LEADING THROUGH THE ARTS:
AN AESTHETIC LEADERSHIP RESEARCH PROJECT

by

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Abstract

This project was to engage in a reflective inquiry process exploring notions of student leadership in the context of an extra-curricular drama production in a British Columbia ‘offshore’ school in Bundang, South Korea. There are two key components: a film project, and accompanying documents including a literature review, reflections and implications. Research related to student leadership, drama as a subject, drama assessment and how drama can work in assistance with EL learners has been reviewed for the purpose of supporting a documentary style film produced at BIS Canada, a BC Offshore school in Korea. The documentary film followed an extraordinary group of ELLs that were involved in the creation of an extra-curricular secondary school drama production. The creation process took place at BIS Canada from September 2014 to March 2015. Through interviews and candid observation, evidence of student leadership, achievement, growth, confidence and a sense of self was displayed through the medium of drama and captured in the documentary film. Reflection on this process and what can be gained through this method has been displayed. Another surprising result was a significant shift in the leadership style of the drama teacher/director in response to the desire to support the emergence of self-regulated student leaders.
Overview of Project and Accompanying Documents

The purpose of this project was to engage in a reflective inquiry process exploring notions of student leadership in the context of an extra-curricular drama production in a British Columbia ‘offshore’ school in Bundang, South Korea. There are two key components: a film project, and accompanying documents including a literature review, reflections and implications. The film highlights specific cases of student leadership and follows those particular stories as they unfold. By filming the process over a long period of time, and then editing key points of the footage together, significant instances of student leadership growth were observed.

The process of capturing the footage for the film project was a tireless one, where by from September to March, the camera had to be always rolling. It was this observational style of documenting their journey that allowed nothing to be missed.

The topics of research in support of the film project were varied, however connections towards the common theme of encouraging self-regulated student leaders emerged. The research reviewed in support of the film is heard through narration outlining the growth taking place during this process. A detailed account of the research that drove this project is outlined in literary review section of this document. Therefore in the film the research reviewed is both summarized and simplified due to the full account provided in the literary review.

The next component of this document summarizes the overall purpose and benefits for the research that was used in support of the film. This sections highlights key connections from what the research reviewed stated and how that was displayed in the film.

The subsequent section offers insight into the rationale and process undertaken to create
the film and associated arts-based inquiry into student leadership. A reflection on the process is provided to encapsulate the learning that has taken place during the course of this project by exploring insights gained regarding student leadership, research in drama education, the emergence of new understandings about my own leadership style in relation to student leadership.

The document concludes with an account of the results as well as recommendations for educators or specialist in this field. Finally, a conclusion of the reflection is presented summarizing the positive and overall benefits of this unique inquiry project.
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Documentary Film

Please follow the following link to view the film:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_KwtYudhxU
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Review of Literature

The following review is of a collection of research assembled for the purpose of supporting a documentary style film produced at BIS Canada, a BC Offshore school located in Bundang, South Korea. The film followed a small group of secondary students that were highly involved in the creation of an extra curricular secondary school drama production. The creation process took place at BIS Canada from October 2014 to March 2015. Through interviews and candid observation, evidence of student leadership, achievement, growth, confidence and a sense of self was displayed through the medium of drama. Therefore, research related to student leadership, drama research, drama assessment and how drama can work in assistance with EL learners has been assembled in support of the film.

Student Leadership

Neil Dempster and Alf Lizzio are both professors at Griffith University in Australia and are recognized educational leadership experts. Alf Lizzio has received the citation for his outstanding contribution to student learning from the Australian Learning and Teaching Council and is a noted expert in leadership development. Neil Dempster is an Honorary Fellow of the Australian Council for Educational Leaders, and a Fellow of the Australian College of Educators where he held the post of National President in 2006 & 2007.

In their forward thinking article Student Leadership: Necessary Research, Dempster and Lizzio (2007) question and evaluate why there seems to be a major rise towards an interest in student leadership in secondary schools. Moreover, their article presents evidence for the existence of a myriad of both qualitative and quantitative studies that offer results primarily
based on an interpretation of what adults feel student leadership should look like and how it should be implemented for young people. That being said, only a few studies are closely reviewed in the article. The authors create a speculative summary regarding the necessity for focused research based on what young people conceive leadership to be and in what circumstances they would see it being important. The article calls for a different kind of research to be conducted in the field of student leadership, and for it to be conducted with a student point of view with student involvement being at the forefront. Finally, they conclude the article by offering suggestions for research for student leadership that is centred around students as they have inferred that this is the most effective process for obtaining an accurate and relevant evaluation.

