

Aesthetic Leadership and School Leadership Preparation: Cultivating Aesthetic Awareness Through an Arts-Based Leadership Development Curriculum

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Abstract

Aesthetic leadership is focused on the developed of leadership qualities and dispositions that contribute to aesthetic awareness. This article outlines three arts-based assignments that were used in developing leaders in order to illustrate the kind of work that can be done to promote the development of aesthetic awareness in leaders.

Aesthetic leadership is a style of leadership that has been variously positioned in leadership studies literature (Mannix & Daly, 2015). Dihn et al. (2014) describes aesthetic leadership theory as focusing on followers and their subjective views (gained through sensory awareness and knowledge) of the leader qualities in the leader-follower dyads. Others have argued that aesthetic leadership is fashioned by sensory knowledge (Hansen et al., 2007).

Hansen and colleagues contend that a significant feature of aesthetic leadership is the

multifaceted nature of leadership and the demand it makes on individuals.

Emotional Awareness: Assignment 1

Emotional awareness offers significant and useful focus to apply to leadership preparation. This area of inquiry offers a lens to deeply examine the social-psychological aspects of leadership practice.

The purpose of an assignment focused on the development of emotional awareness is to evoke feeling to empathize in order to cultivate a creative, problem-solving mindset and empathy for students and families. In order for this to occur, activities need to be organized in expressive, interactive ways and allow for the openness of improvisational theater.

The sock puppet assignment is simple. Students are required to create three sock puppets: the first puppet should represent how they present themselves in the world, the second should represent elements of themselves that they keep hidden from others, and the third puppet represents their leadership identity which should be an integration of the first two puppets.

Many students resist this assignment at first glance, writing it off as silly or strange. Some students have offered to write research papers in order to avoid creating puppets, but we do not allow it. This assignment provides students the reflective space to explore aspects of their identity in an aesthetic manner (through thought, feeling, and sensory engagement) in order to make new meaning in relation to their future leadership.

emotional awareness is linked to instilling a moral purpose and this includes addressing

consequence (the impact of my action or the self-regulatory steps I took to reestablish physiological homeostasis) (Watson & Skinner, 2001; Sterling-Turner, Robinson & Wilczynski, 2001). Using this framework helped Betty go deeper into the assignment as a student.

As a professor, Betty found the depth of understanding varied. At the most basic level, students identified moments when they experienced strong feelings such as anger, outrage, annoyance, or embarrassment. They were able to identify external factors that led to the experience of an intense feeling.

However, students rarely explored the self-

without themselves in it. The second is of themselves hidden. And the third is a portrait of themselves as a leader. There are no restrictions on how this assignment can be completed.

Students can take photographs, create drawings, or construct collages, or use another format. The goal of this assignment is to support students in clarifying their moral purpose. A portrait of themselves without them in it has to reflect their purpose. Like other assignments, after the students present their portraits to the class, they are required to reflect on the activity and write a reflection.

Anna, a leadership student, noted:

At first I found this assignment confusing. A portrait of myself without me in it seemed ridiculous. The more I thought about it, however, the more serious it got. The portrait without me in it had to reflect my passion and purpose for leading. I took a picture of class with the students smiling. My moral purpose is to serve students.

The challenge of seeing herself in a portrait that does not have her face forced Anna to consider what would represent her purpose. This sort of assignment has the potential to push students beyond bland statements of moral purpose, into an arena that allows them to explore their tacit knowledge and visually explore how they will represent themselves.

Betty's Perspective

When Betty completed this assignment as a student, it confused her. She was unsure how she was supposed to construct a portrait of self without her face in it. Betty worked to anchor herself around the idea that the portraits reflected her identity across time (past, present,

future) and contexts (culture, race, gender, home, work, school).

She created portrait-collages that included three main themes: families, education, and politics. In the first self-portrait without her in it, she had shadow figures of adults and children surrounding the word *families*. In her portrait-collage as a leader, a drawing of the White House and of a school were set behind the images of families, and photo images of female leaders who Betty admired. She placed a photo image of herself right next to the female leaders and teacher colleagues. From this assignment, Betty

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classrooms. The assignments described in this paper pushed our students to develop attentiveness in order to help them gain greater understanding of how leaders move and act, not just talk and write, through embodied cognition. Visually-oriented activities such as watching or acting out scenarios, or using films and photographs, an approach to understanding of situations, an approach to instructional leadership practices.

As leadership faculty navigate school reform in the 21st century, it is imperative to

stress the emotional and moral bonds between educational leaders, teachers, students, families, and communities. These qualities will most likely strengthen current practices aimed at improving academic achievement, not dampen or derail those efforts. Many teachers and students strive for organizational beauty and coherence and harmony in what can feel like a disconnected or fragmented learning climate. A focus on aesthetic leadership suggests we reclaim a focus on humanistic experiences of schooling and also challenge those of us who develop leaders to cultivate leaders who have social and emotional competence.

Author Biographies

Diane Ketelle is dean of Mills College School of Education and a professor of education at Mills College in Oakland, CA. Her post-graduate programs in educational leadership has informed her practice as an administrator. Having taught in public schools, private universities, prisons, and in other countries as a two-time Fulbright Scholar, she brings a life-long commitment to education, to the liberal arts, and to an asset approach to education that values the cultural, emotional and linguistic knowledge that every person brings to the task of learning. Ketelle's research focuses on life writing and she has pursued many interesting projects including a three project in a prison helping inmates write their stories. For the past two years, she has been collecting the life stories of female boxers in the Bay Area of California. E-mail: dketelle@mills.edu

Betty Lin is an adjunct professor and advisor in the school of education at Mills College. She has over 10 years of experience building early childhood education programs and preparing early childhood educators, special education teachers, and child life specialists at Mills College. She holds an early childhood special education teaching credential, a multiple subject teaching credential, an administrative service credential, and is a certified child life specialist. In addition, she is an advocate of early intervention and is serving as the state chair of the Infant Development Association of California. She was appointed as a steering committee member of the Alameda County Child Care Planning Council from 2008 to 2014. E-mail: Bettylin5192@gmail.com

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