

## ***Teaching Educational Leadership Via Web Courses:***

### ***Some Old Problems — Some New Possibilities***

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**Annotation** - The paper begins with discussion of the content and development of two web courses in educational leadership. One assignment, crafting a leadership story, is detailed. The paper illustrates how the leadership story is a route to reflection and learning.

**Abstract** - The paper describes two web courses designed for graduate students enrolled in Master's, doctoral, and educational certification programs in educational leadership. One specific exercise designed to further student reflection is presented. Students craft stories of experienced education leaders. These stories are shared in a virtual conference center and students' reflections in- and on-practice are analyzed. The stories illustrate some of the explicit rules used by administrators to manage problems and the more tacit assumptions embedded in practice. A single story is presented followed by comments on the meaning of the story. The narrative and comments provide opportunity for further interpretation of data and reflection on how leadership is learned.

## ***TEACHING EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP VIA WEB COURSES:***

### ***Some Old Problems — Some New Possibilities***

**Captain:** *“You’re a 1<sup>st</sup> rate XO Andy, a damn good submariner. I know the men like you.”*

**Lt:** *“I’d give my life for any one of them.”*

**Captain:** *“I know you would. I’m not questioning you’re bravery. The question is what about their lives? You and Mr. Emmett are good friends, went through the Academy together. Would you be willing to sacrifice his life? Or what about some of the younger enlisted men?”*

*You know a lot of those guys look up to you like a big brother. You willing to lay their lives on the line? You see you hesitate. But as a captain, you can’t. You have to act. If you don’t, you put the entire crew at risk. Now that’s the job.*

*It’s not a science. You have to be able make hard decisions based on imperfect information, asking men to carry out orders that may result in their deaths and if you’re wrong, you suffer the consequences.*

*If you’re not prepared to make those decisions, without pause, without reflection, then you’ve got no business being a submarine captain.”*

DeLaurentis, D. and DeLaurentis, M. (Producers), & Mostow, J. (Director). (2000). U-571 [Film]. (Available from Universal Films)

### Introduction

One of the common complaints about university programs is a disregard for the realities of the workplace. Graduates remember their training with some fondness, but often say it is not particularly relevant to the work they perform. Why? One explanation is that the world of the practicing school principal or administrator is different from the university classroom or the typical internship. While students and interns often play subordinate roles, those in leadership positions are super ordinate and must make decisions that inform others. While university curricula prescribe a careful deliberation and weighing of evidence, real school settings demand immediate responses to emergencies, small and large, often with little time for deliberation. While the

university places greatest value on the written format, with multiple drafts prior to a final outcome, practice demands face-to-face interactions and more immediate responses to situations.

It is often argued that courses and programs in educational administration must take into account real world settings of school administrators or risk being seen as irrelevant. Recent stories in *Education Week* (Olson, 1999) and the front page of the Sunday, *New York Times* (Steinberg, 2000) point to impending shortages of school administrators and difficulties even finding candidates to apply for administrative positions, particularly at the principal level. This places pressure on universities to educate candidates to fill vacant positions. However, it does not provide agreement concerning which knowledge and skills are most important for school leaders and how best to build connections between the university and the community of practitioners.

The paper poses questions in three general areas:

1. What is the appropriate content for courses in educational leadership?
2. Is the content on the web different in significant ways from traditionally taught courses? Does course environment (web versus face-to-face format) in any way change the answer to the question?
3. What is the rationale for using stories and narratives for teaching leadership? Do stories provide unique opportunities for learning and connections to the field of practice?

The paper begins with a description of the content for educational leadership courses taught on the web; it also addresses how web courses can connect content with real experiences of practicing educational administrators. The description includes discussion of content, student participation, and openness to critique specific to teaching educational leadership on the web. The second part of the paper explores the use of story and narrative to teach educational leadership and details a specific story

and commentary. The paper concludes that the web courses offer new opportunities for practitioners to share experience and for learners to better understand the multiple contexts of practice.

### Structure and Content of the Educational Leadership Web Classes

The web classes use a consistent structure and every web page contains graphics and icons, with links to course information and assignments. At the top of every page is a picture and title for the course with links for: 1) getting help, 2) getting started, 3) course syllabus, 4) class modules, 5) library, and 6) communicating with others. Each course contains six modules with a combination of icons that link to different assignments required for students to complete the module. A typical module would include: 1) reading, 2) on-line lesson, 3) assignment, 4) video, 5) conferencing activity, 6) mastery exercise, and 7) module evaluation. Students point and click to the icon to access each part of the module with lesson and assignments. While there are commercial course management systems such as WebCT ([www.WebCT.com](http://www.WebCT.com)) or Blackboard ([www.blackboard.com](http://www.blackboard.com)), the two courses listed below are more customized examples based on personal selections of icons, graphics, display, materials, methods, and evaluations.

### A Description of the Courses

The URLs for the web courses on Educational Leadership are:

- 1) Leadership Skills — <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~abd7/edl600/class/index.html>
- 2) Leadership Development — <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~abd7/edl630/class/index.html>

Course syllabi and overview are similar to those from any graduate class: (1) course description, (2) course objectives, (3) course structure, (4) textbooks and readings, (5)

course outline, (6) evaluation methods, and (7) course policies. Students begin with a broad overview of objectives and then move more deeply into specific readings, exercises, and assessments.

