

Steering Through Turbulent Waters While Developing A Community Of Practice: Struggles In An Undergraduate Leadership Course Based On Service Learning

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Abstract

Theories of leadership development have shifted from a focus on the individual during the past decades, to a new paradigm that focuses on group processes and motivation. However, critics argue that university level leadership education have not changed. The purpose of this study was to explore our own teaching practices and then share our insights with others who may struggle when developing communities of practice.

This study chronicles the first iteration of our joint teaching of an upper-level undergraduate agricultural leadership course. As the semester progressed, we found that learners participating in the community of practice struggled through interpersonal conflicts among themselves and with us. During the early stages of the service-learning project we felt this antagonism and distrust inhibited student learning and sought to understand what was taking place. We found Tuckman's (1965) theory of small-group development helped us "make sense" of what the students were experiencing. Tuckman (1965) concluded small groups go through predictable, sequential stages as they develop and carry out tasks. Awareness of these stages helped us to adjust our teaching pedagogy and steer learners through the process.

We steered through the most turbulent stages of the group development process by infusing pedagogical practices such as written and oral reflection and active learning groups. In this study we share learning interventions and facilitation practices that enhanced student learning. These were based on theorists who argue that learning is enhanced when people engage in group activities and communicate about issues that are important to them (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991; Lave & Wegner, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). Understanding that communities of practice struggle through predictable developmental stages can aid teachers and learners as they make sense of interpersonal conflict on the road to forming successful groups. We found service-learning a viable context for leadership education and that it helps students apply theory to practice, while concomitantly motivating them to learn. Because undergraduate leadership education is challenged by a new paradigm, (a) service learning, (b) well-planned reflective practices, and (c) an understanding of Tuckman and Jensen's group developmental stages may help educators shepherd communities of practice to meet the ideals of this new paradigm.

Introduction

One of the greatest difficulties when teaching a technical laboratory course is to relate abstract theory to workplace situations (Olien & Harper, 1994). In addition to relating, part of the learning process includes helping students experience workplace roles and situations, including teamwork and leadership (Fritz & Foster, 1992; Olien & Harper, 1994). Theories of leadership development have shifted to a new paradigm that focuses on group process and

motivation. Townsend and Throp (1997), however, argue that current leadership education at the university level has not shifted to meet this new paradigm. They state that working in - groups, developing an understanding of self, and gaining the ability to communicate are essential to developing leaders who are motivated and understand group processes.

To meet this new paradigm, Townsend and Throp (1997) and Bruck (1997) called for the teaching of leadership theory and the use of simulations to help students grasp the abstract concepts of leadership and teamwork. Along a similar vein, Conger (1992) suggested that to provide high quality and efficient leadership development programs in higher education, training should include four components: (1) personal assessment of skill competencies, (2) presentation and comprehension of concepts and theories, (3) skill -building simulations, and (4) feedback, or reflection on the previous three components. Critics argue that Conger's "ideal" scenario would fail in university settings because of: (a) a reliance on traditional didactic modes of instruction inhibit students from connecting course content to workplace problems (Conger, 1992), (b) the individualized nature of traditional classrooms pit students against one another and inhibit social interaction (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991), and (c) the decontextualized presentation of theory hinder students from developing accurate schema through reflection (Brookfield, 1995). In this paper, we argue that learning leadership theory void of a meaningful context limits the learner's ability to construct meaning. In other words, we agree with Conger's call for reflection, but disagree that simulations are the most fruitful means by which to situate learning.

With this in mind, we sought to teach a 300-level undergraduate leadership course through actively engaging students in problem-oriented situations where learners would put their existing knowledge about leading into practice. The goal was to use the situated-learning model (Greeno, 1989; Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989) as the theoretical frame for the course. This model hinges on the theory that learning and cognition must take into account the social interaction and physical activity in which learners engage. One central component of this theory is the idea of a "community of practice." A community of practice provides for learning that is shared, purposeful, and patterned (Lave and Wenger, 1989). When engaged in a community of practice, learners work cooperatively on activities as they co-construct the meaning of their work. Consequentially, learning is enhanced as participation in communal experience increase. Learning, then, becomes a function of practice. In other words, learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a sociocultural practice (Vygotsky, 1978).

