

Understanding Leadership through Poetics of Leadership: Searching for Personal Meaning and Authentic Understanding

This FEATURED MANUSCRIPT has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



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The author examines, using educational poetics as form of aesthetic inquiry, pedagogical practices that incorporate a poetics of leadership activity in preparing educational leaders. In particular, the author draws forward John Dewey's philosophical positioning of aesthetic experience. Poetics involves a deepening of understanding and sensitivity to reasoning and imagination in leadership practice, and mirrors how events, actions, and the conduct of others can all express intellectual, aesthetic, and moral meaning. Poetics as an aesthetic mirror is examined in developing moral literacy and ethical frames of leadership. The author explores how leadership preparation and leadership practice have a significant poetic dimension with respect to the search for personal meaning and the development of authentic understanding. Imaginative projection enables the study of leadership to examine the self as an ethical being. Research findings and exemplars of poetic elements are presented in the study. Four years of research data are reported.

NCPEA Education Leadership Review of Doctoral Research, Vol. 2, No. 2 – October 2015

ISSN: 1532-0723 © 2015 National Council of Professors of Educational Administration.

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Poetics is an aesthetical, emotional, and creative expression. I view it as an artistic, introspective immersion and exploration of one's perception and understanding of self and an attempt to exemplify, as close as possible, the human condition relating to one's philosophy of leadership. (Toby, A Doctoral Student)

Poetics as imaginative projection, when merged pedagogically with leadership preparation, translates, in part, as a "process of active response to the world, involving a deepening understanding and sensitivity" to democracy, and "mirrors how events, actions, and the conduct of others can all express intellectual, aesthetic, and moral meaning" (Hansen, 2004, p. 122). Dewey (1958), in his book *Experience and Nature*, is instructive in this respect: "Poetic meaning, moral meaning, a large part of the goods of life are matters of richness and freedom of meanings, rather than of truth; a large part of our life is carried on in a realm of meanings to which truth and falsity as such are irrelevant" (p. 411). Kearney (1968), writing in *The Wake of Imagination*, helps us to understand the value of a poetics for leadership preparation, and of poetic imagination:

It is the willingness to imagine oneself in the other person's skin, to see things as if one were, momentarily at least, another, to experience how the other half lives. . . . The poetical imagination equally empowers us to identify with the forgotten or discarded persons of history. It invites excluded middles back into the fold, opens the door to prodigal sons and daughters, and refuses the condescending tolerance of the elite. . . . the saved towards the damned. The poetical imagination opposes the apartheid logic of black and white. (pp. 368-369)

A poetics for leadership preparation provides a way of examining the importance of imagination in leader preparation and learning, deepening meaning that is concerned with the work of leading in educational settings. Analyzing the problems confronting society, Dewey (1931) argued that what is wrong, lies " . . . with our lack of imagination in generating leading ideas. Because we are afraid of speculative ideas, we do, and do over and over again, an immense amount of specialized work in the region of 'facts' (p. 11). Poetics as a pedagogical consideration in leadership preparation enables both the student and the professor of leadership to engage, imaginatively, in examining the theoretical and practical. For Dewey (1934), the "imaginative experience" exemplified "more fully than any other kind of experience what experience itself is in its very movement and structure" (p. 281), and such experience is at the heart of leading the educational enterprise.

Marcuse (1968), writing in *Education and Social Change*, draws attention to the value of poetics for leadership preparation when he cautions us concerning the role of education,

To create the subjective conditions for a free society [it is] no longer sufficient to educate individuals to perform more or less happily the functions they are supposed to perform. . . . [We must also] educate men and women who are incapable of tolerating what is going on, who have really learned what is going on, has always been going on, and why, and who are educated to resist and to fight for a new way of life. (p. 6)

Preparing future generations of educational leaders, against the backdrop of contemporary social issues and problems confronting education, requires that we re-examine our pedagogical and epistemological foundations in leadership preparation programs. We are at a crossroads where

education, as a cultural-transformative agency of society, must decide how to best realize its potential efficacy in relation to preparing educational leaders “with a moral and political vision of what it means to educate . . . to govern, lead a humane life, and address the social welfare of those less fortunate than themselves” (Giroux, 1994, p. 45).

The author’s purpose in this paper is to examine the epistemological and pedagogical implications of poetics as imaginative projection in preparing educational leaders. Poetics as an aesthetic mirror for leadership preparation serves to illuminate the experiences of learning to lead, within the social and political as well ethically challenging contexts of education and the larger problematics that define a democratic and moral society. The author takes a pedagogical stance that poetics serves to illuminate the experiences of learning to lead, within the social and political contexts of education and the larger problematics that define democratic society. Poetics, as a philosophical and pedagogical convention, presents an opportunity for students of leadership to examine the social texts of their experience, causing them to ask not only *what* the text means but also *how* it means, what its epistemological and theoretical grounds are. And, as Dewey (1927) argued of art, herein poetics, it is argued, serves to “break through the crust of conventionalized and routine consciousness” (p. 184). Further, the author argues that poetics offers students of educational leadership an opportunity to examine the social and cultural texts of their experience, causing them to ask not only *what* the text means but also *how* it means, what its epistemological and theoretical grounds are.

The author provides a discussion of poetics for leadership preparation, drawing on Dewey’s aesthetics and experience as a foundation. Next, an overview of the study and the inquiry method used is discussed. The author then discusses poetics in leadership preparation, demonstrating how the idea of poetics helps bring together aesthetic, moral, intellectual aspects of the work of leading, in relation to the pedagogical considerations for leadership preparation, with examples of curricular elements comprising a poetics activity provided. In the concluding section, a poetics for leadership preparation is hallmarked, focusing on what the practice of leading offers to those who recognize and accept its multiple demands.

Foundation for a Poetics of Leadership

Poetics, as Hansen (2004) notes, is an ancient term, with many meanings, dating back as early as Aristotle’s *Poetics* circa 350 BC¹. In contemporary terms, it is derived from philosophical and structuralist studies of literature, descriptive of the way sounds, words, phrases and sentences form literary units. But conventional poetics might also be construed as the way ideologies, ‘master narratives,’ are threaded into the text, in content and in genre: fiction and nonfiction, objective and subjective voice, definite and indefinite register. It can, as Hansen (2004) explains, “. . . represent studies of makings, creations, and compositions,” and it “. . . can constitute a theory of such making” (p. 122).

Poetics translates into aesthetic form and aesthetic criticism, considering the aesthetics of cognition and meaning. Poetics serves to illuminate the experiences of learning within the social and political contexts of education. It offers students of leadership and leadership preparation faculty members alike an opportunity to examine the social and cultural texts of their own experience, causing them to ask not only *what* the text means but also *how* it means, what its

¹ See Aristotle, *Poetics*, Joe Sachs (trans.), Focus Philosophical Library, Newburyport, MA, Pullins Publishing, 2006.

epistemological and theoretical grounds are. A poetic translates into aesthetic form and criticism, considering the aesthetics of cognition and meaning.

Poetics and Dewey's aesthetic experience. Dewey (1934), writing in *Art as Experience*, suggests that the roots of aesthetic experience lie in commonplace experience, in the consummatory experiences that are ubiquitous in the course of human life. The heart of Dewey's (1934) aesthetics resides in his formulation about the artistic experience (as opposed to a normal experience). According to his definition, an experience is viewed as a total encounter with external phenomena, which runs a complete course from beginning to end and is totally integrated into consciousness as an entity distinct from other experiences.

Learning to lead, to be an educational leader, requires that students and professors of leadership learn to overcome the "inertia of habit" that is necessary to engendering consciousness of our experiences, integrating new learnings through the "imaginative phase of experience" (Dewey, 1934, p. 272). As Greene (1995) explains,

. . . imagining things being otherwise may be a first step toward acting on the belief they can be changed. And it would appear that a kindred imaginative ability is required if the becoming different that learning involves is actually to take place. A space of freedom opens before the person moved to choose in the light of possibility; she or he feels what it signifies to be an initiator and an agent, existing among others with the power to choose for herself or himself. (p. 22)

Poetics within leadership preparation programs illuminates the pedagogical import of the aesthetic and the intellectual, as well as the practices that are concerned with shaping alternative realities.

Poetics and Dewey's poetic meaning. As Dewey (1958) explained in his *Experience and Nature*, poetics is instructive in this respect: "Poetic meaning, moral meaning, a large part of the goods of life are matters of richness and freedom of meanings, rather than of truth; a large part of our life is carried on in a realm of meanings to which truth and falsity as such are irrelevant" (p. 411). Pedagogical considerations necessary to a poetics for leadership preparation poetic addresses a concern for the responsibilities for preparing leader practitioners that understand the responsibility of working in ethically, culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse educational settings.

