Molding Curriculum Leadership Theory

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Abstract

This article addresses the gap in the literature on teaching to engage learners’ aesthetic and professional experiences as part of their curriculum leadership development. While enrolled in an educational leadership course (Curriculum Theory) learners created pottery while thinking through problems of practice. The pottery they created and their reflective writing about it and the process of creating it are treated as data sources to address the following questions related to pedagogical practice: 1) What curriculum leadership capacity are learners being socialized to embrace? 2) What aspects of arts and aesthetics seem most conducive to the personal and social transformation of learners’ practices, perspectives, problems, and pottery? Findings are that learners demonstrated the capacity for negative capability and arts-based/aesthetics activity provided them opportunities to merge curriculum theory, educational leadership, and responses to problems of practice with aesthetic (moral, ethical) values. Art/is/try is offered as a way to extend tolerance for volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity in the development of curriculum leadership capacity toward negative capability.

Keywords: educational leadership, curriculum leadership, negative capability, teaching, arts/aesthetics

Literature on educational leadership as artistry or artful has associated its moral and spiritual dimensions with the quality of social relationships (i.e., collegial, teaching/learning), preparation for social action, and the creation of social realities (Samier, 2006). For instance, the artistry of leadership (i.e., leading beautifully, creative leadership) and the values typically associated with philosophical treatments of virtue aesthetics (truth, beauty, goodness) have been explored whether expressed in leadership practice (i.e., performed), research about leadership (i.e., portraiture), or preparation for educational leadership preparation courses (i.e., taught). Examples of the latter (scholarship on teaching) include learners’ engagement with arts.

Learners have been encouraged to frame and solve problems of practice using pottery and role-playing (Katz-Buonincontro & Phillips, 2011), think about leadership or leadership identity spatially using photography (Arnold & Crawford, 2014), and come to terms with their leadership identity (racially) using journaling guided by a painting metaphor (Ridenour, 2004). However, scholarship on how engagement with arts and aesthetics incites educational leadership toward curriculum (theory, making, implementation) leadership remains at the margins despite the continued resurfacing of scholarship arguing its benefits and advancing its inclusion in preparation and practice (e.g., Ediger, 1982; English & Ehrich, 2016). In recent examples of literature on aesthetics and arts, educational leadership, and curriculum is a concern for opposing
the status quo and the injustices and inequities it serves (Boske, 2011; Osei-Kofi, 2013).

As a curriculum studies scholar who is situated in an educational leadership and policy studies program, I experience the press of federal and state mandates to succumb to an instrumental orientation to curriculum that emphasizes certainty based on binaries such as right/wrong and practice/theory. For instance, I work in a context in which the use of rubrics is a required practice when assessing critical tasks associated with certification programs and qualifying examinations. Also, clinical practice and job embedded assignments are assumed by some students and colleagues in the College to be better than other types of assignments (theoretical, conceptual, historical), and state level discourse around continuous progress and enrollment are geared toward preparing students to move up or back into the workforce to further the state’s economic vitality. In place are metric systems (in K-12 and higher education) associated with ratings, merit pay, and the socialization of educators, administrators, and learners to expect “accountability talk,” “backwards planning,” and S.M.A.R.T. objectives – an acronym from the field of management that Doran (1981, p. 36) used to describe optimal objectives: Specific, Measurable, Agreed Upon, Realistic, and Time-Related. This particular approach to objectives derives from the field of business management.

To resist the press for governmental rationality, instrumentality, and efficiency with regard to curriculum and leadership I have engaged in teaching that promotes comfort with uncertainty, acceptance of complexity, and responsiveness to sources of knowledge such as intuition and revelation. I provide opportunities to build these capacities through sensorial engagement with artifacts and metaphors representing problems of practice. Over time I have been able to integrate my appreciation for arts and aesthetics into my work. I first accomplished this integration as a club disc jockey mixing music, then as real estate agent and owner salvaging artifacts in older homes and buildings that reflected craftsmanship, and most recently as an educator/researcher designing lessons, courses, and research projects. Thus, I have some experience protecting my imagination from the pressure of reality (Stevens, 1965). I am seldom enticed by efficiency, accountability, and certainty. Now, as an associate professor focused on curriculum leadership, it is no surprise that I have come to inquire into the concept of negative capability. According to romanticist poet John Keats (1817), negative capability is characteristic of a “Man of Achievement,” “... that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason ...” (Rollins, pp. 193-194). Negative capability is discussed herein as an attitudinal disposition that can be taken up by those in (curriculum) leadership roles, regardless of their gender identity, in order to wedge a space and make time (create space-time) for trying out ideas, practices, and theories.

It was toward scholarship on art and aesthetics, anti-oppressive education, and curriculum leadership when I decided to include an arts-based activity, clay molding/pottery making, into a doctoral level curriculum theory course for learners in an educational leadership and policy studies program. I had taught the course (2012, 2013) with and without (2016) the pottery-making activity. In preparing to teach the course again in 2017, I revisited photographs of pottery and written reflections created by learners from 2012, and recalled comments they shared with me upon occasion over the years, such as how the pottery they created continues to be a meaningful for them. These artifacts and recollections inspired me to revisit the meaning of arts and aesthetics in teaching and learning curriculum leadership.

Herein I ponder the following questions to inform ongoing pedagogical practice: 1) What curriculum leadership capacity are learners being socialized to embrace? 2) What aspects of arts and aesthetics seem most conducive to the personal and social transformation of learners’
practices, perspectives, problems, and pottery? In other words, what is being asked of learners by having them put their hands into clay – an earthly material? Learners’ written final reflections on their pottery, problems of practice, and developing understandings of curriculum theory from the summer of 2012 provide some evidence to illustrate how negative capability, a dimension of leadership, was promoted. Next I present literature specifically focused on arts and aesthetics in educational leadership with a focus on curriculum leadership and/or reducing social oppression (i.e., inequity, injustice) before laying out the conceptual framework guiding the analysis of data.

**Imagining the Possibility of Anti-Oppressive Educational (Curriculum) Leadership**

Curriculum leadership and creative leadership have been associated with educational leadership in the 1970-80s amid discussions of fostering creative beings (e.g., Tiedt, I. M. & Tiedt, 1975), and preparing students seeking positions in educational administration (Ediger, 1982). These earlier contributions to understanding creativity in relationship to educational leadership have since extended into discussions of K-12 schooling and higher education, namely concerning the development of creativity among post-secondary learners.