Course modules. The web courses are divided in multiple modules, each of which contains one or more topics. Each module has its own subset of objectives, specific readings, web assignments, activities, a mastery exercise, and module evaluation. There is more of an unfolding sense, like peeling the layers of an onion, in the materials and presentation. Documents are more interactive than a traditional text, in that students connect to next steps and links embedded in the presentation.

The objectives for the first class, Leadership Skills, are loosely based on the new NCATE Standards for Educational Administration

<[www.npbea.org/projects/NCATE\\_materials.html](http://www.npbea.org/projects/NCATE_materials.html)>. Module 1 begins with a set of objectives that includes viewing the state Department of Education Professional Administrative Standards, determining which standards are addressed in the course, developing a Leadership Portfolio, and completing a mastery exercise and module evaluation. The evaluation for module 1 and all other modules requires students to rate the module's specific objectives, content, and design using a Likert-type scale (poor to excellent) with open-ended questions for what was effective and what needed improvement.

Module 2 requires students to assess themselves related to: 1) administrative skills, 2) interpersonal skills, and 3) other skills. Students assess their strengths and weaknesses by completing inventories in the following areas:

- Judgment Inventory
- Decisiveness Inventory
- Organizational Ability Inventory
- Leadership Inventory

- Sensitivity Inventory
- Oral Communication Inventory
- Written Communication Inventory

They also complete the “Values at Work” questionnaire (taken from *Why work: Motivation and leading the new generation* by Michael Maccoby, Simon and Schuster, 1998), and a conflict style questionnaire. Students do their own scoring of the self-assessments and keep track of their responses for subsequent postings and mastery exercises.

Module 3 looks at the tactical dimensions of leadership. Students read an e-text version of Machiavelli’s *The Prince*. Students assess their own Machiavellian tendencies and answer multiple questions concerning the text and its modern applications. They peruse other websites concerning leadership and power and complete readings on the micro-politics of schools.

Module 4 looks at leadership and organizational purposes. Required readings from the McGraw-Hill Primus series from the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA, 1994) and Senge (1990) are available online through the library. Students read and write a book review of Warren Bennis’ *On Becoming a Leader* (1994 edition) and watch a digitized video by Bennis —“The Leader Within.” Students are also required to post assignments (such as an organizational flowchart) in the virtual conference center, a course bulletin board. The Mastery Exercise requires students to answer multiple questions on organizational leadership.

1. Begin by briefly stating what you believe to be the purpose and direction for individuals and within your organization. What experiences do you have in articulating and focusing organizational purposes and directions? What have you learned that might change the way you previously handled this goal or objective.

2. Imagine that you recently received a call from the local reporter telling you that she is about to do a story on your school or organization. She is interested in better understanding what you do in the organization and what this has to do with the organization's mission and goals. What would you tell her?
3. What specific actions would you take to develop support for your organization's mission and priorities? How do you (or would you) communicate these actions to others?
4. Comment on the view that leadership in an organization is merely symbolic, the person whom we blame or reward when things are going well or poorly. In this view, what the leader does is less important than the needs of organizational members to have someone to reward or blame.

Module 5 looks toward identifying some of the ethical dimensions of leadership. The goal of this module is to understand how values and ethics are applied on the job. Drawing on work by Amy Gutmann (1995), Christopher Hodgkinson (1991), Donald Schön (1991), Thomas Sergiovanni (1993), and Robert Terry (1993), the module proposes that leadership is always a function of values and commitments to organizational purposes. It requires leaders to consider how schools operate in ways that make or break people. The module concludes with discussion from Amy Gutmann on the importance of "democratic deliberation" to decision making. The module also plants a seed for the importance of reflection, which is elaborated further in the next course, Leadership Development. It is argued that without reflection, practitioners risk failing to learn from their prior experiences. The mastery exercise asks students to examine their own ethical concerns in addressing problems, real and hypothetical.

Module 6 is related to leadership and creativity. Learners are asked to recognize creativity in themselves and others, understand why creativity is important, and learn to nurture creativity in their organizations. The module begins with an online article on how leaders seek consensus and why school administrators are ill served by seeking

compliant professionals. This raises the more serious questions concerning consensus and conflict in organizations and how leaders manage it. The module continues by looking at the work of John Kao (1996) and his book, *Jamming*. Kao proposes that the process of stimulating creativity can be observed, analyzed, and taught. Kao adopts a music or jazz metaphor to suggest how people play off one another to create new sounds, unpredictable and harmonious. The module concludes with a mastery exercise, which asks students to complete a creativity audit of their own school or organization, to be posted in the virtual conference center (VCC).

Leadership Development, the second course in the sequence, provides an opportunity for continued development of skills and conceptual development. There are five modules:

- Overview to the Course
- Leadership and Management Process
- A Cognitive Approach to Leadership Development
- Case Studies of Leaders-in-Action
- Creating a Leadership Story and Counter Story

Each module includes objectives, readings, assignments, group exercises and postings, a mastery exercise and module evaluation.

### Content Themes

The first questions proposed by this paper asked about the content of the educational leadership courses. Looking at the content of these educational leadership classes delivered on the web allows one to question the extent to which the content of the courses draw from a knowledge base in educational administration (Murphy & Louis, 1999).



