

# Developing Practical/Analytical Skills Through Mindful Classroom Simulations for “Doing” Leadership

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## ABSTRACT

This article shows how certain practical/analytical skills are developed for “doing” leadership (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011) through what I call *mindful classroom simulations* in two upper-level social science courses. By drawing from various leadership definitions and Ellen J. Langer’s *Mindfulness* (1989) construct and through the use of an online open-ended questionnaire, participant-observation, and documentary/textual analysis, I demonstrate how well-designed and executed mindful classroom simulations afford individuals and groups the opportunity not only to gain discipline-specific knowledge and improve learning capabilities, but also to develop practical/analytical skills for doing leadership. These mindful classroom simulations can be used in undergraduate and graduate public policy, political science, and public administration courses because simulations are effective pedagogical tools for teaching both course content and transportable practical/analytical skills that successful active leaders require today. Several lessons are drawn from the teacher’s perspective on the effective use of these learner-centered mindful classroom simulations.

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## KEYWORDS

mindful classroom simulations, doing leadership, transportable leadership skills, interpretive methodology

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Scholars working in various academic disciplines, including public administration and political science, have recognized the importance of using innovative classroom techniques for enhancing student learning. Part of these pedagogical innovations, especially during the past three decades, has been the advent and continuous use of classroom simulations. J. Allen Queen (1984) observed that “simulations in the classroom” afford classroom teachers and other educators the opportunity to provide “rewarding learning experiences for students” (p. 144). Educators who use innovative pedagogical tools such as simulations have been shown to encourage more students to take “an active role in [the]

learning” process (p. 144). Queen defines *simulation* as “concentrated learning exercises specifically designed to represent important real life activities by providing the learners with the essence or essential elements of the real situation without the hazards, costs or time constraints” (p. 144). Moreover, Queen adds that “simulations provide experiences for the learner to develop skills in making decisions and solving problems [that] can be used in the social sciences,” including political science, public administration, and leadership studies courses (p. 145). In this article, I adopt this more expansive definition of simulation as a starting point to show and assess the interaction between leadership skills development, classroom

learning experiences (e.g., constructing knowledge bases), and building overall student confidence. Finally, I draw some useful lessons from my own use of these classroom simulations that may inspire others to consider adopting similar innovative teaching tools in their own classrooms in order to engage students in more active learning processes.

Despite such promise for classroom simulations to enhance the students' learning experiences, and perhaps their critical decision-making and problem-solving skills, Queen and others (Hall, 2011; Smith & Boyer, 1996) seem to take for granted the potential for these types of simulations for developing certain practical—that is, public/transportable—skills in both the short and long terms. This article explores the following two interrelated questions: To what extent do mindful classroom simulations—that incorporate the concept of “real lived experiences” (as in “life world,” or *Lebenswelt*; Schutz & Luckman, 1973) of those embodying political/social/historical actors within communal democratic practices—in upper-division undergraduate political science courses (among other social science courses) serve as a constitutive process for developing certain types of analytical/practical leadership skills? And how and to what extent do these simulations also provide an alternative effective pedagogical tool for establishing an active learning environment in which to teach course content, discipline-relevant literatures, and critical thinking skills?

The underlying presumption informing these inquiries is that all student-participants who engage in mindful classroom simulations will have the opportunity to obtain, enhance, and develop certain practical skills and related critical thinking capabilities for effective leadership while learning course content. This study relies on an interpretive methodology that employs several qualitative methods for generating and analyzing word-data, dealing with changing contexts, managing ambiguous circumstances, and various meaning-making processes (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Schwartz-

Shea & Yanow, 2012; Yanow, 2003). In particular, three methods were used: (a) an open-ended questionnaire that generated word-data from student-participants who were active in mindful classroom simulations in one (or both) of my upper-division political science courses; (b) teacher as a participant-observer in the form of meeting facilitator and also debate arbiter within the two distinctive classroom simulations; and (c) documentary and textual analyses of newspaper accounts, student evaluations, informal evaluations by classroom guests/simulation voting publics, and unsolicited student-to-teacher e-mail messages. Note the interpretive methodological orientation taken in this study along with the reliance on Ellen J. Langer's (1989) mindfulness construct (discussed in detail in the next section) are intricately linked because both emphasize the need for multiple perspectives to understanding and the importance of making sense of social phenomena in and outside of institutional spaces, including innovative pedagogical tools such as simulations in the social science classroom.

Although several important scholarly articles have focused on the effectiveness of simulations for teaching and learning as a form of experiential learning, many of these continue to emphasize computer-based approaches (Leonard & Leonard, 1995; Yahr, 1995) and less on classroom environments that afford student-participants the opportunity for meaning-making through simulations and real lived experiences while engaged in the process of “doing” leadership. Hurd and Stein (2004) point out that “involvement is a key to student success in higher education” (p. ix). Providing these types and forms of real lived experiences in a collegial but competitive classroom environment, through the type of mindful simulations presented here, may serve as a pathway for teachers to help students develop not only critical thinking skills but also practical skills for doing leadership. Hurd and Stein (2004) again capture this sentiment and the importance of people-centered simulations in the classroom environment:

The more students are involved with faculty, staff, and peers, the more likely they are to learn and persist. But while colleges and universities have paid a good deal of attention to student social involvement (e.g., clubs, extracurricular activities), they have done less to engage students academically, even within the classroom. It is still the case that too many students...encounter learning as isolated learners whose learning is separated from one another. As importantly, they typically sit passively in classrooms unable to engage actively with others in the construction of knowledge. (p. ix)

