

Understanding “Leadergogy”

The Unique Teaching and Learning Methods in a Leader Development Course

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Abstract

Whereas leadership development is a prominent concern for all organizations, how individuals learn and develop leadership within the classroom remains unclear. This article shows how a new instructional method was adapted from established best practices to form the basis for a new leadership development learning method, called *leadergogy*, emerging from the U.S. Air Force Leader Development Course for Squadron Command (LDC). Interested in determining what learning experiences contributed to higher perceptions of student learning, researchers qualitatively analyzed student comments in end-of-course surveys from 15 iterations of the eight-day LDC in academic year 2021 ($n = 889$) and three iterations of the LDC-Command Modules in academic year 2021 ($n = 165$). Five themes emerged and this article discusses one of them (pinnacle of standards) along with the corresponding subthemes of connection, content, delivery, environment, and experience. These five elements, when taken together, form the foundation of a more comprehensive method of teaching and learning for lifelong adult learners by honoring students' life experiences and embracing a more shared, democratic approach to teaching and learning.

In 2017, the RAND Corporation conducted a study called “Improving the Effectiveness of Air Force Squadron Commanders” designed to assess the responsibilities, preparation, and resources of U.S. Air Force (USAF) squadron commanders (Ausink et al., 2018). In a follow-on study, the USAF collected data from 14,652 survey participants and 3,886 interviews on three key attributes of vitality—esprit de corps, purposeful leadership, and verifiable mission success. The studies concluded that USAF leaders needed to improve their human domain skills when facing complex and emotionally demanding circumstances and to be provided with opportunities to practice these skills in realistic, pressurized situations (Davis & Air Force Core Team, 2018). In response, both the secretary and the chief of staff of the USAF requested that a program be created that provides future commanders with the tools and skills to do so (Wilson & Goldfein, 2018). This program resulted in the creation of the Air University’s Leadership Development Course (LDC) for Squadron Command in 2018.

Taught by highly successful graduated squadron commanders partnered with civilian academics, LDC provides students with an intensive eight-day curricular experience covering human domain content in areas that were found to impact the key squadron vitality attributes such as clarity of purpose, culture, values, communications, human performance, and practical leadership competencies (Davis & Air Force Core Team, 2018). It uses experiential, immersive application activities to deliver an impactful student experience for participants (Hinck & Davis, 2020). Since 2018, the program witnessed considerable success, becoming known as Air University’s top-rated course with student comments characterizing it as “life changing” and “the best educational experience of my life.” As previous research found, LDC addresses key squadron vitality attributes by delivering an impactful student experience (Hinck & Davis, 2020). Nonetheless, the teaching and learning methods undergirding LDC’s success have not been studied. This poses challenges when adapting LDC content and learning methods to new classroom contexts. Thus, when LDC faculty were tasked in early 2021 to deliver similar human domain content in a condensed, two-day format known as LDC-Command Modules (LDC-CM) as part of squadron leadership courses at USAF major commands (MAJCOM), a substantial drop in student ratings occurred. This prompted a review of the course’s curriculum and learning methods.

This study presents the findings of that review whereby researchers examined what learning experiences contributed to the substantially lower perceptions of student learning in the LDC-CMs and those leading to extremely high perceptions of student learning in the eight-day course. Researchers conducted a qualitative thematic analysis of the end-of-course surveys from the three initial LDC-CMs and 15 iterations of the eight-day LDC course occurring throughout academic year (AY) 2021. Results showed an emergence of a new instructional method adapted from established best practices that form the basis for a new leadership development learning method, which we call *leadergogy*. It is composed of five elements that combine into a pinnacle of standards: connection, content, delivery, environment, and expe-



rience. We situate the findings within the broader literature of leadership development, pedagogy, and andragogy and present the implications of leadership education in the USAF.

Literature

The development of effective leaders is a prominent concern for all organizations, especially the U.S. armed services. Although leadership has been widely studied, the study of leadership development has only recently emerged (Day et al., 2014). According to Day (2000), leadership development is defined as expanding the collective capacity of organizational members “to engage effectively in leadership roles and processes” (p. 582), including roles both with and without formal authority. Importantly, leadership development extends beyond training individuals’ behaviors to align with specific theories on leadership to encompass broader considerations regarding the development of leadership attitudes, skills, and behaviors (Day et al., 2014).

Like human development more broadly, leadership development involves complex processes occurring within a larger context of ongoing adult learning (Day et al., 2008). According to Day et al. (2014), leadership development should be understood as a unique field of study independent from leadership more generally. Despite the growth of leadership development research (see Day et al., 2014, for a review), how

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educators engage leaders in developing their leadership capacities within the classroom remains understudied. While some attempt to bridge leadership development learning with principles of andragogy—the study of adult learning—by emphasizing the role of the instructor as guide and facilitator (McCauley et al., 2017), others argue that educational practices remain too instructor-focused with teachers still seen as the givers of learning and students as receivers (Hirsh et al., 2022). While the ideas of pedagogy have changed over time and may not have a central meaning (Shah & Campus, 2021), is there a need for a new term that better captures the variety of learning methods required to engage lifelong learners (Watkins & Mortimore, 1999) in the emerging field of leadership and how leaders study and learn leadership?

