Combs, Harris & Edmonson, 2015:22; Howells, 2013). While emotions like dissatisfaction and resentment undermine classroom atmosphere and the ability to be engaged in learning, it is found that practising gratitude increases engagement, connection to the subject and teacher, understanding, trust and motivation. A culture of individualism, instrumentalism, and consumerism influencing classroom practice is the opposite of and can be counteracted by a culture dominated by gratitude (Howells, 2012:2-8; Howells, 2013).

While teachers should be open to look for what is received from learners, learners need to be taught to respond with gratitude to the gift of education, and to see that it is not a one-sided exercise with a teacher merely imparting knowledge, but a reciprocal relationship between teacher and learner in which the latter also needs to take up the indebtedness that such a reciprocal relationship implies. Without this, one would be adhering to the exchange paradigm prevalent in many aspects of modern education (Howells, 2012:54-55; 2014:61; 2012a:73) with its negative impact on classroom culture. The paradigm of exchange and unhealthy power relations between teachers and learners may confound the relations at the heart of gratitude, since genuine gratitude involves respect and reciprocity and the visible application of rules, fairly and equitably (Howells, 2012:57-58; Howells, 2013).

According to Howells (2012:99-102) resentment and complaints are present in many schools. Resentment is the opposite of gratitude and generates toxic thoughts, feelings, behaviour and words which create a contagious, toxic school environment. The researcher maintains that many classrooms also suffer the consequences of a toxic classroom culture because of a lack of gratitude. A leader who is resentful will contribute to a toxic school culture or classroom climate. Therefore a teacher's best defence against a culture of resentment is a culture consciously built through the active practice of all-conquering gratitude in the classroom situation (Howells, 2012:103; Howells, 2013; Roberts, 2004:69; Fredrickson, 2004:153-154).

A teacher who upholds a strong Christian vision as indicated earlier and who practises values management in class through a pedagogy of gratitude will enhance his or her execution of leadership by creating favourable circumstances for learning to flourish.

## **6. Developing and empowering learners**

Developing and empowering followers were noted earlier as tasks whereby leaders exert influence on followers to excel. Within the classroom situation this implies that learners need to be developed and empowered by teachers to learn optimally. The teacher can enrich teaching (developing and empowering learners) through the implementation of gratitude pedagogy. Howells (2012:10) presents gratitude as part of a teacher's pedagogy that underlies effective teaching.

The development and empowerment of learners make up a high number of a teacher's leadership tasks. Educating learners to become adults who can take up their vocation in cultural development, and teaching them to learn

what is required to do so, provide ample opportunity to practise gratitude pedagogy. Tuition can be considered a gift that is brought to learners (Howells, 2012a:73-74). According to Nkonyane (2014) every lesson is actually a gift to the learners, a gift that can be presented in gratitude. Furthermore, a teacher who teaches from the vantage point of gratitude for the wonders and perfectly created order of the universe brings a special gift to the teaching-learning situation (Demartini, 2002:6-7). To narrow the scope in this section, the researcher will focus only on how teachers can actively practise gratitude by developing learners into grateful learners who can apply gratitude to enhance their learning. In this regard Howells (2012:39) asks the very relevant question: How can gratitude enable us to learn better?

A person who experiences positive emotions, such as gratitude, for having the abilities and opportunities to learn, is in the right state of mind for learning optimally because the contentment and calmness that gratitude brings stabilises brain waves and opens up the brain to creativity and optimal functioning (Lotter, 2005-2012; Van Niekerk 2005-2015; Demartini 2008a:38-40; Demartini 2002:148; Fredrickson 2004:153; McCraty & Childre, 2004:240, 242-244). Gratitude fuels brain development and creativity and builds resilience while helping in dealing with adversity and stress (Howells, 2012:72-73; Demartini, 2002; Fredrickson, 2004:145-161; McCraty & Childre, 2004:232, 242-244). The teacher who teaches learners to study with gratitude, helps them to develop into better learners.

