Revisiting the Art of Undergraduate Teaching in Higher Education: One Person's Journey Towards Enlightenment

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to offer reflections regarding teaching undergraduate students spanning a forty-five year career in higher education. The author discusses his teaching philosophy coupled with his perspective focusing on the "best" pedagogical practices that he has used to enhance student learning. The selected methods are grounded in over ninety semesters of classroom teaching experience much of which is empirically supported by scholarly literature. Hopefully the author's sharing of his life-long journey and commitment to undergraduate education will help sustain dialogue about the importance of pedagogical excellence.

Keywords: Undergraduate education, higher education, pedagogy, experiential learning, teaching practices.

For the past three years I have been transitioning to retirement as part of a *phased retirement program* that allowed me to teach a reduced course load coupled with less demanding research and service obligations. This semester I will complete my 90th semester of teaching (excluding summer school) culminating a forty five year journey instructing all levels of undergraduates within the context of an accredited College of Business. During this interim period of transition I have continued to give much thought as to what constitutes successful undergraduate teaching and felt compelled to share my insights with my colleagues. My normative model is not all inclusive nor is it entirely based on empirical research although I have tried to meet some rigor of academic integrity. My pedagogical philosophy is grounded in many experiences: numerous conversations with other professors from a variety of disciplines; attendance at multiple seminars focusing on the challenges of teaching at the university level; application of empirically tested teaching methods gleaned from the literature; suggestions from instructional experts who critiqued my classroom methods; feedback from students regarding the learning value of my various classes; publication of my instructional methods in refereed journals, and lastly, reflection and continual adaptation of experiential learning in and outside the classroom (Douglas, 1980, 1987-88, 1990, 1993, 1994, 1997, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006; Douglas &

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Adams, 1999a, 199b; Douglas & Chandra 2003; Douglas & Husted, 1984). To add expanded credibility to my pedagogical paradigm I should note that I have earned several teaching awards at my university and have consistently received outstanding student course evaluations throughout my lengthy career in higher education.

My Philosophy of Teaching—the Abridged View

The foundation of my instructional paradigm is based on the following mantra: *Students want to know how much you care before they care how much you know*. Hence being an effective educator involves integrating both your HEART and MIND into the teaching/learning process. I believe that students should be co-determiners of their learning and accept responsibility to contribute to the class in a substantive fashion. Experiential methods should be strategically integrated so that students feel empowered to be partners in and outside the classroom. We cannot rely only on deductive reasoning and monolithic lectures to distribute knowledge. Students need to be engaged in "productivity" not just "activity". Robert Greenleaf, father of servant leadership makes it clear that *false busyness* does not tap the inner spirit of students—hence, careful thought and preparation must precede each classroom encounter (1979, pp. 61-62). Experiential activities must be carefully selected and implemented so that the students' critical thinking skills are refined. Simply pulling an activity to fill time is often unproductive and may result in unintended consequences. To avoid this common "tyranny of the urgency", I suggest using the hour *immediately before class* to review the material and methods you want to utilize that day. If going to class is "just another meeting", the results will be fraught with diminished learning opportunities.

It has also been my practice to assess the learning and decision making styles of my students either formally or informally. For example, in my senior-level Management seminar I use the Gregorc Style Delineator Instrument during the first evening of class (2012). This time-tested assessment divides students into four Decision-Making styles based on how respondents mediate with their environment under stress: abstract random, abstract sequential, concrete random, concrete sequential. I find that the majority of my undergraduate students are *concrete random* which means they learn best with methods that are couched with practical examples and high levels of visual stimulation—graphs, colorful power points, films, hands-on learning assessments etc. On the other side of this equation is me as my dominant decision making style is *abstract sequential* which means that under stress I tend to revert to theory and higher level thinking supported by frequent use of research to support my perspective regarding various topics. I tend to use complex sentences and technical jargon assuming that my audience will be salivating on each sentence. Well, if I only wanted to resonate with 2-3 students who happen to mirror my perception of the world, then all would be great. The "good news" is that my secondary style that is relatively close to my primary style is *concrete random*; hence, I have an above average level of understanding regarding how to navigate between the world of theory and practice and consequently I try to use a portfolio of methods attending to the learning style of most of my undergraduates. Our debriefing of this exercise during the first evening is extensive. For example, after students complete Gregorc's assessment I compile a frequency distribution of their respective primary and secondary decision making styles

and record them on the board. I then compare my own profile and discuss the implications of this data regarding teaching and learning. In addition I ask students to compare their more dominant decision making styles to leadership charts developed by Dr. Gregorc. These charts depict leadership behaviors commonly associated with each of the four decision making styles. As a capstone activity I ask my students to begin their journal (a semester long project) by making an entry after class explaining the learning value of this assessment. This enhanced awareness among class members of the variety of decision making modes also provides them insight when selecting their reading partners for a class project.