Considering the notion that learning can be enhanced through shared purposeful activity, we designed an agricultural leadership course that required cooperation among learners and engaged them in activities that benefited others. We believed—as do Townsend, Bruck, and Conger--that teaching the new paradigm of leadership requires theory, personality self-assessment, and reflection, but also include another component—application - which requires instructors to situate learning in real-world contexts. In this case to bring a real-world context to learning, we chose to follow the service learning (SL) model.

Service learning can be defined as the "combination of the performance of a useful service for society and the disciplined interpretation of that experience for an increase in knowledge and an understanding of one's self" (O'Connell, 1990, p.594). Fritz and Brown (1998) pointed out that an experiential component of leadership education provides personal experiences those students can use to attune their conceptual understanding of leadership. Constructing personal understanding of principles also leads to higher cognition (Whittington and Newcomb, 1992). In addition, learners become engaged because SL leads to a "rekindling

of students' interests" (Kunin, 1997, p.150). Whittington and Newcomb, (1992) suggested that if students' interests are reawakened, their interest can be sparked and their of cognition increased.

Context of the Study

This study chronicles the first iteration of our joint teaching of an upper level undergraduate Agricultural Leadership course. As the semester progressed, we found that as learners participated in their community of practice, they struggled through interpersonal conflict among themselves and between us. During the early stages of the service learning project, we felt this antagonism and distrust was preventing student learning and sought to understand what was taking place in these cooperative groups. We found Tuckman's (1965) theory of small group development helped us "make sense" of what the students were experiencing as they came together in a community of practice. Tuckman (1965) concluded that small groups go through predictable, sequential stages as they develop and carry out tasks. He labeled these developmental stages as (1) forming, (2) storming, (3) norming, and (4) performing. In subsequent years, Tuckman and Jensen (1977) added a fifth stage—adjourning - to the theory. To clarify Tuckman's theory, these stages, and their definitions, will be briefly discussed.

Tuckman suggested that the forming stage is defined by group behavior that hinges on individuals testing the boundaries of what is acceptable, this takes place on both an interpersonal level among members and the leader(s). In this stage, individual dependence on the leader or on some other powerful group member is high. In the second stage, inter-group conflict is the most notable characteristic. Members become hostile toward one another and toward the leader as they express their individuality and resistance to group formation. In the third stage, norming, the group overcomes resistance and moves onto cohesiveness "as new standards evolve and new roles are adopted" (Tuckman, 1965, p. 396). In addition, group members feel more comfortable with peers and express their personal opinions more readily. Performing characterizes the fourth stage. As group members become actively involved in completing or solving the task, individuals adapt to the interpersonal structure created by the group, roles become more functional, and group energy increases and focuses on meeting the goal. In the final stage—adjourning - members become aware of the demise of the group and experience feelings of sadness and remorse.

The theory of group development is well accepted in psychological circles and has been adopted by the educators in leadership development. These stages hold promise for explaining to teacher-practitioners the probable struggles that may occur as they develop communities of practice within their classrooms. The remainder of this paper describes and interprets the stages the leadership course students entered and exited as they formed a community of practice.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this qualitative study was help leadership educators prepare themselves for the struggles of developing communities of practice. The objectives were:

- (1) To describe how involvement in a service learning project influenced the development of a community of practice.
- (2) To document pedagogical practices that the teacher/researcher used to promote the development of a community of practice.

- (3) To evaluate the effectiveness of reflective practices in helping students' link the service learning project to leadership theory.

To make sense of how this specific community of practice formed, Tuckman and Jensen's model serves as a frame. The methods used to document the stages of group development are explained in further detail in the methods section.

