A Learning Revolution: Creating Transformational Learning Cultures in Leadership Development Education

Golnaz Golnaraghi, Mokhtar Noka, Peter Bouffard, Jeremy Staples, Sheridan College

A New Model for Leadership Development Education

According to Canadian HR Reporter (2012) nearly one-half of Canadian employers anticipate losing 20% or more of their executives (due to retirement) by 2017 and 90% of respondents believe the next generation of managers are not ready to take over. These statistics have significant implications for leadership development education. The retirement trend coupled with increased complexities of the 21st century mean that educators must be far more intentional in designing transformational and authentic leadership development experiences that prepare learners for their future careers. "The more you get the next generation involved in the thought process and strategies and thinking through of issues, the more ready they will be when time comes for them to take over" (Silliker, 2012, para. 7).

In this paper, we discuss how educators can better engage students in leadership development by examining *Sheridan's Adventure Learning* (SAL) model. The SAL model seeks to transform leadership learning experiences by having students engage in collaborative, inquiry-based and experiential education, immersed in complex, real world issues identified in curriculum and mediated by an unfolding narrative, technology, peers, teachers and experts (Doering, 2006, 2007; Doering & Veletsianos, 2008; Veletsianos & Kleanthous, 2009, Veletsianos & Doering, 2010; Koseoglu & Doering, 2011).

Over the last decade, Adventure Learning (AL) has been predominantly implemented in K-12 learning environments exploring socio-scientific issues such as global warming. Koseoglu & Doering (2011) demonstrated a strong correlation between emotions and the elements of student engagement through AL. AL affects positive emotions and facilitates enhanced curiosity, creativity, and decision-making skills by broadening learner thought processes, ultimately promoting learning. Combined with utility and dynamics for social interactions, AL has the potential to enhance the usefulness and emotional appeal of an instructional environment, as well as stimulate increased learner involvement and social interaction through appeasement of cognitive load (Miller, 2011).

This study aims to measure the extent of student engagement, exhibited emotions and social interactions as a result of introducing the SAL model of instruction within Leadership Development education. We also seek to measure student feedback on the learning opportunities that this teaching mode provides. Furthermore we explore the relationships of these measures on student satisfaction as a proxy of student success.

The Sheridan Adventure Learning Model

Sheridan's Adventure Learning (Figure 1) model centres on creating powerful learning *experiences* for learners that collapse the space between the leadership classroom and the boardroom. The SAL model is designed using the nine interrelated principals of The University of Minnesota AL model (Doering, 2006; The Learning Technologies Collaborative, 2010), as well as concepts from employee, student and customer engagement research.

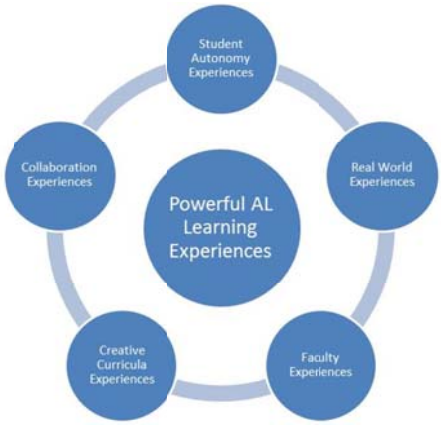

Figure 1: Sheridan's Adventure Learning Model

1. *Real-world experiences*: Using problem-based learning (Doering, 2006; The Learning Technologies Collaborative, 2010), learners are presented with an actual, ambiguous leadership problem by a real world leader. These multi-faceted, complex problems are aligned with curriculum (i.e. change management, cross-cultural/diversity leadership, motivation and engagement) and learning outcomes. Students identify specific issues (Doering, 2006; The Learning Technologies Collaborative, 2010) within the leadership challenge for exploration and generation of real world solutions.
2. *Autonomous student experiences*: Using a constructivist approach (Doering, 2006; The Learning Technologies Collaborative, 2010), student-led hands-on experiences are intentionally designed to run in short (3 week) cycles to foster self-leadership and the ability to deal with ambiguity. Intrinsic motivation for learning is nurtured through adventure (Doering, 2006; The Learning Technologies Collaborative, 2010), excitement, play, and

exploration (Wagner, 2008, 2010). Student teams solve the leadership challenge using course frameworks, brainstorming techniques and leadership theories/models. Professors encourage "trial and error" and weekly individual critical reflections exploring lessons learned from successes and failures.