The term *pedagogy*, once confined as a discipline to the art and science of teaching children and how knowledge and skills are imparted in an early educational context, is outdated (Shah & Campus, 2021) and needs to be updated in higher education and for lifelong learners (Watkins & Mortimore, 1999). While some affiliate pedagogy challenges to ideologies associated with race, ethnicity, and gender, these terms are limiting (Murphy, 1996) and exclude the notion of student as teacher or a shared authority for teaching and learning in the classroom. Meeting the educational needs of students at critical points in their education (young or old) is key to the quality of learning (Usanov & Qayumov, 2020) for all participants. While a variety of teaching should be used to ensure all learning styles are met, traditional education, especially in higher education, focuses on unidirectional methods (e.g., lectures) as the dominant form of knowledge exchange rather than a more democratic approach to learning using shared dialogue (Brookfield & Preskill, 1997) or the use of dis-

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cussion-based methods where the instructor holds the authority (Rose-Redwood et al., 2018) rather than a dialogic approach where teacher and student share the authority for teaching and learning. In-class activities lead to higher student satisfaction and higher test scores than other methods while lectures resulted in lower test scores than other teaching methods (Hackathorn et al., 2011). The term *andragogy*, or the art and science of adult learning (Davenport & Davenport, 1985), encapsulates and honors prior life experiences and education level of the learner (Krajnc, 2014) and emphasizes lifelong learning as an element of adult learning (Henschke, 2011). Teaching and learning are best when multiple teaching and learning styles are employed (Tulbure, 2012; Waite, 2011) with learning strategies that “develop students’ capability to use ideas and information, develop the student’s ability to test ideas and evidence, develop the student’s ability to generate ideas and evidence, facilitate the personal development of students, develop the capacity of students to plan and manage their own learning” (Bourner & Flowers, 1999, p. 6). The use of inductive teaching methods, including inquiry learning, case studies, and discovery learning, are more effective in a student-driven approach to learning (Prince & Felder, 2006) that involves active and collaborative learning environments. Yet, the teaching is still instructor-focused, and learning is student-focused where teachers are the “givers” and students are the “receivers” (Hirsh et al., 2022). Learning effectiveness can be understood via writing assignments and is impacted by differences between students, instructional methods, and the capabilities of instructors (Graham & Hebert, 2010). Because the quality and nature of leadership development programs play important roles in behavioral change and the transfer of leadership skills among organizational members (Baldwin & Ford, 1988), research into the teaching and learning methods of leadership education programs is needed.

LDC Teaching and Learning Methods

To answer the charge to develop USAF squadron leaders’ human domain capacities, in 2018, LDC began offering an intensive eight-day course covering topics such as clarity of purpose, culture, values, communication, human performance, personality, storytelling, coaching, officer performance reports, and justice and discipline. In doing so, the eight-day course provides a mix of large group experiences with 75–

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120 total participants and smaller, 14–16-person seminar breakouts. Large group experiences predominately include short 10–15-minute perspectives on leadership from graduated squadron commanders, with the bulk of students' time occurring in their seminar groups cofacilitated by a graduated squadron commander and an academic instructor. Before teaching, instructors go through a four-week faculty development program with an additional four weeks occurring throughout the year. Course objectives aim to engage students in three domains of learning: cognitive, affective, and behavioral; with specific teaching and learning methods including group discussion, whiteboard prompts, short reflection/journaling, music and improv, live scenarios with AI simulations, and various classroom activities.

Whereas previous research on LDC has focused on the impact of the course, including the application and transfer of leadership objectives (Crowley, 2019), the way leadership is developed and enacted in the course (Hinck, 2022; Iwanenko, 2021; Michaelson, 2020), and how the course sets the conditions for success in command (Longmire, 2019), less attention has been placed on its learning methods. Within this vein, some research has shown an increased importance of self-reflection and introspection when creating a virtual version of the course (Hinck & Davis, 2022). Another study focused on the specific usage of music, coaching, and improv to deepen the experience for students and instructors (Hinck et al., 2023). Most notably, Hinck and Davis (2020) developed a model conceptualizing the learning environment as an ecosystem, stressing the importance of constructing a positive learning environment for both student and instructor development.

The BART (boundary, authority, role, and task) analysis of organizations (Senge, 1991) and in group relations (Green & Molenkamp, 2005; Wells, 1990) is a useful framework for LDC. The boundaries of who is teacher and who is student is less formalized in LDC than other professional military education courses. The shared authority for learning coupled with the dual role of teacher and learner in the task of becoming a better leader using human domain content for self, others, and organizations illuminates an adaptive element how learning and teaching occurs in LDC. Group relations theorists (Alderfer, 1980; Green & Molenkamp, 2005; Laszlo, 2007; McTaggart, 2008; Rice, 1965) say that all thoughts and behaviors can be understood as products of the system, collective, and context that produced them and that no

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human production exists in a vacuum. The system of teaching and learning in LDC seems to be more about the capacity of each participant (instructor and student) to be both teacher and learner.

