Teaching leadership as exploring sacred space
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This paper explores the sacred space of teaching and learning by examining a five-year personal inquiry into the study and practice of teaching leadership. The research described exposes the value of engaging in action inquiry as a heuristic in the ongoing process of teaching and learning about leadership. The writing reflects five years of work and explains a parallel process that describes students' learning and the author's own learning and development as a teacher, scholar, and university leader as a result of working together in experiential undergraduate leadership classes. The data used for this research included student interviews, journals, and reflective papers as well as personal insights gained through my own journaling and reflection throughout the five-year period. Real action inquiry requires a disciplined reflective capacity, and it is one way for students and teachers to transform themselves and their organizations.

Keywords: teaching leadership; action inquiry; undergraduate teaching and learning; action research; case-in-point pedagogy; group relations

Introduction: leadership and the practice of presence

The research described in this paper exposes the value of engaging in action inquiry as a heuristic in the ongoing process of teaching and learning about leadership. Those working in leadership education know the challenges of various pedagogical approaches and the concomitant struggle with measuring one's success as a leadership educator. Most agree that teaching leadership requires an engagement with students in a process of discovery (Doh 2003) that includes an explicit examination of one's most deeply held values and beliefs (Heifetz 1994) while simultaneously attending to the many demands of an increasingly complex social order (Haley 2002).

This writing reflects five years of personal inquiry into the study and practice of teaching leadership. It explains a parallel process that integrates my students' learning with my own learning and development as a teacher, scholar, and university leader as a result of our work together in the classroom. The undergraduate course I teach, 'Leadership and the Practice of Presence', provided the impetus for this study, which describes the complex dynamic and the recursive process of teaching *and* learning about leadership. It is a personal account of learning how to engage one's internal experience while maintaining an ongoing reflective stance on the various external roles and responsibilities one often undertakes when working in higher education.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to describe the process by which I attempted to strengthen the pedagogical design of the course, to reflect and analyze the impact

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of my work on the students' learning, and to assess my own learning and ability to improve my teaching by making immediate, short-term, and long-term adjustments to the course each year it was offered. In addition, as a result of the reciprocal relationship between teaching leadership and practicing leadership, a parallel process of meaning-making in relation to my own professional practice as a university administrator will be described.

In the sections that follow I first describe the conceptual frameworks that guided this research; I then describe the pedagogical methods used for the undergraduate course that is the focus of study. The third section begins to describe the time line and provides a context for the remaining portions of the paper by explaining how this research began with an inquiry into my own effectiveness as an instructor, administrator, and scholar. This section, along with others, also includes student perspectives on their learning from the course. In the remaining sections I discuss the changes I made to the course and my perceptions of the outcomes. Finally, I end with a discussion about the deeper levels of learning available to our students, and to me, and that seem more plausible as a result of this research.

Conceptual framework

There are two related frameworks that guided this study: transformative learning theory (Boyd and Meyers 1988; Mezirow 1999; Cranton 1994), and Bill Torbert's notion of action inquiry. Both frames are useful in analyzing and understanding the experiences and meaning-making of the staff and students. Mezirow (1991) notes meaning-making is central to the learning process. In a new learning situation such as this, students and instructors typically rely on previous experiences that originate from old expectations about leadership and authority (these concepts will be explained more fully in the next section). However, in transformative learning 'we reinterpret an old experience (or a new one) from a new set of expectations, thus giving a new meaning and perspective to the old experience' (Mezirow 1991, 11). Mezirow further explains that we use prior interpretations of our experience to create a revised interpretation that guides future action. This course environment creates a space for meaning-making to take place for students and staff.

This type of learning is grounded in constructivism, which describes how one constructs, makes meaning, and defines one's reality (Cranton 1994). Lambert and her colleagues identify several elements of constructivist learning theory that are useful to this study:

> Knowledge and beliefs are formed within the learner; learners personally imbue experiences with meaning; learning activities should cause learners to gain access to their experiences, knowledge and beliefs; reflection and metacognition are essential aspects of constructing knowledge and meaning; learners play a critical role in assessing their own learning; and, the outcomes of the learning processes are varied and often unpredictable. (Lambert et al. 1995, 18)

In addition to using the lens of transformative learning, my approach is grounded in what Bill Torbert describes as *action inquiry,* as a ' way of simultaneously conducting action and inquiry as a disciplined leadership practice that increases the wider effectiveness of our actions' (Torbert et al. 2004, 1). Torbert describes action inquiry as a way of becoming more capable of transforming ourselves and our organizations by using our own experiences in the present moment to 'engage in action inquiry

intentionally' (Torbert et al. 2004, 6). Consistent with Mezirow's notion that 'meaning exists within ourselves' (1991, xiv), action inquiry is a disciplined way of becoming aware *in the moment* of our actions and behaviors and using this knowledge to act in ways that are consistent with our stated purpose.