Hurd and Stein as well as Shapiro and Levine (1999) highlight one of the most fundamental problems facing classroom teachers: devising more creative ways to teach discipline-specific content and constructing knowledge while building certain leadership skills and broader student confidence. With this in mind, in this study I show how students seem to grasp the discipline-related literatures, methods, and substantive materials through the use of mindful classroom simulations as an active pedagogical tool that also incorporates whole communities (e.g., relying on the use of invited audiences or groups outside of the classroom environment) in the broader experiential learning process. Similarly, Leonard and Leonard (1995) note that their "graduates...rated the simulation experience [in their business courses] over case analyses in terms of decision making involvement and providing a learning framework" (p. 83). Thus, it becomes an educational and, perhaps more importantly, a professional imperative to encourage students to learn from each other, while affording them an environment conducive to experimental and diverse ways of learning, constructing, and expanding knowledge.

Thus, in this article, I show how mindful classroom simulations serve as an effective pedagogical tool for enhancing the learning process, constructing discipline-specific knowledge bases, and cultivating and developing specific practical/analytical skills for doing leadership

(Alvesson & Spicer, 2011). More precisely, these mindful classroom simulations concretize another issue as pointed out by Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003) that "most leadership researchers tend to agree that [leadership] exists; although there are a few that at least acknowledge problems with confusing the label leadership with an assumed empirical reality" (p. 360).

Here, the classroom simulations provide a method for enhancing and developing certain practical/analytical skills from which those in potential leadership positions (e.g., public administrators) can benefit, as these often require working in collaborative team settings. So, in order to assess the usefulness of these mindful classroom simulations to the development of such essential practical/analytical skills, I devised a conceptual framework based on several definitions of leadership and Langer's (1989) mindfulness construct discussed in a subsequent section. The conceptual framework provides a way to gauge or assess how student-participants understand their individual and collective roles within two types of classroom simulations, and a way to understand how student-participants can hone specific practical/analytical skills throughout the duration of a semester-long process. These skills can also potentially serve student-participants outside of safe classroom environments, for instance, when conducting policy analysis, leading organizational change, working within the context of overseeing all facets of a federal, state, or local administrative agency, or perhaps even running for public office. Finally, these simulations are effective teaching techniques for establishing active learning processes that provide open spaces for more creative ways to teach course content that extend far beyond the traditional teaching methods used in political science and public administration classrooms (e.g., lectures, case method, group discussions).

#### **MINDFULNESS: A THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT**

Ellen J. Langer, in her book titled *Mindfulness* (1989), provides a theoretical construct in which to think about cognitive levels of broader

consciousness that can be applied to enhance pedagogical tools used within social and behavioral sciences and humanities courses. Robert J. Sternberg (2000) asserts that “mindfulness has shown itself to be a useful construct in understanding a variety of behavior” (p. 23). In particular, the concept is useful for creating, conducting, and assessing classroom simulations that help develop practical/analytical skills essential to doing leadership in the classroom but, more importantly, in public life.

Mindfulness as a concept is an elusive one in academic circles, but also in nonacademic settings such as public administration and broader political environments. Nevertheless, it “can best be understood as the process of drawing novel distinctions. It does not matter whether what is noticed is important or trivial, as long as it is new to the viewer” (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000, p. 1). Moreover, Sternberg (2000) claims that “mindfulness...is a many-sided, or heterogeneous, construct” (p. 12). At its core, it is made up of heterogeneous components that may afford broader applicability beyond “literatures on cognitive abilities, personality, and cognitive styles” (p. 12). As I show in this study, a broader applicability is possible because mindfulness is a “state of being that creates new categories, is open to new information, and is aware of more than one perspective” (Dickmann & Stanford-Blair, 2009, p. 182). Langer’s (1989) mindfulness and its heterogeneous components best capture the different levels of meaning that underwrite actions taken by individuals who want to engage in doing leadership (pp. 61–79). Last, the opportunity to change within simulation activities is as important as any other element necessary to the skills development process (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000, p. 4). Thus, the mindful classroom simulations afford student-participants and teachers the opportunity to change, construct new categories, contemplate multiple perspectives, engage in innovative thinking and dynamic teaching/learning processes, and view problematic situations under new light and within shifting contexts while attending to the achievement of short- and long-term group (and classroom) outcomes.

## DOING LEADERSHIP: DEVELOPING PRACTICAL SKILLS

Leadership scholars have well understood that there is no clear (or universal) conception of leadership (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2000; Northouse, 2013). In fact, what the available extensive literature on leadership demonstrates is that most scholars are divided on this issue (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011; Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2000; Hickman, 2009; Malone III, 1995; Mumford, 2006; Rost, 1991). Dickmann and Stanford-Blair (2009) observe that “leaders in the twenty-first century need to challenge old assumptions and examine ingrained habits of behavior” (p. 46). What this means, and how to accomplish this mandate, seems unclear and perhaps daunting. Nonetheless, Malone III (1995) finds that the traditional approaches to leadership, especially in business schools but also in public affairs and education administration, have mostly focused on teaching leadership from a conceptual or abstract level (p. 199). He states that these approaches are “excellent for producing leadership *observers*. However, something very different is needed to create effective leadership *practitioners*” [emphasis in original] (p. 199). Malone III (1995) goes on to suggest universities, and other organizations involved in leadership activities, must teach leadership skills beyond the theoretical that often leads individuals to learn certain skills through postgraduate trial and error in the workplace (p. 200). He seems to affirm James Kouzes’s (1993) earlier statement that

leadership skills are developed and replicated by people on the basis of experience—trial and error, doing it, getting the feedback, making mistakes and doing it again....People also learn by watching both positive and negative role models at work....Effective leadership training is found in the doing. (quoted in Malone III, 1995, p. 200)

