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### At the intersection of leadership and learning: a self-study of using student-centered pedagogies in the classroom

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## At the intersection of leadership and learning: a self-study of using student-centered pedagogies in the classroom

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This paper describes the outcomes of a self-study that we undertook as instructors of a capstone undergraduate leadership course. Using the framework of action inquiry and a variety of pedagogical approaches, we sought to create a course and classroom environment that was student-centered, empowering, and transformative. Three questions are addressed: how can we improve the balance of our authority with our roles as instructors; how can we use the balance of role and authority to empower our students; and how can we be critically reflective of our teaching process to improve our learning? Data for these questions were collected from four years of individual and joint reflection and journaling. Additionally, students' reflection papers in the course served as an additional source of data and triangulation.

**Keywords:** self-study; student-centered learning; transformative learning; teaching

### Introduction

Preparing students to be engaged citizens of today and tomorrow calls for transforming the curricular learning environments that students encounter in higher education. Much of the curricular landscape in college involves one-way transactional approaches to teaching and learning that emphasize the recalling of facts and information with little context and focus on critical examination and application (Duch, Groh, and Allen 2001a). As a result, students engage with pedagogical models that neither invite them to the learning process nor challenge them to think about what it really means to learn; their opportunity to learn is cut short and they often 'fail to develop the full battery of skills and abilities desired in a contemporary college graduate' (Duch, Groh, and Allen 2001a, 4). By engaging students in the learning process and inviting them to help construct their learning environments, students are more likely to feel empowered. They become increasingly more invested in their learning and develop interdependent relationships with their fellow students and instructors (Baxter Magolda and King 2004; Duch, Groh, and Allen 2001b; Millis 2010).

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In this self-study we examined our process of attempting to make our pedagogical models more inviting, transformative, and student-centered. In this study we focus on experiences of teaching the capstone course in an undergraduate leadership minor. This self-study pulls from four collective years (between the two of us) of personal inquiry, reflection, and journaling. Additionally, we engaged in joint reflection, inquiry, and meaning-making. Students' reflection papers served as a source of validation of their engagement, empowerment, and investment in learning.

Self-study is the study of one's self, ideas, and actions (Hamilton and Pinnegar 1998) and provides a way for practitioners to examine their own practice and 'contribute professional knowledge about what they learn from their research' (Vozzo 2011, 313). In constructing living educational theories, self-study allows the teacher-researcher to examine questions such as 'How do I improve my practice?' and 'How do I improve this process of education here?' (Whitehead 1989, 43). Rather than merely viewing teaching as a 'routine function, tacked on, something anyone can do ... good teaching means that faculty, as scholars, are also learners' (Boyer 1997, 23–24).

In seeking integrity, the teacher-researcher consciously focuses on his or her actions, attempting to align actions and beliefs (Eames 1995; Hamilton and Pinnegar 1998) as well as one's values (Whitehead 2009a). In his work, Whitehead (2009a) discusses the importance of energy-flowing values, such as love or social justice, which often play a significant role in educators' meaning-making process and its effect on one's living theories around one's practice. This research by teachers on their teaching practice has, 'invaluable promise for developing new understandings and producing new knowledge about teaching and learning' (Hamilton and Pinnegar 1998, 243). An action research-oriented approach to studying the process of teaching adds professional knowledge to the arena of teaching (Eames 1995). When reframed as a form of scholarship, 'teaching both educates and entices future scholars' (Boyer 1997, 23).

Therefore, this purpose of this paper is to provide a personal account of our process of teaching and seeking to improve our practice as educators. This study allowed us to investigate our own practice of teaching as well as contribute these findings to the professional knowledge guiding educators. To do this, we focus on three questions through the frame of Whitehead's (1989, 2009a, 2009b) living educational theory: how can we improve the balance of our authority with our roles as instructors; how can we use the balance of role and authority to empower our students; and how can we be critically reflective of our teaching process to improve our learning?

In the sections that follow we provide the background and context of this course and how it urged us to take on this endeavor. Next, we introduce the conceptual and pedagogical frameworks and models that guided this work. This is followed by an explanation of the approaches and process in which we engaged when teaching this course. We then share findings from the three questions posed for this study.

