

One Man's Story: Leadership Development via Aesthetic-based Learning Practices

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Abstract

This paper tells the story of how the incorporation of aesthetic-based learning practices in The Banff Centre's leadership development programs has influenced the author's leadership practice. The story of the author's personal leadership development via exposure to these practices is framed by three philosophical constructs. The first comes from the science of hermeneutics in which the leader is seen as a crafter of meaning. The second, based on a model developed through the research of The Banff Centre's Leadership Learning Lab, draws on the four phases of aesthetic-based learning: enchantment, imagination, crafting and lifeworld sensibility. The third, currently in development at The Banff Centre's Leadership Learning Lab, is the emerging Leadership Character Capacity Map that, rather than identifying specific character traits, outlines five entry points for character development: place, people, process, presence, and performance. Building on this base, the author reflects on and tells the story of how he has used aesthetic-based learning practices to inform his leadership practice.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore the impact the aesthetic-based learning practices of The Banff Centre's leadership development programs has had on my leadership development. I write this paper as an exploration of my Banff Centre experiences, as an exploration of how my practice and perspective of leadership and leadership development have evolved and are continuing to evolve through my ongoing work with The Banff Centre, particularly the Leadership Learning Lab. In telling this story, it is hoped that readers will gain insights regarding the value and impact of integrating aesthetic-based learning practices with traditional leadership development programming. The story will include descriptions of specific aesthetic-based learning practices I have experienced and how they have enhanced my understanding of leadership and stimulated me to expand my thinking and my practice.

I first became associated with The Banff Centre in the mid-1990s as a facilitator of the outdoor components of The Centre's leadership programs. These components included high ropes course, orienteering, rock climbing, and on-the-ground team challenges. At that time these activities were the focus and background of my experiential education perspective. After a couple of years facilitating the outdoor components, I became responsible for designing and delivering two of The Banff Centre's public programs, *Building Personal Leadership Capacity* and *Leading in a Complex World*, and two *Leadership Excellence* programs for custom clients, all of which have been delivered numerous times. During my time with The Banff Centre I have been a participant in two leadership programs, *Senior Executive A* and *The Art of the Executive Leader*. I have also taken part in three of the six *Thought Leader Forums*,¹ each of which explores the integration of an aesthetic practice with a particular leadership topic. It is this set of experiences that forms the basis of my story.

The Banff Centre began including aesthetic-based learning practices in their leadership development programs in 1994. These sessions, led by Banff Centre artists and performers, are known as creativity sessions to program participants. The purpose of these sessions is to animate leadership concepts being taught in each of the various leadership development programs. The first creativity sessions began with theatre and clay activities and have expanded to include among others: clowning, storytelling, visual images, masks, collage, sculpting and writing, all of which I have directly experienced either as a program participant or as program faculty.

The exposure I have had to the aesthetic-based learning practices associated with The Banff Centre's leadership programs has prompted me to experiment with writing this paper in a style that incorporates poetry and prose along with journal notes. Until recently, I have separated my poetic writing (haiku and related forms) and thinking from my academic writing and thinking. In this paper I wish to integrate the two. The style I am using is an adaptation of the Japanese *haibun* in which a piece of prose is followed by a poetic piece. The purpose of the poetic piece is to capture the gist of the prose piece in a way that provides the reader with a more powerful insight than might otherwise be gained from the prose alone. This combination of prose and poetry is intended to engage the reader's imagination, taking them more deeply into the writer's experience. I also include excerpts from the journal writing I have done while at The Banff Centre. Along with this style, I tell this story within the framework of the following theoretical constructs: hermeneutic leadership, aesthetic-based learning and character capacity development, each of which has been developed by various faculty members associated with The Banff Centre's Leadership Learning Lab.

¹ For a full description of the *Thought Leader Forums* visit http://www.banffcentre.ca/departments/leadership/thought_forums/.