The first thing learners need to experience in class in order to benefit from teaching is being awake and attentive, to which there are many potential barriers, such as boredom, frustration, resentment, anxiety, worry, hopelessness, fear, stress, depression, sadness, guilt, shame and other negative emotions. These may be counteracted by consciously practising gratitude for being awake and present (Howells, 2012:126-129; Demartini, 2008a:38-40; 2002:26, 35). Howells (2012:129) stresses that the kind of inner attitude, outlook or “state of preparedness” that learners bring to their learning will determine the learning outcome. Getting into the desirable state of preparedness may require making a conscious choice and through self-reflection, attaining a state of being grateful, and allowing this grow into a conscious state of gratitude which can hopefully find expression through action (Howells, 2012:130). It is recommended that teachers practise this in their classes in order to teach learners to become grateful learners who can benefit a lot more from their learning by doing so. In this manner, learners can learn that thinking and thanking exist in a circular relationship, as they will learn to think better when they learn to enhance their thinking through thanking (Howells, 2012:140-141). Teachers will truly be developing

the learners in their classes into better learners as part of their long term leadership task (Van Niekerk, 2015:72-75), and they will be playing an active role in promoting a culture of teaching and learning in their schools. Someone who empowers someone else to master the art of learning is truly sharing the gift of learning, and teachers are in a very good position to do this.

Empowering learners means giving learners ample opportunity to practise what they have been developed to do; essentially giving learners the right types of opportunity and exercises to excel in their learning. A leader's gift of gratitude in relation to the empowerment of followers in teaching, thus also entails the teacher continuously looking for opportunities that learners can use to give their best in order to make sufficient progress in their learning for it to be of value to them. When a teacher provides sufficient opportunities to learners to practise and to master gratitude enhanced learning as indicated above, the teacher empowers learners to become better learners. Furthermore, empowering learning is the type of learning that enables learners to advance further on a chosen learning course; thus empowering learners to create a future.

A Christian teacher who is working on providing the best circumstances under which learners can excel, and who is taking actions to develop and empower learners, is fulfilling a long term leadership task by influencing learners to learn better (see paragraph defining leadership). If this is a grateful response for what has been received from the Creator and for being involved in a profession in which they can serve others, learning could be advanced through the application of grateful leadership practice.

If gratitude is not a hallmark of a teacher's leadership practice, any attempt to entice followers to adopt this attitude will not work, because it will not emanate from the leader's identity and integrity (Howells, 2012:13; Howells, 2013). Attention must therefore be paid to how teachers can handle everyday classroom situations where they may demonstrate as leaders how gratitude is practised within their working context as "gratitude lives and breathes in a context" (Howells, 2012:62). Furthermore, according to Dreeckmeier (2005:21) the real test for Christian education is what happens in the classroom on a daily and hourly basis.

## 7. Taking account of the situational dimension

According to Van Niekerk (1995) the characteristics of a leader will predispose the leader to adopting a particular leadership style, and the characteristics of the followers and the situation will also impact on his or her leadership style in specific situations. Taking this into account, one can consider how leadership provision can be enhanced through practising gratitude in each situation that a leader is confronted by. Leaders bring their natural characteristics to any situation. To be effective in any situation, teachers can thus benefit from knowing and appreciating themselves as leaders. Self-knowledge of leaders relates to characteristics such as their view of learners, personality, values, expectations of and trust in learners, knowledge and experience, and task or people orientation (Van Niekerk, 2015:76-81; Van Niekerk & Van Niekerk, 2013; Van Niekerk, 2008). As these characteristics will impact on leadership practice in class, the relevant self-knowledge will put leaders in a better position to appreciate their own unique leadership characteristics and practice, and to improve it. Teachers can use instruments such as personality tests and brain profiling to improve their self-knowledge and their leadership, thereby becoming aware of their natural gifts and challenges that predispose them to act in certain ways, and learning to appreciate themselves as unique human beings who can use their gifts to the benefit of learners (Lotter, 2005-2012). Humans have been uniquely created by the Creator and giving thanks to God by appreciating one's natural gifts is in order, and therefore Christian teachers can give thanks in their prayers for the unique contribution that they have been gifted to make (Verster & Carstens, 2014). Appreciating oneself as a unique person who has a unique contribution to make as leader in the classroom can facilitate the right mind-set for approaching all situations. Teachers who know themselves and express themselves authentically as leaders in their classes have a bigger influence on learners.