## **Background**

The background of our self-study is important in understanding the context in which we took on this endeavor. The undergraduate leadership studies minor at the University of San Diego exists with the mission of: preparing students to take responsibility for their lives and their communities to address the critical leadership challenges of the twenty-first century and beyond. Due in part to the call for new ways of approaching leadership in our increasingly complex world, the Department

of Leadership Studies recently engaged in a process of assessing and reviewing the leadership studies minor. While a number of programmatic and curricular changes stemmed from this review, the most substantial change was within the capstone course. Assessment data indicated that the course was not sufficiently providing a capstone experience; alumni reported not feeling as equipped as they would have liked to address real-world leadership challenges. It was our task to transform this course to be a culminating experience, allowing students to integrate their learning from their leadership coursework, their major field of study coursework, and their out-of-class experiences to help prepare them for effective leadership in the 'real world.' The capstone course is the context in which our self-study took place.

Paige taught in the leadership studies minor at the University of San Diego for four years while she was earning her doctorate and served in a dual role of assessing the minor and making programmatic changes. She taught the course described in this manuscript three times. Dan is completing his fourth year in the doctoral program, and it is his second year teaching in the minor; he taught the capstone course twice. We both had graduate coursework in college student affairs administration and leadership studies and previously taught leadership courses at other institutions. Much of our coursework as doctoral students was informed by the ideas of adaptive leadership and action inquiry (discussed below). We also had a very supportive department chair who encouraged us to try innovative approaches to teaching.

While simultaneously holding the roles of instructors in the minor and doctoral students in the department, we saw this need to further develop the capstone course as an adaptive leadership challenge (Heifetz and Linsky 2002) and an opportunity to apply our learning as doctoral students to improve the course – and ourselves. Adaptive leadership involves examining and shifting one's values, beliefs, and behaviors to best address the challenge. The questions we asked ourselves were: how can we transform the minor and specifically the capstone course to prepare students to address the critical leadership challenges of the twenty-first century and beyond; and further, how can we become better educators in this process?

### ***Conceptual framework***

We took on this adaptive challenge by engaging in a process of action inquiry, a form of action research whereby one reflects in action on oneself, the situation, relationships, and the system as a whole (Torbert 2001). Simultaneously engaging in action and inquiry facilitates greater awareness, leadership capacity, and organizational effectiveness. The three primary aims of action inquiry are generating personal effectiveness and *integrity*, generating relationships based on *mutuality*, and generating *sustainability* within the organization (Torbert 2001). These concepts from action inquiry are supported by Whitehead's concept of self-study and living educational theories; to this, he states:

... [A]ny educational investigation of teachers improving their practice should include the teacher's narrative with a validated explanation of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of their pupils and in the learning of socio-cultural formations in which we live and work. (2009b, 109)

While the three concepts of integrity, mutuality, and sustainability from action inquiry informed our research, they also played a significant role in our pedagogical approaches because they contributed to our core values as teachers.

Knowing that this transformation we sought to make would require more than just changes to the curriculum, we were aware of and committed to the need to transform ourselves, relating to the integrity aim of action inquiry. To model the type of leadership we sought to develop in our students, we would need to challenge our pre-existing ways of viewing ourselves in our roles of instructors, re-examine what it means to teach, and ultimately shift our approaches to teaching. We would also need to include our students in this process of transformation, recognizing that we certainly did not have all of the answers and that they were just as important a part of the course and system as we were. We sought to create a student-centered environment that allowed for students to engage in and take responsibility for their learning, relating to the mutuality aim of action inquiry. Last, we also sought to implement truly transformational changes to ourselves and our practice of teaching that would last beyond the boundaries of the semester and would transform the leadership minor as a whole, relating to the sustainability aim of action inquiry.