So, where do we begin to teach leadership as a concrete, active, practical, skills-centered transportable process? What skills should individuals who want to “do” leadership need to develop? In what ways can we reconcile the

numerous approaches if necessary? To address these questions, I begin with the following premise as stated by Alvesson and Spicer (2011): "Instead of seeing leadership as a fairly coherent process which can potentially happen anywhere [we need] an ambiguity-centered approach [that] sees leadership as a contradictory phenomenon that can be used in different ways by different people" (pp. 9–10). From this and other studies, leadership in a broader sense is "a process that is far more sophisticated and complex than the often-simplistic view presented in some of the popular books on leadership" (Northouse, 2013, p. 1), but also found in some scholarly journals on active leadership.

Despite the variety of often competing definitions of leadership, and the associated levels of types and bases of power, Northouse (2013, p. 5) provides one useful way to think about leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal." This formulation seems ambiguous and perhaps one-sided in terms of leadership skills development. Therefore, other leadership components need to be incorporated when considering what I am calling mindful classroom simulations for acquiring and developing certain practical/analytical leadership skills. Smircich & Morgan (1982) point out that leadership is "realized in the process whereby one or more individuals succeed in attempting to frame and define the reality of others" (quoted in Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003, p. 362). This is where Northouse (2013) becomes instructive once again:

Defining leadership as a process means that it is not a trait or characteristic that resides in the leader, but rather a transactional event that occurs between the leader and the followers. Process implies that a leader affects and is affected by followers. It emphasizes that leadership is not a linear, one-way event, but rather an interactive event. When leadership is defined in this manner, it becomes available to everyone. It is not restricted to the formally designated leader in a group. (p. 5)

Northouse echoes Bass (1985) but more so MacGregor Burns (1978; 2010) who, in his seminal book *Leadership*, introduced the concepts of transformational and transactional leadership but within the context of U.S. national politics. In terms of process as a broader phenomenon, MacGregor Burns focused on close interpersonal relationships between leaders and followers who share certain values and motives. Most relevant for the purposes of this study is MacGregor Burns's emphasis on mutuality in the process and outcome dynamics of leadership. These leader-follower dynamics are also critical to establishing effective mindful classroom simulations that improve student-to-student and student-to-teacher communication and elevate the intellectual classroom atmosphere over time. For example, Burns finds that "the result of transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents" (p. 4). In a broader sense, Northouse (2013) provides additional elements to our understanding of what leadership may be, which I take into consideration in terms of a more constitutive process toward doing leadership (see Table 1) that goes along with MacGregor Burns (1978; 2010), Dickmann and Stanford-Blair (2009), and Alvesson and Spicer (2011).

Table 1 captures the intricate sources and broader structure connecting leadership as a multidirectional or constitutive process, mindfulness as a construct premised on the change notion, and classroom simulations as a teaching technique that function through teamwork. Table 1 points to how fluid doing leadership can be, and how a classroom environment that uses mindful simulations with clear learning objectives, absent some of the workplace stresses and risks, affords individuals the opportunity to hone practical/analytical skills at all levels.

Ample qualitative evidence shows that the use of mindful simulations within such intricate classroom spaces serves as effective pedagogical tools as well for active teaching and learning. For example, one student-participant commented

**TABLE 1.**  
Teaching and Developing Practical/Analytical Skills for “Doing” Leadership

Definitional Leadership*	Mindfulness and Its Components**	Classroom Simulation Learning Objectives/Outcomes	Practical/Analytical Skills Developed
<p>Leadership is a process between a leader and followers (multidirectional).</p> <p>Leadership involves influence that affects followers (and leaders alike).</p> <p>Leadership occurs in the context of groups.</p> <p>Leadership involves the attainment of goals.</p> <p>Leadership needs to challenge conventional ways of thinking.</p> <p>Leadership entails dealing with ambiguities found within any situation/context.</p>	<p>“The essence of mindfulness is change.”†</p> <p>“Process before outcome”***</p> <p>“Welcoming new information”***</p> <p>“More than one view”***</p> <p>“Control over context”***</p> <p>“Creating new categories”***</p>	<p>Develop and maintain a process-centered work orientation.</p> <p>Acknowledge the importance of influencing others in a positive way.</p> <p>Engage in knowledge construction.</p> <p>Work effectively in groups/teams.</p> <p>Take into account competing perspectives on complex issues.</p> <p>Acknowledge the importance of human empathy to problem solving.</p> <p>Pursue various goals simultaneously while considering shifting contexts.</p> <p>Challenge conventional or traditional thinking through new category constructions.</p> <p>Deal effectively with ambiguities and changing environments in public settings.</p>	<p>Acquire social, historical, and political awareness that enhance critical thinking competencies necessary for engaging in public affairs.</p> <p>Interpret and frame problematic situations according to the context in which they emerge and develop.</p> <p>Identify alternative courses of action to resolve problematic situations through conscious listening.</p> <p>Use individual assigned roles within a group/organization to manage collective work tensions.</p> <p>Persuade others to achieve short- and long-term objectives.</p> <p>Incubate ideas for short- and long-term decision-making purposes.</p> <p>Provide prompt responses to points/counterpoints in public and private debates.</p>

Notes.