Dempster and Lizzio (2007) explain that researchers Komives, Mainella and Longerbeam (2006) created a leadership identity development model that was based on interviews of thirteen high school students in the United States. The aim of the model was to discover how adult leaders could foster student leadership development and how they could better understand the process a person experiences in creating a leadership identity.

Dempster and Lizzio (2007) claim that student leadership involvement is on the rise in secondary schools, especially the interest and engagement by the students themselves. The authors present students’ testimonials proclaiming that student leadership is solely dictated by teachers and the student voice is often uninvolved in the decision making process. Though these findings make a strong statement, it must be noted that they represent a minimal perspective due to the number of cases presented.
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The authors highlight that there has been very little research conducted about the structure and implementation of student leadership from the students' point of view. Dempster and Lizzio (2007) summarize this lack of focused research as neglecting the ‘student voice’ stating that “specifically, this research focuses on how adults foster youth participation and leadership in school reform efforts” (p. 280).

The authors discuss the work of Crowther, Hann and Mc Master (2001) who suggest ‘parallel leadership’ is necessary concept that should be implemented by secondary schools. This approach focuses on teacher and principal leaders but is highly dependent on student engagement in order for it to be successful. Due to a lack of student involvement in the structure of the leadership opportunity, total engagement is challenging as students are alienated from its structure. Additional evidence is presented as the authors compare research on student leadership and prove so much of it is centred around what they call an outside-in point of view. This outside-in approach included one survey describing student leadership by evaluating the content analysis of phrases about leadership categorized into five themes originally proposed from work with private and public sector managers. The authors highlight that this research provides the perspective of experienced adult leaders used as the trigger for responses from younger people about leadership.

Dempster and Lizzio (2007) conclude the article by presenting suggestions for improvements towards research of student leadership in secondary schools. They suggest that new research should include criteria that is purely student focused, that attempts to get into the heads of the students involved. Some key suggestions were to conduct studies that try to understand how adolescents understand and conceptualize the abstract concept of leadership, and
studies which provide responses of the who, how and why of leadership amongst young people, as well as studies which lead to understanding the purposes of leadership as seen through student eyes. Finally, there is a recommendation to conduct cross-cultural studies of adolescent views of leadership.

Though Dempster and Lizzio (2007) identify the shortcomings of the current research on student leadership, and they develop ideas of how to possibly circumvent those shortcomings, they fall short of a plan of implementation of these ideas. The absence of any suggestive strategies is the main weakness of an otherwise very extensive review of the current research on student leadership.

Mozhgan, Parivash, Nadergholi and Jowkar’s (2011) article entitled Student leadership competencies development provided excellent insight on that topic focusing specifically on university students. Their research followed a qualitative method of collecting data and then the researchers organized and grouped that data to create statistics. The researchers conducted a wide range of qualitative methods for gathering data, including in-depth individual interviews, focus group interviews, review of documentation, and informal discussions with participants throughout the qualitative research gathering process. Their findings displayed several factors affecting student leadership competencies development including individual factors, experiences and involvement in school or class programs and finally the school environment.

Once the qualitative data was gathered it was arranged into a quantitative summary to more easily identify similarities, trends and possible anomalies. The researchers first organized the data, then generated categories. Next they looked for themes or patterns within the data, then
they tested emerging hypothesizes against the data. Finally, they looked for alternative explanations by changing the emerging themes.

Initially, the researchers’ qualitative studies displayed information that was based on individual considerations relating to leadership knowledge and attitude. Self-confidence, self-sufficiency, emotional intelligence and extroversion were all considerations. Extroversion and emotional intelligence were presented as two of the most effective elements for student leadership development according to the preliminary research the authors’ reviewed before conducting their study. The results of the preliminary research reviewed mirrored the results of Mozhgan et al’s (2011) work. Though these aspects stood out as key factors for student leadership development, the authors’ study found that there were a substantial number of other elements worth noting. Elements such as self perception, making use of former experiences, understanding differences between various viewpoints, recognition of different cultures, creativity and innovation were all relevant.

Another main theme within the research related to student experiences and involvement within class or school programs. It was concluded that aspects like student experiences, peer relationships and student-faculty relationships are necessitated by certain skills; such as communication skills, both verbal and non verbal, and active listening were proven to be essential in developing trusting relationships with both peers and faculty to create effective student leaders.

In addition to individual factors, experiences and involvement in school or class programs, as well the school environment, are significant in student leadership competency development. The size and type of school can vastly affect the previous factors in a positive or
negative way. Depending on how extroverted an individual student leader is, a large or small school environment could act as a benefit or detriment.