Methods

This study employed classroom ethnographic techniques. Hammersley (1990) suggested that the goal of classroom ethnography is to bring forth "patterns of intention and motivation which produced it" (p. 100). To form such an interpretation, data was gathered following strategies for classroom ethnography. To ground our study we used Lensmire's (1994) ethnographic research design to document classroom practice and learning. Three specific pieces of his design were used:

- (1) Field notes: composed of narratives of the day's teaching, as well as students' and teachers' reflections on specific pedagogical and methodological problems and issues.
- (2) Teacher and classroom documents including: lesson plans, lists of rules and procedures, and forms (Burton, 1985 as cited in Lensmire, 1994) enabled us to reexamine what we hoped would happen, in order to juxtapose these hopes against what actually occurred.
- (3) Student produced writing and project artifacts: brochures, intra-university memos, press releases, project designs, as well as exploratory and reflective essays. This data were used as benchmarks and as indicators of progress.

The case study's population consisted of 28 undergraduate College of Agriculture students enrolled in a 3-credit-hour, semester-long course about leadership. The learners were juniors and seniors from a variety of majors including Agricultural Education, Agricultural Studies, Agricultural Communications, Agronomy, and Animal Science. The course was predominantly male, with 19 males and 7 females. Most students were from rural communities. All students were of Northern European-American descent.

This study was based on strengthening classroom teaching practices and student learning. Analysis involved our own and student reflections on the course in a continuous process of accommodation to scaffold learning. Brookfield (1995) has suggested that educators and students alike need to reflect on their actions to make sense of their experiences. Following each class we immediately analyzed the day's events based on our field notes and recollections. As we debriefed, our discussions were based on (1) what we expected to happen during a particular class session and (2) selected student reflective writings that focused on their reactions, interpretations, and understandings of class events. This multifaceted approach triangulated the findings and conclusions of the study.

Because students were unaccustomed to reflective thinking (Williams & Driscoll, 1997), we provided step-by-step reflective prompts--based on seminal leadership theories- that queried students about their involvement, feelings and engagement in the service learning project (SLP). The writing prompts served to guide the student reflections as they independently struggled to make sense of what was happening in class. They handed in their responses to the instructors

without signing them. We hoped that this anonymity would provide more comfort as they expressed their thoughts and concerns. As we analyzed these documents, we looked for patterns and/- or trends in an effort to accommodate the students needs with respect to the course and the SLP. At the beginning of the next class session, students each received a verbatim typed copy of the class's reflections. Next, instructors and learners jointly analyzed the group's responses to determined patterns and trends of the reflective statements. As a result of this process, the class cooperatively worked to adjust their efforts with the SLP. In addition, this process aided the instructors in reevaluating their efforts to scaffold student learning and served as a means to check the trustworthiness (validity) of our interpretations. Further, this process assisted learners in identifying their progress in traversing through group developmental stages.

Additional data (i.e. papers, interviews) were analyzed by coding the results based on the Tuckman and Jensen theory. Our analysis was checked for "confirmability" or the believability of our conclusions (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p. 242) through peer debriefing in the form of an academic departmental seminar. In addition, we conducted a student member-check by presenting our analysis of the class's progress framed by the Tuckman and Jensen theory. Students commented on the presentation through reflective writing, which contributed to the "dependability audit" (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p. 243).

The course was based on the premise that learning must be contextualized and occurs through communities of practice. The ideas explained the expectations of students in the course:

- (1) The course's culminating outcome was, "to acquire understandings and skills necessary for effective leadership and group participation."
- (2) The Service Learning Project served to provide a context for learning leadership concepts, skills, and theories.
- (3) The SLP's goal was to: "Surround Curtiss Hall [the building that the course was taught in] with thousands of donated perennial flower bulbs" (Trexler, 1999).

