

The Use of Collage in Leadership Education

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To understand significant soul truths and ourselves in relation to them, sometimes one must approach them indirectly. As Palmer (2004) suggested,

If soul truth is to be spoken and heard, it must be approached “on the slant.” I do not mean we must be coy, speaking evasively about subjects that make us uncomfortable, which weakens us and our relationships. But soul truth is so powerful that we must allow ourselves to approach it, and it to approach us, indirectly. We must invite, not command the soul to speak. We must allow, not force, ourselves to listen. (p. 92)

Through poetry, art, literature and music, people explore such truths both through reflection and conversation, and the intellect combines with the heart and soul in an exploration of the depth and paradox of these truths.

Leadership is soul truth. It is not purely intellectual; it is also emotional, physical, and spiritual (Covey, 1991, 2002; Farnsworth, 2007; Goleman *et al.*, 2002; Kyker, 2003, 2004; Pescosolido, 2002; Spears & Noble, 2005; Thompson, 2000; Winston & Hartsfield, 2004). It is not one-dimensional, but complex and paradoxical (Greenleaf, 1977; Stacey *et al.*, 2000; P.T.P. Wong, 2004, Spring). It is not simply a practice, but also an art, a process, and way of being (De Pree, 1987; Quinn, 1996, 2004; P. T. P. Wong & Davey, 2007). It is not simply something one possesses, but something that flows in and through relationships (De Pree, 1992; Kelley, 1998; Moxley, 2002; Spears & Noble, 2005; Wheatley, 1999). Leadership is, as De Pree (1992) suggested, a “serious meddling in other people’s lives” (p. 7) requiring serious thought, reflection, and effort. It is a complex soul truth.

One method utilized in multiple realms to understand the reality of complex soul truths is collage. Because of its arts-based approach, it has been used widely in counseling and to facilitate

communication across linguistic divides. However, while many similar art-based forms of leadership education have been discussed extensively (Billsberry, 2009; Enlow & Popa, 2008; Hall, 2008; Loughman & Finley, 2010; Stedman, 2008; Torock, 2008), collage has not been sufficiently elaborated upon as a leadership development tool. Thus, this article provides an overview of the history of collage as a practice, a review of the literature related to its use in various realms, and suggestions regarding its use in relation to leadership development and education.

Collage as Art

In 1200 A.D., the Japanese began using paper and fabric collages as a backdrop for writing poetry via calligraphy (Leland & Lee, 1994). Later, collage became a popular means of creating unique book covers, book marks, coats of arms, cut-paper silhouettes, and ritual masks. More recently, collage has been used in craft work such as “scrapbooks, photo albums, silhouettes and lampshades made of assorted materials: paper, fabric, human or animal hair, and a variety of memorabilia” (p. 8).

While much of the history of collage has been dedicated to creating these craft oriented items, the use of collage in professional art work such as book illustrations, recipe book page ornamentation, and photography began in the 19th century (Leland & Lee, 1994). It was not, however, until the early 1900s that Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque began using collage in fine art. As Brommer (1994) explained, “these cubist artists broke up space and shapes and often used torn, cut, and pasted papers as integral components of their designs” (p. 5). Since then, multiple artists have expanded upon the use of collage in art and increased its acceptance as a valid artistic medium (Zabel, 1992). More recently, photographers and graphic artists have further extended and solidified the use of collage as both a fine and professional art form.

Therapeutic Collage

Beyond the world of arts and crafts, collage has been used and researched with mostly positive results as a means of diagnosing and treating mental illness and in counseling therapy with a focus on collage content, the creation process, client-counselor interaction and discussion, and self-analysis. Collage thus became a form of art therapy.

Although art and therapeutic techniques appear to have been used in conjunction for centuries, the serious use of such methods emerged in the last two hundred years with the rise of psychology as a

legitimate field of practice and inquiry (Killick & Schaverien, 1997; Rubin, 1999). While art therapists use a broad array of mediums (Rubin, 1999, 2001), the basic premises underlying their work remain relatively constant. After selecting an artistic medium, and via the creative process, individuals craft a “self-object” through which they and/or their counselor seek to better understand conscious and/or subconscious issues relevant to the therapeutic challenges.

