

COMMUNITY-ENGAGED PEDAGOGY IN THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM: INTEGRATING E-SERVICE-LEARNING INTO ONLINE LEADERSHIP EDUCATION

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Evidence suggests community-engaged pedagogies are as effective in online courses as in traditional face-to-face delivery; however, guidance and examples for potential early adopters is limited, particularly in leadership education. As online delivery for leadership education expands, leadership educators may be hesitant to redesign community-engaged learning experiences for the online environment as a result of pedagogical and logistical concerns. Nevertheless, virtual community-engaged learning, or e-service-learning, has promise as an effective high-impact educational practice within leadership education. The current paper describes theoretical and practical considerations for leadership educators who intend to development community-engaged online courses.

The evolving discipline of leadership studies recognizes the necessity of cultivating civic-mindedness as a fundamental disposition to effective, sustainable 21st century leadership (Priest, Bauer, & Fine, 2015; Seemiller, 2016; Wagner & Pigza, 2016). Community-engaged learning pedagogies support learners' exploration of

leadership theory and practice, including its more recent social justice orientations, while enabling learners to experience personally how mutuality and reciprocity undergird collaboration across sectors in communities (Wagner & Pigza, 2016; Waldner, 2015). More specifically, Seemiller (2016) demonstrates how common

leadership competencies are aligned with the multiple forms of service typically included in community-engaged pedagogies. Yet, despite the intrinsic alignment between leadership competencies and learning outcomes associated with community-engaged pedagogies, community-engaged learning is surprisingly absent from majority of introductory leadership courses, and the instructional strategy is an unlikely top priority among leadership educators (Jenkins, 2013; Johnson & Woodard, 2014; Priest et al., 2015).

Community-engaged pedagogies such as service-learning or community-engaged research require facilitative expertise and finesse that educators develop and refine through scholarly teaching that integrates experience, reflection, and continued course and assignment modification (Strait, Turk, & Nordyke, 2015; Waldner, 2015). The professional capacity required to facilitate these integrated learning practices is compounded for online educators due to the unique pedagogical and logistical considerations inherent to both service-learning and online learning (Hansen & Clayton, 2014; Kliewer, 2014). Evidence suggests community-engaged pedagogy is viable in the virtual classroom (McGorry, 2015; Moseley, 2015; Nordyke, 2015; Strait, 2015); consequently, leadership educators now have the opportunity to expand our impact through online community-engaged pedagogies. Furco (2015) acknowledged the challenges and opportunities in online community-engaged pedagogies. He cautioned educators of the realities of a “rapidly changing educational and social environment” and notes the promise of online community-engaged learning as a transformative pedagogy remains to be seen (Furco, 2015, p. xi). Despite these considerations, Furco argued the educational practice is a powerful pedagogy that provides students with high-impact, transformative learning experiences. The current paper describes theoretical and practical considerations for leadership educators who intend to development community-engaged online courses.

Virtual Leadership Studies

Educational paradigm shifts toward distance and technology-supported course delivery necessitate the exploration of virtual community-engaged pedagogy (Waldner, 2015). Community engagement is a central tenet of leadership studies and the practice of leadership

and community-engaged pedagogies are nonetheless expected as content delivery increasingly occurs in virtual spaces. Eberwein (2011) noted, “Technology has both augmented educational infrastructures and become a common expectation among the youth of this nation” (p. 63). Just as educators have been challenged to develop hybrid and online versions of their courses and to integrate community-engaged learning, we must now consider how the two pedagogies may now be integrated to provide learning experiences that meet our stated curricular goals and learners’ growing demand for online course delivery.