The aim of the study was to inform university personnel with current and accurate information on how to best prepare future leaders for effective leadership in the twenty-first century. Due to the wide range of qualitative techniques used for gathering information from students the methods enabled a very honest and personal response towards the subject of student leadership competencies development. Assembling the information into quantitative data allowed for the information to be more easily summarized and understood. The main deficiency with the study is that the researchers do not reveal the number of participants that were put through these extensive qualitative studies. Therefore we can not fully know if these findings carry enough weight to be relevant. We can still however, use the study alongside other research to make comparisons of similarities and differences on a general level. The conclusions discovered in review of the previous articles’ studies display strong connections to the findings relevant in my own work with student leaders. I have found that as a result of the established relationships I have with my students, the small school environment where we work as well as the extroverted qualities of most drama participants have allowed leaders to emerge. In addition, by facilitating chances for leaders to have their own voice within leadership opportunities has been vital in the success of my students becoming effective leaders.

**Research in Drama: Issues and Challenges**

Research methodology in Drama consists of mixed opinions. One opinion is that there should be a universal system for researching drama, while the other argues that drama is too unique and organic of an art form to assign a protocol to. Both points of view possess validity.
and are worth reviewing.

In his article entitled *The Philosophy of Research in Drama*, Rasmussen (1996) highlights the many challenges presented when researching the medium. The author states that in recent years many scholarly drama teachers and drama graduate students have focused their interests on a new wave of drama education research with drama activity being at the forefront. The author insists that because these researchers know and understand the cultural and educational values of drama education, the crucial problems and research questions and the need for research, they are the best match for the task. These researchers have traveled through the discipline of drama education from its use exclusively as a teaching method to their understanding of drama’s place as a research discipline. The author claims that the research activity of the past, which included researchers less involved in the field, has produced outcomes based on a lack of theory, support and guidance.

In addition, Rasmussen (1996) argues the research has been too broad, focusing on pedagogy, psychology and sociology. The author insists that the research must be more drama education specific in its focus. The author makes the suggestion that an international research strategy to outline research priorities should be created to contribute to universality.

Rasmussen (1996) explains, “Another difficulty relates to research methodology. Research in drama education seems to demand knowledge of important research paradigms from both the social sciences and the humanities” (p. 130). The author explains that this complicates the research process and puts high demands on drama research students in this field. The author feels that drama as a research discipline must find its own dynamic, distinctive research tradition based on informed choices about available strategies and as well as the development of new
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ones.

The author insists that experts must acquire and accumulate cultural, aesthetic and educational knowledge about drama education, and challenge this knowledge with critical examination and reflection. Rasmussen (1996) calls for the need for more research conferences, and the increase of students' and teachers' research opportunities to bring forth a common language and thinking in drama research. This may be the main flaw in the article as it can be seen as a contradiction to what some scholars in the community believe. Many feel because drama is so ephemeral in its nature drama research would not benefit from a universal language, pattern or protocol.

In the article *Understanding the Challenges of Drama Research*, Taylor (1996) presents an encompassing overview of the difficulties scholars conducting drama research are up against. Taylor (1996) begins paying homage to the many formative journals and periodicals that were first published in the field, sharing insight and ideas that help spread and transform the medium. Taylor (1996) notes that though their findings are not rooted in traditional research, they are richly based in theory and inquiry based learning, which gave the subject touchstones to add to curriculum.

Taylor (1996) indirectly suggests one possible reason that research in drama is viewed as ambiguous is because the pioneers of drama education did not think of themselves as researchers. That being said, he does present the stance that during the early part of the last century the pioneers who developed drama education demonstrated a dedication to inquiry that was not shared by the conventional researcher. Taylor (1996) insists that the collected works of the forefathers of drama education, which consists of: notes, published works, and multiple
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journal offerings, could be considered the very first teacher-researcher study. The author contests that work put forth by the early members in this field shared the conventional researcher's interest in evaluating and studying a subject. In the case of drama, the process of the study was to provide a voice to young people and an opportunity to discover some aspect of themselves as well as something about the world they lived in. Taylor (1996) notes that to dismiss these contributions simply because the researchers did not follow the traditional format practiced by other faculties would be an injustice.

Taylor (1996) reminds us of the qualitative dimension that arts education contains, asserting that drama works through a story framework. Taylor (1996) boasts that drama researchers valued this framework because of the individual experience it creates for the participants. Taylor (1996) insists that multiple reality, ephemeral, and transitory nature of drama allows for multiple individual experiences, therefore the case studies are well suited for drama research. Due to the constantly changing context within drama, the research methodologies must also change to explain the ambiguities often experienced in the complex medium. He explains that many of these early practitioners celebrated these confrontations and struggles that paved the way for many teachers around the globe to test and experiment just exactly how they will best relate to the complexity. In addition, Taylor (1996) identifies that many of the more current and commonly known research would not have been written if it was not for this prior established research tradition. Taylor (1996) also explains that we must be cautious and respectful when including the aesthetic-artistic experience of drama in research. This is because drama is ephemeral, only existing for a observed period which makes drama such a complex and truly unique subject for study.
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Some researchers within the field of drama education have made suggestions to create a universal research language. Taylor (1996) rejects this notion as he suggests that such a thing would be a complete contradiction to the medium.

