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A EULOGY TO A SUMMER PROGRAM: THE DEATH AND LIFE OF LEADERS OF CHANGE

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Nature's first green is gold,

Her hardest hue to hold.

Her early leaf's a flower;

But only so an hour.

Then leaf subsides to leaf.

So Eden sank to grief,

So dawn goes down to day.

Nothing gold can stay.

-- Robert Frost, "Nothing Gold Can Stay"

Leaders of Change (LOC) died this summer, at age nine. I knew it was dying last summer, at age eight, in the week of training before the program started. In the 2018 training, I was provided an opportunity to mark what the program was, to commemorate it for those who would listen and find common cause with the life it had lived. In this eulogy, I will recount that moment, in a humble effort to memorialize the program, and what lessons it might offer forward.

How did I know LOC was dying last summer, in 2018? It was on the agenda for the fourth day of training, for one hour: "Students and Staff Expectations/ LOC Model." Just the acronym—and the program was not so famous as to be known by just its initials. While in previous years I had been asked to lead sessions like this, this year I was curious to see how the Netter Center for Community Partnerships ("the Netter Center"), which coordinated summer programming including LOC, conceptualized what it was. Nevertheless, there were clear signs I already knew the program was dying in 2018, because if the LOC model was truly a unifying foundation for summer programming, it would not be discussed on the second to last day of training. It would also not be paired with "students and staff expectations" and given second billing. I got the phone call the afternoon before—"We noticed we didn't have anyone to lead the training tomorrow about what Leaders of Change is. Can you lead it?"

LOC was, at once, a suite of summer programs for high school-aged youth in West Philadelphia; the collaborative, participatory model through which its earliest programs (or, as we refer to them, iterations) were designed; and the group of young people who have been its backbone and lifeblood for the past nine years. At times, this has manifested in community-based youth participatory action research; at other times, in college bridge programs combined with critical explorations of high school graduates' own educational trajectories.

So, of course, I could talk to the group about LOC. I had done this before. It felt disingenuous to present this as the "model" that would underlie varying programs when the programs were already conceptualized and the important values and visions of the summer programing already discussed on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Schein's (1992) three-tiered conceptualization of organizational culture is a useful diagnostic of the impending death of a program. When a set of values and practices cease to exist at the level of basic underlying assumptions about the program—or even cease to be espoused values because those in leadership forget what they are—and exist solely as initials left on the fourth day of an agenda, twilight is upon them, and darkness is near. But in that last training of 2018, in advance of what turned out to be the last go-around for LOC, I had a chance to share what made it special with the participants gathered for training. In doing so, I had a chance to reflect on what this program's life had meant for so many high school students in Philadelphia. It was akin to a chance to converse with an elderly grandparent, and in that conversation, make sense of who they were and what their life had been. I share that conversation here, to commemorate the program's life.

The Training Begins

It was Thursday morning of 2018 Netter Center Programming training. It was nine o'clock in the morning. Participants arrived and mostly sat by other members of their iteration (program): one environmentally-based program, another cross-grade literacy program, a program by the Black cultural center on campus to foster a college-going mindset, our own college bridge program, and others. Iteration: another artifact, once short for "iteration of LOC." Did they know they were cousins, related to the now-deceased?

The warm-up I designed was intended to get us started realizing that LOC was something we were all doing, even if we did not quite know it; it was a "model" because it provided a way of thinking about how the Netter Center's various summer programs were united. I asked my colleagues to think about five skills that they imagined their summer program would help their students to build, and to list each skill on Post-it notes provided. With this task prepared, I introduced the question, the title: "What Makes Leaders of Change?" I told them I would give three "spins" on this question, three different answers—a testament to the remarkable versatility in what LOC was, and what impact it had had on students and instructors over the years.