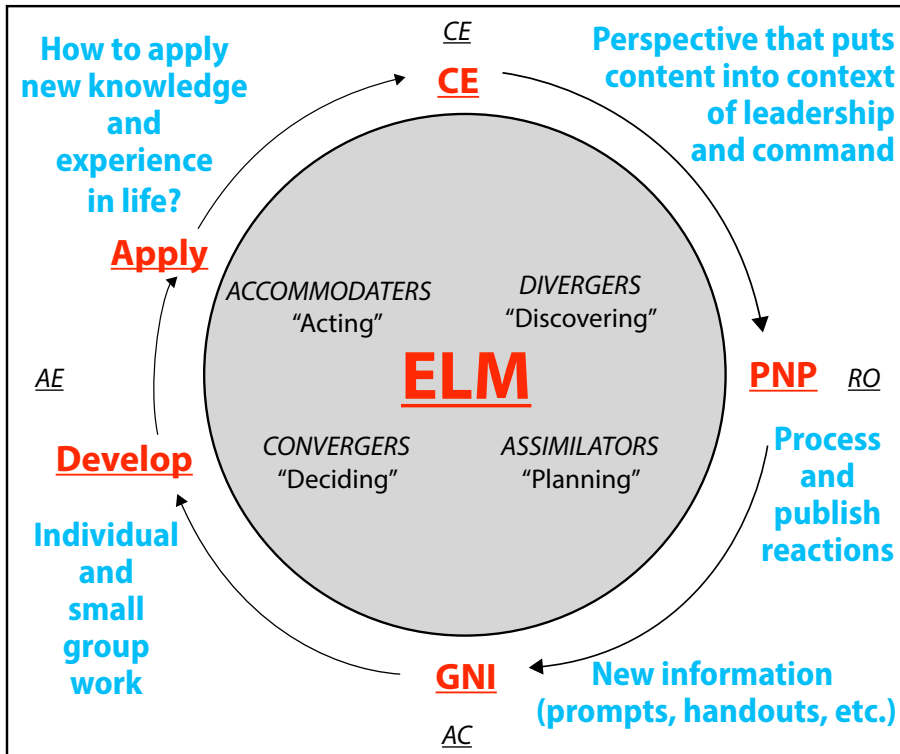
The LDC teaching methods prioritize experiences, small group discussion, and interactive activities that overlap with the Army's experiential learning model (Kem, 2006). The LDC curriculum flow aligns with the experiential learning model and engages multiple learning styles that begin with a perspective—a story that puts the follow-on content into the context of military command and leadership. Each perspective serves as a concrete experience and anchors learning in the emotional/affective zone. In the follow-on seminar, students unpack their reactions to the perspective and/or conduct a personal reflection in their leader book—all which invites students to process and publish their learning (P&P/Reflective Observation). Specific and generalized new information (GNI/Abstract Conceptualization) is presented to students in various ways that include prompts, guided discussions, handouts, slides, etc. Students are then asked to develop (Develop) what they learned in a series of small groups, answering specific prompts, and engaging in a meaningful dialogue with peers. To finish the lesson, students are invited to apply (Apply/Active Experimentation) their new learning by sharing out loud or journaling their answers on imagining how they might apply the new learning in their military/home life. See Figure 1 for the comparison.

While these studies explore some individual teaching strategies, identify the broader importance of the learning environment, describe the underlining learning methods, and connect them to established models, they are coupled with some definitional problems relating to learning activities and typologies of Kolb's experimental learning model used by the Army and LDC (Bergsteiner et al., 2010), and the effectiveness of the methods utilized by LDC remain unclear. Thus, when asked to offer a condensed two-day version of LDC at USAF MAJCOMs, despite similarly trained faculty delivering similar content blocks, a substantial drop in student evaluations occurred. Whereas the eight-day course received a mean score of 4.84/5.00 over 15 iterations in AY21, the average score of the three LDC-CM was only 3.57/5.00—the lowest received by any LDC program, including those conducted virtually. While the standard deviation for the LDC has become smaller over time (from 2.0 to 1.4 we believe due to course improvements), the standard deviation for the LDC-CM was much wider (due to reasons we identify and explain later). The unexplained drop in student evaluations and variance in scores prompted the LDC faculty research team to ask two questions:

RQ1: What learning experiences contributed to consistently high perceptions of student learning in the eight-day LDC course?

RQ2: What learning experiences contributed to substantially lower perceptions of student learning in the LDC-Command Modules (LDC-CM)?

Figure 1
Experiential Learning Model and Learning Styles



Note. Figure adapted from “The Use of Case Studies as an Integrating Approach in Professional Military Education: A Pilot Study,” by Jack D. Kem, 2006, *Essays in Education*, 18(1), p. 9 (<https://openriver.winona.edu/eie/vol18/iss1/>). Copyright 2006 by OpenRiver.

Method

Researchers conducted a qualitative thematic analysis comparing students’ written feedback from the LDC-CM and eight-day LDC occurring throughout AY21. End-of-course survey data for the LDC-CM were provided by the Air Mobility Command representative who organized all squadron leader courses. The LDC-CM portion of the Squadron Leadership Courses consisted of two half-day sessions on content related to the human domain skills when leading a squadron. Data were coded from all questions in the end-of-course survey related to the LDC-CM portion from the three iterations of the LDC-CM ($n = 165$). Data from the eight-day LDC included 15 iterations of the course occurring throughout AY21 ($n = 889$) with researchers



examining responses from eight survey questions related to the student learning experience. Participants were in one program or the other, not both.

Data was collected and coded from eight questions used in the survey and transcript analysis from the instructor discussions that supported three objectives:

1. Assess the Content Value / Area of Impact

Q20–23: “What were the three most (least) valuable areas of instruction?”
Explain top three.