**Creative Achievement via Personal Meaning and Multiple Modes**

According to Naraian (2015), uncertainty and ambiguity help transform schools into places of socially justice practice by fostering a social space in which teachers and learners can work through their creativity together. Similarly, attending to context as well as critical thinking, Bailin (2015) argues that rather than think of creativity simply as attributes of a person, one should think of creativity in terms of the “production of creative products arising from an interaction between (1) the attributes of individuals who are thinking critically within the domain, and (2) the constraints of the domain and context within which they work” (p. 5). Bailin further argued that creative achievement is best fostered through coming to understand the critical and creative nature of disciplinary inquiry and participating in the dynamics of the discipline (i.e., curriculum studies, educational leadership) in personally meaningful ways. Thus, “The disciplines must be seen as modes of inquiry, exploration, experimentation, and expression” (Bailin, p. 12). In other words, creative leadership is a capacity that can be honed through education and disciplinary inquiry. This understanding of creative achievement can be extrapolated to the development and honing of curriculum leadership through engagement with curriculum theory while serving in academic and professional leadership roles.

**Creative Leadership**

According to Ediger (1982), “. . . administration is an art rather than a science” (p. 17). However, Ediger’s description of administration as an art is framed in scientific terms (hypothesizing, testing). He says,

Flexibility is a key concept to follow. Authoritarianism as a concept is to be frowned upon. The school administrator develops new hypotheses and tests them in contextual situations. Feedback is then obtained to notice how successful implemented decisions were in improving the curriculum. (p. 17)
His work on leadership as artistry to improve curriculum is a predecessor to more recent conceptions of artful and creative educational leadership, including those in which intelligence is implicated. For instance, drawing on Howard Gardner’s scholarship on multiple intelligences, Sternberg (2005) provides a model of positive educational leadership characterized by wisdom, intelligence, and creativity synthesized (WICS). He argues:

A great educational leader uses creativity to generate possible depictions and solutions of problems; analytical intelligence to evaluate the quality of these depictions and solutions; practical intelligence to implement decisions and persuade others of their value; and wisdom to ensure the decisions help achieve a common good. (p. 203)

According to Sternberg (2005), these interdependent capabilities can be developed, synthesized, and assessed. The following abbreviated attributes, outlined by Sternberg, are those by which to assess the creativity of those in leadership roles.

1. Redefining problems. Redefining a problem essentially means extricating oneself from the box. This process is the synthetic part of creative thinking.
2. Questioning and analyzing assumptions. Creative people question assumptions and eventually lead others to do the same.
3. Realizing that creative ideas do not sell themselves. Because people are comfortable with the ways they already think, and because they probably have a vested interest in their existing way of thinking, it is difficult to dislodge them from their current way of thinking.
4. Recognizing that knowledge is a double-edged sword. The educational leader needs to use knowledge to move beyond where things are, what others have already done, and ways of thinking that no longer serve a constructive purpose.
5. Willingness to surmount obstacles. Creative individuals encounter many obstacles in their lives. The ones who go on to greatness are those who are prepared to surmount rather than succumb to these obstacles.
6. Willingness to take sensible risks. In taking these risks, creative people sometimes make mistakes, fail, and fall flat on their faces.
7. Tolerance of ambiguity. A creative idea tends to come in bits and pieces and develops over time. Without time or the ability to tolerate ambiguity, many may jump to a less than optimal solution.
8. Willingness to grow. Leaders who are creative throughout their lives continue to grow and recognize that learning is lifelong.
9. Self-efficacy. In the course of their studies, creative individuals will sometimes doubt themselves. To succeed in life, one has to believe not in each and every thing one does, but in one’s ability to get done what needs to get done, and to recover from inevitable setbacks.
10. Finding what one loves to do. Leaders who truly excel creatively in a pursuit, whether vocational or avocational, almost always genuinely love what they do.
11. Willingness to delay gratification. Part of being creative means being able to work on a project or task for a long time without immediate or interim rewards.
12. Courage. Those who do not have courage of their convictions may be many things—they will not be creative. A creative leader can be many things. (pp. 230-235)
While the WICS model focuses on addressing problems in higher education, including the underrepresentation of students of color among those admitted, other literature involving arts and aesthetics that takes on issues of social oppression in K-12 – does so more pointedly by acknowledging what is problematic and pervasive is not simply an outcome of individual capacity and capability or lack thereof.

**Arts and Aesthetics as Oppressive and Anti-Oppressive**

Anti-oppressive discourse and stances are not solely the purview of educational leadership. For instance, in critiquing the oppressive colonial educational system in 1960s Algeria, psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon noted how the European aesthetic served as a policing force, which education helped to transfer into African colonies and cultivate their respect for the “established order” while diminishing the value of local art (Fanon, 1963, p. 38). His critique of the educational system addressed its interrelatedness with several “faces of oppression”, such as cultural imperialism, exploitation, and marginalization (Young, 1990). According to Bhabha (as cited in Fanon, 2004), in his foreword for the reprint of *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon often paid attention to psycho-affective relations or responses to the social world that involved emotions and the imagination.

The concept “imagination” was significant in Rapp’s (2002) discussion of tensions between administrative roles, educational leadership, and social justice. He argued the importance of “oppositional imaginations”, which involves “penetrating social analyses, unwavering convictions, rebelliousness, and a willingness to protest loudly” (p. 233). Not only did he draw on Frantz Fanon, he also drew on education theorists and artists/art theorists such as Wassily Kandinsky. Kandinsky’s (1977) critique of materialism as a tyrannical philosophy is also relevant herein given the materiality of the pottery and in pottery making process. Rather than further promote the divide between spiritual and material existence that Kandinsky critiqued, I emphasize material artifacts, embodiment (as in the doing of leading practice), and the possibilities of practice as an imaginative praxis affecting what one might try and become. Also bridging the relationship between embodied sensorial aspects of educational leadership and intellectual, cognitive, and affective modes of leading, which have tended to undergird the notion of leading effectively, is the aesthetic notion of leading beautifully (English & Ehrich, 2016).

Rapp (2002) further argued that people in positions of power and privilege, such as faculty in educational leadership preparation programs, have a responsibility to “ensure that passionate, creative people who possess oppositional imaginations and commitments to social justice are heard, supported, and respected in educational administration programs” (p. 232), which can be induced through learners’ varied and repeated exposure to the arts. Curriculum and curriculum leadership is thus implicated in his claim that “[b]y engaging the arts, including their own work with photography, clay, and watercolors, students can begin to value process or product” (p. 237). Addressed to a lesser extent in educational leadership is how various forms of art and opportunities to engage multiple modes of sensing are provided in the context of teaching educational leadership/administration coursework.

More detailed accounts educational leadership courses in which learners engage the arts and their aesthetic sensibilities have been provided (Boske, 2011; Osei-Kofi, 2013; Rideneour, 2004). For instance, Boske (2011) described in detail how learners in an educational leadership course were making sense of social justice through multiple forms of art-making, while Osei-Kofi (2013) discussed the challenges and benefits of teaching a graduate level course on arts-
based educational research. Despite noting the challenges she continued to view arts-based educational research as having the potential to incite social justice dispositions.

