Developing Leaders in the Classroom

By Anthony V. Zampella

working paper—July 28, 2016

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 2
THE LEARNING ........................................................................ 3
THE INTELLIGENCES ............................................................ 5
THE COURSE ........................................................................... 6
THE PRACTICES ...................................................................... 7
THE RESULTS .......................................................................... 9
SUMMARY ............................................................................. 11
BIBLIOGRAPHY (course reading list and works cited in this paper) ......... 12
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INTRODUCTION
This paper investigates pedagogy for developing leaders and exploring the exercise of leadership within an academic setting. It introduces questions that resulted from the last 17 years of developing leadership courses, designing and directing a graduate leadership program, and researching nationwide leadership programs designed for academic education. The ideas presented are considered in the specific context of exercising leadership. These ideas are intended for leadership as defined in column (B) of the table below. While leadership might be optional in times of incremental change, by this preferred definition in column (B), it is indispensable during non-linear change and in times of increased complexity and ambiguity, which result in unpredictable futures.

My experience with this topic comes by way of one question: Can we develop leaders in a classroom? My best response is a qualified yes, as long as we venture beyond conventional classroom third-person learning to engage and experience leadership as-lived. I begin here by sharing the recent experiences of our team, who delivered leadership development through the course “Being a Leader” for five semesters in the Business School at Rutgers University in Newark. We redesigned that course as outlined in this paper. We begin with both course descriptions listed below: The original description (A) speaks to a typical course rooted in knowing about leadership (third-person learning), with leadership on a continuum that includes management attributes; the revised description (B) is rooted in our notions of leadership as distinct from management, and of developing leaders through an as-lived experience of exercising leadership during a fifteen-week, semester-long course.

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<thead>
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<th>ORIGINAL – A (learning about leadership)</th>
<th>REVISED – B (developing leaders)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analyses leaders, the leadership role, and the leadership process in organizational settings; examines leadership activities and classical and contemporary theories; investigates interactions among leadership styles, employee predispositions, group makeup, and organizational culture. Assists students in developing their leadership capabilities and in creating a framework for developing these capabilities in the future.</td>
<td>This course explores being a leader and exercising leadership as your natural self-expression. The course examines the exercise of leadership in the face of disruptive change and uncertain futures. Through an as-lived experience of leading, we examine the commitments driving leadership actions, and distinguish the integrity to generate leadership in any situation.</td>
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Unlike most leadership courses in education, this course, on “Being a Leader,” does not focus on management, supervision, or administrative skills or concepts. It is not a study of the theories or concepts related to leadership or team dynamics, nor is it a psychological analysis of communication style or interaction, nor does it analyze different leadership styles.

- We inquire into the being of a leader; not knowing about leadership.

1 Research collected and aggregated by a research team, with Zampella, Brendalyn King, and Neil Ruiz.
2 Zampella explores leadership courses presented in academia in his 2004 paper, “Rethinking Leadership in an Information Era.”
• We employ generative language (speech-acts)\(^3\) properties, practices, and inquiry to develop and expand capacities specific to the field of developing leaders.

• We explore what it means to lead, today, in the face of disruptive change with increased complexity, greater ambiguity, in volatile situations.

• We create conditions to embody and internalize four intelligences of being a leader: Awareness, Integrity, Authenticity, and Commitment as lived from a deep focus on listening and inquiry into action.

• We cultivate a growth mindset,\(^4\) transforming fixed mindsets by creating a “future” context from which students discover who they are as learners, leading in unpredictable situations.

THE LEARNING

The first learning challenge we must address is unlearning. Students arrive expecting to study a concept or to analyze other leaders. They also arrive having been indoctrinated in an analytical mindset, a frame of reference that reduces thinking to knowing (from external evidence). On average it requires half a semester to “loosen” this “knowing” so as to clear an opening for newness as a beginner (beginner’s mind).\(^5\) If engaged as an inquiry into the being of being a leader, this can tap one’s imagination in ways we found to be lacking in our students when they arrived in class. Possessing imagination expands one’s capacity for improvising, a fundamental skill in an uncertain world.

Our learning methodology leaves learners empowered to access being through discovery and inquiry. Quite apart from education that offers greater understanding of knowledge about a subject, our method of inquiry offers access to the being of that subject. We deliver a first-person (phenomenological) learning method inside an ontological learning model\(^6\) that engages the human condition, as lived, to discover, distinguish, and develop leadership capacities from within. This method is unlike . . .