Given the fact that leadership studies is an interdisciplinary subject, it is fitting that our approaches in taking on this leadership challenge and engaging in this action inquiry process came from a wide array of disciplines and backgrounds. The scaffolding for this work pulls from the field of leadership studies (Daloz Parks 2005; Heifetz 1998; Heifetz and Linsky 2002) as well as from the field of educational curriculum development and pedagogy, which includes problem-based learning (Bridges 1992; Cunningham and Cordeiro 2006) and critical multicultural and feminist approaches (Maher and Thompson Tetreault 1994; Sleeter 1996; Weiler 1988). As instructors we have called upon and used various elements of the aforementioned literature to inform the praxis of our work.

As we describe our approach in teaching this course and our learning from this process, we focus on the three main questions guiding this self-study, framed within the main aims of action inquiry (Torbert 2001). First, we discuss our role as instructors in this course and how this relates to authority. Next, we discuss how we used our roles and our authority to empower students. Last, we discuss what we learned about the process of teaching and the role of curriculum in this process. Quotes from students' reflection papers are included throughout our discussion to help illustrate the effect of our roles and teaching practice on student learning.

### **How can we improve the balance of our authority with our roles as instructors?**

Managing our authority role was often quite challenging; we saw our role as a tool that we could use in different ways to enable different outcomes within the classroom. Since this was a capstone and culminating experience, we sought to create an environment in which the students could engage in a real adaptive leadership challenge, creating the space for them to apply their learning from their coursework. We set up the classroom as a problem-based learning laboratory (Cunningham and Cordeiro 2006), with the 'problem' being the challenge of helping determine the way in which the course would unfold. Ultimately, in seeking to create such an environment, we had to alter our typical roles as instructors.

Two frameworks, one from college student development and one from leadership studies, guided the ways in which we took up our roles. Sanford (1967), in discussing college student development, emphasized the importance of maintaining a balance of both *challenging* and *supporting* students. Too much challenge can be

discouraging to students and may impede growth and development, while too much support can also impede growth and development by an overreliance on others for decision-making and critical-thinking skills (Sanford 1967). In discussing the functions of authority, Heifetz uses the metaphor of a pressure-cooker, whereby ‘the cook regulates the pressure of the holding environment by turning the heat up or down, while the relief valve lets off steam to keep the pressure within a safe limit’ (1998, 106). As instructors we had to manage the pressure-cooker of the classroom to turn up the heat (Sanford’s challenge) and turn it down (Sanford’s support) in order to move the group forward.

Paige elaborates on this metaphor in her own words. I described this delicate balance as walking on a winding tightrope, teetering on balancing the amount of structure I was providing (or consciously not providing) and how much I was letting the emergent take hold. Making space for the emergent to unfold was particularly difficult for me because I struggled with feeling drawn to appease the students’ desires and expectations. I had had many of the students in previous classes and formed strong relationships with them and a true care and concern for them. It was difficult for me to step back and watch the students struggle when I knew I could ‘swoop in’ and save them from the fears and anxiety. I also struggled with knowing that some of the students were at times frustrated or angry at me; my desire to be liked became apparent and a challenge needing continuous negotiation. To combat this pull and desire to fulfill their desires and save the day to lessen the anxiety, which would ultimately diffuse the learning, I kept the purpose of learning at the forefront of my intentions on how and when I intervened. I also intentionally sought to be transparent in my actions and inactions when I thought it would contribute to students’ learning (different from being transparent to ease my own anxiety), sharing with the students how I was feeling and why I was choosing to do certain things and not do other things.

A key, yet very challenging, aspect of managing our role was our use of authority. The concept of leadership that we teach in the leadership minor is one that is collaborative, integrative, and authentic, so our approach to teaching needed to model this. Viewing ourselves as instructors who often already challenge the typical authority dynamic one may see in a college classroom, we had to examine our own relationship with authority and find ways to challenge it even more. For both of us, recognizing our relationship with control was pivotal.

Our shifting authority role in the class led to having a different type of control in the class to what is normally experienced as the traditional authority role in a classroom. At times this meant letting the students take the class in an unknown direction and see the students do something the ‘wrong’ way. Dan struggled with losing that traditional type of control. In his words, I felt a dramatic experience of needing to let go of my ego as the ‘professor.’ In my previous experiences as an instructor, I participated in a more conventional approach to teaching whereby the instructor provides knowledge to his or her students. However, in this type of course that type of instruction was neither helpful nor effective. An example was when many of the students were getting angry with one of their classmates who repeatedly attempted to take control of the direction of their group project. The student disagreed with where the rest of the group wanted to go, and he served as a roadblock. However, for several weeks, no one would name their anger or provide critical feedback to the student about his role.