Meeting students’ learning needs and modality expectations requires leadership educators to explore technology-assisted course delivery. Online and distance learning programs provide expanded access to leadership studies programs and challenge course designers, often the faculty themselves, to mirror curricular and cocurricular content and engagement opportunities for online learners. If community-engaged pedagogy is indeed essential to leadership studies, it is necessary to establish a virtual option for online learners. The absence of such equivalency presents inherent inequity among traditional and virtual learning experiences. For example, learning outcomes related to group processes and team leadership are commonly featured in leadership studies programs (Jenkins, 2013). Hansen and Clayton (2014) and Kliewer (2014) suggested virtual community-engaged pedagogies present an enhanced opportunity for students to explore collaboration and group dynamics, including power and equity. Virtual spaces allow students and educators alike to redefine community and reconsider the traditional power dynamics between educator and learner.

Designing Virtual Community-Engagement

Designing virtual community-engaged assignments forces leadership educators to reimagine the interaction between learners and community members and consider the various manifestations of engagement. Komives, Wagner, and associates (2009) and Seemiller (2016) outlined multiple forms of individual civic engagement, ranging from direct service, advocacy and education, to philanthropic giving. Students can be surprised to learn of the various options for civic engagement,

particularly community-engaged learning than extends beyond direct service to include research, advocacy, or social entrepreneurship. Likewise, leadership educators must now reconsider what form community-engaged pedagogy takes and how to best integrate it into their online course design. To do so requires the exploration of a variety of technologies and platforms that are conducive to the desired learning experiences.

Guthrie and McCracken (2010) and Waldner, McGorry, and Widener (2012) suggested online learning is a facilitator rather than a barrier to community-engaged pedagogies, and that virtual experiences are, in fact, the future of community-engaged pedagogies. Hansen and Clayton (2014) echoed this perspective and claim online learning provides “a doorway leading toward alternate ways of conceptualizing and implementing service-learning” (p. 13). Nevertheless, Waldner et al. (2012) cautioned, “even those highly committed to service-learning . . . abandon their service-learning efforts when migrating teaching online because they view the online medium as a barrier” (p. 123). The limited availability of resources for virtual community-engaged pedagogies may reflect educators’ hesitancy to adopt the approach. While scholarly dissemination flourishes for both community-engaged learning and online/distance education, Waldner and her colleagues identified a scant 18 journal articles and a single book related to the topic of virtual service-learning, or e-service-learning, in their 2012 review. Of the examples available, most courses are hybrid offerings. Too few examples of community-engaged learning in fully online courses have been documented, despite learners’ interest in e-service-learning (Mandrell, 2014). More recently, leadership educators and community engagement scholars have begun in earnest to explore the potential of virtual community-engaged pedagogies, as is evidenced by Crabill and Butin’s (2014) edited volume; yet, there remains a dearth of empirical scholarship on the practice. Therefore, the early adopters of virtual community-engaged pedagogies are challenged to both create and document successes and lessons learned.

Course designers are also challenged to delineate community-based learning and community-engaged learning. Community-based learning connotes a learning experience in which students physically participate in a structured learning exercise in the community

for the course purposes. Cooperative education and internships are typical examples of community-based learning that may not necessarily incorporate the civic learning outcomes central to community-engaged learning. These learning experiences are traditionally embedded off-campus and in the community. Although similar, community-engaged learning implies a broader cadre of learning opportunities that engage a community partner without necessitating a physical presence on site. For example, collaborating with a community partner to create a marketing proposal, write grants, create a business proposal, and solicit donations are indirect service-learning experiences that are not contingent upon place. The terms, although often used interchangeably, have more nuanced meaning within some disciplines and may or may not reflect a fundamental commitment to the common good and recognized best practices for campus–community partnerships (Holland, Green, Greene-Morton, & Stanton, 2003; Martin, Smith, & Phillips, 2005). Therefore, it is constructive to adopt intentional, specific terms and definitions for pedagogies that integrate community partners as coeducators, particularly within interdisciplinary courses and programs such as leadership studies.