Taylor (1996) states: If we accept that the arts are about the metaphoric representation of human affairs through a variety of forms, and that what powers this metaphor is a belief in individuals’ capacity to demonstrate truths in uniquely personal yet communal ways then it seems inevitable that attempts at securing a common and universal research language will be frustrated. (p. 272)

It is this very complex fabric of the medium that suggests that conventional research is not always the best fit. Taylor (1996) recommends that we continue evolving as the pioneers of drama education did nearly a hundred years ago.

Drama Education

Benefits for teachers and learners. McKone (1997) investigates the engagement in drama and assessing learners based on that engagement within secondary school drama classes. McKone (1997) notes that drama is a very difficult subject to assign a letter grade or numerical value to. However, the way of the educational world requires such a grade for the class to have value towards university entrance. Therefore, drama teachers alike have experimented for years with creating and recreating assessment strategies and formulas. In this article, McKone evaluates one assessment matrix created by an Australian secondary school drama teacher. Running down the vertical column of the assessment matrix, the types of drama knowledge being assessed are listed. Moving horizontally, three phrases flow from left to right indicating a
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growing scale of letter grade ranging from E to A. The three phrases: Action, Personal Relevance and Making Meaning essentially are consistent to low level innovative, medium level innovative and high level innovative, respectively. The author explains that as a team the student and teacher plot along the matrix where the learner has landed during the task. Teachers who have followed this system are said to have reported very few inconsistencies from where they see the learner on the matrix and where the learner sees themselves.

McKone (1997) explains the benefit of the phrases as the student can rationalize their placement on the matrix. Action refers to learners who participate very little or who vaguely understand the purpose of their actions. Personal Relevance implies that a learner is actively engaged on the basis that what they are creating is personally relevant to their own sense of self-worth. Finally, Making Meaning suggests the learner is aware of the impact the drama is having on both the participants and the audience. This scale allows both learners and teachers to justify the grade based on their results.

McKone (1997) presents some valuable insight on assessment for drama teachers, but more importantly, clarity and meaningful feedback for learners about that assessment. The main aspect the author fails to mention in the article is that the criteria allows learners a lot of room for personal growth because the assessment is based on individual participation. This means one student’s best is not the same as another’s, even though they both could receive the same letter grade. Therefore, the evaluation system could be reworked to be more formative. Learners could plot their progress on the matrix and be encouraged to grow their skill set to reach Making Meaning. Stephen Cockett (1998) picks up on this notion as he weighs in during his own discussion of the same matrix and suggests some specific flaws during his review of McKone’s
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article.

**Challenges with drama assessment.** Cockett’s (1998) article inspects the assessment strategies reviewed by Frank McKone and advises some effective suggestions and adaptations. Cockett (1998) recognizes the requirement for a numerical or letter grade to be given to all subjects taught in schools. He explains that the granting of a letter grade subdues the bureaucratic aspect of education and gives students a placement value. That being said, the author emphasizes how inaccurate this can be. In drama, a formative dialogue between teacher and student is vastly superior in terms of making a student exactly aware of how they are doing and what they are falling short of because it is a real time description of exactly what they are missing. He describes this as an essential part of the learning process because without it students have no idea how to improve in drama. The first issue the author immediately addresses in his review of McKone’s work is that in defining quality of engagement by finding ‘a best line of fit’ underneath the three phrases that correspond to a letter grade defeats the purpose of formative assessment. In addition, he notes that this system places the same value on all the types of drama knowledge. By listing the types of drama knowledge vertically, one on top of the other, they now have to be weighted equally.

The author stresses that evaluation in drama must be more dynamic and allow for formative growth because learning in drama is tied to specific events and experiences that take place during the process. The way students create and develop concepts in drama is deeply connected to how they express the concept, the author maintains that this notion is the main reason why drama is taught in schools. The author explains that over time students are capable of mastering a sense of awareness as they learn drama but the specific nature of their learning is
integral to their particular experience in drama. Therefore, Cockett (1998) explains that formative evaluations can be truly effective only when they refer specifically to the process of the drama being created. He suggests that in McKone's matrix the diagrammatic representation of a student's engagement in the drama could be used just as well as a basis for reflective evaluation between teacher and student as for determining the 'line of best fit’.

