STUDENTS ARE LEADERS BUILDING CAMPUS COMMUNITY

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INTRODUCTION:
The argument that higher education is not the same as a business organization is often raised, particularly when governing bodies clamor for an operating approach that more closely approximates that of successful businesses, particularly with regard to accountability measures. But certainly there is much to be gained by adopting some of the business approaches that would help us to become more effective. Becoming a learning organization is such an approach.

It has always been a bit of an anomaly for me that universities are not necessarily learning organizations. . . at least not in the sense that we have come to understand the terminology in the literature on organizational development. Senge (1990, 1994), who gave us the five disciplines associated with the concept of learning organizations, is perhaps the best known contributor to the field. He also talks about metanoia — a shift of the mind — in an organization that continually expands its capacity to create its future. A pragmatic approach is taken by Kline and Saunders (1993) who list sixteen principles that promote organizational learning and then outline the ten steps necessary to become a learning organization. Dixon's (1992) review of the literature and implications for human resource development professionals proposes reframing learning within organizations to address the needs of the system, not just the individual. Watkins and Marsick (1993, p. 8) describe the features of a learning organization in a way that, for me, succinctly summarizes much of the recent writing. They claim that learning organizations have these characteristics in common:

- leaders who model calculated risk taking and experimentation,
- decentralized decision making and employee empowerment,
- skill inventories and audits of learning capacity,
- systems for sharing learning and using it in the organization,
- rewards and structures for employee initiative,
- consideration of long-term consequences and impact on the work of others,
- frequent use of cross-functional work team,
- opportunities to learn from experience on a daily basis, and
- a culture of feedback and disclosure.

In addition, Watkins and Marsick (1993, p. 11) suggest six action imperatives for creating learning organizations. Leadership must create continuous learning opportunities, promote inquiry and dialogue, encourage collaboration and team learning, establish systems to capture and share learning, empower people toward a collective vision, and connect the

organization to its environment. From my experience (which is supported by conversations with colleagues at a number of universities and colleges throughout the country) institutions of higher education fall short of these action imperatives in actual practice. However, this paper is not about delineating the various shortcoming of universities as learning organizations or the gap between their espoused philosophy and their practice. Rather, it is intended to describe a model for experiential leadership education in the college classroom and to explain how a group of students have successfully engaged The University of Arizona campus in organizational learning and community building.

AED 401/501— LEADERSHIP CONCEPTS AND CONCEPTS:
For the past several years, students enrolled in Leadership Concepts and Contexts have been asked to incorporate a campus community building dimension into the planned learning activities. The intent is to encourage class participants to think beyond departmental boundaries, to believe that they can bring about positive change on campus, and to practice skills and concepts from the course curriculum.

A learning organization continually cycles through a process of collective reflection, generating shared meaning, collaborative planning, and coordinated action. At the same time, individuals within the organization are reflecting on their experiences, making connections to other people and other ideas, deciding on a course of action, and carrying out the plans made. The learning that occurs throughout these cyclical processes in continual and it transforms the organization. The learning cycle in AED 401/501 (Leadership Concepts and Contexts) follows essentially the same course. Students design a class project intended to transform the organization and enhance community on campus. At the same time, they are transformed by the process.
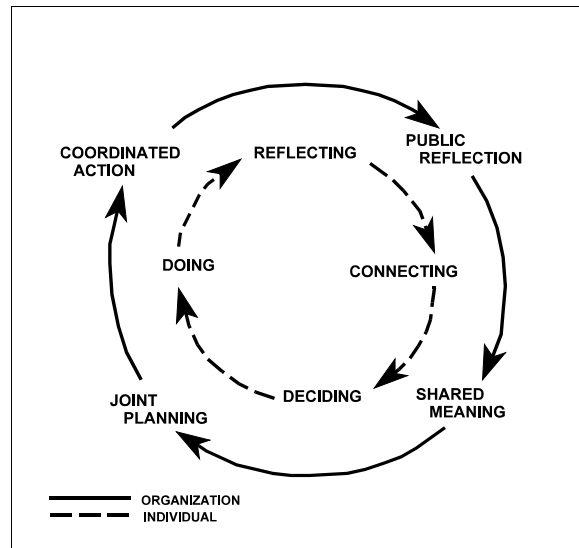
Learning Organization Cycle
(Adapted from Senge's Fieldbook)