Dewey (1958) notes that "a large part of the goods of life are matters of richness and freedom of meanings," poetic and moral meanings, "rather than of truth; a large part of our life is carried on in a realm of meanings to which truth and falsity as such are irrelevant" (p. 411). In similar fashion, leadership that is bound in aesthetics is leadership that is concerned with forming new wholes. Preparing the mind for leadership is concerned with the value of an "aesthetic imperative" to guide learning and practice, not disconnected, but reflexively in concert so as to engender an appreciative value for imaginative possibilities. Without imagination, as Dewey (1934) reminds us, "there is only recurrence, complete uniformity; the resulting experience is routine and mechanical. Consciousness always has an imaginative phase, and imagination, more than any other capacity breaks through the inertia of habit" (p. 272). Leadership that is concerned with the aesthetic is leadership that embraces the imagination; leadership that is animated by an understanding of creating "an experience" through imaginative pedagogical practices.

Poetics as a necessary grounding. Poetics is the necessary grounding of aesthetics and an important element in any productive construal of the notion of the aesthetic. Aesthetic experiences, like poetry, film, novel, stage play, or music, are a constant symbol of the possibilities of educational leaders, teachers, and students creating different the future they will take part in as citizens. When ‘strongly spent’, the aesthetics of leading invests in the development of ‘Others’ whose wills “pitch into commitments deeper and deeper” developing through aesthetic experiences an ability to see beyond existing realities, to engage in imaginative possibilities.

Aesthetic experiences guided by poetics give form to leadership possibilities through students of leadership struggling with the conventions of an ‘organized society.’ Poetics is the grounding for the aesthetics of leading and learning, and necessary to enlivening the critical voice of leadership. Poetics speaks to differences, to possibilities, to actualization of aesthetics in leading—of the aesthetic imperative and democratic possibilities. Poetics, as a form of aesthetic criticism, fosters in the student of leadership an understanding of the responsibility of the educational leadership to make the realities of the day visible, and therein enable the teacher and the students with whom the teacher engages to offset the implications of ‘organized society’ by creating different possibilities – alternative realities – in the school and classroom.

Poetics as imaginative projection. Thomas Alexander (1993), in his book, *John Dewey and the Moral Imagination*, is instructive in pointing out that imagination is one part of human activity, and is complementary to perception, activity, habit, and intelligence. Dewey (1934) observes, “The constant adjustment of both the new and the old is imagination” (p. 272). This adjustment comes from within the learner, not from the material being learned. Warnock (1978) explains imagination:

Imagination is our means of interpreting the world, and it is also our means of forming images in the mind. The images themselves are not separate from our interpretations of the world; they are our way of thinking of the objects of the world. We see the forms in our mind’s eye and we see these very forms in the world. (p. 194).

Maxine Greene (1995), writing in *Releasing the Imagination*, is insightful when she writes:

Imagination is what enables us to cross the empty spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called “other” over the years. If those others are willing to give us clues, we can look in some manner through a stranger’s eye and hear through their ears. That is because, of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. It allows us to break with the taken for granted, to set aside familiar distinctions and definitions. (Greene, 1995, p. 3)

The lived experience revealed in personal narratives of one’s life emerges in our “consciousness, and by so doing, transforms it, as social scientific accounts, or even psychological ones would never do” (Greene, 1995, p. 4). This is the power of imagination; the possibilities of poetics as imaginative projection in leadership preparation and practice.

Overview of Inquiry Methods

The perspective of a poetics for leadership preparation presented in this paper incorporates a philosophical examination of poetics, Deweyan in nature, and a pedagogy as ‘poetic practice’ complimented by an analysis of data from the use of a *Poetics of Leadership Activity* (2007-2015) integrated in doctoral courses over eight years. The doctoral program, premised on a “scholar–practitioner” construct of leadership, is in its eighteenth year (see Appendix A for a discussion of scholar–practitioner). The primary courses included *AED 602 – Inquiring into the Ethics and Philosophy of School Leaders*² and *AED 612 – Conceptualizing Scholar-Practitioner Models of Leadership*.³ The participants included 136 doctoral students in the program for the academic years 2006-2007 – 2014-2015.

The *Poetics of Leadership* activity, in its origin and throughout its development, was instructed, in part, by Dewey’s (1934) notions of aesthetics and his discussion of what constitutes “an experience,” when the aesthetic, artistic, intellectual are drawn together with the practical encounter of the world, a work or practice, an event, etc., in such a way that what is experienced “. . . carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency” (p. 35). The primary elements that shaped the ‘poetics’ include: aesthetic experience, aesthetic criticism, and aesthetic form (Brown, 1989, 1990; Dewey, 1916, 1927, 1931, 1934, 1938; Granger, 2001; Greene, 1973, 1978, 1981, 1986, 1988, 1995; Giroux, 1992; Hansen, 2004; Sartre, 1965, 1972; Stevens, 1951, 1964; Marcuse, 1978; Oakeshott, 1962). The primary elements that shaped the “poetics as pedagogical practice” include: cognitive aesthetics, moral creativity and practical wisdom, metaphor and language, and cultural texts and narrative (Brown, 1989; Foster, 2002; Giroux, 2002, 2004; Hansen, 2004; Hunt, 1990; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Murdoch, 1970; Nussbaum, 1990, 1995; Reimer, 1992; Ricoeur, 1975/1977, 1981, 1983/1984; Trier, 2003).

Complimenting and extending the philosophical examination of poetics and of pedagogy as ‘poetic practice’, the researcher analyzed a longitudinal data set. The philosophical examination and the analysis of data focused on two years of experience using the “Poetics of Leadership” activity in the doctoral courses. The poetics activity included the selection and presentation, by students and the professor, of aesthetic and literary works that served to interpret the ethical, moral and philosophical dimensions of educational leadership in AED 602. The poetics activity was subsequently revisited as a theoretical interpretation of models of scholar-practitioner leadership in AED 612.

Aesthetic and literary works were examined as the curriculum, student-selected in nature, for the poetics, and included poetry, film, novel/novela texts, and lyrics from songs. Metaphorical language was also incorporated as interpretive text and as analytic convention. Students engaged in selection, oral and dramatic presentation, and narrative interpretation of the poetics, connecting elements of the poetics with leadership philosophy, theory and practice. During the orientation to each course, the professor introduced the *Poetics of Leadership* activity

² AED 602 Course description: This course is a survey of major ethical and philosophical influences of importance for educational leadership. The educational leader as scholar-practitioner will serve as a focus for examining the relevant dimensions of leadership. Specific focus will be given to the inner self and understanding the relationship of philosophical foundations, ethical and moral theory, spirituality, and social justice and caring to the development of educational leaders (see Jenlink, 2015).

³ AED 612 Course description: This course is specifically designed to bring closure to the doctoral coursework experience. It provides the candidate a philosophical and practical setting in which to design models of scholarship, practice, and leadership (scholar-practitioner leadership) for the educational setting. The candidate will be expected to use his/her model in a practical setting to evaluate its applicability (see Jenlink, 2014).

by presenting his own dramatic and interpretative selections of poetics that afforded the doctoral students exemplars of how film, literature, and poetry might be used to examine the philosophical and / or theoretical tenets of scholar-practitioner leadership.

Data for the study included poetic elements from each doctoral student (both the curricular selections made by each student and the respective narrative analysis constructed by the student), respectively from the two courses. As well, data included a longitudinal set of interview data spanning the two-year time span during which the Poetics of Leadership activity was used in courses for each of four cohorts, respectively. Data were organized and analyzed using narrative analysis and an “educational poetics” frame (Gitlin & Peck, 2005). The work of Shotter (1996) served to frame an analytic lens to examine the narrative process of making meaning, through poetics, of ethical and moral dilemmas and decision-making. Shotter’s framing of social poetics as a conceptual tool for examining the cognitive reasoning, not only involves analyzing what is said through narrative, but also draws attention to the importance of focusing on ‘arresting moments’, moments that may clarify thought, challenge beliefs and create new possibilities for thought and action (Shotter, 1996, p. 294).

Poetics in leadership preparation. Poetics as imaginative projection for leadership preparation clarifies our image of what the role of imagination is in understanding the complexity of maturing as an ethical being. Poetics as imaginative projection calls attention to multifaceted nature of the leader’s work in the educational setting, drawing the student of leadership into a deepened and broadened sense of the intellectual, moral, and aesthetic nature leading a school. Poetics as imaginative projection also illuminates that the work of leadership preparation is as much about the leader’s disposition as it is about his or her formal preparation.

Teaching educational leadership entails an in-depth knowledge of content within the discipline, and particular content or subject knowledge depending on the course and the program. As well, teaching educational leadership requires an in-depth knowledge and understanding of pedagogy, and particular pedagogical considerations. In part, these pedagogical considerations require an understanding that pedagogy is a political practice that illuminates the relationships among power, knowledge, and ideology.

However, self-consciously, if not self-critically, we must recognize the role pedagogy plays in influencing how and what knowledge and identities are produced within particular sets of classroom relations. As a moral practice, what the faculty of a leadership preparation program teach cannot be abstracted from what it means to invest in public life, presuppose some notion of the future, or locate oneself in a public discourse. The moral implications of pedagogy also suggest that our responsibility as educators cannot be separated from the consequences of the knowledge we produce, the social relations we legitimate, and the ideologies and identities we offer up to students (Giroux, 2004, p. 122).

