Implicit Leader Development: The Mentor Role as Prefatory Leadership Context
Anthony E. Middlebrooks and Judi T. Haberkorn

Understanding Leadership for Cross-Cultural Knowledge Management
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A Historical Perspective on Nonverbal Communication in Debates: Implications for Elections and Leadership
William A. Gentry and Marshall P. Duke
Formal teaching and learning organizations and their members vary widely on the continuum of responses to the diversity of learners and challenges presented in our time of rapid technological change and globalized economy. Educators and leaders of K–12 environments in the United States are confronted with national expectations per No Child Left Behind without a coherent national curriculum but with increasingly diverse student populations in frequently underfunded contexts. Consider the pedagogical challenges of the 21st century. A typical K–12 classroom may have students whose primary language is not English, students with a wide range of learning, physical, or other strengths or needs (gifted, talented, autism, ADHD, diabetes, or Down’s syndrome, to name a few), and whose reading levels may vary by five or more grades. Our K–12 students have been raised in a technological era with instant access to information that is often linked randomly rather than linearly, with graphics, video, sound, and music. While best practices of the past 20 years reflect modest efforts to differentiate instruction, Fuchs (2006) points out compelling evidence suggesting that most classrooms are lacking any type of differentiated instruction, with teachers perhaps not responding to the diversity of their students due to a lack of knowledge and skills or inadequate resources to support comprehensive and systematic performance monitoring. In discussing several studies relating to the efficacy of cooperative learning for different populations, Fuchs brings up the centuries-old truism known to educators: Silver bullet solutions do not exist. Despite the broad-spectrum success of a given curriculum, instructional program, or procedure, some learners will not respond.

In examining andragogical challenges, the general perspective of adult educators is that adults as self-directed learners necessitate more facilitation than direct instruction (Smith & Reio, 2006). Andragogy as a learner-centered approach acknowledges the unique personal experiences that adult learners possess, which provide abundant resources for learning. In discussing this perspective, Smith and Reio note the view that adults are focused on solving problems they face in their everyday lives and have an immediate need to apply what they have learned to these problematic contexts. In discussing a study by Justice and Dornan, Smith and Reio (2006) refer to outcomes indicating that developmental differences in metacognitive abilities among adult students have potential significance for designing and delivering instruction. However, the authors cite other findings suggesting that while instructors are aware of differences between traditional and nontraditional adult students, they are not altering their teaching to address the needs of their older students.

Gregory and Chapman (2002) use the analogy of considering height, weight, and shape in the design of clothing as an example of why one size does not fit all, relating this to the variation in student prior background and experience and current knowledge and skill as rationale for adjustments that do not force all learners to endure the same old thing. While I have observed educators in K–12 settings making effective strides to differentiating for their diverse, 21st-century learners, many classrooms today are still reminiscent of instructional patterns prevalent in the second half of the 20th century: teacher-centered, lecture-based, and whole-group instruction. As a lifelong learner having
completed several postsecondary programs, I would concur with the information presented by Smith and Reio (2006) that instructors of adults in many cases have not transitioned to accommodating the needs of older adult students.

In reflecting upon the pedagogical challenges of the K–12 environment and the andragogical challenges of postsecondary education, a question to consider is the degree to which technological advances and globalization have brought greater similarity to the issues facing K–12 and postsecondary educators and leaders, as well as to the greater opportunities for personalization in instruction and assessment noted by Gardner (2006). While research pertaining to effective differentiation for learners at different stages of development will add to our knowledge base, combined efforts to examine the common issues driven by the changes and challenges of our 21st century may be more conducive to effecting systemic change.

Strategic Issues in Leadership Education

It is particularly imperative in leadership education for educators to be cognizant of the effects that their approaches to instruction will have beyond the courses taught. Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) point out that great photographers are great not because of their subjects but because of their skillful framing—or transmitting of their point of view. Educators, like photographers, select which aspects to focus on and which to exclude when they design and implement a course. Utilizing a traditional sales mentality puts forth a model that does not reflect thoughtful consideration of the strengths and needs of diverse learners. Adult learners who continually experience this model in a leadership program are not primed to provide leadership in their diverse organizations in a manner that takes into account the wide-ranging strengths and needs of their members, whether they are students or employees. Educators utilizing a sales mentality are not fostering learner entry into what Gardner (2006) refers to as the terrain of working on one’s own mind, where knowledge of one’s learning proclivities and quirks supports identification of pedagogy and curriculum that are optimal for one’s particular set of intelligences and stupidities. The use of uncommon literature to address common issues succeeds beyond the primary purpose of differentiating and unifying the learning investment of individuals working in diverse organizational contexts. It supports Gardner’s notion of assuming the role of one’s own tutor, where working on one’s own mind makes searching for generic solutions a moot point. While filtering common questions about the management, transmission, and assessment of knowledge in diverse professional cultures through varied conceptual frameworks, learners are identifying which options best suit their current contexts as learners working on their own minds. They are also deriving benefit from the perspectives of their fellow learners, growing their view of the world around them, which may then influence their actions and make a difference in an era when the capacity for thinking collaboratively and crafting novel solutions is seen as essential to creating both business and social value (Brown, Issacs, & the World Café Community, 2005). Perhaps most importantly of all, the learners are experiencing the modeling of effective leadership that takes into account the individual. Tomlinson and Allan (2000) remind us that inherent challenges in differentiation necessitate risk-takers, inventors, artists, and professionals who will not accept the constraints of paint-by-number approaches to teaching. Restructuring in leadership education moves beyond paint-by-numbers to cubism in breaking apart the traditional course into components and portraying them in a manner that encapsulates a multifaceted view to engage and enrich learners as they grow their capacity to provide effective leadership in the contexts of their diverse organizations.

References


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