

Unleashing Leadership through Artwork

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Abstract

Howard Gardner (1993) continued endeavors to establish a way to account for differences in individuals beyond traditional intelligence measures. Pedagogical strategies to address “multiple intelligences” are a unique way to develop course material, whether the setting is secondary or post-secondary. While some students thrive in traditional course experiences others may be lost in the material, looking for something else to assist them with comprehension. As an instructor the use of alternative teaching methods to reach beyond the textbook, PowerPoint presentation, and lecture is essential in bringing the reality of leadership to all students. “Using artwork to communicate the role of leadership through history is a creative and engaging way to encourage students to see leadership beyond the text and beyond their [personal] experiences” (Stedman, 2007). The intent of this paper is to provide a theoretical foundation and examples for using contemporary artwork in leadership classrooms.

Introduction

Developing instructional materials for a course is a challenging task that requires the instructor to look beyond one’s comfort zone for something which can reach all students. Too often there is a trap to use PowerPoint presentations. Howell (2007) noted that “it’s a rare event for a lecturer not to use PowerPoint” (p. 137). Identifying ways to enhance the pedagogy of teaching becomes overwhelming and is often dismissed for a variety of reasons.

Instruction of leadership principles is equally challenging; leadership is enigmatic and constructed individually and the strategies to enhance the development of complex leadership models are just as important as the leadership concepts themselves. Being innovative often means taking risks and trying new strategies. The idea of multiple intelligences provides a framework for some exciting and engaging leadership activities.

In a majority of the literature one finds allusions to the blend of multiple intelligences and leadership that concern specific skills required of a leader. From Katz (1955) to Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, and Fleishman (2000),

theorists have proposed that leaders need to be equipped with an array of skills. Bass (2002) referred to them as “intelligences” (p. 106). These intelligences provide an ideal mix of what a leader should have and do. While all leaders may need some degree of each of these, how does one instruct beyond the leadership-oriented intelligences to those associated with learning?

The intent of this paper is to provide a framework for leadership educators to use creative means, specifically contemporary artwork, to enhance the experience of leadership students. Contemporary artwork is the period of artistry since World War II. In comparison, “pop art” is a genre from within the contemporary art period. Furthermore, “pop culture” is a phrase used to identify items or artifacts which are deemed popular by culture and began as a result of the “pop art” movement (UVA, 2004). Artwork which is contemporary, but also meets the needs of the masses and expresses the ideas and beliefs of a particular period captures the essence of unleashing leadership through artwork.

Multiple Intelligences

In the early 1980s Howard Gardner set forth on a path to assist instructors in understanding the number of ways people see the world. Gardner (1993) wrote about the theory of multiple intelligences to address the subtle differences that exist in how people interact with the world. Gardner (2006) set forth the basic definition of intelligences as “the ability to solve problems or fashion products that are of consequence in a particular cultural setting or community” (p. 6). The idea of multiple intelligences (MI) simply pluralizes the concept.

Gardner (1993) identified seven intelligences. He indicates they categorize different ways in which people process various kinds of information (Gardner, 2006). Intelligences include visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic, interpersonal, musical-rhythmic, bodily-kinesthetic, intrapersonal, and logical-mathematical (Gardner, 1993). In most activities we use a combination of intelligences, but often have the greatest moments of learning using the one or two which we prefer. Gardner (2006) expanded the MI theory to include two additional intelligences – naturalistic and existential.

There have been many instructional guides developed for integrating the multiple intelligences in the classroom. Reardon and Derner (2004) wrote *Strategies for Great Teaching* which is a book designed to provide instructors with specific activities that integrate a variety of intelligences. Kagan and Kagan (1998) developed a comprehensive resource guide for educators which gave an in-depth review of each intelligence, as well as age-appropriate activities. They categorized each intelligence into a broader category including traditional intelligences (verbal and logical), art and music (visual and musical), outdoor (bodily and naturalistic), and personal (interpersonal and intrapersonal).