Based on these expectations, the learners placed themselves in small groups ranging in size from three to eight, where they outlined individual responsibilities for their respective groups. These responsibilities were shared with the entire class through small group presentations of action plans.

Students additionally reflected on these activities through writing assignments on topics such as: defining leadership, interviewing friends and leaders about their perceptions of power and authority, studying the leadership characteristics and styles of great past leaders, reflecting on the accuracy and implications of personality inventories, and comparing compulsory groups to volunteer groups. The students also participated in oral reflection, through in-class large and small group discussions. The students reported that these activities "tied everything together" (student reflective writing, 12-6-99).

Findings

In this section, the researchers first describe the major characteristics of the Tuckman and Jensen stages of group development as defined by Brunette (1997). Next, we describe what happened in the course and how students and teachers reacted to the events that unfolded as the community of practice formed. Interspersed in the chronicling of events are our interpretations

as teacher/researchers.

The forming stage can be characterized as a time when participants get to know one another in relation to the current situation (Burnette, 1997). In this agricultural leadership course, the first days were used to introduce the learners to the expectations of the course and to introduce them to the SLP goal. After the presentation we asked the students (1) how they were going to accomplish this, (2) who should be contacted or talked to and (3) who would do the contacting?, and (4) what groups the students wanted to create and be a part of? As a result of this probing, the students "...kind of split themselves up pertaining to what they wanted to do and what they were good at"(student interview, 12-4-00). They split themselves into small groups consisting of four to six students.

Observations of the groups at this time highlighted their immediate and uncoordinated attempt to accomplish their perception of the task.

They sat in their usual small groups and worked independently and hastily towards finding an immediate solution to a very large-scale problem. One group went to the campus administration building information desk to find out where to go. A second group felt they were already connected [to the right people on campus] and headed straight for the phones. A third group went to look at the existing landscaping and came back with an approach to planting and landscaping the assumed area. A fourth group wandered around the building looking for an appropriate planting site... A fifth group stayed in class to find a bulb seller located within the community (field notes, 9-8-99).

At this time, not all students reacted positively to these activities, one student stated what he liked least about the class was:

...the way time is wasted and the way the teachers feel the students have all the time in the world to work on this class... instead of teaching a class on leadership, and showing what it is, we are supposed to do it on our own (student reflective writing, 9-24-99).

Acknowledging this frustration, we were also excited at their comprehension of their responsibility to 'do' leadership. Following this initial thrust into the project, the students returned to the classroom and began to share their conceptualization of the project. However, they quickly realized that each group had a differing interpretation. The result of these varied interpretations led to the storming stage.

Burnette (1997) suggests that participant's actions are in competition and/- or conflict with one another during the storming stage. This occurs because of differing ideas about the task at hand and because groups fear that they may not be able to meet the expectations of other group members. In addition to this conflict and fear, interpersonal relationships are developed and tested during this stage.

In our class, students had various ideas of what needed to be done and/or what was happening with the project. These varied versions and different approaches to the project created a high level of storming amongst the class members. Part of their frustration concerned the level of participation of their fellow students. Students suggested that teachers should take

responsibility, or leadership, for involving less active class members. One student stated that “for those who are not very involved you [the teachers] could find out what they are interested in and then delegate a job to them. This would force them to get involved and do something...” (student reflection, 9-27-99). Instead of taking charge of the student learning experience, we-- the teachers-- tried to heed the insight of other students who called for more communication. An example of a comment made at this time is “we can make progress by talking to other groups and taking action...” (student reflective writing, 10-4-99). Following the advice of students, we provided opportunities for others to voice their concern. Many expressed anxiety about the scope of the project: “I think this project is too big, it will not get done...” (field notes, 9-22-99). In addition, students were doubtful that university administrators would okay the project (field notes, 9-14-99). The myriad of concerns and viewpoints created an environment of fear and rebellion amongst the learners, both with each other and with us (the teachers).

