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Leadership Aspects of Integrated Learning with Technology in Democratic Environments

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Abstract:
Teaching as a collaborative enterprise can further be enhanced by the use of integrated learning methods and the infusion of technology. Teacher as a leader must then work as a catalyst to facilitate this learning process. A creation of democratic environment has become increasingly easier with the use of the technology. Yet, the right attitude in leadership and the adaptive challenge are as equally important as the infusion of technology into classroom learning and teaching. Teacher is still the noble master and technology is the revolutionary servant in a more democratic world.

Introduction

Traditionally, teaching has been a sacred profession. It has so long been confined to an assembly of noble men who were respected as leaders in their spheres of knowledge. During the early years of Eastern and Western civilizations, educators like Brahmins, Socrates, and Plato as generalists and philosophers have passed on their know-what (knowledge) and know-how (technology) to the next generation of pupils. In the post-modern society, the marriage of technology and information has democratized the monopoly of knowledge that used to be vested in gurus or teachers. The combination of data and information may not necessarily advance our knowledge; however, by using information and technology we can collectively develop our knowledge to gain insights into the realm of
As an educator, I find that the best learning comes from teaching and by doing. Learning then consists of three gradual processes: learning to know, teaching to understand, and doing to internalize. For the overall experience, it requires collective action and personal reflection. Thus, education becomes a conscious process for personal development and for the common good, not an end in itself. In the knowledge society where information is readily accessible, professors no longer have the monopoly on knowledge. Knowledge and wisdom can be sought collectively by inspiring students who engage actively in the learning experiment, infused increasingly by technology.

In this article, the art of teaching in Section II highlights a philosophy of collaborative learning that involves students and employs a wide collection of teaching methods, including technology. Section III presents a leadership framework that could easily be applied to a classroom learning environment. Here, leadership as an attitude or a software in leading without authority in a democracy where nobody is in-charge could be found in the work of Harlan Cleveland (1985 and 1997) and Ronald Heifetz (1995 and 1997), two of my inspiring teachers and practitioners of leadership. Their notions of leadership may captivate us to understand the ecology of teaching as a sacred profession in a technology-driven, more democratic world. Section IV concludes with the idea that teaching and learning could best be served by exercising leadership in a democracy where everyone has equal rights and individual responsibility for personal actions and reactions. Technology has increasingly been facilitating this process.

IIA Democratic Philosophy for Integrated, technological Learning

A teacher as a leader must create a learning environment for students to unleash their endowed potential to gain knowledge, enhance skills, and to develop personal qualities. For this purpose, the moral power bestowed in teachers should be used creatively and democratically in the classroom for innovative learning activities. Teachers are neither the leaches who are solely attached to teaching nor the students who are purely seeking knowledge: they are collectively engage in a learning enterprise; thus, one cannot sustain without the work of the other. Creating such a conducive environment is not easy but to do so is mutually beneficial in the end. As aspired teachers, we are essentially leaders who want to create a new environment to make something productive and meaningful happen in the classroom where learning should
Teaching is neither lecturing nor professing; it requires an act of active listening. Listening to the voices of the students offers an important link to engage them in active learning and in navigating the learning process. The work experience of students could also become an instrument in learning which gradually leads to their own motivation. Starting from what they know of their story is an eternal connection to their lives and values as a human. It is challenging for professors to build a trusting foundation and to maintain the attention of the audience as we begin to exercise our leadership roles in the classroom.

In my graduate and undergraduate classes, I have used a host of teaching methods and learning tools. Among them are: lectures, case studies, Socrates method of questioning and debating, role playing and simulations, field trips and guest speakers, educational videos, mid-term quizzes, final exams, and term papers. With these methods, the role of the teacher is to orchestrate the symphony of learning activities so that various learning faculties are awakened in the students. When there are constructive engagements where everyone has a shared responsibility and a sense of ownership, the learning experience can be inspiring and relevant to the real world.

Here are some of the selective approaches that I have integrated in several courses:

1. Lectures should not be limited to text book readings alone. Additional readings from professional journals and newspapers such as Harvard Business Review, Public Administration Review, Foreign Affairs, US News and World Report, Time, Newsweek, New York Times, and others have been used to complement the academic learning experience, particularly in world politics and public policy issues where a potential Rhode scholar in the class could meet a constellation of Road scholars with their diverse perspectives. These are readily accessible through Internet.

