

A Winning Strategy: Using *Glory Road* to Illustrate the Stages of Group Development

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Abstract

Leadership educators work to engage and teach their students in new and innovative ways. The film *Glory Road* was shown in an agricultural leadership class to reiterate a lesson taught on Tuckman and Jensen's (1977) Stages of Group Development. Students wrote a paper to communicate their ability to identify and evaluate the stages of group development illustrated in the movie.

Introduction

Educators, especially those who teach leadership in a college setting, are constantly searching for new and innovative ways to teach leadership concepts and theories so that their students can retain knowledge learned in the classroom. Today's millennial generation students, also known as "Generation NeXt," have been led to believe "that education is supposed to be entertaining, easy, and fun" (Taylor, 2006, p. 50). These students, most of whom communicate with each other and learn through technology, continue to "challenge and confound many in higher education" (Taylor, 2006, p.48-49). This is why many educators have found that straight lecture is no longer a viable option for all classes (Williams, 2006). According to Hickam and Meixner (2008), "Not only do our students crave

experiential pedagogies, they are likewise hungry for multi-media and pop culture stimulation” (p. 42).

Due to the fact that educators have realized the principles of andragogy and experiential education work well when teaching leadership principles, movies have been found to be “a great way to infuse leadership theory with novel teaching methodology” (Williams, 2006, p. 60). Hickam and Meixner (2008) state, “At any college or university, film can complement courses across disciplines and departments, especially those tied to leadership education and development” (p. 43). According to Graham, Sincoff, Baker & Ackermann (2003), “Using movies to teach leadership is a winning strategy” (p. 37). They also state that movies “are entertaining, informative, energizing, and educational, if used skillfully” (Graham et al., 2003, p. 37).

Educators today are turning to the art of storytelling “to drive home difficult or complex points about leadership, vision, teamwork and customer service” (Carley, 1999, p.15), and the use of movies in the classroom combines students’ love for technology with the ability to learn experientially. By allowing students to physically witness and discuss leadership theories, students are then able to build the mental synapses that lead to deeper learning (Williams, 2006).

Learning Objective

The focus for this lesson was to have students view the film *Glory Road* as a way to reinforce knowledge learned in lecture about Tuckman and Jensen’s (1977) Stages of Group Development. The learning objective was: After viewing the film *Glory Road*, students will be able to identify and articulate their understanding of each stage of Tuckman and Jensen’s Stages of Group Development.

Tuckman and Jensen’s Theory

According to Levi (2007), “There are many stage theories of group development” (p. 38). Many of these theories have similar elements, which seek to explain why groups take time to develop before they can become productive, and why groups go through series of conflicts (Levi, 2007). One of the best-known group development stage theories was developed by Tuckman and Jensen (1977), and “focuses on the development of internal relations among team members” (Levi, 2007, p. 38).

Tuckman and Jensen’s theory is comprised of five stages of group development: Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, and Adjourning. The first stage, *forming*, is marked by few measurable accomplishments and is where members get to know one another. Group members in this stage tend to be tentative, polite,

and somewhat uncomfortable or constrained, yet compliant towards the leader (Levi, 2007). Once the members begin to feel comfortable interacting with each other, the group moves into the second stage, *storming*. This stage is characterized by “conflicts among group members and confusion about group roles and project requirements” (p. 39). Group members may realize that the task at hand is more difficult than they anticipated and subgroups may arise between members over conflicts with group roles. However, this can help to clarify the group’s goals and lead to better group cohesion.

In the *norming* stage, the group becomes more cohesive and organized. Ground rules, or norms, are established to help team members work together and develop social relationships so that increased levels of trust and support are apparent (Levi, 2007). Next, in the *performing* stage, the group has matured, knows how to operate, and can focus on the task at hand. The focus of the group is performing, or completing the task that they initially set out to accomplish. Lastly, in the *adjourning* stage, some groups will have a planned ending and will complete their task and then disband. Other groups may dissolve because they failed to accomplish their goal or encountered unanticipated problems which made completion of the task impossible.