I shared a picture of the program from the year before—or, rather, our iteration, Leaders of Change: College Bridge. (Notably, we were the only program to preface our title with Leaders of Change this summer.) The picture portrayed my colleague and co-director Ms. Warfield-Henry, eight high school graduates/college-going freshmen, a long-term Philadelphia councilwoman, and myself, smiling before the pre-freshmen's presentations. This picture showed what our program had grown into, and as the slide on the screen showed our Summer 2017 crew, I looked out to the leaders of programs in 2018, and I thought: *here's what we had built, over nine years of iteration in the truest sense of the word: an opportunity for college-going graduated seniors to immerse themselves in a university setting, develop academic skills and navigational capital (Yosso, 2005), and be explicitly taught the culture of power in universities (Delpit, 1988) while simultaneously conducting a youth participatory action research (YPAR) project (e.g., Mirra, Garcia, & Morrell, 2016) that reflected on their own schooling experiences in order to speak back and spark change for the cohorts behind them. The College 101 course, taught by alumni from the program, was a chance to explicitly learn and build the skills for navigating campuses as first generation students; the Critical Reading and Writing course, taught by Ms. Warfield-Henry, was a chance to explicitly develop the academic skills they needed; the Urban Education course, an adapted version of the undergraduate course I taught at the university, was a chance to learn about the relationship between equity and schooling to ground their YPAR projects. And here the pre-freshmen were in this photo, at the culmination of the summer: dressed professionally; smiling broadly; sharing a summer's worth of growth, both in substance of their recommendations back to their schools and in form of papers and presentations that would serve them well for where they were going. They had a sense of accomplishment from the summer and excitement for move-in day and orientation.*

I looked back up at the photo on the slide. No relatives from the Netter Center attended to see what had emerged from a summer of possibilities. No relatives from their schools were able to attend, to hear their recommendations. The Councilwoman came—was this for the photo op or to truly listen to what young people have to say as the "ultimate stakeholders" (Su, 2009) in our schools? Looking back, this was clearly a sign LOC was dying: energies directed elsewhere, other priorities not pausable for the presentations—more object than subject. No time to consider this now, in the training. I moved on to the next slide.

Creation, Creativity

"What Makes 'Leaders of Change' - Spin #1." To the audience, I provided an articulation of what grounded this program, what defined what a LOC was. In 2010, when LOC began, we called it the 2-1-5, in reference to Philadelphia's area code. Two (2) big ideas: that students can be change agents and that knowing oneself and one's college and career goals can help. One (1) mission: that we would help engage youth's passions and talents to provide opportunities to build commitment, contribution, and connectedness, to become change agents in their schools and community. Five (5) essential questions that guided our exploration: Who am I? Where am I going? How am I going to get there? What communities am I a part of? How can I be a change agent in those communities?

I thought back to the very first summer, in 2010, being part of a team of five or six who designed LOC at University City High School. Looking up at the slide of the 2-1-5, I recalled: *It's as if we were given ingredients and asked to create something delicious. The Philadelphia Youth Network provided six weeks of funding for rising high school seniors, paid as employees in a service learning project. The College Board provided us the full CollegeEd curriculum, to facilitate students' conceptualizations of their futures, the arcs to getting there, and the steps along the way. An expert and organizer from a local non-profit business and economic development center was there. An educator from a local environmental sustainability-focused nonprofit who supported youth action research projects was there. To create and design the program, four school-based Student Success Center employees of the Netter Center with expertise in college and career development, plus three would-be-future teachers with a lesson-planning eye, worked together to plan. And 60 talented, engaged, excited students (employees), unsure of what the summer would hold in store for them, waited for the first day. My colleague John Mull defines creativity for teaching as an*

imaginative activity, which is "fashioned so as to produce appropriate actions or outcomes associated with the professional work of teaching that are novel and useful." I think back on the creativity of this group, in the process of the creation of LOC: its birth.

This first original creation had a decidedly YPAR emphasis to it, even though we didn't use that language or consult YPAR frameworks (e.g., Mirra, Garcia, & Morrell, 2016). We split students (employees) into six teams, each responsible for deciding on an issue that mattered to their communities, researching that issue both through background texts as well as interviews and surveys in their communities, and then presenting and discussing their "change campaigns" at a community stakeholders' roundtable. I remember the conviction with which our team, Team B, decided to work to improve community-police relationships; the energy with which they sought to understand how their peers felt about this issue; the courage it took for them to enter the police station—this physical manifestation of a felt oppression, this geographic location that sparked painful memories for some —and begin to interview officers about their perspectives; the accomplishment that came with dialoguing with others at the end to push the issue forward. Looking back with frameworks from the academy, this program valued preparing students to be participatory citizens in a democracy, on issues that mattered to them (e.g., Dewey, 1938); it also engaged students in a problem-posing critical pedagogy, which centered their knowledge and their voices in conversations about issues of justice (e.g., Freire, 1998). The experience felt transformative. This was what the 2-1-5 looked like, in the first summer of LOC's life. I moved to the next slide.

