

**MORE DRAMA IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP:  
DEVELOPING CREATIVE AND ETHICAL CAPACITIES IN THE NEXT  
GENERATION OF SCHOOL LEADERS**

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This paper shares the outcomes derived from research conducted with the participants of an interdisciplinary workshop entitled “The Drama in School Leadership” that employs applied drama processes and analysis in order to understand educational ethics. Participants explore high-stakes scenarios in school leadership by taking on roles in scripted cases with an ensemble. Findings from previous research on a similar workshop had shown that these methods help develop a felt or embodied understanding of ethical decision making. The findings generated from data generated from this second, different group of participants indicated new insights about leadership style and some increased facility with actual application of ethical frameworks to cases as a result of these methods. Participants also acknowledged the parallels between creative risk-taking in applied drama and real school leadership. Finally, participants articulated that while there is indeed ambiguity associated with ethical decision making, this approach allowed them to better understand the complex, even paradoxical dynamics between stakeholders in schools.

**Introduction**

A growing body of literature suggests that school leaders need to understand how to lead from an ethical center, while keeping in mind a complex number of factors including an awareness of the viewpoints of a multitude of stakeholders (for example, see Begley, 2010; Shapiro, Gross, & Shapiro, 2008; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005; Starratt, 1994; Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 2005). To address this need, many leadership preparation programs often focus on the

various inputs to decision-making, such as the background of leader, strategies to gather information from stakeholders, and the various ethical frameworks to guide decision makers (Cooper, 1998; Greenleaf & Spears, 2002; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Leithwood & Steinbach, 1995). However, those very same preparation programs appear to overlook the fact that there are also negative impacts of both the decisions and the decision-making process. Branson (2010, p. 1), in fact, contends that those involved in supporting the development of school leaders “have yet to find the most effective way to help prepare current and future educational leaders for being able to confidently and effectively deal with their complex, problematic and unavoidable ethical decision making responsibilities.”

Though it might be assumed that if a school leader manages the decision-making process then positive outcomes will take care of themselves, this does not seem to be the way relationships among staff play out (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). There seems to be a taken-for-granted regard of the effects of leadership that implies that for many people leadership is viewed as being synonymous with “goodness” (Kellerman, 2004). All too often, Palmer states, leaders are not aware that they are making a decision mired in ethical tension, nor are they necessarily prepared to meaningfully reflect on the process of deciding.

Palmer (1996) offers a powerful metaphor to dramatize the emotional tension that comes with ethical and unethical forms of leadership:

A leader is a person who has an unusual degree of power to create the conditions under which other people must live and move and have their being, conditions that can be either as illuminating as heaven or as shadowy as hell. A leader must take special responsibility for what’s going on inside his or her own self, inside his or her consciousness, lest the *act* [emphasis added] of leadership create more harm than good. (p. 200)

There is indeed much more drama involved in decision making than a formula for good leadership could ever suggest (Kidder, 2009).

School leaders, in practice, often become overwhelmed as they attempt to solve problems with complex, interpersonal dimensions (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2013). Merely studying ethical frameworks from a classroom desk may or may not, in fact, help a leader develop empathy for those affected by decisions. According to Tuana (2007), simply identifying that a situation involves an ethical issue does not necessarily mean that one experiences the action as ethical or feels any personal investment in the ethical decision-making process. In order to develop an understanding of the psycho-emotional impact involved in making difficult decisions (Andrade & Ariely, 2009), therefore, something more than just access to a moral or ethical framework is necessary (Fullan, 2003). Using drama, the art, to study the drama, or conflict, in the workplace gives leaders opportunities to proactively witness and engage with ethically charged scenarios. In advance of being immersed in them at the workplace, such opportunities to envision and predict complex dynamics in action seem worthy of pursuing (Strike et al., 2005). “Drama,” McCammon (2007, p. 947) contends, “by its very nature, is inherently dialectic.” When the nature and type of interaction is focused, drama can be used to promote reflection and provide opportunities both to explore and to learn about the complexity of professional relationships (Saldaña, 2010).

The findings of an initial research study held in April 2010 at Santa Clara University on the effects of a professional development workshop that used dramatized fixed-scripts illustrated that approaching the study of a case as drama may have more lasting meanings for school leaders in terms of the conceptual knowledge they developed through a felt understanding of the ethical dimensions of decision making (Clark, Dobson, Goode, & Neelands, 1997; Cranston & Kusanovich, 2013; Saldaña, 2003, 2005, 2010). As the findings of the initial study demonstrated, the participants believed that this approach offered them sophisticated team-building skills that

they could later use to engage their own staffs when strategizing, planning, solving problems, and implementing programs (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2013). The findings, furthermore, illustrated the potential power of a dramatized, fixed-script approach as being a useful component of a school leadership preparation program.

Thus, the authors approached the second workshop with an intent to expand their inquiry and understanding by considering this question: What is the nature of learning for participants who engage in a performing arts-based approach known as applied drama (Nicholson, 2005; O'Neill, 1995) while studying an ethical decision making process (Begley, 2010)?