Art therapy is particularly “vital for those who cannot or will not talk,” (Rubin, 1999, p. 1) because of the capacity that the self-object has for communicating what the individual is unable or unwilling to verbalize (Betts, 2005; Talwar, 2007). As Mackay (2009) eloquently wrote, “when words are not enough or thoughts and emotions are too difficult to verbalize, art provides a safe place for expression” (p. 118). This may explain why, in some cases, the creative process of collage work alone proves sufficient to provide healing even without conscious reflection and analysis (Ault, 2001).

As just such a technique, collage has an extensive history as a means of diagnosing mental illness and a tool in counseling therapy. Therapeutic methods focus on multiple aspects of the collage itself and the process of collage creation. Thus, counselors examine the content of the collage, the creative process used by the client, the client counselor interaction relative to the collage, and, in some cases, the way in which the individual self-analyzes the collage. In so doing, art therapists have used collage as a means of diagnosing symptoms (Buck & Provancher, 1972), evaluating cognitive processes (Lerner, 1979), understanding identity formation (Takata, 2002), and exploring meaning making (Ikemi *et al.*, 2007). Objective methods of diagnosis have even been developed to facilitate these processes (Lerner & Ross, 1977). Regardless, all of these methods are considered valuable because the medium of collage is believed to tap both conscious and subconscious cognitive stores and to facilitate cognitive, emotional, and communicative processes. Consequently, collage has been used to assist a wide range of clientele, including schizophrenia patients (Moriarty, 1973), multicultural clientele (Landgarten, 1993), and young students (Takata, 2002), as well as traditional, diverse clients (Ikemi *et al.*, 2007), with various emotional and psychological concerns.

Collage in Social and Organizational Settings

Given the value of collage in the realm of human experience, it should come as no surprise that its value beyond therapy and psychology has come to be demonstrated. For example, collage has been used widely as a means of promoting social change (Banash, 2004), developing marketing materials, branding organizations, and creating advertisements (Banash, 2004). Other uses have

included developing consumer collages, establishing and expressing an organization's mission/culture, and facilitating communication in organizational settings (Costa *et al.*, 2003; UVU Advisor Training Office, 2007; Williams, 2002). Finally, educators have used it as a tool for exploring and discussing current affairs and social issues such as racial portrayal in the media and fourteenth amendment violation (Reissman, 1991).

Collage and Leadership Development

Given the versatility of collage relative to developmental, educational, psychological, communicative, and organizational processes, it seems only natural that it also be used for promoting leadership development. Consequently, the following methods represent some ideas for using collage as an individual or group leadership development tool.

Regardless of whether or not the focus of collage activities is on individual or leadership development, the basic foundational tools and processes remain constant. Instructional leaders should assemble and provide the following essential materials: scissors, glue, magazines, and construction paper. Magazines should be carefully selected to ensure a wide variety of pictures, symbols, and cultural artifacts thereby allowing participants a wide range of images to draw upon as they explore and strive to communicate their understanding of leadership and related concepts. Facilitators should ensure that different cultural/racial groups are represented well in the magazines selected. (Landgarten, 1993). Construction paper should be colored, which allows for intentional color selection, as color choice may relate to the conveyance of emotional meaning in the collage (Ikemi *et al.*, 2007).

Once materials are assembled, the next step involves identifying the desired outcome for the collage and structuring the activity to achieve that outcome. In general, collage is best used for exploring, individually or in groups, the meaning of concepts and ideas. However, it can also be used to explore emotions and to facilitate personal awareness and growth. The following examples represent some ways in which leadership development practitioners can use collage.