A pedagogy that incorporates a poetics of practice illuminates what is done, the style or manner in which it is done, and the impact of all this upon those involved. Poetics highlights truths about human cognition and conduct. Such truths include the fact that art, conceived both as a way of conducting oneself and as an accomplishment, and in turn leadership that is conceived similarly, can yield an enhanced sense of purpose and meaning. Art as process and as product helps substantiate the self and the connections between persons and their world (Hansen, 2004). In similar fashion, the art of leading helps substantiate the self and the connections between leaders and their world. Learning to lead through poetics shapes the art of leadership and the practice of leading.

Pedagogical practices within leadership preparation cannot be abstracted from the context in which they take place. It is precisely this critical contextualization that connects what and how leader educators teach to how they translate the connection between what students of leadership bring to the university “classroom and those larger public discourses and social events that bear down on their lives” (Giroux, 2004, p. 123).

Giroux (2002), writing in *Breaking Into the Movies: Film and the Culture of Politics*, argues that the “. . . pedagogical can be taken up as a form of cultural production that rewords the relationship between cultural texts, teachers, and students” (p. 77). For leadership faculty in a preparation program, “. . . this means developing a theoretical case for using popular cultural texts such as film, television, advertisements, music videos, and mass circulation magazines as serious objects of knowledge related to the power of self-definition and the struggle for social justice” (Giroux, 2002, p. 78).

The pedagogical task of poetics within leadership preparation involves more than an act of translating different cultural texts and artistic media into learning experiences for students of leadership. It involves engaging students these cultural texts as a form of writing, allowing the students of leadership to make the ‘text’ mean differently by “. . . reorganizing the systems of intertextual, ideological, and cultural references in which it was constructed historically and semiotically, and in relation to the wider social events” (Giroux, 2002, p. 89). A pedagogy of leadership preparation, guided by poetics that takes cultural texts such as film, novel, poetry, stage play as an object of study, must work to both engage and disrupt those meanings held by the student as well as the cultural meanings ideologically embedded in the texts “. . . so as to break into the commonsense assumptions while simultaneously challenging the lived experiences and social relations that they produce . . .” (Giroux, 2002, p. 97).

A pedagogy guided by poetics works to engage the student of leadership in the ethical and practical task of analyzing critically how different forms of cultural text might function as ways to examine and interpret social practices of school leaders, to examine the everyday lives of educational leaders and position them within existing social, cultural, and institutional orchestrations of power; how the historical and contemporary meanings that cultural texts produce might serve to “. . . align, reproduce, and interrupt broader sets of ideas, discourses, and social configurations at work in the larger society” (Giroux, 2002, p. 7).

Poetics speaks to artfulness as a quality or dimension of human, social activity; leadership preparation and practice are forms of activity in a social context. A “poetics of practice” encompasses actions and consequences of leadership preparation activity (Hansen, 2004). The notion of a ‘poetics of practice’ merges *poiêsis*⁴, whose root meanings include ‘making’ and ‘creating,’ with *praxis*, whose primary meanings include ‘action’ and ‘how one is faring.’ A poetics of practice illuminates what is done, the style or manner in which it is done, and the impact of all this upon those involved. Finally, a poetics illuminates the relationship between the cognitive and aesthetic dimensions of human learning and conduct.

Moral creativity, imagination, and practical wisdom. Poetics lends to the fostering of moral creativity and practical wisdom. The ethicist Martha Nussbaum (1990, 1995) brings to the

⁴ In Book VI of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguishes *phronêsis* (practical wisdom) from *poiêsis* (art of production in the following way. While *phronêsis* and *poiêsis* have in common that they both deal with “things which admit of being other than they are”, *phronêsis* “is itself an end,” namely a work of art or a product. For purposes of this text, *phronêsis* is interpreted as “practical wisdom” and understood as the product of “making,” “creating,” or for our purposes “poetics.” See Aristotle, 1962, book VI, 1140b, lines 5-6.

foreground dimensions of post-modernism within her Aristotelian view of the role in practical wisdom of fictional literature. Poetics for Nussbaum (1990) functions not to establish the end toward which practical wisdom should be directed, but as a means, literature being a vital, perhaps even necessary, instrument for becoming a practically wise person.

Pedagogical considerations of imaginative projection through such elements as novels and tragic poems and plays – which for Nussbaum epitomize *poiêsis* – provide a unique and important education in what she calls ‘moral attention,’ that is, attention to the concrete particularities of actual persons and situations around us (1990, p. 162). Practical wisdom consists in overcoming ‘moral obtuseness’ and ‘simplification’ by sharpening, through literary narratives, our capacities for ‘moral perception,’ ‘moral imagination,’ and ‘moral sensibility’ (1990, pp. 154, 164, 183-185). These phronetic capacities are not a means for ‘applying’ historically established moral ends, but for Nussbaum, the very end and completion of moral life as such. Moral wisdom consists precisely in attention, care, and perception of human particularity.

The place of narrative stories in poetics, within Nussbaum’s ethics, provides a means to this phronetic end. For Nussbaum (1990), “Stories cultivate our ability to see and care for particulars, not as representatives of a law, but as what they themselves are” (p. 184). Moral tragedy – which for Aristotle was the height of poetics – plays a particularly strong role for Nussbaum because it attunes its audience to the need for overcoming the simplification and narrowness that cause tragic conflicts in the first place, by teaching us to attend to the particular singularity of others. The use of novels/novelas and tragic poems and plays presents the student of leadership with cultural texts within which to situate his or her own life text, and through which to critically examine one’s lived experiences, assumptions, values, beliefs, and the depth to which these influence his or her practice.

The fostering of moral creativity and practical wisdom through poetics in leadership preparation enables the student of leadership to further develop an ethical and moral positioning as a leader. Poetics merges a moral dimension to the aesthetic. This interprets as pedagogical perceptiveness encompassing moral perceptiveness. A moral perception in leading, much the same as in teaching, has to do with the qualities of attentiveness and of what has been previously referenced as aesthetic criticism or critical appreciation. For the faculty person teaching leadership, it has to do with a his or her “capacity to discern the salient issues and concerns at stake in an educational situation and to act upon them (or to “rise” to meet them, as Dewey might put it” (Hansen, 2004, p. 133). For the student of leadership, it has to do with, again in similar fashion, his or her capacity to discern the salient issues and concerns and to act upon them; to take a particular position or stance such as a position on social justice in the face of injustice to others.

Metaphor and poetics as imaginative projection. Iris Murdoch (1970), writing in *The Sovereignty of Good*, explains that metaphors “are fundamental forms of our awareness of our condition: metaphors of space, metaphors of movement, metaphors of vision” (p. 77). Poetics present the student of leadership and the professor leadership alike with a form of inquiry through metaphorical inquiry. Metaphor “. . . influences reasoning, argument, logic, and explanation” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 193). It does so by actively enabling and helping constitute these cognitive processes. Metaphor

. . . unites reason and imagination. Reason, at the very least, involves categorization, entailment, and interference. Imagination, in one of its many aspects, involves seeing one kind of thing in terms of another kind of thing – what we have call metaphorical thought. Metaphor is thus imaginative rationality. (p. 193)

A poetics for leadership, as ‘pedagogical practice,’ is sensitive to the premise that “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing and experiencing one kind of things in terms of another,” (p. 193). Foster (2002), arguing in “The Decline of the Local: A Challenge of Educational Leadership,” is instructive in understanding that our use of language and metaphor to some extent determines how we think and that language and metaphor are the primary tools that leaders use to manage meaning. “That is, leadership is language and language is how leadership is exerted” (Foster, 2002, p. 3).

In an expanded sense of poetics as imaginative projection, dominant models of discourse – the language of ‘organized society,’ of ‘ideological constraint,’ or ‘moral management’ – use metaphor as convention and label to bind and organize us; as a form of social control. The languages used to preserve domination are complex and sometimes contradictory. Much of how they operate to anesthetize desire and resistance is invisible; they are merged with our common sense. These languages contain us, and we are simultaneously bearers of the codes of containment. To understand, as Foster (2002) argued, that “. . . language and metaphor to some extent determines how we think” is to realize the importance of metaphor as a poetic element of pedagogical practice. Hunt (1990) explains the essence of poetics as pedagogy: “Whatever damage or distortion the codes [metaphor] inflict on our subjectively elastic conception of ourselves, socially we act in an echo chamber of the features ascribed to us,” Black man, White women, Latino student, educational leader, writer, poet, worker, homeless person, and so on (Hunt, 1990, p. 200).

Cultural texts, narratives, and pedagogy. Cultural texts such as films, novels/novelas, poetry, plays, and music are rich with metaphorical language as a way to understand, express, interpret, and examine the meanings of the world. Integrating poetics in leadership preparation expects an understanding that metaphor is not just as an alternative way to represent a concept, but as a dialectical means by which particular new meaning is formed.

Examining leadership meaning within cultural texts such as films, poetry, novels, plays, and music lyrics places emphasis on metaphors as “the most brilliant illustration of the power of language to create meanings by the means of unexpected comparisons” (Ricoeur, 1975, p. 27). Although metaphors differ from symbols in comparing two or more terms with one another . . . they retain the analogous poetic function of symbols by, as Ricoeur puts it, “introduc[ing] the spark of imagination into a ‘thinking more’ at the conceptual level” (1975 p. 303). Situating the student and the teacher in “both cultural texts and the readings that circulate within, above, and against them must be examined,” as Giroux (2002) argues, “as part of a broader discourse that takes up the circuits of power that constitute the ideological and material dynamics of capitalism (or any other social and economic system)” (p. 94).