3. *Collaborative experiences*: Collaboration and interaction opportunities is at the heart of SAL (Doering, 2006), encouraging transformative learning through interactivity between learners and their peers, professors, and industry leaders. Learners engage in team-based problem solving which allows them to work through stages of team development, leadership and followership, and conflict management. The hybrid learning environment (face to face classroom methods mediated by computer based activities) (Doering, 2006; The Learning Technologies Collaborative, 2010) allows students and professors to collaborate virtually through the Learning Management System (LMS).
4. *Creative curricula experiences*: The SAL model strives to support and extend learners' knowledge and skills beyond their current levels through scaffolded learning experiences (Doering, 2006) and authentic real world narratives synched with curriculum (Doering, 2006). SAL places learners within these real world narratives to engage and play to their need for relevancy, reality and immediacy (Wagner, 2008, 2012). Hybrid learning and rich multi-media, (Doering, 2006) leverage visual literacy of learners (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2010), while engaging them within a richer context.
5. *New faculty experiences*: SAL professors act as the *guide on the side* coaching and mentoring learners throughout their exploration, problem solving and learning. Customized feedback (Woodruffe, 2009) is provided at frequent intervals to learners focusing on the learning process serving to promote intrinsic motivation (Wagner & Harter, 2006).

Table 1: The Sheridan Adventure Learning Experience within Leadership Development

The Adventure Learning Experience – Leadership Development	
Pre-Week 1	• Self-assessments and authentic leadership development plans • Leadership problem-solving process orientation • Complex, multifaceted real world leadership problem introduced • Students identify and explore issue(s), prepare questions to pose to the leader
Week 1	• Student teams meet with Leader to explore issue(s) to determine root causes • Student teams continue exploration, analysis, and solution generation • Virtual team discussions and activities, social networking sites, coaching with peers and professor enhance team problem solving • Individual reflective blog/journal entry
Week 2	• Team presentations to Leader • Teams debrief with Leader • Leader explains what actually happened, lessons learned • Individual reflective blog/journal entry
Week 3	• Debrief and feedback with peers and professor • Summarize connections to curriculum , outcomes and lessons learned • Individual reflective blog/journal entry

Multi-Method Research Approach

A multi-method research design encompassed an online student survey instrument and three semi-structured focus groups. The online survey was distributed to a population of 195 full-time community college students who participated in an SAL course, with a sample of 84 (response rate of 43%). The sample encompassed 59% female/ 41% male and 71% domestic/ 29% international students who voluntarily participated in the study.

Online Survey Instrument

The online survey instrument was designed in Survey Monkey and intended to measure participants' perceptions of student engagement defined as the intrinsic motivation and affective commitment and connectedness to learning (12 items); emotions defined as the memorable moments of affections like happiness, joy, interest and enthusiasm in the positive side of emotions (6 items); and social interaction defined as the opportunities to build interpersonal relationships and communication (6 items). The survey instrument also included 13 items to measure students' level of agreement with different aspects of SAL model (See Appendix 1). Quantitative data collected from the survey instrument were analysed using descriptive analyses (Frequencies, central tendencies). Aggregate summaries were calculated using the total to maximum method that represents the total frequency achieved divided by the maximum frequency that can be achieved with scale starting at zero. The result is an average score represented as a percent with 0% pointing to the lowest end of the scale and 100% to the maximum end of the scale.