Developing a capacity for reflection and analysis in the moment by examining one's practice and subsequent experiences can greatly enhance an instructor's ability to access these data in a purposeful way to contribute to the ongoing learning process. In addition to gathering data from other resources, the *first-person* perspective (Torbert et al. 2004) is valuable as an ongoing parallel process of identifying ways to improve one's teaching of leadership (Marshall 2001).

In this study, I attempt to 'interweave subjective, intersubjective, and objective' (Torbert et al. 2004, 9) data throughout. Subjective data are derived from my own intentions for the future of this study (to improve the course), intersubjective data include data about what is happening in the present moment (ongoing reflective practices), and objective data include information obtained from others in the past (interviews). Alternative ways to characterize the three levels of inquiry are first-person, second-person, and third-person research and practice (Chandler and Torbert 2003; Torbert 2000; Torbert et al. 2004).

Thus, with regard to first-person action inquiry, I include insights, learning, and reflections from my own journals and note-taking throughout the five-year process. Second-person data were derived from five interviews (once a month for five months), journal entries, and reflections from my work with four women: three students and one staff member who participated in the fall 2002 course. Additional second-person data were gained through professional articles I have read and from discussions and feed-back from experts, colleagues, and mentors. Third-person data were collected through final course evaluations and students' class papers.

As with many studies, it is impossible to report all of the findings that emerged between 2002 and 2007. My approach stems from my prior experiences and under-standing of leadership and authority. In the following sections I first explain the pedagogy used, then synthesize the data using each level of inquiry described above, and finally discuss the major outcomes of this study that became visible over time.

Course pedagogy

The course is designed as an intensive weekend experience with two pre-session and two post-session classes (the terms *course*, *conference,* and *weekend* are used interchangeably throughout this paper). The course is structured both organization-ally and in content similarly to group relations conferences that are grounded in the psychoanalytic understanding of groups and organizations (Getz and Gelb 2007; Wells 1990). The pedagogy used is sometimes also called 'case-in-point' (Daloz-Parks 2005) in view of the fact that the group is used as the source (case, or point of study). The strength of this type of pedagogy is that it engages the learners (students and faculty) simultaneously in four levels of analysis: intrapersonal (introspection), interpersonal (interactions with others), group (any sub-system within the larger whole), and system as a whole (or larger organization, in this case the temporary organization of the class) (Wells 1990). Building one's capacity to understand each level of analysis develops slowly over time and with practice. Typical of a systems theory approach, students' learning is enhanced when they begin to understand that

the actions and behaviors of individuals and groups often represent more than what is observable and conscious (Lewin 1997). Events that unfold also might have meaning for the larger group and organization or for the class as a whole (Bertram-Gallant and Getz 2009).

The weekend is a tightly (and purposefully) structured format that includes small-group and large-group activities (events) that are designed to heighten students' awareness about their relationships (and relatedness) with authority: their own and others. However, many students initially perceive the format as lacking structure because they perceive that they receive little guidance (from the authority figures, such as myself and several other supporting instructors) about how to negotiate the space and/or manage themselves without specific instructions delivered to them in traditional ways.

Questions about authority, truth, and ultimate power are salient for young adults developing toward inner dependence (Daloz-Parks 2000). Many view leadership as something located in a position or title, and in our leadership programs we help students unpack these notions by demonstrating that leadership is a *process* versus a *position* (Heifetz 1994; Heifetz and Linsky 2002). Unclear distinctions remain between *formal* authority, best described as those in positions with a title like *professors*, *coaches*, and *administrators*; and *informal* authority, which is conferred on those who are perceived by the group to be able to meet the group's needs in some way.

Thus, in this course, students are given the opportunity to reflect on the ways in which they manage themselves in an organization, and their relationships with those both in formal positions of authority (instructors) and informal positions of authority (peers).

The students learn by examining their own and others' behaviors as it occurs *in the moment*, and the events that unfold during the weekend are emblematic of issues that arise in most organizations. Since most young people are accustomed to a more traditional pedagogical style in their classes, previous expectations about the role of an instructor weigh heavily on the minds of most students.