There are some traditional content areas and course topics that emphasize managerial, organizational, and environmental issues in educational leadership:

- Professional standards in educational administration
- Leadership skills and self-assessments
- Schools as organizations and institutions
- Leadership and management processes
- School politics and the uses of power

There are also a few newer leadership areas and perspectives covered in the courses:

- Value themes and ethical dimensions of school leadership
- Leadership and creativity
- Cognitive perspectives on leadership
- Narrative approaches to leadership

This balance of old and new represents a field which has undergone much change over the past 15-20 years, with new insights from well established disciplines and new perspectives raising new problems, new questions, and new opportunities for educational administration.

An example of one theme is the view that leadership involves self-knowledge. There are over a dozen self-assessments in the Leadership Skills course and students have an opportunity to assess their own skills, strengths, weaknesses, and inclinations. There is also a follow-up which encourages learners to apply this self-knowledge to understanding past actions and to speculate on how future performances will be modified based on this knowledge.

A second theme asks education leaders to look at problems and processes through multiple lenses. Course reading points to evidence that effective school leaders adopt multiple frames of reference (Bolman and Deal, 1994). Course assignments ask learners to consider how they frame problems they have encountered in the workplace.

This leads to further reading (Senge, 1990; 1999), which gives consideration to how leaders consider their own mental models and the mental models used by others.

Another central idea in the curriculum has to do with understanding the mental processes that leaders master as they gain experience and expertise. Leaders are seen as facing changing situations involving complex, and interwoven themes (Gardner, 1995; Hallinger, Leithwood, & Murphy, 1993). Underlying this thinking is a view that leadership develops as the learner manages mental resources efficiently in thinking more deeply about a problem.

Is the content and structure of a web course in educational leadership different from face-to-face versions of the same courses?

This paper is concerned with how curricular materials specific to educational leadership interact with web-based course instruction. However, there are some obvious differences between web classes and face-to-face courses that go beyond the scope of this presentation (i.e., issues related to prior experience with computers, access to electronic media, time, distance, etc.). Students participate on their own time schedule (asynchronous participation), with due dates for specific assignments. There are no chat rooms (synchronous participation), where students are expected to go online at the same time, in either course.

One of the most obvious concerns in teaching classes on leadership is a possible gap between the written form of the web class and the mostly face-to-face settings in which leaders practice. This is even more an issue for web courses where there are no face-to-face interactions than in traditionally taught courses. To address this concern, reading assignments include case studies of leadership with longer and more complex

stories of leadership. Mastery exercises ask learners to account for how leaders act by explaining the formal knowledge base that leaders draw from and connecting it to the “how-to” knowledge that is required to do one’s job inside and outside the school or organization (e.g., manage conflict, lead reform efforts, work with personnel, or respond to unanticipated crises, etc). Additionally, in bulletin board postings, students comment on the more tacit understanding of when and why leaders took action, and how their actions might be similar and different to the leadership actions described. Learners also respond to the actions and considerations of their classmates.

Another practical concern has to do with the availability of information and materials related to leadership. Besides the instructor-developed materials, there are many commercial sites related to leadership and educational leadership, that provide articles, biographies, books, and assessments (e.g., Machiavelli’s, *The Prince*). These online resources are available at the click of a mouse and mostly free of charge. An added benefit is the web class student develops a personal library of information that serves as a continuing resource for study and reference. And, unlike traditional texts, many of these web resources and materials are continually updated.

A third issue concerns feedback to and from the instructor. There are some traditional assignments in the course:

- Book review
- Movie critique
- Instructor based questions
- Self-assessment
- Mastery exercise
- Module evaluation

In these web-based courses, learners complete required reading assignments, web activities and searches, individual and group exercises in the virtual conference center,

comments, web postings, and more. Learners have an opportunity to play a leadership role in the instruction by providing feedback to classmates in the virtual conference center; they also provide feedback to the instructor in mastery exercises and module evaluations. This allows for immediate feedback to the instructor. Another positive outcome is that students in other leadership classes can make up missed class assignments by accessing the web-based materials that are open to everyone. On the down side, there is a volume of e-mail related to assignments that is significant. In the Leadership Skills class, there are approximately twenty separate written assignments, each of which requires an acknowledgement, written evaluation, grade, etc. With approximately twenty-five students in a class, this represents about five hundred e-mails, which are not evenly distributed over a semester. As long as the instructor is the hub for most of the assignments, the volume of e-mail is a challenge to teaching on the web. As web courses become more commonplace in university programs, it is likely there will be adjustments to the number and types of assignments given in web classes to prevent lower motivation and burnout.

### Part Two – Crafting Leadership Stories in a Web-Based Setting

The final questions raised by this research concern the rationale and potential benefits for using stories and narratives in teaching educational leadership. Do stories provide unique opportunities for learning and connections to practice? How is it possible for stories to be developed and told in a web-based setting?

