

Approaching Leadership Education In The New Millennium

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Leadership Education--The Scope of the Field

Who are the leadership educators, who are their students, and what do they teach? An interesting assignment--the challenge to define and describe a specialized field of education which has at its core a body of knowledge that some do not consider a discipline and which does not have a concrete definition of what it is about.

Leadership is cast in many roles and, thus, leadership educators may be found in a variety of venues, including youth club organizers, junior high and high school teachers, college professors, student program directors in higher education, community development professionals, military trainers, religious groups, human resource development specialists, civic organizations, and consultants. Additionally, there are untold numbers of people engaged in leadership education in a wide range of venues in countries throughout the world. In addition to teachers and trainers, there are leadership coaches, mentors, and role models. Some leadership educators are skill builders while others teach from theoretical frameworks and conceptual models; some encourage studying the lives of great leaders while others invoke action and reflection. The focus of each educator's work draws on his or her personal beliefs and assumptions about leadership, as well as about education.

Meanings

We use many shades of meaning when talking about leadership. Indeed, words can be a difficult way to communicate! In the case of developing an understanding of the field of leadership education, this is doubly so.

In the first place, although there is no universally accepted definition of leadership, nearly everyone knows what it means--from his or her own perspective and context. I don't struggle with this overmuch as an educator, since I think this is an important aspect of leadership. If my focus was more on the research side, I would perhaps argue that we must come to grips with a definition that everyone could agree upon so that there could be a standard, something against which one could measure and weigh and compare and correlate and draw

conclusions. I do, however, believe it is important for me to be clear in my teaching what I mean when I use the term leadership. For me, leadership is a shared responsibility for creating a better world in which to live and work which manifests in our passion to engage others in bringing about purposeful change.

In the second place, the term education has multiple definitions as well. How we see education depends on our lifespan of experience--from the early years as a young student in a classroom, though whatever level of achievement attained beyond high school, and into the lifelong learning mode. An educator, then, as perceived through our personal lens, may be many things.

When we say leadership educator, we narrow the view somewhat. Yet most of us in the field did not go to college to become a leadership educator. Instead, we evolved from myriad beginnings--many separate threads to create the warp and woof of the field of leadership education. In my case, I began my graduate work thinking that I was studying volunteerism but soon discovered that "volunteer" is another word for "leader."

A Framework for Describing the Field

Peter Vaill has said, "Leadership, I will argue, is mainly learning." (Vaill, p119). This echoes my view that there is a strong link between leading and lifelong learning. It also opens the door to a broad-based philosophy for leadership education that derives from a variety of sources--experiential education, community development, higher education and adult education with touches of systems thinking and the new physics. So let me draw on the evolving philosophical framework I've used for some time (Apps, 1994; Huber, 1998; Zinn, 1998) to lay out what I believe comprises the field of leadership education.

As leadership educators, we each have a personal philosophy that guides our work. Whether we have invested time in putting that philosophy on paper or not, it is part of us--the north star is there whether we take time to look at it or not! This personal philosophy is grounded in our own values and beliefs about education, and in the assumptions we make about leadership. I believe it is important to explore values and beliefs in five areas: the leadership learner, the overall purpose of leadership education, the content or subject matter to be taught, the learning process, and the role of the leadership educator.

The Learner

If we are to call ourselves leadership educators, then who would we teach? And what do we know about those who would learn to lead? Learning to lead, it seems to me, is a lifelong journey. Some begin to learn about how to bring about purposeful change quite informally while they are still very young. Others may not begin to seek knowledge and skills associated with leadership until they find themselves in a leadership role. This may be an elected or appointed position or

something much more informally driven by a passion to make a difference. As educators, we may find these learners in youth organizations or elder hostels, in churches or street gangs, in corporate boardrooms or on college campuses, down the street or on the other side of the globe.