In short, I view students as collaborators in the learning process rather than passive vessels who "take and regurgitate" notes. Students should come to class with a sense of eustress and anticipation; my primary role should be to serve as a facilitator and guide so that we can uncover the meaning and value of the assigned reading. Moving students to accept and embrace this form of empowerment often requires patience and thinking *outside the box.* The following discussion will highlight a few pedagogical strategies that have proven successful at least based on the surrogate measures of student course evaluations, peer assessments, and scholarly publications relative to my teaching methods. In terms of the more recent focus on assessment of learning, the data is still being compiled and reviewed. However, given the importance of undergraduate teaching, I thought it might be of value to share my insights.

Liftoff-The First Class Session

Approximately two years ago my university designed a new marketing program centered on the following slogan: *More From Day One.* The rationale behind this mantra was to send a message to all university stakeholders that students, especially freshmen, should be expected to "hit the ground running" at the beginning of the semester. To help freshmen make a smooth transition from high school, a University College was recently established to provide academic advising, professional mentoring, and targeted workshops geared to a variety of topics such as time management, study strategies, note taking, and learning style assessments. Instructional expectations were also ratcheted up for faculty and staff. But retention and success depends on many transitional issues one of which is a continuing commitment to excellence in the classroom. Hence it became imperative that faculty review how they used the first day of class.

"More from day one" fit perfectly with my teaching philosophy as I have always considered the first day of class as sacred ground. Simply calling the roll, distributing the syllabus, offering a few comments and dismissing class is indeed a missed opportunity to begin the process of building a partnership with your students hopefully culminating in a learning community. First I suggest that faculty may want to begin this process before entering the classroom by being able to pronounce the name of each student as this gives a message to your class that "your name" is important. You may also want to send an email to your class before your first meeting explaining a few of the highlights of the class and welcoming them to your world of challenge and excitement. Tell them something about yourself in order to begin the process of "breaking the ice". At this point you

could ask them to think about an icebreaker question that they might want to share during your first meeting. I have asked students to simply share any of the following: their favorite song; their favorite movie; their favorite food; their favorite teacher etc. This process opens the door to beginning a conversation thereby encouraging students to feel comfortable speaking in class. In my leadership class I ask my students to select an animal which they feel reflects their perception of effective leaders. This exercise always provides threads for integrating a variety of topics relative to the study of leadership—an appetizer that whets a student's desire to come back for more. Choice of animals such as lions, beavers, bears, hawks, cheetahs, dogs, cats etc. lend themselves to commentary/questions about how animal behavior relates to leadership topics such as hierarchy, role expectations, power, authority, patience, teaming, use of threat, and dominance.

Of course, I do have to manage the time allocated to this process unless I want to use another class meeting to distribute the syllabus and discuss the content and methods that will be used to foster learning in the course. It is important that the instructor "sits" during this process if possible and uses a conversational tone of voice. Professors are trying to establish a collaborative culture and this is a critical first step towards empowering your students. I do walk through the key expectations and timeline for the course explaining with conviction how the assignments will be of learning value as they contemplate their professional careers. Although I welcome questions I am aware that students may be a bit overloaded the first day; hence I also encourage emails to help clarify any element contained in the syllabus. I often end my first class stressing that OUR syllabus is a COVENANT based on mutual trust and distributive leadership - the very foundation of Peter Senge's Learning Organization - let's begin our journey (Pierce & Newstrom, 2014, p. 55).

Fostering Student Engagement: The Socratic Process

To paraphrase Socrates, it may be better to pose the right question than give the right answer. Hence, the use of the Socratic process is heavily based on rich exchanges between the professor and students carefully exploring the complexities and implications of a variety of subject matter. This process requires professors to carefully develop a set of *reflection* questions that challenge students to both understand a concept and be able to apply it to both practical and complex dilemmas. Some authors have referred to this method as fraught with higher levels of risk because the professor must be ready to facilitate complex issues and often redirect conflicting views so as to mediate a host of perceptions and value systems (Lam, 2011). Although this white water rafting frequently challenges students and professors to leave their comfort zone, the learning value can be exponential. One must be open to ending some classes "without closure" just as Socrates would do when teaching philosophy to his students.

