

***The Magical Leadership Journey of Two Heroes Harry Potter and Neville Longbottom:  
A Comparative Analysis of Leadership Theories in Popular Culture***

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**Abstract**

This paper compares and contrasts two key characters from the popular Harry Potter series about the process of becoming a leader and hero through two leadership theories. Harry, known as the "Chosen One", is viewed as a natural leader and hero based on the trait theory (Fleenor, 2006). In contrast, Neville, who is considered a leader and hero in the latter part of the series, is believed to have undergone training and acquired leadership skills, which aligns with behavioral theory (Khan et al., 2016). This study analyzes the factors contributing to their leadership development, including family backgrounds, personal experiences, critical events, and relationships with others portrayed in the series. The result shows that the combination of natural qualities and external influences shapes their development as leaders, which highlights the complexity of leadership development. The alignment and misalignment of Harry and Neville's journeys with the trait and behavioral theories of leadership in the Harry Potter series provide valuable insights for leadership education among young people. By examining the characters' experiences and identifying the factors contributing to their development as leaders, educators can develop more effective leadership curriculum and programs that incorporate stories of protagonists from popular culture who become leaders in different paths. This paper calls for more research on leadership theories in popular culture for children and adolescents, highlighting the importance of leadership education and inspiring young people to become leaders in their own lives.

Keyword: Leadership Education, Trait Theory, Behavior Theory, Harry Potter; Popular Culture

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## **Introduction**

Have you ever read or watched the Harry Potter series? Have you ever wondered what it takes to be a great leader in the Wizarding World? J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series has become a beloved classic, attracting audiences with its magical world and characters. The audience witnesses the growth of Harry Potter and Neville Longbottom, two characters who start with similar sufferings but become leaders in their own way at different times. Through analysis of their family backgrounds, personal experiences, critical events, and relationships with others portrayed in the series, valuable insights can be gained about the factors that contributed to their leadership development. Additionally, a deeper understanding will be achieved by comparing and contrasting their process of becoming a leader and hero based on two leadership theories. According to the trait theory (Fleenor, 2006), Harry, known as the "Chosen One", is viewed as a natural leader and hero. In contrast, Neville, who is considered a leader and hero in the latter part of the series, is believed to have undergone training and acquired leadership skills, which aligns with behavioral theory (Khan et al., 2016).

Join me on this academic exploration of Harry and Neville's leadership journeys. To better understand the leadership development of Harry and Neville, the following research questions will be explored:

1. How does Harry's development as a leader in the Harry Potter series align with the trait theory?
2. In what ways does Neville's growth as a leader in the Harry Potter series align with the behavioral theory?
3. How can the alignment of Harry and Neville's journeys with the trait and behavioral theories of leadership inform leadership education for young people, and how can this alignment be put into practice?

## **Roadmap**

This paper will delve into the leadership theories of two key characters, Harry Potter and Neville Longbottom. First, I will provide an overview of their family backgrounds, personal experiences, and relationships with others in the series.

Then, I will briefly introduce and compare the two leadership theories: behavioral and trait theories. I will delve into the stories and examine what led Harry and Neville to become leaders in different contexts. Critical events that shaped their leadership roles include the death of their parents, the formation of Dumbledore's Army, and the final battle of Hogwarts.

Furthermore, I will examine two critical characters that greatly impacted Harry and Neville's leadership journeys. Professor Albus Dumbledore, a powerful and influential mentor to Harry, plays a significant role in guiding Harry toward his leadership role. On the other hand, Lord Voldemort, the biggest antagonist in the story, is responsible for Harry and Neville's parents' deaths, causing them to fight against him and eventually leading them to become leaders in their own ways.

Finally, I will call for more research on leadership theories in popular culture for children and adolescents, highlighting the importance of leadership education and inspiring young people to become leaders in their own lives.