As a result, their dependency on authority is so great that they become confused and angry when their expectations of the person *in charge* are not met (Daloz-Parks 2005; Heifetz 1994). The anxiety and the subsequent questioning about the structure and methods being used are what elicit the anxiety that is available for study. My role as the lead instructor (*director* of the weekend conference) is to create (and sustain) an environment that helps students recognize they actually *are* fully responsible for their own learning, and thus they are encouraged to build their own ways to construct new knowledge about themselves, their groups, and the system (all of the students and the instructors) as a whole. Some of the most powerful learning occurs when students are able to view each other as valid resources of data versus relying on gaining knowledge solely from the instructor.

Many students find ways to experiment with their learning during the variety of large-group and small-group events during the weekend. Students gain access to their experiences (Cranton 1994) and continue to reflect on old patterns and tightly held belief systems based on previous experiences (Mezirow 1991). They then have opportunities for *reflection and action* (Argyris and Schon 1974); that is, reflecting and experimenting with new ways of acting, thus constructing new ways of being and seeing themselves and others. As previously noted, these are essential aspects of constructing knowledge and meaning (Cranton 1994; Glisczinski 2007). One of the specific objectives of the course is:

  – To study and analyze the dynamic forces that influence the life of groups and
    organizations – including those which are intentional and conscious as well as
    those that are unintended and less conscious.

This has been the most difficult objective for undergraduate students to comprehend,
and in the final section of this paper I describe how, after four conferences, the
students demonstrated valuable learning about the power of the group consciousness.

   As the lead instructor (I will refer to this role as *director* from here), I too have
many opportunities for reflection and learning. In fact, Adams (1997, 224) noted that
'The primary task of the director is to tend to the complexities of self.' Interestingly,
her publication is entitled *A letter to a young director* and it resonated with me greatly.
She commented further: 'The task is to hear, to be sensitive to, to understand as best
as possible, what is going on in the conference at two levels, the readily available and
the more covert levels. You are the instrument to measure these' (Adams 1997, 244).
I have learned much about myself, about teaching leadership, and about valuable
lessons learned and demonstrated by the authenticity of students and faculty (I will
refer to the faculty as *staff* members from here) working with me in the course. I begin
the analysis in the following section by describing my experience as the director of the
conference for the first time.

Finding voice begins with recognizing that you have one

The first conference I directed was in the fall 2002 semester. I remember it well as
an important event in my own development as an instructor. This type of teaching
is not easy and I knew this when I agreed to create the course for undergraduates,
with the encouragement of my colleague, Terri, who had many years of experience
with this type of teaching with graduate students. At the time I had been appointed
associate dean in the School of Education following two years as assistant dean and
then two years as director of graduate programs; the previous 16 years I spent as a
women's basketball coach at a number of universities. This is relevant in several
ways. First, finding my own voice as an academic and as an administrator in
academic affairs was a struggle for me at this point in my career. Second, at this
time I did not have a tenure-track faculty line, and opportunities to teach and
engage in research began to present themselves in a variety of ways; this led me to
believe that a tenure-track position was something I could aspire toward, and
eventually did. Finally, my introduction to this type of teaching was in January
2000, when I participated in the first graduate conference at our school. I immedi-
ately began to see how much this work could impact and transform our students,
faculty, and me.

   I began with a great deal of trepidation and anxiety about taking on the role of
director, having worked on staff in only a handful of graduate conferences. My
colleague Terri agreed to serve in the role of associate director. She was very well
respected by the faculty who were on staff and who held her in high regard. In my
journal I wrote 'One of my challenges will be to bring myself to the role – and not try
to be Terri. Also this will be an adjustment for the staff.' In retrospect, I struggled
greatly with finding my own voice and fully embracing my role as the director of the
conference. I found it difficult to speak many times, and I was glad to place Terri in a
position to take on all of the negative projections from students when she spoke with
poise and confidence. After the conference I wrote in my journal:

> While I intellectually know that I am quite competent, I often lose the ability to be aware of my strengths and capabilities, and therefore I put myself in subordinate positions to others whom I feel (at the time) to be more competent than myself. This was certainly the case with Terri at the undergraduate conference. Of course she did not intimidate me, but I was not confident in my own ability to do the job as well as she does.

Most people would agree that confidence and the ability to communicate this effectively is one of the most fundamental attributes of good leadership. While some may find this easy, others, especially women, learn early on that self-expression and speaking about one's experience can be problematic. Specifically, displays of behavior that *appear* to 'convey dominance, negative assertion, self-promotion, or lack of warmth' (Eagly and Carli 2004, 296) are not consistent with expectations of female gender roles, and thus can impact a woman's ability to lead. One result is that women are often encouraged to be less self-promoting and to be more self-effacing than men. Furthermore, research (Carli 1990; Carli, LaFleur, and Loeber 1995) with college students shows that women who demonstrate competence and assertiveness are less likely to be able to influence men, and therefore many women rely on more gendered behaviors such as nurturing and outward expressions of warmth.