Situating the student of leadership within cultural texts, in particular literature in the form of novels/novelas (or film interpreted as text) draws to the foreground Ricoeur’s (1981) poetics of the semantic innovation involved in narratives. Like symbols and metaphors, narratives (both fictional and historical) can be understood under a “. . . philosophy of the creative imagination”

as “operati[ing] on the verbal level to produce new configurations of meaning” (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 39).

Narratives involve a ‘semantic innovation’ in a similarly dialectical way to symbols and metaphors: by ‘configuring’ language into a concrete story or text with a world of meaning of its own, narratives are able to ‘refigure,’ through their interpretation, the further world of meaning (or thought) of their reader; the student or the teacher of leadership interprets his or her understanding (theoretical, philosophical, methodological, pedagogical) through the narrative texts, furthering the meaning of leadership as the pedagogical is translated into a ‘poetics of practice.’ Trier (2003) is instructive, pedagogically, in understanding that a “poetics of practice” necessarily considers that as text is interpreted, “. . . the meanings one makes of a text can be radically different from someone else’s, and [that] the difference in the readings lies less in the text and more in who is reading it, as well as when and under what circumstances and with whom they are reading it” (p. 129).

Poetics of Leadership—Interpretations of Doctoral Students

In the sections that follow, texts from philosophical and theoretical interpretations of doctoral students will be examined with respect to the poetics activity. In particular, exemplars of how film, literature (novel/novela), poetry, and metaphor served to inform the aesthetic, moral, and intellectual development of the doctoral student as he or she was in a process of becoming a scholar-practitioner leader. Selected elements from doctoral student poetics will be presented to serve as exemplars of student selected film, literature, and poetry. A closing section will hallmark a complete poetic from one doctoral student, providing an in-depth examination of the complexity of merging the elements, and at the same exemplifying a “poetics of practice” that shapes and is shaped by the doctoral student’s interaction with cultural texts.

Poetry as a lens for poetic practice. Poetry is both artistic creation and cultural text, presenting to poet’s interpretation of social issues or artistic interpretation of the times, and within particular cultural contexts. Poetry, such as the works of Walt Whitman, Langston Hughes, Pablo Neruda, and Dylan Thomas speak across generations as the social and political memory of a society. Just as there is a temporal and aesthetic dimension to poetry, there is a moral and intellectual dimension that speaks to the people that follow decades later, providing a cultural-historical lens through which society might examine, and reexamine its existence. There is an aesthetic dimension that serves the artistic and at the same time moral creativity necessary to constructing meaning in daily experiences and interpreting the experiences in terms of the ethical and moral implications.

There is also a dimension of poetry that is political – poetry as critique of social issues – and therein poetry takes a form as political memory in society. Poets and those concerned with politics, such as Hejinian (2000) have clearly articulated this form of politics and influence:

. . . it [poetry] is also a denotatively social and therefore political practice. Poetry comes to know that things are. But this is not knowledge in the strictest sense; it is rather, acknowledgment—and that constitutes a sort of unknowing. To know *that* things are is not to know *what* they are [this is selling], and to know *that* without what is to know otherness (i.e., the unknown and perhaps the unknowable). Poetry undertakes

acknowledgement as a preservation of otherness—a notion that can be offered in a political, as well as epistemological context. (p. 2)

In relation to this political dimension, an educational poetics of leadership has as its object the critical assessment hegemonic patterns, embedded ideologies, and persistent cultural patterns that marginalize, oppress, and otherwise set up and maintain asymmetrical relationships of power.

In the text that follows, the poetry and respective philosophical and theoretical interpretations of doctoral students exemplify aesthetic experiences with the poetics, in particular poetry as imaginative and cultural texts. Importantly, the texts demonstrate how poetry serves as a lens through which to question, challenge, and otherwise acknowledge social issues of the day.

Stan's thoughts on Robert Frost's poetry. Stan,⁵ selected Robert Frost's poem, *Stopping By Woods On a Snowy Night*, sharing that the poem "means many things to many people. However, I find this poem to directly pertain to the scholar-practitioner leader. The scholar-practitioner leader has a critical awareness. This awareness allows them to see beauty, potential, and opportunity where others cannot." In his experiencing the poem, Stan interprets Frost's thoughts in concert with his own self-examination of what it means to be a scholar-practitioner.

Frost's rider in this poem stops in the woods one evening to enjoy their beauty while they fill with snow. These woods do not belong to him, but none-the-less he admires their majestic quality. A scholar-practitioner leader follows the same path very often. He has a keen eye for aesthetic beauty. He sees not only potential but opportunity to learn and develop new ideas and processes. School leaders learn not only from their own surroundings but as well as others. Beauty is not only found and developed within their schools but in others as well. The scholar-practitioner leader learns from the work of others and tries to apply it to their own practice. John Dewey (1980) wrote that "In order to understand the aesthetic in its ultimate and approved forms, one must begin with it in the raw; in the events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of man, arousing his interest and affording him enjoyment as he looks and listens . . ." (p. 4). Frost's rider takes the time to admire the beauty of another's land while taking in a rich observation.

The night is very dark and lonely in this poem. I have found through my own experiences that the woods at night can be very frightening. The woods are typically devoid of artificial light. The strange sounds are unidentifiable. Fear can be overwhelming. However, if one can gather their courage and remain calm a wondrous world will unfold before the observer. Your eyes slowly adjust to the dark and the sounds become pleasant rather than frightening. School administration often has the same qualities. The future often seems devoid of light. Finding new strategies for educating students and leading teachers can be worrisome. If the scholar-practitioner leader will gather their courage and stay the course, beauty and opportunity can be found. Francis Duffy (2003) wrote about school leadership stating it is ". . . not for the timid. It requires a great deal of courage" (p. 7).

The rider's horse finds it strange to stop in such an isolated place. Without a farmhouse near, there appears to be no reason to stop. Leadership is sometimes questioned when the leader stops at an unknown landmark. When a leader attempts to

⁵ Stan (pseudonym) was a second-year doctoral student taking AED 612 in Fall 2005.

break new ground and encourages a faculty to explore foreign concepts their reaction can be much like the rider's horse. Individuals will question the leader and wonder if the leader really knows what he is doing. The leader must ignore these shortsighted responses and stay the course. The scholar-practitioner leader encourages and introduces the concepts that he is exploring so that others may see. Michael Fullan (2001) identifies schools as facing "turbulent, uncertain environments" (p. 109). Fullan (2001) wrote that holding firm to an uncharted course requires "moral purpose; incomprehension is to respect the complexities of situations that do not have easy answers" (p. 123). This is often what I find to be the most difficult task as a leader.

Frost's character identifies the woods as being "lovely, dark and deep." He sees the beauty in what many would describe as frightening and lonely. The rider takes in the possibilities and opportunities that exist in this isolated place. However, there is a recognition that one cannot dwell in such a place for extended periods of time. Frost states "and miles to go before I sleep." Educational administration is often the same. We are faced with many tasks. Possibilities and opportunities abound in many areas. We cannot dwell in just one place. Instead, we must be attentive to a variety areas in an effort to insure that many needs are met. Gordon Donaldson (2001) found "Leaders who succeed at maximizing time on task for both students and staff find themselves impaled on their own pikes, their own attempts at leadership thwarted by a conspiracy of busyness" (p. 11).⁶

Joan's⁷ thoughts on William E. Henley's poetry. Joan's selection of the poem *Invictus*, by William E. Henley, spoke to her about resiliency and courage. She quoted the poem at length:

OUT of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

⁶ For references cited see Appendix A.

⁷ Joan (pseudonym) was a first-year doctoral student taking AED 602 in Spring 2006.

Joan, a high-school principal in an urban center school district, explained that “. . . many of the students who enter into school today have so much more weight on their shoulders and on their minds other than completing assignments and meeting project deadlines.” She goes on to explain that the “. . . barriers to success include but are certainly not limited to cultural differences, poverty, violence in the home, various beliefs and non-beliefs about the value of an education, and no one to voice these inadequacies to those who can make a difference.”

Joan notes that the poem *Invictus*

. . . does not specifically address any one problem nor does it give any solutions, but it allows the reader to take their circumstance and replay it in their minds while internalizing the words “unconquerable, wrath, horror, master, and captain.” It simply says that life may not have dealt you a hand worth playing, but there is still a choice to be made.

As Joan interprets *Invictus* through the lens of her own experience and that of her students, she explains that while a scholar-practitioner may never have encountered the struggles that many students face today, yet

. . . he or she can be there to help someone make choices that have the possibility of changing that person’s life forever. The scholar-practitioner leader should have a wealth of knowledge about options that can be made available to help the downtrodden rebound, recover, and receive the benefits of those options.