2. Case studies tend to bring real world issues into the classroom discussion and debate. Student groups are now exposed to a set of selected case studies in public affairs, economic issues, or foreign relations. Groups and individual student are given the responsibility of analysis and problem solving but they also are presented with the opportunity to develop communication and presentation skills, team work, and leadership initiatives. Many of the students use e-mail as a major form of
communication and employ the Power Point as an effective presentation tool.

3. Socrates method of questioning and debating introduces students to critical thinking — a tool of developing intellectual intelligence (i.e., IQ). For this type of teaching and learning, students are encouraged to read the text books and assigned materials prior to the class sessions. For example, the Socrates method of questioning is used to learn more about the debate between Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry on American federalism and intergovernmental relations.

4. Role playing and simulations offer students the opportunity to engage in experiential learning where emotional intelligence (as opposed to IQ) is sensitized. With student participation, a professor could bring alive real world issues and dilemma in a similar manner to which the actual case had occurred. The Cuban missile crisis, the Gulf war, the Korean Peninsula, the Federal budget negotiations are a few examples where role playing and simulations have been successful. Several innovative student groups have used interactive computer communication in relaying messages while they are engaged in the simulation.

5. Field trips and guest speakers are a way to promote interactive learning between the classroom and the outside world. Inviting practitioners to the classroom and taking students on a field trip infuse different perspectives to academic learning. Students find guest speakers as a confirmation of the academic relevance in the real world. This also establishes mutual respect between the academic community and the society at large.

6. Educational videos from CNN, ABC, PBS, and the Annenberg Series can also supplement students to learn more about issues in different perspectives from the experts.

For the competitive marketplace, which is largely driven-by ever-changing information technology and the dynamics of multiculturalism, we become a tribe of global learners and teachers who continually cultivate new knowledge and skills, largely through technology. An array of varying teaching approaches and options must be included to accommodate for diverse learning needs and preferences of our students. With computers and telecommunication, professors and students can be well-wired and the communication can be direct and constant. By integrating a host of approaches, students are well-prepared to develop their innate talents and skills. Donald Langenberg (1997: p. 36), chancellor of the University System of Maryland, writes that “these skills include initiative, persistence,
integrity, and the ability to communicate effectively, to think creatively as well as critically, and to work with others to solve problems.” To prepare our students to meet the future needs, we should open the windows of our classrooms to allow the winds of knowledge (driven largely by technology) and the voices of diversity to flow freely. Thus, a democratic way of teaching and learning can motivate everyone and give the class the freedom to conceive and practice teaching and leadership as a sacred commodity (Mendis, 1997).

III Teaching with Technology as a Leadership Challenge

Educators — both teachers and administrators — can use their roles of leadership to help others. Leadership then differs from benevolent dictatorship where the human spirit could be fatally wounded. Leadership should not be associated with a control-freak, a positional administrator, or a tyrant teacher who claims to know everything. Yet, they are simply nominal leaders. Leadership, which intricately links the power and the authority, is a spiritual commodity which is sharable, expandable, and noble. When one separates the nexus between the two, there emerges a leader who is more likely to be corrupt and dictatorial; but leadership is not. In the 1800s, British politician Lord Acton said that power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely whereby leadership is absent. The primary requirement for leadership to flourish is to create a democratic environment where the human spirit could govern with its natural sovereignty in the dominion of divine powers. This is a contrast departure from the concept of power in human control. Technology could increasingly be associated with leadership since it undermines the accumulated positional authority and tends to spread more with democratic values.

My concept of leadership in teaching and learning has derived largely from the work of Harlan Cleveland (1997) and Ronald Heifetz (1994). Within the growing body of leadership literature, Heifetz adds the most critical element to define leadership, the values or the nature of spiritual-being in the realm of leadership. He (1994: p. 13) writes that:

Leadership arouses passion. The exercise and even the study of leadership stirs feeling because leadership engages our values. Indeed, the term itself is value-laden. When we call for leadership in our organizations and politics, we call for something we prize. If one asks: ‘Would you rather be known as a leader or a manager? A follower or a leader?’ the response is usually ‘a leader.’ The term
leadership involves our self-images and moral codes (italic original).

It is gradually being recognized that leadership has a set of wholesome attributes that are more divine than human. In his article, Heifetz (1985: pp. 179-203) also writes that there are times when a member of a group, whether a person with formal authority or not, moves from the dance floor of activity in a group to the balcony of reflective, reverent wonder about what is going on in the life of the group. At those times, I believe, the Holy Spirit of God is at work in that person.