2. Assess the Application of Learning / Level of Impact

Q24: “How do you plan on applying what you learned in this course?”

3. Assess Course Effectiveness / Depth of Impact or “Student Experience”

Q13: “How would you rate the quality of your online/virtual education in LDC?”

Q14: “The course better prepared me to thrive in the unique context of leading a sq or sim org.”

Q18: “Rate your experience with the following aspects of the course.”

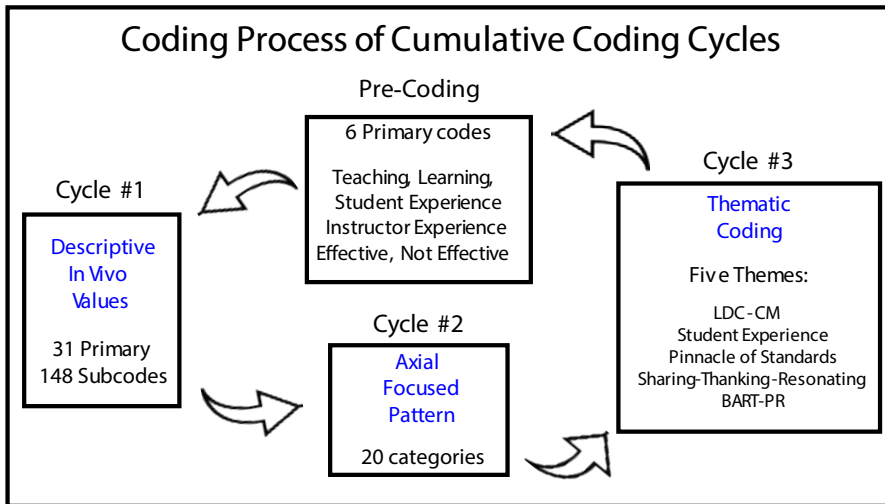
Researchers analyzed the data by conducting a qualitative thematic analysis using a grounded theory approach. Given previous studies’ call for development of new teaching and learning methods for lifelong adult learners (Hirsh et al., 2022; Shah & Campus, 2021; Watkins & Mortimore, 1999), this method best suits the study’s research aims by allowing themes to emerge organically from the data without any a priori assumptions, enabling new insights to emerge through close engagement with the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 2015). Accordingly, researchers engaged in a cyclical process of cumulative coding cycles. This process began with (a) familiarization of the data by reading through the entirety of the data set; (b) initial pre-code generation identifying areas of effective and ineffective teaching, learning, and both student and instructor experience; and (c) three cumulative coding processes moving from descriptive, in vivo coding to axial, focused coding whereby emergent patterns were identified and concluding with a final thematic coding of the data into major themes (see Figure 2). For this process, three researchers were involved with 95% inter-rater reliability. The differences were in descriptive coding in cycle 1 that were resolved before moving into categorical coding in cycle 2.



Findings

Analysis of the LDC-CM and eight-day LDC end-of-course student surveys revealed five themes: LDC-CM, student experience, pinnacle of standards, shar-

Figure 2
Cumulative Coding Cycles



ing-thanking-resonating zone, and boundary-role-authority-task-purpose-relationships. This article only examines the theme of pinnacle of standards as one way to understand why the LDC-CM resulted in substantially lower perceptions of student learning and the consistently higher perceptions of student learning in the eight-day LDC. Each of the five subthemes in the pinnacle of standards is discussed with comments from the LDC-CM showcasing the deficiency of each category contrasted with the more positive, impactful descriptions provided by students in the eight-day LDC. While instructor experience was examined, the focus in this article is on how the students learned from instructors and the student experience and does not address the instructor experience.

Theme 1: Connection

Students in the eight-day LDC reported consistent and strong feelings of connection fostered among their peers and instructors. As one student noted, “I feel like this course gave me new tools for my toolbox and allowed me to build new connections with some great people. I highly recommend to any future squadron commanders or senior NCOs.” As another stated, “I have now gained unique perspective and lifelong friends (in just 8 days) that I can reach out to.”

This building of connection enabled trust to emerge among students and instructors, allowing them to open up and become vulnerable. As one comment details, “This course is the best course in the Air Force for many reasons but mostly because of the



vulnerability of the instructors and the seminar team building.” LDC instructors modeled vulnerability by sharing personal stories and experiences of adversity during command, after which students were asked to personally reflect upon and then discuss the stories in seminar groups. Taken together, this process emphasized connection before content, thereby enabling student vulnerability and enhancing their ability for reflection and growth: (1) “The course provided the time and space for self-reflection and discussion on difficult topics ... it provided instructional venues, allowed shared stories/experiences from classmates and instructors.” (2) “Sq/CC [squadron commander] perspectives hit the nail on the head. I believe that set the tone for students to open up and be vulnerable within their breakout groups and seminars.”

In contrast, the LDC-CM was unsuccessful in fostering a sense of connection. Students were left confused, bored, or disengaged from the command perspectives and small group discussions:

I felt like directions for the small groups were often confusing. The afternoon session really just felt like we were being talked to. Also, spouses seemed very bored. The presenters didn't convey the questions to the class but were more concerned on telling the story. Either change back to the instructor from the previous sq/cc courses this year or prepare the new instructors better so the class can get something worthwhile out of this full day! But 3 hours of listening to your stories is not productive. The lead briefer repeated himself a lot.