Focus Groups

A total of 19 students voluntarily participated in three focus groups. Ten semi-structured questions were posed in these focus groups to gain a better understanding of participants' perceived opinions of SAL. The questions were designed prior to the interviews to help the research remain focused, while having the flexibility to probe for details. Each session lasted for approximately 60 minutes, was digitally recorded and later transcribed into 30 pages of narrative for analysis. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic categories and types (positive and negative attitudes).

Findings from the Student Survey and Focus Groups

Respondents showed strong satisfaction and appreciation for the SAL model, with 81% indicating that if given the choice they would definitely or possibly enrol in another SAL course (versus 73% for hybrid courses). Students also reported high attendance and preference for the SAL mode of instruction, with 75.3% indicating that they always attend the face to face component of their SAL class, and 62.8% always attend the online component of class (both numbers are approximately 10% higher than attendance for hybrid instruction classes).

The 12 engagement set of measurement items revealed that in almost all items average scores were in the top box of the 7 point agreement scale (Agree and Strongly Agree). Students reported that the SAL model allowed them to imagine themselves in a leadership positions in the real world (87%); imagine themselves in the positions of the industry leaders (85.3%); wanted to learn more about the industry leaders (84%); wanted to learn more about the issues presented in the leadership challenges (82.7%); wanted to learn more about the content presented by the challenge (80.5%), and learn more about the subject (80.7%). On average respondents rated 78.1% and 76.8% that their curiosity about the content and subject (respectively) grew as they learned more.

When asked about emotional reactions and feelings towards SAL using 6 statements, respondents indicated that they were highly interested in the SAL course (81.1%); found the activities more interesting than usual courses (74.3%); and were challenged and having fun (80%) with the real world leadership problems offered by the SAL model.

The 17 item statements related to essential skills development yielded very promising potential for the SAL model. On average respondents believed that SAL allowed them opportunities to *practice* leadership and followership (80.7%), and offered more opportunities to *practice* team building skills (81.4%). Other highly rated skills include enhanced problem solving skills (78.4%), more opportunities to think critically (77.7%), more opportunities to be creative (78%), more opportunities to collaborate with others (79.9%) and more opportunities to reflect on what they have learned (78.9%).

Respondents report that the SAL model results in better quantity and quality of social interaction between learners and their peers, faculty and industry leaders. On all scales, the SAL model rated significantly higher on quantity and quality of social interaction when compared to hybrid instruction.

Participants were asked two open-ended questions to solicit views of their most and least favourite aspects of the SAL model. The four frequently cited *most favourite* aspects were real world/real life, hands on experience, team work, and interactions with experts (industry leaders). The four most frequently cited *least favourite* aspects were confusing/ambiguous, time restrictions, team conflict/challenges, and the need for a more robust online experience.

Powerful and Engaging Learning Experiences

Participating industry leaders believe the SAL model is very effective compared to other teaching modes, and better prepares learners for the job market. Leaders indicated that they learn from students as "they bring new thoughts to the issues I often may have not considered." The findings suggest a number of design considerations that inform future SAL learning experiences.

Real world Authentic Learning: Learners are deeply interested in the real world, hands-on aspects of leadership beyond the boundaries of the classroom. Student response to the SAL experience lies in its participatory nature. By immersing learners in authentic leadership narratives, they experience "adventure," "surprise," "fun," and "creativity." In this case, learners thrive most when the leaders are relatable and the leadership problem is current and relevant. Learners are immersed in the experience by imagining themselves in the leader's role and using problem solving tools and leadership frameworks to come up with creative solutions. Learners distinguish that the experience serves to better prepare students for "real life," and "circumstances [they'll] face in the future."

Appetite for Ambiguity and Self-Direction: Learners recognize that working through ambiguity (inherent in problem-based pedagogy) is important to their leadership development journey. That said some learners feel anxious and frustrated by this same ambiguity. While students feel that traditional lecture style knowledge delivery is "boring," and leads to poor learning experiences (Wagner, 2008; 2012), an unguided problem-based approach can also be ineffective for students who lack self-direction or prerequisite knowledge (Veletsianos, 2010). A carefully planned and developed problem-based pedagogy that is scaffolded and guided by the faculty is imperative for fostering self-direction, learning and growth. This environment

embraces successes and failures as learning opportunities and encourages regular individual reflections that foster deeper learning and self-awareness.