It is important to be able to handle adversity as a leader. Challenges provide opportunities for growth and must therefore be appreciated by teachers. Christian teachers can thus give thanks for adversity, as it can be viewed as a stepping stone to a next level of learning to improve their leadership (Demartini, 2006:102). Managing challenges can give teachers more insight into their own leadership characteristics, and provide opportunities to work on these characteristics to further enhance their leadership. The leader needs to respond with gratitude to challenge and adversity because it brings with it certain lessons (in particular regarding areas where development is needed) as well as resilience (Demartini, 2002:40-42; Howells, 2012:115-116; Watkins, 2004:178-179).

Gratitude is a very social emotion (Roberts, 2004:65), and teachers who constantly follow a gratitude approach will find ample opportunity to use this social attribute to build good relationships with learners (Howells, 2014; Fredrickson, 2004:151, 157, 159). Gratitude constitutes a unique way of orienting oneself in a positive way towards others, and a leader's people orientation will clearly show in characteristics such as the teacher's view of learners, personality, values, expectations of and trust in learners (Howells 2013). A teacher can show appreciation of learners in person-oriented actions such as taking the suggestions of learners into account, looking out for the welfare of individual learners, being friendly and approachable, doing little things to make it pleasant for learners, finding time to listen to learners, making jokes and friendly comments, and seeking approval and cooperation before going ahead (Love, 1994:38). Person-directed actions such as these constitute more than just an attempt at building a good classroom atmosphere and good relations if they stem from a genuine feeling of appreciation of learners and for being able to work with them. Gratitude has the potential of eliciting such behaviour that can enhance leadership. Gratitude comes from the heart, and therefore is prone to elicit a positive response, such as in acts of recognition and appreciation, like greeting learners from the heart, recognising them by name, acknowledging good points, and paying attention to them (Howells, 2012:77, 80-81; Howells, 2013; McCullough & Tsang, 2004:129, 136).

The emotional intelligence dimension of gratitude in teacher leadership is acknowledged in the above actions, yet leadership sources that link gratitude and leadership are inclined to present gratitude in leadership as mainly consisting of the leader thanking followers for what they have 'given' in the workplace.

Taking the work of Demartini (2002; 2006; 2007; 2008a; 2008b; 2010; 2012) on gratitude into account one can deduce that teachers who lead their classes in an emotionally balanced state springing from a place of gratitude for everything received, for the perfect balance and harmony in creation, and for the opportunity to serve, are actually serving them by modelling what it means to live gratitude. Thereby teachers lead with emotional intelligence, because according to Demartini (2002:5-6; 41-42), gratitude leads to balancing the emotions, freeing people of their lopsided perceptions and emotions.

A teacher who wants to live in gratitude can work on his or her leadership characteristics mentioned above in order to improve leadership. Taking the characteristics of learners into account in influencing learners is yet another

way that teachers can practice gratitude, thereby enhancing their leadership. Relevant attributes of learners to be taken into account are, *inter alia*, their level of responsibility, their maturity as learners, their motivation to learn and their identification with learning outcomes (Van Niekerk, 2015:81-84).