Description of Practice

This activity was conducted in the Team Leadership class at Texas Tech University. Prior to students viewing the film *Glory Road*, the instructor for the agricultural leadership course taught a lesson about Tuckman and Jensen’s (1977) Stages of Group Development. The lesson was lecture based and included a group activity in which students were asked to correctly define and place in order the stages of the model.

Following the initial lecture, students spent two class periods watching the film *Glory Road*. They were asked to identify examples of Tuckman and Jensen’s (1977) Stages of Group Development while actively watching the movie. Students took notes while viewing the film and were instructed to watch specifically for the exact scene in which each stage of group development was shown, what characteristics or strategies were used in each stage, any instances where the team regressed or a breakthrough was made, and any other related team leadership concepts that were illustrated. Students then had to write a three page paper with specific examples of each stage of group development and their opinion of whether or not the team followed Tuckman and Jensen’s five stages.

Glory Road Rubric

Objective:

Describe how Tuckman and Jensen’s five stages of group development were illustrated in the movie, *Glory Road*.

Tuckman and Jensen’s Stages of Group Development:

Forming → Storming → Norming → Performing → Adjourning

Instructions:

Actively watch the movie and identify an example of each stage of group development. Take notes as you watch in order to more effectively write the paper.

Specifics to watch for:

- The exact scene in which the stage is taking place
- What specific characteristics/strategies were used in each stage
- Any instances when the team regresses or a breakthrough is made
- Other related team leadership concepts that are illustrated in the movie

Paper Requirements:

- The review should be at least 2 pages but no longer than 3 pages.
- Specific examples of each stage (If two stages are completed in one scene, be sure to clarify that in your explanation)
- A concluding paragraph with your opinion of whether or not the team followed Tuckman and Jensen’s stages or if another group development theory is more appropriate
- Double-spaced, 12 point font (Arial or Times New Roman), one-inch margins
- Use proper grammar and punctuation

Grading: You will be graded using the attached rubric.

CATEGORY	4 – Above Standards	3 – Meets Standards	2 – Approaching Standards	1 – Below Standards
Focus or Thesis Statement 4 x ___ = ___	The thesis statement names the topic of the essay and outlines the main points to be discussed.	The thesis statement names the topic of the essay.	The thesis statement outlines some or all of the main points to be discussed but does not name the topic.	The thesis statement does not name the topic AND does not preview what will be discussed.

Support for position 6 x ___ = ___	Includes 5 unique and very well written pieces of evidence.	Includes 5 or more pieces of evidence that support the position statement.	Includes 3-4 pieces of evidence that support the position statement.	Includes 2 or fewer pieces of evidence.
Evidence and Examples 6 x ___ = ___	All of the evidence and examples are specific, relevant and explanations are given.	Most of the evidence and examples are specific, relevant and explanations are appropriate.	At least one of the pieces of evidence and examples is relevant and had an explanation.	Evidence and examples are NOT relevant AND/OR are not explained.
Closing paragraph 4 x ___ = ___	The conclusion is strong and leaves the reader solidly understanding the writer's position.	The conclusion is recognizable, but could have been improved.	The conclusion is weak and needed more development.	There is no conclusion – the paper just ends.
Grammar & Spelling Capitalization & Punctuation 5 x ___ = ___	Author makes only minor errors in GSP so the essay is exceptionally easy to read.	Author makes a few errors in GSP but the essay is still easy to read.	Author makes several errors in GSP that catch the reader's attention and interrupt the flow.	Author makes many errors in GSP that interrupt the flow and readability.

Results to Date

All students in the Team Leadership class ($N = 34$) completed the assignment and agreed to allow their papers to be used to pull specific examples of how *Glory Road* illustrated stages of group development.

Forming

- “Don Haskins, a newly appointed coach at Texas Western University creates a team with a limited budget. They are initially complacent toward their coaches, which is typical in newly formed teams. They aren't sure how to act around their coaches or team members of varying races.”
- “During the first stage, Forming, team members spend time getting to know one another and orienting themselves. The cafeteria scene in *Glory Road* is one example of this stage. All of the players are sitting at one long

table introducing themselves and sharing their backgrounds. It is obvious that they are comparing one another and still identify as individuals instead of a team when they start a game of basketball using a garbage can. They use this competition to try to determine each member's role or status."