## **Who Are the Heroes?**

Harry Potter is a young orphan who lives with his abusive relatives, the Dursleys, until he finds out that he is a wizard and attends Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Harry's parents were killed by the dark wizard Voldemort when he was just a baby. He was left with a lightning-shaped scar on his forehead due to the spell. Throughout the series, Harry, a brave Gryffindor, goes on numerous adventures with his friends, facing many challenges and obstacles, and ultimately defeats the biggest antagonist Voldemort. Harry's best friends, Ron and Hermione, bring unique perspectives and set of skills that complement his own, and their friendship allows them to face the challenges of the wizarding world together. Harry's relationships with other fellow students at Hogwarts also shape his leadership development. His rival, Draco Malfoy, for example, challenges Harry to stand up for his values and beliefs, while his friendship with Neville Longbottom highlights the importance of helping others to reach their leadership potential.

As a peer and follower of Harry, Neville Longbottom grows as a true leader in later parts of the story, providing an inspiring example of how one can overcome adversity, reach their full potential, and shine as a leader and hero. Neville is also a member of the Gryffindor house. Neville's family was deeply attacked in the resistance against Voldemort, and both of his parents were tortured to insanity by Voldemort's Death Eater, Bellatrix Lestrange. This traumatic event profoundly impacted Neville's life and greatly influenced his personal growth and leadership development. Neville is known for his timid character, and he was perceived by many as weak and bumbling. He struggles with self-doubt and lacks confidence. However, his true potential was revealed as he became more confident and stepped up as a leader, taking charge of Dumbledore's Army in Harry's absence.

Despite being underestimated, Neville proves to others that he is a capable and effective leader. He consistently demonstrates loyalty to his friends and is always willing to stand up against injustice. Eventually, he earns his peers' respect and ultimately plays a critical role in defeating Voldemort.

In the Harry Potter series, both Harry and Neville are portrayed as victims of the dark force. Harry became an orphan when his parents were killed by Voldemort, and he was forced to live with his cruel and neglectful relatives. Similarly, Neville's parents were tortured to insanity by Voldemort's Death Eaters, leaving him with his grandmother as his only caregiver. Both characters faced significant challenges and difficulties from a very young age, influencing their character development and leadership journeys.

Moreover, it is interesting to ponder the fact that Neville could have been the chosen one instead of Harry. Both were born at the end of July. Sybill Trelawney, a seer and Divination professor at Hogwarts, foretold that both could have potentially fulfilled the prophecy by defeating Voldemort (Rowling, 2003). The fact that Harry was chosen over Neville to be the one to defeat Voldemort could be explained by the power of fate and destiny, but it also emphasizes how individual choice and agency can affect one's future. Despite not being the chosen one, Neville still plays a vital role in the fight against Voldemort and demonstrates significant leadership power, which shows that one's leadership potential is not constrained by fate.

## **How Did They Become Leaders Differently?**

Before exploring the analysis of the leadership of Harry and Neville, I will introduce the two leadership theories. Trait and behavioral theories employ two different approaches to understanding how one becomes a leader. The trait theory suggests that certain personality traits, such as intelligence, courage, and assertiveness, are inherent and essential to be a good leader (Fleenor, 2006). On the other hand, behavioral theory approaches effective leadership as not determined by inherent traits but by the leader's behaviors and actions (Khan et al., 2016). It emphasizes the importance of learning about becoming a leader rather than what traits they are born with from the beginning.

In the previous section, we have compared the similar childhood and sufferings between Harry and Neville. Due to the choice made by Voldemort, Harry became the “Chosen One” and is known as “The Boy Who Lived” when he was only one year old (Rowling, 1997). He did not fail the wizarding world’s expectations and hope and defeated Voldemort in the last book. Growing up with abusive relatives, Harry displayed outstanding “adaptability” and dealt with them in an isolated and obedient manner (Fleenor, 2006). After being introduced to the wizarding world by Hagrid and entering Hogwarts, he quickly becomes friends with many peers, especially Hermione and Ron (Rowling, 1997). He showed his kindness to his friends and became the leader of the “Gold Trio”. Even being treated badly by his rival Draco Malfoy and some fellow students from the Slytherin House, Harry could maintain his emotion and not let their negative behavior affect him to pursue the grand goal. He remained focused on his studies and missions and continued working hard to become a powerful wizard. When he learned from Hagrid and Dumbledore that he would be the one to defeat Voldemort, he did not hesitate or resist but was “eager to accept responsibility” and continued to learn and grow to be successful (Fleenor, 2006).