Crisis, Clarity

I looked out to the audience in the training session, and then up to the title of this next slide: "What Makes Leaders of Change - Spin #2." This slide took a different angle on the question. Whereas the 2-1-5 in the first spin was about what defined LOC as a program, this one involved an emerging understanding of the identities youth were taking on as they developed through participation in the program. The slide had a Venn diagram with three overlapping circles: becoming a college-ready student, becoming a career-ready professional, and becoming an agent of change. Sometimes, we emphasized the ways in which students were developing 21st century workplace skills (a mandate of the Philadelphia Youth Network grant), and students in building these skills could imagine themselves as being and becoming—taking on that identity of—a professional. In our college-ready work, students built those skills toward applying for college and could begin to imagine themselves as college students—originating in our use of the CollegeEd curriculum and in subsequent grants received by the Netter Center. And true to its origins, our goal was to create structured experiences for students to develop the skills to make change, and to truly begin to see themselves as leaders who could transform society, rather than solely as individuals defined by the status quo and constrained by structured inequities.

I thought to myself how hard-won this three-circle understanding of the development of our youth was*It came at a moment of crisis, or perhaps, incoherence, listlessness, loss of purpose. In 2014, Glen Casey, an alumni of University City High School and the third summer program of LOC, had been the first alumni to work in LOC. LOC had evolved into a focus on college preparation, and this particular summer, Glen assisted students in a biology lab research-focused iteration of the program. Glen contacted me and explained the way the program was unfolding this summer. He was concerned it had lost something it had when he had experienced it: the leaders of change part. It was a college bridge program, providing an important opportunity for students to come onto an Ivy League college campus, imagine themselves in this context, and develop key academic skills in the sciences. However, it had no angle of youth leadership, of engaging youth in the consideration of societal issues, of positioning them as agents of change.*

I looked back up at the Venn Diagram, and thought back to the summer of 2015, when we developed it*I could picture them around my backyard patio table: Glen, having been in LOC and supported college bridge; Bear and Carmen, who continued to work with the YPAR-structured iterations like the original LOC; Jess and Giselle, who had designed and led a cross-grade literacy program, in which high school students were engaged as teachers and mentors of elementary school students, tackling issues of critical media literacy and ensuring students had access to high quality reading instruction. The Venn Diagram emerged from our conversations as a way to conceptually understand what united our programs: their conceptualization that youth became leaders of change at the intersection of college, career, and activism. We worked to articulate what specific skills each of our iterations—the origin of that term!—developed, and how students might be engaged in a progression across these iterations from before 9th grade to after graduating 12th grade.* This backyard roundtable activity, essentially, became the instructions the participants in our 2018 training were about to receive. I switched to the next slide.

Titled "Iterations," the instructions were clear. Participants were to gather together in their iterations for Summer 2018. They were to share out the Post-its they had created at the beginning of the session. As a group, they were to consider where each Post-it skill fell on the Venn Diagram: "In what ways can you frame the skills students learn in your program according to these three broad sets of skills?" Groups took a solid 20-25 minutes to do this, building relationships with each other as they negotiated the joint enterprise (Wenger, 1998) of their programs. I walked around, listening to the conversations among groups, hearing the ways in which, unbeknownst to them, they were all speaking the same language and, across groups, how we all had the same goals. This is why we were iterations of a common "LOC Model," even if it did not become apparent until day four of

the week's training.