#### Why Stories?

There are multiple reasons for using stories to teach educational leadership. Stories enhance understanding of one's profession (Barone, 1997; Bruner, 1996;

Clandinin & Connelly, 1991; Coles, 1989; Danzig, 1999a, 1999b; Schön, 1991). Issues related to school culture, personal relations, values and beliefs, rituals and myths, take on more meaning as they are presented in stories of practice. Underlying concepts are sometimes overlooked or ignored in the rush of daily experience. These principles risk losing their explanatory power if they are presented as abstract principles, divorced from the original contexts in which they occur.

Stories allow others to consider the informal or tacit systems that exist side-by-side with the manifest systems operating in schools and other organizations. Learners and leaders gain from the richer descriptions of the processes by which decision makers classify ambiguous and large amounts of information; they learn from the descriptions of how leaders view and subsequently act upon problems that contain only partial information and conflicting expectations by the parties involved.

Stories provide an opportunity for practicing administrators to share their experiences. Many people enjoy sharing personal and profession experiences, particularly with someone who is less experienced. Listeners have the opportunity to develop new relationships and find new empathies in old relationships. Stories emphasize the value of practice and theory, experience and reflection.

Stories allow for prior knowledge to be stored and recalled. Prior knowledge affects how leaders think about a problem, an important component of determining an actual solution (Hallinger, Leithwood, & Murphy, 1993). In playing chess, the expert is able to bring up/ recall old knowledge (the locations of pieces, what happened after certain moves) in new circumstances, with variations. Stories provide this meaningful way to store and access prior knowledge, and apply it to new situations and

circumstances. Situating learning in the stories of administrative practice is likely to make the new knowledge more meaningful and usable.

In summary, the story is a model for examining the underlying experiences of a story teller. It allows the listener to hear about some of the experiences that shape a person, and some of the filters through which actions are viewed. Crafting and reflecting on stories leads to great understanding—of self, of workplace practices, of professional motives.

What is a leadership story? Modules four and five in the Leadership Development course provide examples of leadership stories. Gardner (1995) defines the leadership story as a drama that unfolds over time, one in which the leader is the principal character. The leadership story is a story of identity, one in which leaders are successful in conveying a message to their followers. The story is effective in that it *fits*, i.e., the story makes sense to audience members at a particular time, where they have been and where they would like to go. Stories draw and evoke empathetic identification among listeners. Stories illustrate the “practical theories,” the deeply held images and moral principles that guide actions. Storytelling is a natural way people represent their experiences (Bruner 1996; Danzig, 1997; Gardner, 1995).

In sum, stories lead to learning about the importance of one’s own story, and the basically interpretive nature of one’s work. The leadership story allows the learner to hear the inner thinking and dialogue of the storyteller. Even when people cannot explain what was done and why actions were taken, they may be able to illustrate what they mean with a story. This leads to the somewhat paradoxical stance: on the one hand, the story is a construction of events; yet, the story tests these constructions by

bringing to the surface and then discriminating among alternate accounts of events. The listener is presented with a vocabulary and concepts that are embedded in the story. Instead of abstract principles, complex life dramas and real people are brought into open discussion (Day, 2000).

### The Web Assignment

The web assignment proposes that writing someone else's story helps a practitioner to become more aware of her own experiences and the more critical underlying theories that inform a particular understanding of the world. The writer is able to look at alternative interpretations of the events and what goes into crafting a believable interpretation. In doing this, the learner gets a sense of his or her own standards concerning what is credible in an explanation versus its alternative. The study of practice involves generating, comparing, and discriminating among multiple representations of phenomena.

Initially, students enrolled in the web course are given the following instructions:

#### *Crafting a Leadership Story - An Assignment*

*Seek a participant and in an initial meeting, explain what you want to do and gain that person's agreement to participate. They must sign a written permission form. Try to establish a climate of trust. Be open about your needs and goals for the project and be honest about the time commitment required. Discuss the procedure you intend to follow and raise the issue of confidentiality. Be scrupulous in maintaining confidentiality throughout the project. Do not identify by name the administrator or any other people involved, in class discussion or in the story writing.*

*Your story should be written in 1st person, trying to capture the voice of the story teller you have interviewed. It should be written in an easy-to-read style that will be meaningful to others and not read like a research report. While you may use references to help support your*

*conclusions, it may be better to integrate these comments in the text of the paper. Otherwise, you might include an addendum.*

*The story should include a final personal reflection section that addresses what you learned by working on a narrative project. What connections do you see between the leader you interviewed and yourself? Can you see parallels between this person's experiences and ideas and your own? What insights have you gained on your own professional work by writing this person's story? You might extend the analysis or even do a more formal analysis of what makes your story a good story. Who are the actors and what is the action? What makes it memorable? Does it follow a particular narrative style?*

*The story, with your summary/analysis and supporting transcripts is due one week prior to the end of the semester. You should prepare a one-page summary to share your insights with other members of the class and post it to the virtual conference center.*

*Your paper should be approximately 1,500-2,500 words. You may supplement the leader's story in any way you deem appropriate and you might include drawings, visuals, photographs, etc. One of my colleagues had a student who did a similar project involving a larger group and developed a sketch to portray belief systems. While the sketch went through many drafts, it portrayed many aspects of leadership and administrative practice. You will need to find someone who is willing to be interviewed and willing to meet with you two or three times during the term.*

### Criteria for Assessment

*This final paper will count 50% of your final grade. Your project will be judged on the following criteria:*