In a less detailed example, Ridenour (2004), a “weekend painter,” described how she taught a course in educational leadership/administration at the master’s level that was focused on cultural diversity and related issues. In teaching the course, she offered learners six options from which to select a final project, one of which was to create a work of art with an explanatory essay. However, the main source of data came from the journal-writing project, which culminated with a reflective essay. She found that through arts-based teaching using metaphor and journaling learners were able to express the confusion, ambivalence, fear, and uncertainty they felt about issues of diversity associated with racial bias and racism. Although she framed teaching and learning opportunities using the metaphor of a landscape painting and provided learners the option to create art, she did not describe artwork produced by learners aside from their journal entries.

With this contribution to the literature I seek to portray active engagement with materials in artistic practice to complement scholarship describing more passive engagement based on the modalities of viewing and listening to others’ works (e.g., Kaimal et al., 2016). I aim to provide a glimpse into learners’ more active engagement with the process, products, and values concerning problems of practice and curriculum leadership.

**Conceptual Framework**

I offer art/is/try (art is: try) as a conceptual framework for inquiry and teaching that emphasizes “trying” (attempting to accomplish) over “doing” (accomplishing). Trying, as in trying out leading practices, is understood as a creative endeavor to be directed toward enduring problems confronted in practice when best practices fail, when continuing to do what has been done fails to bring forth a resolution, and when persistence in confronting intractable problems is the best answer to the question: What next? The interrelated core concepts of Art/is/try are anti-oppressive (curriculum) leadership, teaching/learning, and arts/aesthetics (i.e., creativity, artistry, and negative capability.

Art/is/try combines theoretical/practical insights from literature and teaching informed by philosophy and practical experience. I forward art/is/try as a framework for planning and analysis that is conducive to critique of strengths and weaknesses – in some ways, but not others. Art/is/try I am imagine and use it is focused on making sense of data in the attempt to understand learners’ engagement with arts and aesthetics, curriculum (theory, leadership), and problems of practice confronting them in their educational leadership roles. Its purpose here is to contribute to the conversation on leadership development involving arts-based educational teaching, research, and scholarship.

**Anti-Oppressive Educational Leadership**

The mere inclusion of an arts-based activity challenges the domination of technical-rational approaches to curriculum and/or leadership as effectiveness (English & Ehrich, 2016; Samier, 2006). Including arts and aesthetics in the curriculum of educational leadership in the development of curriculum leadership involves dedicating space-time to theorizing curriculum leadership concerned with problems of practice, namely how they are created and how leadership
might work to alleviate them of their power to harm (educators, learners). Taking an anti-oppressive approach to educational leadership entails noticing problems of practice, how they are framed, and how they might be reframed, demystified, and disempowered. Such work can entail recognizing and opposing various faces of oppression described by Young (1990) as powerlessness, cultural imperialism, exploitation, marginalization, and violence. Enacting such a view toward educational leadership offers and/or promotes critiques of domination in education while also treating education, aesthetics, and art skeptically – as potential methods and expressions of domination.

Educational Philosophy of Inquiry and Scholarship

In addition to the human elements of political practice, Bennett (2010) argued that what is also needed is a “cultivated, patient, and sensory attentiveness to nonhuman forces operating outside and inside the human body,” which can come through learning “how to induce such attentiveness to things and their affects” and being willing to appear foolish (p. xiv). The artifact-oriented experience of molding a mound of earth (clay) into an artifact in the form of pottery places ontology (materiality) alongside the creation of knowledge and understanding via teaching, learning, and conducting research. Instead of positioning experience and understanding as singular and intentional outcomes of human activity and agency, I position them in a process involving human actors (learners, educators) acting (reflecting, writing, reading, imagining, leading) and non-human actors (clay, kiln, wetness, scoring, heat, glaze) creating (pottery, leadership, possibilities). Additionally, use of hands to work the clay and writing reflectively stretched across the course as phases of the process can be understood as an example of Slow ontology, in which one is not unproductive but differently productive to engender a different way of being scholarly (Ulmer, 2016), or otherwise.

Early studies of potter communities, as a type of community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), provided an entry point for introducing clay molding into the course. However, the focus in the course was on learners as members of an educational community becoming members of a classroom community, and becoming members of a “potter community.” This included attending to the ways in which artifacts (i.e., artifacts) and opportunities for learning provoked learner engagement in the socio-cultural and material learning process. The artifacts, opportunities, and engagements help to describe the teaching as a response to onto-epistemological questions central to curriculum studies that included: Who is being taught, what, and toward what end?

Teaching

Teaching in higher education is described by terms such as heutagogy and ergonagy, which are less popular than pedagogy (teaching child learners) and andragogy (teaching adult learners). Heutagogy, defined by Hase and Kenyon (2007), is the study of self-determined learning (p. 112). Heutagogy has been associated with reflection and development of the capacity and capability to be well prepared for the complexity of the workplace (Blaschke, 2012). Since its inception in Australia in 2000, it has been presented as an extension of andragogy but has been given limited attention in higher education literature and research. Ergonagy is more oriented toward occupational-vocational education and training in preparation for work (Tanaka & Ever, 1999).

Of these approaches to teaching discussed in higher education literature that which is
focused on pedagogy tends to emphasize the teacher-learner relationship. The literature on andragogy, heutagogy, and ergonagy tends to emphasize the learner, reliance on experience, and the role autonomy in the development of performance-oriented dispositions toward learning. These three ways of describing teaching have relevance for teaching doctoral level learners that are either content with or seeking advancement in their current roles as practitioners, contemplating academic careers, or considering a scholarly/practitioner academic position. The phrase problems of practice is amenable to teaching regardless of the educational leadership roles adult learners occupy or aspire to occupy, and regardless of whether the problems they confront involve practice and/or scholarship.

**Capacity to Develop Negative Capability**

I discuss teaching to develop adult learners’ capacity to engage in curriculum leadership as a critical and creative endeavor. Given the theoretical focus of the course (*Curriculum Theory*), I was most concerned with the capacity to experience and understand, as well as how the capacity to do so might be extended through arts and aesthetics. Although capacity and capability, as referenced in the description of heutagogy, are often used interchangeably in the literature my working definition of capacity is the ability or power (i.e., will) to do, experience, or understand, whereas capability is the extent of the ability or power (i.e., will) to do, experience, or understand. Capability here is associated with negative capability and distinct yet interrelated to capacity.

Tsur (1975) discussed how literary works and critiques of them reflect two critical attitudes: *quest for certitude* and *negative capability* (p. 776). Tsur claimed that in the attempt to achieve certainty one is lead toward concreteness and positivism or factualism. The strategies of seeking certitude he noted are also examples of “reaching after fact and reason” (p. 783). They are: Offering a theoretical formula, which may be more comforting than immediate experience with its fluidity; removing the disquieting element from complex feelings, relationships, and personalities by labeling them, preferably with some psychological term; and quoting to an external authority of a preferred status (p. 784). These strategies are helpful for understanding the nuances of written and spoken language use in philosophically positivist endeavors as opposed to those that are philosophically ambiguous and probabilistic.