Collaboration & Social Interaction; the Heartbeat for Learners: Collaboration and social interaction opportunities with peers, faculty and industry leaders encourage transformative learning on many levels. The collaboration and social interactions with peers, faculty and the leader help extend learners' skills, knowledge and learning. For example, learners believe that collaboration with all actors allows them to foster diverse thinking and generate more creative ideas. The focus on teamwork with their peers encourages students to *practice* their leadership and followership styles, team development and conflict management much more than they would in a traditional class. Learners recognize faculty having a strong influence on their learning. Learners say the SAL faculty "[do] not play teacher," instead they facilitate participation and invite diverse worldviews. They are "passionate," "caring," "respectful," "listen" and "love what they do." Learners are motivated by frequent authentic feedback and positive reinforcements offered by faculty.

Conclusion

In this study insights were gained about learners' SAL experiences during a semester-long Leadership Development course. Our findings are in line with other studies which served to assess the AL approach within K-12 (Veletsianos & Doering, 2010; Veletsianos, 2010) suggesting that the SAL experience was challenging, engaging, and collaborative. The SAL model creates transformative learning environments that extend learners' self-awareness and 21st century skills (i.e. critical, creative and reflective thinking), better preparing them for their future careers and lives.

The study supports the viability of the SAL model within Leadership Development education and the potential for integration into other higher education courses. To do so requires dedication and a long term perspective. Rethinking 21st century learning, demands a passion for creating cultures of transformative learning opportunities that foster engagement, intrinsic motivation and authentic participation.

Appendix 1 – Factors / Items Used in the Student Online Survey Instrument

Factor	Items	Source
Engagement	12 items with 7 point scale	Koseoglu & Doering, 2011
Emotions	6 items with 7 point scale	Koseoglu & Doering, 2011
Social Interactions	6 items with 5 point scale	Blended Course Student Survey University of Central Florida
AL Aspects and Opportunities	13 items with 5 point scale	Blended Course Student Survey University of Central Florida
Satisfaction and Commitment	2 items with 5 point scale	Blended Course Student Survey University of Central Florida

References

Barell, J. (2010). Problem Based Learning: The Foundation for 21st Century Skills. In. J. Bellanca & R. Brandt (Eds.), *21st century skills: Rethinking How Students Learn*. Bloomington: Solution Tree Press, pp. 175-200.

Doering, A. (2006). Adventure learning: Transformative hybrid online education. *Distance Education*, 27 (2), 197-215.

Doering, A. (2007). Adventure Learning: Situating learning in an authentic context. *Innovate*, 3(6).

Doering, A., & Veletsianos, G. (2008). Hybrid online education: Identifying integration models using adventure learning. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 41(1), p. 101-1.

Kay, K. (2010). 21st Century Skills: Why They Matter, What They Are, and How We Get There. In. J. Bellanca & R. Brandt (Eds.), *21st century skills: Rethinking How Students Learn*. Bloomington: Solution Tree Press, pp. xiii-xxxi.

Koseoglu, S., & Doering, A. (2011). Understanding complex ecologies: an investigation of student experiences in adventure learning programs. *Distance Education*, 32(3), p. 339-355.

Miller, C. (2011). Aesthetics and e-assessment: the interplay of emotional design and learner performance, *Distance Education*, 32(3), p. 307–337

Oblinger, D. & Oblinger, J. (2010). Is it age or IT: First steps toward understanding the Net-Generation. In D. Oblinger and J. Oblinger (Eds.), *Educating the Net Generation*. The Netherlands: Delft University of Technology. Retrieved July 25, 2012, from http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/pub7101.pdf.

Silliker, A. (Dec 17, 2012). One-half of firms to lose one-fifth of executives by 2017, *Canadian HR Reporter*.