- 1. The richness of the description of the administrator's beliefs and knowledge, professional development, and actions.*
- 2. Evidence of understanding about administrator's personal practical knowledge and how this is developed.*
- 3. Use of sound data gathering and organizing strategies.*
- 4. Quality of utilization of information from relevant literature.*
- 5. Existence of a clear "data trail" that allows the reader to connect comments with concrete data.*
- 6. Level of analysis of information and ability to synthesize into a coherent and meaningful whole.*
- 7. Evidence of personal reflection about your own practical knowledge.*
- 8. Quality of written expression and presentation.*



Permissions. *You will need to have the interviewed person sign the following informed consent form in order to participate in the project. You will need to sign one as well.*

### Some Guidelines For Interviewing

*Getting started is no small task when collecting interview data. After getting written permission, you are interested in biographical information about the interviewee. Some possible prompts for your interviews might include:*

#### Growing up information

- *Where did you grow up (city, suburb, rural)? What was your background? What was/is your parents' education and occupations? Did you travel a lot as a child?*
- *How did you deal with authority at home and in school?*

#### Educational information

- *What is your education background and experience?*
- *Where did you go to school? Where did you go to college?*
- *What kind of student were you? Who were significant others that influenced you?*

#### Professional information

- *How did you come to a leadership position?*
- *When did you decide to become an administrator?*
- *Were you ever a teacher? Have you ever left education?*
- *What factors related to your returning to the field? What and who influenced your decision? What are some of the high points/low points of your career?*
- *Can you give a specific example of a situation or problem where you had to take a leadership role? Who was involved (examples might be a hiring or firing, student discipline, police involvement, seeking services, welfare clients, etc.)? How did it turn out?*

Students are required to audio-tape and then transcribe interviews; they must also complete summary sheets based on the interviews they conduct.

### A Story Example: Leadership Explored

What follows is one example of a story generated this past semester as part of a web-based graduate level leadership development class taught at a state university in the western region of the United States. The leadership story is followed by the learner's reflections and comments about the story in general and about the leadership actions.

### Client-Centered Leadership in a State Agency:

I was born in St. Louis Missouri. I have two sisters, one six years older and one six years younger. My parents were both born in Missouri in small towns, they married and moved to the big city of St, Louis to make their way in life. During WW II when I was born, my father worked in a pharmaceutical factory in the city. When I was about five years of age my father and mother opened a small grocery store in St. Louis. Both of my parents worked seven days a week in the store. They went on over the years to buy, sell and operate a number of small grocery stores and cafes in the states of Missouri and Wyoming, moving occasionally, every few years between the two states.

I think my first real experience with leadership and management was watching my parents operate their small businesses and their interaction with their employees and the public they served. They worked hard and, they were good at it. While I was in high school and working as a fry cook in my parents' A&W Root Beer Drive -in, I learned more about leadership and management than I did from most of the management classes I have had over the years. One must be very quick, agile, flexible, and fast on your feet to be a fry cook in a busy cafe. You have to be able to keep many different items in your head at one time, while thinking ahead constantly to your next move. I found this to be very good training in later years while serving in leadership position in a large public bureaucracy bouncing from crisis to crisis.

My school experience for the most part was not very good. I did not like school very much and never felt very successful while I was there. I think my dislike and fear of school started very early. I can remember being frightened to go to kindergarten. I started at age four for some reason. I don't think I was ready to go to school, but my parents must have thought it was a good idea. St. Louis, Missouri was one of the cities in the United States where the kindergarten concept first started. My parents must have been trying to get me on the road to a good education quick. They themselves did not have much formal education. Neither of them had gone past the 8th grade in school. In fact when I graduated from high school in 1958 I was the first person on either side of my parents' families to graduate from high school.

I started kindergarten at an early age and I remember not liking it much. I was frightened of being at school and away from home and our small grocery store. I remember one especially bad time in kindergarten when I wet my pants. My teacher called for the principal

to come to our room to get me. I remember I was crying and the principal, who I remember as a very large woman came and grabbed me, put her large hand over my mouth and drug me off to the bathroom. I did not understand why I was going to the bathroom because I no longer need to go. I had already done that in the classroom. At recess that day I remember being embarrassed and scared, so I left the school and walked several blocks to my Dad's grocery store. My parents were not happy to see me, in fact my Dad gave me a spanking and told me I needed to be in school. He let me change my pants and then took me back to school. I think this is one of several reasons I never liked school very much.

I always had the feeling in school that I knew more than I was able to display to the teacher on the tests or in the school work I did. I was a shy student and always tried to fade into the woodwork in the classroom. I suspect that if I were to talk to most of my former teachers today, they would be surprised that I was able to go on to college and find a job.

There are a few teachers who stand out in my mind, one bad and the other two very good and helpful. The rest of my teachers are sort of a blur of mediocrity. The worst teacher I can remember was in the fourth grade.