\* *Drawing from Leadership: Theory and Practice* (6th ed., pp. 5–6), by P. G. Northouse, 2013, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

\*\* From *Mindfulness*, by E. J. Langer, 1989, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley/Addison Wesley Longman.

† From “The Construct of Mindfulness,” by E. J. Langer and M. Moldoveanu, 2000, *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(1), 1–9.

that the skills learned while actively working on various simulation exercises and learning new knowledge

helped me in my work with my ability to recognize seemingly simplistic political [points of view] and [to] deconstruct [that] simplicity into multidimensional models of analysis that reveal the good and the bad of city/state and federal politics. [The] knowledge [gained through classroom simulations] and the gained leadership abilities [are] recognized by my coworkers and supervisors...It has been nice to continue...dialogues started in the classroom and apply/introduce them to...other forums that welcome such thought.

In this case, it seems doing leadership (or leadership as process more broadly) means having: (a) the ability to recognize often diverse perspectives, or points of view; (b) an appreciation for social and workplace ambiguities; and (c) a positive public experience and welcoming attitude toward civic engagement.

### **INTERPRETIVE METHODOLOGY**

This study relied on several interpretive methodological techniques or qualitative methods for accessing the meanings—beliefs, values, and feelings (Yanow, 2000; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006)—associated with the student-participants who engaged in the two types of mindful classroom simulations employed in two upper-division undergraduate courses. These meanings inform and also explain the various actions and decisions taken by individuals and groups within classroom simulations. Keep in mind that at the center of any leadership development process (e.g., through the use of classroom simulations) are the ways in which individuals “affect the meanings, ideas, values, commitments, and emotions of” others within a team setting, organization, or group (Alvesson & Svingsson, 2003, p. 362). For this reason, an interpretive methodological orientation provides the most appropriate way to access and assess human

ideas, feelings, and values that are rooted in social constructions and other forms of historical contingencies that often determine, or at minimum explain, actions or behaviors (Bevir & Rhodes, 2004; Figueroa, 2010). The interpretive methods or techniques chosen here to access and understand these meanings “are based on the presupposition that we live in a social world characterized by the possibilities of multiple interpretations. As living requires sense-making, and sense-making entails interpretation, so too does analysis” (Yanow, 2000, p. 5). Moreover, as Jerry W. Willis et al. (2007) point out about maintaining an interpretive methodological orientation,

interpretivists hold that human beings have social agency and act on their own initiative, and that social phenomena are best studied by scrutinizing one situation in a particular context. [And] social reality is constructed through interaction, development of shared meaning and communication. (p. 192)

In terms of my own involvement in the simulations and interpretive research, I drew “on personal experiences in all [my] dimensions (kinesthetic, affective, cognitive, and so on) as a proxy for understanding others, contextualized by intersubjective knowing, in a comparative context” (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006). As many have noted, at the center of interpretive research is the researcher-analyst who “through a close interaction with the actors, becomes a ‘passionate participant’” (Diaz Andrade, 2009; Yanow, 1997). Overall, this interpretive enterprise affords the researcher-analyst access to various meaning-making sources and structures. These interpretive concerns (sources and structures), in fact, are constitutive of the practical/analytical skills development process: the multiple voices in practice (including the teacher as participant-observer), the diversity of individual and group perspectives and ideas, and the deeper understanding of the multilayer contexts or “situatedness of knowledge in action and production” in which policy and administrative issues emerge (Yanow, 1997).

In this study, I relied on three qualitative methods for word-data access, generation, and analysis (Prasad, 2005; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006) in order to assess the usefulness of classroom simulations (as learning spaces for student-participant meaning-making experiences) to build, develop, and nurture certain practical/analytical leadership skills. After gaining official Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval in January 2012, I then administered an open-ended questionnaire (14 questions) using Survey Monkey software to about 65 undergraduate students (approximately 22% rate of return) who participated in either or both of the simulations during the Fall 2010–Spring 2011 and/or Fall 2011–Spring 2012 semesters. The open-ended questionnaire asked students, among other questions, to share their lived experiences within classroom simulations, and to provide their own interpretations and understandings of the various simulation activities in light of individual assignment objectives, the broader competitive team-setting environment, and weekly changing contexts. Second, I relied on data from participant-observations done during all the simulation exercises. According to Harold Levine et al. (1980), participant-observation is a

naturalistic, qualitative research [technique] in which the investigator obtains [data] through relatively intense, prolonged interaction with those being studied and firsthand involvement in the relevant activities of their lives. The primary data are typically narrative descriptions (i.e., field notes) based on direct observation, informal conversational interviews, and personal experience. (p. 38)

In particular, I served as debate judge for both the U.S. Presidency course classroom simulation policy debates, and the U.S. Congress electoral campaign simulation political debates, related press conferences, and the “Meet the Press” forum. Finally, I drew from some documentary analysis done on a variety of sources from newspapers, e-mails, and handwritten personal notes, to in-class anonymous questionnaires and student and peer course evaluations, respectively.