Besides, Harry is intelligent, vital physically, and demonstrates task competence in numerous events (Fleenor, 2006). For example, in the fourth book, "Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire," Harry is one of the champions to participate in the Triwizard Tournament, which includes multiple tasks testing intelligence and physical abilities (Rowling, 2000). In another task in the last book, Harry takes on the responsibility of finding and destroying the remaining Horcruxes, showing his competence in planning and executing such a complex task independently and collaboratively. Harry’s successes in finishing these tasks demonstrate his excellent physical abilities, intelligence, and perseverance.

Harry consistently demonstrates remarkable and unbelievable courage facing lots of hindrances. He often puts himself in danger to protect others. Harry is also highly determined and resolute under challenging situations and refuses to give up even when things seem impossible. For instance, in the Order of Phoenix, he enters the Ministry of Magic to rescue Sirius and Ron’s father, even though he knows it is highly likely to be a trap (Rowling, 2003). He also shows excellent resolution in facing his own death in the Deathly Hallows. He accepts his fate and chooses to sacrifice himself to defeat Voldemort.

In addition, he is also trustworthy for people around him. He can keep secrets even in front of personal risk. For example, despite threats and torture, he keeps the truth about Snape's true identity from the Death Eaters in the Deathly Hallows. He is also loyal to his friends and allies and can do anything to protect them from getting hurt. He risks his own safety and life to save them. For example, in the Goblet of Fire, he rescues Gabrielle Delacour during the

Triwizard Tournament without caring about the scores and when he tries to rescue Ginny from the Chamber of Secrets in the second book (Rowling, 1998).

Besides, Harry demonstrates a strong empathy and understanding towards others, even those who have treated him badly. For example, he shows kindness and compassion towards Dobby, a house-elf who was mistreated by his masters (Rowling, 1998). Harry displays a keen comprehension of his friends and allies, prioritizing their well-being over his own. He is particularly empathetic towards those who have suffered loss or trauma since he has experienced the pain himself with his parents' deaths. For example, he helps Hagrid when he is grieving over the death of Aragog and supports Neville when he is struggling with his own fears and lack of confidence (Rowling, 1998).

Furthermore, Harry has a natural ability to inspire and motivate those around him. In the fifth book of the Harry Potter series, Harry, Ron, and Hermione form a secret organization called Dumbledore's Army in response to the Ministry of Magic's efforts to conceal news about Voldemort's return and their authoritarian policies at Hogwarts. As the most skilled and experienced fighter and wizard among the group, Harry takes on the role of leader, teacher, and coach for the group of students, using his knowledge of practical defense against the dark arts to instruct his fellow students in practicing defensive magics. He not only teaches the spells to the members for one-on-one and whole group sessions but also motivates them to believe in themselves and have strong hearts (Rowling, 2003). Harry's ability to connect with and understand the needs of his fellow students is also evident in the way that he tailors his teaching to each member's strengths and weaknesses. He also creates a sense of camaraderie and loyalty among the members of Dumbledore's Army by treating everyone with respect and valuing their contributions and voices.

Harry's natural charisma and passion for the cause of fighting Voldemort help to motivate and inspire his fellow members of Dumbledore's Army. Under his leadership, the group becomes a powerful and unbreakable force for resistance and rebellion against the oppressive power of Professor Umbridge and the Ministry of Magic (Rowling, 2003). Through Dumbledore's Army, Harry also learns important leadership skills such as communication and trust-building. He learns to rely on his friends and to distribute tasks and power to others to accomplish their goals more effectively as a team. For example, he delegates the task of finding and guarding the Ravenclaw Diadem to Luna Lovegood and Neville Longbottom while he continues with the mission of destroying the remaining Horcruxes (Rowling, 2007). This shows his trust in their abilities and commitment to the goal of defeating Voldemort in a collective effort.