Applied drama, as framed by Nicholson (2005) draws on the work of Dorothy Heathcote (Wagner, 1999) and has specific intended social, educational, and communitarian purposes “that are motivated by the desire to make a difference to the lives of others” (Nicholson, 2005 , p. 16). Applied drama learning is both a cognitive approach to knowledge and also a social and emotional process. It evokes a context for social interactions between individuals and groups whose voices and viewpoints may not be properly heard (Nicholson, 2005). It is most often undertaken in spaces “not usually defined as theatre buildings, with participants who may or may not be skilled in theatre arts and to audiences who have a vested interest in the issue taken up by the performance or are members of the community addressed by the performance” (Prendergast & Saxton, 2009, p. 6). The roots of applied drama, McCammon (2007) suggests, can be traced back to Bertolt Brecht who proposed that drama could instruct and change society and its social institutions.

In order to respond to the question about the nature of learning in this interdisciplinary context, the authors facilitated and studied a second iteration of “The Drama in School

Leadership” workshop in November 2011 that was held at the University of Manitoba with a group of educational administrators and school leaders. The intent of the second study was to elicit further insights about the effectiveness of this directed, fixed-script approach to school leadership preparation by dissolving, at least in part, the boundaries between two academic disciplines, specifically theatre and educational administration (Fuchs, 1996).

In the workshop, three ethical dilemmas were explored in the dramatic scripts developed specifically for the workshops. These dilemmas can be described as

- 1) the ethics of supporting an under-performing teacher over a long period of time while students are obviously suffering;
- 2) the ethics of determining discrimination in the midst of curricular reform calling for the organization of a new team of teachers; and
- 3) the ethics of how to fire a teacher in an ambiguous situation while retaining the person’s dignity.

The three plays, entitled respectively “Grace Period,” “Discriminating,” and “How to Fire a Teacher,” were performed on the last day of the workshop. In each of these scripts, the participants took on a role, temporarily committing to the value stance of one of a diverse array of stakeholders. They enacted the scripted cases not from their personal understandings of what was right and just, but rather from differing views of what was ethically correct in the specific context of the scene.

Approaches that enable learners to not only think through a question such as “what would I do if...?” but also allow them to experience what it feels like to be in the midst of the ethical tension of enacting a difficult leadership decision offer unique learning opportunities (Freeman & Stewart, 2006). While educational leaders need to cognitively understand the ethical dimensions of their choices, arguably what is often lacking in their preparation are professional development opportunities that develop a felt understanding (Clarke et al., 1997) of what it

means to lead in contexts that are fraught with ambiguity and complexity (Hamill, 2006).

### **Ethics and Values in Drama and Educational Leadership**

Ethical decision making is informed on some level by the values the decision maker holds (Hodgkinson, 1978; Strike et al., 2005). What we value, and how we demonstrate what we value, and to what degree our demonstrated actions match our stated values, show us which ethical framework we are truly operating from. Drawing on the earlier work of Hodgkinson (1978, 1999), Begley (2004) has illustrated that our values have syntax and are nested in ever expanding circles or spheres. According to Begley, in matters of values we move from what is in our closest circle, considerations of self, to our motivations, to our understandings, to our values, and then end with attitudes that lead to actions. Applied drama techniques (Nicholson, 2005) help us witness the values syntax that Begley (2004) suggests inform actions. Through drama we are given memorable images and referents through which we can see and analyze a decision through an ethical framework, such as an ethic of connectedness (Frick & Frick, 2010) or any other ethical framework, as the nested values of each character literally play out in front of us.

While there are numerous examples of ethical frameworks (Begley, 2010; Shapiro et al., 2008; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005; Starratt, 1994) for understanding ethical situations, and processes to guide decision making (Cooper, 1998; Kidder, 2009; Kouzes & Posner, 2007), in the 2011 research study, which is reported here in the article, the authors chose to facilitate character and script analysis by applying Begley's (2010) concept of an ethic of critique. Begley's ethic of critique was chosen because it aligns well with the character analysis process used when working with scripted scenarios. Nagrin's (1997) framing device outlined in "The Six Questions" is often used to focus performing artists on how best to develop a sense of the

character they play. Nagrin's (p. 34) six questions can be compressed into one, which asks "Who (or what) is doing what to whom (or what) and where, in what context and under what difficulties and why?" Using Nagrin's framing structure, the participants in the workshop were directed to focus on Begley's (2010) conceptualization of an ethic of critique with its multiple concerns for stakeholders, voices, and turbulence in order to understand the conflicts emerging in each script. An ethic of critique was chosen because it provides a sharp focus on the barriers to fairness, especially for those with less agency, privilege, or voice.

It is worth noting that Begley's conceptualization of an ethic of critique extends Hogdkinson's (1978, 1999) work that focused on developing an analytical model to distinguish among different types of values that are fundamental to understanding how and why decisions are made. In the workshop context, with its ensemble-building approach and highly dynamic interactions between participants, this particular ethical framework (Begley, 2010) seemed fruitful insofar as it would allow for the workshop participants to engage in dialogue and thoughtful inquiry. Ultimately, participants were asked to reflect on this dynamic interplay of values among multiple characters and unpack how and why decisions are made.

