

Leadership Across the Curriculum

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2. Leadership Across the Curriculum

3. Practice

4. Drawing from the history and lessons learned from the writing–across-the-curriculum movement, this article proposes a basis and an example for teaching leadership-across-the-curriculum. With an intent to strengthen both leadership education as well as the course context, LAC offers faculty the opportunity to go beyond the simple transfer of knowledge.

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Leadership Across the Curriculum

Introduction

In the 1970s, a curriculum movement that originated from research studies at The University of London's Institute of Education in the late 1960s began to emerge in the United States. (Stock, 2001 and Ochsner & Fowler, 2004). Dubbed "writing-across-the-curriculum" by the research team, which was led by James Britton, the intent was to produce better writers and better learners. Some of the primary goals involved with writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) are: "to promote active learning, to engage students as critical thinkers, and to elevate the status of writing throughout higher education" (Ochsner & Fowler, 2004, p. 117). Despite both accolades and criticisms, WAC is a genuine concept created with the idea to better education.

As applied to leadership education, the three decades of WAC research and practice have much to offer. While leadership concepts are being employed throughout many disciplines, these efforts most often lack the coordination, organization and formality needed to produce the results that can offer greater benefits for students before and after graduation. Learning from research on WAC, it is noted that, "without pedagogical intervention, students may simply reproduce their errors" (Ochsner & Fowler, 2004, p. 125). An understanding of leadership theory from both the student and faculty member can make a serendipitous relationship of leadership development an engaging process that works in conjunction with the coursework. Such a relationship can also assist in true leader development versus mere skill development, which is the fundamental difference in education and training. Differentiating education and skill is a distinct and important lesson also learned from WAC where, once adopted in the United States, it became "little more than a model for 'grammar across the curriculum'" (Stock, 2001, p. 99). To keep LAC an educational effort more must be done than simple and unstructured group work.

Learning Assumptions and Objectives

Leadership development happens with experiences whether intentional or not. Popper notes that "leaders' development is a process that occurs continuously in an organization. Many organizations attempt to confine it artificially to courses and supplementary training. This limits the range of developmental possibilities, since leadership experiences and vicarious learning take place all the time over a broad range throughout the organization" (2005, p. 71). As noted earlier, higher education is especially guilty of this attempt to compartmentalize learning. Breaking these boundaries and coalescing disciplinary learning with leadership education can strengthen students' learning within a discipline.

It is important to note at this time that not all leadership learning is the same. As delineated by Brungardt, leadership training is the narrowest concept and "refers to learning activities for a specific leadership role or job" (1996, p. 84). Leadership education offers a broader idea and "includes those learning activities and educational environments that are intended to enhance and foster leadership abilities" (Brungardt, 1996, p. 83). Finally Leadership development "is a continuous learning process that spans an entire lifetime; where knowledge and experience builds and allows for even more advanced learning and growth" (Brundgardt, 1996, p. 83). Given this, the basic objectives of LAC are to 1) place students in team situations to reinforce learning of a specific subject matter, 2) offer students leadership education and developmental

opportunities specific to their disciplines, and 3) fill the call from employers for teamwork and leadership abilities.

One assumption being made is that all students have been exposed to some level of academic leadership education during their first year experience. Whether this exposure comes from a succeeding in college type of course or a formal academic leadership education class should not matter. What does matter is that the leadership concepts taught are communicated to non-leadership faculty so that they can integrate those concepts into their curriculum. This communication allows for a more just assessment of the leadership expectations when infused into projects. As previously discussed, communication of what is being taught also relieves non-leadership faculty from spending time on leadership related concepts. In essence, “Leadership has to be a major component in the collective mental model of the organization” (Popper, 2005, p. 71).