• third-person or empirical learning with a focus of attention on what we learn or on acquiring knowledge from an “objective” or empirically based perspective;

• second-person learning, a.k.a. experiential learning, with a focus of attention on how we learn and how we experience connection and apply knowledge as verified by empirically based measures; or,

• first-person learning or existential learning, with our focus on intention to question why we learn, and challenge who we are as learners.

\(^3\) Developed by John Searle and J.L. Austin, and applied to “design” by Fernando Flores.

\(^4\) Developed from research by Carol Dweck, Peter Senge, and Ken Wilber to explore evolving mindsets and levels of awareness or consciousness. Mindset model applied in course based on research by David Rooke and William R. Torbert.

\(^5\) Term distinguished by Shunryu Suzuki in his classic text, *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, to cultivate awareness of a beginner.

\(^6\) Ontological inquiry into being explores the nature (structure), function (purpose), and meaningfulness (quality) of the being of human being.
Our first-person method involves:

1. **ONT/OLOGY**—Our ontological model offers an inquiry into the nature (structure), function (purpose), and meaningfulness (quality) of being human. We examine learning and discovery through the core inquiry of what it means to be human.

2. **PHENOMENOLOGY**—A first-person, as-lived examination into how we perceive the world, others, and ourselves. This method shapes the way we perceive and listen to that of a cultural anthropologist. We (re)discover our world through increased awareness to access our perceptions, through enhanced listening to access how we hold language, and through mindful breathing to access our body.

3. **MINDFULNESS**—An inquiry into witnessing the machinery that is our mind. We engage practices to challenge and expand who we are as an observer to be present in the moment with purpose and without being judgmental.

4. **GENERATIVE LEARNING**—Unlike learning that focuses on process or content, generative learning focuses on generating context for action: by discerning, questioning, and challenging our interpretations we create a future context for leadership.
# THE INTELLIGENCES

We examine our course work, study, practices, and experiences through four fundamental intelligences for being a leader, which together constitute a lens through which students experience, question, and examine as-lived situations. We identify reflexive constraints that prevent them from experiencing these intelligences fully in their lives. Students emerge empowered to choose newly—from a different and open context—for each situation. We distinguish these four intelligences—awareness, integrity, authenticity, and commitment—as follows:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Intelligence/Capability</th>
<th>As-Lived Experience</th>
<th>Description and Practices</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>(SELF-)AWARENESS:</strong> With Attention and Intention, we are conscious of our surroundings, and our selves. We perceive, directly and clearly. <strong>TENSION:</strong> Confusion/Clarity <strong>OUTCOME:</strong> Experience openness</td>
<td>What are the perceptions that we use, or that use us? To bring our awareness to each moment inside of a “whole view” or context that comes from within, and that surrounds, us.</td>
<td>• VIEWS: Direct View (experience); New View (as beginner); Clear View (free of bias); Grounded View (with evidence); Whole View (includes parts). • MINDFUL: Being mindful requires that we pay attention and practice in a particular way: On purpose, in the present moment, and without judgment.</td>
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<td><strong>INTEGRITY:</strong> Conscious of our word: To become accountable to the workability of our word. We own/generate agreements. <strong>TENSION:</strong> Part/Whole <strong>OUTCOME:</strong> Create/experience workability</td>
<td>We engage Integrity as a function of honoring our word. We expand the willingness to be accountable for keeping our word, and communicating when we must break our word.</td>
<td>• HONOR OUR WORD: We develop practices for honoring our word in all areas of life. With practice, we begin to appreciate how integrity leaves us accomplished, whole, complete, and open to receive what’s next. • MANAGE OUR WORD: We examine our level of workability in managing deadlines and schedules, delivering on our promises to others and to ourselves, and holding ourselves and others accountable. • CREATE SUSTAINABILITY: We engage practices to sustain the conditions for workability with attention to being whole, complete, and opposed to binary assessments of right/wrong and good/bad.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>AUTHENTICITY:</strong> Conscious of possibility: To become accountable to our potential. We live our purpose. <strong>TENSION:</strong> Resolve/Freedom <strong>OUTCOME:</strong> Generate/experience possibility</td>
<td>Being Authentic involves an as-lived practice of disclosing our choosing to our self. Often, we compartmentalize, fake it, cover up, or pretend—just to fit in, to accommodate expectations, to land a deal, or to smooth out conflict.</td>
<td>• THE TRAP: In a world with increasing complexity and disruptive change, it is becoming more untenable to manage the tension between our authentic being and our expected self. • THE PRACTICE: We engage mindful practices to identify and release the constraints on our authentic being, as lived, each moment to moment. • THE PRETENSE: We identify the self-deceptions that compartmentalize our lives, keeping us from 1) owning and accepting our whole self; 2) owning and honoring our unique potential; and, 3) owning and living our purpose.</td>
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<td><strong>COMMITMENT:</strong> Conscious of a future of our own creation. We care for something bigger than ourselves. <strong>TENSION:</strong> Concern/Contribution <strong>OUTCOME:</strong> Generate contribution, experience impact of contribution.</td>
<td>Without any organizing commitment, events will occur as random tasks or unconnected choices without any compass guiding us. A compelling future binds and guides us, cutting through the noise that is human life today.</td>
<td>• THE SHIFT: Over the last 15 years we have evolved from the previous command and control model of leadership, which demands compliance, to leadership models that cultivate commitment. • THE PRACTICE: By employing generative language we cultivate our commitment to enlist and support others as the key to sustaining our leadership and learning.</td>
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Through practices, contemplation, readings, inquiries, and weekly journals, students discover, distinguish, and challenge who they are as learners and leaders.