*Focus on Outcomes: Witnessing Dramatic Decision-Making*

The act of performing, posits Denzin (2003), is an act of intervention, a method of resistance, a form of criticism, and a way of revealing agency. Theatre theorist and practitioner Spolin (1963) described the function of the dramatic arts as that which helps us grapple with the essential and central "problems of being human." In watching or performing a play that demonstrates some typical outcome(s) of the actions or inactions of administrators, one can witness different characters with contrasting ethical perspectives trying to do the right thing but

encountering problems or roadblocks along the way. In some cases multiple ethical perspectives are found and expressed within one single character. The real motivations of leaders (which may very well be to do the best job, or to do good) are often misinterpreted because final actions do not always reveal process. The “problem of being human” (Spolin, 1963) is that the effect of an announcement of termination of contract for a veteran teacher may feel the same to that teacher whether the administrator was operating from an ethical stance or not. It would seem that the ability to foresee the emotional weight of difficult decisions would be an asset for current or aspiring school leaders. In the high-stakes arena of school leadership, hindsight is not enough. The implication of embodying and witnessing all of these possible outcomes is that our foresight is enlivened and enriched, allowing us to navigate more competently from an ethical centre.

#### *Applied Drama Animates Educational Leadership*

Drawing on the earliest history of theatre from the time of Plato, Ridout (2009) has suggested that theatre is and always has been exceptionally well suited to dramatize ethical situations. In dealing with complexity, theatre allows for multiple meanings, understandings, and interpretations to be grappled with simultaneously. Ridout (2009) notes that both theatre and ethics ask the same core question: “How shall I act?” This relationship is significant because, according to Branson (2010, p. 3), in the context of school leadership, “the leader becomes an ethical person in order to act ethically.”

Typical methods of reading or discussing leadership scenarios (Kowalski, 2012; Strike et al., 2005) might engage learners cognitively, and possibly affectively, if they are emotionally and socially sensitized through their reading and discussion. These methods, however, likely fail to call on the bodily-kinesthetic dimension of our knowledge and do not require us to exercise



our intuition or imagination in any communal space. Real decision-making happens in real-time, on our feet, and requires an attunement to reason and intuition, and to other people (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2013; Nicholson, 2005).

Begley (1999) argued that preparation programs designed for educational administrators should not treat ethics as another management strategy to be observed from a distance. Rather, professors of educational administration ought to immerse educational leaders in the struggles associated with the challenges of determining what is right, not just what is most expedient, or efficient, or effective under a specific set of circumstances (Begley).

If we ought to immerse educational leaders in the real struggles of leadership what does immersion look like? This research seeks to investigate whether applied drama (Saldaña, 2003) is one of the methods of immersion that should be considered. The workshop approach invited participants to “make manifest their own subjectivities in the world evoked through character and play, a world laden with metaphor and nuance, a world where relationship to other and self-spectatorship are in dynamic and unrelenting interaction” (Gallagher, 2003, p. 3).

The authors’ (see Cranston & Kusanovich, 2013) previous research findings revealed that a directed, fixed-script, applied drama (Nicholson, 2005) approach sensitized individuals to more subtle and profound ways of “walking in someone else’s shoes,” to understanding multiple perspectives, and to seeing the ensemble-building approach of applied drama as a device for personal and group development. Thus, having established a tentative relationship between ethical thinking, theatrical process, and educational leadership development, the authors proceeded into the second workshop with more robust prompts that asked specific questions about decision-making style, ethical approach, ethical frameworks, and the experience of applied

drama (Nicholson, 2005) as a means to challenge and expand participants' thinking and approaches as school leaders.

### **Methodological Approach**

This interdisciplinary, qualitative study (Jacobs & Frickel, 2009) was based on an interpretative arts-based research paradigm, which utilized an applied drama approach to the workshop design and delivery (Nicholson, 2005; O'Neill, 1995) and a narrative inquiry research approach to the data analysis (McMillan, 2010; Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Data was collected through the use of participant journals (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004).

Dramatic narratives provide a way of organizing episodes and accounts of actions; they can bring together mundane facts and fantastic creations (Denzin, 2003; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007). In response to suggestions that the simple reading of a narrative flattens the emotional content of the story (Mattingly, 2007; Portelli, 1998) and that narratives convey meaning that can only be perceived through listening to them and becoming involved with them (Portelli, 1998), the authors developed a workshop approach to discussing and analyzing cases of educational leadership that had been re-written as dramatic scripts and then performed through an immersive method of applied drama (Nicholson, 2005; O'Neill, 1995). "Live performance," Dolan (2005) claims, "provides a place where people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world" (p. 1).

The term "applied drama" describes the process, as well as the product—the performance—of enacting scripts (Leavy, 2009; Nicholson, 2005; Norris, 2009) in order to

understand particular cultural practices of peoples or organizations (Denzin, 2003). Performance provides, as Denzin (2003) notes, the opportunity to reaffirm, resist, transgress, re-inscribe, or passionately re-invent socialized practice. Applied drama is a type of performative arts-based representation that allows the human condition to be portrayed symbolically and aesthetically to facilitate spectator engagement, involvement, and reflection (Cannon, 2012; Nicholson 2005). In order to maintain the integrity of the case study contents, and ensure that typically unvoiced viewpoints represented in the fixed-scripts were consistently upheld, the authors did not employ any applied theatre techniques that would rely on verbal improvisation, divergent rewritings, or other devised theatre techniques. The methods used also avoided a theatre of representation to ensure that actual dilemmas experienced by participants in their current positions, if any, could not become the subject matter (Meyer, 2001).