### **Attending to Language Use and Meaning-Making Processes in Word-Data Analysis**

The use and understanding of language, and meaning-making processes more broadly, are important aspects of interpretive research and analysis in the social sciences and humanities (Geertz, 1973; Fischer, 2002). Fischer (2002) states, “The depth of such meanings...can be revealed only through detailed descriptions of the social context of the situation in which communication and action take place” (p. 150).

In this article, I closely attend to the language used and expressed by student-participants (among others) through “thick descriptions” of their own simulation experiences, and the connections between context and word choices each made while in teams within the mindful classroom simulations (Geertz, 1973). Note since social meanings “are not directly observable, the realm of meaning has to be approached through reflection and interpretive analysis” (Fischer, 2002, p. 139).

The three interpretive methods chosen afford a closer focus on language use, shifting contexts, lived experiences, and individual meaning-making processes that are essential to successful classroom simulations. In doing so, as a teacher I was able to understand the deeper values, beliefs, and feelings that inform the active learning processes established by mindful classroom simulations, but also the choices made by student-participants while each performed various leadership roles within the simulations. As Fischer asserts, “meaning operates in a complex of interaction involving different levels of awareness, abstraction, and control” (p. 139). These three levels of meaning are at the core of the mindful classroom simulations that are related to, and informed by, the teacher’s own educational goals with the use of this active learning tool. Finally, I also examined the descriptive language used by active audience members who served as simulation “voting publics”—local media, faculty colleagues, visiting students, and invited student family members and friends—to provide a broader context to understanding how these types of classroom simulations build certain practical/

analytical skills for doing leadership inside and outside the safe classroom environment.

## **TWO TYPES OF MINDFUL CLASSROOM SIMULATIONS**

Beginning in the Fall 2010 semester and through the Spring 2012, I used two types of what I have been calling mindful classroom simulations in two upper-division undergraduate courses—U.S. Congress and U.S. Presidency—at the University of Texas, Brownsville (UTB). These classroom simulations serve as critical pedagogical tools that illuminate the historical, theoretical, and institutional themes covered in the course. Student groups ranging from 10 to 40 in size (depending on course enrollment) constituted both simulations. All student-participants in these groups engaged in various writing and debating exercises, usually in front of small to medium-size audiences (up to 100 people). Each student-participant was expected to integrate the course materials into the simulation assignment. The remainder of this section describes in more detail all the main aspects of each mindful classroom simulation.

For three consecutive Fall semesters (2010, 2011, and 2012) in my U.S. Congress course, I implemented a Congressional Electoral Campaign Simulation that includes a one-day primary candidate debate, several post-primary political/policy debates, the presentation of two campaign political commercials per congressional candidate group, a "Meet the Press" political discussion forum hosted by media owners with the respective campaign press secretaries as guests, online media group reporting (each media group established blogs, or some online website to inform the public about each campaign's messages and electoral strategies), and a public town-hall style meeting at a central university location.

The congressional classroom simulation consists of the following roles. (These roles change depending on enrollment and various course themes.) Every student-participant in the particular group has a special role to play in the campaign: (a) a candidate; (b) a campaign

chairperson (e.g., chief policy advisor who designs campaign brochures/website); (c) a press secretary who writes press releases, responds to press inquiries, advises the candidate on how to handle the press corps and how to respond to the opponent's campaign attacks, etc.; (d) a public relations advisor who designs and directs filming of TV political commercials and advises the candidate on public image; and (e) a campaign web master who manages the campaign's web presence. The congressional simulation concludes with a general election held at the end of the semester; a winner is announced in the subsequent class session before final examinations.

In the Spring 2011 semester, I designed and implemented a different mindful classroom simulation in my upper-division U.S. Presidency course. This simulation does not emphasize electoral politics but rather focuses on debating contemporary policy issues through historical actors and their respective governing philosophies. The simulation is called *The Meeting of the Minds: Presidential White House Staff Forums (WHSF)*. Depending on the size of the class, the format is as follows: Six students select one historical president—regardless of party—randomly from a box and he or she will then embody that president by researching and learning everything possible about the elected official: ideological orientation, personal values/moral beliefs, underlying social guiding principles, and religious/racial views that often inform not only a person's broader thinking on social/political/public issues, but also shape the ways that leader engages in administrative rules and policy development, implementation, and evaluation over time. The rest of the class serves a variety of positions as part of the selected President's White House Staff (WHS): chief of staff, press secretary, foreign policy advisor, and domestic policy advisor. These teams compete for some incentives, such as points toward final course grade. I assign historical and contemporary readings but also send the respective teams the most relevant information (e.g., websites/web links) that cover, or discuss, the "hot" or "live" national policy area assigned for the week. As

the Texas Faculty Association (2011) reports on this simulation,

students [are presented] with a contemporary hot-button topic for them to research during the week, which may include stem cell research, abortion, and same-sex marriage. The simulation presidential debates [take] place [one day a week] with all students dressed in business attire.

Thus, the classroom simulations, more precisely the WHSF, takes seriously not only a potential leader's preparation and knowledge of current policy areas and internal institutional mechanisms (or organizational structures, rules, and procedures), but also the importance of public image in the short and long terms. Both of these areas are important and essential for public administrators and others aspiring to become successful leaders.