Thus, rather than fostering connection between students and instructors, learning methods in the LDC-CM were perceived as unidirectional, with content flowing from the instructor to students, contributing to a lack of identification and interest in the stories presented. Instructors were perceived as concerned not with connecting with students, evident not only by failing to convey questions to the class but also because students perceived them as focused on themselves and the presentation of their stories.

Theme 2: Content

Students in the eight-day LDC consistently saw value in the leadership tools, stories, scenarios, and overall content presented to them in class. Students came to see the “real world” applicability of the content: “This course was phenomenal. The real-world experiences that were shared during the sessions really made the class. The lessons dealing with the human factors/interactions were very useful as they related to real world situations.” For others, the content felt tailored for them specifically: “It [LDC] highlighted foundations for leadership development: trust, empowerment, vulnerability Content felt customized to us and applicable across all career fields and mission sets.”



Taken together, the relevancy of the content uniquely enabled students to personally grow:

I believe the know yourself and know your team were outstanding. I have done this in several other courses, but it was very by the book and a “cool, I know my personality is letters.” This instruction was way more than that. It allowed each student to lead in ways that they thrived, and for those challenges/blind spots, how to get better at those gaps of leadership.

Real Life Perspectives of being in Command—allows to visualize and realize one should prep/prepare prior to taking command. The Personality traits and the 5 Voices—discussions throughout the whole course provided discovery who we are as well as others and how we see and do in life. The daily phrases were thought provoking in allowing me to think deeper about my Leadership abilities now and in the future.

In contrast, students in the LDC-CM perceived the content as lacking substance, practicality, and relevance. As one student explained, “I’m concerned this course is entirely based on personality and personal stories. Very little advice or lessons. There weren’t scenarios to work through on the road show module. I would have like more concrete/actionable info. More substance, less philosophy.” Thus, despite similar content presented, the LDC-CM students did not see its real-world applicability, with this evident even when comparing comments on the same content blocks, like personality.

Theme 3: Delivery

Students in the eight-day LDC course found the delivery of course content as contributing to their learning and development. This included not only the variety of learning methods applied but also how they were delivered. As one student explained,

You can never get enough stories. So much value in someone sharing a story, THEN applying the course content. Makes the content more relevant and gives leaders a chance to reflect on their own stories and where they could have modified their actions had they known the content.

In this sense, the eight-day course engaged students across three domains of learning—cognitive, affective, and behavioral. By placing command perspectives before a content block, students were put into an affective learning state first, thereby enabling further cognitive engagement, reflection, and growth in the small group discussions.

Further contributing to this were students’ perceptions of the delivery as genuine and authentic:



The Sq/CC perspectives were fantastic—they were all up there with some of the better TED talks I’ve seen. I feel like some of these should be shared with a wider audience because they were really genuine and taught great lessons. Finally, the retired GO perspectives were awesome, and it was great to have them in our seminars as regular participants—they were very down to earth and relatable.

Squadron CC perspective is very powerful. It is authentic. How the speaker approached the situation and learned from it is very valuable ... Leading Squadron in Crisis gives us an opportunity to think through a situation that could possibly happen and learn from each other.

In contrast, during the LDC-CMs, students felt the delivery fell flat most of the time, both in terms of the large group experiences and within seminar discussions:

I had high expectations based on discussion with others that had attended LDC. The afternoon didn’t really improve my ability to help lead in a crisis. The stories were great in hearing actual stories, but I think they could be cut down. Maybe the instructors just failed to effectively facilitate. It was good, but I would try to condense this to one full day to make room for other sessions.

As the comment suggests, the large group experience failed to set the affective tone for the student. Despite some positive descriptions of the stories, the students felt that less time should be devoted to them, while instructor facilitation was seen as lacking. Taken together, the failed delivery of content contributed to a lack of cognitive engagement and perception of skill development.

Theme 4: Environment

Whether in resident or virtual, LDC instructors aim to create learning environments whereby student learning comes from self, peers, and instructors in meaningful ways (Davis & Hinck, 2021; Hinck & Davis, 2020). Comments from the eight-day LDC reflected this in a variety of ways: (1) “Hearing senior leaders and group commanders’ perspectives in such an intimate, close environment was exceptional.” (2) “The personal experiences shared by the instructors coupled with the seminar discussions provided a unique and insightful perspective on the roles of the Squadron Leadership Triad.”

Importantly, students viewed the learning environment as one whereby authority was shared, contributing to a sense of collective understanding. Thus, learning emerged not only from stories or content told by instructors but also from discussions with their peers—including those from different ranks and statuses.



Learning from all of the others in the seminar was invaluable. Excellent insights shared by both “new” squadron commanders as well getting the enlisted perspective. The clarity of purpose was on-point. Understanding the interaction/role/value of all of the members on the command team was huge! The Leadership Perspectives helped put a very real and very human face on the things commanders will face (not just a bunch of hypotheticals.)

In contrast, a productive, shared learning environment failed to take hold at the LDC-CM. As one student noted, “I think we should be in smaller groups. The small group discussions were most valuable, but because we just discussed what we wanted. Maybe the class was too big.” Here the instructors were not seen as contributing to the group’s collective learning. While the comment expressed a desire for more small group discussion, the value of the small groups was not related to the development of one as a leader but was perceived as useful because students could discuss what they pleased without concern for course content. This suggests that the learning environment was not established, leaving students disconnected from the course’s educational purposes, instructors, and, to some extent, their peers.