Drawing on the methodologies of two diverse academic disciplines, namely education and theatre, the arts-based workshop was team-led by an educational administration expert and a professional theatre practitioner/educator (Knowles & Cole, 2008). Saldaña (2003, p. 239) notes that theatre practitioners such as one of the authors, specifically through the nature of their training, possess several “prerequisite skills” for qualitative inquiry through applied drama research approaches. These include (a) the ability to analyze characters and dramatic texts, which transfers to analyzing narratives for participant actions and relationships; (b) enhanced emotional sensibility, enabling empathic understanding of participants’ perspectives; (c) scenographic literacy, which heightens the visual analysis of organizational settings, spaces, and participant styles, and so forth; and (d) an aptitude for storytelling, in its broadest sense, which transfers to the writing of engaging narratives and their presentation in performance.

This workshop took the stance that studying the lives of people in context should not be

merely voyeuristic, visual activities that involve gazing at a presumed "outside" world, but also ought to involve collaboration and commitment to a critical, postmodern, performance aesthetic where there is space to express multiple and multi-layered voices (Denzin, 2003). In this regard the lives and physical distance between the characters in the plays and the actors who portray them blur as they react to one another and react emotionally to how they portray characters who may speak and act very differently from them (Denzin, 2001; Saldaña, 2003, 2005). Similarly, the character and the actors, and the decisions they make are fallible, tenuous, and fluctuate between what is and what ought to be (Saldaña, 2003, 2005).

Data was collected about the participants' perceptions of the effects of the approach through a journaling process over the two days of the workshop (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). Participants were given writing prompts at four times during the workshop to capture their thoughts and evolving understandings of ethical decision making in the midst of their experiencing the dramatic methods of the workshop and the details of the scripted cases. The open-ended writing prompts were designed to allow participants to provide answers to questions in their own words or in a manner that reflected their own perceptions rather than those of the researchers (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The prompts focused on the following topics:

- 1) Describe your own typical decision-making process and particularly your approach to the ethical decision-making processes as an educator.
- 2) Describe how you perceive applying an ethic of critique (Begley, 2010) to a scripted scene while preparing for performance and upon performing it.
- 3) Describe any changes in thinking and feeling that may have resulted through the applied drama processes you have experienced throughout the workshop.
- 4) What do you think you will take away from the workshop?

In addition, the participants were informed that they could go back to earlier responses they had written to the prompts and revise their personal narratives for the workshop (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004).

The analysis of participant journals (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004) followed a narrative inquiry approach in which each of the individuals' journals as a whole was analyzed using a recursive (also referred to as a constant-comparative) approach (McMillan, 2010; Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010) to see if this unique endeavor in professional development for school leaders might in some small ways build their perceptions of their creative capacity as active and empathetic learners, and deepen their awareness of the ethical dimensions of educational leadership (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2013). The use of narrative in teacher research has become more recognized and influential, particularly since narrative can be used to describe not only the process of creating a story and its themes, but the internal logic of the story and its outcomes (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1988; Scherff & Daria, 2010; Webster & Mertova, 2007). The narrative prompts allowed the participants to shape their own understandings and tell their own stories of the experience of "The Drama in School Leadership."

The recursive analysis involved identifying a set of key themes by reading and re-reading each of the journals and organizing themes into a coded hierarchy (McMillan, 2010). Clustering lower order codes developed higher order themes (McMillan, 2010). The data were again read across the sixteen participant journals to further organize what appeared to be consistent themes written about by the participants in the journals.

The research study and its methodological procedures complied with ethical guidelines approved by two university ethics boards.

### *The Participants*

The November 2011 workshop was advertised in “The Manitoba Teacher,” posted online by the Council of School Leaders, a special area-group of the Manitoba Teachers’ Society, and promoted in graduate classes in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. Workshop attendees were invited to participate in the research study. However, participation in the study was not a condition of attending the workshop.

Sixteen adults participated in the study. All but two of the participants held formal school leadership positions, such as principal, vice-principal, or department head, and the other two identified themselves as teacher-leaders in their area with aspirations to more formal leadership positions.

### *The Workshop*

The authors co-facilitated a two-day intensive workshop in theatrical methods for educational leaders focused on developing, studying, and experiencing directed, fixed-script dramas. The workshop, which drew on classic and contemporary ensemble-building methods that are frequently applied in the service of developing performing arts projects, is best characterized as a form of applied drama (Nicholson, 2005; O’Neill, 1995). The “Drama in School Leadership” approach drew largely from the work of Stanislavski (1936a, 1936b, 1961), whose work informed that of Nagrin (1997), to explore how dramatic performances can be directed in such a way that they lead to self-awareness, relatedness, and understandings of the ethical dimensions of enacting leadership. Clurman (1972) captures the complexity of the Stanislavski system, also referred to as “method acting,” in writing,

the systems *is* a technique, it is not an end in itself. Nor is it a *theory* . . . it is a means whereby a particular artist or group of artists may more authentically manifest whatever they wish in the theatre. [emphasis in the original] (p. 147)

Stanislavski's system is not about acting as pretending to be someone or something the actor is not. It is not about acting as faking, but rather is about producing real, authentic behaviour and emotion on stage (Clurman, 1972).