The learner’s skepticism about the successful completion of the project caused a minor rebellion to occur when the principal instructor was gone and the secondary instructor was in charge. Upon his return, the following events occurred:

the students [had] changed the vision of thousands of bulbs to hundreds of bulbs. He told the students they weren’t visionary enough. They responded in saying that it was overwhelming and presumptuous to ask the community for help in getting thousands of bulbs. He shook his head no. The students responded with eye rolling and talk amongst their small groups about how unreasonable and unrealistic he was being (field notes, 9-17-99).

A few days after this confrontation, the university landscape architect visited the class and shared her expertise about landscape design, bulb numbers (which were in agreement with the primary instructor), and how to get university “Okays.” She suggested sequential steps to the learners for completion of the project. A student reported “I think that things are starting to flow a lot better now... before everyone had a negative outlook on the project, now the class’s heads are starting to come up” (student reflective writing, 10-15-99). Another student noted “I feel that we have made good progress... although we need to take action. We need to get things lined up--bulbs, tools transportation, scheduling, donations, etc.” (student reflective writing, 10-4-99). The groups became more focused and efficient as they directed their efforts. As their “heads started to come up;” they moved into the norming stage.

The transition from group member’s independence to dependence furthers the development of a community of practice. As participants recognize the abilities of others and the benefits of working together, they develop rules and requirements for the project and each other (Burnette, 1997). While many of the students were stalling a few had taken the initiative to begin their leadership tasks and had created an informational brochure and letter. These items were shared with the class for revision. This tangible visualization of the project helped many of the learners realize that this project was going to happen (teacher’s reflection, 10-6-99). Each student was given a copy of the brochure and the accompanying informational letter to make revisions and/or additions. Following the large-group editing process, final copies were made and used to solicit funds. These events allowed the university communications group to begin soliciting administrative “Okays.” As the “excited Okays” came in from deans and university administrators, they were shared with the class. Seeing the possibility of the project coming to fruit, the learners re-formed their groups’ identities and responsibilities according to their

personal interests and experiences. After they reformed, students developed action plans. One learner observed “at first I was a little skeptical because I wasn’t sure how everything was going to work or fall into place but now things are going good. It seems each group has taken an active part in doing things to get this under the way” (student reflective writing, 10-15-99).

Yet, with all of the organizational action of the norming stage, some students were still concerned with the division of responsibility. One student stated “we need to communicate more and discuss; the work needs to be distributed more.... Some people are getting overloaded with work” (student reflective writing, 10-15-99). Students also commented on their classmate’s lack of responsibility and understanding of the project:

We (as a class) have segmented into 2 groups I believe. 1. People who are really excited about the idea but aren’t facing some of the key issues; instead they are focusing more on the issues such as permission, recognition, brochures, etc. The other group is more concerned with time frame, logistics, such as are we going to have what we need and how exactly is this going to get done... (student reflective writing, 10-15-99).

To ease these concerns the instructors allotted whole class periods and daily portions of class time for learner discussion and sharing. We continued to use reflective questioning to solicit information. Communication between small groups and individual students catalyzed students to “...dig in and get things done” (student reflective writing, 10-15-99). These conversations established norms that organized the groups for the performing stage.

The performing stage is classified by interdependence between members and groups. Participants adjust to meet the needs of the group to achieve the goal (Burnette, 1997).

As the process of the project started moving along, it was because some of the group members started taking responsibility. This is one of the main ways the group has changed. Different members are starting to take responsible roles in achieving the project’s end (student reflective writing, 10-15-99).

The SLP afforded students opportunities to learn in many different situations. However, students continued to voice concern over the lack of involvement of their classmates. One learner shared the insight “I think everyone is involved, some less than others. The result is, some people are pulling more than their share of the weight” (student reflective writing, 10-29-99). Recognizing this, we asked the learners to discuss and reflect on what could be done to overcome this inequality (field notes, 10-20-99). One student responded:

I feel that everyone is involved. Some people want to do more of the grunt work outside, while others may want to do the stuff involved within the class. If you [the instructors] feel that someone is not doing their full potential I think you should try to help them out by either finding something for them to do or help them get started and work with them until they can get a grasp on the job or task they are to do. Right now some of [my] classmates aren’t doing much, but maybe they are waiting for more of the grunt or manual labor (student reflective writing, 10-20-99).