Theme 5: Experience

Arguably the most important theme from the eight-day LDC course was positive descriptions of the student experience. Comments included those evaluating the overall design of the course—“the design, structure, and how the course grew on the day before provided a very positive experience, along with listen[ing] to others”—as well as its impact related to personal development: (1) “Learning through experiences and conversation really solidified the material being presented. It allowed me the opportunity to internalize, reflect, and mentally make a leadership game plan.” (2) “Leadership case studies and crisis response exercises really allowed us to practice and build confidence for future scenarios with our Airmen.”

More specifically, students noted how the teaching and learning methods felt authentic, real, and challenging: (1) “The first-hand stories and debriefs thereafter were so powerful and thought provoking. This is what set this class above anything I have experienced in the past.” (2) “Leading a squadron in crisis, the role play was authentic, and I felt the panic and unsureness of the actions.”

Most comprehensively, how all four of the previous themes coalesced into a positive learning experience was evident in the following student comment:

Hearing the stories of others, bouncing ideas/scenarios off of others, and being asked to lean into discomfort is a premiere opportunity that some never get, or don’t get often. Knowing yourself and understanding what you bring to the team, and where you need cognitive diversity to offset your attributes is crucial



as a leader. Having the chance to practice tough scenarios before being in real ones is highly productive and value-added. Leaning on the vast experience in the room and the trust built in a short amount of time allowed us to really ask hard questions of ourselves - some of which we might otherwise ignore or overlook when faced with tough situations or decisions. It also gives us a network to reach out to for help in the future, and that builds confidence.

As the comment demonstrates, the previous four themes contributed to the positive experience by emphasizing the importance of connection, the applicability of the course content and its impactful delivery, and the creation of an environment of shared learning.

Conversely, the LDC-CM failed to deliver an effective learning experience. As one student explained,

Extra time could have been used for another subject. The LDC felt more like a church sermon than adult leadership learning. Lots of weird overhead questions. It felt very programmed and scripted. LDC was easily the least relevant or exciting portion of the course, cannot emphasize this enough. I don't think the Thursday session was really needed. Not much of a gain ... I had high expectations for this part of the week but was disappointed. Less doom and gloom, more specifics about building teams and building the mentality and ethos to survive in the high-end threat environment.

In this case, the negative characterization of the experience as akin to a “church sermon” highlighted the culminating lack of success when attempting to create a positive learning experience, with the inability to construct a positive learning environment evident by the ineffective manifestation of the previous four themes. Thus, poor delivery occurred—described as “programmed and scripted,” content seen as “not much of a gain,” the learning environment as “weird” with too much “doom and gloom,” and no mention of connection or learning among student peers and instructors.

Discussion

Taken together, we argue that the five themes emerging from the comparison of students' perceptions of learning in the LDC-CM and eight-day LDC articulate a new form of leadership development learning, which we call leadergogy. We begin by summarizing what leadergogy is and situate its five elements within the literature on adult learning and leadership development. We then offer two primary reasons why the LDC-CM student experience could have suffered and discuss three implications for the USAF and leadership development programs more broadly.

Defining Leadergogy: The Pinnacle of Standards

As a learning method, leadergogy begins by enacting and developing *connections* among students and instructors before providing relevant *content* aligning with the stage of students' leadership development, learning, and experiences. Through multiple learning modalities communicated authentically, the *delivery* of leadergogy encompasses all domains of learning (cognitive, affective, and behavioral), contributing to a carefully orchestrated *environment* in which all voices and experiences are shared and heard in a psychologically safe space conducive to learning. These four elements culminate in a unique *experience*—one where students perceive the benefits of the leadership development program while fostering personal growth, gratitude, and optimism for their future development (see Figure 3).

Components of Leadergogy

Connection. Because relationships matter in the human domain, leadergogy emphasizes connection before content to build trust and strengthen the social fabric among participants. This occurs by building affective links that promote psychological safety and inclusivity that enable sharing and discussing difficult situations (Dewey, 1933/1986; Edmondson, 1999, 2004; Schein & Bennis, 1965). Students and instructors come to appreciate, support, and connect in ways allowing them to explore new avenues for personal growth, reflection, and perspective sharing while offering gratitude toward others and expressing humility.