Thus, the participants worked alone in writing, drawing, thinking, and moving; worked with a partner in pair-share exercises; accomplished dozens of carefully ordered and progressively challenging movement and vocal exercises, like mirroring a partner, freezing in statue formation, and actioning/reactioning; and discussed the ever-changing and developing sense of trust, ensemble, and connectedness they might be experiencing. They also worked in small groups to analyze, discuss, rehearse, and perform their assigned play, taking roles that did not reflect their current professional position. Principals played students, teachers played principals, and both had the opportunity to play central office administrators.

Each group worked with the director to explore entrances, stage movement patterns, and relationships between characters, postures, gestures, vocal choices, and concluding stage pictures. All of the choices made were built on the vocabulary of theatre the authors had established throughout the entire workshop. Life experience and imagination helped participants create believable portrayals of their characters. While the scripts were fixed and the performances directed, as each individual prepared and imagined how the character's identity might best be portrayed on stage, nuances of gesture, posture, and improvised movement patterns began to emerge. The entire group functioned as a cohesive ensemble in exercises, discussions, and during large-scale group drawings and brainstorming projects. All of this served to warm-up and free the body, voice, and mind for the culminating work of staging three distinct plays in

small groups for the other workshop participants to witness and discuss (Spolin, 1963). Group discussion, based on Begley's (2010) framework, sought to highlight the ethical dilemmas inherent in each script following the performances. A final, individually written reflection by each participant concluded the workshop.

### *The Scripts*

In this project, the authors scripted and dramatized fictional but universal narratives that had been previously taught as straightforward cases in a graduate-level education course by one of them. The scripts were developed using a postmodern understanding of narrative where knowledge of the ethical elements of the scripts were not developed as detached, isolated, or predetermined aspects of a so-called "real-world" of educational leadership (Wilber, 1996). The complexity written into the scripts allowed for conflict between the actors and potentially conflict within the actors to occur as they struggled emotionally to do the "right thing" (Derrida, 1978, 1981).

The authors chose not to put on display the raw lived-reality of the participants' lives by having them script their own professional stories. In part this choice reflected Saldaña's (2005) caution that "just as no one wants to read mediocre research, no one wants to sit through mediocre theatre" (p. 31). Thus, as mentioned previously, three one-act plays with clear plots, an engaging dramatic arc, and believable characters entitled "Grace Period," "Discrimination," and "How to Fire a Teacher" were used at this workshop. The storyline of each of the plays centered on the complex, ethical dimensions of choosing how to act ethically while mired in the midst of making challenging personnel decisions that are endemic in contemporary schools.

One of the authors, a professional theatre director, facilitated the dramaturgical,



character and script analyses necessary to prepare for performance. This approach in part addressed the criticism supported by Abbs (1992), who alleged that drama, used extensively as a medium for cross-curricular learning, has lost its integrity: "Devoid of art, devoid of the practices of theatre, devoid of artistic and critical terminology, drama became a method of teaching without a subject" (p. 2). The intention of the workshop was not to borrow or intersperse a few ideas from the theatre arts into a leadership development workshop. Rather, "The Drama in School Leadership" immersed participants in the discipline inherent in theatre work, demanding complete cognitive, affective, and kinesthetic commitment and understanding of a real person in a realistic context.

### **Findings**

The findings drawn from the analysis of the data collected during this study revealed that, overall, the experience of the applied drama methods (Nicholson, 2005; O'Neill, 1995) in "The Drama in School Leadership" did sensitize, influence, and challenge the thinking of leaders regarding their responsibility, their identity, and even their competence as ethical decision-makers. For the purposes of this paper, the authors focus on four emergent themes that presented themselves in the written comments of a significant portion of the participants. The first theme was the overwhelming use of the terms "collaborative" or "consultative" to describe their leadership style when asked to describe their decision-making process. The second theme that was prevalent was the perception of an increased facility in applying an abstract ethical framework in a very concrete and palpable way after experiencing applied drama methods. The third theme to emerge was the perception of the relevance of personal risk-taking within a group setting to the overall learning process. The fourth theme found repeatedly was the notion that

when administrators espouse that all decisions in schools should benefit and appropriately serve children or youth as the primary stakeholders, some cognitive and ethical dissonance may ensue.