In our work with these learners, we need to recognize that our interactions need to address multiple expectations. I believe that the large majority of our students are what I would call volunteer learners. The matter of learning to lead is a choice they make rather than simply a class that is assigned, or a requirement for continuing professional development units to be met for certification in the workplace. As such, they are likely to expect to be active participants in the teaching/learning transaction. Most will not sit still for lengthy lecture sessions, but will want to be learning something they can try today and be ready to apply as early as next week! Often, the learner soon becomes the teacher--perhaps even before class is out or the workshop is finished.

Additionally, as leadership educators, we must teach the whole person, a concept discussed in Apps' (1996) book *Teaching from the Heart*. More than most other topics, leadership cuts across disciplines, job titles, and community issues. We are helping to develop the capacity of individuals and organizations to lead. These people are not cardboard cutouts! They are unique. And the issues and problems with which they grapple are complex. We must be prepared to strengthen the body, challenge the mind, and encourage the spirit of those who step forward to follow their passion and create a better world in which to live and work.

The Purpose of Leadership Education

The overall purpose of leadership education is driven by the sure knowledge that the world is ever changing. Those who lead are involved in creating that change rather than simply trying to figure out how to cope with change. Leaders take responsibility in ways that bring people and institutions into the change process. The purpose of leadership education is to prepare people (and organizations) to be responsible, together, in an increasingly interdependent world.

The goal of leadership education is to provide opportunities for people to learn the skills, attitudes, and concepts necessary to become effective leaders. However, absent a universally acceptable definition of leadership, we must look instead to the context within which leaders will lead to best decide which skills to teach, what knowledge is key. Additionally, we need to recognize that our underlying purpose will differ slightly in differing venues. In some cases, we may be called upon to prepare people to influence international policy on hazardous waste management, while in others we might be working with young people who want to create a teen center in their community. The skills and concepts to be learned are not the same. Our purpose as leadership educators includes modeling lifelong learning values and practice. In each context, there is much to learn before we can

teach. Indeed, we perhaps never truly learn to be leaders until we teach what we know (Kouzes, 2000).

Certainly, the purpose of leadership education can not be defined without attention paid to the purpose of leadership. As educators, we must examine our own assumptions and beliefs in this area. Is the purpose of leadership to provide people with resources? ...to protect people from the future? ...to help people change social conditions? ...to make good decisions for people? ...to serve under-represented populations? Delving deep for the answers to these questions shapes the way we educate leaders. Just as I believe there is no single definition of leadership that suits everyone, so too will the purpose of leadership be conceived differently within our field.

The Content: What Do We Teach?

A recent article from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Mangan, 2002, p. A10) reports that James MacGregor Burns has assembled an interdisciplinary team of scholars to continue the process of legitimizing leadership studies as an intellectually responsible discipline. There is, as the author points out, constructive disagreement concerning definition of key terms like morals and values. Nevertheless, the hope is to describe a set of principles that are, at the same time, universal to leadership and flexible enough to be applicable in a variety of situations. The caution here is to not make the assumption that leadership, as we know it in North America, is equally valued throughout the world's cultures.

So what DO we teach? In my own teaching, I believe it is important to teach leadership for a reason. Without purpose, leadership has no momentum...no real reason for being. However, once the purpose is known and the context explored, then what needs to be taught becomes more readily apparent. In this regard, the content of leadership education might be thought of as determined jointly by the learner and the educator. A grounding in leadership theory may be useful, but is not always the best place to start. If we are teaching in a setting where an event has precipitated the need to develop leadership capacity--for example, a small firm has recently had to change it's entire focus--we may need to start with some problem-solving and skill-building sessions. If we are involved with a community or a campus organization that has some long-term goals they are moving toward, an approach that explores leadership foundations and organizational development theory might be the starting point.

The leadership course I've developed at the University of Arizona draws students from many disciplines as well as a few returning adult students. About all they have in common is an interest in learning about leadership! An examination of the syllabus for my course would reveal that what I teach is the **process** of leading. Looking at the campus as their community, we begin to discuss what is working well and what needs to be changed. The students decide on a project...a purpose

for their learning about leadership. This then becomes the context that determines specific skills and concepts to be learned. At the same time, I encourage purposeful reflection to help prepare students to make connections that promote transferring their learning to other settings...new contexts.