As Tsur (1975) further noted, the two critical attitudes quest for certitude and negative capability “bear a remarkable resemblance to such psychological tendencies as flexibility and rigidity, abstract and concrete personality, tolerance and intolerance of ambiguity, respectively” (p. 787). He also noted that correlations between personality and qualities, such as rigidness, might be situational. This treatment of tendencies reflected in personality and other types of qualities (i.e., attitudes) offers dichotomous structure (flexibility versus rigidity), which is not the case for the “critical attitudes.” In other words, the attitudinal dispositions reflected by a *quest for certainty* or the *quest for uncertainty* are oppositional whereas as certitude and negative capability are not dichotomous.

For instance, one could be said to have *confidence* about what it is that one knows (certainty), or *doubt*. Given that negative capability encapsulates more than an attitude of (being comfortable with) uncertainty, the non-parallel structure and dichotomous treatment of these concepts is problematic. Negative capability is not a quest or rejection of certainty, but way of being comfortable while being/feeling uncertain. It has also been associated with psychological tendencies such as tolerance for ambiguity and flexibility in thinking.
Scholarship focused on organizational leadership and management has taken up Keats’ notion of negative capability as depicted through psycho-analysis by Bion (1975) as involving patience and being present, and Eisold (2000) who defined it as “the ability to tolerate anxiety and fear, to stay in the place of uncertainty in order to allow for the emergence of new thoughts or perceptions” (p. 65). More recently, Simpson and French (2006) discuss the dimension of leadership called the capacity to be present or available for thought. Instead Simpson, French, and Harvey (2002) focus on the outside, what can be seen, on action (decisive action), not thought (reflective inaction). The pressure of leadership to solve problems immediately suggests that one knows something and what to do to address the problems. Simpson and French consider that sometimes those in educational leadership roles do not know and therefore educators might develop in them ways to work with ignorance as much as with knowledge, which could mean letting go of the illusion that we/they [teaching, leading] know what we are doing.

According to French, Simpson, and Harvey (2009), negative capability implies the capacity to engage in a non-defensive way with change and resist the pressure to react. Additionally, negative capability rests on tolerance for ambiguity and paradox (Simpson et al., 2002. French et al. (2009) further described the value of negative capability in that not knowing and not acting leaves spaces that are essential for establishing a creative capacity; a moving back and forth between the edge of knowing/not knowing and finding insight in between.

Negative capability has yet to make inroads into educational leadership literature. As of yet, the only published article focused on educational leadership and referencing qualities associated with negative capability was by Clarke (2016), who described educators in Australia using a heuristic framework to understand education: volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA).

V: volatility (change happens rapidly and on a large scale),
U: uncertainty (the future cannot be predicted with any precision),
C: complexity (challenges are complicated by many factors and there are few single causes or solutions), and
A: ambiguity (there is little clarity on what events mean and what effect they may have).

(p. 8)

This framework draws from military discourse and has been has been adapted for use in business leadership (Horney, Pasmore, & O’Shea, 2010). For Clarke (2016, p. 8), negative capability is considered part of the conversation on developing the professional knowledge, skills and dispositions (capacity) of those in school leadership roles (i.e., the capacity to tolerate VUCA).

While Clarke (2016) described education on the whole as complex, particular areas may be also understood a highly complex. For instance, coming to understand curriculum and developing curriculum leadership in a broad sense could entail asking questions that are epistemological, political, economic, ideological, technical, aesthetic, ethical, and historical (Apple & Beyer, 1998). In addition to complexity, one might consider the volatility, uncertainty, and ambiguity surrounding how these questions are raised, addressed, or ignored. Moreover, the relationship of negative capability to the overall framework of art/is/try are aesthetic questions (i.e., How do we link the curriculum knowledge to the biography and personal meanings of the student? How do we act “artfully” as curriculum designers and teachers in doing this?), and ethical questions (i.e., How shall we treat others responsibly and justly in education? What ideas of moral conduct and community serve as the underpinnings of the ways students and teachers
Clarke (2016) associated negative capability with adaptive leadership, which he described as a predilection for leaders to analyze, pause, reflect, pace, take the heat and hold steady (as cited in Parks, 2005). He further claims it is a precursor to informed action (as cited in Cornish, 2011) and personal capabilities that comprise Duignan’s (2012) formulation of a ‘capabilities framework’. Like Sternberg (2005) and Bailin (2015), who argue that creativity can be nurtured, Clarke also claims that negative capability is a disposition and state of mind that can be nurtured and acquired if assisted through personal reflection and critique accompanied by opportunities for interaction with colleagues and offered strategies to enhance reflection, critique, and dialogue to promote inner leadership. He suggested the use of case studies (narrative accounts of lived experiences and practice dilemmas), problem-based activities, and conceptual or analytical frameworks, but did not mention art or aesthetics. Further examination of how to nurture and acquire negative capability is necessary (Clarke, 2016).

Reflective Analysis

During the summers of 2012 and 2013, I asked students to create from clay a representation of a problem of practice that was of concern to them. This process of creating pottery from clay occurred in two days, in which one-hour sessions within eight hour long classes spanning 3-5 weeks. Firing of their artifacts in a kiln occurred after each of two phases. Phase 1 (day 1; hour 1) involved molding a mound of clay using basic plastic tools to carve it and water to smooth it or fuse parts. Phase 2 (day 2, hour 2) involved adding a glaze. Learners received their final artifacts on the last day of class at the end of week 5, and submitted their final reflections the following week.

Prior to molding clay, learners wrote pedagogical letters to help them think through curricular problems of practice and inquiry prior to molding clay. They also read scholarship across the five weeks by authors, such as by Boske (2011), Callejo Pérez (2012), Taliaferro-Baszile (2010), and Tuck (2009), whose scholarship helped communicate to students the aesthetic, existential, and racial/spatial attributes of curriculum leadership practice. The core required text was the first edition of the text by Wesley Null (2011), Curriculum: From Theory to Practice, in which he discusses curricular traditions (systematic, existential, pragmatic, radical, deliberative). The prompt guiding the final reflection was: Write about your developing understanding of curriculum theory in connection to your pottery.

Only two students had previous (minimal) clay-molding experience. One completed the pottery and an alternative final (a draft a paper that was the basis of a conference presentation). The other student completed both the pottery (a scenario) and the final reflective paper (essay). Two other students later worked together to combine their reflections into an article that was published in a journal focused on curriculum (Passero & Jones, 2016). Students received basic materials and little instruction on molding clay beyond Tuck’s (2009) reference to scoring the clay as a metaphor for combining theories. All learners worked full-time, primarily in school-based administrative (principals, assistant principals) or quasi-administrative roles (behavioral interventionists, instructional coaches).