One story of Socrates' teaching methods may illustrate leaving class open-ended. During one class Socrates was trying to stress the vagaries of Hedonism and pointed to the importance of distinguishing between needs and wants. Socrates criticized the marketplace and the many cosmetic goods that people buy unnecessarily only to satisfy their Hedonistic drive for pleasure. After he dismissed class, some students were perplexed as they saw

many advantages to the marketplace and found it difficult to comply with the ideals of sacrifice being advocated by their professor. Later in the day a few of Socrates' students observed him shopping in the marketplace moving from tent to tent examining a variety of goods. They thought - "what a hypocrite" and could not wait to go to class the next day. Before class commenced one student asked Socrates why he was visiting a marketplace that he had maligned in class the previous day. Socrates responded as follows: "I was simply observing all the *wants* I do not need." This story illustrates that learning often takes place in and outside of class - the goal of every educator. In short, professors who use the Socratic process are more likely to inculcate a thirst for discovery and critical thinking rather than simply "covering material" in a sequential monolithic manner.

Conversational Teaching: Understanding the Dialogic Method

When one is truly engaged in conversation with another party, active listening is present and both participants often lose track of time—sometimes reaching a mindset referred to as *flow* (Pierce & Newstrom, 2011, p. 111). At the heart of this deep surface listening and understanding is dialogue whereby each party is openly sharing their thoughts, values and perceptions. Stephen Covey advocates that we must first "seek to understand, and then be understood" (p.237). This should be the goal of every class session but too frequently professors depend on discussion and debate rather than deliberation and dialogue. Covey and others stress that although discussion and debate can be useful, these methods tend to create a win-lose environment that can result in anger, defensive reasoning, emotional outbreaks, and group divisiveness (pp. 207-209). If educators are going to establish a win-win culture of discovery and learning, they must build a classroom culture of trust and openness. Dialogue is based on sharing insights and using the following active listening skills: don't interrupt the speaker, deliberate via paraphrasing before responding, share your interpretation of an issue without attacking the other party and keep the tone of your comments professional and nonthreatening (Yankelovich, 1999, pp. 41-46).

Facilitating the lines of demarcation between dialogue and discussion can be challenging but if you pose the right reflection questions and give students time to deliberate, then the chances for dialogue are enhanced. One method used by an American Indian tribe was the "talking stick". You can use this method to foster dialogue. Students can only share when they have the talking stick. The stick is placed on a desk or passed to students who want to share (Covey, 1989). This discipline helps minimize judgmental and marginal listening hopefully fostering careful thought before sharing ideas. One can also use some version of the talking stick in small groups to introduce the method and then debrief the process carefully explaining the differences between the Ds of communication: debate, discussion, deliberation and dialogue. If you can establish this mindset with your class then you may truly enter the "zone of learning" and the passage of time will seem of little consequence - students WILL be engaged and boredom should be at a minimum.

Beyond Participation - Nurturing Classroom Contribution

James Clawson, respected author and leadership consultant, makes it very clear that collaborative organizations rely heavily on employees who are viewed as KPCs - *key proc-*

ess contributors (2012, p. 41). These transformed employees accept expanded responsibility and use their talents to seek creative solutions to complex problems. KPCs thrive in an empowered workplace - what Peter Senge calls a *learning organization* (Pierce & Newstrom, 2014, p. 51*)*. I believe that this cultural paradigm should be used to cultivate learning within undergraduate courses. To extrapolate using Douglas McGregor's classic set of assumptions as a benchmark, professors must see students as Theory Y contributors who can be motivated with challenging assignments, thought-provoking Socratic dialogue and experiential learning rather than relying on Theory X approaches such as pop quizzes, threat and fear of failure (Pierce & Newstrom, 2014, p.42).