**What students said:**

1. **Class as Tool:** “After the first few weeks I didn’t even care about the grade I received. I was focused on changing my mindset and focusing on what my life meant to me, and using the class as a tool to help me figure it out.”

2. **Authentic Being:** “I really thought I was authentic before this class. [If asked,] I would have said that I was what you saw, and I really believed this. Now I experience being authentic, but this person is nothing like the “authentic person” I was before this class. Every day I find examples of myself being inauthentic and yet [I’m] still shocked by my previous actions. I am both grateful and over-the-top blown away by the change this class has brought me.”

**THE COURSE**

We delivered the 15-week course in the *Business School at Rutgers University, Newark,* for five semesters, from January 2014 to May 2016. After each semester our faculty and research team surveyed undergraduates from ages 20 to mid-40s on the impact of the course’s intelligences and practices, and the results on their lives.7

A total of 146 students surveyed found these practices useful, and “strongly agreed” that these intelligences, once embodied and internalized, impacted their lives as follows:

1. **AWARENESS (MINDFULNESS):** To access **Authentic Listening,** students employed mindfulness practices such as “Being Complete” (89.66%), “Being Present/Mindful” (95.16%), and “Pausing” (91.45%).

   ![Awareness Graph]

2. **INTEGRITY:** 95.12% of learners found the practice of “honoring my word” to be most useful to expanding the capacity for **Integrity** (as workability) in their daily lives, of which 95.42% strongly agreed this impacted their lives.

3. **AUTHENTICITY:** 93.38% found the practice of “observing pretenses and deceptions” to be most useful to expanding the capacity for **Authenticity** (freedom to express oneself) in their daily lives, of which 93.56% strongly agreed it impacted their lives.

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7 Self-assessed surveys included 42 questions that rank-ordered each intelligence, practice, or narrative as follows: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree
4. POWER: 95.14% found the practice of “acting now” to be most useful to expanding the capacity for Power (as “being decisive and acting now”) in their daily lives, of which 91.92% strongly agreed this practice impacted their lives.

5. AUTHENTIC LISTENING: 92.00% found the practice of Authentic Listening (being fully present to another by dropping our POV) to be most useful for their daily lives.

Note about Authentic Listening: This practice is also a course outcome—deep listening from an expanded awareness to receive situations with minimal reaction—resulting from several practices, which find students achieving a new level of openness.

Incredibly, 92.61% of learners said “the course opened me to the power of language.” This openness finds students engaging situations, in three new ways:

- open mind as curious;
- open heart with expanded compassion; and,
- open will with greater courage to act.  

What students said:

1. Authentic Listening 11/13/15: “My co-worker, Marcel, at NJPAC, griped to me about this terrible breakup he was going through. At first my first instinct was to interject and give him ideas on how he should fix it, but then I realized, well, that wouldn’t be practicing authentic listening at all. I had to let go of my problem-solver, winning formula to be present in the conversation. So, I sat there looking straight into his eyes as he went on and on about the problems with the girl and the breakup. He seemed to have said it all so I simply said ‘is there anything else?’ Oh boy, yes there was: he continued more and more about his heart and how it hurts, and went on for maybe another three minutes. He was left with nothing else to say, and I offered no input of my own. He sort of smiled and realized that he had said what he needed to get off of his chest. Even though the things he is going through are rough, I said nothing else except for ‘I get you,’ and I feel that he felt he had been gotten.”

2. Update 11/16/15: “Something truly amazing happened today; Marcel called and expressed something to me. He is 38 years old and I am 24 and he said ‘even though I got 14 years on you I wanna thank you for the wisdom you’ve [given] me. You know so much and helped me out. You are a really good and wise friend.’ I was taken aback! I have only known this guy for two months, for which the first month we didn’t really talk. This was proof to me that I had made an impact by just listening fully to what he had to say and allowing him to figure out what he needed in his life. I made an impact being fully present to listening [to] the speaker and it felt great. Very moving, truly.”