The most important aspect of both simulations, but in particular the WHSF, is the engagement in team-centered research, writing, and public presentations or debates. Teachers benefit from the reinforcement of main course themes and from making individual content materials applicable to simulation group work and public presentations. For example, one student-participant stated:

The extensive research done by the group and the contemporary issues shared by the respective media groups allowed me to learn new materials [on] American politics. The constant reminder by the media group and the rival [WHS] teams [regarding the importance of] issues like immigration reform, abortion rights, [and] homosexual rights...allowed me to research in depth the components in each respective case.

In terms of the WHSF, the president and his WHS are expected to learn and publicly discuss their positions on complex and often controversial national policy issues, such as affirmative action, environmental policy,

abortion, same-sex marriage, stem cell research, national security, and campaign finance reform, and address these through the various lenses of his or her chosen historical president. Some of the selected presidents have included Woodrow Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry Truman, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Ronald Reagan, and Bill Clinton. The general idea works as follows: If a student-participant chooses President Harry Truman, then he or she must embody Truman holistically by researching and learning everything about him—his ideological orientation, life philosophy, and social and political views on similar or comparable national issues—to determine how he would deal with a current policy area. The student basically becomes Truman the commander-in-chief/administrator/governor while working closely with four randomly chosen classmates who serve as White House staff members as previously described. One student interviewed by the local media said it most appropriately, "The goal for each team is to match these current policy issues with our [chosen simulation] president's social, political, and other views and voting patterns to determine how that president would stand on that particular [current] policy issue" (Texas Faculty Association, 2011).

As both instructor and simulation arbiter, I provide the policy area, specific issue, and related research questions, at least one week in advance starting mid-semester. Note only 20th century presidents are eligible for selection because part of the exercise is to try to apply 20th-century general principles to 21st-century policy problems. The presidential WHS members compete for about six to eight weeks also during the latter part of the semester as is normally the case during the Fall semesters with the congressional electoral simulations.

By the beginning of each simulation week, student-participants should already have in their possession the basic background information on the weekly national policy issue that would then get them started on their broader research. Considering this is a weekly

classroom simulation exercise with changing national or regional policy areas, and because there is usually so much literature on a particular topic (e.g., stem cell research), the students must also learn how to discriminate based on the type of argument their group wants to develop and present at the end of the week. This process takes different forms of leadership abilities from all levels within a group. First they must match their president's (or administrator's/governor's/mayor's) social, political, and other views (voting patterns) in historical context to often more complex current national/regional/international policy areas. Second, they need to learn how to anticipate counterclaims. And finally, they need to develop the ability to infer information from ambiguous data and justify their own claims.

To be successful, teams must learn to always anticipate the other side's position, or any possible objections to their group claims. This means preparation is important, and they ought to be prepared to defend their views, or past decisions, but also get ready to provide their own critiques of their opponent's past policy choices. Each team is assessed based on the quality of its individual claims presented; the type of evidence used as support for those claims; how they integrate historical, constitutional, economic, sociological, theoretical, and institutional data; and how they manage the allotted time during debates. What students realize is that the U.S. presidency extends beyond one individual. One student said, "We always talk about public figures, but this class gives us an idea of the function of it all. We are learning what goes on inside the executive office" (Texas Faculty Association, 2011).

In the beginning of class before each debate session, each team submits a two-page position paper (based on its position taken on the weekly national policy issue assigned). Then, at the end of each week, the teams are ranked according to a cumulative point system from highest to lowest. The top two scoring teams compete in a final policy debate on some national or international policy area in front of a large university-wide audience.

Both mindful classroom simulations have several similar objectives: (a) to engage students in debate on current "hot" or "live" national policy issues; (b) to teach students how to frame arguments based on historical, theoretical/ideological, constitutional, and other grounds; (c) to teach students the various ways either a president with his WHS and the Office of the President (EOP), or a congressional candidate and his or her campaign team propose, or counterpropose, solutions/positions on national policies while considering the other federal institutions, state governments, and international entities/contexts; (d) to teach students how to engage in what I call *critical learning processes* to integrating content, context, and word-data analysis by showing them how to draw on their personal experiences, intellectual curiosity, and individual imagination; and (e) to teach group dynamics and the benefits of working together inside and outside the classroom environment. These five purposes are closely linked to the broader practical/analytical skills and abilities that are developed over time—learning how to listen, think, incubate ideas, and react/respond swiftly and promptly to a point/issue/claim (while literally and figuratively performing on his or her feet before small, medium, and large audiences)—throughout the different stages in the process of accomplishing individual and group goals within a safe competitive classroom environment.

### **Classroom Simulations and Mindful Teamwork**

Part of the constitutive process (as shown in Table 1), informed by Langer's mindfulness concept, is participating in teamwork. Throughout the six- to eight-weeklong simulations, teamwork is the principal mechanism that makes the simulations work from beginning to end. Individual student-participants and the teacher will benefit from the across-group dynamics that develop within mindful classroom simulations emphasizing teamwork, public debates, and the critical reading of texts. These benefits range from the teacher reiterating the main course themes at different stages throughout the simulation activities and students

learning how to critique another perspective or point of view fairly, to assessing alternative lines of debate and competing outcomes. From a teacher's perspective, classroom simulations, and in particular teamwork, tend to reduce the possibility of having to race through course materials at the end of the semester as suggested or outlined in the course syllabus. Mindful teamwork, as a tool within the classroom simulations, enables a seamless integration of weekly course assignments—from the historical and theoretical foundations to the more pragmatic aims of each course. As one student-participant pointed out:

This class simulation helped me become a more open-minded person in a way of becoming friends with different types of people. For instance, in my group I had four extremely different individuals... We each had so many ideas that were [in no way] alike; [similarly with] our personalities. This simulation helped me realize that we are all just people and even though we act or think in different ways we can still work together and be successful.

