

Leadership Abstract Submission
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The Learning Revolution: “Community Development” of the College Community in Ontario, Canada.

A case study in Learning Centered change and Learning Centered Community development.

The new Doctoral Program in Higher Education for Community College Leaders offered by the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, provides a remarkable case study of an educational revolution in process. The innovative architecture of the program incorporates a learning centered community development design as the process that facilitates individual doctoral candidate success simultaneously educating candidates in this paradigm in order to fulfill the cohort vision. The cohort envision a learning centered system wide educational revolution resulting in the development of learning centered community college organizations.

As an International Program Advisor and during a recent in-course presentation to the first cohort of Community College Leader doctoral candidates, Terry O’Banion confirmed, with a glint in his eye, the revolutionary nature of this educational program. The intent is obvious - to develop and promote the learning centered revolution or paradigm shift that he describes and advocates in a number of his publications. As such then this program is innovative to the extent that it evidences the learning centered principles of “Learning Colleges” as a methodology to prepare college leadership and facilitate system wide change. Facilitating the learning centered process is valued as a central product of the program both in terms of individual knowledge and skill development as well as in terms of community college system change. Both Associate Program Director, Charles Pascal, and Program Coordinator, Roy Giroux clearly articulated these program objectives during the initial Leadership Development Course. The course and program reflect this new paradigm which facilitated the cohort to produce an initial vision consistent with learning centered principles as reflected in the following statement: “As a team of values driven individuals, we will create a passion for life long learning and academic excellence in our students, colleagues, employers, and the global community...”

As a University of Toronto program, the Doctorate for Community College Leaders demonstrates “an overhaul of the traditional architecture” through its accessible design and delivery which breaks away from many of the University’s long standing policies and procedures regarding location, times, residency requirements, payments schedules and the nature of the individualized scholarly pursuit. The program, by design, “places the learners first” many of whom would not be involved except for the numerous changes to the traditional delivery method. Some of these adjustments include: an accessible fee payment schedule (pay as you go-small installments), accessible schedule designed for working professionals (classes on weekends and

during intensive summer institutes), location choice (in community college - rather than on the university campus), a cohort approach that invites collaborative team based academic pursuits (the program course work is completed together, as a group, with opportunities to contribute to, team up, discuss and negotiate major elements including curriculum content, assignments and evaluation), professors as leaders\learners among colleagues (as opposed to the “sage on the stage”), and peer review contributes to evaluation (as opposed to exclusive “sage” evaluations).

The delivery and design of the first leadership course in the program was specifically intended to facilitate the development of a learning centered community of scholars and required participants to facilitate the paradigm shift necessary to the process. Course facilitation, curriculum, assignments and evaluation reflected the paradigm shift to the participants who were facilitated into the change process. A critical element of this paradigm is evidenced in the values and relationships between participants which emphasizes respect and equality for the learners as all participants are viewed as lifelong learners, including professors. Learning centeredness is promoted as more effective and efficient than the “sage on the stage” paradigm because it substantively increases the input and learning potential of the participants who value everyone as contributing to the process as opposed to the faculty centered approach, that dominates higher education, and emphasizes value of inputs of the “sage on the stage” exclusively. However, as Terry O’Banion pointed out during his presentation to the cohort, these remarkable differences in paradigm are often misunderstood by the very people that discuss and debate them in the field of higher education. Indeed, some might argue that the paradigm cannot be “taught”; that it must be constructed by the individual through a learning experience. The product must be processed.

The learning centered community produces the product as the participants are facilitated into the learning centered paradigm. Central to facilitating this shift is the fundamental principle of valuing all the participants as contributors to the learning experience of each other rather than valuing only the “sage on the stage”. The “sage on the stage” paradigm actually reinforces a non democratic process of inequality which is mirrored in the relationships between group membership that appear to dis-empower participants by minimizing the value of all other group member learning inputs except those of the “sage on the stage”. Group members tend to develop an external locus of control (that places responsibility for their learning in the hands of the “sage on the sage”) that is oriented toward seeking learning inputs as well as affirmation or approval almost exclusively from the “sage on the stage”. On the other hand, the learning centered model tends to democratize and empower group membership by emphasizing equality between roles (every one is a leader/learner). Therefore group members seek learning inputs from each other and seek to maximize the learning inputs through collaborative endeavors while developing an empowered internal locus of control which translates into personal valuing and energized responsibility for their own learning. Naturally, a collegial learning environment develops characterized by mutual respect for the learning enterprise and profound respect for the participants. The process is the product.

While the theory of this discussion can be logically understood the experience of learning these ideas is profoundly complicated. Though one can give lip service to the idea that a learning centered student process is a welcome alternative to the “sage on the stage” model, one can only truly shift one’s paradigm once reflection is constructed through experiences of this model.

During the leadership course, substantive changes resulted from the learning centered approach. There were many pivotal experiences that challenged a paradigm change. A critical moment occurred when Terry O'Banion confronted the inappropriate usage of learner centered vs learning centered. A new appreciation of "fellow students" was experienced which include, in the first cohort, faculty, deans, chairs, directors, executive directors, vice presidents and presidents from the college system. This new appreciation transcended status and prestige (which was encouraged by my prestigious learning centered colleagues) in a profoundly more democratic appreciation of the equality and value of all the contributions of participants to the task at hand: learning about learning and leading learning centered organizations.

Our self proclaimed "leader/learners" were constantly inviting everyone to share center stage, in a rather "unsagely" fashion, requesting input into course design and evaluation as they shared from their own experiences of personal/professional development, and modeled the valuing of all group members as contributors to the process. This process definitely became the product. Listening to special presenters/ facilitators indulged in various course readings, and encouraged to be on the stage with everyone else to facilitate learning labs, participate in discussions, share a leadership learning experience, co-facilitate group visioning and co-facilitate an instructional session, the inputs of all participants were valued equally. Participants actually became learning centered leader/learners. Furthermore, this change is fundamental to supporting the kinds of changes that are in the process of revolutionizing the system. Past academic experiences were markedly different than this: a lack of appreciation, respect and value for the contribution of fellow students to the overall learning experience due to the focus on the "sage on the stage."

This case study is submitted as evidence documenting that individual learning as well as revolutionary system change are occurring through a paradigm shift in the higher education of community college leaders. By virtue of its community development approach this University of Toronto program for Community College Leaders has broken away from the "thousand years of tradition wrapped in a hundred years of bureaucracy" that has described higher education. Indeed, the program participants, design and organization reflect the central organizing principles that define "Learning Colleges", Terry O'Banion ,1997:

- * The creation of substantive change in individual learners.
- * Engaging learners into full partnership and personal responsibility.
- * The creation of learning options.
- * The formation of collaborative learning activities.
- * Facilitator's role defined by needs of learners.
- * Success defined by the evidence of improved and expanded learning that is documented.

The Community College Leaders Doctoral Program incorporates these principles to facilitate the process that is the product that will incorporate the principles to facilitate the process to re-organize the college system in Ontario.

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