Taking comments like this into account, the instructors began to work specifically with those students who seemed to not be fully participating. Even with this ‘help,’ we did not feel that all students engaged in the project (teacher reflection, 10-25-99). Although this concern lingered, the outcome of the students’ efforts was a two-day planting experience. Students led themselves in planting 8,500+ bulbs purchased with \$3,500 in funds donated by university administrators, community businesses, and university employees. Planting the bulbs was a:

capstone rather than an introductory team building [activity]. I think it was more effective in that they knew each other in very different lights. Yet, they all understood and were comfortable, to a certain extent, with each other and what their roles were. They all had vested interest in the project whether it be for grades, personal satisfaction, or the fact that they had worked so hard to make it come to pass (field notes, 11-11-99).

A student later reflected on her participation in the SLP stating: “I felt that most everyone was involved, although it was frustrating to see people not active. I’m very satisfied with this class, and learned several life skills to use toward my career. Our jobs require us to work in groups and through this project we have learned the stages that groups go through. Thank you for making this class very beneficial” (student reflection, 12-1-99).

The students were excited about their successful experience and breathed a sigh of relief in accomplishing an enormous task. Yet, following the planting the adjourning process began.

Burnette (1997) states that “termination of task behaviors and disengagement from relationships” marks the adjourning stage of group development. Most groups include some type of celebration to mark the completion of the project and to give participants an opportunity to terminate their involvement in the group.

The primary adjournment to the planting day was a visit by the students to the local bar. Students reported that many of their classmates showed up and that the main topic of discussion was the SLP and what they had learned (student essay on reflection). Final formal adjournments were made through a thank you/congratulatory letter from the primary teacher to the students, and a class party at his house. Thus, the learners “closed with a little party and a little sadness” (student reflection paper, 12-1-99). At this point, while learners were excited about accomplishing their goal, they also became disengaged from the course. A feeling of “what do we do now?,” (student reflection paper, 12-1-99) was felt by all in the seven remaining days of class.

In response to the question “what do we do now?,” the final days of the course were spent in reflection on the SLP. Each day, students were randomly grouped and then assigned a Tuckman and Jensen (1977) stage of group development. Students were instructed to identify what happened in the stage, who the leader was of each event in the stage, and what leadership style was used by a leader in specific situations found in the SLP. A student shared the comment that this “tied everything together” (field notes 12-6-99). Through specific guided reflection learners were able to evaluate what they had experienced and then cognitively relate personal experience to leadership theories (Merriam & Clark, 1991). However, reflection was not a high point for all learners. One student reported that his:

analysis of being a leader is that it is natural – leaders step-up. Some talk more to make a point, and others lead through example... they shined through projects. [And that] this class is 75% analysis of feelings. The project could've been done in half the time if they [the instructors] would have cut through the bullshit and got things done rather than this analysis (12-6-00).

Nevertheless, all of the literature reviewed (Brookfield, 1995; Kunin, 1997; O'Connell, 1990; Williams & Driscoll, 1997) strongly encouraged the instructors to require students to reflect on their experiences. Therefore, students were required to complete the reflective exercises. We did however, change the structure of the reflective process to aid the students in their reflective efforts and to share our analysis and feelings of what happened during the SLP.

The educators created a slide show chronicling the project. This slide show served as (1) the concluding act of adjournment for this project, (2) another way of reflecting, and (3) a validity member check on the analysis of the course. Following the presentation, students responded with their impression. Two students comments are representative of their classmates:

I believe that this study or the information presented was accurate. I think it should be emphasized that you can learn basic skills at a job, but something like this project gives you skills that you will remember for a long time. These skills aren't something that you have to struggle to remember; they just stick (student reflection, 10-6-99).