My parents had recently moved to Wyoming from Missouri. They had bought a small grocery store to operate in the town of Powell, Wyoming. In Missouri I had attended a Lutheran parochial school. I remember the teachers being very nice and kind. The school was small; so two grades were in each room, each teacher taught two grades. When I moved to Wyoming and began to attend the fourth grade, I could tell right away that most of the other students knew a lot more than I did and had much better reading skills. This was very clearly pointed out to me constantly by the teacher. While attempting to read aloud in class one day the teacher announced to me and the rest of the class, that I was doing very poorly and probably did not belong in her fourth grade class. She said I would probably not be able to keep up with the rest of the class. Everyone in the class, except me, had a good laugh about the teacher's statement. I was devastated and wished I was back in Missouri where the teachers were kind and nice to me even if they did not teach me to read very well.

The two teachers who stand out in my mind as being very helpful to me were in Middle school. One was an art teacher who taught me to appreciate art and even said I did a good job on a variety of projects I did in his class. He was a very likable sort of person and is the first teacher I had that demonstrated that it is possible to be an authority figure and still be nice, and approachable. I learned a great deal from him not only about art but also about leadership and how to motivate people.

The second teacher I remember fondly from my middle school years was my English Literature teacher. She was an "old maid" schoolteacher who was very bright and witty. She inspired me to read for pleasure not just because I had to for a school assignment. She seemed to like me as an individual and seemed interested in what I was doing outside of school as well as what I was supposed to be doing in class. She used to come into my Dad's grocery store to shop. We would have a good time

talking about school and other things. I think she saw some potential in me that other teachers did not. In fact I have saved an old report card from my eighth grade English Class where my teacher had written, "that I could do better if I only tried harder." I think that statement pretty much sums up the time I spent in school, grade school, high school and college.

My parents moved back to Missouri in my senior year of high school. Needless to say I was not too happy about leaving my friends and starting in a new high school my senior year. However, it may have been one of the best things that happened to me. The school I attended in Missouri was in a small town. The high school was very small and well behind the school I had attended in Wyoming. I achieved a new status of being a "bright student" compared with many of my classmates. My self-esteem was greatly improved. I really did not know any more than I knew while attending school in Wyoming, but when the school graded on a curve I was on top. This was very helpful to my self-image. I was one of only two students from a graduating class of 60 that went on to college.

I did go to college for two years and decided I did not like the world of education and thus decided to get a job in the "real world." I did get a job working as a welfare caseworker in St. Louis, Missouri. I was given a caseload of 350 poor older persons. I was supposed to see them each twice a year to determine if they were still eligible to relieve the \$70 per month the state of Missouri was giving to "Old Age Recipients." My caseload was located in downtown St. Louis. Most of my clients lived in "flop houses" which cost them \$15 per month. The clients would have the balance of the \$70 or \$55 per month to take care of all of their other expenses. This work was a real "eye opener" for a young man who had spent most of his life growing up in a small town in Wyoming. The poverty and despair that people lived with day in and day out was very discouraging to see. If I actually tried to do something to help any of these people, I would not be able to keep up with the necessary visits each month to keep up my "case count." This was the number of clients I was supposed to see each month so I would be on target to see all 350 clients each year. It was frustrating seeing such needy people and being able to do so little for them. It also soon dawned on me that people I worked side by side with were making more money than I was and we were both doing the same work. The difference was, those who made more money had college degrees. I did not; I only had two years of college. That is when I decided to go back to college.

I did go back to college and finally got a BS degree. It took about 6 more years because I worked full time at a state mental hospital while finishing my degree. After college I took a job in the State of Washington as a Consultant on Aging with the State Agency on Aging. My job was to do community organization work in towns in Eastern Washington to develop needed services for older persons. I met with older persons and community leaders around the state in planning and implementing a variety of programs. I was very fortunate in this job to have as my first boss an outstanding woman who had pioneered the development of services for older persons in the United States. She was a very good role model for me. She was very knowledgeable and well respected in her chosen field of work. She used a common sense approach to leadership. She had high expectations of those who worked

for her, but she was always very supportive and approachable. I learned a great deal from her, not only about the substance of our work with older persons, but more importantly how to motivate others with respect, integrity and high expectations.

After several years of working for the State Program on Aging, going through several bosses, some good, some mediocre, and one really bad one, I was appointed the director of the agency. My responsibility was to operate a Statewide Program for older persons to meet their needs and help them maintain their independence as they aged. This was my first real opportunity to be in a leadership position.

After serving as the Assistant Secretary of the Washington State Aging and Adult Services Program for about 20 years, I became Deputy Secretary of Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). DSHS is the largest agency in Washington State Government with 19,000 employees and a budget of \$6 billion per year. The department serves about 1.3 million people each year. Besides the Aging and Adult long-term care program mentioned above, the Department also operates the States' Children' programs, the Welfare program, the programs that serve the mentally ill, the developmentally disabled and those involved with Juvenile delinquency. The Department also operates the state Medicaid program which funds hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, doctors, dentists and pharmacists throughout Washington State.

Over the years I have had several opportunities to be involved in developing and implementing major policy changes for the State of Washington. I was involved in developing the largest information system in the State of Washington. This system determined eligibility for all those individuals in the state receiving social and health services. The system has approximately 2 million entries per day. I also was involved in reforming the State's welfare system. The new welfare reform system changed policies that had been in place more than sixty years.

I will report here on just one situation that I felt that I was able provide leadership that had a significant impact on the lives of the clients the Department served. This was the improvement of the Long-Term Care System in the State of Washington so that people would have a choice in how they received their longtime care services.