The Learning Process

The true test of leadership education is the extent to which people are creating positive change in the world...being leaders and doing what leaders do with and for others. I firmly believe that we can not simply tell students and workshop participants about leadership and then expect them to be effective leaders. Nor do I believe it is possible to help them develop a prescribed toolbox full of skills that will guarantee their success. Rather, those who would learn to lead must do so by being leaders. Sounds perhaps a bit simplistic, yet it implies that leadership learning is applied learning. Most educators have been exposed to the theory and tenets of experiential education. Indeed, Kolb (1984) provided us with the basics of experience as the source of learning many years ago. This does not mean that foundational courses in leadership studies should be dismissed. Of course not, but if the goal is to increase the capacity of people and organizations to lead, then they must gain some experience in the endeavor.

Since leadership is not a solitary endeavor, the learning process pays attention to the others who are or will be involved in bringing about positive change. If we are to develop collaborative leaders, it is appropriate to do so in a community setting, whether that community is a place, an organization, a multi-national corporation, or simply a community of interest. The reason I like to focus the learning process within a community is because I believe communities have a shared stake in creating the future together. This deepens and personalizes commitment to the learning process.

Senge *et al* (1994) promoted the concept of a learning organization that bears a striking resemblance to Kolb's (1984) learning cycle and is similar to Apps (1994) transformation cycle as well. Generally, the cycle includes reflecting, connecting, deciding, and doing. The cycle is grounded in its own context and thus, even though the action implied by the cycle remains constant, the focus varies and even determines the entry point. The learning then has a purpose that determines the content and shapes the process.

In my approach, I work to facilitate the creation of a learning community in which being a leader and doing leadership is the experiential learning activity. Often, in the classroom, we begin the cycle with some deep **reflecting** about the campus as a community and examine what's working well and what might really need to be changed. The **connecting** arc of the cycle develops as we probe the context and explore the relationships between units and people and outcomes in an effort to find the point at which students can truly have some influence in bringing about change to benefit the campus. **Deciding** just what to do and how to accomplish

the goals generally produces a stormy period in the semester. In fact, the process moves predictably through the stages of group/community development described by, among others, Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (1998). Once we get through this negotiation period, activity picks up and students become increasingly involved in **doing** what is needed to engage and enhance the campus community. In addition to learning ABOUT leadership, the students are learning FOR leadership.

The Role of the Leadership Educator

I've heard it said that there are those who believe that leadership can't be taught. And I've heard the rejoinder...maybe it can't be taught, but it can be learned. What, then, is the role of the leadership educator? There is a range of titles that may be applied to persons who teach leadership and/or develop leaders--director, professor, trainer, consultant, coach--but I believe that the most useful descriptor is facilitator. This stems from my conviction that we are all called to lead and that the capacity to create positive change in the world lies within each of us. Once a person, a group, an organization or a community has a reason for learning to lead, I see my role as facilitating their ability to do so in a manner that will bring about change while they are developing skills and learning concepts which are applicable in other contexts.

For those involved in higher education, whether in student affairs, cooperative extension service, or in the classroom, I strongly encourage examining Boyer's (1990) four types of scholarship -- discovery, application, integration, teaching -- as it applies to the role of the leadership educator. For me, it is of particular interest since leadership, as a discipline, has existed on somewhat shaky ground. However, as higher education begins to more fully embrace Boyer's concepts, we might find ourselves on a firmer foundation, perhaps even held up as a model for integrating the four types of scholarship into our work. I would posit that the most effective leadership programs, courses, and majors are working across disciplinary boundaries and actively employing Boyer's more inclusive view of what it means to be a scholar. It is this approach that mirrors the increasingly interdependent human community of which we are a part.