The three indicators listed across the top of the matrix that correspond with the letter grade evaluating quality of engagement, Action, Personal Relevance and Making Meaning, represent a progression in quality, with Making Meaning being the highest. McKone (1997) suggests that learners who achieve this level, display strong group awareness, and take leadership positions in structuring and directing the drama process. However, it is unclear how the three categories represent a progression in quality of engagement, as good drama includes all three elements, and all drama, good or bad, is a process of making meaning. Also, the categories defining progression do not adequately take into account the social nature of drama and that each individual's contribution may, and should, vary according to the demands of the drama and in response to the contributions of others.

The author concludes by explaining that engagement in a dramatic process can never be adequately described as a sum of its parts because learning in drama is experienced as a combination of thought, ideas and expressive form. Drama is an incredibly diverse subject, that requires a social component and relies on a varied range of interrelated contributions. In the conclusion of the article the author advises that it is imperative to be aware of the risks of making it too simple or too complex when creating an assessment model for drama.
Connections discovered. After implementing the matrix presented in the McKone review I discovered similar difficulties that Cockett mentioned in his review of the same strategy. I found that the main weakness of the assessment is that it did not take into account the social nature of drama that allowed for the forming of ideas. I concluded, as Cockett did, that the engagement of a student within drama cannot be easily plotted on a line and is better observed thereby allowing for a dialogue to foster any formative growth. I have found this method extremely effective both in my teaching of drama as a subject as well as my directing of the drama production represented in the film project.

Benefits of Drama in ELL Settings

Sağlamel and Kayaoğlu (2013) published a quantitative study that proposes the possibility that the language anxiety levels of students in EFL speaking classes can be reduced through their participation in creative drama. 565 students studying at a Turkish state university were administered an adapted version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) known as FLSAS. The study randomly selected 22 of the 565 students to participate in a 6-week creative drama programme run by a researcher with training in creative drama and leadership.

The twenty-two randomly selected subjects participated in creative drama classes that consisted of four components: warm-ups, pantomimes, role-play and evaluation. The authors of this study elaborated on the effectiveness these activities can have on alleviating anxiety when speaking a foreign language. By beginning with warm ups, the participants can ease into the dramatic process, building trust with their peers. When working through pantomime, voice and sound are absent, therefore, learners may demonstrate their ideas through the use of their body
and expressions without relying on language. Through role-play students must encompass a completely different identity separate from their actual one, allowing for an increase in confidence and self-esteem. The evaluation phase can take place at any point throughout the class as participants come together and brainstorm about the possible conclusions they have drawn or to discuss thoughts relating to something they saw or experienced while reflecting on the process.

The researchers carried out the FLSAS test both at the beginning and the end of the study. The results of the qualitative study demonstrated a statistically significant decrease in the language anxiety levels of students who participated in the creative drama program. There are several conclusions that could be drawn from the study. The study provides some insights into the sources of language anxiety by grouping items. When related items were grouped, lack of confidence, fear of failure, physical and mental avoidance, reluctance to participate in speaking classes, competitiveness and perfectionism were categorized as issues that were found to be key factors to language anxiety in speaking classes. It is possible to make connections to these topics to see how the participation in the creative drama classes could elevate these issues.

Sağlamel and Kayaoğlu (2013) suggest that creative drama activities should be integrated into the speaking curriculum classes because, based on their findings the general results displayed that drama activities bring enthusiasm and diversity to lessons. The authors also note that in other studies, qualitative analysis was used to measure the effectiveness of drama. However, Sağlamel and Kayaoğlu (2013) used a quantitative method in their study, leaving some questions unanswered because of the limitations of the quantitative survey method. One key question was what are the potential sources of language anxiety in speaking classes? Qualitative
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interviews would provide deeper insight with less statistical and more humanistic results. The authors of the study also suggest other flaws within the research are mainly represented by evaluating the results of pre-testing and post-testing the same participants. In addition, the number of the control group tested was very insignificant.

**Conclusion and connection to film project.** As alluded to earlier, Sağlamel and Kayaoğlu (2013) suggest that other qualitative studies could contribute more dimension and diversity towards the results of their qualitative study. Finally, the authors make clear that the techniques used in the drama classes for their study were obviously not the only way to operate a drama class for ELL learners and that numerous other ideas could and should be put forth. Therefore Sağlamel and Kayaoğlu (2013) conclude that many methods of implementing drama to larger test groups in multiple regions would provide more evidence towards their outcomes.

Through out my own experiences teaching drama in an ELL environment, I have seen first hand the remarkable and undeniable benefits that drama has produced. The study presented through Sağlamel and Kayaoğlu’s work has reinforced my confidence and conviction towards what I was already doing.