Denise’s⁸ thoughts on Robert Frost’s poetry. Denise reflects that in Robert Frost’s poem, *Road Less Traveled*, the traveler discovers in the journey of life there are decisions that irrevocably alter the course of life. In the poem, the traveler is confronted with two paths that require a commitment—an either/or choice. While the poet expresses the desire to travel both paths, he is cognizant that an individual traveler can only choose one path. Consequently, situated in the traveler’s choice is the discovery of his destiny. Relatedly our destinies are linked to the roads we choose. Denise shares:

As I read this stanza of the poem, I recall the choices that members of Cohort 03 and I made when we chose the road that would situate us in a program that promoted and fostered a scholar practitioner concept of educational leadership. In this journey, each of us would traverse a path that continues to alter our lives and the lives of the people we touch in an authentic, meaningful way. In Frost’s poem, the traveler stands and peers down the path seeking to gain knowledge of the journey ahead before making the final commitment.

Denise, in her reflections on Frost’s poem, finds herself as a traveler on a journey. She quotes the first three lines:

⁸ Denise (pseudonym) was a second-year doctoral student taking AED 612 in Fall 2005

Two Roads diverged in a wood
And I took the one less traveled by
And that has made all the difference

Recalling her entry to the doctoral program, she notes having been “introduced us to scholar-practitioner leadership and its tenets of democracy social justice, equity, and caring. I remember the stories of challenges, sacrifices and changes in life styles. Consequently, I began a journey “that has made all the difference” (Frost as cited in Felleman, 1965, p. 317). As Denise examines the nature of scholar-practitioner leadership, she goes deeply into the connections between poetry and leadership. She shares the following:

The Choice of the Road: Commitment and Challenge

In the second stanza of Frost’s poem, the traveler ponders on the reason for choosing the second path that is “grassy and wants wear” (Felleman, 1965, p. 317). Embedded in the traveler’s musings are the essences of criticality and commitment. In the life of the scholar practitioner, the road beckons one to attempt the path of scholarly inquiry that results in “personal transformation, the improvement of professional practice, the generation of knowledge, and the appreciation of the complexity, intricacy, structure and –some would say the beauty of reality” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 68).

Because of my commitment to the journey, I accept the challenges of the road that creates a scholar-practitioner that is shaped by scholarly inquiry and professional experiences. In this transformation is the construction and reconstruction of scholar-practitioner leadership that is both transformed and transforming. Also present in the journey is the personal construction of the framework of the scholar practitioners’ obligation and the challenges that confront and confound me as I confront the realities of educational leadership in the public school system.

However, in order to fully understand the challenges inherent in the traveler’s choice is the paradox of the two roads in our uncertain world. While Frost presents the traveler with two roads, Wheatley (1999) notes we must be aware of the paradoxes that are an inherent reality in a scholar practitioner’s life—right and wrong, heaven and earth, equilibrium and chaos, hope and discouragement . . . (p. 90). Further, Wheatley posits that these “paradoxical but natural processes exist for growth and self-renewal” (p. 90). It is in this growth and self-renewal that the scholar practitioner is created. Much like the traveler, we are required to choose our road and as a result to grow in the requisite skill and strength that the journey requires.

Commitment to the Road Taken: No Turning Back

After the traveler chooses the road and the commitment is made, Frost ends the second stanza with the notion that once the commitment is made there is no turning back. While the traveler intends to revisit the choice and explore the road not taken, Frost doubts that he will ever return. Inherent in Frost’s doubt is the ideas of commitment and resilience to meet the challenges of the road taken and the journey ahead. In the scholar-practitioner’s life commitment to the task and resilience in the presence of adversity are key attributes to successful educational leadership.

Situating these concepts of struggle and resilience in scholar-practitioner leadership practice, Starratt (2004) notes the struggles that we face an educational

leaders—the “tragedies of thwarted human potential, diminished human dreams, seemingly crushing handicaps that populate the corridors of our schools” (p. 19). However, Starratt suggests that as scholar-practitioner leaders, we must not walk away from these harsh realities; we must find the strength within ourselves to recognize “the deep wellsprings of human possibility that human beings can achieve even in the most desperate circumstances” (p. 19).

Accordingly, Wheatley (2002) notes that that educational leaders will “walk through many dark nights” when she encourages us to consider the “dark nights of the soul” as a catalyst for rebirth (p. 3). In that moment of regeneration, Wheatley reminds us that we “emerge into the light” (p. 3). It is this hopeful expectation that motivates the traveler and the scholar-practitioner to remain committed to the journey.

Reflecting on the Journey: The One Less Traveled

In the final stanza, Frost notes that when reflecting on the road not taken, the traveler took the one less traveled and that “made all the difference” (Felleman, 1965, p. 317). Relatedly, the road of the scholar practitioner is also a journey of individualism that reminds me of the following quotation from Henry David Thoreau:

If a man does not keep pace with his companions,
Perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer.
Let him step to the music which he hears,
However measured or far away.

As I reflect on the scholar practitioner paradigm, Frost’s descriptions of the roads and Thoreau’s imagery of the different drummer, I am aware of the importance of blending scholarly knowledge, ethical, caring action, and unwavering commitment into the scholar practitioner leadership mosaic. Additionally, I am inspired by the challenge and commitment that can be found in the journey of the scholar practitioner resulting in a rich, multifaceted, and meaningful life—scholarly, spiritual, ethical, caring, and committed. Therefore my metaphor is the following: Scholar-practitioner leadership is an uncharted journey of individualism and challenge.⁹

Trina’s¹⁰ thoughts on Maya Angelou’s poetry. Trina’s selection of the elements of her poetics, as she explains, “ is a representation of my authentic self and my concept of a scholar-practitioner leader.” She shares: “. . . my personal experiences and personal preferences have colored my choices. The poem . . . examined in this poetic reflects what I value in a scholar-practitioner leader.” The poem Trina selected is entitled Inaugural Poem, written by Maya Angelou for the inauguration of President William Jefferson Clinton. She shares her poetics, reflectively merging her interpretation of poetry with her understanding of scholar-practitioner leadership.

When I read this poem I hear the poet’s voice vividly speaking to me through imagery and metaphor. It is as if she is beckoning me to reach my fullest potential a scholar-practitioner leader. This triumvirate parallels the nature of the scholar-practitioner leader.

⁹ For references cited see Appendix A.

¹⁰ Trina (pseudonym) was a second year doctoral student taking AED 612 in Fall 2006.

In the second stanza of the poem, Angelou (1993) writes, “But today, the Rock cries out to us, clearly, forcefully, Come, you may stand upon my Back and face your destiny, But seek to haven in my shallow” (p. 1). The rock immediately brings to mind the image of strength and integrity. Just as leaders are called to care for others and scholar-practitioners engage in experiential learning and knowledge sharing, the rock supports others but does not shield them from new experiences or their destiny.

The river in this poem beckons others to, “. . . come rest here by my side.” To those who heed the call, the river offers to, “. . . sing the songs of the Creator gave to me when I and the Tree and the Rock were one. Before cynicism as a bloody sear across your Brow and when you yet know that you still knew nothing.” The water seems to be reaching out to those in turmoil and attempting to provide guidance to them. This image may be related to an ethic of care. Effective leaders inspire others to trust in the idea that their needs will be met and experiences will be shared. Scholar-practitioners engage in the cycle of inquiry, which exemplifies the idea knowing that we know nothing. Our cup of learning is never full. By continuing to create new knowledge, put this knowledge into practice, and explore further questions, scholar-practitioners know that knowledge is not stagnant.

The tree in Angelou’s work offers roots and stability to the reader. It is introduced as, “I am the Tree by the River, Which will not be moved.” The tree is constant. It knows the past and looks to the future. It tells the reader, “History, despite its wrenching pain, Cannot be un-lived, and if faced With courage, need not be lived again.” Out of imperfect practice, new questions and new knowledge are created. This inquiry into new knowledge prevents the scholar-practitioner from engaging in uniformed, repetitive practice.

Clinton’s inaugural poem concludes by offering hope for the future. The last stanza reads, “Here on the pulse of this new day You may have the grace to look up and out And into your sister’s eyes, into Your brothers’ face, your country And say simply Very Simply With Hope Good morning.” The new day brings the opportunity for change and encourages readers to continue their journey with the courage to view the future optimistically.

Trina concludes that the metaphor of River, Rock, and Tree provide translate into the actions of scholar-practitioner leaders. She explains that the poetic furthers the cycle of inquiry, quoting Cahnmann (2003): “A poetic approach to inquiry requires the careful study of our own written logic, technique, and aesthetic” (p. 33). A poetic, Trina explains, “brings a personal dimension to the object or concept being examined.”¹¹

Film as a Lens for Poetic Practice

Film as media entertainment and cultural text, represents what Giroux (2002, 2004) terms the popular culture. Alice Walker, reflecting on the making of the movie *The Color Purple*, warns us, “I believe movies are the most powerful medium for change on earth. They are also a powerful medium for institutionalizing complacency, oppression, and reaction” (1996, p. 282). The pedagogical challenge with film, as Giroux (2002) argues, lies in trying to engage the film as a form of writing. This requires the student and teacher of leadership to “. . . mean differently by

¹¹ See Appendix A for references cited.

reorganizing the systems of intertextual, ideological, and cultural references in which it was constructed historically and semiotically, and in relation to the wider social events” (Giroux, 2002, p. 89). Film as popular culture, when considered as an element of poetics for examining leadership, acknowledges the importance of rethinking the role that educational leaders as scholar-practitioners “. . . and other cultural workers might play in addressing how the issue of political agency is defined through the cultural representations and resources that are largely enacted in the social formations that constitute everyday life” (Giroux, 2002, pp. 92-93). In the text that follows, selected film and respective ethical, political and theoretical interpretations exemplify doctoral students’ renderings of popular culture through poetics, in particular focusing on the work of the scholar-practitioner.