Participants in a conference are required to engage in activities that invite them to gain access to their experiences, prior knowledge, and belief systems. During the conference, opportunities abound for students to experiment with taking on various roles, and they can choose to express themselves in large and small groups, with or without the staff and director present. The data that emerged indicated that participants often discovered remarkable opportunities for self-reflection about finding one's voice in the context of this leadership course (Richards-Wilson 2004). In this respect, it is significant that the four people who volunteered to participate in a 2002 follow-up study were women. In the following paragraphs, several students, including the four women I interviewed, describe – through focus group interviews, journal entries, and final course papers – their experiences of finding voice.

Kerry, a junior, found it difficult to speak during most of the conference, acknowledging that she deferred to men to take the pressure off of her, but she learned that doing this was preventing her from expressing herself:

> After a while into the conference, I found my own voice and started talking a little bit more. And I think that yeah, definitely women – or at least I – look for men to take up that role in that conversation, as being the people that have the main focus, so I don't have to take up that focus. And that's something that now I feel like I have recognized and I've tried to not let myself get in that position of being uncomfortable and wanting the attention off me. Because once that happens, then I can't express myself at all, because I clam up and I don't talk.

Similarly, Caren, a senior, discussed her feelings regarding speaking up more and said:

> I feel like I've reflected on that a lot. And it bothered me that I didn't maybe speak up more – 'cause I feel like maybe I should have – during the conference. So I think now, because of that, and being a woman and wanting to be a stronger woman, I take up my authority much more. And I've reflected on that a lot.

Concerning her learning after reflection, Amy, a sophomore, wrote in her final paper that:

confidence is one of the strongest feelings that I walked away with from the conference. It seems like I have found my voice. I see myself standing up in conversations with my coach, my friends, and my family.

The issues that arose during the conference are not specific to undergraduate students. These are familiar episodes in the lives of many adults. I began to reflect on the type of learning that the students described, and increasingly began to understand what was meant by the old adage 'We teach what we need to learn the most.' What began to surface for me, and something I could feel at the most visceral level, were my own fears of incompetence in this work and, equally as frightening, my thoughts about my (in)ability to be successful as a teacher and scholar. I identified as an administrator, and felt relatively confident in that role. I recalled what Sandy (who was the administrator for the conference) wrote in her journal about me in my role as director:

> The director was very active in many of the administrative duties when compared to the model I witnessed in July. She was obviously new to her role and the weight of the responsibility that goes along with being the lead authority in this conference was clearly creating anxiety for her.

Sandy's insights were important because they helped me recognize that I was in fact taking on administrative tasks to relieve some of the anxiety inherent in the director role, and my desire to demonstrate my competence led me to the very familiar place of administration. After all, I was a very astute administrator – good at making lists and taking care of details, and, in fact, this was one area where I knew I was *competent*. But how did I feel about my capacity to exercise effective *leadership*?

So, the question arose, What did I need to learn, and how could my knowing, and then *acknowledging*, what I needed to learn be used to benefit our students' learning? I intuitively knew that by teaching this course I was entangled in a web of complex and interrelated learning opportunities with my colleagues and our students. I realized that real learning was possible by reflecting on the ways I was working with the students and staff at the conferences, as well as my colleagues at the university. If 'exercising leadership frequently means getting people to face the internal contradictions of the situation being addressed, to examine the unconscious processes, patterns, and mental models related to effectiveness' (Getz and Gelb 2007), then my own sense of anxiety related to (in)competence was exactly what was available for study (for me and others). The concept of *using self as an instrument* finally made sense. I read and reread Kenwyn Smith's chapter entitled 'On using the self as instrument: lessons from a facilitator's experience,' in which he said:

> The starting point to using self as an instrument is to be fully open to whatever emotions well up within the facilitator, even if they are threatening and would normally be censored. Then intense intellectual work is required, actively seeking new patterns for understanding what is transpiring in the group. The third requirement is then to work out, on the basis of the feelings and thoughts that are surfacing, how to make active use of one's personhood as a catalyst for group development and member growth. (Smith 1995, 293)

What I know now is that when one *comes clean* (e.g. admits fallibility), it goes a long way toward helping others do the same. In this way, those of us working in leadership development can begin to help people move away from traditional concepts of *command and control* leadership.