A few years ago the Washington States' long term care program looked a great deal like the rest of the country. It was out of control financially and was not providing the services that people wanted and needed. The State was spending more money on Nursing Home care for low-income older people than the state could afford. What is more unfortunate is that older persons in need of long-term care did not want to move to a nursing home to get a service. Most would prefer to stay home and not move to the "dreaded" nursing home.

When I became the Assistant Secretary for the Aging and Adult Services Administration, my first goal was to repair a great deal of damage that had been done by former directors to the staff. Many of the staff had become demoralized and frustrated and had given up trying to be productive. They saw much of the money needed for necessary long-term care services going to a service no one really wanted, the nursing homes. There was however, a very powerful lobby of Nursing Homes

Administrators who had a great deal of influence with the Governor and legislature and how money was spent.

Many of the current staff and I had worked together for several years before I was appointed the director. The staff knew I was not the smartest of the bunch, but they did see me as someone with integrity. I stressed to them that I could not make the necessary changes in our office and in the long-term care system by myself. I also told the staff I would do all I could to support them in their work as long as they were working to bring about a positive change for older persons in our state. My relationship with the staff became very positive. They knew I respected and would support them if they attempted to do good work. Most of the staff had not had a supervisor who supported what they did, let alone be interested in what they were doing. We made a pretty good team.

As a result of this experience I developed my Ed Sullivan theory of Management. Simply stated it is; Ed Sullivan appeared to have little or no talent, he did not sing, dance or play the piano, however, it was not the Ed Sullivan Show with out him. I could identify with Ed. I did not have nearly the skills, intelligence or abilities of many of those who worked for me. They however, needed someone to get them organized and support so they could do their best work. I was able to provide this service to them. It proved to be a good relationship, and it worked. We were as a group, able to bring about much positive change in services for disabled adults and older persons in the State of Washington.

As a result of the positive working relationship in our agency we were better able to focus on ways to improve the long-term care system in the State of Washington. After much discussion with the management team, we decided that what the old people in our State wanted in their long term care services, is the same thing we all wanted in our lives. That is, "choice" and "control" over the simple things of life. Such things as; what time you get up in the morning, what time you have breakfast, what you have for breakfast, who you share a bathroom with, who you share a bedroom with etc. We decided all these simple choices were all taken for granted and were often lost when someone in need of long term care moved from their own home into a nursing home.

We, a staff of bureaucrats knew we had strong feeling about these simple choices in our lives and decided that those we were trying to serve must feel the same way. So as an Agency we set out to develop a system of services that we would want to use if we ourselves had long term care needs. This "philosophical sense" was developed into a clearly understood "vision" for the agency. All those who worked in the system could understand the "vision" and how important basic choices are to everyone. We were then able to transfer the basic 'vision' into a set of action steps to make the Washington State Long-Term Care system more user friendly.

As a result of these actions, The Washington State Long-Term Care System is now recognized as a model for the rest of the Nation. Not only do the users of the system get a choice about how they want their long term care service, the System is less costly than other state long-term care system around the United States. The nursing home caseload has gone down dramatically in the state and more older

persons are receiving their needed services in their own homes as they prefer. The State had saved a great deal of money and those in need of long-term can get a preferred service.

### Reflecting On The Leadership Story

Students post their stories on the web and share their stories with other students. They are asked to comment on what they learned from their stories and the stories posted by other students in the class. In subsequent assignments and postings, the story crafter reflects on learning that resulted from writing the story. The following questions and answers are a sample of some of the postings from the student who crafted the preceding story.

#### **What principles of leadership and leadership practice did you learn or resulted from crafting the story of leadership?**

*The primary principal of leadership that I learned from my leadership story is that there is no single sure way to become a leader. Leaders seem to come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. I also learned that a leader does not have to be successful as a student in school to become successful later in life. I learned that a key to being a good leader is to be able to motivate others to do their best, and that a group can be most successful if they work together.*

*From my leadership story I learned that the leader does not have to be the smartest member of the group to be the leader. My leader acknowledged that there were many people he directed who were smarter and had more skill than he did. However for these folks to be most successful they needed someone like him to lead them.*

#### **Was there a focus or point to the leadership story you crafted? What helped you to find or focus on the importance of the story?**

*The focus of my leadership story is how someone can be a successful leader in spite of the fact that he may not be the smartest or most skilled person in the organization. The person that I interviewed has been a successful leader and manager in a very large state government agency. The agency is primarily made up of very highly trained skilled professionals such as social workers, nurses, doctors, lawyers, accountants, etc. The person in my story had little or no training in any of these skilled professions, yet he was the leader of the organization in which these skilled professionals worked. From what I can*

*determine he was seen as a good leader and he was respected by the people who worked in the organization.*

*I think his success as a leader can be attributed to the fact that he apparently respected the abilities and skills of the people who worked for him and he supported them in accomplishing jointly agreed upon goals. He was seen by the people that worked for him as a person of integrity and honesty. The people who worked for him knew they could count on him in times of need for his support and assistance in doing their jobs.*

