Innovative Reflection Tools for Developing Leadership: Additional Ideas for Educators and Practitioners

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Program Description (80 words)
Research continues to support the finding that critical reflection is a foundational aspect in developing leadership skills and competencies for individuals of all ages. The purpose of this engaging workshop is to offer a variety of innovative reflection tools that can be used by leadership academics and practitioners in various leadership development settings. Each tool presented will be taught, practiced, and shared.

Abstract (500-1000)
We facilitated our first reflection tools workshop at the ILA conference in Prague. It was a very popular session, and we have received many requests through the years to bring additional reflection tools to ILA in a follow-up workshop. We have a host of new reflection tools (e.g., activities, exercises, toys, resources) that we have acquired through the past three to four years, so we plan to present and engage participants in this 2013 workshop by sharing these new tools in Montreal. However, it is important that some literature and theoretical frameworks be shared to support the need for critical reflection and these types of tools.

Individuals cannot develop leadership unless they are receptive to learning, and learning is the basis of effective leadership development. Kolb (1984) defined learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 38), and emphasized that learning takes place through reflection on experience. Since developing leadership is a transforming process, transformational learning theory provides a meaningful theoretical lens to direct our session. Merriam and Caffarella (1995) suggested that “transformational learning theory is about change—dramatic, fundamental change in the way we see ourselves and the world in which we live” (p. 318). They proposed that this kind of learning is more than merely adding to what we already know. It changes, alters and shapes people. According to Clark (1993, p. 47), “they are different afterward, in ways both they and others can recognize.” Both Mezirow (1991) and Merriam and Caffarella (1995) contended that this theory highlights three main components: mental construction of experience, critical reflection, and development and action. Critical reflection is the primary keys to this transformation. Effective learning follows effective reflection, not from the experience itself; individuals must not only think about their experiences, but they must also examine the underlying beliefs and assumptions that influence how they make
sense of their experiences. We argue that effective critical reflection is an important component of all long-term learning and leadership development programs, courses, and initiatives.

Additional frameworks are helpful as educators and practitioners work to help their students and clients effectively reflect toward increased learning. First, the goal of guided reflection toward leadership development should be to help individuals make connections between concepts they are learning and their related experiences; they should be able to have concept connections, personal connections, and social/community connections. Reflection can take any number of forms, as long as individuals are required to organize and construct their own understanding of concepts and related experiences (UVU Service-Learning Reflection Guide, 2008). Questions that help facilitate person reflections can fall into three primary categories:

1) Affective – What did you see and how do you feel about the experience?
2) Cognitive – How does this connect to the concepts we are learning and the boarder social issues or past experiences?
3) Behavior – What will you do differently because of the experience?

Second, Eyler, Giles, and Schmiede (20XX) argued that there are four key characteristics of high-quality reflection throughout service-learning courses. These can be applied, however, to facilitating reflection in all types of leadership development environments. These include:

1. Continuous – Reflection is implemented through the course, training, or workshop, not just at the end, but before, during and after.
2. Connected – Reflection activities are directly and intentionally connected to courses, training, or workshop goals and objectives.
3. Challenging – Reflection activities should create an opportunity for individuals to think critically about their experiences.
4. Contextualized – Reflection is meaningful and addresses not just the content of the course, training, or workshop, but also the context around them.

The purpose of this engaging workshop is to offer a variety of innovative reflection tools that can be used by leadership academics and practitioners in various leadership development settings. In this 75- or 90-minute session, participants will learn about innovative reflection tools, practice using them, and then share their experiences with others in small groups. Each participant will also receive a packet that includes descriptions of each tool, technique, and activity, with references and additional resources. Here is an outline of our proposed session:

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Session overview (this will be similar to Prague, but it is quick and will get all attendees on the same page)
   a. What are the session objectives?
   b. What is reflection? (flip chart activity)
   c. Why do reflection? (includes introduction of theoretical framework already described)
3. Possible reflection tools we may present (each one we chose will have a short explanation, opportunity to practice the tool, and duo or trio sharing exercise, and implications to practice discussion):
   a. Group activities (e.g., Concentric Circles, “Gotcha”, Stand and Declare, Fish Bowls, Frierian Fish Bowl, Building Solutions, Block Arrangement Exercise, Readings)
b. Journal activities (e.g., clusters, the Critical Incident, dialogue, different perspectives, and the Fly on the Wall)

c. Reflective activities (e.g., Moods, Body Parts, Quotes, Ball of String, Poem/book, and Brainstorm Groups—linguistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, spatial, musical, mover, mathematical)

d. Other tools (ideas from participants)

4. Debrief and Summarize: overall implications to practice in the leadership education and leadership development programs; summary/next steps

In our combined 60 plus years of professional leadership development and teaching experience, we have observed that most individuals and leaders (e.g., college and university students, employers and employees) do not understand how to reflect or engage in a critical reflection process that could assist them in transformational learning and leadership development experiences. Dilworth (2009) agreed when he said: “It takes time and practice to unlock the ability to reflect. The art of critical reflection takes even longer, and some never get there… When the reflection pushes to the deeper levels of self, it becomes possible to jettison dysfunctional assumptions and behaviors. Deep learning can then occur. It can become transformative learning.” This workshop can assist educators and practitioners in learning about some of the variety of techniques and tools available to enhance these reflection skills. They can immediately begin to implement what they have learned into their own classrooms and work settings.