The Learning Technologies Collaborative (2010). 'Emerging': A re-conceptualization of contemporary technology design and integration. In G. Veletsianos (Ed.), *Emerging technologies in distance education*. Edmonton, AB: Athabasca University Press.

The University of Central Florida. *Blended Learning Toolkit* retrieved September 2012 from http://blended.online.ucf.edu/evaluation-resources/survey-instruments/

Trilling, B. and Fadel, C. (2009). *21st Century Skills: Learning for Life in Our Times*, San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Veletsianos, G. (2010). A Small-Scale Adventure Learning Activity and its Implications for Higher Education Practice and Research, *University of Regina, Faculty of Education*, Retrieved from: http://hdl.handle.net/10294/3103.

Veletsianos, G., & Doering, A. (2010). Long-term student experiences in a hybrid, open-ended and problem based Adventure Learning program. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 26 (2), 280-296.

Veletsianos, G., & Kleanthous, I. (2009). A review of adventure learning. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 10 (6), 84-105.

Wagner, T. (2008). *The Global Achievement Gap*: *Why even our best schools don't teach the new survival skills our children need and what can we do about it*. NY: Basic Books.

Wagner, T. (2012). *Creating Innovators: The Making of Young People Who Will change the World*. NY: Scribner.

Wagner, R. and Harter J. (2006) *12 Elements of Great Managing.* NY: Gallup Press.

Woodruffe, C. (2009). Generation Y asks why Y? *www.trainingjournal.com*, p. 31-35.

Author Biographies

GOLNAZ GOLNARAGHI, Marketing and Leadership Professor, Faculty of Business, Sheridan College

Golnaz (MBA, Doctoral Candidate) found her calling in 2006 when she joined Sheridan College as a Professor of Marketing and Leadership in the Faculty of Business. She applies over 15 years of business experience with high performing international organizations in creating engaging, real-world learning experiences for her students. She is passionate about leadership development, diversity in organizations and teaching and learning excellence. In 2012, she was a recipient of the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Design (NISOD) Excellence Awards. She has presented at various international conferences including AOM 2012 (Boston), CMS7 (Italy) and IFSAM 2010 (France), and published in *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal.*

MOKHTAR NOKA, Institutional Research, Sheridan College

Mokhtar holds a Master's degree in Economics and Quantitative Methods and Sociology Diploma. He worked in Germany as a Data Analyst for the biggest Health Insurance Company, then moved to Brock University, where for eight years he worked as Researcher and Developer on several research projects related to human resource management. He then entered into a partnership in a consulting company where as manager of research he served over 150 private and public Canadian organizations in the field of human resource management and data mining. Mokhtar has co-authored several articles around employee engagement, inclusivity at the workplace and leadership effects on stress.

PETER BOUFFARD, Creativity and Leadership Professor, Faculty of Business, Sheridan College

With over a 25 year business career as an entrepreneur, Peter (CA, MBA) was the founder and CEO of four successful businesses. A jump into the world of painting 10 years ago inspired Peter to combine his business experience with his energy for developing the creative leadership potential of learners and professionals. He is a passionate believer in the leadership potential that exists within all of us. Peter has been working within higher education since 2007 inspiring learners to develop their authentic leadership potential and creative thinking capacity to make the world a better place.

JEREMY STAPLES, Associate Dean, Faculty of Business, Sheridan College

Jeremy has been an educational leader for 25 years working in the Ontario College system focusing on developing opportunities that create exceptional student learning experiences. Over the last 7 years his focus has been on the development of student's critical, creative and reflective thinking capacity in order to prepare them for the workplace demands of the 21st Century. As an advocate for the importance of a growth mindset, Jeremy has collaborated with a variety of faculty teams to create innovative programs and courses that develop student's self-awareness and personal leadership. He has completed the Chair Academy Foundation and Advanced Leadership programs and has been recognized with the Academy's 2013 Idahlynn Karre Exemplary Leadership Award.