

## Before and After

### Revising an Online Discussion Topic with UDL and Cultural Responsiveness to Increase Student Engagement:

**Discussion Board Title:** What are the Qualities of a Good Leader?

**Format:** Distance Learning, Asynchronous

#### Before (Spring 2020):

**Preparation:** Read the excerpt from *The Prince* by Machiavelli.

**Discussion Board Title:** Machiavelli's *The Prince*

**Prompt:** Evaluate Machiavelli's concept of fear/love and discuss whether either of these is a better approach for a ruler. Reply to two (2) peers.

#### Before (Fall 2022):

**Preparation:** Read the excerpt from *The Prince* by Machiavelli, as well as other materials in the module.

**Discussion Board Title:** Fear or Love?

**Prompt:** In *The Prince*, Florentine humanist Niccolò Machiavelli claimed that the function of a ruler or government is to preserve order and security. To achieve this, the ruler may use any means necessary so long as he does not turn the people against him. A ruler could keep the people on his side by instilling fear in them or by provoking love. Both approaches might keep the people in line either by making them so scared of their leader or by making them incredibly loyal to him. In the end, Machiavelli argued it was better for a ruler to be feared than loved. Is ruling with fear or with love the better choice for effective leadership?

#### For the Initial Post:

1. Select a ruler from **history** (any ruler from any time or place that we covered in class or that you know of from another history class, or any person currently ruling anywhere in the world today) or **fiction** (any genre from literature, TV, film).
2. Briefly describe the ruler you selected: who, what, where, when they ruled (or the fictional setting in which they ruled).
3. Describe at least one (1) situation, circumstance, or event associated with this ruler in which they wielded power by instilling fear or love in the people.
4. Evaluate how successful this ruler was in this instance or overall.
5. Cite any outside sources you referenced in this post.
6. Include the name of your ruler and fear/love in the title of your initial post.

#### For the Replies:

Ask questions, agree/disagree (and give reasons why), make comparisons, give another example that supports or contradicts the claim made in the initial post.

**Commented [BP1]:** An excerpt from this classic Renaissance work of political theory was on the syllabus for this intro-level History course. The discussion was intended to take place in-person, but as the topic fell near the end of the semester, the format shifted quickly to an asynchronous discussion after the March 2020 pivot to online teaching. The speed of the pivot meant that there wasn't a lot of time to think deeply about assessments and course design.

**Commented [BP2]:** The prompt is broad enough to permit students to voice their opinions; however, there is no context or clarity on how to evaluate the source or what to look for in the replies. The Spring 2020 discussion devolved very quickly into students just agreeing with what someone else said, if they replied at all.

**Commented [BP3]:** This was a 16-week online asynchronous course which allowed a full week for each module; students had plenty of time to consider more robust discussion tasks.

**Commented [BP4]:** I wanted students to consider leadership and what makes a good leader, but within the parameters and concepts established within the source document. Students could compare or use Machiavelli's concepts to evaluate other rulers.

**Commented [BP5]:** Students had **choice** in their selection, which was a way to embed **inclusivity** and **cultural responsiveness** into the assessment. Students could also show their learning by revisiting rulers already covered in the course. The result was that students chose rulers past and present from nearly all corners of the world, and a variety of pop culture figures. Many students chose rulers from Asia and commented how under-represented these rulers were in the textbook.

**Commented [BP6]:** Students could **apply their learning**, based upon reading the source and the other materials (texts, videos, podcasts) in the module by making the comparison and explaining the context of their selection in relation to what they've learned. Additionally, **students were making their learning relevant for them**, albeit at a historical distance.

**Commented [BP7]:** Students **practiced research skills**, which was a learning outcome for the course, but in a low-stakes assessment.

**Commented [BP8]:** More detailed instructions for the peer replies, but still **broad enough to give students agency** in who they replied to and how they framed the replies.

After (2023 to present):

**Preparation:** Read the excerpt from *The Prince* by Machiavelli, as well as other materials in the module; complete the short reading comprehension quiz on *The Prince*.

**DB Title: Qualities of Leadership**

**Prompt:** Machiavelli certainly had ideas about the qualities necessary for leadership. Politics has changed drastically since then, but Machiavelli would probably still acknowledge the complexity of modern leadership. As global citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and future leaders, you will have many opportunities to evaluate and select leaders, perhaps even be a leader yourself in some capacity. Now is the time to start thinking about the qualities you want to have (or be) in a leader.

**For the Initial Post (text, video, or audio):**

- Reflect on what leadership means to you. What qualities do think make a good or even a great leader? How do these qualities differ from the two extremes of love and fear that Machiavelli argued (include one quote from *The Prince* as evidence)? Why do you think these qualities are important today and would they have been important in Machiavelli's day?
- Give an example of someone you think is a good leader and discuss how this person reflects the qualities of leadership you value. This example can be any of the following:
  - a) a **real person** who has some leadership position and is a **public figure** (i.e., someone in government at any level, an organization, a religious leader, a department, a team, etc.), and may or may not be known to you personally;
  - b) a **real person** in a leadership position that you do know personally and who you've interacted with in some way but who **isn't a public figure** (i.e., your soccer coach, club president, etc. Note: avoid using their real name – just use their title or initials since they are private figures);
  - c) a **historical figure** (i.e., from anywhere in the world, any time period); or
  - d) a **fictional person** from popular culture (i.e., tv, film, literature, theater, etc.). Include some background information about this person to establish the context of their leadership, as well as circumstances or situations when this person displayed the qualities of leadership that you value.

**For the two (2) Replies to Peers (text, video, or audio):**

- Focus on the qualities of leadership described by your peers. What do you agree with? How can you complicate or challenge these qualities with other qualities? Ask questions, disagree, or even give a counterexample to help your peers hone their ideas about leadership.

**Commented [BP9]:** Taking a quiz on the reading prior to the discussion helps ensure that students understood the concepts and did the reading.

**Commented [BP10]:** Although Machiavelli framed his theory in relation to political rulers, what he was really talking about was leadership. My goal with the discussion in this version was to make it more relevant for students, not something they could think about in the abstract with historical or fictional characters, but in everyday life.

**Commented [BP11]:** This approach pivots the discussion from the abstract to something that is **meaningful and immediate** to each student. This also contains an **inclusive** approach because everyone has their own values.

**Commented [BP12]: Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** applied so that students have options for the posts and can choose the option that best meets their individual **accessibility** needs.

**Commented [BP13]: Reflection practice** embedded into the assessment by means of thinking critically about their own views in relation to what they've learned.

**Commented [BP14]:** Students still required to utilize the source and make comparisons but the comparison is more relevant to each student.

**Commented [BP15]:** Another opportunity for student agency in the selection; plus students can use their example as evidence to support their ideas about leadership. Students are making their own argument instead of just evaluating Machiavelli's.

**Commented [BP16]:** Student can select real people, whether known directly or indirectly, to show leadership in action today. This helps **make the assignment meaningful to each learner**.

**Commented [BP17]:** Students still have the option of a historical or fictional figure if that's how they find meaning in the assignment.

**Commented [BP18]: UDL** applied to the replies as well.

**Commented [BP19]:** This gives students a little bit of direction in what to look for as they read through the posts.

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center by [email](#) or submit a [consultation request form](#).