As such, mindful teamwork within classroom simulations is one way to establish “new constructs” as Langer (1989) suggests for both students and teachers alike. For instance, one student-participant of the Congressional Electoral Simulation observed:

[Placing] us [in] teams was good for us despite the protests. The [team] confrontation helps us deal with personalities that range from aggressive to apathetic. The ability to get these individuals to work well together required a strong leader that was not only a good listener but [also] emotionally intelligent. Responding to each individual's needs as people... helped move the process along [within or through] group meetings, exchange of notes, team effort searches for references, leader follow-up e-mails/CCe-mails to ensure accountability.

These “new constructs” include the ability to listen and understand other people's expecta-

tions, objectives, and outcomes. From my own teaching experience with these simulation activities, immediate feedback from students following a simulation assignment is useful for keeping track of students' overall progress in grasping course materials and following semester themes. To illustrate further, two different student-participants pointed to the usefulness of teamwork, extended communication, and debate in the learning process:

Communication and teamwork [were] probably... the most vital parts of being a [participant in the classroom simulations]. We know that without constant texts, e-mails, phone calls, meetings, and even Skype, and lunch/dinner dates, our weekly debates would not have been possible. [Student 1, emphasis in original]

Debate teams... teamwork [were] difficult/confusing/time consuming! But very *worth it*. I came to love (and hate) the people I got to work with each week and our rivalry against the others was always nasty, but fun and friendly! [Student 2, emphasis in original]

Thus, from a student's point of view the ability to do leadership, in a practical sense, also means to involve oneself in these types of team-oriented activities that instill deeper and broader learning opportunities. Finally, from a teacher's view, the teamwork component to the classroom simulations serves as a constitutive learning experience for all involved in the simulations, and as a practical tool for getting most of the assigned coursework completed without having to shortchange any important themes toward the end of the semester.

### TEACHING THE IMPORTANCE OF PROCESS AS CRITICAL THINKING

Although Langer (1989) does not make it explicit, she suggests that developing a process orientation would benefit potential leaders. She claims, “A true process orientation also means being aware that every outcome is preceded by a process” (p. 75). Nevertheless, I would take it further: We need to take seriously the various

processes involved in teamwork including group problem solving while student-participants focus on accomplishing both individual and group goals—the process in thinking, the process in action, and the process in making choices—as almost essential for doing leadership. In sum, details found in process are important to understanding how things develop the way they do and how outcomes are produced through process as critical thinking. The types of mindful classroom simulations described here are grounded on this premise of process as critical thinking. This process orientation to developmental thinking informs the other skills necessary for doing leadership effectively, such as conscious listening, presence recognition, engaging different perspectives, and reacting/responding to claims. Some of these are discussed in the subsequent sections. Keep in mind that what I am calling conscious listening is at the core of Langer's mindfulness construct and a significant element to doing leadership more effectively within local, regional, and national political and public administration environments. As one student-participant expressed:

The class simulation improved my listening skills very much. Being part of one of the campaign groups, I had to listen to everything my candidate wanted from me and when we had debates I really [paid] attention to the other group's argument, which helped us fight back when we needed to [defend our views]. Being [on] a team was a challenge but we all learned from each other, and even if we didn't agree most of the time, we were all after the same goal [that meant] we would have to get it together and keep at it.

This comment captures one of the core dimensions of leadership as described here: the need to listen at all levels to prepare properly for the task at hand. Yet, another student-participant expanded the need for conscious listening that seems to underscore the broader process of learning to do leadership. He pointed out:

The different [simulation] exercises gave me different situations to be able to better listen to my classmates. It made me aware of various real life scenarios that may arise in which I need to listen well as [a leader].

This last testimony relates to another theme on the development of certain practical leadership skills: engaging and paying attention to different perspectives.

### **ENGAGING DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES AS A TEACHING TOOL: A PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING MINDFUL PRACTICAL SKILLS**

Assessing a problem or an issue from different perspectives not only helps a potential leader understand where he or she stands on that particular issue, but also provides students and teachers an appreciation for broader meanings beyond their own ethnocentric views (e.g., taking on changing, often ambiguous environments and complex levels of meanings). As Langer (1989) states, "Openness, not only to new information, but to different points of view is also an important feature of mindfulness" (p. 68). According to one student who participated in the Presidential WHS classroom simulation:

New information to win a debate helped me consider different [perspectives] that I normally would not have [considered] before. [B]eing put in an environment which is foreign to one's own personal views is not only helpful to develop critical thinking but [also] to have well thought out rebuttals [prepared].

Such attention to diverse views becomes a useful skill, especially for those working in positions of potential leadership, for instance, supervisors and managers from profit and nonprofit organizations and bureaucrats in public administration and state governance, who have the responsibility of overseeing staffs, balancing budgets, and multiple schedules, and working in teams for resolving common/collective problems. Moreover, attending to other perspectives affords individuals the opportunity to learn about often disparate ways of doing things within broader social/political life. As an

illustration, a Congressional Electoral simulation student-participant claimed:

[The] simulation...made me more aware of the impact of policies [on society]. It allowed me to look in more detail at certain legislations that I thought were meant to be progressive, yet had hidden set-backs. For instance, "No Child Left Behind" sounds like a magnificent bill, but forces teachers to teach to the test. I think these types of active classroom simulations are fun, and allow room [for] socializing with students from other fields of concentration. I think that it is of extreme importance to know [the] different points of view.