It was not until after the project was done that I was able to help all of the students process through their experiences, insights, and emotions related to the group project and the parts of the project that did not go as successfully as they would have liked. By allowing them the space to work through the project and provide each other with feedback, the students (and myself) were able to draw upon the experiences for deeper learning about one's authority, role, and boundaries. The student who was causing a lot of frustration for his classmates processed his experiences in a reflection paper: '[The project] was very painful mentally and emotionally. I questioned myself [and] my leadership style .... [but] I am unable to deny the fact that I gained much insight about myself and how I work on a team.' Moving to a new way of teaching was helpful for me in terms of the personal insights made and in the learning I observed in my students; it was also at times challenging for me, given the lack of control over the direction of the course and the students' learning.

In posing this leadership adaptive challenge and giving the work back to the students (Heifetz 1998), we sought to take on the roles of facilitator or consultant. Since often the class session was in the hands of the students, we had to learn to operate in the moment and think on our feet rather than have a lesson plan prepared. This exposed us to the students as human, recognizing that we do not have all of the answers, and thus making us quite vulnerable; it also allowed us to learn from this vulnerability. Further, the students examined the role that authority plays in their lives. This allowed the students to really examine authority and their relationship with and perceptions of authority. In her reflection paper a student wrote about her newfound awareness of the role of control and authority in her life:

All of my life I have been controlled. I am required to be in class a scheduled time. Listen without asking questions ... These expectations have confirmed me into a life of needing control. However, I have received nothing more from this control than good grades ... I have not accomplished anything meaningful, but only feedback that makes my authorities pleased.

Paige felt she was well versed in leadership concepts, having taught over 10 different leadership courses, many of these more than once. As is in most leadership curriculum, the concept of trust had always been something that I believed in and sought to build in the classroom through icebreakers and other team activities. In such activities, students share unique personal information or try to tackle a group challenge. Through these activities students get to know each other better, thus hopefully making the classroom environment more comfortable and inviting for learning. The trust built within the classroom for this course, however, was at a much higher level. In reflecting on this and discussing it with the class, it was clear that there was a different level of vulnerability within every member of the class, including my own. One student noted the value of vulnerability for the group process: 'The willingness of my classmates to be vulnerable allowed us to maximize our experience.' Another student acknowledged how vulnerability enabled him to be more of his authentic self when working with his classmates:

I learned everything I did this semester through an openness and vulnerability to experience. By breaking down the walls I had previously built, I become vulnerable to others in a way I had rarely before – I was going to let other people see me for me.

Paige also recognized the value of vulnerability in her teaching practice, which she discusses in her reflections below. By breaking down some of the walls of authority and assumptions of what an authority figure should do, I was able to bring a much more authentic presence (as well as a sense of relief at times), allowing me to use my vulnerability in such a way as to move the group forward. My relationship with the students felt much more collaborative and mutual, exuding a feeling of ‘we are all in this together.’

Our learning about ourselves as educators followed us out of the context of our classes and into the other arenas of our lives, which Dan expands upon in his own words. I noticed I was becoming much more reflective as a doctoral student and as an instructor in other courses; I was also applying that reflection into my personal life. Engaging in this type of pedagogy required me to be more reflexive in terms of my thinking about my role, my students, and my work, and be more expressive with others, including my family, friends, and colleagues. This approach to my teaching provided me with the opportunity to find my voice and experiment with different roles that I had previously avoided. As someone who had previously struggled to feel confident in voicing my opinions and concerns to those with formal authority roles in my life, I was able to use my experiences in the course to develop my ability to confront others and make peace with the need for conflict, especially within leadership practice.