Theoretical Constructs

Hermeneutic Leadership

Upon my arrival at The Banff Centre as a program facilitator in the mid-1990s, my understanding of myself as a leader was that of an expert in the field of outdoor experiential leadership education. By the mid-1990s I had spent twenty years teaching in traditional classrooms and outdoor wilderness settings for a variety of organizations. I understood myself as an educational leader, as one who knew how to design and deliver effective educational programs. While I was constantly looking for ways to improve my teaching and of understanding the learning process, I basically accepted my leadership role as that of being the knower and the one who made things happen. These were my responsibilities as the leader. It was my role to have more answers to questions, more knowledge and know-how than those I instructed. Now, after ten years of association with The Banff Centre, I have come to a new way of seeing my leadership role in my teaching practice.

While at The Banff Centre I have been introduced to the metaphor of leader as hermeneut, as "a seeker, questioner, and crafter of meaning" (Woodward & Funk, 2004, p. 2). Through exploration of this metaphor I am gaining insight into my role as leader. Now, in addition to the leadership role of knower and doer that I have previously seen myself in, I see myself in a leadership role in which I am developing "the capacity to interpret information, question the current status of what is known and unknown, seek insights into life experiences and create meaning from them" (Force & Funk, 2005, p. 2) while working to develop these same capacities in others. In the process of becoming a hermeneutic leader I have been learning to ask provocative questions, questions with and without answers. I have been experimenting with the processes of crafting meaning of the complexities involved in leading and leadership both for myself and for others. In the process of developing myself as a hermeneutic leader, I work at "interpreting and reinterpreting what is happening, making new meanings from what is emerging, reflecting on those new meanings and acting from what has been learned, . . . [which means] constructing and reconstructing meaning through ongoing processes of reflecting, questioning and acting in conjunction with others" (p. 4). It is from this hermeneutic perspective that I make sense and give meaning to my practice as a leader.

traveling a *wilderness of complexity*
i fall into a *funk*
questioning the *meaning* of my *work*

traveling a *wilderness of complexity*
i am but a lost *knower*
seeking the *meaning* of my *work*

traveling a *wilderness of complexity*
i continue *teaching*
knowing the *current design* doesn't quite *work*

traveling a *wilderness of complexity*
i shift my *metaphor*
arriving at the *meaning* of my *work*

traveling a *wilderness of complexity*
i become the *hermeneut*
crafting new *meaning* for my *work*²

The hermeneutic metaphor does not negate what I have previously known about myself as a leader or what I know about leadership in general; rather, it transcends and includes what I have known and understood. It takes what I already know, reframes it, situates it, and guides me forward in my thinking. In the words of Woodward and Funk (2004),

The hermeneutic approach draws forth much of what the leader already brings into the world. The practice is developed largely by drawing on the dynamics of meaning-making embedded in the leader's individual psychology and in the inherent nature of the group grounded in a distinct culture. It is upon these two naturally occurring dynamics that the leader builds his/her practice. (p. 13)

My role as a leader is still that of knower and doer, but it is no longer limited to that. Now with the hermeneutic metaphor in mind, I seek to become a meaning-maker as well. However, metaphor alone does not drive the change to make this shift. It may be the spark, but it still needs to be fuelled. The fuel that has fed the fire of change in developing my hermeneutic approach to leadership is embedded in the four aspects of aesthetic-based learning outlined below. It is within the aesthetic-based learning environment that the inner hermeneutic qualities of my personality have emerged.