Ultimately, Dumbledore's Army plays a critical role in the final battle against Voldemort and his Death Eaters. Many of its members, including Neville Longbottom, Ginny Weasley, and Luna Lovegood, become important fighters and leaders in the resistance. Harry's leadership of Dumbledore's Army helps to empower and motivate his fellow students to stand up against the Ministry of Magic and the evil forces. His ability to motivate people and create a sense of shared purpose and belonging is one of his most notable leadership qualities.

While Harry's leadership style aligns with the trait leadership theory, Neville's journey toward becoming a leader can be better explained through the behavioral theory of leadership. Throughout the series, Neville is portrayed as timid, clumsy, forgetful, and insecure, lacking confidence in his abilities and often getting bullied by his peers. Unlike Harry, who exhibited leadership qualities from an early age, Neville's leadership potential was not immediately

apparent at the beginning. However, as the story progresses, Neville begins to show signs of growth and development as a leader. He gradually becomes more assertive and confident in various events, especially after joining Dumbledore's Army and being mentored by Harry. Under Harry's guidance, Neville learns to hone his skills in spells and leadership, gradually building his competence and confidence as a leader based on his experience and what he has learned from others.

Neville's transformation makes a great appearance in the final book, where he assumes the role of the leader of Dumbledore's Army after Harry and his friends leave Hogwarts to find Horcruxes (Rowling, 2007). In this role, Neville displays a strong sense of responsibility, taking charge of the whole group and motivating them to fight against the Death Eaters and protect Hogwarts from the Death Eaters. His leadership is firm but compassionate when he encourages his fellow students to stay strong and fight for what they believe in. In comparison to his earlier character, Neville's transformation into a confident and capable leader is significant and thought-provoking. His development as a leader is a gradual process shaped by his experiences, mentors, and personal growth. From being hesitant and uncertain to taking charge and leading others, Neville's journey makes an outstanding example of how behavioral theory can help explain the development and growth of leaders. Through his experiences with Dumbledore's Army and his mentorship under Harry, Neville develops his skills, builds his confidence, and grows as a capable and inspiring leader at his own pace and way.

As Harry and Neville develop their leadership skills, they encounter two influential characters in the series: Dumbledore and Voldemort. They both significantly impact Harry and Neville's development as leaders. Dumbledore serves as a mentor and guide to Harry throughout the series, offering advice and wisdom to help Harry face the challenges as the Chosen One. Dumbledore is a wise master, and he is always calm and patient. He deeply understands human nature and is committed to justice and the greater good. His influence on Harry is profound because Harry learns valuable lessons about leadership, loyalty, and sacrifice from him. For example, in the fifth book, Dumbledore teaches Harry about the power of communication and the importance of building alliances in the fight against Voldemort (Rowling, 2000). In the sixth book, Dumbledore encourages Harry to take a more active role in preparing for the final battle and teaches him the importance of making difficult choices and sacrifices (Rowling, 2005).

Voldemort, on the other hand, demonstrates the opposite of Dumbledore's leadership style. He is a tyrant who rules his followers through fear, intimidation, and violence. He lacks empathy, and he enjoys manipulating others for his own good. Voldemort's influence on Harry is primarily negative, as Harry is forced to fight the evil and darkness within himself from a very young age and is left with the mission to defeat him. However, Voldemort's influence on Neville is more neutral. Neville's parents were tortured into insanity by Voldemort, and Neville grows up with a great fear of the dark wizards. However, when he becomes more involved in the fight against Voldemort, Neville begins to overcome his fear and develop the courage to stand up and fight him. Voldemort's influence on Neville serves as a catalyst for his growth as a leader. He learns to overcome his limitations and become a powerful wizard in the fight against Voldemort and the dark force.

Throughout the series, both Harry and Neville undergo significant growth and development as leaders, influenced by their experiences of different events and mentorship with various characters. Harry's leadership skills are shaped early on by his experiences with Dumbledore,

who serves as a mentor and guide throughout his time at Hogwarts. Dumbledore helps Harry to understand the importance of compassion, empathy, and selflessness in leadership, teaching him to value the lives of others and always to do what is right for the greater world. Under Dumbledore's guidance, Harry learns to think strategically and critically and becomes good at solving problems under various circumstances. He has developed his ability to make tough decisions and work together with his allies in fights and difficulties.