Similarly Paige reflects upon this theme. Through teaching this course three times I was able to examine the roles that control and perfectionism have in my life both professionally and personally. In leading a class that in many ways is messy and unpredictable, I learned to value the opportunity to slow down, connect, and make meaning of different experiences. While this learning came from my experience in teaching this course, I experienced this transforming my teaching in the other more traditional classes I taught, allowing time and space for the unknown and for students to take the lead. I also recognized this shift within my personal life and my relationship with colleagues, friends, and family, whereby I noticed myself letting go, slowing down, and listening more.

We both feel that through teaching this course and engaging in this self-study and process of transformation we are ‘growing into’ the educators we are meant to be. We are achieving a greater sense of peace within our roles and a greater sense of vocational calling to be college student educators. Our learning in this course has allowed us to improve our practice in other courses and beyond the boundaries of classrooms. We recognize that this transformation was truly influenced by our relationships with our students, which leads to the next section on mutuality and our learning about empowerment.

### **How can we use the balance of role and authority to empower our students?**

Our vulnerability as instructors helped provide a scaffolding of common trust within the entire group. This development of authentic trust within the classroom enabled the students to recognize that we truly cared about their learning and were there to support them in their process, rather than scheming behind the scenes with an insincere agenda. In a reflection paper, one student described the classroom environment as a ‘community of care.’ Another student discussed the support she felt in being able to be responsible for her own learning: ‘It was nice to be able to practice this freedom in academics in a class where we are free to make mistakes.’

Similar to Getz's (2009) work on the act of teaching an undergraduate leadership course as sacred space, we held the intentions of creating a space that allowed for each of us to be engaged in deep learning and reflection. We sought to empower the students, helping them be true authors in their own experience and learning. The authentic trust served as a key foundation for the students to take risks and feel empowered in their roles within the class; they challenged themselves, each other, us (the instructors), and the learning process. They also became more invested in this learning process than we had ever seen a group of students be before; this conclusion was also evident in the students' final reflection papers. One student noted the different type of learning required in this class: 'I put *more* of a *different kind* of effort that has never been required or expected of me in other classes.' Another student wrote about his investment in his learning through his new understanding of responsibility:

[In] other classes I am responsible for getting the work done and going to class, but ... not much else ... Not giving my full self [in this class] made me feel as if I was letting down other members of the group.

Dan recalls one particularly difficult class session about one month into the semester, which he discusses below. The students were working steadily to determine what they wanted to consider and explore in the class, but kept discussing their 'frustration' with the process. The word 'frustration' was used repeatedly by several of the students, and at the end of that particular class I voiced that while I too was frustrated, the entire group was no longer allowed to use that particular word. Everyone in the class needed to dig deeper into the frustration and examine what made their process and experience in the seminar class frustrating. By enforcing this expectation, I meant to empower myself and the students to wonder and question the experiences that held us back from doing our inner work. That push was what was necessary to have everyone in the space hold up and examine their beliefs, assumptions, and automatic impulses to various tasks. As a collective group, there was a wealth of intellect to explore and examine the root cause of these frustrations. Ultimately, through that discussion, the collective group was able to move to a place of deeper learning and make changes that helped them access new ideas and a greater ability to be present with one another. One student shared the challenges she had in working with a classmate and the newfound understanding she gained about herself and others through this process:

I am disappointed with the way I acted ... I learned that I need to focus on maintaining an open mind. I need to remember to allow people a clean slate by improving and renewing my patience ... I am not going to like every team member's personality, but I need to remember and appreciate that different personalities might help contribute to different ideas and spur creativity.

One of the most salient outcomes of empowerment that Paige experienced was a reframing of what it means to learn. When teaching this class for the first time, I came in with little to no expectations. As best as I could, I left it up to what would emerge in the class and trusted that what was meant to happen would happen (which was a big stretch for me, who was usually used to coming into class with a seven-page syllabus, specifics up to the detail of margin sizes for assignments, and planned-out class agendas). As the class started to unfold, I noticed that I was being pulled into identifying tangible pieces that I could take away from the class as

evidence that ‘something’ was happening (such as when the students selected the books they would read). Similarly, the students were seeking out tangible products without exploring the purpose or ‘why’ behind them. In recognizing this, I consistently pushed the students (and myself) to think about what it is they really want to *learn*, not what it is they wanted to *do*. Together they challenged the traditional and assumed notions of learning. Through engaging in this action inquiry process, the class (instructor and students alike) found that the real learning came from simultaneously reflecting on and engaging in the leadership process. One student discussed this learning alongside learning in other traditional courses:

In every learning environment that I have been part of until this, [learning] was universally a three-step process. Receive a task (conflict) → complete the task (resolution) → Receive a grade (feedback). Being present in this course has shown me that learning can exist in a variety of ways through a variety of means over a variety of settings.