And finally, attending to "perspective" within a team setting provides individuals a rich environment to collaborate with not only audience members including the teacher but more importantly teammates who diverge from that individual's own beliefs and principles. Another testimony from a different student-participant highlights this last point:

The face-to-face debates along with the group deliberations further enhanced my listening skills. Such simulation activities mainly consist of perception, and every team member has a different view of the work done by the team. The team deliberation allowed for a constant exchange of...new and better answers for press conferences and...debates.

Note that confronting these public speaking phobias is important to learning how to do leadership as suggested in this article. Lastly, the same student-participant discussed the broader benefits of listening and learning from others' perspectives:

I think that [these] debates or even talking in front of class forces you to conquer your fears...and allows you to be open [to other] opinions. Most importantly, these simulations allow [me] to be more aware of the world and [my] surroundings.

Thus, perspective is an important attribute for a potential leader to develop and maintain over time.

## CONCLUSION

Since Fall 2010, I have incorporated two distinctive types of classroom simulations in two undergraduate upper-division undergraduate courses: U.S. Presidency and U.S. Congress. Because these simulations seek to develop practical/analytical skills, they also can be adopted in other undergraduate and graduate courses in both political science and public administration, among other social science (and humanities) courses from nonprofit management, human resource management, and public service and leadership, to American political parties, state and local government, bureaucratic politics, and governmental budgeting and finance. After receiving positive preliminary feedback about these simulations from students and others, I sought to understand more formally whether or not the use of these mindful classroom simulations would serve as a process for developing practical/analytical skills for "doing" leadership. Some of the more practical skills that mindful classroom simulations seem to develop over a six- to eight-week period range from conscious listening, political/policy writing, public speaking, argumentation/debating, and collegial group problem solving, to basic archival and database research, personal/group empathy, and appreciation for complex and often controversial ideas. Moreover, the simulations also helped students to learn course-specific content. For instance, both types of mindful classroom simulations encouraged student-participants to integrate course readings with practical exercises. As one Fall 2011 student-participant pointed out:

[Classroom simulations] put the material discussed [in class] into action. This process solidifies the original material discussed in a more tangible and memorable learning experience. Instead of memorizing, we applied our information in a way that helped in comprehension for a lifetime.

In sum, I document several practical/analytical skills that follow this learning process: establish critical reading, writing, listening, and speaking competencies, acquire/build social, historical, and political awareness through research and social application, learn about the importance of human empathy, especially for problem-solving purposes, use individual team roles to manage collective work tensions, and persuade others toward achieving short- and long-term goals.

In terms of the usefulness of mindful classroom simulations for doing leadership in particular, it has been revealed in this study, and, as I have stated elsewhere, "students enjoy the challenge the freedom to use their imaginations, explore new ways of thinking, and engage each other on otherwise tough issues, in a 'safe' classroom setting" (Texas Faculty Association, 2011). Moreover, these types of classroom simulations, especially as pedagogical tools, build individual confidence overall. Attesting to this last point are three student-participants who expressed that their individual confidence level increased during and after engaging in simulation activities. One particular student-participant claimed that she "did learn a lot of leadership skills [by serving as a] candidate. For one, I learned to be confident...[and now can] accomplish anything." A second student-participant asserted, "The simulation in the end forced me to be courageous and conquer my fears. It made me realize that I have potential." Finally, a third student-participant observed that

having been [press secretary] for my group and speaking in front of so many individuals that have had way more world/job/life experiences than I [have] and wowing them week after week was a great ego boost for me,. It makes me so much more confident in myself!

These comments reveal that mindful classroom simulations seem to play an important role in building confidence that also extends to relating well with people outside of the safe classroom environment, especially in public sector

positions in need of strong, active, and effective leadership. In a related subsequent project, I explore how—and the ways in which—these mindful classroom simulations also seem to encourage what I call *representation as performance* (student-participants as living representative texts, and their simulation outcomes/assignments as representative artifacts that together constitute two forms of public leadership performance).

Finally, in assessing the dynamics between the use of what I have called mindful classroom simulations, student active learning experiences, and the various practical/analytical skills developed, several lessons can be drawn for teachers to take into consideration if adopting such learner-centered pedagogical tools. First, teachers are free to experiment and design simulations based on the course objectives/learning outcomes that relate to the content areas students are expected to master within a given semester. Second, teachers who use this framework become more attuned to students' use of particular discipline-specific language or concepts, the improved ways in which students communicate with each other and the teacher, and the extensive meaning-making process that is often taken for granted in most college classrooms, if not the wider learning community environment. Teachers will witness a transformation beyond leadership skills (e.g., overall student confidence) among individual students and groups alike through the use of mindful classroom simulations. Third, mindful classroom simulations allow teachers to transform the entire classroom into writing intensive and public speaking labs that bring together whole communities of learners. Fourth, with the focus on building certain analytical/practical skills for doing leadership—as an important course goal also—these types of mindful classroom simulations help teachers rethink how to cover course content in a more interactive fashion on a weekly basis. Finally, teachers are able to understand the deeper values, beliefs, and feelings that inform the active learning process, but also the choices made by student-participants as each learns how to do leadership within the simulations, and beyond.

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