Achieving this metamorphosis for co-determined learning may be best achieved by following some carefully crafted teaching guidelines offered by Dennis Gioia regarding how to facilitate true contribution within the classroom (1987). Gioia suggests that we often use participation and contribution as synonyms but there is a vast difference. KPCs offer substantive responses to a variety of assignments always adding value to the dialogue/discussion. Participants may offer comments that have good intentions but lack depth of thought and preparation. We have all had to monitor the "talking head" who believes that simply saying something will earn "participation" points. However, the perpetuation of unproductive comments actually wastes valuable learning time and can derail dialogue if not curtailed. Here are some ideas for establishing a classroom based on *contribution*:

1. Reward contribution by assigning at least 15% of your grade point distribution to this process.
2. Briefly explain the difference between participation and contribution within the context of classroom dialogue.
3. Provide students a copy of Gioia's article entitled *Contribution! Not Participation in the OB Classroom* and ask them to submit an email stating that they understand the gist of the article and will attempt to become "contributors" to help build a community of learners.
4. Practice empirically tested methods for leading classroom dialogue:
   a. Have students exchange their thoughts with a partner before offering their insights to the class—sometimes called *pair sharing*.
   b. Use one-minute reflections to have students jot down their ideas on paper before contributing to class.
   c. Use reflection breaks and allow students to sit quietly for a moment and simply cogitate regarding their pending response.
   d. Use *centering* before beginning class by asking students to close their eyes, clear their mind and focus on a place that creates a sense of peace and quiet.
   e. Ask students to send email responses to you before class meets so that you can respond *privately* and provide suggestions that may enhance the quality of their response.
   f. Use the 60 second rule—namely, learn to tolerate silence rather than feeling compelled to fill the void as this impatience may condition students to become passive as they wait for you to take control.

Using these and other creative approaches to facilitating rich communication among members of class will require professors to play many roles such as active listener, facilitator, conflict manager, synthesizer, orchestra leader, questioner, coach and even gate closer (strategically using extinction and carefully worded sanctions to curtail unproductive comments). If innovative methods and professorial leadership are integrated successfully, specific types of student behavior should evolve as the semester progresses. Gioia suggests that the following student behaviors mirror his perception of *contributors:*

1. Cite pertinent examples based on personal and/or professional experience.
2. Offer observations that thread concepts with class dialogue.
3. Provide succinct summaries that recap key ideas from the readings or cases.
4. Ask thoughtful questions that lead to a deeper understanding of concepts/theories.
5. Play the devil's advocate to generate further thought.
6. Respectfully disagree with professor or classmates in a constructive manner so as to promote further explanation of issues.

Balancing the fulcrum between participation and contribution requires a huge commitment from both professors and their students. Gioia warns that instructors must not succumb to the mindset that many raised hands and comments result in high level learning. Quality must be balanced with quantity. Students must understand that they will be required to be *prepared* to use their cognitive and emotional intelligences to the fullest of their ability often refraining from blurting out ill-conceived opinions that are not grounded in careful reasoning. Perhaps one of the greatest challenges for professors is balancing process with content. Following the pathway of contribution requires time and patience. Professors may find that what they do address in class results in higher levels of learning rather than simply covering topics in a monolithic linear fashion. In the end, this form of conversational teaching may achieve one of the primary goals advocated by the late Stephen Covey—give individuals a *voice;* in the classroom context, this means allowing students to be co-contributors in the learning process (Pierce & Newstrom, 2011, p. 283).

Building a Culture of Trust

At the heart of learning is open empathic communication all of which depends heavily on the existence of trust between professors and their respective students. Traditionally undergraduate students have been leery of their professors perceiving them as aloof and omniscient pontificates of knowledge. This type of cognitive dissonance may contribute to one of two extremes: *blind trust* where students accept every professorial comment as infallible or *suspicion* where students exude minimal trust regarding professorial intentions. (Covey, 2006, p. 289) Both of these mindsets erode learning opportunities. If a culture of trust based on high levels of critical thinking and open communication is to be established within the classroom, this hierarchal paradigm of the professoriate must be changed. Building this collaborative rapport will be a gradual process but certain teaching strategies may facilitate this paradigm shift.