Using qualitative software, I coded final reflections in order to understand how the 11 learners discussed art and aesthetic of pottery making in relationship to curriculum (leadership, theory). Using qualitative software, I began data analysis using a priori codes focused on art,
curriculum theory, metaphors, theory, practice, and art. While analyzing the final reflections, I inferred meaning from excerpts guided by the framework and added the following codes: uncertain yet evolving conceptions, space, and curriculum policy.

Compound or co-occurrence coding revealed that the most often used codes were 1) art and curriculum theory with 2) uncertain yet evolving conceptions of curriculum (theory, leadership) in relationship to engagement with art (process-product). Excerpts coded as such were the most descriptive sources of how learners were responding to the arts-based activity and communicating that experience via self-reflective writing. The findings are arranged thematically in the sections below to highlight aspects of negative capability interpreted from excerpts of the learners’ finals. Learners’ names are pseudonyms and listed in Table 1.

Table 1

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learners’ Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Cuple</th>
<th>Gif</th>
<th>Mybo</th>
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<td>Bos J</td>
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Fostering Negative Capability

The findings were that 1) learners demonstrated the capacity for negative capability (tolerance for uncertainty, ambiguity, complexity, flexibility) and 2) arts-based/aesthetics activity provided them opportunities to merge curriculum theory, educational leadership, and responses to problems of practice with aesthetic (moral, ethical) values. The first finding involved the change process related to volatility and curriculum leadership as an active pursuit of (trying to identify) possibilities during the change process while maintaining a tolerance for uncertainty, ambiguity, complexity, and becoming flexible in their thinking and acting (i.e., improvising).

Tolerance for Volatility: Leadership as Trying That See(k)s Possibilities

Clarke (2016) described the current context of education as volatile, meaning change happens rapidly on a large scale. In the process of molding clay to create pottery, another notion of volatility was enacted: physical change related to chemical composition. A few learners indirectly referred to this aspect of change during the phase of molding clay. Comments across the sample included:

- the clay dries and hardens thus becoming more difficult to mold; the clay sticks to the surface of the paper making it difficult to lift intact; the clay is tacky not sticky, so joining clay parts requires a physical process of scoring each part and pressing them together, which risks changing the shape of the parts.

- Some pieces fell apart in the transfer to and from the kiln. While learners did not observe
the actual transfer of the artifacts across campus or into and out of the kiln, they observed the influence that movement and heat had on the artifacts. As the clay was fired it hardened and some pieces broke and fell apart. Either the learner or I reconnected the parts using wood glue. In the final reflections, learners shared evidence of affect (i.e., attitude, emotions, feelings) generated in response to their entanglement with the physical and social aspects involved in the process of pottery making.

For instance, Cuple was at first determined to create a cup to represent her idea of administrators gathering to dialogue “over a cup of coffee.”

I smashed the clay and started over. I made a plate and on it inscribed “Education feeds the soul,” and in the center I put “Plate of change…. I used to be a coffee cup.” This plate is very symbolic of the changes and struggles within myself. This process is a journey, one filled with inquiry and self-reflection. When I originally started I was determined to create a coffee cup, but as I learned new information and saw different ways of approaching my project I realized I needed to change. It is a reminder that in education things are not static, they are fluid and you have to be willing to concede and change when your approach or attempt is just not working. I found flow on this day, working with the clay and creating a symbolic piece that represents my curriculum theory.

In Cuple’s struggle to mold the clay into a preconceived artifact, it and the process became symbolic of educational change and personal transformation – a “flow” from cup to plate. “A cup made of clay, paint and glaze (the positive capabilities) designed to form an appropriate space (negative capability) has the capacity to contain liquid” (French et al., 2009, p. 6). Cuple described learning as acquiring new information and using symbolism as a reminder that in education things are not static and even may be volatile.

Like Cuple, Repo also described failed attempts to mold a preconceived artifact amid her changing perceptions or understandings about aspects of self, leadership, and curriculum.

My first try at shaping the clay into my artifact was unsuccessful. After molding a shallow basin, attempts to attach separately formed projections to the outer edge of the shallow pool were unsuccessful. Even scoring the surfaces failed to create an adequate bond. As I regrouped to start again by reuniting all the clay in order to sculpt the artifact from one piece of clay rather than multiple pieces, it occurred to me that this was more appropriate since the finished product, i.e., my understanding of curriculum and curriculum theory, must come from the ultimate meaning or overview rather than discrete pieces that I create based on my understanding of theory and practice.

Repo was focused on molding the clay to become the artifact that she imagined. She described learning that came as a result of her lack of success in representing that initial vision.

According to French et al., (2009), at times leadership benefits from seeing what is going on rather than what was planned or intended, which can also mean re-presenting a vision and of one’s leadership identity as a certain force. The ‘aha’ moment came when Repo flipped it. She wrote, “Aha, I was looking at the map by [William A.] Reid.” She then saw it as a turtle with legs projecting outward to symbolize essentialism and perennialism. She named its shorter projections, which resembled a tail and head just poking out from under the shell, globalization and sustainability. Once she flipped it back over, the negative space that was the underside of the
turtle’s shell became her reflection pool.

In molding, painting, and writing about this artifact, Repo worked in an intellectual space of conflicting and overlapping theories to make sense of them, her relationship to them, and what they meant for her practice as a principal. The negative space created by the underside of the “shell” served her reflective process. Negative capability, like the use of negative space in art, supports comfort in the liminal (intellectual, social) spaces characterized by ambiguity and possibility.

**Tolerance for Uncertainty: Improvised (Flexible, Adaptable, Fluid, Adjustable) Leadership**

Turbo also described attempting to create an artifact according to a plan that failed. Her plan to move from purpose to vision and action was rethought while struggling to make that which she envisioned. She said,

> My piece started out with both a utilitarian and symbolic purpose. I wanted to create a tall, straight sentry tower on a hill to represent farsightedness, as well as a pencil holder. I had a clear vision, but unfortunately did not have the skills to clearly articulate that vision in clay. However, I improvised and believe the improvisation is even more meaningful. The hill became a turbulent sea, representative of the challenges that currently face curriculum makers. This includes a corporate influence that is looking out for its own interests as well as a lack of deliberative discourse on creating and preserving public spaces for democratic education.

From the resulting description of the pottery she crafted, the arts related quality of improvisation was invoked and described as meaningful than articulating a clearly, preconceived vision. Implicated in her narrative about her artifact, she referenced challenges (problems of practice) (i.e., corporate influence) and possibilities (improvising, creating and preserving public spaces for democratic education). In artists’ and laypersons’ terms, to improvise is to create without preparation or adapting a device or method for some new or unanticipated use and therefore suggests one’s comfort in working with the unknown or unrehearsed. Improvisation relies more on intuition and instinct than fact and reason, and is therefore complementary to Keats’ idea of negative capability.