*Reconciling Collaboration, Consultation, and Solitude*

Participants overwhelmingly described their decision-making process involving other adults as either collaborative or consultative or both. Only in one case did a participant say their decision-making style was predominantly solitary, though several acknowledged that after collaborating and consulting rather extensively or for reasons of expedience they tended to make decisions in a solitary manner. Many participants described not only their dominant decision-making mode, but in some ways, their leadership style. This is best illustrated in the comments of three of the participants who wrote the following:

As a leader on any given day I prefer a collaborative approach involving discussion, interaction and listening to facets of issues/challenges that arise. Listening to colleagues and students allows a school leader to make a calculated decision that is beneficial to all parts, a decision that allows for a just outcome. (Journal 11)

Each type of decision-making process, every situation in fact, requires something different. I always try to be collaborative and consultative whenever possible. (Journal 9)

My decision-making process often is highly collaborative and often requires consultation and discussion. (Journal 16)

In addition, some of the comments related to a solitary approach to decision-making may have had to do with administrative protocols enacted by school divisions. As was noted in one journal,

certain divisional goals do need to be accomplished and are spelled out; so there may also be less consultation in those instances. (Journal 12)

However, as the following comment illustrated, another participant noted that there are different

approaches that are used when working with students to reach a decision than are used when working with staff. The participant stated:

I would typically describe my leadership role as needing to be both collaborative and solitary. When I'm working with other educators to obtain a "like" goal, I tend to collaborate. But, when I'm working with students on their issues, solitary decisions need to be made. (Journal 13)

Others did not distinguish between student or staff stakeholders in their decision making processes but did express the importance of withholding judgment until as many points of view as possible could contribute to the discussion. This sentiment is illustrated in the following comments:

My approach is intended to be collaborative. Some people might not describe it that way, but many would see it that way. I try to bring the people involved together in the same space. It is important that each person has an opportunity to express him or herself. My goal is to listen to the many viewpoints and try to not make a decision for as long as possible. (Journal 13)

Or it was stated in Journal 1:

I realize that I can be myopic in my thinking, as a result I try to make it part of my practice to look at other viewpoints.

Some participants acknowledged that in consulting with others they may not only learn more about a situation, but can be offered guidance or advice in best practices as well. As one participant noted,

my approach to the process of decision-making has been consultative and collaborative. I believe in finding out best practices from colleagues . . . (why reinvent the wheel?). Big decisions are often life changing and/or have an impact on many people. It just makes sense to gain different perspectives. (Journal 10)

In addition, several participants noted that the applied drama approach experienced through the workshop allowed them to experience collaboration and deepen their understanding

of leadership decision-making styles. One participant best illustrated this in the following comment:

This session has helped me consider what I already do intuitively and think about being more explicit in certain areas. It has helped me to look at real ethical dilemmas and view them from a different lens (or lenses) to examine the value of competing interests. It really helped me to solidify how a birds-eye-view approach to a situation might become richer by looking at a variety of personal perspectives. This activity has also been very good to help me consider and develop empathy for those characters that seem beyond redemption. (Journal 9)

*Applying and Enacting an Ethic of Critique in Studying Other's Actions*

Participants were asked to analyze the characters, words, actions, and themes in their scripts using the ethical framework defined by Begley (2010), an ethic of critique, that helps educators analyze overlooked stakeholders, values in conflict, and issues of injustice in any given ethical decision-making process. Participants engaged in this with a great deal of fervor after the initial character and script analysis process, as they came to understand the dynamics at work in the narratives. For example, two participants wrote:

I could identify the stakeholders and particularly those people who would be impacted by my/the character's decisions. (Journal 9)

The main values in conflict in these plays are between teachers, principal, children, and community. Children and community typically do not have a voice. Also, conflicts within oneself are evident by the way the characters think of themselves. (Journal 10)

Understanding multiple stakeholders is a part of script analysis in theatre, and participants, as they prepared to understand their assigned parts, successfully engaged in recognizing and naming stakeholders, as in the following example:

In the play "Discriminating," the stakeholders included students, teachers, the school community and the whole staff. Parents had no voice in this play

therefore could not express concern over the kind of education their children were or were not receiving. Students are struggling internally with what is happening in the classroom and they know they are not receiving “good” teaching but are unsure of what to do about it—or if they need to do anything at all. Some wonder how it will affect them directly, if it will matter that their education is low quality in this one classroom. (Journal 11)

Some participants immediately applied the study of characters as stakeholders to the study of their multiple constituents in their profession, as is noted in the comments made by this participant:

I have enjoyed the opportunity to reflect further on the “roles” we all assume and how each relationship affects what we do. The process has led me to further questions: Do I really understand the “other’s” perspective? Do I really think about how I influence others and how the “role” I play on a daily basis impacts others? (Journal 15)

Or, as was stated in Journal 7,

I think that as an administrator, there are so many arenas of practice that come into play in every situation. I think you have to remember in regards to “self,” that it isn’t just you involved in the situation.