For teachers to take the maturity and level of responsibility of their learners into account in the learning situation is an example of a giving act that can benefit learners. A sign of their maturity is their readiness to accept responsibility for their own learning by working in a self-disciplined way (Van Niekerk, 2015:82-83). Teachers can show appreciation every time that learners display such behaviour. The essence of the teacher's task is assisting learners to become mature in their learning by meeting them at the level at which they function, and taking them to a higher level.

Another example of how a teacher taking the characteristics of learners into account constitutes giving, is when the teacher considers the motivation levels of learners in the learning situation. The close connection of gratitude to inspiration has already previously been alluded to, as well as the motivational effect of enthusiasm. Sharing the teaching and learning experience in class from a vantage point of gratitude will thus have a definite impact on effective leadership, as learners will be able to learn better. Enhancing learning by assisting learners to appreciate their learning task (an issue addressed earlier during the discussion of the development and empowerment task of the teacher) is also a powerful motivational tool.

Most learners do not desire to fail in their attempts to learn; therefore the ideal situation would be to motivate them to excel at their personal best, which implies that they will not be compared with others, but appreciated in their uniqueness as learners (Dreeckmeier, 2005:50-51; 138-140). It is part of the human condition that different learners function differently in the learning situation, and showing gratitude in teaching implies being willing to cope with this. Appreciating learners for who they are, accepting and supporting them as unique persons, is a sign that we accept and appreciate what we have received from the Creator to work with, even if this means facing daunting challenges in the teaching-learning situation. Learners will identify better with learning outcomes when their diverse learning needs and approaches are appreciated and taken into account (Wydeman, 2015:137-143). A teacher needs to not only acknowledge what learners bring to the learning situation, but for best results their attempts at reaching learning outcomes need to be appreciated as well (Howells, 2012:95).

With regard to the characteristics of learners, a teacher who wants to live gratitude can take such characteristics of learners that impact on his or her leadership into account, in order to improve grateful leadership provision.

A leader who wants to show or live gratitude can consider such characteristics of the situation that impact on his or her leadership, such as classroom culture, effectiveness of group work, time pressure, the relation between the teacher and learners, the authority of the teacher, structuring of the task/ learning programme (Van Niekerk, 2013; Van Niekerk, 2015:84-88) in order to improve grateful leadership. Teachers may ask how each of the above aspects can be improved in the current functioning of their classes, in order to bring more effective leadership into the classroom, but this will not be discussed further here.

The point made in this section is that leaders who take the characteristics of the leader, followers and situation into account in leadership bring a gift of effective leadership to followers in the many situations confronting leaders on a daily basis. This section provided a short discussion on gratitude within the situational dimension of leadership as a part of the more encompassing theoretical framework of effective leadership (provided in an earlier paragraph).

## 8. Conclusion

At the beginning of the article the concepts gratitude and leadership were elucidated in order to provide a theoretical framework for the discussion in which the author attempted to indicate from a Christian reformed perspective that gratitude in the provision of teacher leadership plays an enhancing role in the provision of *efficient* leadership, which is leadership that, inter alia, creates circumstances conducive for followers to excel, developing and empowering them to do so, and takes the characteristics of the leader, followers and the situation itself into account in the provision of situational leadership.

Teacher leadership was used to demonstrate that gratitude in leadership entails Christian leaders showing an all-encompassing response to the functions or tasks that leaders need to perform.

An attempt was made to show how gratitude in leadership can permeate a teacher's whole leadership practice, and that a discussion of gratitude in leadership must relate to the essence of leadership encapsulated in the theoretical framework of effective leadership used in this article. The



gratitude of leaders manifests in the essence of their leadership practice in both its long term and situational dimensions.

Leadership was discussed as a process of influencing learners by creating desirable circumstances for them to flourish, developing and empowering them and taking the characteristics of the situation into account in leadership provision, which implies that a teacher is a leader. When this influencing process becomes gratitude driven, educative teaching becomes the gift that a teacher bears.

