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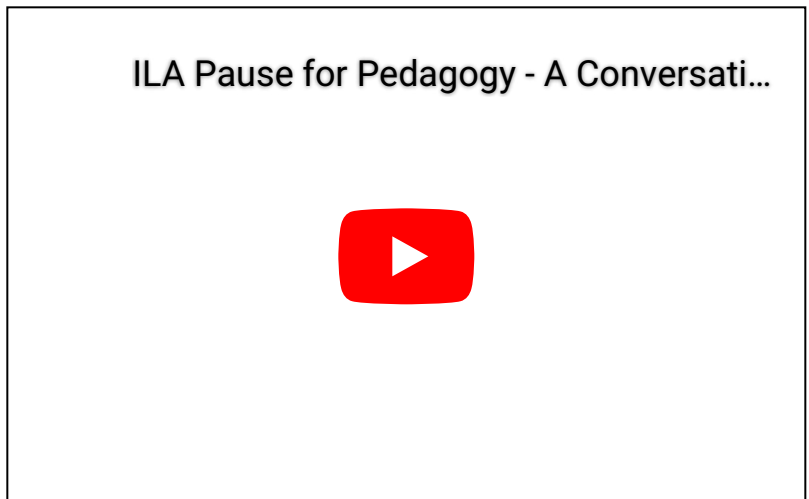


2019-Teig

Paradigms and Narratives, Discomfort and Liberation: A Reflective Journey in Teaching Critically

By Trisha Teig

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Trisha Teig is a Visiting Teaching Assistant Professor at the University of Denver. She instructs courses and develops curriculum in the leadership minor for the Colorado Women's College Leadership Scholars and the Pioneer Leadership Program. Her research focuses on leadership education and development for college students, social justice in leadership education, and women/gender and leadership. Trisha completed her Master's of Education in Student Affairs at Texas State University and her PhD in Higher Education at Florida State University.

Abstract

In the fall of 2016, I proposed and was approved to teach the course LDR 2242: Gender and Leadership. In reflection of the experience, I offer ideas for actualizing the work of integrating identity as a critical practice for teaching leadership. It is imperative that leadership educators incorporate elements of social justice in their courses (Teig, 2018). Exclusion of these topics inhibits the opportunity for full exploration of leadership learning in relationship to power structures and social identities, factors of significant influence to the leadership process. To that end, I structured the course to critically analyze leadership theory and practice through the lens of critical and postmodern gender theory.

Three key insights molded my pedagogical perspective from teaching the class. First, leadership educators should not underestimate the importance of introducing students to complex, paradoxical concepts to structure theoretical comprehension. Second, vulnerably sharing your own story as the instructor provides a foundation for prioritizing shared narrative and creates a space for influential engagement. Finally, while it is useful to anticipate challenges of addressing social justice issues in the classroom, no amount of planning can prepare educators for what difficulties might arise, nor how powerful this content can be.

Introduce Paradigms to Frame Critical Analysis

When framing a course steeped in theory, I am an avid advocate of introducing students to concepts of ontology, epistemology, and research paradigms. In leadership education (and many other disciplines) we often present theories for students to read and learn without giving them the tools to critically examine them (Dugan, 2017). In the Gender and Leadership class, I began teaching these concepts in the third iteration of teaching the course.

The addition of the content, particularly the language around research paradigms — positivism/post-positivism, social constructivism, critical theory, and postmodernism — (Dugan, 2017) vastly improved students' ability to understand and analyze theory. This content allowed students to identify differences in theoretical arguments. After introducing the concepts, the students participated in a debate between the critical theory and postmodern perspectives of current leadership in the feminist movement. By sharing the

paradigm framing tools to understand the ontological and epistemological viewpoints of these ideas, the class actively engaged in understanding and placing these arguments in context.

Share Stories to Learn Deeply

My second learning moment was presented in the form of a class assignment that allowed students to share their stories, based on tenants of critical, feminist, and engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994). hooks (1994) advocates for intentional efforts to name and reframe power systems in education and focus on learning from everyone (instead of just the instructor) in the classroom. The “Our Stories, Our Voices” assignment (Teig, in press) implemented the reconstruction of power through the sharing of lived experiences. Students were asked to present in 5-7 minutes — through whatever creative format they wished — their life narrative. The students were instructed to consider influences of their environment (family, location, education), their social identities (particularly gender identity and race), and other defining experiences that shaped their lives.

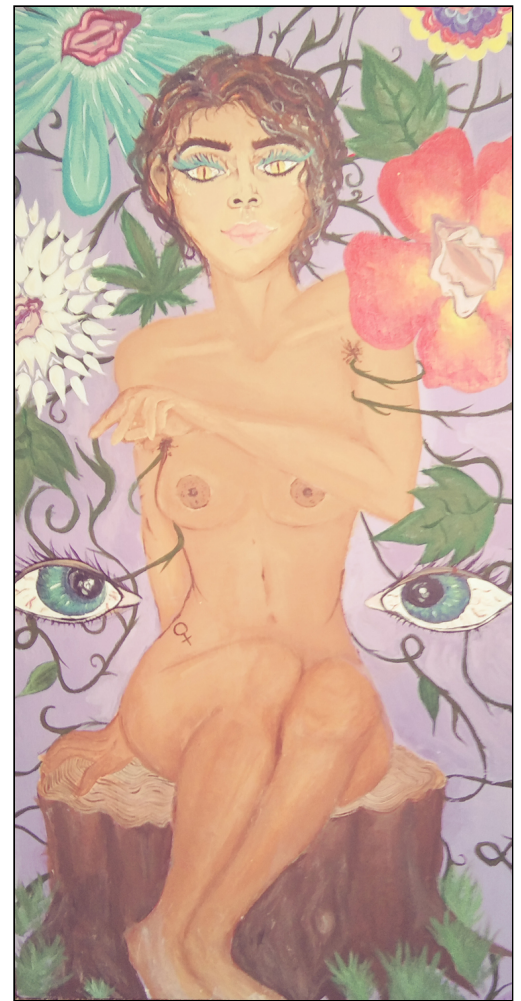
In the first semester of implementation, I purposefully placed the assignment in week twelve of a fourteen-week semester because I anticipated the vulnerable and challenging nature of the content. Due to time constraints, we split the students into two groups, with my teaching assistant taking one group and me taking the other to listen to the presentations. The outcomes of this set-up were both positive and negative. Some students poured themselves into the project. For example, a spoken word poem induced tears and deep connection amongst the group. An art student captured her experience in a beautiful, painful self-portrait reprinted here with the student’s permission. On the other hand, many students offered only surface responses. Upon reflection of these disparate outcomes and recommendations for changes from the students, I changed the format.