Reflection and action

As students' views of leadership start to expand and they begin to explore with one another, some become deeply engaged in the learning while others withdraw. Hence, it is difficult to identify specific learning outcomes immediately, and to discern why some students do not fully engage. In every class there are always two to three students who indicate that they did not learn anything in the class, and while I take these comments (on final papers and course evaluations) very seriously, I may never know what type of learning surfaces for those students years later, as it is not unusual for our graduate students to tell us it took them a couple of years to make sense of their learning.

In this course, the perception of the teacher having all of the answers is dispelled, and students begin to understand that they are truly responsible for their own learning. When this occurs, it enables them to participate in more meaningful types of interactions with their peers. Josh explained this in his final paper:

> Instead of hearing a professor speak all the time and simply soaking up what he or she says, this class forced me to learn from my own experience and reflection. While to me, this was more mentally draining than any other way of learning I've gone through, I feel as though it was the most rewarding. Even though gathering information and reflecting on it was very exhausting, it was also very gratifying because the information and knowledge came from me as opposed to a textbook or professor.

As such, it usually takes at least a full day for the students to fully grasp that they are responsible for their own learning. Josh noted:

> Here we were in charge and the teachers were just there to at times try and help us by suggestions and ideas. But for a good chunk of the conference we all were looking at these authority figures for approval and recognition that we were doing not just what we were supposed to but that we were doing it well.

Eventually, most of the students understand and appreciate that they already have the knowledge and experience necessary to learn from each other about various aspects of leadership and authority.

An example of reflecting and then acting is demonstrated in John's final paper. John received a significant amount of feedback from his peers about gender differences in communication. After getting the feedback that he spoke much more often than others, especially some of the women, he decided to change his speaking patterns by thinking first and waiting before he spoke, to give others an opportunity to get into the conversation. He reflects on his learning:

> One event in particular showed me that what I was trying to do was positive for the group. During our discussion (about what exactly, I do not recall), a thought came to my mind and I was about to comment on it. However, I stopped myself and thought that I should allow someone else time to let their voice be heard. Then, just a few seconds later, one of the females in our group who did not speak too often came out with a comment that was very similar to what was going through my head at the time. It was rewarding for me to hear her say this because, while it obviously was not directly because of me that she said it, had I simply spoken up like I was so accustomed to doing, she probably would not have had a chance to say what she wanted to say. So, I felt like my silence gave her the opening to make her comment.

This is a wonderful example of John working to develop a sense of awareness or a capacity for reflecting *in the moment* and then making a purposeful decision about

how to respond (or in this case, not). The outcome was quite extraordinary, as the point John wanted to make was made *through others*, and as a result he could *join with* his colleague to move the group further along toward their goal. Obviously John did not take his learning quite this far, but the insight will probably enhance his work with groups in the future.

Exploring the nature of competency

In the first staff meeting for the spring 2004 conference, I opened with the following quote: 'The whole of competency must be understood as a relationship between the individual competencies and the group competency at a particular time and that these two aspects affect and are a part of each other' (Ford 1997, 256). I wanted to convey to the staff my experiences up to this juncture as a director, and to link this learning with them and to the students. Ford described the difference between the singular competency, which is all or none – either I am competent or not – versus the notion that we all have an array of competencies. I added:

> When I realized that my competencies are mine, that is, I can't compare them with others' or even expect that they will even be seen by others as *competency*. I can feel freed up to do the work of a conference director, in whatever form that would take at this time in my development.

I wanted the staff to also be freed up to do their work, and to be open and aware of the ways their work would influence (and be influenced by) the work of the students. The staff had changed slightly from the previous conference. Terri took on a behind-the-scenes role as head of small-group training. I invited Amanda to be the associate director; she would be the only staff member who was not from our school. Although Terri still played a significant role in the staff preparations and subsequent learning, this felt like an important step for my fully taking on the role of director of *this* conference. I was developing competence (and confidence) in my director role.