Lessons, Legacy

As a teacher, I am loathe to interrupt generative conversations when progress is being made and the energy for the work is palpable. But the session was nearly over; there were perhaps three or four minutes left. I used my loudest teacher voice and likely said what I often say in these moments: "I am sorry for rudely interrupting so many good conversations all at once." I switched to the final slide: "What Makes Leaders of Change: Spin #3." This last spin was a spin forward: how to think about making a LOC program. In essence: what conceptual tools and scholarly mindsets would aid participants as they thought about designing and planning their iteration. On the slide, I briefly previewed three elements that had been critical to our understanding of the process of making our LOC programs over the years. First, there was a strong sense of backward planning, drawing from Wiggins and McTighe's (2005) work, beginning with Stage 1 goals and essential questions: *rooted in the 2-1-5, and in the Venn Diagram, I thought to how College Bridge had come to be about the twin questions of developing successful future freshmen in tandem with elevating their voices around what they need and what their high school cohorts behind them deserve. Then, there was Stage 2 design of assessments: what is the authentic experience that will culminate this program and show us students have developed as career-ready, college-going agents of change—like writing a college-level research paper about the importance of library access, or teacher-student relationships, or access to extracurriculars, and delivering these messages to school stakeholders to make change.* And then finally, there was Stage 3, the design of the sequence of learning activities to get there. This is one of LOC's legacies, I believe: drawing on these tools of instructional planning to create a learning and leading experience across all three circles of the Venn diagram. Left behind on Google Folders, likely long since forgotten, are the artifacts of these designs, a reification of our work that had naturally developed over the years (Wenger, 1998).

Second on the slide were sociocultural theories of learning, which help explain how a learning experience like ours can support students' development as career-ready professionals, college-going students, and agents of change. Over my time as a teacher and doctoral student, I came to understand that sociocultural theories frame learning as occurring within a community, engaged in the development of proficient practice in a certain realm and a concomitant transformation of identity in that realm (Wenger, 1998). The bullet points told a brief story of how we had come to understand learning. Bullet point one said: "More knowing other/ oldtimer." *I thought back to our recent years in College Bridge and the power of these bullet points. The importance of the more-knowing other, who can speak to and demonstrate what success looks like; as this was Ms. Warfield-Henry and I as instructors, it was even more pivotally our undergraduate associates, who taught College 101 and who were in college at the present, that could truly speak to what college was like.* Bullet point two read: "Make the invisible visible."*I thought to how explicit we had learned to be in describing those hidden skills of navigating institutions like college—especially predominantly white institutions for our first-generation students of color—emphasizing the importance of building a support network and mastering the social skills alongside the academic skills to make it to and through college.* Bullet point three stated: "Scaffolds and supports." *How did our staff insist on high, college-level expectations and intentionally develop those tools to help students achieve them, like graphic organizers, one-on-one mentoring, structured seminars, reflective opportunities, library scavenger hunts, and so on.* From these sociocultural bullet points, LOC's legacy also includes, I believe, an understated approach to learning that helps students enter these communities of practice in careers, college, and citizenship.

Last on the slide were the critical theories that shaped our conceptualization of students as change agents. This is what Glen observed was missing from the 2014 program. This is the true "big idea" of what makes LOC what it is—even if the content, and the role, and the format, and the location, and the iteration are different. Drawing from Freire (1998), the bullet points began with problem posing: *I thought to how we scaffolded opportunities for students, in the 2011 YPAR version, to see issues of personal and environmental health, business ownership, residential conditions, safety, and community, as issues related to justice and to then structure their investigations of their own neighborhood areas in relation to these categories. The bullet points then moved to co-investigation: I thought to how College Bridge evolved to clearly value the knowledge our high school graduates and our undergraduates and we, as high school teachers, had and to investigate these issues together while always recognizing how we are learners from the ultimate stakeholders, too. Action and reflection towards transformation was the final bullet point: that core sense of critical praxis (Freire, 1998), which insists that our students' work is not simply to succeed in the society as it is, but also to see themselves as change-makers into what society should be.* LOC's legacy includes—and insists!—that societal change occurs not only in providing increased access of marginalized youth to college and careers critical for success in today's society, but also in providing these youth opportunities to critique, challenge, and change our society and act towards its transformation. These are why the two big ideas in the 2-1-5 are juxtaposed together. This is why the three Venn diagram circles are intersecting.

The training session ended, and the participants departed. It was as if this session was a conversation with them, in their old age, after they had reflected on their life's twists and turns, their adaptations and changes, their moments of clarity and moments gone astray, their clear-eyed sense of the legacies they wished to leave. That was one year ago. I saw a vibrancy in them last summer—in our iteration, LOC: College Bridge—even as I observed their distance from the other programs, whose participants were trained. When one dies, no one can ever live its name again, but they can draw on their lessons and preserve and build on and from their legacy. Though leaf subsides to leaf, and dawn goes down to day, when one can mark the passing of a season,

or a day, or a life, or yes, a summer program, they can then seize the subsequent spring, the next tomorrow, the next opportunity for creation and creativity. In this way, programs worth their weight in gold live on.

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