For Heifetz (1997: pp. 124-34), there are six key components to leadership:

1. “Getting on the balcony” for reflection and to observe the pattern of human spirit that leads our behaviors and values
2. Identifying the adaptive challenge to take, develop, and give responsibility
3. Regulating stress for a sustained period of disequilibrium to adapt into new ways of doing things and learning a new set of ways
4. Maintaining attention to hold the environment or the audience
5. Giving the work back to people to evolve themselves into the best of their adaptive work, and
6. Protecting voices of leadership below to participate in the collective vision.

Heifetz, who is an accomplished musician and a trained psychiatrist, has successfully combined his world of music and psychiatry with the world of leaders and practitioners at Harvard. Yet, his elements of leadership have a deep spiritual underpinning.

A similar line of thinking has been advocated by Peter Vail (1988: p. 224) at the George Washington University who writes that “all true leadership is indeed spiritual leadership. . . . Leadership is concerned with bringing out the best in people. As such, one’s best is tied intimately to one’s deepest sense of oneself, to one’s spirit.” Peter Senge (1990: pp. 345-46) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who has a global view of leadership, writes that most of the leaders develop vision, values, purpose, or mission and have a sense of larger “patterns of becoming” in their personal aspirations and in their organizations. Senge (1990: p. 346) elaborates that:

I reflected back on gifted leaders whom I have known, I realized that this ‘larger story’ was common to them all, and conversely that many otherwise competent managers in leadership positions were not leaders of the same ilk.
precisely because they saw no larger story.

It implies that the purpose of the story is deeply emanating from personal insights and accumulated experience of leaders as teachers. Senge (1990: p. 348) concludes that our “common ground, . . . upon which we can all agree after discovering that my view is shared by you and the others,” would be spiritual in nature. Thus, Senge and others assert that we are One at a higher spiritual plane. Answers to these challenges of leadership in teaching must then be dealt within a broader framework of spiritual understanding and moral reasoning for the welfare and happiness of the community of learners.

For the community of teachers as learners and leaders, leadership can mean a development of attitude, a world view, a value judgment, or a spiritual concern. Harlan Cleveland (1985) offers that leaders need to develop their own personal use of seven “attitudes,” not skills, but attitudes. For him, the study of leadership is “the get-it-all-together profession” because everything relates to everything else. For someone to aspire to be a political leader, a corporate leader, an educational administrator, a foundation officer, a diplomat, or a teacher in a fast-changing, information-driven, knowledge-society, the individual must understand and acquire the following seven attitudes prescribed by Cleveland after years of reflecting, writing, and exercising leadership:

1. A lively intellectual curiosity, an interest in everything — because everything really is related to everything else.

2. A genuine interest in what other people think, what makes them tick – which means you have to be at peace with yourselves for a start.

3. An attitude that risks are there not to be avoided but to be taken.

4. The feeling that crises are normal, tensions can be promising, and complexity is fun.

5. The realization that paranoia and self-pity are reserved for people who don’t want to be leaders.

6. A sense of personal responsibility for the general outcome of your efforts.

7. The quality of unwarranted optimism: the conviction that there must be some more upbeat outcome that would result from adding up all the available expert advice (Mendis, 1995: p. 4).

These attitudes suggested by Cleveland are more related to the metaphysical qualities of the wholesome mind than innate skills, family lineage, and the power
itself. For a teacher who would like to act in the domain of leadership must first develop attitudes and then the ability to become a leader in the classroom. Adapting to changing technology and the use of it is an attitude.

Conclusion

If teaching has traditionally been revered as a sacred profession and the concept of leadership is being associated more within the ascendancy of human spirituality, leadership in teaching must be the noblest work in a democracy where technology further enhances it. In a free society, leaders tend to “make” things happen whereas leadership is more concerned about “letting” things happen. A teacher could teach but teaching and learning as a pluralistic undertaking would yield better results when everyone is involved. Here, technology works as an equalizing force in “letting” things happen. And, a teacher as a leader is a catalyst. First, it is an attitude before it becomes an ability.

A teacher also becomes a visionary who could see the larger picture and its configurations to navigate the voyage of the learner in the Information Age. Democracy is the breeding ground for those attitudes and adaptive challenges to flourish in the valleys of freedom where the knowledge has neither monopoly nor boundaries. Technology tends break those walls of boundaries.

The practice of democracy in classroom leadership revolves around three tenets: the freedom of an individual to express openly without fear, the liberty for the student body to decide collectively for a shared vision, and the civility and collegiality for a transformative experience in learning with technology. The art of teaching in a democracy is then a collective, on-going experiment. Technology is the transformer.

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