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Presenters' Bios:

Dr. Joe Albert is currently an assistant professor in the Department of Organizational Leadership at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington. For the past five years he has directed the Comprehensive Leadership Program for undergraduate students at Gonzaga. He holds a Ph.D. in leadership studies, a master's degree in counseling- psychology both from Gonzaga and, an undergraduate degree in business management from St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia.

Originally from Soldotna, Alaska, Kaitlin Vadla is the only student at Gonzaga ever to have been inducted simultaneously into the Comprehensive Leadership Program, Entrepreneurial Leadership Program, and Honors Program. Kaitlin recently returned from the Middle East where she attended the Leaders in Dubai Business Forum as one of only two students at the conference. After listening to Kofi Annan, Steve Forbes, Muhammad Yunus, and others speak at Leaders in Dubai, Kaitlin has been working to create a grant program at her university to help more students take part in international leadership opportunities. Kaitlin spent a year studying at Magdalen College at Oxford University in England, and she graduates from Gonzaga in the spring of 2008 with a major in International Relations and minors in Spanish and Political Science.

2. Title of Presentation:

The uses of storytelling in the leadership development process:
Transformative classroom pedagogy

3. Presentation Track: Practice (this could also be included in a research track but at the time of this submission we are only at the beginning of collecting data about the class experience.)

4. Session Description/Abstract:

Based on an innovative course called Leadership and Storytelling, this interactive workshop explores the convergence of narrative, identity, and leadership and investigates what this convergence means for leadership development. Discover what it is about narrative that makes it such a powerful tool in developing authentic leaders.

5. Submission Description:

(We would be willing to be accepted for a poster presentation if the paper is not accepted.)

a. Introduction:

Stories have played a critical role in the communication of traditions, history, and values since the beginning of civilization (Fulford, 1999). Most people know how to tell stories and do so frequently, to explain our motives, to tell a joke, or to illustrate a point. However, we are not as adept at understanding how narrative explicitly transfigures the commonplace, how it shapes our identity, and how it relates to leadership (Bruner, 2002). There is something more powerful than we notice about narrative. This proposal is based on the transformative classroom experience of the teacher and undergraduate students in a course called Leadership and Storytelling. We would like to use the insights of the instructor and the students to answer four questions, that serve as the objectives, during the span of the workshop. 1) What is the significance of narrative for leaders? 2) How was the course structured to investigate and convey that significance? 3) What was it about the course that made it such a meaningful experience for students? 4) How can workshop participants incorporate narrative into their own lives to become better leaders? Following is a brief outline of how we will address these four questions.

b. Background and Description:

1). Significance of narrative.

While there is long and sustained interest in folklore and narrative, the critical role of storytelling in leadership has only recently become a focus of attention. The reasons for the increased interest are varied. Recent literature illustrates a diverse range of situations where leaders might use stories as tools for communicating a vision, socializing new employees into the culture or to maintain a current culture (Trice & Beyer, 1993), providing hope and inspiration (Gardner, 1995), and to stimulate change (Denning, 2001).

In addition to the benefits derived for leaders in impacting their organizations, the creation of a leadership story can also offer benefits related to increased self-awareness. Tichy (1997) suggests,

The most effective leaders are those who are in touch with their leadership stories... The story shapes our attitudes, actions and reactions. When we know our stories we know ourselves. Stories, however, are equally important because they allow other people to know us. Stories create real, human connections by allowing others to get inside our minds and our lives (p. 77-78).

2). Classroom experience.

The Leadership and Storytelling class was based on developing and sharing three types of stories: Who I Am stories, Who We Are stories, and Future stories (Tichy, 1997). *Who I am* stories deal with personal stories about the individual. They include descriptions of events, relationships and situations that have been important in shaping the individual and the beliefs he or she holds. These personal narratives identify key values the individual may hold and how they were developed. Utilizing the notion of personal turning points, as suggested by Bruner (1994), students were invited to explore experiences from their lives that caused a significant impact and change in their values, career interests, and worldview.

Who we are stories are stories about a group, family or organization that involve significant events and experiences that have shaped their common identity. The purpose of these stories is to clarify or emphasize certain beliefs, common history or shared values within the group. This type of story invites a great deal of reflection on collective identity and group definition.

The final type of story is the *future story*. This type of narrative is a sharing of a view into the future. It usually deals with goals, dreams, and vision. President Kennedy's future story of landing a man on the moon managed to mobilize the energy and resources of thousands of scientists to that end and energize the nation to a seemingly impossible goal. This section also allows for an exploration of "plot *reversioning*" or narrative approaches to therapy (Leiblich, McAdams & Josselson, 2004).

3). Why was the classroom experience meaningful.

Taking a life stories approach to leadership allows for the creation of coherence. Looking at one's life from a narrative perspective invites one to rediscover oneself and to begin to create meaning of one's own life. We would like to discuss three phenomena that we feel are at the heart of why it was such a meaningful experience:

A). Creation of a safe space

Students described the space in the classroom as "peculiarly truthful," "open," and "a place where I could be vulnerable and honest in a way that I hadn't even been able to be with myself." The space was created in part due to the instructor's understanding of himself and of others, and to his willingness to take the risk of being candid. In addition to the influence of the instructor, the space was created out of the recognition of the shared fear and vulnerability of the participants; "there is much more at stake than a grade here," one student remarked, "this is about *identity*."

B). Fostering the notion of authorship

The course created a paradigm shift for how students could view their lives. Using the work of McAdams (1993) as a prime source, students were encouraged to become authors of their own story. With the intent of fostering a more authentic leadership

identity students were led through a process of reflecting on their life experiences and surfaced emerging themes that manifest in their current values, career choices and belief system.

C.) Taking students to the edge of knowing

There is a certain depth and vulnerability about this process that is more difficult for some than for others. It takes one to the center of oneself, to the root of one's motivations, and to the unexplored areas of one's life. The willingness of moving into the unknown or unexamined dimensions of one's life was facilitated through the use of narrative as a means of doing this self-exploration.

4. How can workshop participants incorporate narrative into their own lives to become better leaders?

In addition to the discussion of the class methodology the session facilitators will invite participants to identify 'Who I am?' stories from their own experience that they can develop and use to communicate their own values, beliefs and motives. These activities are useful to participants who seek tools for leadership development experiences in classrooms, in training, and in consulting. The goal will be to help participants experience the transformative process of using narrative as a methodology for leadership development.

d. Results: At this point we are in the process of gaining IRB approval to solicit feedback from students in the class. This proposal focuses on the pedagogical aspects of the classroom experience that resulted in such a powerful experience.

References

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