Aesthetic-Based Learning

As a result of their research at The Banff Centre, Woodward and Funk (2004) have identified four aesthetic-based learning practices that serve as focal points for the developmental experiences that foster hermeneutic leadership. The four aesthetic-based learning practices include: *enchantment*, "the ability to let oneself feel wonder . . . [and] to find fascination . . . in everyday people, events, and objects" (p. 13); *imagination*, "the ability to see something that is not real or

² The process for creating this verse is one I learned in a Thought Leader Forum. The general process is to select 12 to 15 words from the prose text that appeal to you and then use them in creating a verse. The form of the words can be adapted to fit the context of the verse. The words selected from the prose text for this verse are in italics.

present . . . [and] to see new possibilities . . . find hidden or deeper meaning . . . [and] to think metaphorically" (p. 14); *crafting*, the ability to "make something or bring something into being . . . [and] live intentionally with mindfulness and deliberation" (p. 14); and *lifeworld sensibility*, which is "the environment into which the leader expresses him/herself . . . [and] the ability to remain unique in a world that uses culture to normalize" (p. 14). Following are examples of how these four aesthetic-based learning practices look as lived-experience and how they have influenced my leadership development.

Enchantment. In addition to feeling wonder and finding fascination in everyday experiences, enchantment is about identifying with and creating the sacred (Woodward and Funk, 2004). Co-facilitating programs with Tanis Helliwell opened my eyes to how this can be incorporated into leadership development and one's personal life. On the first day of *Building Personal Leadership Capacity*, Tanis would ask each of the participants to select a reflection card from a small container, which was held in such a way that the words on the cards were not visible. We each selected a single card and used it as the focus of our reflective journal writing throughout the program. Below are samples of my reflective writing that illustrate enchantment as identifying and creating a sense of sacredness, a sense of connection to something beyond self.

22 October 2002 - Beauty: *Beauty is love - Maturana love, i.e. allowing others to be their 'full' self in my presence and the presence of others. So what does that mean? It means giving space for others to have their own experiences. . . . They can have and can share their feelings - it means keeping in mind that the feelings are theirs and are real. The same is true for intentions, wants and thoughts.*

23 March 2003 - Love: *Love is that ability to touch someone. Caring enough about someone so that you stay connected. A willingness to find out who they are and what their experience is. . . . Love is the realization of oneness, oneness or wholeness of self - body, mind and soul, oneness of life, of the kosmos. Love is reflected in our ability to remain open to those we disagree with or who disagree with us, with those who are different from us, to those we love and live with, to ourselves, to those who are yet to come.*

These reflections and others like them, in combination with the visioning exercises we did with program participants, led me to co-creating with my wife Colleen a vision for our lives together, a vision simply stated as "A Life of Beauty." A life of beauty is one filled with wonder, one in which we are fascinated with every day aspects of life and connected to the sacred. We use this vision to guide all our major decisions, where we live, how we live and with whom we associate. The power of this vision is in its openness. We have no single definition of beauty. The meaning of beauty is contextual, which requires us to mull it over, think about it, wonder what it means in this instance and to converse about it. As such, the lived-experience of our life of beauty is always evolving, always requiring us to be hermeneuts, crafters of meaning. As a result of this, I have a much clearer idea of the value and power of the visioning process for individuals and for organizations. The power of which is embedded in the following verse:

a journey of *wonder*
filled with *tyrannosauric* dreams
the moving *cinematography* of
unknown *athabaskan* landscapes³

³ The italicized words in this verse are taken from an autobiographical writing exercise.

Imagination. In *The Art of the Executive Leader* program each participant, of which I was one, selected an envelop that contained the name and address of an individual with whom we were to meet and engage in a leadership conversation. We were connected with local business people, politicians, students and the general public; all accept me. We were told there was one "wild card" in the pack of envelops. I didn't realize that I had received the wild card until I was at the assigned address where I was introduced to Wallace Cameron. To my surprise, Wallace was a shaggy, wire-haired dog. To his owner's surprise, I hung out with Wallace for 15 minutes or so. He sat at my feet and I caressed his ears, petted his back and chatted aimlessly with him, as one tends to do with dogs. Wallace seemed to enjoy my company, and I certainly enjoyed his. After I left Wallace, I stopped at a local cafe and, with a cup of tea in hand, contemplated what I had learned from this encounter. In making sense of my time with Wallace in terms of a leadership conversation, I had to draw upon all my imaginative resources. I had to be open to the possibility that I could actually learn something from Wallace. I had to think metaphorically in order to achieve the deeper meaning of our interaction. My experience with Wallace was most certainly one of aesthetic-based learning.