Paul’s¹² examination of Crash, the film. The film *Crash* (2004), for Paul, symbolized the principles he associated with the scholar-practitioner. As he explained, for him, the : “ . . . the various scenes in the movie . . . challenged the inner prejudices that are within all of us. Similar to the scholar-practitioner, the characters of the movie used critical reflection to analyze (assess) their experiences. Paul examined the film in relation to his own cultural experiences as an African-American male, and an assistant principal. His insight draws from his experiences as he deconstructs the film in relation to the work of a scholar-practitioner leader.

Throughout the movie, issues of hate, stereotyping, and discrimination were at the forefront. In every scene in which a character displayed or experienced hatred or discrimination, they would have to reflect on the scene to determine how they would respond to a person from a different ethnic group than the one they represent. In some cases, regardless of the race of the characters, the response was positive.

I would like to emphasize the roll of one character that displayed the traits of the scholar-practitioner. On two occasions the character, Daniel, who was a locksmith, was discriminated against because of his ethnicity (Hispanic). Once, in the home of a Caucasian couple who had just been carjacked by two African American men. The second time, he was spoken to rudely by an Indian gentleman, who was a business owner. The Caucasian female and Indian gentleman assumed that Daniel was a thief and their thoughts were directed by the fact that he was Hispanic.

Daniel responded to both of them by trying to provide them with quality work. After he heard the comments made by the female, he ignored her and continued to focus on his goal of installing new locks. The scholar-practitioner must be committed to producing quality work even in the midst of those who expect a sub par performance or some form of impropriety. In his conversation with the gentleman, he was cursed and disrespected repeatedly. He listened and continuously tried to stress to the gentleman that he needed a new door. As an educator the scholar-practitioner must employ this same determination. The scholar-practitioner must be determined to provide quality leadership to all stakeholders in both good and bad times.

The characters of the movie also displayed a courage that is present in the scholar-practitioner. As stated earlier, the characters used critical reflection to analyze their experiences. Several times during the movie characters were challenged to reflect on their beliefs and make decisions that contradicted these beliefs. It is a courageous individual

¹² Paul (pseudonym) was a second-year doctoral student taking AED 612 in Fall 2005.

that can challenge her or his on belief system and change their practice. This is a challenge that must be accepted by the scholar-practitioner in an attempt to make socially just and equitable decisions.¹³

Darlene's¹⁴ examination of *Coach Carter, the film*. Darlene is a middle school principal in a large district situated within a university community. The film she chose, *Coach Carter* (2005), is based on a true-life account of the controversial basketball coach, Ken Carter. Coach Carter was labeled a trouble maker and a hero when he made national news for a gymnasium “lockout” of his entire undefeated basketball team because of their poor academic performance. Darlene examines Coach Carter as a scholar-practitioner who understood the importance of a strong academic background for students if they were to rise above their existing conditions. Darlene shared the following quote for the film as further explication of the values that a scholar-practitioner must inculcate in individuals:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate; our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light not our darkness that most frightens us. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were all meant to shine, as children do. It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same; as we are liberated from our own fear. Our presence automatically liberates others. (The character Cruz in the film, *Coach Carter*)

As Darlene explains, the young man, Cruz, internalized the values that Coach Carter stressed; values that” . . . helped him become a ‘winner’ in life.” Darlene contrasts the person Cruz was before Coach Carter arrived, a high school student who rebelled against high expectations, such as those set by Coach Carter for participation on the basketball team. Through the work of Coach Carter and the success of his teammates, Cruz sacrifices himself, giving up attitude and old life in order to become part of team.

The film exemplifies also the courage of taking a public stand, such as Coach Carter did when he enforced the “lockout” at the threat of his coaching success and job and under staunch criticism from parents, community, and fellow educators. Darlene compares the work of being a scholar-practitioner with the work exemplified by Coach Carter, focusing on the words by Cruz as he and his teammates take their own stand to protect Coach Carter. Cruz realized, as Darlene noted, “. . . his potential and the effects his life could make in others.” Cruz recognized, just as scholar-practitioners do, that: “Our presence automatically liberates others.”¹⁵

Nina's¹⁶ examination of *Mona Lisa Smiles, the film*. All her life she wanted to teach at Wellesley College so when a position opened in the art history department she pursued it simple mindedly until she was hired. It was whispered that Katherine Watson, first year teacher from Oakland State made up in brains what she lacked in pedigree. Which is why she was on her way to the most conservative college in the nation. But Katherine Watson did not come to Wellesley to fit in, she came to make a difference. (Film, *Mona Lisa Smiles*)

¹³ See Appendix A for references.

¹⁴ Darlene (pseudonym) was a first-year doctoral student taking AED 602 in Spring 2005.

¹⁵ See Appendix A for references.

¹⁶ Nina (pseudonym), was a second-year doctoral student taking AED 612 in Fall 2005.

Nina opened her film discussion with this quote from *Mona Lisa Smiles* (Roth, et al., 2003), explaining that the film portrays the struggles that are created when making a difference is the goal. Katherine saw a chance to make a difference in the lives of many young women who attended Wellesley College to learn the ‘graces’ of becoming a hostess for their prospective wealthy husbands. She faced many hurdles before being accepted as a teacher. Through steadfast resolve, Katherine became their mentor.

Nina explains the importance of Katherine’s choice to make a difference and the importance of building relationships:

To make a difference involves effective leadership. Effective leadership requires authenticity in building and cultivating relationships. . . . Relationships within a school determine and influence the outcomes. Relationships built on trust are durable, enabling the leader to be effective without ruling through mandates . . .

Katherine Watson stated, “I came to Wellesley because I want to make a difference.” The scholar-practitioner . . . [embraces] the idea of making a difference through the promotion of equity, justice, caring, and democracy. . . . Katherine presented the ideas that opened the hearts and minds of the young women to look to the future. Katherine saw potential in many of the young women for advancement in careers.

The idea of advancement was against the [traditions] of Wellesley College and the Board. It took great courage on the part of Katherine to stand for what she believed. Often, the scholar-practitioner, in spite of opposition, must have courage to stand for what is best for those whom he or she serves.

Truth Beyond Tradition, Beyond Definition, Beyond Image

My teacher, Katherine Watson, lived by her on definition and would not compromise that, not even for Wellesley. I dedicate this to an extraordinary woman who lived by example and compelled us to all see the world through new eyes. She’ll be sailing to Europe where I now she’ll find new walls to break down and new ideas to replace them with. I’ve heard her called a quitter for leaving, an aimless wanderer, but, not all who wander are aimless, especially not those who seek the truth beyond tradition, beyond definition, beyond the image. (Editor of Wellesley College Newspaper, Film, *Mona Lisa Smiles*)

These words were written by the editor of the college newspaper, a young woman who resisted change the most. Betty sought every opportunity to pit Katherine against the other young women and often promoted vocal resistance. . . .

The words “lived by example and compelled us all to see the world through new eyes,” “know she” “find new walls to break down and new ideas to replace them with,” and “an aimless wander, but not all that wander are aimless, especially not those who seek truth beyond tradition, beyond definition, beyond image,” express the tasks of the scholar-practitioner. The practitioner who is able to apply all these concepts while promoting equity, social justice, with an ethic of care in a democratic way becomes a true scholar-practitioner.

Betty’s final words were, “We’ll never forget you.” Those who truly practice the scholar-practitioner [way] are not forgotten because they make an indelible imprint upon the hearts of those to whom they mentor and teach. . . Foster (1994) sums it effectively in

his statement: “A practice is a lifework, an attempt to develop excellence in a calling” (p. 48)¹⁷

Literature as a Lens for Imaginative Projection

Literature, novel/novela, works of fiction serve to engage the imagination, stimulating cognitive aesthetics and providing text and context within which to examine values, beliefs, and assumptions about one’s life and practice. As a lens for poetic practice, literature, what we call the literary, has been that which poses the greatest danger to representations:

It might be called the “post” that has always haunted the “modern”, the (im)possibility of representations that has haunted representations. . . . Literature comes to be that which can, in some sense, mark the break, the interruption, the insufficiency of truth as representation, and the necessity to tell the story differently. (Nealon, 1993, pp. 237-238)

Literature provides the student of leadership a literary challenge to his or her own beliefs, values, and assumptions, and at the same time provides a context within which to examine one’s story and change one’s story as it is told through the experiences of self in relation to others.