**Did you learn anything about yourself as a leader in crafting the story of leadership? If yes, what?**

*I have always believed that the only way for a leader to be truly successful is to have the respect and support of those he leads. This belief was validated by the leadership story I wrote. My natural tendency is to work in a team approach with those who work with me to solve problems. I have heard some say that a good leader must be somewhat aloof and maintain some distance from his staff. I have heard some say, that if you involve those you are supervising in the decision making process, it is seen as a sign of weakness and indecision on the part of the leader. I have never felt good about this approach to leadership.*

*The leader that I interviewed clearly demonstrated that his success was based on his ability to have all staff involved in a decision making process to resolve common problems and issues. The leader used a very inclusive method of leadership that appeared to work very well. This is the type of leadership with which I feel most comfortable.*

**What did you learn about yourself and your leadership from writing the leadership story that was different from what you got from reading the leadership biographies presented in the course readings?**

*I think the major difference in what I learned about myself in my leadership story and the leaders I read about in Gardner's book is the fact that it was easier for me to identify with the person in my story than it was for me to identify with many of the leaders in the book. Several of the leaders in the book, such as Oppenheimer, Sloan, Marshall, etc. had pretty big egos and appeared to be much more "directive" in their style than I would ever be comfortable with. These leaders may have been good at getting things done, but I learned I do not like their approach.*

*The person I interviewed has a style and approach much similar to the one I use. I learned from him and others in Gardner's book that more than one leadership style will work. There is no one "best way" to be a good leader.*

**Did crafting the leadership story motivate you to examine your own values**



**and actions more carefully? Did you scrutinize your own actions and values in relation to the storyteller's actions and values?**

*The writing of my leadership story did help me to examine my own values and actions as they relate to leadership. My leadership story helped me to validate my strong feeling that it is almost impossible to accomplish much in the way of creativity and quality in an organization without using the skills and talents of all those involved in the organization. My belief is that all employees are important to the well being of the organization and that the organization can only achieve its ultimate success if all are involved in resolving issues and solving problems. My leadership story helped me to reflect on the importance of treating all employees with dignity and respect. Not only is it the right thing to do, the organization will be more successful as a result.*

**Did crafting a story of someone else's leadership lead you to a better understanding of leadership, how leaders think about problems, how they make sense of complex sets of information, how and why they take action? If yes, how do you know?**

*My leadership story has helped me to understand a very important principle, that is, "leaders can not do it all by themselves." To be a good leader there must be followers and teamwork.*

*A good leader will help his followers to perform to the best of their abilities. A good leader supports his followers and demonstrates that he can be depended on in time of need. A good leader must be a person of integrity and honesty if he is to gain the respect of those who follow.*

*I learned from my leadership story that the person I interviewed may not have been the smartest or most skilled person in his organization, but the organization and employees performed at their best when he, as the leader, was able to organize the work and the workers to accomplish an agreed upon goal. Their goals were met because of a mutual respect and appreciation between the leader and the followers.*

*I have learned that an organization can only solve complex problems and resolve difficult issues when the followers and leaders work together for a common good. The followers and the leader must have a respect and understanding of the role of each if they as a team are to be successful and achieve their greatest potential as an organization.*

The story and commentary provide a pathway into the thinking and actions of this one leader. Is there an "Ed Sullivan" school of leadership? Were the leadership

practices portrayed accurately? Was the leader effective? These questions are secondary to the more primary concern of this paper, how leadership is learned. In hearing and then crafting the story, a student considers what is important in the story; she reflects on how the actions and skills demonstrated by the leader are similar to and different from her own ways of acting. The effect of the story is multiplied many times, as each student crafts a leadership story, posts the story in a virtual conference center, interprets the story, and reads the comments of others. An added benefit is that practicing administrators and school leaders are provided a way of sharing their experiences with others. In the process, a bridge from old to new, from experienced leader to beginning practitioner, is established.

### Summary and Conclusion

This paper describes objectives, content, and selected outcomes of two educational leadership courses taught in a web-based setting. The first course focuses on a self-examination of leadership skills through a series of online self-assessments, readings, and applications to practice. The course is built around the assumption that self-knowledge, identifying one's inclinations, strengths, and weaknesses, is a first step towards becoming a leader.

The second course adopts a more narrative perspective. After reading the biographies of leaders, students interview a practicing education leader and craft the leader's story. These stories present the leader's early life, educational, and professional experiences. Students write in the voice of the storyteller, (first person singular) and craft a story of how leadership is learned and practiced. Students hear and

write a more detailed explanation of cognitive skills (i.e., communication, decision-making), and the actual circumstances in which they are applied.

This view of what needs to be learned in order to be a leader and how one learns it, is in sharp contrast to the one-dimensional view of the captain in U-571 who tells his junior officer that he must learn to make decisions “without pause, without reflection.” Leading a department, school, or district in the year 2001 is not the same as captaining a U-Boat in 1944. Schools are not at war. The individual good is not sacrificed for the greater whole. The leadership stories illustrate how experienced leaders work within a framework of rules and apply them individually and specifically to each situation. The stories illustrate how leaders adapt rules to meet specific problems and accommodate multiple needs. The stories teach leadership by building a sense of the indeterminate aspects of leadership and multiple contexts in which leadership is practiced. Teaching leadership is not only teaching about the formal rules and policies, but also teaching how cultural norms, initial value sets growing up, institutional experiences, and professional socialization shape knowledge and leadership practice.

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