My experience has reinforced that trust can best be established and sustained by honoring the principle of integrity. Acting with integrity requires individuals to demonstrate both

competency and character (Covey, 2006, pp. 54-57). Given that most professors possess reasonable levels of competency - i.e., they know their subject matter, perhaps the most crucial part of the integrity question lies with character. As suggested prior, *students want to know how much you care BEFORE they care how much you know.* Hence instructors need to emulate key character attributes such as honesty, credibility, and humility. Ideally this modeling will be reciprocated by your students so that *smart trust* drives the learning process. Smart trust promotes high levels of critical thinking that encourages thoughtful dialogue and rich exchanges of complex ideas (Covey, 2006, p. 290). Although not necessarily profound, the following steps may help build a community of trust within the classroom:

1. Practice full disclosure and transparency when designing your syllabus and supporting handouts. Clearly explain the learning goals for your class, your teaching style, your grading system, expectations for student performance, deadlines for all assignments, availability for office hours, etc. There should be no *hidden agendas.* After you explain the details of the course syllabus, encourage questions.
2. Walk your talk— strive to ensure that the content and teaching style you deliver are congruent with the curricular expectations of your university's catalogue and handbook. Tell your students that the syllabus is a covenant based on mutual trust. They will be asked for periodic feedback to help insure that their journey remains on track. Reinforce that trust requires collaboration and mutual accountability so both of you will have to live up to the learning goals and expectations outlined in the *playbook.*
3. Show humility by indicating that if you make a mistake or fail to adequately explain a complex topic you will acknowledge this misstep and reteach the material. This may require some professors to remove their mask of egotism and control and can be uncomfortable. Stephen Covey Jr. beautifully portrays the value of humility as part of the trust equation: *A humble person (professor) is more concerned about what is right than being right, about acting on good ideas than having good ideas, about enhancing new truth than defending an outdated position, about building the team than exalting self, and about recognizing contributors than being recognized for it.* (p. 64*)*
4. Always treat your students with respect and dignity. Learn their names and be sensitive to the implications of personality and cultural differences as you strive to move towards the contribution model. Introverts may be slower to enter the dialogue but may provide the greater substance of thought. Some international students may find the Socratic process of engagement a bit threatening so walk softly as you try to incorporate a broad array of student responses (Cain, 2012, pp. 186-191). The bottom line is that even though conflict and disagreements may surface during the learning process civility and mutual respect should serve as the guideline for all classroom dialogue.
5. Credibility requires both professors and students to uphold their commitments. James Clawson stresses that *promise keeping* is the foundation for building and sustaining personal and organizational trust (p.81). Stress that being prepared for class and meeting deadlines for assignments is expected. Professors must also strive to return graded papers and tests within reasonable time frames. Also, if a

professor has scheduled office hours, KEEP them. This is part of promise keeping.

6. Lastly, instructors may ask students to sign a covenant acknowledging that they understand the requirements for the course as outlined in the syllabus and that they are willing to meet these expectations. This is becoming a common practice in industry regarding codes of ethics in that new employees must sign that they have read and understood the behavioral expectations of the company and are willing to comply (McKay, 2013, p. 1). Management experts have demonstrated that high trust organizations execute in a more efficient and effective manner (Clawson, pp. 87 & 205). It seems that this finding can be extrapolated to the undergraduate classroom meaning that mutual trust between professors and their respective students should result in higher levels of learning.

Story Telling with a Purpose

Being an effective teacher and leader are closely intertwined. Some leadership experts have reported that successful leaders are usually great storytellers (Clawson, p. 232). Even the late Stephen Covey suggests that "to teach is to learn" (p. 265). Therefore, if you strategically integrate an occasional story and relate its purpose to the content or process of class, it may contribute to enhanced *learning*.

Many professors have heard the term "war stories" which has been associated with wasting the time of students because the content and purpose of the story is often totally unrelated to the topic being discussed in the classroom. However, stories that are selectively integrated and serve to enhance the understanding of subject matter can be of value and are frequently a way of personalizing the learning process. Stories can be gathered from life experience, reading trade books, studying cases, work experience, films and consulting assignments, etc. The story of Socrates in the marketplace related in the discussion above is one example of how a story can be used to reinforce a key point.