The participants noted that they felt the turbulence, which is identified in Begley’s (2010) ethic of critique, furthermore, emotionally, physically, and cognitively through the playing of the action. The following two statements illustrated this fact:

My thinking about the consideration of turbulence has changed because the process has helped me to understand the complexity of the relationships of the players, each of them carrying their own “spin” on the conflict. (Journal 2)

The conflict exists between the teacher and himself, which I hadn’t felt before we discussed the characters. He knows he needs out, doesn’t seem able to follow any steps, but isn’t happy. I also still feel it’s between teacher and students and superintendent of human resources and the teacher, as well as the union rep and the superintendent of human resources person. (Journal 6)

*Taking a Risk Through Embodied Learning*

The creative intent of the workshop was made clear to all participants in advance of the workshop, and yet with the performing arts one cannot exactly predict what will be expected when you walk into a workshop setting. While this fact is thrilling for the performer, it can be intimidating for many school educators, even if some suggest nothing ought to frighten them as they enact leadership (Fleck, 2005). In arts-based work the tolerance for ambiguity and presumption and generation of immediate trust between members of the group leaves some non-arts practitioner participants uneasy. Several participants seemed to be referring to some sort of risk-taking or challenge that was required of them because of the unfamiliar methods.

As they were developing relationships among themselves, as themselves and as their characters, several participants attributed their growth to the inherent challenge of embodied work. In an entry in Journal 2, the idea that leaders who only look at their own immediate relationships are somehow playing it safe was conveyed:

My thinking has changed about the stakeholders because previously I did not consider the relationships among the stakeholders. The process of drawing connections and examining *all* [emphasis in original] characters opened this thinking for me. By examining relationship among characters I became more aware that I don't consider the conflicts among them, only between me as an administrator and the other characters. The workshop process challenged me to understand the complexity of the relationships and how little risk I'm typically willing to take. (Journal 2)

It seemed clear that personal fears could block confidence and even right action, as evidenced in the author of Journal 11 who alluded to the confidence that was built as a result of playing a character who made a tough decision:

I often think I know what would be the right decision to make but don't choose it because of all the ramifications. Sometimes I think it's not worth taking the risks but have to admit now that through taking on my role I feel more willing to put myself out there.

In Journal 6 there is further evidence that there may be a connection between challenges overcome on the personal, creative ensemble level and the ability to creatively imagine meeting challenges in a professional setting like a school:

Because I haven't had the opportunity in an administrative role, I have trouble thinking about how I might now approach ethical decision making with a staff, for example. But being a part of the performance and watching others perform, as well as listening to how others felt about their roles, I have a feeling I will address ethical decisions differently, making sure every stakeholder has a voice. I didn't think we could actually all be performing by the second day. I was really skeptical that the group could pull it off but in the end everyone in the workshop was really convincing and helped create a whole situation on stage that I definitely thought I could potentially run into someday.

*It's (Kind of) About the Kids*

Naturally, educational leaders talk about their main concern—students—no matter what the prompt, and seem to know and agree that children or youth ought to come first in their decision making processes. Therefore it was expected that in the prompts about decision-making style and stakeholders many mentions of the children would be made early on in the workshop:

I focus on what is best for the child even if it will not be a popular decision because in a school the main stakeholders are students and always will be.  
(Journal 8)

Similarly the author of Journal 11 noted that

in the case of schools, students are the bottom line . . . therefore the decision that ultimately benefits the students is the best decision.

Later prompts eliciting understanding after working on the scripted plays revealed that the participants were concerned with many constituents—not just students—in the school

community. This is best illustrated in the sentiments of the authors of Journals 1 and 5, who wrote these entries:

The outcome of firing a teacher clearly has an impact on everyone involved—all stakeholders—recognized or not. The entire process would potentially create tensions personally, professionally—with the school community. Some of the tensions I see are the personal emotions of some characters like the superintendent or teacher. There is a lot to the decision like feelings of guilt, the moral of teacher, and the person's financial stability. It makes me wonder if he or she has a family? In a way, it's like "ruining someone's life." What happens to the teacher's self-esteem in all of this? (Journal 1)

We each are held accountable for our performance. Taxpayers and parents expect that children are receiving the best possible education. However, the system makes it difficult to follow through with accountability. The universities push education students through—evaluated by other teachers (former). The union gets in the way of holding teachers accountable—facilitated by other teachers or former teachers. The administration is skewed /torn in its role between instructional leadership and management. It is not general practice for teachers to have challenging professional dialogue with each other. (Journal 5)

Written comments that made reference to decision-making being only "about the kids" were not evident in the analysis of journals or recorded in the field note observations as the workshop progressed in the second day.

## **Discussion**

Early on, collaboration and consultation were two words commonly used by participants to describe their leadership styles. There was surprising similarity among the participants' responses to the initial prompt asking them to describe their leadership styles. In some ways, the overlap found in the individual responses seemed to express a collective discourse that school leadership must be consultative or collaborative. While the majority of the educators in the workshop acknowledged that some solitary work is done in making decisions, their responses even when they identified that they did make solitary decisions, referred to using



consultative and collaborative processes without providing examples of how this was done in solitude.

As the workshop progressed and the kinesthetic engagement required participants to prepare and enliven the dramatizations and this became the norm, in other words, after hours and hours of not being in their seats but interacting very intensely with others, many of the participants made reference in their journals to private and personal dimensions of ethical decision making. For example, almost all of the participants offered various descriptions of how certain bodily indicators signified that a tough decision was indeed being made ethically correct. These included references to having the ability to sleep well without care after making a tough decision, to being able to breathe easily or feel at peace. Generally, it appears that the untroubled conscience was paramount for many of the participants as an indicator of ethical action (Rogers, 1920). Though not conclusive, it appears that decision making, even when it involves the actual or even pretended gathering of input from others, in what is commonly referred to as a consultative or collaborative fashion, ultimately has a solitary, inner dimension, experienced in the body, and expressed as such.