I spent the time between the 2002 and 2004 conference/class thinking about what I needed to change and/or adjust in the class. I reviewed the syllabus and the course evaluations and I reflected on the focus group interviews. The course evaluations were mostly positive, and the final papers in the course led me to believe that students were learning. I believed that many students completed the course with a better understanding of what it means to exercise effective leadership. This is not to say all (or even the majority) of students learn *how* to better exercise leadership, but most learn to become *aware* of what it means to be an effective leader. However, I realized at that time I was unable to articulate *exactly* what the students were learning. Hence, I thought it was time to do additional research. I paired up with a senior colleague who agreed to help me explore a variety of survey instruments, and finally decided to create my own survey instrument tailored to the specific questions I had about this class. I administered the leadership survey I developed to the 32 students who participated in the spring 2004 course. The survey consisted of 45 questions and used a seven-point Likert scale to measure participants' experiences with leadership and group dynamics. For each item they were asked how well they understood the statement; with one indicating 'not at all,' to seven indicating 'extremely well.' The survey, along with two others, was administered before and after the conference, and it also included six

open-ended questions on the post-survey. The students completed these along with the traditional course evaluations at the end of the class. The result was *survey overload*! I spent countless hours investigating various instruments that would be appropriate for this study, and then I prepared all of the various technical details that go into administering any pre-survey and post-survey; collected and analyzed the data; and speculated and hypothesized about the data. What did I learn? What I can say is that the responses I received were overwhelmingly *inconclusive*. There were questions that elicited minor, insignificant changes in the survey responses after the conference. But nothing surfaced that would indicate positive (or negative) significant change as a result of participating in the class. The most significant learning for me from this process was that using quantitative measures for a pre-empirical and post-empirical study was not the most appropriate strategy for learning more about this particular class. Additionally, I can hypothesize that not enough time had elapsed between the pre-test and post-test administration, and I might have had better success had I waited longer to administer the post-survey. After analyzing the data, I found scant utilizable information to better understand the experiences of the students, and subsequently to improve the course.

However, one result of this work was my growing awareness that being a *competent* scholar/researcher does not mean I must use quantitative methods of analysis. I understand and appreciate the strengths inherent in statistical methods of analysis, but they did not adequately answer my research questions, nor did the research resonate with me. My scholarly contributions will continue to include non-traditional forms of inquiry, and I am more confident in pursuing this direction. Upon reflection, I am reminded and not surprised that what *this* class (and others like it) do is get students and staff to think deeply, reflect, and question their inherent (and often deeply ingrained) values and beliefs about themselves and others – and this contributes to leadership effectiveness. Furthermore, this particular type of teaching and learning is best *described* by students and staff members who are capable of being in touch with their own *incompetence* and can experience moments of fallibility, which I believe many intuitively know is exactly what they need to learn. About two weeks after completing the conference Kerry explained:

> I question myself more than I would like to because of what I experienced and learned during the conference and it has made my life a lot less fun. I feel as if I over-analyze everything and that I'm not normal anymore. This has put a strain on my relationships with my friends and my family, and has even allowed me to look at my peers and professors in a different light. I believe that gaining the ability to look deeper in myself for the true meaning of my own thoughts will be beneficial in the long run, but right now it's difficult to deal with the repercussions of my own thoughts and ideas.

Some might interpret or be disturbed by the rawness of Kerry's comments and thus view them as a limitation. But this is exactly the type of honest questioning that is often unspoken and thus unavailable for examination. It is too easily portrayed as a weakness or lack of confidence. Yet anyone who has experienced moments or periods of change resulting from deep introspection has had the experience of feeling lost and discouraged. Five years have passed since the first conference, when Kerry was a student. She is now a successful development officer at a local university and I continue to have brief encounters with her. She talks with enthusiasm about what she learned about herself and others as a result of the deep learning she engaged in at the conference.

A more integral perspective

I had much to think about during the 18 months before I offered the course again in the fall 2005 semester. This was a significant period of transformation for me and also for the development of the course. I thought deeply about the class, my role as a (now) tenure-track faculty member, and my identity as an administrator. As the Associate Dean, I was embroiled in the complexity of spearheading a national accreditation visit for our school, and had a growing awareness that I had developed an intuitive way of sensing the needs of individuals (faculty members), groups (faculty committees), and the system as a whole (school). As a result of my experience using this pedagogy I grew more competent in seeing and articulating the various *implicit and explicit* roles in which I saw myself and others, and then instinctively knowing what steps to take to move the groups forward. Although I had always been able to *remain calm* in times of chaos, I was more able to see the complexity within the chaos. For example, I began to understand that the anger expressed by some faculty was more than simply an unwillingness to participate in the process; it was a system dynamic that could represent any number of frustrations and fears. If I kept this concept in mind, I found it easier to work from a place of compassion versus defensiveness.