The research reviewed in this document has been used as cornerstone in the making of the documentary film created at the BC offshore school, BIS Canada, in Bundang, South Korea. Though the students worked closely with an adult faculty member while creating the drama production, the film demonstrates how the student leaders guided their peers, made tough decisions, and were faced with real leadership situations throughout the entire 6 month journey. Finally, the film demonstrates the remarkable leadership opportunities that were granted during this evolutionary process.
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Research in Support of Film Project

The literature review assessed findings relating to the effective practices of student leadership, the theory and philosophy behind research in drama, assessment in drama and finally how drama can encourage EFL students to be more confident and experience less anxiety when speaking. This research has acted as a foundation in the creation of documentary film that sets out to demonstrate that by presenting students with leadership opportunities within the creation of a drama production they will evolve as substantial leaders within that community and grow as more confident and capable human beings.

The research relating to student leadership effectively supports the film as it displays findings revealing important information about student leadership that the film maker needed to be aware for the creation of the project. Findings such as most of student leadership projects or initiatives are created by adults giving students literally no voice in the shaping of their leadership task or journey are very relevant. This is the key factor that needed to be avoided throughout this project. Through out the film evidence will be presented of students creating their own leadership opportunities. Essential freedom has been given to student leaders to allow them to shape their own leadership paths, this evidence is demonstrated with examples in the footage and voice over dictation.

In addition, the research reviewed revealed that student leadership competencies development included individual factors, experiences and involvement in school or class programs and finally the school environment. These aspects will all be demonstrated in the film with examples in the footage and voice over dictation. The literature also demonstrated that among the many factors mentioned, student faculty relationships are very important to create
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security and confidence in order to foster student leadership. The strong relationship based on up to six years of consistency with some of these students as well six years developing the drama program will be alluded to and evidence of the effects of this timeline will be demonstrated with examples in the footage and voice over dictation.

The literature reviewed relating to the theory and philosophy behind research in drama was used as additional support and guidance throughout the film making process. It was used in many ways to provide confidence to the film maker that drama is a unique medium in its own right and cannot follow traditional patterns. As well, much of the work being conducted during the process of the drama production that was captured on film was experimental.

The review of assessment in drama supported and enabled the flexibility for student shaped leadership as well as the naturalistic flow that the production took on. As demonstrated by the literature on this subject, assessment in drama is not specific, but is most productive through formative feedback. During our work of creating our drama production, I practiced this format of assessment of student performance and received both positive reactions as well as results. As this production is not scored for a graded mark as it is an extra curricular activity this format for encouraging assessment was perfect. It was also suggested to student leaders to follow this model of providing feedback to their peers and the students receiving feedback were encouraged to engage in an active conversation to ensure clarity.

Finally, the review of the research conducted on how drama can reduce anxiety with ELLs created an overall theme that was felt throughout the film. All learners captured in the film project are Korean national ELLs. Even though in many cases these students’ English proficiency is excellent they are not native speakers and are still learning a second language.
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That being said through out the film there is countless examples of students demonstrating empowerment as they work in drama towards the common goal of creating a successful production in English.
Reflection of Process

Context

In 2009 I began working as a creative arts teacher at BIS Canada: South Korea’s first BC offshore school. Over the past six years I have worked diligently to grow the Creative Arts program within the school community. One way I have contributed to this goal was through the creation of our extra curricular drama club. Every year, dedicated drama learners would come together after school and work tirelessly to stage a drama production that we would perform for the school community each March. Over the years I have discovered many fascinating insights while working with young people towards the creation of this difficult task.

This past summer while on campus at Vancouver Island University during the start of my second year of my Masters of Education program, I dedicated much thought to the subject of my thesis project. I was aware that our drama club would be a great context for my final project due to the age range of students and the amount of time spent with them, so I began thinking specifically about the capacity in which my inquiry would take shape.

Currently the culture at BIS Canada embraces the arts with enthusiasm and acceptance, although this was not always the case. Korea is a fiercely academically driven society, especially at the high school level. Many parents - and students for that matter - did not see the value in dedicating this tremendous level of time and commitment towards the Creative Arts. In 2009 we were a new school only a year old, and new things always face resistance. With that having been said, there were those enlightened few in the beginning who saw the incredible learning opportunities that this after school club offered, and it wasn't long until the entire school community started to get behind this creative arts movement in our school.
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Challenge to Change

In order to stage an effective show each year, a high level of professionalism must be brought to the production. Prior to this year, this expertise was accomplished by a dictatorship style of leadership, specifically naming myself as the dictator and my students as my faithful disciples. This always provided successful results and as well was very much inline with the Korean top down style of management, therefore my students demonstrated no resistance while working in this atmosphere. This method had proven to be successful and in some ways very necessary during our formative years while this creative arts culture was being developed. Conversely, as I was thinking about my thesis project I considered the possibility that another style of leadership for this production could allow for more responsibility to be put on the learner thereby giving them a greater sense of involvement in the outcome of the project.