The second theme that the authors derived from the data relates to how the ethic of critique (Begley, 2010) was, for the most part, successfully applied to the ethical dilemmas presented in the preparation and staging of the scripts (Saldaña, 2005). For a large number of participants, the character analysis process served as a highly useful mode of reasoning about ethics. Nagrin's (1997) work on performance analysis had allowed participants a window into the theatre artist's approach to textual analysis (Denzin, 2003).

What seems most effective about this step in the applied drama process (Nicholson, 2005) was that a conceptual bridge was built between two analytical approaches, thus making the

application of an ethical framework, a task that many well-educated adults might struggle with, more accessible. Also significant in this finding is that the participants articulated the situations with great psychological detail and emotional nuance when approaching them as dramatic texts. These findings led the researchers to conclude that there might be some profound ways in which applied drama (Nicholson, 2005; O'Neill, 1995) assists with an adult learner's ability to apply an ethical framework, such as Begley's (2010) ethic of critique to highly charged situations in schools. The script and character analysis phases of preparing for the performances may have contributed to each learner's success in this regard.

The way applied drama (Nicholson, 2005) practices use teamwork to build an ensemble that can accomplish a common task was indicated in some of the responses. School leaders could see how group cohesion was developed despite but also because of some challenging exercises that required a kind of personal courage. A constant willingness to try new things and possibly fail was demanded of every participant. Everyone accomplished the exercises leading up to the performances and everyone embodied and presented a believable, understandable, sympathetic character in the somewhat complicated one-act plays. This finding, that there was some awareness of the risk taking involved in the performing arts process, seemed to be acknowledged in numerous ways throughout the journals.

Though a seasoned theatre artist might not feel any of the exercises at the workshop were risky, for a non-performing artist they very well may have been. The fact that participants acknowledged, on some level, the importance of being pushed beyond their own comfort zone creatively seems significant. These kinds of journal responses were similar to the participant responses in the first study (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2013) that noted how the idea of relational

trust, so fundamental to school staff success, was built up throughout the communal workshop process.

The final theme illustrates the prevalence of a leadership discourse that prioritizes placing the needs and well being of children and youth, in effect students, first. Similarly to the first thematic finding, in which the language around leadership identity transformed from socially acceptable terms like “consultative” to somewhat personal understandings, so too did the overriding initial emphasis on students as the main concern in all ethical decisions give way to a more problematic acknowledgement of just how much adults consider other non-student adults when making difficult ethical decisions. Why this might be so is beyond the scope of this paper and the results may not be generalizable.

However, there seems to be an outcome of the applied drama (Nicholson, 2005) experience facilitated in this case by a particular set of scripts that allows for deep reflection on leadership. This deep reflection gets at some measure of authentic experience that overflows the very platitudes that most educators would be happy to espouse. The act of performing a directed fixed-script offers those who perform and the audience who spectates the opportunity to become the kind of leaders who possess empathy and intellect, and passion and critique (Denzin, 2003). Without this shared event of the simulation of the real, lived drama in school leadership, it seems that it would be more difficult to generate this individual and collective wisdom because envisioning all of the stakeholders’ and their motivations is difficult to do on one’s own.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study reveal further insights into the complexities inherent in leadership, insights that are particularly distilled by virtue of immersing ourselves in the

discipline of the theatre arts. Instead of traditional, sedentary role-play exercises, the authors propose that learning “on our feet” unlocks a whole host of important understandings about the human and therefore dramatic nature of educational leadership. If a shared goal of theatre, ethics and qualitative inquiry is, as Saldaña (2010) states, to explore and learn more about what it means to be human at its best then, arguably, an approach such as is described in this study offers tremendous potential to help prepare the kind of educators children deserve to have leading schools. Although this interdisciplinary work highlights some preliminary understandings that may be foundational to other leadership development pursuits, clearly what is needed is more empirical research that tests some of the ideas proposed in this paper.

Applied drama (Nicholson, 2005; O’Neill, 1995) offers both preparation and praxis for the next generation of school leaders who, like all organizational leaders, will require great creative and ethical capacities. Theatrical performances are, Langellier (1999) proposes, sites where context, agency, praxis, history, and inter-subjectivity intersect. By being exposed to a proximate simulation of the real drama in school leadership, it seems that a more robust understanding of what constitutes the ethical dimensions of leadership can be anticipated and cultivated. One of the goals of this line of research is to contribute to an epistemological and conceptual pluralism that challenges existing ways of knowing, representing, and reifying what is often portrayed as a singular reality of school leadership that is cemented in objective cases (Denzin, 2003). It seems timely to consider how tomorrow’s leadership teams could enter the profession with more sophisticated tools for understanding the complexities of the drama inherent in the work of running schools, and the study and art of drama itself may assist this endeavour.

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