Another assumption made is that leadership-across-the-curriculum is applied in situations where active and experiential learning are appropriate and implemented correctly allowing for the application of prior leadership knowledge leadership. Through appropriately outlined teamwork, students can apply principles of delegation, power bases, credibility, authentic leadership, follower development and conflict management to name a few. Expectations for the leadership element in a team project should be well defined from the start of the project. For example, if students are assigned a team project part of the final grade should include and assessment of elements of teamwork such as meeting preparedness, idea generation, delegation, and conflict management. These elements can be assessed through team member evaluations and brief process reflection papers.

A final assumption is that leadership development activities do not need to be intertwined with all classroom learning. Another lesson learned from WAC is that not all students learn through writing and that “writing does not and should not serve as the sine qua non of active learning” (Ochsner & Fowler, 2004, p. 124). The LAC concept does not imply that all learning should be tied to leadership development. Some courses demand elements of the use of individualized learning and independent memorization exercises and assessments, however this should not be the sole teaching technique or focus. As Cronin notes textbooks are “a point of departure, not an end in themselves” (1991, p. 486). While LAC offers faculty an opportunity to create change agents, visionaries, and genuine future leaders within their given disciplines, significant content knowledge must of course still be conveyed.

LAC Applied

In an Agricultural Communications class at Oklahoma State University, leadership concepts are well infused into the course content. In the *Planning Campaigns for Agriculture and Natural Resources* course (Campaigns), students complete a semester long, experiential learning project working with an actual client in need of a communications campaign. At the start of the course, students are placed into groups and are taken through Tuckman’s team development process (Bass, 1990) which requires the creation of a team name (forming) and a road trip to meet their client (storming). Weekly lab meetings (norming) take the students through challenges and opportunities and eventually the final presentation of the campaign (performing). Finally the team adjourns with an end of the semester team evaluation.

Other leadership concepts included in the class are conflict management, power bases and the purpose and process of delegation. During the fourth week of class, conflict management in teams is discussed and team meetings with the instructor are arranged to address any team issues. Power bases are also included at time to demonstrate how each member is functioning within the team. The purpose and process of delegation allows for students to observe how work has been delegated and how delegation can facilitate follower development. One limiting factor of this class is that not all students have had a foundational leadership class, so some class time is dedicated to the teaching of leadership concepts. (As the instructor, I hold a split appointment between agricultural communications and agricultural leadership, so the teaching of leadership concepts is not an additional burden).

One key element is that students are graded on leadership concepts and are aware of these concepts early on so they will demonstrate the appropriate leadership behaviors in their team settings. Because a dysfunctional team rarely produces a quality project, teams are taken through a development process and monitored closely. Teams are also monitored for mistakes in leadership processes, such as students “dumping” work on team members instead of delegating work, so that mistakes are corrected. Although some leadership concepts are taught in class, the primary focus of class sessions is on the elements of creating a communication campaign. The intended outcome is students who not only understand the purpose and process of creating a communications campaign, but also have an understanding of some leadership concepts that will assist in the execution of a future team endeavor.

Summary

LAC is not a solution, but rather a tool to better equip students to more highly succeed both academically and professionally. Using the ideas and issues of WAC offers LAC an opportunity to emerge with fewer critics and better preparation. Since not all colleges have an introductory leadership course that offers true leadership education, some faculty may find it necessary to use a small portion of class time to teach some basic leadership concepts upon which the students will be assessed within a team project. What is most important is that there is a purposeful connection between the course content and the leadership education concepts, and that students are aware of and assessed on their team member performances. Where there is an opportunity for experiential learning, there is an opportunity to offer the application of leadership concepts. It should although also be noted that the coalescing of two disciplines is never simple and that, without proper guidance, discovering self-efficacy the first time leadership concepts are taught might be difficult.

For leadership faculty, there exists a responsibility to assist non-leadership faculty who desire to strengthen their through the use of leadership education. If a required fundamentals of leadership education or similar class does not exist, leadership faculty (if one exists) need to work to generate support for such a class so that students get at least a basic exposure to leadership education concepts. Such a class needs to go beyond skill development into basic leadership education so that students have knowledge upon which they can build in future classes and careers.

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