Why a Documentary Film?

In addition to taking a different approach to my usual style of leading, I also thought about the possibility of conducting a different approach for presenting my inquiry. It was within this line of thought that I conceptualized the idea to create a film documenting the process of my learners’ journey. I concluded that there would be a number of positive reasons for presenting my inquiry through this medium. This method would provide the viewer with a visual understanding of the learners themselves and their experiences and growth within the BC offshore environment. The concept of the documentary film seemed to be beneficial for several reasons: not only would I be able to collect data and evaluate my findings multiple times by reviewing the recorded footage, I also would be held accountable to report an honest documentary of the results as I would be presenting the findings in a visually recorded format rather then in a written one.
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Creating a film that tells the story of my learners’ journey while working to accomplish the common goal of a collaborative drama production essentially uses one art form to report on the success of another. As a creative arts teacher and an artist this was an extremely exciting premise.

Process of Gathering Inquiry

In September 2014, at our first drama club meeting, I distributed the standard permission form indicating to each student and their guardian the commitment required to be a member of the drama club. In addition, the form stated that all rehearsals and live performances would be filmed, and that some but potentially all of the contents of that captured footage would be assembled into a film, and that film would be posted publicly on the school website. All guardians of the students involved in the club signed the form, granting their permission for the creation and public display of the film project.

Once consent was obtained I assembled an outline proposing that I would document the journey of my students as leaders within this project. I concluded that research on student leadership and more specially student leadership within the arts would be my focus for my review of literature. At that early stage I was very unclear as to how this documentary film would take shape, I did know however, due to preliminary research relating to the genre that I would essentially need to film everything. Also I was aware that as the director of the drama production I would be required to be involved in the rehearsal process and therefore would be unable to operate the camera. In support of this conclusion I also felt if I was the one behind the camera my students may feel apprehensive about acting naturally. Therefore, I asked a few specific students to always film our rehearsals, and asked them to be as inconspicuous as possible. It was not long before the camera became another member of rehearsal and the students did not even
notice its presence. In my initial planning of the film, my inclination was that by capturing
everything that was taking place each day, a story would unfold naturally on its own in front of
the camera. I knew this was a gamble, but I was confident that something special would reveal
itself based on the long-standing relationship between myself and my students, and the
environment of trust that we had built. Through this organic process these two factors naturally
revealed themselves to me as main plot points of the story in the film, especially after I had
conducted all my research and wrapped up the last bits of footage.

**Research Shaping Story**

The necessity of trust within both peer and faculty relationships was one key point that emerged from my review of research conducted in the field of student leadership. Though this point seemed like common knowledge and was already strongly present within our club during past production runs, the reinforcement of its importance within current research on student leadership was immensely reassuring, therefore this concept began to emerge as a key point that helped shape the film.

Similar to the concept of trust within relationships, it was well understood that the presence of a positive and supportive environment was essential for students to create a large scale collaborative project. This concept was highlighted within studies relating to student leadership and it also acted as a key point that shaped the film.

The final and strongest concept that gave story to the film was the idea that educators or adult leaders must allow learners room to organically lead themselves. Having control within leadership scenarios ensures that students can shape their own leadership opportunities and that the student voice is present within this journey. This concept was as clear
as the others, although it was unique in being absent from our formative process in years past. This realization allowed for a major change in the way I lead and the way I foster student leadership.

Creating Story Through Editing

The editing process in documentary film making is essentially the creation of the film, and I knew that this process of selecting and then shaping the raw footage into a story would be no easy task. As I was forming and creating the theatre production with the students, I was very conscious of providing students opportunities to lead. In all honesty I did not know at the time if the camera would be able to capture the essence of the moments and tell the full story of the personal growth that was taking place.

When I first sat down at my Mac book in front of two hundred and fifty hours of footage, I was a little apprehensive to say the least. As I began sifting through the material, I re-reviewed the research exploring student leadership, drama education and the power of drama to enhance the speaking confidence of English language learners. I then reviewed the footage through this lens, bookmarking evidence of these situations. After compiling a long list of possible clips there still needed to be something to link them together. The journey of creating our production acted as the foundation for our story, as it contained a beginning, middle and end. However, I still needed particular characters in my story for the audience to care about. I looked more closely at the individual leaders and their stories. I found that one leader, my assistant director, clearly emerged as the protagonist of the story and the obstacles within her path represented the story’s antagonist.
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This focused approach using the traditional story format allowed me to narrow my search as I looked for examples of my assistant director learning to lead. I compiled footage that followed the journey of how my assistant director found her voice. One example of a clip I used was when I gave a ten minute speech to the cast and crew about coming together to continue to work hard. Of that ten minute video I used a ten second clip in the very beginning of the speech where I announced that I would be leaving my assistant director in charge because I needed to leave the theatre in order to work with the production crew to create our backdrop. When I saw this clip I got very excited and immediately looked for the footage of my AD leading when I was not in the room, hoping there would be moments where she could find her own voice, and there were many!