Literature of different genre provides an aesthetic window into the moral creativity and practical wisdom of the author and at the same time makes public the author’s work as public intellectual in a particular cultural-historical moment of the time. The novel/novela may provide social critique on issues and problems in society, or direct the reader to reflect on his or her own issue or problems in the large context of society. Literature as cultural text and context, as the voice of artfulness and moral reason and at the same time reflective of the voiceless an immoral, situates the reader in such a way as to as cause question of one’s on positionality and practice. In the text that follows, literature in form of novel/novela is examined as a dimension of the poetics of leadership, and students’ ethical and theoretical interpretations of scholar-practitioner leadership presented.

Jean’s¹⁸ narrative interpretation of *The Fire Next Time*... Educational leaders, Jean explains, “. . . must care about those entrusted to our guidance and work daily to debunk the myths and misconceptions that have become truths to so many students, parents, and community members.” Jean selected James Baldwin’s novel, *The Fire Next Time* (1963) as a literary lens through which to explain scholar-practitioner leadership.

James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time* (1963) speaks to American people both Black and White and urges them to mutually find a way to end racism in order to change the history of the world. It opens with a letter to his nephew entitled “My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation.” In this letter, he basically tells his nephew that he cannot believe what White people say about him – that he is not inferior. He goes on to explain why he feels that many Whites believe their misconceptions while others know what is true and what is right but choose not to acknowledge those truths. He says, “To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger. In this case, the danger, in the minds of most white Americans, is the loss of

¹⁷ See Appendix A for references.

¹⁸ Jean (pseudonym) was a first-year student taking AED 602 in Spring 2006.

their identity” (p. 23). In the second part of the book “Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region in My Mind,” Mr. Baldwin goes on to chronicle his younger years in the ministry, his departure from Christianity, and experiences with Elijah Muhammed and Muslim movement of the Nation of Islam. In both the first and second parts of the book, James Baldwin speaks about loving Whites in spite of themselves. He encourages everyone to move past the ignorance and the suffering toward healing. He states,

I do not mean to be sentimental about suffering – enough is certainly as good as a feast – but people who cannot suffer can never grow up, can never discover who they are. That man who is forced each day to snatch his manhood, his identity, out of the fire of human cruelty that rages to destroy it knows, if he survives his effort, and even if he does not survive it, something about himself and the human life that no school on earth – and indeed, no church – can teach. (p. 113)

The course objectives relating to ethical reasoning, moral responsibility, and democratic community resound throughout *The Fire Next Time*. Leadership can no longer be directed from above, but leaders must work as facilitators in a communal setting where all voices are heard and acknowledged. The scholar-practitioner leader is bound to a “moral democratic concept of leadership, which includes the principles and practices of caring, trust, social justice, and collaborative inquiry” (Heckman, 1996, p.142). Leaders must also encourage members of the school community to be aware of the cultural needs of the students and community members.

Transformative leadership is also interwoven throughout the book as James Baldwin is on a quest to help transform the minds of American people in order to place racism in the consciousness of the minds of both Blacks and Whites so that history could be changed forever. . . .

The scholar-practitioner leader, as Jean explains, “. . . is a moral, ethical, and transformative leader who understands and accepts an expanded role of leading change in the social setting of the school learning community, as well as in the social context of society.” Her thoughts direct us to see the scholar-practitioner leader as “. . . a life-long learner who constructs knowledge from practice and resists social injustices and oppressions of groups by working through communal and collaborative processes.” Jean believes that the for the scholar-practitioner leader, his or her “. . . leadership role is not grounded by one theoretical perspective, but includes tenets from various educational theories and ideologies. Jean concludes by stating: “We must embark on a transformative mission to impart truth and subsequently lead students to the possibilities that await them.”¹⁹

Wanda’s²⁰ narrative interpretations of *Teacher Man*. Wanda selected Frank McCourt’s novel, *Teacher Man* (2005) for her poetics. She opens her discussion that the book is tribute to all educators. She considers McCourt as “. . . a scholar-practitioner in today’s society.” A New York teacher with thirty years experience, McCourt “tells the stories of his days as a teacher and the challenges that he is faced with. The challenges that arise during his teaching career are both student challenges and challenges he is confronted with by other educators, who have different beliefs and philosophies.” As Wanda examines the novel, she understands that the book, while fictionalized to some degree, is also

¹⁹ See Appendix A for references cited.

²⁰ Wanda (pseudonym) was a first-year doctoral student in AED 602 Spring 2006.

autobiographical, a self-reflective examination of his own experiences set against the backdrop of New York City Schools.

A Scholar-Practitioner's Story

Mr. McCourt's teaching philosophy and methods were not conventional. He was able to greatly impact the lives of his students when others overlooked them or did not challenge them to their full potential.

Within our current education system and our schools, the ability for a scholar-practitioner to exist sometimes seems impossible with the hierarchies that are currently present and clearly in place. It is as though we are not encouraging or leading our teachers and students to become scholar-practitioners. "The scholar-practitioner's work, in part, is to illuminate and interrogate injustices-such as those created by hierarchies of participation and forms of social control" (Jenlink, 2003-04, p. 3). Mr. McCourt challenged the hierarchies and stood up for the rights of students who were labeled as disadvantaged and destined to never attend a college. Power was not the object of Mr. McCourt's goals as a teacher. His reasons for becoming an educator far surpassed the notion of power. He explains:

There are teachers who teach and don't give a fiddler's fart what their students think of them. Subject matter is king. Such teachers are powerful. They dominate their classrooms with personality backed up by the great threat; the red pen inscribing on the report card the dreaded F. Their message to their students is, I am your teacher, not your counselor, not your confidant, not your parent. I teach a subject: take it or leave it. (Mccourt, 2005, p. 147)

Mr. McCourt promoted democratic leadership and meaningful participation and respect for everyone. He maintained a classroom where all involved had the right to participate and influence in the decision-making process. This process does not involve a select few making decisions for all. Mr. McCourt was involved with his students and their education and wanted what was in their best interest.

A scholar-practitioner leader, as per Starratt, "is primarily concerned to cultivate an environment that supports participation, sharing of ideas, and virtues of honesty, openness, flexibility, and compassion" (2001, p. 338). Scholar-practitioner leaders work together collaboratively to discuss problems and concerns involving mutual perspectives. A scholar-practitioner leader ensures that there will not be unheard voices. The voices of the students were clearly heard by McCourt. He provided a safe learning environment where students could be risk takers and actively participate. Mr. McCourt thought carefully about how statements and his actions would affect his students.

In order to have equality for all, leaders need to look at democratic leadership and the impact that it would have in our schools. As scholar-practitioners we must look to take down these hierarchies of power and build open communication where all voices are considered equally important and crucial. Scholar-practitioners must bring these injustices that are created by the hierarchies to light. This can be done through democratic leadership and the scholar-practitioner. The scholar-practitioner "understands that s/he occupies objective positions within a variety of contexts, and that from these objective positions s/he must necessarily take a stance on

differing social issues” (Jenlink 2003-04, p. 3). This is an understanding that Frank McCourt demonstrated in his career as an educator.

Poetics (including productions such as poetry, fiction novels, movies, plays, and music) as an epistemological/pedagogical tool pushes us to ask: What is it we believe/value as an educational leader? Who are we as educational leaders, as scholar-practitioners? Who are we as ethical and moral beings? What perspectives guide our actions? Where are others in relation to us? What are our understandings, our frames of reference for societal and educational issues? What responsibilities do we, as educational leaders, have for/with others.

Conclusions and Final Reflections

It was the intent of the author in this paper to extend the lines of inquiry and pedagogical considerations concerning leadership preparation by elucidating a poetics for leadership preparation. It is believed that a poetics for leadership preparation can help faculty and scholars of leadership preparation better articulate a collective sense of the meaningfulness experienced in leading in the educational setting.

The poetics for leadership preparation translates, in part, as a “process of active response to the world, involving a deepening understanding and sensitivity” to democracy, and “mirrors how events, actions, and the conduct of others can all express intellectual, aesthetic, and moral meaning” (Hansen, 2004, p. 122). Examining one’s own practice in the mirror of poetics affords a critical, reflective pedagogy for understanding the necessity of ethical sensitivity, ethical reasoning, and moral imagination in relation to ethical leadership.

As the participants engaged in self-critical reflections, their understanding of leadership exists, in part, emerged in the experiencing of the activity, and in the ‘arresting moments’ where the construction of meaning was most profound. Most participants noted that the experience of poetics made it possible to examine personal and professional experiences in a non-threatening way, allowing for imaginative moments through which they could move beyond the realities of a world as it was or had been experienced.

Poetics, as participants noted, provided space for examining theory and practice, making connections that heretofore had not existed, and a chance to make sense of their experiences as they were learning to become education leaders. The poetics also made an otherwise complex and daunting theory base more accessible while engaging participants in examining underlying epistemological foundations. As Greene (1967) reminds us, to teach “is to understand a profoundly human as well as a professional responsibility” (p. 3). A poetics of leadership preparation creates the imaginative space wherein democratic possibilities become reality when reality is transformed by the liberation of the mind.