THE PRACTICES

Practices make up a large part of the class, and comprise 60% of the student’s journal, which in turn comprises about 40% of the course grade. If we leave students with anything, it is that the course lives in their body as a set of practices that will have altered the trajectory of their lives to shape and open new possibilities.

The purpose of the practices is to embody the work beyond any terminology; that is, to bring the language into the body as a neck-down (somatic) experience, and to create sustainability, which we engage through a level of mastery using the students’ lives.

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8 Generative listening, as developed by C. Otto Scharmer (see bibliography).
A total of 146 students surveyed “strongly agreed” that these practices, once internalized, expanded capabilities as follows:

91.45% found the practice of “pausing” between events (multiple times daily) to increase their ability for **being present** (94.76%).

90.28% found the practice of speech-acts such as “Promising and Requesting” led to more **power** (91.92%), which led to acting now (95.14%) and occurred to them as greater freedom, choosing well, or feeling empowered.

When asked how these practices impacted their lives:
1. **88.49%** of students strongly agreed, “This course changed how I view and interact with someone significant in my life.”
2. **89.18%** of students strongly agreed, “I found the practices in the course to be critical to my development as a leader.”

![Impact of Course](chart.png)

**What students said:**

1. **What I discovered:** “The breathing practices not only helped me forget whenever I [craved] a cigarette, but it also helped me see and get off of any triggers I may [have been] experiencing, which caused me to want to smoke in the first place. I was a smoker for 10 years and this is the first time that I’ve gone more than a week without smoking. This was a real win for me.”

2. **Who I became:** “After a stressful day at work I had a presentation in one of my other classes, which I dreaded. While presenting, I heard myself stumble over my words and immediately became frustrated with myself. In the middle of presenting I stopped to become present, to feel the ground below my feet and just breathe. The students looked at me with this strange look on their faces, unsure if my actions were part of the presentation. Within moments I was able to regain connection with the audience and engage in answering the student’s questions flawlessly. Once the presentation concluded, I knew I [had] nailed it.”

3. **What I experienced.** “The practice I always seem to use is the pause in-between. On this particular day, before going into work and [talking] to my boss, I paused, felt the ground, and freed my mind. I didn’t want to go into my boss’ offices thinking that she would never give me a promotion even
with me asking. So, I freed my mind, went into her office, and talked about a promotion, and to my surprise she told me that there was a position for me at another store, where I would have my own team and get a raise as well.”

THE RESULTS
Beginning in 2015, we surveyed students on the quality of their learning as associated with specific results in their lives. For these two semesters (46 students) we found:

- **90.00%** said, “the course increased [my] effectiveness in my professional life.”
- **90.87%** said “the breathing and mindfulness exercises in the course increased my overall effectiveness/satisfaction.”
- **88.43%** said “this course increased the quality of my life.”

![Course Results](chart.png)

What students said:

1. **Empowered**: “I was a quitter who didn’t believe in my ability to do things on my own. I used to find excuses or avoid things that would require more of me, such as taking more than four classes at the same time, asking questions of professors, or practicing what I learned by, for example, seeking out an internship. Today I’m the opposite. Instead of wasting time looking for excuses for not doing something, I find solutions to get things done. I’m discovering a new, stronger me.”

2. **Disorienting Dilemma**.° “When considering my impact on others, it can be [painful]. I have physically and emotionally hurt people, some of [whom] I deeply love and care about, in the name of making myself be recognized, making myself better than them, making myself win. I am actually saddened thinking about it, and the impact my actions may have had on them. The one I cannot shake is the impact on my sisters (little sister, and older one). I have always made sure that any field in which they were exceeding was one I mastered and became the best in. More so, I have held and flaunted those facts to them, pushing them down for me to succeed. I know I have done this to many people, but the fact I have done it to my sisters actually kind of hurts. Frankly, they deserved better.”

° Term used here as applied by Jack Mezirow (see bibliography).
3. **Transformed:** “Upon entering the class, I approach the course like most students. My top priority as a leader was to get an “A” in the course. I felt that if I got the highest grade in my class it meant that I learned the material and succeeded in all aspects of the course. As the weeks passed, I realized that this class had much more to offer than a grade on my transcript. I now understand that there was a lot that I needed to learn about being a leader. The course taught me about integrity, values, ideas, and knowledge. While the grade is important, the knowledge I gained about leadership, what it truly means to be a leader, and how to lead in today's society is irreplaceable. 