First, I recognized that I had expected students to fully buy-in to this assignment without offering my own example in a vulnerable and authentic way. To remedy this, I developed my own story presentation, including effort and thought, honesty, and depth. I shared this narrative with students the

week before they presented their own. I did not hold back. I told my story, and, in turn, they welcomed and emulated my openness. Second, I moved the assignment to the third week in the semester and gave the presentations two full class periods, allowing students to hear each story. The inclusion of "Our Stories, Our Voices" in the third week established a connection that resulted in deeper, thoughtful engagement in difficult topics later in the course. In processing the assignment after completion, one student stood up in front of the entire class and declared: "We know each other now; we are family".

While "Our Stories, Our Voices" offers an opportunity for profound connection, there are caveats to consider. Primarily, there is a degree of uncertainty about what stories students may share. There will be pain and hardships, as well as triumphs and beauty. There may be stories of abuse or violence, depression or thoughts of self-harm; items an instructor must be prepared to address as a support person and resource. It is crucial for the instructor to encourage openness and also recognize that because of these nuances in experience, it should not be up to the student with the arduous life to feel compelled to share for the sake of connection. Turner Kelly and Bhargal (2018) note it is often students from marginalized identities, because of systems of oppression and discrimination, who might have more challenging stories. Consider the representation of students of color, trans+ students, and students from other marginalized identities, as well as your classroom and campus dynamic around issues of identity and diversity as you introduce this assignment.

Discomfort, Dissonance, Liberation



Discomfort defines my final learning moment. There will be challengers. There will be wounded. There will be dissonance, tears, and uncertainty. When educators bring up tough topics within a brave space (Arao & Clemens, 2013), the result is often push-back. Learning from dissonance is an experience for the educator as well as (and often as much as) the students. Dissonance impacts the whole class – how the instructor manages it can create positive change or allow for continued conflict or avoidance.

In a class focused on critiquing leadership through the lens of gender, the most vocal dissenters were usually cisgender males, often white, who were unwilling to accept their discomfort without confrontation. There were also woman-identifying students who shared frustration with continued obstacles without solutions. There were trans+ students who described significant barriers they faced on campus and in the classroom (including our class). These are problems without clear solutions. Unlike traditional concepts of teaching, with direct, “correct” concepts to be presented for students to absorb, facilitating this type of content can be messy, scary, and disruptive.

Yet, for all its uncomfortableness, it is also transformational. Many students expressed liberation because of the course. One trans+ student described learning to take ownership of their leader identity through processing their gender identity: “Coming to terms with my gender identity has helped me realize that I can be a leader in ways that I never knew I could before. Just like there’s no one set way to be a girl or boy or person, there’s...no one set way to be a leader, either.” Reconstructing our understandings of leadership can dismantle traditional conceptualizations that limit access and scope. Leadership educators must engage in this content because it matters to re-frame leadership through identity and social justice.

Conclusion

By framing conversation in paradigms, sharing narratives, and riding the wave of dissonance, we created a class that pushed the boundaries of gender and leadership, instituting critical, engaged pedagogy for change. Incorporating a social justice-framed pedagogy in the leadership classroom created a space of collective learning that stepped beyond the bounds of the classroom. In a

student's words, shared a year and a half after participating in the course: "I think about your class all of the time and miss it terribly. I still carry everything I've learned and will for the rest of my life."

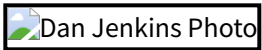
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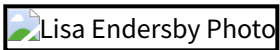
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PAUSE for Pedagogy aims to connect leadership education theory to practice and seeks to take lessons learned in the classroom to expand our theoretical knowledge of teaching and learning. Written for both the experienced educator and those new to the profession, this column will add tools to readers' pedagogical toolboxes. Most columns are accompanied by a video interview with the author exploring the ideas raised in the article in more detail. The series is edited by Lisa Endersby and Dan Jenkins, members of ILA's Leadership Education Member Interest Group. Have you implemented an

innovative practice in your leadership education? Contact Dan and Lisa at pauseforpedagogy@ila-net.com.



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Lisa Endersby is a speaker, educator, and storyteller exploring the intersecting realms of technology, leadership, and assessment in higher education. Her current role as an Educational Developer at York University involves supporting faculty in exploring and implementing innovative best practices for teaching and learning. Her doctoral work examines the relationship between professional identity development and communities of practice. Lisa also volunteers her time as the EDC Institute Coordinator for the Educational Developers' Caucus (EDC). Lisa can be reached at lmendersby@gmail.com.

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