

Philosophy of Educational Leadership

Conversation and Collaboration. My philosophy of educational leadership starts with a belief that change and inspiration happens through conversation, "...the kind of conversations that bring people closer to the heart of a shared concern, give them new eyes to see both the problems and possibilities, and set the stage for taking creative action" (Palmer et al., 2010, p. 21). I believe that strong educational leaders possess the facilitative skills necessary to bring people together to engage in authentic, meaningful, and productive conversations about enhancing teaching and learning in higher education. As Roxå and Mårtensson (2009) state, "...communication is the driving force for development" (p. 549). It is through these conversations that we build upon the input and perspectives of others across the academic community to generate new insights and ideas that inspire further growth within ourselves and enable actionable change in our teaching and learning environments. This ability to discover new meaning is where the magic of conversation exists. It is here that something is created that would never have surfaced without the process of collaboratively exploring multiple points of view. Through authentic and meaningful dialogue, we develop an empathetic and compassionate understanding for others' points of view and a sense of trust that flows into our future conversations and interactions (Senge, 2006). Whether I am leading team meetings, facilitating a teaching and learning workshop, global café, or focus group, supporting an institutional decision-making process, adjudicating an awards committee, engaging in strategic planning, or working with a colleague in the Taylor Institute on a specific teaching and learning initiative, my intention is to consistently create the conditions and the space for meaningful conversations, open dialogue, and collaboration to occur amongst colleagues.

Building and Sustaining Networks. I deeply value the existing teaching and learning experiences and expertise that exist across the academic community. My educational leadership practices are informed by Roxå and Mårtensson (2009), whose research suggests that teaching and learning practices and cultures are strongly influenced by the small, but significant conversations that occur amongst colleagues. When educational leaders intentionally foster, integrate, and provide opportunities for knowledge sharing within and across interdisciplinary networks, we help to form the foundation for a strong teaching and learning culture. Through our work at the Taylor Institute we consistently encourage faculty and staff to consider how our programs and initiatives can further support the flow of knowledge related to the scholarship, leadership, and practice of teaching and learning. I have worked intentionally to ensure new programs, such as the [Teaching Scholars](#) program, are designed to help others actively build and sustain integrated networks of practice across our teaching and learning community, and to foster the development of educational leadership at the meso-level of the organization (e.g. departments, faculties, working groups).

Building Capacity and Enabling Others. My ethos in work (and life) is to help others identify and realize their full potential. Within my role as a teacher, educational developer, and a director, I believe that transformation happens through building capacity in others (Grabove et al., 2012; Hargrove, 2008). This commitment is based firmly in creating a learning-centred space (Weimer, 2002) that enables others to take ownership of their learning, growth, and development. Core to establishing conditions that enable others' growth and success, I strive to develop interpersonal relationships based on trust, mutual respect, curiosity, humility, kindness, and compassion. My commitment to building capacity and enabling others is clearly apparent in my consultations with individuals and small groups, where I consciously hold back my own input and advice, and instead use my expertise to ask questions that inspire reflection, idea generation, meaningful dialogue, and future action. As evidence of my commitment to building capacity and enabling others, I authored a chapter for the [Educational Developers Caucus Guide on Building Rapport](#) on how I have worked to integrate this intention by using organizational coaching to build rapport with staff.

Enhancing and Aligning Practice. I am always learning. I am committed to strategically aligning our work to the larger whole, to taking scholarly approaches to practice, to engaging in practice-based research, and to reflecting critically with a focus on continuous improvement, learning, and growth (Dweck, 2006). Over the course of the last four years, I led a collaborative process to develop clear strategic priorities and goals for our unit, and a plan to assess the scope, quality, and impact of our programs and initiatives. We work to ensure informal and formal assessment methods are implemented for our educational development programs and initiatives. Uniquely, from 2014-2018 all members of the TI's educational development unit collaborated to develop a unit portfolio, where we align our programs with strategic priorities, communicate their impact, and reflect upon how we will continue to improve. I am currently working with TI leadership to develop a new strategic plan which will inform and elevate our work over the next five year, to ensure we become a global leader in teaching and learning.

Timmermans' (2014) identifies adopting a scholarly approach to practice as a core way of knowing and being for educational developers. Whether I am using scholarly work and collecting evidence to inform the development and enhancement of teaching and learning initiatives, or collaborating with colleagues to create and disseminate knowledge, this tenant grounds my work. My active engagement in the scholarship of educational development and teaching and learning within colleagues within and beyond the University of Calgary, provides evidence of my commitment to a scholarly approach to practice for the broader benefit of the academic community. This work contributes to my development as an educational leader, and helps to inspire a reciprocal sense of spirited curiosity and collaboration alongside many colleagues from a variety of disciplines and contexts.

Conscious Leadership. Based on my leadership experiences and learnings, I can summarize my approaches to leadership from the lens of conscious leadership (Jones & Brazdau, 2015; Hofman, 2008). Being conscious is about being aware of and responding to one's surroundings. Conscious leadership is facilitated through awareness, intentionality and transformation. Through conscious leadership, these processes are enacted across multiple levels (self, others, and the organizations and communities which surround us). Conscious leaders are aware that everything across an organization is connected, and that these interconnections influence our daily practices, cultures, as well as our ability to influence and adapt to change. Conscious leaders act from a space of reciprocity, recognizing that the heart of every organization is made up of emotional beings that are striving to flourish. They encourage shared leadership and a dedication to ongoing learning that is bounded by intentional introspection, reflection and growth. Although this is an emergent concept, the foundations of conscious leadership continue to inform my leadership beliefs and daily practices.



Figure 1: Conceptualization of a framework for conscious leadership. This framework is informed by the work of Jones & Brazdau (2015) and Hofman (2008)

Teaching and learning institutes play a critical role in advocating for and contributing to positive change in post-secondary education, within and across multiple levels - from individual instructors to departments, faculties, institutions, and throughout our national and international post-secondary landscapes. Higher education requires leadership that listens and adapts to ever-evolving contexts, creates spaces for meaningful dialogue, and enables individuals and communities to work towards a common goal of enriching student learning. It is no secret that our work is challenging and complex. There is no one single solution or approach to building a strong teaching and learning culture. I seek inspiration in grounding my work in scholarly and authentic approaches to practice that are meaningful to me, and most importantly, to those I work with and serve on a daily basis.

References

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