

Association of Leadership Educators, Inc.
Presentation proposal – 2006 Annual Conference

Anthony Middlebrooks, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Leadership
University of Delaware
188A Graham Hall
Newark, DE 19716
tmiddleb@udel.edu
302-831-5831

Audrey Helfman, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Leadership
University of Delaware
186 Graham Hall
Newark, DE 19716
ahelfman@udel.edu
302-831-1708

Title: Creativity as Pedagogical Tool for Teaching Leadership

Presentation Track: Practice

Session Description:

The concept and processes of creativity closely align to those of leadership, both implicitly as conceptual framework as well as explicitly as skills and tools. This presentation shares applications of creativity for teaching leadership, specifically to individuals in the initial stages of forming an identity as a leader.

Biographical Profile

Tony Middlebrooks, Ph.D. is Assistant Professor of Leadership in the School of Urban Affairs and Public Policy at the University of Delaware. Prior to his academic career, Dr. Middlebrooks spent ten years in non-profit leadership positions. He currently teaches courses in a variety of leadership topics, consults in leadership and program evaluation, and pursues research in leadership development. Dr. Middlebrooks holds a doctoral degree in Educational Psychology from the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

Audrey Helfman, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Leadership in the School of Urban Affairs and Public Policy at the University of Delaware. She has been teaching courses in leadership and creativity for the past ten years. She works with students in the Middle East through a U.S. State Department funded project to encourage leadership development and civic-engagement. Dr. Helfman also guides mid-career women through a year-long leadership development program for the Institute for Public Administration.

Paper

Introduction

This paper examines the pedagogical utility of creativity to teach introductory leadership, more specifically to facilitate the student's initial formulation of leadership as a dynamic process and leader

as a potential identity. Creativity has been noted as an important asset for leaders, however consideration of creativity as a potential pathway to engaging leadership represents a shift in emphasis from how leaders can develop creativity to how creativity can help develop leaders. This alternative approach offers both instructional opportunities as well as social and motivational benefits. In other words, in addition to the academic benefits, using creativity to teach leadership offers students an interactive, engaging learning experience.

The learner objectives of applying creativity to teach leadership look very much like those of a typical introductory leadership course. The uniqueness of this approach, however, lies in the application of creative problem-solving and as implicit conceptual framework and the explicit teaching of specific creativity techniques to achieve objectives. This provides a foundation for later learning about leadership by emulating the process while applying the skills. The following objectives are typical of this introductory course:

1. Creativity in leadership
 - a. Students will learn creativity techniques and their application to effective leadership
 - b. Students will understand leadership as process by engaging in creative problem-solving
 - c. Students will enhance their creativity and ability to understand different perspectives as they engage in shared visioning exercises
2. Your identity and potential as a leader.
 - a. Students will identify as a leader, specifically able to articulate what makes them a leader, in what context/s, and to what end.
3. The definitions and basic theories of leadership.
 - a. Students will define leadership and explain multiple theories of leadership, attributing theories to major authors and figures.
4. The variety of leadership practices and contexts of practice.
 - a. Students will be able to explain how leadership looks in a variety of fields of practice.
 - b. Students will execute various leadership practices in a real-world setting.
5. Leadership vision as ethics and integrity.
 - a. Students will understand their own ethical base within the broader context of moral and ethical issues in leadership.
6. Leadership influence as change.
 - a. Students will have a basic understanding of the change process, issues that facilitate or inhibit change, and practices to successfully lead change.

The theoretical foundation for this course interweaves: (a) formation of self-identification and self-awareness as a leader, (b) development of applied knowledge and skills, and (c) real-world application of effectively functioning as both a follower and a leader. (Middlebrooks, 2006)

Background

Learning leadership comprises a process of both formation and development. Leadership formation involves the individual changing how they conceptualize themselves, by definition shaping them into an essence that did not previously exist. With that changing concept comes a change in how an individual views and uses the tools of leadership he or she currently possesses. Leadership development, by contrast, builds on that essence, i.e., grows or evolves to more complex understandings of leadership. Distinguishing between formation and development may serve as a critical juncture in one's progression from competent human being, to whom many leadership lessons apply, to effective *leader*, which is an identity comprising a specific endeavor and application of those lessons.