The collaborative approach to learning empowered the students and us to think beyond the traditional aspects of creating and assessing classroom learning. This connects to the next section of the manuscript – sustainability and our learning about curriculum and process.

### **How can we be critically reflective of our teaching process to improve our learning?**

Throughout our experiences facilitating this course, the flexibility inherent and essential to this pedagogy allowed us to develop a curriculum that helps students engage in meaningful ways with their own learning. As a parallel process, we did the same, learning a significant amount about ourselves and about how we can harness this knowledge to continue to improve our practice as educators. Teaching this class in the way we did asked us to tap into our own leadership successes and failures, examine ourselves deeply, and think critically about ourselves as educators. The learning that resulted has been transformational, both personally and professionally.

The principle of sustainability within the action inquiry framework, also called third-person research/practice, relies on the previous two principles of action inquiry integrity and mutuality (Torbert 2001). A strong emphasis and presence of integrity and mutuality creates the space and environment in which transformation can exist within the organizational level in a dispersed yet integrated way. Third-person research/practice is difficult to achieve and involves challenging traditional approaches of authority, decision-making, and organizing (Torbert 2001). It creates a space for ‘more and more of the members to voluntarily adopt’ a focus on integrity and mutuality (Torbert 2001, 256). These ‘members’ are the instructors in the minor, the students in the minor, and the department’s leadership.

We will not begin to pretend that the leadership minor has achieved the status of a sustainable organization according to this framework, recognizing of course that this is more of a journey than a destination. We will, however, share our reflections on how we (the collective we, including our program and department) are creating an environment to facilitate continued inquiry, transformation, and sustainability.

As a result of our experiences teaching this course and the students’ unequivocal response to this course and demonstrated learning from the course, we used these ‘data’ to examine the leadership minor as a whole, knowing that for this to be

sustainable within the minor our efforts could not exist within the boundaries of one course. In the process of making program and curriculum changes, we intentionally identified learning outcomes and associated courses that reflected the type of leadership and transformation we seek to develop in our students (and model ourselves). This involved a purposeful reworking of course names, descriptions, assignments, and sequencing. Recognizing that structure is not enough, purposeful efforts were also made to determine *who* would teach the courses in the minor and what training they would have prior to teaching. With many of the instructors being doctoral students or affiliates of the department, we sought prior coursework or training within the department as a prerequisite experience.

These are examples of some of the tangible aspects and strategies used to set the foundation for this transformation. More important, however, are the efforts in creating a community of reflection and inquiry, particularly vital (and challenging) with instructors rotating in and out due to their roles as doctoral students. A key player creating this environment and community is the department chair, who lives and breathes these same ideas, engages in ongoing action inquiry (Getz 2009), and was part of and supportive of these efforts from the beginning. In fact, she taught us both much of what we learned to get us to the place to take on this endeavor. We witnessed ourselves and others voluntarily adopting the principles of integrity and mutuality (Torbert 2001), and through this we are creating a thriving community. The journey proceeds with how we can continue to encourage this inquiry and transformation beyond our tenure in the organization.