There are several underlying assumptions which become readily apparent early in the semester to students enrolled in AED 401/501. These assumptions are the foundation for the curriculum and they frame the operating principles for the class. For the Leadership Concepts and Context course, it is assumed that:
- ▸ We are all called to lead.
- ▸ Leading and lifelong learning are inextricably linked.
- ▸ Leadership education is most effective when it is contextually grounded.
- ▸ Leading and managing are different but not dissociated.
- ▸ Leading is a shared responsibility for creating a better world in which to live and

work which is manifested in our passion to engage others in bringing about purposeful change.

AED 401/501 meets once a week for 1½ hours which allows adequate time for group discussion and reflection plus a variety of in class learning activities. The focus is on personal leadership development through experiential learning, philosophical exploration, and both individual and group reflection. The purpose of the course is to provide a broad overview of leadership concepts and skills within a meaningful context developed by participants in the class.

STUDENT PROJECTS:
So, how does all of this play out? Let me outline two recent class projects, the first was a Campus Community Forum, and the second, an interview project focused on Service, Leadership, and Campus Community. In each case, students were asked to design and implement a project that would enhance campus community and would also provide them an opportunity to apply the concepts and skills they were learning in class. In addition, both projects were enhanced by the fact that each class included an eclectic group of students from a number of different majors, both undergraduates and graduate students, returning adult students, U of A staff members, and a cultural diversity which approximated that of the broader campus.

The idea for the Campus Community Forum grew out of a discussion of elements of the university system which confounded, frustrated, and alienated students. The question which hung in the air was, "Why don't "they" do something about all this?" After reflecting on our underlying assumptions, they began to realize that "they" was "we" and that what might replace bureaucracy was community. Thus the plan to bring people together to envision an ideal campus community was born.

Several weeks later, about four dozen people gathered in one of the dormitory common rooms. Participants included students, several faculty, a number of staff people, a dean, a vice president, a campus journalist, student services representatives, and the president. AED 401/501 students led them through a series of exercises which kept the attention focused on campus community. The first activity called for small groups to talk about what campus community meant to them and ultimately come up with a single sentence which expressed their ideas. These were then shared with the whole group. Next, participants were asked to reflect on the outcomes from the group discussion and to imagine the best possible future for the communities described. These vision ideas were posted on newsprint for all to see. Because the students didn't want to simply raise the possibility of an enhanced sense of community on campus without suggestions for following through, they concluded by asking participants to write suggestions for actualizing the vision on sticky notes and post them on a wall of newsprint. Dozens of post-its declaring "I can. . ." and "Together we can . . ." proclaimed that the group was ready to take steps toward a preferred future.

The second case (Service, Leadership, and Campus Community) came about as a result

of students trying to come to consensus on the single issue which elicited passion and generated commitment to a purpose for their project. Rather than a unifying purpose, they came up with a descriptive category for the kinds of issues they cared most about — the service role of the university and its leadership, and the ways in which community is enhanced by service. To explore the relationship between service and leadership, they chose to interview a broad cross section of the campus community. They developed an interview script which asked these four questions:

- ▸ When you think about service as it relates to the campus community, how do you explain what it means?
- ▸ How do you see yourself involved in service with, or for, the campus community? Can you describe some examples?
- ▸ In our discussion in class, we've talked about how serving the campus community and being a leader are often similar activities. What do you think? How do you see this happening?
- ▸ How would you describe a university president's leadership role as it relates to enhancing campus community?

Students analyzed and synthesized data from the interviews, using the information as the basis of a 2-hour dialogue with the new president of The University of Arizona. In addition, they developed a web page intended to share their findings and highlight service leadership on campus. When the president arrived, he took a seat on the long side of the conference table and, with magic marker, wrote his first name on the identification placard in from of him. His action invited openness and thus set the tone for the ensuing dialogue.