Tolerance (i.e., for uncertainty, change, or difference) can vary in degree for people under different situations. For some learners, uncertainty came with the introduction of the activity. As LOT wrote, “In the spirit of honesty, for the first five or ten minutes after being handed that slab I still had no earthly clue what to create.” LOT went on to describe how understanding the purpose did not translate immediately into knowledge of what he would do (create). He stated,

> It was easy to relate the purpose of the activity to the Boske (2011) reading we had completed for that class. In her writing, she speaks of ‘sense making’ as ‘the process by which participants drew meaning from their lived inquiries while engaging in complex reflective processes.

Eventually, he was able to relate Boske’s (2011) mention of “other differences from the mainstream” (p. 83) to his work in special education. He wrote it had been his career’s quest to
educate those around him to stop seeing his students as “others” or referring to them as “those kids.”

Also included in excerpts, related to art and leadership or curriculum theory/practice, were terms central to the idea of negative capability, such as flexibility and synonyms. For instance, according to FitBot, “most artists, all after, must possess some appreciation for adaptability. Curriculum theory and practice is an art that demands fluidity but seeks to make a difference in the lives of others”. Here curriculum (theory, practice) is associated with artistry.

Turbo also referred to the notion of change, and response to it, involving a process of adjustment. Referencing Dewey from the assigned text, Turbo wrote,

Before this class, I thought of curriculum theory as an oversimplified dichotomy: two schools of thought - the traditional and the progressive. However, I now see the development of various curriculum theories as a more nuanced historical progression with interwoven elements, and that even Dewey throughout his life adjusted his writings to respond to the current realities of the time. (Null, 2011)

The pragmatic approach to education resonated with Turbo, who also shared in the reflection that Dewey’s *Experience and Education* (1938) had formed much of her “curriculum thinking throughout” her “experience as an educator.” Without noting that he built on negative capability, Turbo referred to *Art and Education* (Dewey & Barnes, 1929), namely Dewey’s valorization of uncertainty, mystery, doubt, and half-knowledge. Turbo ended her reflection with a firm stance regarding creative and systematic approaches to education. She said, “I continually strive to meet the challenge of promoting creativity and providing aesthetic experiences to engage learners while meeting the current standardized expectations for student learning.”

**Tolerance for Complexity: Leading Toward Justice and Away from Oppression**

Several learners described their understanding of social justice and oppression. For instance, Bos J integrated the themes of justice and oppression with curriculum, leadership, art, ethics (justice, equity), and intellect the following excerpt in which she described her artifact: “The Bridge.”

The bridge has walls of social justice built on each side, which epitomizes strength and are designed to reject inequitable practices that may attempt to disrupt the social justice discourse. These walls of social justice are critical in preventing the perpetuation of curriculums that intentionally exclude or oppress certain groups of people. The walls are built by ‘public intellectuals,’ which Wraga (2006) defines as curriculum leaders who can speak intellectually about and analyze current curriculum needs of our schools. The walls are a representation of the curriculum advocates who work and speak for curriculum practices that are in best interest of all students. As I conversed with my peers during the process, I begin to think about how there is a need to transcend from theory to practice, and the bridge symbolized the means by which that connection would be made.

While Keats’ notion of negative capability did not fully embrace intelligence as an outcome of remaining in a space of uncertainty, recent work on creativity and creative leadership has incorporated it (Sternberg, 2005), though not without critique (Koro-Ljungberg, 2003). Here,
Bos J’s reference to public intellectuals more emphasizing ethical or moral aims supported by analysis than engagement with knowledge as a self-interested activity.

Also relating leadership to social justice was Mybo, who reflected on how her understanding of curriculum changed alongside the clay as she molded it into a bowl of questions. Mybo stated,

I formed a bowl shape because as I read about curriculum, I came to understand my initial understanding of curriculum began to expand and my narrow views of pragmatic curriculum changed. The question mark represented the unanswered questions about how to navigate the systematic curriculum created by federal and state policies in order to intertwine social justice and equity for all students. My question mark represents questions I borrowed from Null (2011) that ask: What is curriculum? What is it for? Who is it for? How should we structure the decision making process? What should we do to make a good curriculum? What should people who specialize in curriculum development do in order to make curriculum better?

Here the problem of practice concerned social justice and equity as well as the limitations to it posed by working within the dominance of systematic curriculum as perpetuated by federal and state policies. Mybo was self-critical in her remark about having narrow views yet open to change despite the complexity of the problem she described and the myriad questions she noted. Her willingness to admit that her prior views and preference for pragmatism were narrow is an example of creative leadership attributes identified by Sternberg (2005), which are recognizing knowledge as a double-edged sword and being able to use knowledge to move beyond ways of thinking that no longer serve a constructive purpose.

A different angle on curriculum leadership was taken by a learner who was most concerned with teaching and learning, and more specifically the role of motivation in student achievement. Though not directly stated, Pag implied that the relationship between motivation and achievement was complex and involved student choice. Rather than creating a single artifact, Pag created a scenario composed of multiple artifacts, including an apple that fell off and was lost in the kiln. Pag explained,

A faceless student is wearing traditional high school clothes – shoes, jeans, a white shirt, and a book bag. He/she is standing in front on a podium; hands resting on the sides of the wood structure. The podium holds an apple, a pencil, and a gun. The student is faceless so observers may more easily identify with the piece and see themselves as the student. The apple on the podium represents educational facilities. The pencil represents personal effort and the gun represents apathy (see Figure 1).
Despite his primary focus on student motivation (i.e., personal effort, apathy) and educational facilities, Pag implicated educational leadership and the development of motivation (via professional development) in the final reflection.

Regarding district training Pag wrote, “In their eyes it [curriculum] becomes nothing more than the guides we use to standardize our teachers’ instruction, reduce unknown variables, and compare the pace at which we cover the material.” Then he pointed to the lack of varied methods used in leadership development. He continued, “Just like our students, we all have different strengths and weaknesses, and we learn best in different ways. The deficiency appears in the lack of exposure to methods that through variety will eventually appeal to all practitioners.” He then reflected on a story told by a district administrator and surmised, “The lesson here is that without reflection our practice hurts and loses momentum. It loses the potential gain of learning from our mistakes and successes.” Pag discussed standardized curriculum, standardized professional development, and the lack of opportunities to reflect and learn from mistakes as barriers to leading well on behalf of students.