Similarly, Neville's growth as a leader is heavily influenced by his experiences with Harry, who serves as a mentor and role model in the series. Harry's leadership of Dumbledore's Army helps to inspire and motivate Neville, giving him a sense of purpose and direction. During his interactions with Harry, Neville learns to believe in himself and to trust his own abilities, gradually building his confidence and competence as a leader.

When it comes to leadership development in Harry and Neville, one can possibly argue that they represent two different leadership theories. Harry's leadership style aligns with the trait theory, as he exhibits leadership qualities from an early age, which should be attributed to innate characteristics such as bravery, intelligence, and charisma. Harry's natural leadership is also shaped by the guidance and mentorship of influential figures like Dumbledore and Sirius Black, who help him develop his leadership skills through their own experiences. On the other hand, Neville's journey toward becoming a leader can be better explained by the behavioral leadership theory. Neville initially lacks confidence and is often bullied, but he develops as a leader after joining Dumbledore's Army and being mentored by Harry. Under Harry's guidance, Neville learns to follow Harry's thinking, actions, and abilities, shining in the leadership role of Dumbledore's Army in the final book.

Despite these differences, it is important to note that both Harry's and Neville's development as leaders is influenced by a combination of innate traits and environmental factors. Harry may have been born with certain qualities that make him a natural leader. However, it is the guidance and experiences he gains from mentors like Dumbledore and Sirius that allow him to develop these traits thoroughly. Similarly, while Neville's leadership potential may not have been immediately apparent, his leadership growth and development were shaped by his experiences in Dumbledore's Army and his mentorship under Harry. In both cases, it is the combination of natural qualities and external influences that shapes their development as leaders.

## **Conclusion and Implications**

Harry Potter and Neville Longbottom are fictional characters, and their leadership development are open to interpretation. However, we can make some observations based on their behaviors and actions throughout the Harry Potter series. The examples provided above demonstrate how Harry and Neville's family backgrounds, personal experiences, and relationships with others in the series have influenced their leadership growth. Both Harry's and Neville's development as leaders are shaped by a combination of innate traits and external factors, which highlights the complexity of leadership development. Moreover, the Harry Potter series showcases the significance of persistent effort and dedicated practices in coming of age and becoming a hero. Through the characters' struggles and successes, young people can learn the value of hard work and commitment in achieving their own leadership goals.

The alignment and misalignment of Harry and Neville's journeys with the trait and behavioral theories of leadership in the Harry Potter series can provide valuable insights for leadership education among young people. To effectively integrate the insights from Harry Potter and Neville Longbottom's leadership journeys into youth leadership education, the following educational practices are recommended.

Developing a curriculum that centers around the analysis of literary characters, such as Harry and Neville, can help illuminate their leadership qualities and behaviors. The curriculum would involve lessons that explore these characters' decisions, actions, and growth, linking them to different theories of leadership. Discussing how personal challenges, inherent qualities, and other factors contribute to leadership development can provide students with insights into how they might develop similar traits and behaviors. Reflective practices are crucial in helping young people identify and develop their own leadership. Activities such as journaling or creating digital stories about their leadership experiences allow students to document and reflect on their personal growth and the effectiveness of different leadership styles they experiment with. Connecting students with mentors who exemplify strong leadership through both traits and behaviors can provide real-world role models and guidance. These mentors help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, offering advice and sharing their own experiences. Workshops and guest talks from experienced leaders can also inspire students and provide practical insights into the realities of leadership. Engaging students in community service projects where they can take on leadership roles is an excellent way to apply their learning in real-world contexts. These projects not only help students practice leadership but also benefit their communities, reinforcing the importance of responsible and effective leadership. By focusing on these educational practices, leadership education for young people can be enriched, making it more engaging and applicable to their everyday lives.



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