## Conclusion

As researchers engaged in a process of self-study on our own learning as teachers, we have been on an important journey of discovery, but reflect back to Whitehead and McNiff's (2006, 97) question of 'How do we show that any conclusions we come to are reasonably fair and accurate?' Our work as scholars within this self-study has been conducted in an effort to demonstrate validity and legitimacy (Whitehead and McNiff 2006). Validity is attempting to demonstrate trustworthiness to the claims that we have made within our work; meanwhile, legitimacy is an effort to establish our informal and formal authority as individuals with expertise and knowledge about what we are discussing (Whitehead and McNiff 2006). In the end, we follow Whitehead and McNiff's advice around the validity and legitimacy of living theory approaches to action research. The authors state:

The standards of judgment need to be lived in a realization of the values of truth, in understanding the normative contexts of practice; of forgiveness, in a readiness to extend understanding from one valued self to another; and of commitment to transformative communicative action, to transform the normative conditions of current social formations into new, compassionate, and equitable social formations. (Whitehead and McNiff 2006, 110)

The validity of our work is largely supported by the feedback received from our students, in particular from their reflection papers. Upon completing the course and discussing their learning in their final reflection paper assignment, many of the students expressed that they had never learned so much in a class before that would be applicable to their current and future professional and personal lives. A student described this growth:

This class was more than just another note-taking lecture style class; it was a class that inspired me to be a better person and to become a stronger leader ... We grew in areas that we did not even intend in growing. This growth is especially meaningful because it will guide me through my life and the choices that I make.

The students also expressed gratitude for the opportunity to guide their own learning, to be asked what they think, and to be trusted to take responsibility for their learning. One student expressed this gratitude in her final reflection paper: 'Thank you so much for giving us the freedom to develop as a class and expand on our own learning of ourselves and the leadership and world around us.' We express similar sentiments; this experience transformed us and how we engage in our professional and personal lives.

We relied on each other as colleagues, fellow students, and close friends to process through the curriculum and our experience as instructors. Additionally, during this time, we presented our research at several conferences and colloquia where we interacted with colleagues, serving as 'critical friends,' who provided feedback to us around our learning in an effort to continue working toward validity and legitimacy (Whitehead and McNiff 2006). Likewise, we also had ongoing conversations with our supervisor and another colleague who had served as an instructor in our leadership studies minor and who was completing her dissertation research on this type of pedagogy. These individuals served as an informal validation team to help us process through our thinking, encourage us to be aware of our blind spots and assumptions, and provide advice and insights for our research and practice (Whitehead and McNiff 2006).

One fear amongst both of us, which emerged at various points in time, was the nagging thought of 'Is this really working?' We both had class sessions when we left saying: 'I really don't know whether they're getting it ... and I'm not even sure I am.' We used each other as sounding boards to garner some new ideas and techniques. We realized very quickly that this type of approach takes time, and just as our students experienced fear and trepidation, so did we. As we confronted those fears, discussed them with our students, processed our experiences along with theirs, and found mutuality in our collaborative work, we found our teaching got stronger.

This process began with seeking to transform the leadership studies minor at the University of San Diego. It turned into a journey of how this need to transform the whole in turn transformed us (the individual) and our students (the group). These levels of a system (individual, group, and whole) are so intricately connected and ultimately reflect the leadership challenges and complexities with which we are faced in society today. After all, 'a part ... [is] a manifestation of the whole, rather than just a component of it. Neither exists without the other. The whole exists through continually manifesting in the parts, and the parts exist as embodiments of the whole' (Senge et al. 2004, 6). This also connects with Whitehead's call that living educational theories can allow educators the opportunity to research 'their own experiences and generat[e] explanations of their educational influences in their own learning, in their pupils' learning and in the socio-cultural formations in which we live and work' (2009b, 108).

As leadership educators, we hope that our collaborative learning (between us as faculty members and our students) continues to have an impact on us, the students we taught, the leadership minor, and ultimately the world long after we leave the confines of our semester's worth of work together. We sought to transform ourselves

as educators through this self-study and yearn to be, ‘great teachers [who] create a common ground of intellectual commitment [and who] stimulate active, not passive, learning and encourage students to be critical, creative thinkers, with the capacity to go on learning after their college days are over’ (Boyer 1997, 24). In attempting to meet Boyer’s call, we also continue to use Whitehead’s distinction of learning from educational learning, where ‘educational learning is informed by values that carry hope for the future of humanity’ (2009b, 107). While we transformed as teachers, we transformed also as learners, seeing both as inseparable parts of the same whole for the good of humanity.

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