Storming

- "Tensions rise among the team during practice, which occurs throughout the storming phase, because some of the team members feel the need to have fun instead of focusing on basketball. Confusion about group roles also takes place during this movie. While the boys are playing their first challenging opponent, one of the young men urges Coach Haskins to let 'them play their game,' and tries to coach the team even though it is not his place."
- "This is the stage where subgroups may form also. The movie is set in the 60s, during a time when racial tensions were high, and it was violent. This led to the black members of the team sticking close to each other and defending each other against any white person, teammate or not."

Norming

- "The third of Tuckman's stages is the norming stage. In this phase the group develops structure and becomes cohesive. Group rules are established in this stage. Norming is demonstrated in *Glory Road* when the coach sets the team up with rules. A specific phrase he said was 'great players make simple easy plays.' After that the team began practicing and working more efficiently together."
- "I think that the norming stage started when the guys start getting along and going into town together to go out. Shortly after that, the practices become more cohesive and the players start acting civilized toward each other. The big win against Iowa was the last part of the norming stage, I think, because after that, it was all about basketball and building the team."

Performing

- "The fourth stage in the process is the performing stage. The team is in their prime when they are playing together as one unit. In my opinion this stage is more towards the end of their season when they are getting closer

to their ultimate goal of winning a national championship instead of when they first begin to win basketball games.”

- “I think that the performing stage reached its peak in the NCAA championship. The players came together on the court to get something they had been dreaming about. The performing stage is probably one of the most dominant stages in *Glory Road* because the team had so much success.”

Adjourning

- “Adjourning is often described as the division of the team after accomplishment of their goals. This is best described in the film when the players emerge from the airplane in El Paso to a screaming, welcoming committee ready to celebrate their victory and Coach Haskins’ accomplishment.”
- “The Miners disembark the airplane, holding their trophy, and each member is accompanied with a short summary of what they did after college. The text is the only indication that the team eventually disbanded.”

Overall

- “Overall I think this movie was a great example of Tuckman’s stages of group development because it doesn’t just show the team going through it with ease, it shows that things can push a team back into a step that they had already passed. Through multiple scenes, this movie showed each of the stages in great detail and I don’t think a better example could have been given.”

Conclusions

By reading students’ *Glory Road* papers, it can be concluded that the students were able to positively identify and articulate their understanding of each stage of Tuckman and Jensen’s (1977) Stages of Group Development.

Students enjoy watching films in a classroom setting because it is a nice change of pace from lecture, is relevant to course content, and helps make concepts learned in class seem more real-world. According to Graham et al. (2003), movies “are entertaining, informative, energizing, and educational, if used skillfully” (p. 37). By using movies in the classroom to help students visualize leadership concepts,

their hunger for multi-media and pop culture stimulation is satisfied (Hickam and Meixner, 2008).

Recommendations and Implications

In order to effectively use movies as tools to help students better visualize leadership concepts, it is suggested that instructors watch and thoroughly review a film for good examples of leadership concepts before showing it to students. Prior movies that have been used for this class include *Ocean's 11* and *Miracle*. Other movies should be explored for their applicability; *Remember the Titans*, *A League of Their Own*, *Hoosiers*, *We Are Marshall* and other sports themed movies lend themselves to this particular leadership concept.

According to Williams (2006), movies have been found to be “a great way to infuse leadership theory with novel teaching theory” (p. 60). The use of movies in the classroom can be a valuable learning tool and a great way to help students visualize and reinforce leadership concepts learned in class.

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Author Biographies

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Gaea Wimmer is a Ph.D. candidate in Agricultural Communications and Education at Texas Tech University. She teaches four undergraduate leadership classes for the Interdisciplinary Agriculture- Leadership degree. She received her B.S. degree in Agricultural Education in 2003 and her M.S. in Curriculum and Instruction in 2006, both from Kansas State University.