Additionally, it is believed that intelligences do not exist in isolation of one another, but co-exist and interact as we learn. The more an activity or learning experience utilizes a combination of intelligences, the greater the opportunity for retention (Gardner, 1993).

Gardner (1999) discussed developing understanding in learners and said this development must take place without the pressures of exams and has to allow learners to “approach intriguing phenomena” (p. 164). The integration of learning from school to a museum or gallery provides a basis for encouraging students to see leadership from a variety of perspectives. A key identification made by Gardner is the concept of “entry points” which provide educators ways to align with specific intelligences. Each of these is briefly summarized as:

1. Narrational: learning through story telling.
2. Quantitative/Numerical: learning through numbers of patterns.
3. Logical: learning through deductive reasoning.
4. Foundational/Existential: learning through fundamental questions.
5. Aesthetic: learning through materials which feature harmony and balance.
6. Hands: learning through experience.
7. Social: learning through a group experience.

In an ideal learning environment, the educator introduces teaching methodologies which support each of the intelligences. While some educators may utilize strategies which closely align to their own preferences, the goal is to provide a wide array of learning experiences. There are many ways leadership educators can enhance the learning environment and the purpose of this piece is to provide a practical way to use aesthetics as an “entry point” (Gardner, 1999) for understanding leadership.

Leadership in Contemporary Artwork

Historically artists communicated ideas and opinions about world issues using their artwork. The works of Michelangelo, DaVinci, Monet, and Picasso render many viewers speechless as the viewer is often transported to another time and place just by viewing the piece. Famous moments captured, such as *Washington Crossing the Delaware* by Leutze (1851), *Landing of Columbus* by Tolin (1862), and *Relic* by Sorolla (1893), provide a new, different, or enhanced perspective of leadership for the student.

Using artwork to unleash leadership in the mind’s eye of the student is a creative and innovative way to teach leadership. It provides the “entry point” (Gardner, 1999) to begin conversations about leadership concepts. Contemporary artwork – artwork produced since World War II – allows students to experience a contemporary concept (leadership) through contemporary view points. “Pop art” artwork illustrates the broader norm of society and gives an interpretative glance into concepts which are complex and widely experienced. “Pop culture” refers to items of society identified as popular.

Alburty (1999) shared Bruce Payne's "leadership and the arts," a program designed to illustrate the reality of leadership in the business world. This innovative program introduces students to theatre, but in a way which is engaging and far from textbooks. It is this exposure which drives students to "think outside the box" and learn new ways seeing things (Stedman, 2007).

Reinforcing many of the multiple intelligences of leadership, Hamblen (1993) referred to the role of art in instrumental outcomes. Artwork can be used to enhance creative behaviors including critical thinking, self-awareness, and social relations. These align very closely to the skills identified by Katz (1955), Mumford et al., (2000), and Bass (2002). Hamblen (1993) purported that art provides an additional outlet to develop the cognitive components of "artistic expression and response" (p. 192). She also reported students can gain "a sense of value and purpose" (p.192).

Eisner (1987) initially proposed that instruction using art had a transfer quality, allowing students to gain benefits beyond that of the artistic expression. He also discussed the ability for people to imaginatively manipulate concepts, a skill that is very beneficial in many leadership education programs. Humans are able to take a concept and imagine what it could be, asking "What is a leader?" and "What is leadership?" These questions are often asked of students studying leadership.

There exists a wide array of artistic mediums appropriate for instruction. Contemporary artwork provides alternative perspectives to students beyond those of the instructor or peers. "Pop art" provides a creative way to introduce students to leadership concepts. "Pop art" draws on themes, ideas, and imagery from a wide array of sources (Daly, 2002). Whether discussing power, communication, relationships, transformation, or ethics, artwork captures a moment and allows students to interpret what these concepts mean.