9 November 2005 - Lessons from Wallace the Dog: Wallace exemplified the notion of being unutterably one's self. In doing so he was able to completely draw me in. . . . He was fully present. His presence allowed me to be present as well. . . . In my exploration of the ways in which leading is a performing art, my encounter with Wallace demonstrated the following: letting go of expectations, responding to what emerges and to what others have to offer, being willing to give fully of yourself as well as being willing to receive, the power of silence, the value of not playing the status game and being open to the moment. . . . In our 15-minute conversation, Wallace exemplified everything we have been exploring in our class over the past few days.

This experience with Wallace and others that challenge the imagination have begun to influence my work in other contexts. In planning programs or other activities with colleagues and, at times with family members, I have become much more open to possibilities. If they have an idea that sounds reasonable, though different than mine, I say, "let's try it." Only by trying it will we know if and how it will work. We can evaluate afterward.

Crafting. As a result of over 10 years of experience with aesthetic-based learning at the Banff Centre, I am finally learning to apply it to the programs I develop in other contexts. In my work with the master-of-arts degree in leadership at Royal Roads University, I have started using improvisational theatre exercises to animate various leadership concepts being taught. This has been a major change for me. When I first engaged in these improvisational theatre exercises as a participant in Banff Centre programs, I was quite self-conscious. I would worry about doing it right and about what others thought of me. I would shrink back into the crowd in the hope of not being asked to demonstrate an activity. Even when I first started facilitating improvisational activities on my own, I was very tentative in the way I presented them. Whenever I am under pressure or feeling anxious as a facilitator, I tend to forget the value of my sense of humor; I become overly serious. I only started overcoming this when I started using the 5 Laughs activity. This activity involves five different kinds of laughs starting with a deep belly laugh and evolving to a high-pitched witch's laugh. The more I incorporated this into my teaching, the more relaxed I became. The more relaxed I became, the more confidence I gained and the more willing I was to experiment with other aesthetic practices.

*believe and begin
laughing I smile, smiling I laugh
breathing in and breathing out
I give up the song sheet
I sing my own song⁴*

The realization that I was overcoming my self-consciousness through improvisational exercises didn't really dawn on me until recently during a misnaming activity in which we were directed to point at various objects and misname them.

7 November 2005 - Misenaming activity: During this activity I felt a shift come over me, a new confidence I hadn't felt before. My whole body moved with deliberation, with energy. I was fully present. I would look at an object, stand firm, shoot out my hand and in a firm voice call out a name. As I did, I witnessed myself doing so, which reinforced the doing. I gained confidence as I went on. Being more confident, I avoided being influenced by others' naming. I was spontaneous - no stacking, no category patterns.

Through experience with activities like these and other aesthetic-based learning practices I am coming to realize the possibilities, to see the applications and to see which practices fit for me in my work. I am becoming much more cognizant of the notion of animating leadership concepts through aesthetic-based learning practices, and, as a result, I am engaging myself, and others, in new ways of learning.

Lifeworld Sensibility. In September 2005 as part of my work with The Banff Centre I attended the *Desire Lines Arts and Ecology Symposium* at Dartington College of Art in Devon, England. There, while watching the film *Rivers and Tides* in which Andy Goldsworthy creates transitory art composed of ice structures that melt in the sun and leaf patterns that blow away with the wind, I came to realize the transitory nature of my work, of anyone's work, and, in a sense, the ephemeral quality of our creations. This realization led me to think about the actor's paradox: "Act always as if the future of the Universe depended on what you did, while laughing at yourself for thinking that whatever you do makes a difference" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 133). While at first this was a bit disconcerting, a bit difficult to truly grasp, after thinking about it for a time I saw it simply as the nature of things. My living, our collective living, is intimately bound in relationship to the ecological order of all life. Like all living organisms, our time on earth is but a brief moment in the bigger scheme of things. This is what Woodward and Funk (2004) mean when they talk about *lifeworld sensibility* being the capacity for ecological sensibility, the ability to see oneself as a set of interconnected relationships with "nature, people and their networks, material things, ancestors, spirits, etc." (p. 14). This realization dawned on me one summer evening while canoeing in central Alberta. As I paddled on an ox-bow lagoon, I noticed the reflection of the forest on the water. I was quite surprised at how far I could actually see into the forest in the reflection. For the first time I saw the underlying connection between the two.