Assessing/Discussing Individual Understanding

One possible way to use collage is to assess individual, small group, or class mental models relative to leadership or some related concept. Instructors distribute collage materials to participants and instruct them to take approximately 20 minutes to identify, cut out, and paste five to ten images to a

sheet of construction paper, representing the concept of leadership. When participants finish, the instructor asks them, in groups of three to four participants, to discuss the images selected and why they felt these represented the concept of leadership. Groups then identify and report back to the larger group regarding any similarities or differences they discovered. A general discussion follows regarding these differences and what may account for them. As a follow up, facilitators may ask participants to write a brief one- to two-page paper or to carry on a web-based discussion of how their thinking about leadership changed as a result of this activity. Through this activity, not only does the instructor create an interesting context for discussing the challenges and differences related to defining leadership, but also, he or she acquires insight regarding the existing mental models of the class, in general, in relation to the concepts. This same approach can be used to explore any concept or idea that is discussed in the classroom in relation to leadership wherein individual perceptual differences are likely. Thus, facilitators might also ask participants to select items that symbolically represent good leadership, bad leadership, women's vs. men's leadership, different styles of leadership, different traits of leadership, leadership processes, leadership experiences they have had, and so forth.

Group Collages

Facilitators may also use group collages to invite individuals to explore meaning, emotion, and leadership practices. Assuming one wants participants to explore the concept of leadership versus followership; groups ranging from two to four participants could be invited to select different colored sheets of paper to represent the two concepts. After labeling one as leadership and the other as followership, the group would then identify and attach images, words, symbols, etc. to the sheets representing these concepts. When finished, the groups might discuss why they chose the images they chose and any similarities or differences they found between items on the two sheets and their meaning. They might also address what these suggest about similarities and differences between leaders and followers or leadership and followership, and the participants' own comfort/preferences for leading/following based on what their discussion reveals. As groups process and discuss their experience making the collage, deeper insights emerge.

To further learning or alter the nature of the experience, facilitators may alter instructions to encourage different types of discussion and thinking. For example, a group might be asked to have individuals identify and select images, but to forego pasting them on paper until they are done selecting all the items. Then they can dialogue regarding the items they selected and agree to paste images on the sheet only when there is consensus regarding their value. Debriefing can then focus

on why some images were selected and other were not, emotions associated with the process, and/or the dialogue and decision making processes used by the groups.

A third approach involves inviting participants to paste images on the paper(s) without talking or communicating in any way. After the collage is assembled, group members then identify the aspects of the collage that they most like and agree with and those they dislike and disagree with. Having them write their opinions down individually and then discuss them can foster interesting dialogue about the creation of the collage and different ideas, beliefs, and values in relation to the topic selected.

Methodology aside, through debriefing, participants may explore meaning in response to the images selected, think about the positioning of items and why they were placed where they were, discuss patterns that emerge in item selection or positions, or converse regarding other similar meaning oriented aspects of the collage. They can also explore emotional responses by either discussing them directly or by beginning with the colors used, expressions on facial images, or emotions evoked by particular images or even areas of the collage. Finally, they may also address the processes used by the group to develop and discuss the collage including: how leadership emerged in the group, team work and effectiveness, roles team members played, emotional intelligence successes and challenges of group members, dialogue and communication processes, conflict resolution processes, etc.

Self-Reflective Assessment

Another interesting way to use collages in leadership development involves inviting participants to, at the beginning of a unit of study or class, develop a collage regarding the topic they will address and to write a brief summary of what the collage means. At the end of the unit, they complete the same activity and discuss differences in their understanding of the concept as a result of the learning. Further discussion might address specific aspects of the unit or personal experiences that altered individual perception. A modification of this approach involves giving participants the initial collage and summary prior to making the second collage and inviting them to specifically seek out items that represent how their perspective on the topic has changed. Again, follow-up discussion could focus on items selected, why they were chosen, and what led to the changes depicted.

These collages can be done individually, in pairs, or in small groups with varying instructional approaches designed to explore different aspects of leadership. For example, if a facilitator wants a group to explore group learning in general and their own learning in particular, he or she could ask participants to review a previous group collage and discuss what it meant to them individually and as a group when they created it. They could then discuss and recreate the collage based on what they learned as a group. Follow-up conversations could focus on how group learning takes place, the means and importance of group knowledge management in relation to group learning, etc.

Conclusion

Whether leadership development practitioners use them to explore individual understanding of ideas, promote group dialogue and learning, as team building activities or whatever other ends they determine valid, collage represents a significant and important leadership development tool because of the tremendous power it wields to invite others to delve into their own mental models, emotions, and meaning making processes both individually and collectively as a means of accessing soul truth. To this end, it is hoped this article has provided facilitators with insights about how they might best use collage in their work.

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