Let me tell YOU a story. Getting buy-in to the Socratic teaching process can be difficult as some learners would prefer a more direct presentation of material that allows them to primarily take notes and remain relatively uninvolved in class dialogue/discussion. Students who prefer a traditional lecture method may consider the in-depth dialogic processing of certain topics to be a waste of time. Most experienced professors have observed the nonverbal expressions of student boredom seemingly conveying the message, "Get to the point". If I sense this ambivalence I have often stopped to share my "near death experience" while swimming in the Mediterranean Sea with my brother in 1964. I put two diagrams on the board—a straight line labeled A to B and a saw toothed line (graph) labeled A to B. As I explain how my brother and I noticed that we were being gradually drawn further from shore, I tell them that my brother yelled to one of his friends from New Jersey who was an experienced ocean swimmer - *WE NEED HELP*. His friend Mike headed toward us and told us NOT to swim in a straight line but to swim diagonally towards shore in order to break the current. Fortunately, he was on our outside and after about 25 minutes of "tacking" we may it safely to shore, breaking the undertow. At this point I return to the board to reinforce that the mathematics of geometry may not always result in

success - the shortest path between two points may not be a straight line. I then ask if any of my students have sailed - sometimes I find one or two that understand what it means to tack in order to move a sail boat if there is no wind (sometimes called being in the irons). I then stress that learning can be very similar and I tend to use tacking to carefully process complex ideas and this may involve some digressions and minor detours in order to fully understand the nuances of the topic. Hence, the Socratic process of teaching/learning is seldom a straight line method and is best viewed as a "tacking" approach. In short, sharing this story involving a sailing metaphor may help all students better appreciate the learning value of the Socratic teaching process.

Classroom Technology: Balancing Substance and Sizzle

The late Stephen Covey warns us that technology is a good servant but terrible master (2001, p. 2). Because of this caveat I am extremely cautious about quickly adding new forms of technology to the classroom unless I can be persuaded that it may enhance the learning process. With the increased emphasis on distance/asynchronous learning, many faculty have created blended classes that use various forms of teaching technology such as blackboard, on-line chat rooms, video streaming, skyping, creative power point presentations, document scanning/distribution, u-tube scenarios and social networking. Most classrooms now have "smart stations" that allow faculty to use the computer and related technology as part of their teaching portfolio.

But I remain skeptical that the new technology of teaching should supplant the rich face-to-face dialogue of the traditional classroom. I have now graduated to "white boards and dry erase markers" coupled with an occasion integration of a power point slide, film, YouTube excerpt, or virtual discussion board. However, many of my upper division students tell me that they prefer the Socratic process and engagement in the learning process. Without sounding overly critical, some of my students have grown to detest ritualistic power point presentations and find them demotivating. Therefore, it seems that we need to strategically integrate our emerging technology, especially within the traditional undergraduate classes.

One example of technology that I have used successfully has been the use of a contemporary film coupled with a *listening guide* (Douglas, 1984, p. 21*).* After some instruction, I learned to lower our multiple screens, load up a DVD, adjust the picture and sound, and "push" the right button to begin the film. But the value of this process is far beyond being able to view this film on a blue-ray DVD and bigger screen. Films must be carefully selected for content and fit with the subject matter you are teaching. Students must be given a preview of the purpose and content of the film and then encouraged to peruse their listening guide so that they can take notes where appropriate. In my senior-level Management seminar I use *Mr. Holland's Opus* showing the film in two parts. Since this is an evening class, we see the first half of the film, complete the questions on our listening guide, take a break and come back to debrief the film using the questions posed within the listening guide. These questions challenge students to apply assigned readings to various scenes within the film. Assigned readings deal with a variety of topics such as McGregor and Maslow's classic articles on motivation, Stephen Covey's book entitled

The 8ᵗʰ Habit, Fred Luthans' article entitled *Psychological Capital,* and *Lead like Jesus...*by Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges (Pierce & Newstrom, 2011). This method is based on a model entitled FILM: Film Integrated Learning Modules (Douglas, 1984). Hence, the pedagogy has been tested and published; but more importantly, the use of technology has been carefully integrated into class to enhance the understanding of assigned readings.

In short, it seems that we must be careful not to simply use technology to appease the new generation of visual learners. Professors must examine the new technology from an epistemological perspective - does it add value to the learning process or is it simply entertaining. Once this question has been resolved, then professors need to balance traditional teaching methods such as the Socratic process with periodic integration of carefully selected technology. The ultimate goal should be to minimize the sizzle and enhance the substance of the learning process.