I had never noticed [the sad good-byes] but if I look back on it, I think we all were kind of sad. Maybe not sad but maybe shocked. Shocked that the project some of us thought was impossible, was actually finished and better than the first plan (student reflection, 10-6-99).

Learners also reflected on the course and their experiences through two short essays on the impact and their involvement in the SLP. These final reflections concluded their involvement in the course and "helped to explain why we did the project and tie[ed] things together well" (student reflection, 12-6-99).

Conclusions/ Implications

Based on the theoretical framework of group development and the findings of this case, we draw the following four conclusions:

- (1) Learning communities undergo five definite stages of development. Considering the time requirements for most university courses, reflective questioning and discussion can be used to assist students with their transitions through the stages.
- (2) Service learning projects must be large enough to seem almost insurmountable to the learners, but manageable enough to be completed. This is critical because it insures that high levels of learner engagement and participation can be achieved by requiring a variety of tasks to complete a SLP.
- (3) Learner interest and engagement in the SLP will be greater if the SLP deals with a medium and service that is familiar to them. In this case study some of the agricultural leadership students were familiar with planting and growing things-- thus, they worked on bulb layout and organized materials for planting. Others were more comfortable with

publishing and designing informational literature and therefore involved themselves in that way.

- (4) Reflection serves as both a catalyst and a learning tool. Although learners voiced much frustration with continual reflections, they were also awakened to learning as they reflected in essays and discussions.

Implications from this study are directly related to the implementation of learning theory. Theorists argue that significant learning occurs when people engage in group activities and communicate about issues that are important to them (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1995; Vygotsky, 1986). However, the process of learning in groups can be a rough experience for both learners and teachers. Nonetheless, understanding that all learning communities struggle through predictable developmental stages can aide teachers and learners as they make sense of interpersonal relationships and their individual roles within the process. Furthermore, recognizing that these stages exist allows educators to facilitate the process through reflection, group sharing, and heightened communication efforts. Because agricultural leadership education at the university level is challenged to move to a new paradigm, service learning, well-planned reflective practices, and an understanding of Tuckman and Jensen's group developmental stages can help educators shepherd communities of practice to meet ideals of this new paradigm.

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Steering Through Turbulent Waters While Developing A Community Of Practice: Struggles In An Undergraduate Leadership Course Based On Service Learning

A Critique

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Using guidelines by qualitative experts (Guba, Lincoln, Hammersley, etc.), the researchers have conducted and reported an excellent classroom ethnographic study. Staying within the page limitations, they have also produced what appears to be a complete reporting of the study—oftentimes a challenge in reporting qualitative research.

If anything could have been added to the reporting, it would have been a discussion of the topic areas taught at critical “turning points” in the class. Perhaps as a result of this study, consideration should be given to reordering topic delivery to offer students insights into what they are experiencing and feeling during the team development stages.

Likewise, it would have been helpful to know if the upper-level leadership course had any prerequisites. Student course work and previous leadership experiences likely had some impact on student approach and role in the service learning project. Additionally, it is recommended the instructors consider adding a formal peer evaluation process that is used midway and at the end of the service learning project. This evaluation could include several dimensions and, in my experience, provide valuable insights into student engagement as viewed by peers. Midway through the semester, the evaluation also reminds students of the performance expectations associated with the service learning project.

Service-learning leadership courses are being taught in a number of agricultural education departments nationally. They are not only excellent vehicles for developing leaders but engage students in communities, and offer universities opportunities to extend beyond their campus boundaries. It is recommended that faculty in agricultural education departments offering service learning leadership courses consider a national “show and tell” seminar. The seminar would be for exchanging of ideas among those already offering these courses, and an opportunity for those considering adding these courses to dialogue.