Just as a multitude of global issues do not fall neatly into disciplines for their study and resolution, so too will the leadership engaged in bringing about positive change need to be able to incorporate multiple perspectives in their endeavors. Thus, our role as leadership educators, whether inside higher education or far beyond the campus, is to help people "see beyond themselves and better understand the interdependent nature of our world, (or else) each new generation's capacity to live responsibly will be greatly diminished." (Boyer, p 77). Lipman-Blumen (1996) describes this as connective leadership and takes the position that this type of leader is our best hope for the evolving global community. Drath (2001) goes so far as to say that all leadership is shared leadership and is the process of meaning-making across differing worldviews.

A View from the Field

The field of leadership education is growing and changing. As the world becomes smaller and more complex, the need for preparing and encouraging people to step into leadership roles is acute. As leadership educators, we help people to understand what it means to be a leader and to recognize passion, authenticity, credibility and ethics as the cornerstones upon which to lay the foundation to bring about change for the greater good. These are not traits inherent at birth, nor are they attributes to be acquired through study. Rather, I believe that these essential characteristics of effective leaders are personal choices, coming from the core of each individual. It is our responsibility to encourage those who would learn to be leaders to delve deep into their own being to determine these choices.

Leadership educators actively involve people in a learning process intended to increase their capacity to engage others in creating a better world in which to live and work. To that end, we must draw upon the resources available to us (both internally and externally) to nurture personal growth, to be empathetic, to be creative, to be reflective, and as appropriate, to invoke humor in our teaching. Our role must not be taken lightly, and, at the same time, we should not take ourselves too seriously. Facilitators are not necessarily experts in all aspects of leadership. Rather, we recognize that our field is dynamic and that we may well be learning new ideas from those we teach. Additionally, there are resources available to us, examples of which are included as an addendum.

With the advent of this new Journal of Leadership Education, a new resource will stimulate our thinking and our work. The challenge, and opportunity, is to use it as a forum for sharing and testing our own views of leadership with those of others; for striving to understand what leadership is and how it is learned (and taught); and, for increasing our understanding of the myriad dimensions of context that ground our work as leadership educators. As our field matures, it is a challenge worthy of the investment.

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Addendum

There are various resources available to support our work and encourage collegiality. The brief listing that follows should be taken as suggestive of resources we might find but certainly not exhaustive.

Centers

James MacGregor Burns Academy of Leadership which promotes leadership knowledge and practices that empower all those who strive for a just, equitable and thriving society, particularly those who have been historically underrepresented in leadership. (<http://www.academy.umd.edu/home/index.htm>)

The Center for Creative Leadership, is an international educational institution that encourages and develops creative leadership and effective management through research, training, and publication. (<http://www.ccl.org/index.shtml>)

The Robert K. Greenleaf Center, an international organization whose goal is to help people understand the principles and practices of servant-leadership. National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs which collects, categorizes and publishes program information. (<http://www.greenleaf.org/>)

Organizations

The Association of Leadership Educators whose mission is to strengthen and sustain the expertise of professional leadership educators. (<http://www.aces.uiuc.edu/~ALE/>)

The International Leadership Association whose Global Learning Communities bring scholars and practitioners together for the purpose of collective learning and problem solving, to exchange ideas and resources to create knowledge. (<http://www.academy.umd.edu/ILA/index.htm>)

The Community Development Society is a professional association where research and practice join to build community. (<http://www.comm-dev.org/>)

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Other useful publications:

The Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA (<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/heri.html>) has published a very useful guidebook called "A Social Change Model of Leadership Development."

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation (<http://www.wkkf.org/>) has made their recent publication on successful leadership programs widely available: "Leadership in the making: Impact and insights from leadership development programs in U. S. colleges and universities."

The National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs <http://www.inform.umd.edu/OCP/NCLP/> publishes a monthly newsletter,

“Concepts and Connections: A Newsletter for Leadership Educators,” which is broadly disseminated.