## Bibliography

AROS. 2012. *Ter wille van die nageslag. Handleiding vir gereformeerde onderwysers en ouers*. Totiusdal: Aros Uitgewery.

AROS. 2015. *Dit is gereformeerde onderwys. Gereformeerde vakbenaderings*. Totiusdal: Aros Uitgewery.

ASHKANASY, N.M. & DASBOROUGH, M.T. 2003. Emotional awareness and emotional intelligence in leadership teaching. *Journal of education for business* 79(1):18-22.

BASS, B.M. & BASS, R. 2008. *The Bass handbook of leadership. Theory, research, and managerial applications* (4th ed.). New York: Free Press.

BLAKE, R.R. & MOUTON, J.S. 1964. *The managerial grid*. Houston, TX: Gulf.

BLAKE, R.R. & MOUTON, J.S. 1965. *A 9,9 approach for increasing organizational productivity*. In E.H. Schein & W.C. Bennis (Eds.). *Personal and organizational change through group methods*. New York: Wiley.

CALVYN, J. 1984. *Institusie van die Christelike godsdiens. Boek 1*. Vertaal deur H.W. Simpson. Potchefstroom: Calvyn Jubileumboekefonds.

COETZEE M. & JANSEN C.A. 2007. *Emotional intelligence in the classroom: The secret of happy teachers*. Cape Town: Juta.

COMBS, J.P., HARRIS, S. & EDMONSON, S. 2015. Four essential practices for building trust. *Educational Leadership* 1:18-22.

DAY, D.V. & ANTONAKIS, J. 2012. Leadership: Past, present, and future. In: Day, D.V. & Antonakis, J. (Eds.) *The nature of leadership*. (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage. 3-25.

DEMARTINI, J.F. 2002. *The breakthrough experience. A revolutionary approach to personal transformation*. Carlsbad, Cal.: Hay House.

- DEMARTINI, J.F. 2006. *Count your blessings. The healing power of gratitude and love*. Carlsbad, Cal.: Hay House.
- DEMARTINI, J.F. 2007. *The heart of love. How to go beyond fantasy to find true relationship fulfilment*. Carlsbad, Cal.: Hay House.
- DEMARTINI, J.F. 2008a. *The gratitude effect*. Stonebridge Books: Auckland Park.
- DEMARTINI, J.F. 2008b. *The riches within. Your seven secret treasures*. Carlsbad, Cal.: Hay House.
- DEMARTINI, J.F. 2010. *Inspired destiny. Living a fulfilling and purposeful life*. Carlsbad, Cal.: Hay House.
- DEMARTINI, J.F. 2012. *The breakthrough experience. An exceptional opportunity of a lifetime*. Seminar Handout.
- DIE BYBEL, 1971, 1983.
- DOOYEWEERD, H. 1963. *Vernieuwing en bezinning om het reformatorisch grondmotief*. Zutphen: JB van den Brink.
- DOOYEWEERD, H. 1968. *In the twilight of Western thought*. Nutley, NJ: Craig Press.
- DREECKMEIER, T. 2005. *Educative teaching. A guide for teachers and student teachers*. Pretoria: CcE Books.
- EMMONS, R.A. 2004. The psychology of gratitude: An introduction. In: Emmons, R.A. & McCullough, M.E. (Eds.). *The psychology of gratitude*. New York: Oxford University Press, 3-16.
- EMMONS, R.A. & MCCULLOUGH, M.E. (Eds.). *The psychology of gratitude*. New York: Oxford University Press, 145-166.
- FIEDLER, F.E. 1967. *A theory of leadership effectiveness*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- FOWLER, S. 1987. *Christian education distinctives*. Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education.
- FREDRICKSON, B.L. 2004. Gratitude, like other positive emotions, broadens and builds. In: GEORGE, J.M. 2000. Emotions and leadership: The role of emotional intelligence. *Human Relations* 53(8):1027-1055.
- GOLEMAN, D. 1996. *Emotional intelligence. Why it can matter more than IQ*. London: Bloomsbury Printing.
- GOLEMAN, D., BOYATZIS, R. & MCKEE, A. 2002. *The new leaders*. London: Tome Warner Books.
- Gratitude in Education, [http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/expandinggratitude/gratitude\\_education](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/expandinggratitude/gratitude_education) (accessed 10 March 2016).