deep
within the pond
the forest⁵

⁴ This verse is composed of phrases taken from various parts of my journal written during Banff programs.

⁵ Force, 1996.

My exposure to aesthetic-based learning has not only reinforced my ecological perspective, it has added new dimensions to it. In expanding this perspective, I have been able to deepen my capacity to engage in the lifeworld. To engage in the world in a manner that allows me to be my authentic self despite the pressures to normalize.

1 December 2005: "Acting" has the negative connotation of pretending, but actors are not pretending, rather they are authentically engaging in taking on a role and living that role as genuinely as possible. Is that not what we hope and expect of those placed in leadership roles?

As I develop my understanding of aesthetic-based learning, I am coming to see these four practices not only as four discrete practices that can be used to enhance learning, but also as a framework for designing leadership development programs. The four practices lead to a series of design questions: (1) *Enchantment*. How do we start the program in a way that creates a sense of wonder for the participants? What will engage their curiosity? (2) *Imagination*. What concepts and information will assist the participants in seeing new possibilities? What activities will stimulate the making of deeper meaning? (3) *Crafting*. What opportunities do the participants need to bring these new possibilities and meanings into being? What do we want them to take back into their lived-world? (4) *Lifeworld Sensibility*. How do we end the program in such a way that the participants can see the far-reaching impact of their work beyond that of themselves and their organization? I now use these questions and others like them to guide the designing of new programs. Doing so allows me to fully incorporate aesthetic-based learning into my work as teacher and facilitator.

Character Capacity Map

The majority of the Banff Centre's leadership development programs are competency-based. Each of the competency-based programs is designed to develop a specific set of leadership competencies. However, several new programs have been developed over the last couple of years that go beyond competencies. These programs are designed to build character capacity. Thus, in the spring of 2005 Andre Mamprin, Colin Funk, Brian Woodward, Bastiaan Heemsbergen, and I gathered together in The Banff Centre's Leadership Learning Lab for the purpose of creating a Leadership Character Capacity Map. Our initial intention was to design a map similar to The Banff Centre's Competency Map. However, after a very short conversation, it became evident that none of us agreed with the idea of listing a set of character traits for leaders. Many others have done this, and few are in agreement as to which character traits are necessary for effective leadership. The Josephson Institute of Ethics lists the following six characteristics: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship, while Warren Bennis' list includes the following: vision, inspiration, empathy, and trustworthiness (Spears, 2002). A more extensive list is the US Army's list of 23 leadership character traits: bearing, confidence, courage, integrity, decisiveness, justice, endurance, tact, initiative, coolness, maturity, improvement, will, assertiveness, candor, sense of humor, competence, commitment, creativity, self-discipline, humility, flexibility, empathy/compassion (Clark, 1997). Given that there are many such lists, we saw no need to create yet another. After exploring the nature of our character capacity programs, we came to the realization that these programs provide participants with entry points for developing their character capacity rather than prescribing specific leadership character traits. In addition to this important breakthrough in our discussion came the belief that the character traits required for effective leadership are contextual. By this we mean that the character traits required for effective leadership vary according to organizational sector, position within the organization, culture and society in which the organization is imbedded as well as other variables beyond our knowledge. Therefore, we decided it was not our place to determine a set of leadership character

traits that we are trying to instill in others, but rather, to create a map made up of pathways that would assist participants in developing the character traits that fit their individual needs.