STUDENT DISCOVERIES — LESSONS LEARNED:
Students working on the Campus Community Forum explored the meaning of community on campus in some depth before finalizing their plans for the forum. They discovered that, in much the same way it takes a community to raise a child, it takes a campus community to educate a student. There were faculty, staff, administrators — even other students — who in one way or another had some influence on the quality of the education each member of the class received. They were surprised to learn who some of those people were and how they contributed to students' education.

The forum group was also pleased to discover the extent to which various members of the campus community made themselves available and contributed to the forum dialogue. Similarly, many of the administrators, staff, and faculty invited to the forum were encouraged to find students who had concerns about campus community as well as ideas about how it might be enhanced for the benefit of all.

The third discovery for students involved in the forum was that being an effective leader sometimes means being an effective facilitator of an educational process. Long held notions about leaders seeking power over other people and/or resources began to fade and were replaced with an awareness of the potential released when leaders seek power with people. This was manifested in their decision to ASK participants about the meaning of campus community rather than stage a confrontation and TELL them what they should do to create a better sense of community on campus.

Students involved in the Service, Leadership, and Campus Community project sought information in a much more traditional fashion. From their interviews, students made the following discoveries from each of the questions:

- ▸ In general, students think of service in terms of what's available to them, faculty mentioned forging links and doing committee work, and staff thought in terms of identifying needs and helping others.
- ▸ Overwhelmingly, people throughout the campus community felt it was important to build collaborations to enhance university life.
- ▸ Interviewees agreed that leadership and service were interrelated — different aspects of the same activity.
- ▸ The President's primary role as it relates to campus community is to model both leadership and service.

Another discovery made by the Service Leadership project group resulted from a two-hour dialogue during class with a president new to the campus. It soon became apparent that, in less than one semester, he had aggressively sought to know the campus community. He was very open, candid, and genuine in his interchange with students. For that class period, it was as though the hierarchy had disappeared. One comment in particular stood out as students reflected on their time with him. He explained that for many years he had often been the dominant person in a group. However, it was only when he realized that he didn't have to prove anything that he was free to serve. Then he felt he had truly become a leader — one who serves the greater good of the university community.

The third big lesson for the Service Leadership project group was that they discovered that in the process of working toward enhancing community on campus, they created community in class. They reflected at length on the meaning of the struggles encountered in trying to work together. They learned that, as a group, they had passed through the forming, norming, storming and performing stages (Gozdz). Experiencing those stages and coming to an understanding of what each stage meant helped them to appreciate the complexity of the campus community and the barriers to be overcome by a new president in his search for ways to serve and strengthen community at our university.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP EDUCATORS IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
As a leadership educator, I believe that students learn best from experience and within a meaningful context. If we begin with an understanding that leading and managing are not the same and focus on leadership as a relationship in which we engage others in bringing about positive change, then it seems obvious that students must learn about their reason for wanting to lead and the situation surrounding that purpose. Too often, we jump to the skill development stage before reflecting on purpose and context. And quite often, the skills that form the basis of a leadership education effort are, in fact, management skills.

If the intent is to develop effective leaders in and for a learning organization, then it seems to me that each member of that organization ought to have at least the most rudimentary skills suggested by the Learning Organization Cycle presented earlier. It follows then that students, administrators, faculty, and staff all need to develop skills in reflective thinking,

creating shared meaning, collaborative planning, and integrating action toward mutual intent. Students in AED 401/501 have the opportunity to learn and apply these skills as well as model them for others in the campus community. This comes about as a result of a classroom environment that expects students to take the lead in their own learning and to develop a meaningful context within which to learn and lead for the purpose of enhancing campus community.

At The University of Arizona, students in AED 401/501 have served as catalysts for bringing cross-sections of the campus together to enhance a sense of community. They have successfully implemented projects which are designed to create shared meaning and encourage coordinated planning. Though a process of learning and leading, applying what they discovered in class, these students have stepped up to their role as active members of campus community and The University of Arizona is the richer for it. University students are perhaps the most powerful players in creating community and moving the campus in the direction of becoming a learning organization.

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