- 
- HARRIS, A. & MUIJS, D. 2005. *Improving schools through teacher leadership*. Berkshire: Open University Press.
- HERSEY, P. & BLANCHARD, K.H. 1969a. Life cycle theory of leadership. *Training and Development Journal* 23:26-34.
- HERSEY, P. & BLANCHARD, K.H. 1969b. *Management of organizational behaviour*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- HERSEY, P. & BLANCHARD, K.H. 1972a. The management of change: Change and the use of power. *Training and Development Journal* 26(1):6-10.
- HERSEY, P. & BLANCHARD, K.H. 1972b. The management of change: Change and the use of power. *Training and Development Journal* 26(2):20-24.
- HEIDELBERGSE KATEGISMUS. 2004. In: *Leer en bely*. (Tweede hersiene uitgawe). Hatfield: Lig in Duisternis Uitgewers. 201-227.
- HOUSE, R.J. 1971. A path goal theory of leader effectiveness. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 16, 321-338.
- HOWELLS, K. 2012. *Gratitude in education: a radical view*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- HOWELLS, K. 2012a. Exploring the role of gratitude in the professional experience of pre-service teachers. *Teaching education* 23:1, 71-88.
- HOWELLS, K. 2013. The role of gratitude in helping school leaders strengthen relationships. *Perspectives on Educational Leadership* 6: 1-3.
- HOWELLS, K. 2014. An exploration of the role of gratitude in enhancing teacher-student relationships. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 42:58-67.
- <https://www.peterstark.com/power-of-gratitude-in-leadership/> (accessed 10 March 2016). <http://www.stepupleader.com/gratitude-important-leadership-practice/> (accessed 10 March 2016).
- <http://www.stepupleader.com/gratitude-transforms-leadership-influence/> (accessed 10 March 2016).
- HU, X. & KAPLAN, S. 2015. Is “feeling good” good enough? Differentiating discrete positive emotions at work. *Journal of Organisational Behaviour*, 36:39-58.
- LEITHART, P.J. 2014. *Gratitude. An intellectual history*. Waco: Baylor University Press.
- LICKERT, R. 1961a. *New patterns of management*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- LICKERT, R. 1961b. An emerging theory of organizations, leadership and management. In: Petrullo, L. & Bass, B.M. (Eds.), *Leadership and interpersonal behaviour*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
-