I am also a lot more patient with my family, friends, co-workers, and myself. I give people my undivided attention and I let them speak without interrupting. I listen about their day, problems, or concerns without feeling triggered. I also give myself more time between events by planning out my week instead of saying yes to requests right away. Lately, the stresses in my life seem to be less hectic than before. For instance, my family and friends have acknowledged my change in attitude and are pleased with my willingness to change and better myself. They have also noticed that my competitiveness in winning and defensive arguments have lessened.

Overall, after applying the practices I was taught in class to my everyday life, I feel less tense throughout the day and more open-minded about others. I can take on more responsibilities without burning myself out.”

When asked, **90.27%** of students strongly agreed that they “would recommend this course/learning to a friend or business associate.”

**What students said:**

**#1:** “Professor Zampella [and team] created an environment and experience where you were always challenged and, more importantly, you challenged yourself. As I mentioned, the course was about us. It wasn't about learning to be a leader, but finding the leader already inside of ourselves. It was definitely a growing experience, the last 12 weeks. I've done things I never expected to do before this course. I've spoken to people that I would [have] never spoken to before. I learned to be in the present and put myself ‘out there’. You won't get this experience in any other course nor will it be one you forget once the semester is over.”

**#2:** “I think this course is a great way for future leaders to experience an aspect of their roles within their organizations and their everyday lives that most people never explore. Some people, even as [undergrad] seniors, just aren’t ready for the class, but those who are get an experience that they would otherwise likely never have had.”

**#3:** “I have never taken a course much like this one, where the instructor and team are dedicated to our personal growth. They have invested time in me, individually, in a way no course is designed to do. This course is more than a business course; it truly is a personal development course that has caused me to grow in a manner [for which] I could never repay this team. Thank you for this wonderful semester and your absolute support.”
SUMMARY

In delivering the course “Being a Leader” for five semesters, we have defined some territories of learning, and have discovered some areas to explore.

Language: The role of language in developing leadership cannot be understated. We use specific words with specific meanings, unlike typical jargon or terminology. This rigor distinguishes intentional expressions that open domains of action and interrupt the automatic or reflexive meanings students employ when they enter the course. The capabilities we expand in the course—such as integrity, authenticity, and commitment—are expanded by constructing intentional language both as content to expand awareness and as context through increasing awareness to shape perception. Language offers access to being by way of as-lived experiences, which alter self-talk, self-assessments, and conversations in everyday life.

Learning: Students become a different kind of learner, first willing to unlearn (or bracket) current knowledge or understanding, and then to explore as-lived experiences to discover new insights into their assumptions and worldviews. Our first-person (phenomenological) method, rooted in the nature (structure), function (purpose), and meaningfulness (quality) of being, lives in learners through listening, speaking, and practices. An area we must continue to explore and break open includes becoming aware of, and present to, language as access to one’s frame of reference and worldviews that define one’s self-perceptions and mindset. What we say constrains and confirms the way we view reality, and how we interact with the world.

Listening: Students become open to language as a radical opening, not to better define or defend situations, but to be moved by their lives: to generate and express their experiences. This opening, sustained through listening practices, leads to learners being generative. Through contemplative practices, learners relax and release reflexive listening and speaking. Deep and intentional listening, coupled with a new relationship to language, finds learners observing, discovering, and practicing course intelligences to inform and transform their own self-perceptions.

Practices: The necessary function of practices is to develop and sustain a generative mindset. Greater emphasis on practices also reveals new areas of learning. The course practices interrupt patterns in students’ lives—structural patterns held in the human body (that shape and constrain actions) and habitual patterns in the brain (that shape and constrain perceptions). The practices now distinguished in this learning have evolved and require more integration. This level of integration requires greater attention to identify, distinguish, and measure the most effective techniques to sustain the practices as natural.

In addition, the course material, research, and measures point to the importance of somatic learning and practices, to embody the material neck-down, beyond the head. These somatic practices begin to honor the body as a rich source of information to access being in one’s listening, learning, and leading.

The first-person nature of the learning empowers students to achieve these intentions:

- Increased awareness offers access to who they are as observers;
- Enhanced listening offers access to how they hold (relate to) language; and,
- Mindful breathing offers access to their body.
BIBLIOGRAPHY
(course reading list and works cited in this paper)


NOTE: Course material researched, designed, and developed for delivery within an academic leadership curriculum by Tony Zampella. Sources used to develop this material for academia include works by philosopher Martin Heidegger and also includes research developed by Susan Cook-Greuter (2002) from successive stages of ego-development, revised (2013) and applied learning and coaching expert, Julio Olalla of Newfield Network.