In Pag’s final reflection the problem facing the boy at the podium was not simply about his lack of motivation to achieve or inadequate educational facilities. The narrative he offered was a more complex portrayal of the educational context facing the boy. Pag provided a backstory on how the dominant discourse of standardization contributes to the reduction of opportunities for educators and administrators to learn and provide leadership of curriculum and instruction, especially those that make instigate engagement with various modes of inquiry, exploration, experimentation, and expression (Bailin, 2015). At the time of writing this final reflection, Pag was a behavioral interventionist planning to enter a district’s leadership development program. He referred to himself as a teacher focused on transformative education. He declared, “This is the ultimate goal for us as teachers – to lead students to a place where the
experience is transformative and lasting.” His goal raises the question of how leadership practice can become transformative for those whose leadership development was not.

Without specifically naming social justice or social oppression, another student, Gif, used the metaphor of a giraffe to convey her conception of leadership. She described the savannah as the field of curriculum studies over which the giraffe remains watchful. “However one animal, the giraffe, remains apart, surveying the changing community while contemplating the potential evolution of the field, envisioning the betterment of all of its members.” The community over which the giraffe watches is symbolic of Gif’s understanding of curriculum leadership as being on the lookout for opportunities and threats to a complex habitat and ecosystem. Her concern about community and the environment is reminiscent of those shared by advocates of eco-justice and environmental justice. This connection is more strongly expressed by Pyre.

Pyre sculpted a pyramid (see Figure 2) and described how through the course he had come to embrace the idea of global sustainability, although sustainability and environmental concerns were not introduced through the course. He attributed the development of his sense of stewardship to the documentary, Schooling the World: The White Man’s Last Burden (Grossan, Hurst, Marlens, & Black 2010), which was partly shown during class. The film describes how the promise of education has been used to entice students away from their communities so that over time this break in family structure and learning from elders has contributed to the destruction of traditional sustainable agricultural and ecological knowledge.

![Figure 2. Pyramid.](image)

The faces of oppression from cultural imperialism, exploitation, and marginalization are addressed in the film and were reflected in Pyre’s final reflection on his pyramid and various cultural references related to balance or equanimity. Another student, Sentower, used the metaphor of ecology to create a cautionary tale based on the children’s story *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss (1971). Sentower began the reflection with these words from the *The Lorax*: Devastation, Darkness, and Despair. She continued to note how the warning in that story about the effects of mindless “progress” on the earth’s ecosystem. She used the story to reflect on her problem of practice related to coaching teachers while being governed by systematic approaches to enacting curriculum in early childhood education. She described how her story and artifact evolved together. “One did not occur before the other. Each
symbol of representation influenced the development of the other. As my pottery took shape, my story took shape alongside it.” She further described the various components – a base, rubble, and inscription (see Figure 3).

First I formed the base. The flat round center that resembles a tree stomp—like the one that the Lorax popped out of and stood on the first time he spoke for the trees. Next I formed the rubble. The brick like structures that surrounded the base, supporting the base so that it can hold the weight of my voice. The base itself, does not only serve to withstand the weight of my voice in protecting the Promise—it is the Promise. As I developed my pedagogical story, the Promise came to represent the curriculum.

Figure 3. Tower.

More specifically, Sentower referred to the promise of early education for all children and contemplated about the purpose of her leadership in early childhood education. She wrote, “Although this promise remains unfulfilled for many marginalized children, families and communities, as an educator, I believe, that fulfilling this promise is central to my work.” Her comment reflected her concern with marginalization, which is a face of oppression (Young, 1990).

**Tolerance for Ambiguity: Leadership as Seeing and Daring to be Differently**

Ambiguity is characterized by limited clarity on what events mean, what their effects are, or when differences between states are unclear (right, wrong; good, bad; helpful, harmful). LOT’S uncertainty about what to create was also a result of the ambiguity surrounding how to frame a problem of practice in his pedagogical letter related to special education (as segregation) and regular education (as inclusive education). His moment of realization came through classroom dialogue and re-reading a book proposal on inclusion that he interpreted as a critique of his work in special education as being harmful. LOT said,

I was too focused on one particular topic. I was seeing through the wrong lens (cue light-
bulb and harmonious chord). Through the above mentioned re-readings and the ultimate shift in my response took place both before and after completing the clay project, I do remember what made me decide to finally shape a telescope. I wanted to portray my interpretation of the readings for the course as well as our in-class discourse – as far as what I have taken away from both.

LOT described working from uncertainty about what to create to working through fury about his problem of practice. His first line communicated his realization that what blocked him from representing his problem of practice in clay stemmed from being “too focused on one particular topic and “seeing through the wrong lens.” Being too focused through the wrong lens was inadequate for meeting the challenges ahead. Negative capability involves tolerance for ambiguity and paradox, which “may enable one to explore new ways of working in conditions of uncertainty” (Simpson et al., 2002, p. 11). LOT relinquished his initial perception of the problem and the proposal’s sentiment (affect) as he interpreted it, in order to reframe the problem and experience it anew. His product-process reflected his journey back to his childhood memories of looking through a telescope with his grandfather and crafting figures with clay as a child. In this case, his personal and professional meaning making connected his past and present.

FitBot, like LOT, described not having “the faintest inkling of ‘what’ to fashion with the clay” or how it would be once completed. However, his concern was with how it might appear to classmates, how they might interpret it or project their aesthetic values onto it. He wrote: “I understood implicitly the interpretative value others would bestow to my artifact as I worked diligently to give it shape and, hence, meaning.” Though he did not describe the value others would use to judge his artifact, he described working on it through two philosophical curriculum perspectives: existentialism and pragmatism. “While in tune with my existential self, I was in control of making sense of my artifact as way to understand curriculum building. Conversely, the pragmatic ‘self’ seemed regimented and governed by the tangible.” As such, his curricular orientation to the process illustrated an ambiguous experience of moving back and forth between two ways of engaging, not across opposite perspectives but across two perspectives that can be understood as consonant and discordant. The pragmatic work of John Dewey (1934) coupled with his interest in art and experience is one example of educational (curriculum) leadership that was informed by existential and pragmatic concerns.

Ambiguity was also encouraged through reading Taliaferro-Baszile’s (2010) article paired with Hendry’s (2010) commentary on it. Taliaferro-Baszile described a green-eyed woman whose identity was unclear to the narrator. Hendry’s commentary further speculated about who the woman was. As we discussed these companion pieces in class, neither learners nor I seemed convinced that the woman was one person – if a person at all – and not an apparition. FitBot refers to the work of Taliaferro-Baszile (2010), himself as pottery artist, and questions of being (i.e., self) and knowledge (epiphany). He summarized,

My connection with the existential self, personally situated as a pottery artist, coupled with my understanding of the Ellisonian self represented in Taliaferro-Bazile’s (2010) work proved epiphanic. As I continued to think about my the shape and intended symbolism of my artifact, I was reminded of the ‘complicated conversation’ (p. 483) surrounding curriculum theory and how the self can be situated as an ont-epistemological site for conceptualizing and understanding curriculum as a practice which has rendered other ways of knowing as invisible. My artistic expression borne out
of our in-class project—my pottery representation of *Faces at the Bottom of the Well* (Bell, 1992)—was also an act of self-exploration, not one confined to the need to assimilate and accommodate to the artistic fancies of other classmates.