The Teacher as Servant: Striving for the Ideal Paradigm

If individuals choose to devote their lives to undergraduate education, they should consider modeling the philosophy of *servant leadership*. This paradigm of leadership was first coined by Robert K. Greenleaf and was given more formal attention in his first book entitled *Teacher as Servant: A Parable* (1979). In his first publication Greenleaf attempted to inspire a team of college students to accept a paradoxical view of leadership—namely, that true leaders exist to *serve the needs of others first*. Greenleaf's unorthodox view of the leadership process created much controversy as it was diametrically opposed to the traditional leadership theories more heavily grounded in a top-down hierarchal model where the leader gives orders to subordinates to execute the directives of top management. Greenleaf's philosophy has been carefully examined and reviewed by numerous authors regarding its applicability in various contexts. Given the movement towards service learning and experiential teaching within higher education it seems reasonable for professors to consider adopting Greenleaf's' paradigm as a guide for effective instruction. According to Hays, incorporating servant leadership attributes within the class room added value to the higher education learning process (2008). Key results from his research showed the following:

1. Students manifested higher levels of self-efficacy while feeling like *key process contributors.*
2. Students' critical thinking skills were enhanced.
3. Students learned to be accountable for their own learning complemented with increases in pro-active behavior, self-leadership, and personal autonomy. Students experienced an exponential increase in trust resulting in enriched dialogue.
4. Students began to appreciate that the respective roles of teacher and learner are closely aligned.

Another interpretation of Greenleaf's original thoughts suggested that servant leaders can enhance employee productivity by developing an organizational culture based on the following: active listening, trustworthiness, stewardship, and authenticity. (Douglas, 2003, p.6) Active listening requires deep surface listening based on paraphrasing the sender's message, maintaining good eye contact with the messenger, maintaining a conversational tone of voice, removing physical barriers to communication and reading non-verbal cues from the sender. This level of listening is an ideal foundation for Socratic teaching. Of critical importance is that the participants in the dyadic communication process refrain from forming judgments and interrupting the sender before they are finished - a classroom tendency during discussion of highly complex and/or controversial topics. Of equal importance is to avoid marginal listening is which the recipient simply tunes out the message of the sender resulting in frequent misunderstandings - a common pattern towards the end of class or when a student's emotional trigger has been pulled.

Trustworthiness speaks for itself in that effective leaders want to avoid the extremes of gullibility and suspicion among their workers while encouraging regular constructive feedback that is based on sound judgment (Covey, 2006, p.293). In class, professors should strive for the same type of Theory Y climate whereby students feel comfortable contributing value added ideas during class dialogue. In terms of higher-end learning we allude to this process as enhancing critical thinking skills, especially the upper stages of Bloom's taxonomy (Clark, 2013).

Thirdly, the author promotes a sense of stewardship which fits with viewing the employees as the most important asset of the organization. Effective stewards provide employees with opportunities to expand their professional skills while engaging them in challenging projects. (Douglas, 2003, p.8) Again, this servant leadership principle seems to dovetail with higher education teaching as Theory Y oriented professors also want to view students as the most important asset of the university providing them assignments that stretch their capabilities and groom them for their next level of classes.

Lastly, servant leaders tend be authentic (Autry, 2001, p.10). They strive to model integrity and are transparent with their employees in all forms of transaction. This often includes abiding by a code of conduct and a willingness to collaborate on decisions within the workplace. Managers who are authentic are willing to take off their masks and emulate humility - sometimes admitting mistakes and asking for help. It seems reasonable that ethical professors will manifest the same level of openness and commitment to the learning goals and assignments outlined in the course syllabus. Contemporary professors must be willing to admit missteps and seek feedback from students and colleagues regarding suggestions for improving the learning process.

Let the Journey Continue

In short, my suggestions for successful teaching highlighted above seem to mesh well with the inherent philosophy that undergirds servant leadership - namely, *service to others before self.* More traditional professors may have to change their paradigm of teaching from omniscient sage on stage to facilitator/guide. This migration process may be en-

hanced by encouraging students to be active participants in their undergraduate education complemented by teaching practices that nurture co-determined learning, dialogue rather than simply discussion, smart trust, substantive reflections and feedback via contribution and value added integration of technology. This transformational process is not a quick fix nor does it provide THE answer to the ART of successful teaching. Moving towards a more experiential paradigm of teaching/learning will require risk-taking and a willingness to learn from mistakes. Like change expert Eric Abrahamson (2000) suggests, it may require constant tinkering with an occasional over hall of the course. (p. 76) But staying in the safe harbor of monolithic lecturing will most likely result in many missed learning opportunities. Perhaps it is time for LIFTOFF!

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