Situating poetics in leadership preparation challenges the student of leadership to interpret lived experience deeply so that we might realize the multiplicity of possible constructions and the inevitable partiality, and even impermanence, of our own visions. As the participants reflected in their self-critical examinations, understanding leadership exists, in part, in the experiencing of the activity (the poetics of leadership activity), and in the ‘arresting moments’ where the construction of meaning was most profound. Most participants noted that the experience of poetics made it possible to examine personal and professional experiences in a non-threatening way, allowing for imaginative moments through which they could move beyond the realities of a world as it was or had been experienced.

This pedagogical approach opens discursive and conceptual space for alternative thinking. Finally, different media of creative expression and production as epistemological/pedagogical tools of leadership can (as read by students and professors of leadership through these different artists and poets) allow for questioning, critically, one's own beliefs, values, and assumptions; to evolve our own understandings in relation to the understandings of others. Shelby, a doctoral student in her second year (2006-2007), is instructive in understanding the power of poetics as a pedagogical approach to leadership preparation when she explains:

I was overwhelmed by concepts that were new and confusing so I created a mind map, something that I taught my students to do but that I had not used myself with new learning. The result was an incredible mind map that revealed the twists and turns in my thinking and helped me to organize this new learning in a meaningful way. My practice was becoming integrated into this new scholarship and I felt successful.

Shelby's experience is characteristic of many doctoral students who found the doctoral program intense and the poetics activity a way to begin understanding the complex process of becoming a scholar-practitioner. Shelby often wrote poetry, a form of mind mapping for her, as an expression of her own process of working through the confusion, as demonstrated in her original poem "Möbius Strip":

Möbius Strip

A magician's trick, illusion
the irony of using a mathematical concept
to illustrate new ideas
a heuristic of sorts for a
bricolage of etymologies,
critical theories,
epistemologies.

That should have been my first
clue that my educational journey would be bumpy.

Research design that could only be comprehended
through the variegated colors of Crayola
markers and a mind map
that grew to amazing proportions.

My comfort zone – learning – seemed uncomfortable,
a wrong fit as I searched for solid ground on the Doctoral plain.

A critical lens, a pragmatic lens,
a postmodern lens, a feminist lens –
Better here or here

I squinted - hoping for a clear vision, the perfect lens
only to return to my Moebius strip of the scholar-practitioner leader.

An infinite loop of learning.

Poetics in leadership preparation challenges us to interpret lived experience deeply so that we might realize the multiplicity of possible constructions and the inevitable partiality, and even impermanence, of our own visions. The possibilities for understanding leadership exists, in part, in the aesthetic experiences we as professors of educational leadership can make possible, the imaginative moments through which we can enable our students to move beyond the realities of a world as it is experienced in the present. To move the mind beyond the mind. We must remember that, as Wallace Stevens (1951) explains, “Reality is life and life is society and the imagination and reality; that is to say, the imagination and society are inseparable” (p. 28). Leadership, like an aesthetic experience, has its own rhythm, tone, resonance, and drama.

Appendix A

Scholar–Practitioner Leadership Preparation²¹

The construct of scholar–practitioner as used throughout this paper is premised on an alternative epistemology wherein the educational leader as scholar and his or her leadership practice are inseparable from scholarly and critically oriented inquiry and practice. This interprets, for purposes of understanding the relationship between scholar and practitioner, as leadership praxis. In this sense, praxis connotes a necessary relationship between theory and practice, that is, theory means social, cultural, political, and economic theory, and practice means actions and decisions that an individual takes part in to fulfill his or her professional, political, and social/civic responsibilities. Scholar–practitioner leadership is grounded in a postmodern – post-formal view of leadership, which seeks to blur boundaries in the knowledge–practice and inquiry–practice relationships. A scholar–practitioner leader is aware of the origins, context, and patterns of the knowledge related to an issue. Equally important, the scholar–practitioner leader works from a repertoire of inquiry methods to explore, create, and transform social relations and knowledge within the larger political, economic, and cultural struggles of education and society. This post-formal way of knowing or inquiry creates deep understanding and facilitates continuous formation of questions that are the essence of scholar–practitioner leadership (Jenlink, 2001; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1999). Post-formal inquiry in the critique of practice enables the scholar–practitioner to examine the origins of practice while considering the historicity of the phenomena. Central to the critique of professional leadership practice is the role of “self” that “can only become critical when we appreciate the historicity of its formation. We are never independent of the social and historical forces that surround us—we are caught at a particular point in the web of reality” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1999, p. 62). In this sense, the scholar–practitioner engages in a self-critical inquiry and at the same brings a critical lens to his or her praxis. This type of critical praxis implies that at the same time as the questioning and researching occurs, the knowledge, values, and beliefs that are uncovered must be framed within a consideration of their implications for social justice, caring, and democracy. This framing, questioning, and researching activity is embedded within a continuous critical reflection on what is uncovered.

The scholar–practitioner leader understands the complexity of social relations and in general the complex nature of political and cultural struggles in which education is engaged within society. Pragmatically, the scholar–practitioner is consciously aware that every action has critical implications for themselves and others. They also realize that reality is not something external to human consciousness that can be discovered through some scientific process. To be a scholar–practitioner leader implies that knowledge, values, and beliefs cannot be given or transmitted to others, but that these other individuals must be allowed participation in the construction of meaning, definition, knowledge, or action. Simultaneously, the scholar–practitioner understands the import of facilitating a critical literacy, for him or herself and for others. The scholar–practitioner leader embodies the values of social justice, caring, equity, self-criticality, and democracy and they understand that their role as leader is equally one of cultural

²¹ Excerpted from P. M. Jenlink (2007). *A poetics of leadership exemplar: The scholar–practitioner’s obligation: Freedom’s poetic*. Paper presented at the 8th Annual Curriculum and Pedagogy Conference, Marble Falls, TX, October 3-7.

worker, scholarly practitioner and public intellectual within the classroom, school, college, educational community, and in state and regional/national policy making contexts.

The conceptualization of leadership that is defined by a blurring of boundaries between "scholar" and "practitioner" suggests, at first glance, as seemingly a merging of contraries, or contradictories. However, the merging of such contradictories has important implications within a postmodern, post-formal context of education. The synthesis developed from such merging has implications for redefining the practice of educators and other cultural workers: the kinds of relationships educators create, how educators frame and carry out work, and how educators give voice to social activism, knowledge creation and transformation, and democratizing education.

The notion of what stands as "scholar" takes new meaning, no longer bound within a modernist dualism. In a post-formal sense, the educational leader employs criticality as a scholarly lens in concert with multiple inquiry methods to create a scholarship of practice. Such a scholarship of practice offers important considerations for educational leadership's place in critically examining and addressing issues and problems that "schools of education need to think about regarding the social responsibility of school administrators and teachers and the role that both public schools and higher education might have in terms of their wider political and social function" (Giroux, 1994, p. 31).

A scholar-practitioner stance suggests an interrelatedness of both positional (position in situ) and orientation (position-taking) to convey physical positions of the person and the intellectual activities and perspectives carried over time and across different contexts. In this sense, stance makes visible and problematic the various perspectives through which scholar-practitioners frame their questions, illuminations, interrogations, and actions. A scholar-practitioner stance is, in part, a disposition through which the scholar-practitioner reflects upon her or his own actions and those presented by others. Rather than passively accepting information or embracing a false consciousness instructed by dominant ideologies, the scholar-practitioner takes a much more active role in leading, learning, and reflecting upon her/his relationship with her/his practice and the social context in which the practice is situated. A critical stance for the scholar-practitioner is undergirded by a perception of reality that considers the world and our place within it as incomplete, becoming, and subject to our own projections. It is a critical encounter in which such issues as what counts as knowledge or practice becomes subject to individuals' own histories, ideals, practices, and perceptions (Freire, 1998, pp. 73-80).

The critical stance does not simply acquiesce in or absorb new knowledge or practice but rather encounters it as a claim that exists alongside many alternative possibilities and therefore must struggle to retain its legitimacy (Curzon-Hobson, 2003). A scholar-practitioner who embraces a critical stance subjects her or his knowledge and practice to a variety of frameworks that he or she has encountered and reflects upon this practice or knowledge in social contexts characterized by tensions and conflicts.

The notion of scholar-practitioner stance is underpinned by a sense of fragility and openness in the social context, the positions one has in contrast to the position-taking one engages in gives way to the fragility and openness. Importantly, the scholar-practitioner recognizes the value that is gained within a social context that is exploited by all in order to reflect upon and imagine anew what is presented and the perceptions of our interrelationships (Freire, 1985, p. 44). The scholar-practitioner often brings to question and introduces conflict to bear on the object of inquiry through her or his practice. Freire (1972) explains this process as "epistemological encircling" in which new ideas—through dialogical inquiry—conflict with and challenge what is considered absolute and show the learner that things can be different" (p. 53).

Thus, in mediating injustices and inequities within the educational setting, the scholar-practitioner works to create a more democratic culture while fostering a sense of becoming, both in her or himself, as well as in others with whom s/he interacts. This creates a symmetry in the relationships and practices, participation and power, wherein the scholar-practitioner is working alongside others toward defining a socially just and democratic society.

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