FitBot drew on readings at the intersection of race, gender, and curriculum to create a well based on Derrick Bell’s (1992) work, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism*. In doing so, he dared to defy unspoken aesthetic values about truth, goodness, and beauty by crafting a well with small faces painted in shades of black and brown looking up from its bottom (see Figure 4).

![Figure 4. Faces at the bottom of the well.](image)

FitBot cited work by scholars of color who challenge such norms as being Eurocentric rather than universal and situates his work of art among others that embrace difference. He wrote, “Truly provocative works of art and scientific discoveries are often achieved not by one’s blind obeisance to conventional (systematic) thought but rather by artistic inquiry grounded in heterodoxy and a desire to be different.” FitBot characterized art-making as an ambiguous process of mediating between what is (norms) and what could be (possibilities), as well others’ interpretations and evaluations of his work and commitment to exposing racial in/difference.

**Discussion**

Overall, the course offered learners the opportunity to rethink curriculum leadership as a creative capacity involving capabilities that support communities in imagining possibilities for undermining a) the problems of concern to learners in the course and b) the problems they perceived to negatively affect learners in their respective educational settings. A way to understand the opportunity afforded by the arts-based activity is to ask, what did they learn and how? The main experiences that tested uncertainty and ambiguity were the molding and glazing activities.
Art is Trying and Failing In(to) the Process

According to Sternberg (2005), “Creative people sometimes make mistakes, fail, and fall flat on their faces” (p. 232). Learners in the course often communicated a sense of learning from error and through failed attempts to create preconceived representations of their problems of practice. Despite a few setbacks in crafting their ideal image they tended to change their artifacts and seek possibilities for what else it could be. The revised or replaced artifact forced learners to think about this unanticipated or adapted artifact in relationship to the problem of practice, and reframing it within their developing narrative. Thus the artifacts were not only representations but also reflective devices allowing learners to reframe the problems.

Their reflections on what they planned or revised often illustrated the complexity of the problems with which they grappled. Complex problems are such that many stories can be told about them, many responses can be taken toward them, and many angles can be taken in responding to them. Failing in this case – in making art – was a low-risk activity, but nevertheless provided the opportunity to try again and differently.

A creative practice more notable in art, though not specific to discussions of negative capability, is improvisation. Improvisation involves another attribute associated with negative capability – flexibility. Flexibility, as a way of being, is consonant with clay molding as clay is a malleable and changing substance. Furthermore, molding clay can lead to improvisation, especially when tools and skills are limited and the image of the artifact to be produced is generated in the creative moment. Improvisation, as adaptability, can be an unrehearsed response, use, or application. The curriculum theories presented in the course provided learners with alternatives ways of thinking that could be adapted in practice and molded into combinations to result in a different set of strengths and limitations for leading in their respective contexts. Likewise, curriculum leadership practices aimed at confronting problems of practice have situational strengths and limitations though some can be “scored” to fit better together than others. There was not one way to understand curriculum theory, a problem of practice, or art.

Learners’ comfort with ambiguity was also tested through the glazing process and course material. During the glazing process, learners had to distrust their perceptions (gray would not later appear as gray but as blue of uncertain hue), while trusting that the result would be more or less what was communicated on the labels of the glazes (color and effect). This aspect of the process provided them an opportunity to accept or reject ambiguity in their creative process. They could have chosen not to use glaze but instead they all decided to use it. In doing so, they were exhibiting the creative leadership attribute identified by Sternberg (2005) as delayed gratification. Similarly, a key attribute associated with negative capability is to delay action rather than rush to judgment. In other word, when doubts and partial truths are the basis for action one can accept that is the case and resist the urge to act without further insight.

What Students Made From Clay?

Another way to understand the opportunity for learning the arts-based activity afforded is to ask, what did students make from the clay? Most often they made metaphorical connections and symbolic artifacts of their evolving notions of curriculum theory and educational leadership. Learners were able to “bridge” personal meaning to the activity of pottery making to represent professional problems of practice. Their reflective writing integrated discussions of art, leadership and curriculum and often included questions, critiques, and commitments invoking
aesthetic, ethical, and moral values.

For instance, issues of truth were evident in discussions of the promise not being fulfilled and the need for public intellectuals who are entrusted to communicate on behalf of communities. Both examples concern ethics, such as promise keeping as an ethical value and public intellectualism as morally guided leadership. Beauty and standards were considered alongside discussions of social difference such as whether or not the “well,” reflecting the permanence of racism (created by a Black man), would be evaluated positively by classmates, (who were predominantly White women). Goodness was also evident in questions and critiques about what is best for students with special needs, teachers, and those being developed for educational leadership positions. Such discussions were connected to several faces of oppression (marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism) and an ability to express (voice, dialogue) such concerns in practice. While the systematic curriculum was often framed as a barrier to creative leadership guided by values (aesthetic, ethical, or moral), other curriculum theories or perspectives were often combined or positioned alongside one another and used as heuristic frameworks for framing or reframing the problem of practice: pragmatic (i.e., deliberative), existential, and radical.

Some learners referred to their pottery artifacts as reminders or sources of inspiration for doing and being in particular ways according to their commitments. In several cases, being creative or supporting creativity through arts or aesthetic experiences was not a new idea but the activities and scholarship reminded them of prior knowledge and authors toward which they reached back, including John Dewey (1934), Derrick Bell (1992), Sir Ken Robinson (2001), Daniel Pink (2005), and Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi (2013). Others sought scholarship after being stimulated toward further inquiry. A lesson taken from this is that learners may have some experience, interest, commitment, or comfort with art or aesthetics or uncertainty in the artistic process; any or all of which may be dormant and unexpressed in their leadership practice.

Conclusion

Art/is/try is a potential avenue towards negative capability and is meant to emphasize trying (more than doing). This is not to be interpreted as advocating for benign neglect, intentional failure to learn, or apathy. Instead it is a call to exercise restraint, perseverance, and openness to creativity. Art/is/try can be used to wedge space-time for experiencing volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity that folds back into the process to generate additional experiences for learners to develop tolerance for each quality in their expression of curriculum leadership capacity as well as in their imagination. Art/is/try can be used to support learning to pause or inaction associated with reflection, thoughtfulness, and patience even when artifacts and contexts change quickly. Art/is/try can be used to induce attentiveness to personal meaning and transformation, social transformation, and things ignored or otherwise taken for granted in developing educational (curriculum) leadership.

References


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