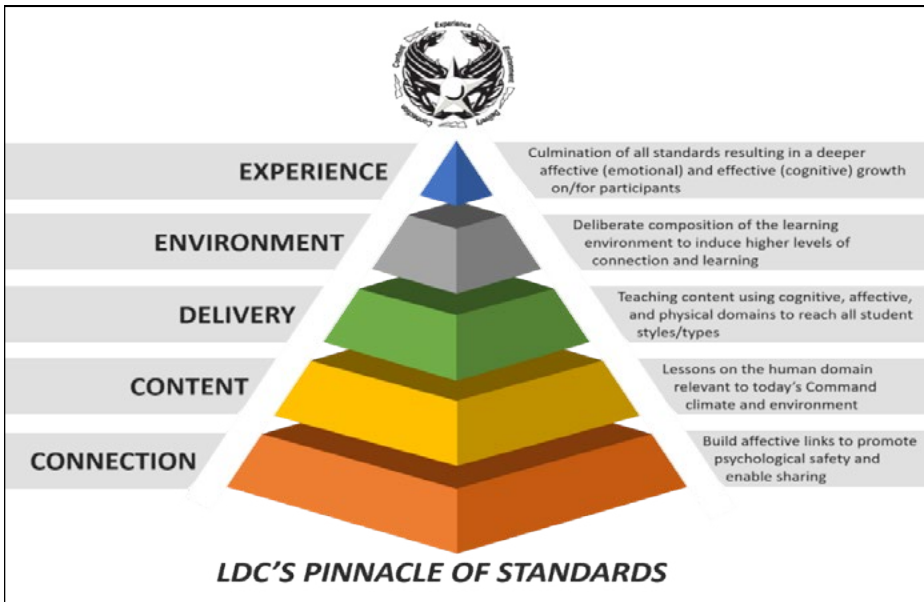
Content. Leadergogy provides relevant, thought-provoking tools and frameworks for hard-hitting content in the human domain (Hinck, 2022; Hinck & Davis, 2020). Importantly, the content must align with individuals' current stages of learning and experience, honoring prior life experiences and the education level of the learner while emphasizing learning as a lifelong process (Henschke, 2011; Krajnc, 2014). If the content is not made relevant for the time and place in the student's career, perceptions of the applicability of the learning does not occur, stymieing self-development.

Delivery. Whereas traditional educational practices focus on unidirectional methods (e.g., lectures) for knowledge exchange (Brookfield & Preskill, 1997) or use discussion-based methods whereby the instructor still maintains authority (Rose-Redwood et al., 2018), leadergogy includes a range of teaching and learning techniques not only to reach all student learning types but also create an affective state whereby students and instructors share authority in a genuine and authentic way. Thus, leadergogy engages students in three domains of learning—cognitive, affective, and behavioral. This enables students to feel the importance of others' perspectives and stories and fosters deeper self-reflection, development, and introspection. Whereas previous research shows that learning best occurs when multiple



Figure 3

Leadergogy as a Pinnacle of Standards



teaching and learning styles are employed (Tulbure, 2012; Waite, 2011), leadergogy uses such teaching and learning techniques in a way that emphasizes relationships with and among participants (Green & Molenkamp, 2005; Lazlo, 2007; McTaggart, 2008; Rice, 1965; Wells, 1990) and provides a way of combining teaching techniques into a new model that accompanies the experiential learning model.

Environment. Leadergogy aims to maximize and carefully orchestrate the internal and external learning environments so that student learning comes from self, peers, and instructors in meaningful ways (Davis & Hinck, 2021; Hinck & Davis, 2020). Building from research showing student preference for learning methodologies based on shared dialogue (Brookfield & Preskill, 1997) and prompt-based discussions as a means to reinforce shared authority between the teacher and learning, leadergogy supports nontraditional approaches to teaching and learning that de-centers authority away from the instructor (Rose-Redwood et al., 2018). By creating an environment of shared authority, supported by trust as modeled by instructor vulnerability and personal stories when in command, students mirror such practices and develop their capacity to use ideas and information to test and share different perspectives and reactions. This, in turn, facilitates greater personal development and ownership, with students afforded greater agency in planning and managing their learning (Bourner & Flowers, 1999, p. 82) when addressing ambiguous, potentially awkward, and difficult situations.

Experience. The goal of leadergogy is to produce a positive impactful experience for learners. This represents the top-level standard upon which student learning can be evaluated. The student experience marks a culmination of the previous four standards while adding consideration to the overall product of the learning methods employed and environment created. Because meeting the educational needs of students at critical points in their education is key to the quality of learning for all participants (Usanov & Qayumov, 2020), with leadership development concerned not only with individual behavioral change and skill improvement but attitudinal alignment and personal motivation for growth as well (Day et al., 2014), the goal of leadergogy as a learning framework is to leave students with an impactful learning experience resulting in a deeper affective state conducive to greater cognitive growth and sustained behavioral change (Hinck & Davis, 2020; Hinck et al., 2021) that aligns with the organization's goals (Day et al., 2014). Thus, the combination of meaningful teaching and learning strategies, in addition to a truly student-driven learning approach, results in leadergogy creating positive perceptions of student learning that can drive continued leadership development and growth.

When taken together, these five standards form the foundation of a more comprehensive method of teaching and learning for lifelong adult learners (Henschke, 2011; Usanov & Qayumov, 2020; Watkins & Mortimore, 1999), which honors students' life experiences (Krajnc, 2014). Importantly, it provides a new way to approach adult learning and leadership development by addressing deficiencies from more limiting, and vague principles of pedagogy and andragogy (Murphy, 1996; Shah & Campus, 2021) and embraces a more shared and democratic approach to teaching and learning (Brookfield & Preskill, 1997; Rose-Redwood et al., 2018). Hence, leadergogy goes beyond andragogy's six broad assumptions regarding adult learning (learners' concept, the role of experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, motivation, and need to know) (Knowles et al., 2015) by providing a more useful, specific, and empirically backed framework for leadership development programs in which content is constructed and delivered in service to creating an environment leading to an impactful and meaningful leadership development experience.