To prepare for such a venture is daunting and does require research and an open mind on behalf of the educator. In an effort to motivate the use of this tool, the following resources are recommended:

- Farthing, S. (Ed). (2007). *1001 paintings you must see before you die*.
- Gardner, H. (1994). *The arts and human development*.
- Gardner, H. (2004). *Frames of mind*.
- Gardner, H. (2006). *Multiple intelligences: New horizons*.
- Gardner, H. (1982). *Art, mind, and brain: A cognitive approach to creativity*.
- Kocur, Z. and Leung, S. (2007). *Theory in contemporary art since 1985*.
- Phaidon. (2004). *The art book*.

These resources provide a general understanding of the pedagogical principles behind the use of artwork in leadership education. However, Farthing's (2007)

and Phaidon's (2004) books present a wonderful breadth of artwork examples and illustrations to guide reflection and consideration. These two resources are great places to start the familiarization process and can assist in establishing what artwork is appropriate or garners a particular reaction.

Whether students see Warhol's *200 Soup Cans* (1962) to discuss American's cultural leadership, *Sailing Against the Current* by Barceló (1991) to show determination, or Howson's, *Road to Zenica* (1994) to illustrate ethical leadership, the intent is to provide an additional outlet for students to see leadership and experience it.



Road to Zenica. Reprinted with the permission of the Flowers East Gallery, London UK.

Other examples may allude to the cultural impact of leadership on others. *Air Superiority* by Komar and Melamid (1997) illustrates a prime example of the United States' leadership and the influence it has had.



Air Superiority. (1997). Reprinted with permission from Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

Additional examples are provided in Table 1. The titles of the paintings and complementary leadership topics are provided. These are meant as only a guide to encourage further reflection of how artwork can illustrate essential leadership concepts. It is often up to the viewer to identify the meaning. The pieces mentioned below are capable of presenting a variety of concepts. The images not only encourage reflection on specific topics, but illustrate a key moment in time captured by the artist. Providing background information of the painting (who, what, when, and how) also gives students a wonderful learning experience.

Table 1: Titles of contemporary artwork and corresponding leadership concepts

Title of Work	Artist	Leadership Concept
<i>Portrait Group</i> (1951)	Rodrigo Moynihan	Leader Member Exchange (LMX)
<i>The Death of Nelson</i> (1952)	John Minton	Transformational Leadership
<i>Washington Crossing the Delaware</i> (1953)	Larry Rivers	Path-Goal Theory
<i>Forget it! Forget Me!</i> (1962)	Roy Lichtenstein	Gender Leadership
<i>Lending an Ear to the Past</i> (1994)	Ofelia Rodríguez	Trait Leadership
<i>Thumbing</i> (1991)	Gilbert Proesch and George Pasmore	Followership

Conclusion

Each learner brings a unique set of needs; much like the leader brings unique skills and qualities to the classroom. The theory of multiple intelligences explains that we are all different in our abilities. As instructors we should seek out creative ways to address the needs of our students.

Aesthetics is one way we can get students to think of leadership outside of the box. Textbooks, PowerPoint presentations, and lectures serve as powerful tools, but often fall short of engaging students in a personal experience. Artwork, whether contemporary or “pop,” can transport the learner to a different time, a different place, and a different perspective. It can be the entry point.

It becomes not *what* we want students to learn, but *how* we want them to learn. Taking a small calculated risk is what leadership is about, it is a lesson we should also be willing to take in the classroom.

While this particular paper is meant to capture a particular form of artwork, contemporary and “pop art” to address the use of “popular culture” in leadership, there are many and varied pieces of art one should consider. This is a beginning. Being open to a variety of artwork will lend to the most success of this teaching strategy.

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Biography

Nicole Stedman is an Assistant Professor and coordinates the university wide leadership minor University of Florida. She teaches courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels with an emphasis on leadership development. Her current research interests are how educators can create experiences to increase capacity for critical thinking in the leadership classroom, including the use of artwork and other creative mediums.