Leadership educators generally agree that learning to lead requires initial focus on the individual leader, namely what should a leader know, do, and be like. The agreement ends at this general level. Leadership studies comprise a broad spectrum of skills, knowledge, activities, models, and “lessons”. As individuals interact with this knowledge base, they necessarily must pick and choose the pieces that best suit their interest, personality, and context as a leader. They also necessarily construct and reconstruct their understanding of leadership and their own identity as a leader. Assumedly, the more information to which a leader is exposed, the more likely he or she will find what best motivates, develops, and guides their activity as a leader.

Both leadership and creativity have been defined in turn as an innate ability, an individual skill set, a specific outcome, and a process. Personality characteristics associated with creative activity overlap those traits found in effective leaders. Creativity theories vary in where creativity resides – in the creative person, in the context, and in the relationship between person and context. Similarly, leadership theories place leadership in the leader, in the situation, and in the relationship between leader and follower. A creative product may at the same time be the innovative, “out of the box” actions of an effective leader. Only the novelty aspect of the creative product and the focus on influencing others in leadership distinguish the two. And, even those concepts intermingle in the practice of each.

Unfortunately, although leadership and creativity share so many facets, little research has been done to examine the full capacity to which creativity could enhance leadership development, instead focusing on the use of creativity in leadership practice.

Creativity, and its associated techniques, facilitates the development of specific habits of mind, which in turn influence how one functions in a given situation. A *Leadership Roundtable* at the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard University identified leadership curriculum as one of the key themes in leadership. In summarizing that theme, the group advocates that leadership curriculum focus on “...how leaders function...”(Pruyne, 2002, p 16). They go on to endorse applied case studies and learning leadership tools as the preferred pedagogy. Further, the most recent innovations in teaching leadership focus on curriculum utilizing various vehicles to illustrate leadership lessons, such as film, literature, philosophical writings, and challenge activities to deliver and drive home lessons of effective leadership (Pillai & Stites-Doe, 2003). A creative mindset, or disposition, enables students to transcend the particular curriculum, utilizing creativity techniques to generate implications and applications from any curricular vehicle.

In addition to applying creativity to explicit leadership lessons, creative problem-solving also provides a conceptual framework that closely parallels leadership in both character and practice. If, as Drath and Palus (1994) assert, leadership itself is a constructionist process that emerges through a social process of meaning-making, then emulating this process *at the implicit level* as a context for learning leadership provides an embedded process that is more representative of how leadership functions than specific theories or a list of lessons drawn from an experience (Ospina & Schell, 2001).

How it works

The introductory leadership course, *Leadership, Integrity, and Change*, at the University of Delaware (UD) provides one example of how creativity can be integrated into a college curriculum. During the initial weeks of the course, students explore the many different beliefs, ideas, and activities of leaders, much like any introductory leadership course, as a lead up to introducing the concept of creative problem-solving and the course assignment around which the process will focus.

Within those initial weeks, major ideas are emphasized that begin the exploration and initial formation of an identity as a leader, as well as develop a broader systems view of the concept. Integrated into those lessons are a variety of creativity techniques designed to model divergent and metacognitive thinking, which enables students to navigate the many lessons, rules, and ideas about leadership. More importantly, course execution emphasizes practices that encourage a creative environment, such as agreeing on groundrules, embracing humor and positive affect, and understanding the nature of conceptual blocks. These practices closely emulate effective leadership in practice.