- LICKERT, R. 1967. *The human organization*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- LOTTER, A.L. 2005-2012. *Initial and continuous training sessions on brain profiling and associated services*. A.L. Lotter and Associates.
- LOVE, J.R. 1994. *Liberating leaders from the superman syndrome*. Lanham: University Press of America.
- MCCRATY, R. & Childre, D. 2004. The psychophysiology of appreciation. In: Emmons, R.A. & McCullough, M.E. (Eds.). *The psychology of gratitude*. New York: Oxford University Press, 230-255.
- MCCULLOUGH, M.E. & TSANG, J. 2004. Parent of the virtues? The prosocial contours of gratitude. In: Emmons, R.A. & McCullough, M.E. (Eds.). *The psychology of gratitude*. New York: Oxford University Press, 123-141.
- MCGREGOR, D. 1960. *The human side of enterprise*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- MCGREGOR, D. 1966. *Leadership and motivation*. Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press.
- NKONYANE, V.A. 2014. The lesson as a gift from the teacher to the learner: Ubuntu approach for teaching in African rural contexts. Paper presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Teaching Practice in Education (ICTPED). Boksburg, 26-28 August.
- ROBERTS, R.C. 2004. The blessings of gratitude: A conceptual analysis. In: Emmons, R.A. & McCullough, M.E. (Eds.). *The psychology of gratitude*. New York: Oxford University Press, 58-78.
- ROSMARIN, D.H., PIRUTINSKY, S., COHEN, A.B., GALLER, Y. & KRUMREI, E.J. 2011. Grateful to God or just plain grateful. A comparison of religious and general gratitude. *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 6(5):389-396.
- SCHIMMEL, S. 2004. Gratitude in Judaism. In: Emmons, R.A. & McCullough, M.E. (Eds.). *The psychology of gratitude*. New York: Oxford University Press, 37-57.
- SMITH, T.G. 1991. Die Historiese Opvoedkunde – 'n Temporaliteitspedagogiese denkverloop. In: Steyn, J.C. (Red.). *Onderwys in transformasie: Opstelle in die Historiese Opvoedkunde*. Stellenbosch: Universiteitsuitgewers en -Boekhandelaars.
- STOKER, P.H. 1997. 'n Situasië-analise, behoeftebepaling en formulering van doelstellings vir Bybelgefundeerde vakonderrig in Christelike onderwys. In: Stoker, P.H. & Gerber, J.M. (Reds.). *Voed hulle op*. Bloemfontein: VCHO, 17-33.

- 
- TANNENBAUM, R. & SCHMIDT, W.H. 1958. How to choose a leadership pattern. *Harvard Business Review*, 36(2):95-101.
- TANNENBAUM, R., WESCHLER, I.R. & MASSARIK, F. 1961. *Leadership and organisation*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- VAN NIEKERK, E.J. 2005-2015. *Brain profiling practice experience*. A.L. Lotter and Associates.
- VAN NIEKERK, E.J. 2006. 'n Reformatoriese perspektief op die langtermyndimensie van die onderwyser se leierskapsrol. *Tydskrif vir Christelike Wetenskap* 42(4):95-112.
- VAN NIEKERK, E.J. 2008. 'n Reformatoriese perspektief op die korttermyndimensie van die onderwyser se leierskapsrol. *Tydskrif vir Christelike Wetenskap* 44(3&4):271-291.
- VAN NIEKERK, E.J. 2013. Dankbaarheid en leierskap: 'n toeligtig vanuit die idees van John F. Demartini en 'n reformatoriese perspektief daarop. *Tydskrif vir Christelike Wetenskap* 49 (1&2):163-184.
- VAN NIEKERK, E.J. 2015. The educator as leader. In: Coetzee, S.A. & Van Niekerk, E.J. (Eds.). *An educator's guide to effective classroom management*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- VAN NIEKERK, E.J. & VAN NIEKERK, P. du P. 2013. Conscious leadership: a conceptual framework of elements for short-term and long-term effectiveness. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 4(13):283-292.
- VAN NIEKERK, P. du P. 1995. 'n *Evaluering van die doeltreffendheid van leierskap van boere in die Gamtoosvallei*. Unpublished master's thesis. Port Elizabeth: Port Elizabeth Technicon, South Africa.
- VEITH, G.E. 2002. *God at work. Your Christian vocation in all of life*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway.
- VERSTER, P. & CARSTENS, J. 2014. Work – the quintessential commission given to mankind: A missiological approach. *Journal for Christian Scholarship* 50 (1&2):125-147.
- VROOM, V.H. & YETTON, P.W. 1974. *Leadership and decision-making*. New York: Wiley.
- WATKINS, P.C. 2004. Gratitude and subjective well-being. In: Emmons, R.A. & McCullough, M.E. (Eds.). *The psychology of gratitude*. New York: Oxford University Press, 167-192.
- WYDEMAN, J.L. 2015. Managing learner participation in the classroom. In: Coetzee, S.A. & Van Niekerk, E.J. (Eds.). *An educator's guide to effective classroom management*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
-