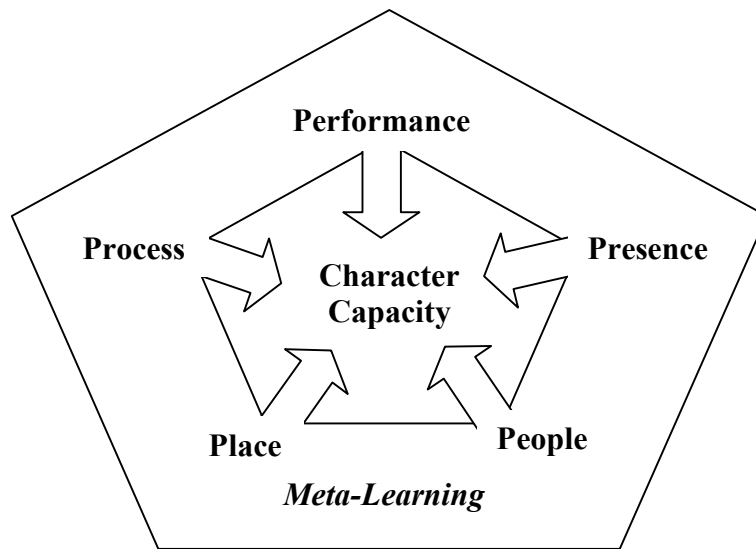
Our conversational process was one of *serious play* (Palus and Horth, 2002) in which we questioned the conventional wisdom of character trait lists, suspended our initial agenda of creating a list of character traits, and began to experiment with other possibilities. As we played with ideas, the notion of pathways emerged and captured our curiosity. Our thinking was that character capacity development occurs when program participants journey along pathways that cause them to reflect on and expand their current way of being. The first couple of possibilities we listed began with the letter "P;" we playfully continued with this pattern until we had a list of five pathways on which we could all agree. The initial list included: process, practice, principle, performance, and paradox. In discussing the meaning of each of these pathways, we concluded that they are meta-learning processes, processes in which participants learn how to develop character capacity as well as developing character capacity.

Recognizing that our Map was in an embryonic stage, we ended our conversation with the agreement to continue to think about the ideas we had generated and to experiment with them in the work that we do, to test them out, and to refine them. Figure 1 represents the version of the Leadership Character Capacity Map with which I am experimenting. I have introduced some pathways that differ from the ones outlined in our initial discussion. While there are many possible pathways, the ones I have included are those that I have experienced and am most comfortable with in my work at The Banff Centre and other venues. I present this version of the Map (Figure 1) in order to further the discussion between members of The Banff Centre faculty as well as to pique the interest of other leadership development practitioners. The Map also serves as a framework for understanding how the aesthetic-based learning processes have furthered my development as a hermeneutic leader.

Place. The role of *place* as a pathway for developing leadership character capacity is to create an atmosphere of possibilities, to provide a sense that something important has happened there in the past and is about to happen there again. I refer to such places as *secular-sacred* spaces. The energy for creating this atmosphere is found in the natural and cultural surroundings of the place and the history of those who have been there before. The power of place is in its ability to provide a stimulating environment where people find time and space to contemplate, reflect, imagine, and craft. The Banff Centre is this kind of place.

Character Capacity Map
Pathways to Building Character Capacity

Figure 1



Arriving at The Banff Centre engenders the feel of a pilgrimage; there is the sense of connection with something beyond self (Force, 2000). Here the mountains, young and rugged, pushed upward by two colliding tectonic plates, tell the story of geological time. Here in the forested valley below Tunnel Mountain, known as the Sleeping Buffalo to the local first-nations people, aboriginal tribes gathered regularly for thousands of years to trade goods, share stories, celebrate the seasons, and engage in spiritual rituals. Here for over 75 years people from all walks of life have come to The Banff Centre to engage in creative excellence. Over the last ten years, I have journeyed regularly to The Banff Centre with the intention of experiencing the sacredness of the place.