In addition, this small section of the speech also set up the other student leaders taking on the task of designing the backdrop. As I mention in the film I would have normally completed the task of designing the backdrop myself, but because I was consciously looking for opportunities for students to have a voice, it allowed for a great opportunity and added to the story of the film as well.

The research towards drama education speaks tirelessly of the ephemeral nature of the art form, the notion that drama is a living breathing entity that is constantly changing and each performance is always different due to its live performance nature. I found a moment in one of our live performances where an actor made a cue error, and it was possible that a second error was to come with the same type of cue. My AD had developed such confidence within her role that she was able to confidently trouble shoot an excellent preventive strategy. When I interviewed her after the shows’ run, she spoke freely and proudly of this moment. I felt this
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moment really acted as the climax of the story, so I placed it towards the end of the film. I also used footage leading up to the event, during the event and the AD’s retelling of the event to tell the story. I feel the joining of all these clips with two sets of narrative, myself and my AD’s, proved to be very effective in displaying the accomplishment that took place within this situation.

Other Examples of Arts-Based Research

The process of seeking insights through this aesthetic method was unique in its nature. That being said, most methodology of arts-based research tends to be thought of in this light. Pranee Liamputtong and Jean Rumbold’s book *Knowing Differently: Arts-Based and Collaborative Research Methods* (2013) explores the experiential research methods (arts-based, reflexive, collaborative) that allow researchers to access their own and their participants' knowing in richer ways. Each section outlines innovative methods of research and analysis using literary forms, performance and visual arts, and through collaborative and interdisciplinary inquiry. Methodological discussions and first-person accounts of experiences in using these methods in order to fire the imagination of students and researchers are offered. I feel in my work, through the recorded medium of film, from an almost ‘fly on the wall’ perspective, I too was able to access my own and my participants' knowing in richer ways.

Growth and Change as a Result

Through the process of collecting and reviewing this data, I changed my own leadership style, encouraged learners to find their own style, and documented the entire process. These shifts in perspective provided invaluable insight towards fostering student leadership within the arts. In years past delegation of tasks to the young ‘leaders’ was so much a part of the way our
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drama productions were produced that our leaders were actually asked to follow. I was asking my learners to trust me, but I was not reciprocating the same trust. Now I was empowering young leaders to find the solution to a problem that needed to be solved, and they had the space and resources to solve it. I was there as a guide, not a saviour. I offered a different type of assistance: we talked through the situation, and I would ask my leaders what possible solutions existed. This approach proved extremely positive as young leaders effectively solved the issues and left the situation feeling empowered and confident. This method created a chain reaction whereby the more solutions they found, the more confident they became in finding their own leadership abilities.

Recommendations

The experience of working with this group of learners and documenting the journey has profoundly changed the way I think about fostering student leadership within the arts. Relationship and environment are essential, but those aspects take time to establish, and cannot be artificial. With that having been said, the amount of time required to create an arts-based project such a school drama production, clearly would contribute to the growth of these two mentioned factors. I had the advantage in this situation by working in this small private school setting with the same group of learners for many years, however as I mentioned we had gotten into a different type of leadership style requiring a revolutionary change to the system. To make this type of change, a near revolution in our culture needed to happen.

Personally I feel the ability to stay true to this format of leadership with consistency and discipline is credited to the constantly running camera. I found the camera forced me to check myself on a daily basis, ensuring I was thinking about the way I was leading and the way I was
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fostering student leadership. The camera’s presence was one practice ensuring results, but drama teachers and directors working on a large-scale production could also apply principles of checking themselves in a different ways. The adult leader could keep a journal of situations where students are presented with problems that needed to be solved. In the journal the adult leader could state the problem and then reflect upon how students fostered student leadership and with a conscious effort to allow for student-discovered solutions to the problem. This journal would effectively provide the adult leader with the same accountability as with the camera as well as providing opportunities for reflection. The same method could be used with a video reflection after each rehearsal or practice.

**Conclusion**

The results that emerged from the creation of a documentary film that was supported by effective research were remarkable. Through this creative experience I have grown as a leader and even more in the way I think about leadership. Leaders must lead by example, and they must be willing to try new things and risk failure. I was unsure of the results this experiment would provide, but I had confidence in what the research suggested and found a strong enough connection to my own setting and situation. Therefore I can confidently say, while working in a collaborative aesthetic setting, if you build relationships, create supportive environments and encourage self-regulated leadership, tremendous success and growth will be the outcome.
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References