During the summer before the fall 2005 conference, at the insistence of Terri, I attended a week-long seminar at Ken Wilber's Integral Institute in Boulder, Colorado. During this week, there were opportunities to explore leadership development from each of the four quadrants (self: personal development; behaviors: tools, skills, and abilities; culture: norms of organization, social identity; and system or organization as a whole) that Wilber uses as an organizing framework to understand the individual and collective experiences of people, systems, and the larger social order (Wilber 2000). This experience changed the way I looked at my work with the undergraduate students. During the week I was exposed to a wide range of activities that engaged me cognitively, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. As a result, I hoped to integrate a variety of pathways, or instructional activities, to help our students begin to think more deeply about the conscious and unconscious ways they make decisions *in the moment* that impact and influence both themselves and those around them.

In my search for new understanding, I found great resonance with the book *Presence, human purpose and the field of the future* (Senge *et al.* 2004). I thought it was quite synchronistic that when I developed the undergraduate course in 2002, I chose the title 'Leadership and the Practice of Presence.' Everything was making more sense; I had begun to find my voice. The connections between my teaching, the research I was interested in pursuing, and my administrative work began to *feel* more integrated. I made several changes to the fall 2005 class, which are briefly described next.

Several faculty colleagues also began exploring similar aspects of this work in their related disciplines. I began to explore what it meant to view leadership development from an integral perspective, and how this could enhance the work I was doing with the undergraduates. Undergraduate students, or millennials, as they have been coined by student affairs professionals, have been characterized as being overly stimulated by advances in technology and involved in so many activities (work, school, community) that they have little *downtime* for reflection or thoughtful contemplation. I found this characterization helpful as I tried to understand the students I was working with.

I changed the reading assignments, and added readings from *Presence* and another reading on the similar topic of presence by Otto Sharmer (2003). I also added three

new seminars: one on drumming, which connected making music with aspects of group dynamics; another on movement, taught by a faculty member in theater arts who used movement to help students appreciate the value of discourse in learning more about individual differences; and the final seminar on meditation and *presencing*, which gave the students a chance to practice slowing down their mind and becoming more mindful of how they interact in the world. When we do this we become more cognizant of the 'capacities that develop from our interactions' (Senge et al. 2004, 9). *Presencing* involves moving individuals, groups, and organizations through an unfolding process that teaches us that the phenomenon of leadership 'based on presence is that we know it can be trusted, because of its honesty and forthrightness' (Roberts 2007, 108). Trusting that this type of experience will enhance leadership effectiveness, students responded positively in their journals and indicated it was rare for them to pause and be quiet; very few had ever thought much about how they have developed habitual ways of thinking and acting in the world. This session was not nearly long enough for them to grapple with the complexity of *presencing*; but when it was connected to the other experiences they had at the conference, it was just enough for some to take notice of familiar patterns.

Another significant change: I was ready to fully embrace the role as the director, and Terri would not be included on the staff. Instead I hired a very experienced senior male from outside our region to be on staff to assist me. I was a little anxious about this because I knew he was not familiar with some of the more non-traditional techniques we were using at our specific conferences. Indeed, one of the changes I made was the inclusion of a morning quiet space for the staff. Colored pencils, paper, paints were available for the staff if they wanted to tap into the creative energy we so often disregard as unimportant to the *real* work. He was actually unconvinced about the benefits of including these aspects in the conference, but he supported the staff and myself nonetheless, and asked important questions that pushed my thinking.

Inner dimensions of consciousness

I must pause now to take note of my learning in *this* moment. I have grown accustomed to engaging in the simultaneous process of action and inquiry, and must admit that writing this paper (which has been on my mind for a couple years in various forms) has not been easy. When I review what I have written I think maybe I am being too pedantic or self-promoting; I wonder what my colleagues will think about my choice of methodology, which includes so much personal disclosure (some of those colleagues will be making decisions about my promotion and tenure next year); I feel a flutter in my stomach when I think about presenting this work in public as I prepare for a national conference where the paper has been accepted. This is my first attempt to articulate a deeper learning about myself that I have always found extremely powerful and *very* private. However, I have been encouraged by my colleagues and other scholars who have begun to take seriously the study of one's personal search for meaning and purpose in higher education (UCLA n.d.). Also, many faculty and administrators are including various contemplative practices in their work and beginning to recognize the benefits of this inclusion to their teaching and administrative positions (Zajonc 2003). Yet, I find myself grappling with the distinctions between faith and spirituality; consciousness studies and contemplative practices; connection and interdependence, and other aspects. But I have *great* clarity about the need for leadership development that engages the inner dimensions of consciousness and

strongly endorse an authentic exploration of one's deepest desires, which will surely strengthen students' capacity for exercising effective leadership.

