How to Use Teachable Moments
By Jeremy LaCasse, geLi Faculty Dean
April 3, 2011

Students and the experience of school provide numerous moments every single day to help students learn to lead. Here’s a simple guide about how to utilize these moments: To utilize these moments, we need to keep the following things in mind:

1. Have a plan. Identify what it is that you want to be teaching when you encounter a teachable moment. The objective does not need to be complex. In fact, it needs to be simple. For example:
   a. Helping a student to be aware of the impact of her or his behavior on someone or the group.
   b. Providing coaching to a student as he or she attempts to solve a group-based problem. Have a plan for what you want to coach about. Using a sports metaphor, one does not teach the entire game of tennis in one lesson. Instead, break it down. Pick a particular piece of leading and help the student consider that piece.
   c. Develop a skill such as running a meeting or providing effective feedback. You are looking for a moment when a student might be most ready to benefit from this learning and skill.

2. Pick the right moment. Remember that students who are emotionally engaged tend to learn more than students who are indifferent or highly stressed. Your job is to find a moment when the student is most likely to be receptive to what it is that you are trying to teach.

3. Once you see the moment, have the confidence to step in and utilize that moment. This is easy to write and, with practice, easy to do. It is getting over the initial stress of not knowing if it will go well. Think of it as similar to the first class you ever taught in your subject area. As you teach, you become more confident and effective because you respond to the feedback your students and colleagues provide. You utilize that feedback to arrive at more effective means of teaching.

4. As the moment unfolds, do your best to adjust to the nature of the moment. This is similar to anything that you might teach. You gather feedback from your students and your own observations and attempt to understand whether they are, indeed, learning what you hoped. You make adjustments that increase your effectiveness.

5. When it is over, let it go. Knowing when the moment has passed is as important as seeing and then utilizing it. As they say in Texas, when the horse is dead, get off.

6. Have patience. No student has ever learned how to do something perfectly the first time. Know that you will have other opportunities to reinforce this lesson and make sure you are ready to take advantage of them when they arise. You will also have opportunities to improve your own pedagogy of leadership.

In summation,
   a. Know what you want to teach.
   b. Keep an eye out for circumstances or help organize an experience that will help a teachable moment arise.
   c. Take a chance. If you are prepared, engaging a student in the learning process is a much less daunting task.
The work you do of developing leadership capacity in your students is some of the most important work you do in the course of a day. Every interaction taking place in your school is an opportunity for a student to learn to lead. Don’t let them go to waste.