Course delivery method, or modality, may determine the extent to which learners engage with one another and community partners in a physical space. Course modality is one reason the delineation between community-based and community-engaged is valuable. Waldner et al. (2012) provided a typology for virtual community-engaged pedagogies, or e-serving-learning, that considers instruction delivery and service delivery as either online or on-site. Traditionally delivered service-learning includes on-site delivery of instruction and service, and e-service-learning hybrids occur depending on the variances among curriculum delivery and service delivery. “Extreme Service-Learning,” or “XE-SL,” reflects learning experiences through which both the course content delivery and service-learning experience occur virtually (Waldner et al., 2012, p. 134). Furthermore, the design of XE-SL could feature small groups assigned to a community partner cultivated by the instructor or a virtual service opportunity identified individually or collectively by learners in the course. Such design options challenge instructors and learners to reexamine the role of place in virtual

service-learning, including place-building, sense of place, and the meanings of community in technology-mediated spaces (Hansen & Clayton, 2014, p. 20).

In some cases, learners enrolled in fully online programs may not have readily accessible community partners or learning sites during the timeline established by the instructor. Additionally, online learners may require, or simply prefer, virtual engagement to the traditional, face-to-face learning environment. A clear distinction between community-based and community-engaged learning therefore provides course designers an opportunity to reconsider how virtual engagement can reflect best practices for collaboration, community partnerships, and civic-learning without requiring physical presences and engagement.

For example, I integrated a community-engaged social media advocacy campaign into a recent hybrid course that connected learners with campus and community partners without requiring direct, on-site service. The learning experience was intentionally designed as community-engaged, yet the virtual and often asynchronous service component better met the logistical needs of my students while maintaining its value to our partners. Similar examples of e-service-learning include policy analysis and consulting projects through which student teams engage virtually with community partners.

Strait and Sauer (2004) provided several suggestions for integrating e-service-learning course components that are applicable to leadership educators. First, they suggested starting with a single course and piloting the course content and community engagement learning experience before expanding the offering into additional sections. Second, they introduced learners to the purpose of community engagement, specifically e-service-learning, as it relates to both leadership studies and leadership development. Details regarding the learning experience, including who, what, where, when, and why, must be clear. Third, they provided explicit communication channels for community partners and cultivate their role as coeducators. Finally, they integrated a reflection component that challenges students to synthesize their learning in the course and through the service-learning component. Strait and Sauer's suggestions provide leadership educators generalized guidance that can facilitate course development; however, our field is

positioned to more clearly articulate best practices for leadership educators.

Building Leadership Educator Capacity

Our field is primed to commit to virtual community-engaged learning, and this promising trend is reinforced by the developing body of literature emphasizing the importance of community-engaged pedagogies in leadership education and the rising number of hybrid and online course offerings within leadership studies. Leadership educators are challenged with increasing our collective self-efficacy with distance learning technology as well as that of our community partners who are coeducators in this space. The professional development needs are multiplied and may require support from multiple units within the university, including colleagues who support community partnerships, teaching and learning, and distance education. Some institutions have centralized units that support service-learning, while other provide minimal support for faculty interested in community-engaged pedagogy. Communities of practice among leadership educators are needed to bolster the support available for developing and implementing virtual community-engaged learning.

Conclusion

Leadership educators have reaffirmed the intersections of community engagement and leadership education for the purpose of developing civic and socially responsible leaders. Community-engaged learning has been central for some educators, but it has unfortunately remained a peripheral consideration for others (Priest et al., 2015). The symposium articulates the case for community-engaged scholarship and teaching as "pedagogy of practice" (Ganz & Lin, 2011). Concurrently, we recognize an increasing prevalence of hybrid and fully online leadership courses that mirror traditional, face-to-face offerings. Leadership studies exist today as a testament to the value of innovative, responsive, and interdisciplinary scholarship and teaching. Similarly, we must now forecast future trends for our work as we continue to wrestle with emergent concepts and the increasing complexity of higher learning for the public good. As the discipline responds to emerging scholarship, shifts in the higher education landscape, and core

values and pedagogical considerations are refined, it is crucial that leadership educators, scholars, and practitioners explore best practices for e-service-learning and additional yet-to-be-imagined strategies to cultivate civic mindedness.

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