I can say this with such strong conviction because I have had the experience myself and see direct and relatively immediate results in my own capacity to exercise effective leadership. I am more able to consider the depth and breadth of my own competence as an instructor and administrator. This does not mean I do not make mistakes, in fact I make them often; but I know if I wait long enough a resolution will emerge, and my feelings of doubt, frustration, or fear will dissipate in the process. This type of teaching is very difficult for the director, who is vulnerable to the projections and desires the students have about what makes a *good* instructor (leader). Being able to hold steady in the face of great criticism is not easy, and this is where much of my learning has emerged. I was recently introduced to the relevant leadership concept of negative capability, which is the 'capacity to sustain reflective inaction' (Simpson, French, and Harvey 2002, 1210). It is described as negative because it is the ability to *not* do something as a purposeful solution. It is an 'emphasis on patient waiting and on containing the pressures evoked by uncertainty' (Simpson, French, and Harvey 2002, 1211). Similarly in my work with these conferences, I have learned what I describe as *discernible stillness* or the ability to be fully aware of the chaos surrounding me; to be conscious of an impending outburst in a group; yet, I remain still enough to *see* and to *feel*. I can accept the group as an entity that has a life of its own, and I know that the individuals within the group often respond in ways that seem odd to others, in an effort to provide temporary relief for the system (whole group).

Surfacing the unconscious: seeing the whole and the parts at the same time

In my journal in November 2005, I wrote:

> The learning seems to be more focused on the individual level. I need to focus on how to emphasize to the students that there is a group consciousness. When one is in an individual space/consciousness – it is easy to lose the concept of the group. Group consciousness cannot be set aside for individual consciousness. Holding the capacity for being aware of self and others (group consciousness) is imperative, and we must learn to work from this place.

Thus in the spring 2007 course, I made significant changes in the pre-session and post-session, added a new final assignment, and enlisted the help of a colleague to work with me on designing exercises using photographs (that the students took) to illustrate the significance of the group as a whole (Wells 1990). I gave much more specific attention to providing instruction during the first class about group relations theory (as an aspect of systems theory), and outlined specific elements of the theory and asked the students to begin thinking about these elements by taking pictures of how boundaries, authority, roles, and task (four elements) were represented in their lives. These were the photographs we used for the duration of the class and during the conference. There is not enough space in this paper to adequately describe the events, discussions, and subsequent learning that transpired. The final projects demonstrated a sophisticated level of learning. Perhaps this was because the group was smaller (only 16 students this time) or because all but one were women, and just about one-half were either juniors or seniors. There is no way to differentiate one reason from another, and there is little I can do to explain this. I realize this was the group meant to be present for this experience at this time. One example of a final project completed by students

is relevant. It was a mosaic picture of a Buddha statue. When you step back you see one large picture, but as you get closer you see that the larger picture is made up of many tiny pictures. The students told me this was what they learned about developing the capacity of seeing the whole and the parts at the same time, and being able to hold the complexity of both simultaneously – not one or the other.

This is an ongoing process of inquiry, reflection, and action, and thus my work is never completed. I continue to think about this class and wonder, for example, why the course evaluations were so much better for this particular course than any of the other three previous conference/courses. I am hesitant to put this in writing, but while I certainly learn something from reviewing course evaluations, I do not believe they tell the whole story. I received the outstanding undergraduate faculty member of the year award for our school based on this course (I taught only one undergraduate course that spring). Even though several students expressed very real and genuine gratitude to me for exposing them to this class, I do not think the students' enthusiasm was remotely about *me*. The 15 very high-achieving young women in this class were able to see themselves in me as I *finally* became fully present in my role as director. They examined themselves deeply, and discussed and debated issues of voice, power, authority, and roles. They got angry at me, they fought back, they lost composure and then regained it; they learned to sit still amidst the chaos in the room and in their minds. They used me so they could make sense of their own competence. And we all learned together.

My work with undergraduate students for the past six years integrates much deeper levels of learning than I could have previously imagined. My own doors of perception have been opened and I see, feel, and intuit circumstances at each turn, and have been involved in an intentional and iterative process of thinking, reflecting, and acting with purpose. What began as a fairly innocuous interest in using this pedagogy became a pursuit of a deeper understanding of myself and others that helped shape the class, my teaching, and my work as an administrator. My strongest desire now is to find meaningful ways to articulate my experience while being present to the ubiquitous nature of what it is I am trying to describe. What I have experienced is conscious, unconscious, and without consciousness; the sacred space between consciousness and unconsciousness. This is the stillness where insight exists and becomes discernible without dialogue or discussion.

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