Evaluating the LDC-CM: Lessons Learned and the Reinforcement of Leadergogy

This study was prompted by concerns regarding the drop in student perceptions of learning in the LDC-CM compared to the eight-day LDC. Whereas student comments from the eight-day LDC course exemplified the leadergogy framework, responses from the LDC-CM demonstrated more middle-line and typical student evaluations of professional military education courses. Taken together, the comparison of feedback from the two courses supports the argument for leadergogy as a



new form of effective leadership development learning, with the lower scores in the LDC-CM arising from an inability to enact the leadership framework.

When evaluating the LDC-CM feedback within the framework of leadership, two primary potential reasons for the lower perception of student learning, and thus lower scores of the course emerged: relevancy and training. First, the relevancy issue was understood by students viewing the LDC-CM content as not useful for those who were either already in command or about to take command. In this sense, students were already in an affective state whereby the current stress of command or immediate worries about taking command shortly resulted in the lack of resonance of LDC-CM content. Thus, future iterations of the LDC-CM should modify both the content and its delivery to emphasize the immediate applicability of the tools and value of discussions and shared perspectives experienced within the course to honor the educational needs of students at their current stage in development (Usanov & Qayumov, 2020).

Second, four elements could have contributed to training issues regarding those teaching the LDC-CM:

1. Inadequate training in adapting the implementation of leadership's standard of connection given the shortened time for the LDC-CM. Here opportunities for connection between students and instructors were insufficiently intentional given the time constraints. Yet, the difference in length between the LDC (eight-day) and LDC-CM (two-day) is a relevant factor in the time available for connection that relates to the overall experience. While not causal, it is a confounding variable.
2. An inability to maximize the learning environment due to the USAF MAJCOMs selected location in which LDC instructors were unfamiliar.
3. A low degree of immersion and limited continuous exposure to purposeful LDC delivery, leading to limited usage of scenarios, application activities, and meaningful reflection from shared perspectives among students and their peers.
4. A lower quality of experience. Because learning effectiveness is impacted by differences among students, instructional arrangements, and the capabilities of those implementing instruction (Graham & Hebert, 2011), the three aforementioned issues related to training, in addition to the issue relating to content relevancy, detrimentally influenced how students and instructors could create an impactful experience characterized by shared authority and personal growth.

Thus, future implementation of the LDC-CM should include more faculty development accounting for the shortened class time and adaptation of learning activities in service to fulfilling the leadership framework. LDC faculty may also consider traveling to the LDC-CM locations prior to the class to familiarize themselves with the location to improve the orchestration of the environment.

While an alternative explanation for the lower LDC-CM scores may be the difference in contact hours, analysis of the student feedback suggests this not to be the



case. As the LDC-CM examples demonstrated, students actually believed that less time was needed; specifically, less time devoted to stories (see Theme 1), suggestions that the curriculum be condensed to one day (see Theme 3), and time better utilized if given to another subject (see Theme 5). In contrast, students from the eight-day course noted how trust was built in such a short amount of time (see Theme 5). Taken together, this suggests that the quality, not quantity, of contact hours determines how students perceive the efficacy of professional military education (Hinck & Hinck, 2023). Yet, as argued earlier, the difference in length between the eight-day LDC and the two-day LDC-CM is a confounding variable and very relevant in the overall experience.

Implications

Our project provides three implications for the wider educational field, professional military education, and the USAF. First, leadergogy, as a new form of learning methodology, offers an empirically backed framework that honors the voices of students and teachers, which is key to creating a shared learning environment whereby all participants act as co-learners and co-teachers. This enables greater learning and personal development to occur by enlarging the field of perspectives and leadership experiences contemplated, both successes and failures, helping to shape the attitudes of learners in more constructive and confident ways.

Second, the study advocates for a variety of teaching and learning methods, including multiple learning styles, and engagement of the affective learning domain to support cognitive growth and behavioral change. When employing leadergogy effectively, less emphasis is placed on formal lecturing, and instead, greater usage is made of prompt-based discussions, experiential learning tools, and emotional storytelling. This enables learning and personal development to emerge not only from readings but also from the collective knowledge, experiences, and inquiries of the group. The real-life experiences of students are as important to learning as the expert content knowledge and teaching methods of instructors. Students thus develop and apply new knowledge and skills in concert with the instructors and their peers, with relational development among them creating a positive learning environment.

Third, the research addresses three of the four key attributes in the 2018 chief of staff of the Air Force's "Action Orders on Accelerating Change or Lose" (Brown, 2020). It reinforces the "Airmen" concept that sees all participants as learners and teachers with universal skillsets viewed as significant to all Airmen regardless of their Air Force specialty code, advocates for the need to revise our educational bureaucracy and learning practices, and identifies outdated learning systems and programs that require new designs for more effective learning and leadership making us competitive in the future high-end fight.



Conclusion

Moving away from traditional classroom approaches of instructor-centric authority and content delivery, this study offers leadergogy as a new teaching and learning approach established from best practices to form the basis for a new leadership development learning method. At its heart, leadergogy aims to craft a meaningful student experience by creating connection before content to foster psychological safety and personal growth, content relevancy, and effective delivery placing students in an affective state conducive to greater learning, and an environment whereby trust, authenticity, and vulnerability emerges to enhance shared learning from peers and instructors. Taken together, the leadergogy framework offers new ways by which programs may assess and construct their curriculum, including its application to improve the learning effectiveness of future and current leaders not only in the Air Force and Space Force but other service branches as well, in addition to leadership education programs within higher education and the private sector. ❧

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