After a few weeks of initial exploration, the students are introduced to the Campus Change Project (CCP) as their major assignment for the semester. The CCP was developed by Dr. Audrey Helfman at UD as a means for involving first-year leadership students in a real-world experience with direct application to their organization, i.e., the University. The project is a group activity broken into numerous challenges that follow the creative problem-solving process. The actual practice of the CCP is to identify a problem, issue, or area for improvement at the University, explore the issue, generate solutions, create criteria for evaluating solutions, craft an implementation plan, and present it to both peers and campus administrators for assessment and potential adoption. Engagement in the project provides a frame for highlighting group processes, lessons in effective communication and management, and effective leadership at multiple levels.

Students engage the various challenges by adopting Von Oech's (1986) creative problem-solving roles (Explorer, Artist, Judge, and Warrior). For example, students' first challenge as an Explorer comprises turning inward first, i.e., explore yourself and your team, what do you need to know about yourself and those you are working with that will influence your success in the project? Cognitive psychologists as early as Vygotsky (1986) assert that concepts are internalized through interaction with the sociocultural milieu, particularly via social interaction. Each role, and the sum of the roles, provides a framework such that the concrete activity of problem-solving and the conceptual activity of integrating that work into understanding leadership facilitate the internalization of key leadership ideas.

Results to date

Information about the effectiveness of using creativity as a learning strategy has been gathered from students through course evaluations. The evaluations requested ratings on the effectiveness of the teaching method used, extending learning beyond the textbook, creativity, promoting teacher-student interaction, and stimulating independent learning on a 5-point rating scale. Notably, creativity (M=1.3), valued learning experience (M= 1.3) and extending learning beyond the textbook (M=1.3), gathered from course evaluations from 144 students, showed there was little variation across three different faculty when using the same creativity-based instructional model (Morrison, Rha, & Helfman, 2003).

Conclusions/Recommendations

Forming and developing leaders function more effectively with a creative disposition. Creativity and innovation have been heralded for some years now as the key to future success in all sectors, particularly leadership. While leadership educators have rightly emphasized teaching creativity, this paper asserts that the relationship between the two concepts is reciprocal. Consequently, integrating creativity into the curriculum and pedagogy of general leadership courses can effectively develop the much-desired creative disposition, **and** facilitate the more transcendent and transferable aspects of effective leadership.

In addition to the practical and motivational qualities, perhaps the most important facet of utilizing creativity to teach leadership lies in the integration of explicit and implicit influence it brings to a student's developing construction of self as a leader. The constructive nature of the brain comprises

both understanding and process. In other words, we construct our habits of processing information as well as our representation of that information. Given the similarities between leadership and creativity, utilizing a more concrete process like creative problem-solving might serve as a more efficacious pathway to developing into a leader.

References

- Drath, W. & Palus, C. (1994). *Making common sense: Leadership as meaning making in a community of practice*. Center for Creative Leadership.
- Middlebrooks, A. (Spring 2006). *Leadership, Integrity, and Change Syllabus*. Leadership program, School of Urban Affairs and Public Policy, University of Delaware.
- Morrison, J., Rha, J., & Helfman, A., (2003). Learning Awareness, Student Engagement, and Change: A Transformation in Leadership Development. *Journal of Education for Business*, 79(1), 11-17
- Ospina, S. & Schall, E. (2001). Perspectives on leadership: Our approach to research and documentation for the Leadership for a Changing World Program. Retrieved November 14, 2001 from <http://leadershipforchange.org/insights/conversation/files/perspectives.php3>
- Pillai, R. & Stites-Doe, S. (Eds.) (2003). *Teaching leadership: Innovative approaches for the 21st century*. Greenwich, CN: Information Age Publishing.
- Pruyne, E. (2002). *Conversations on leadership: Harvard University roundtable*. Cambridge: Harvard Center for Public Leadership.
- Von Oech, R. (1986). *A kick in the seat of the pants*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Vygotsky, L. (1986). *Thought and Language* (A. Kosulin Trans.). Cambridge: MIT Press (Original work published 1934).