ancient forests
river valleys, snow-capped peaks
a thousand years of gathering
still the mind, calm the soul⁶

Walking along the Bow River, trekking through the forest to the top of Sleeping Buffalo, and gazing out of a classroom window at the majestic view of the Rocky Mountains, ground me. As I engage with the natural environment surrounding The Banff Centre, I become reflective, contemplative, self-aware, all qualities of leadership character I wish to enhance. The more I engage in these activities the greater my capacity to center and focus my attention. The more connected I become with others. Through repeated practice these activities have grown in depth and breadth and emerged as ongoing patterns of behaviors. The more engrained they have become the better I am at taking them into other contexts of my life. For example, this practice of engaging with the natural surroundings has become part of my work at Royal Roads University where I can often be found in one of the many gardens meeting with graduate students to discuss

⁶ This verse is from my journal dated 1 June 2006.

their research projects and academic progress. The gardens, not only ground me and allow me to focus my attention, they also stimulate my thinking as well as that of my students. From my experiences in the natural surroundings of The Banff Centre and the gardens of Royal Roads University, I have come to believe, like Csikszentmihalyi (1996), that

certain environments have a greater density of interaction and provide more excitement and a greater effervescence of ideas; therefore, they prompt the person who is already inclined to break away from conventions to experiment with novelty more readily than if he or she had stayed in a more conservative, more repressive setting. (p. 129)

While these natural environments have contributed to bringing forth my innate creative talents, so have the artists' spaces of The Banff Centre where many of the aesthetic-based learning activities take place. Not only have I been able to engage in aesthetic-based learning with artists and performers, I have done so in their studios and on stage. These are the secular-sacred spaces where creative juices have flowed and will flow again. This is where others have toiled; this is where others have brought forth their talents to create and produce works of the visual and performing arts. Entering one of these spaces is like entering a sanctuary. It is in these spaces, where I have been challenged to engage, that a sense of awe and inspiration has encouraged me to interact with others to my fullest extent - a task that has not always been easy. While the natural environments have taken me inward, the artists' spaces have taken me outward. It is in these spaces that I have been able to explore and develop my capacity for hermeneutic leadership. I have become more of a seeker of knowledge, an inquirer, than before. In my work with my graduate students, I am known for my inclination to challenge their thinking by asking provocative questions.

People. The pathway of *people* builds character through role-modeling, through interaction with people who manifest leadership character capacity by bringing forth their complete self in the work they do. Through face-to-face contact with mentors, it is possible to come to know the "who" of the person is as well as the "what" they do, know, and think. This experiencing of the "who" of one person serves as a model for the "who" in others, It encourages us to bring forth our complete self to whatever we do. The strength of The Banff Centre's leadership development programs is in the diversity of people involved, the artists and performers, thought leaders, and faculty. Interacting with each of these groups of people provides me with opportunities to expand my character capacity. Working directly with the artists and performers in their creative spaces has given me insight into the nature of my creative talents as well as a better understanding and heightened interest in various art forms. But more importantly, I have come to discover whom these artists and performers are as leaders as they coach me, and others, through the aesthetic-based learning activities they facilitate. It is in these settings that I experience their patience and compassion with those of us who know nothing of their trade. In their presence I am constantly reminded of the importance of these leadership qualities when asking people to step forward and take a risk, to be vulnerable. Hence, I learn to be more patient and compassionate with those whom I teach.

Ed, the potter, sees beauty in form
Kim, the clown, brings a sense of play
Jane, the artist, combines the unusual
Colin, the actor, brings stories to life
With them I dance into new worlds

Each artist and performer brings a fresh perspective to our interactions. It is through these interactions that I become more open to others with different ways of being, to seeing the world through different lenses.

For the character capacity-based programs as well as in the *Thought Leader Forums*, The Banff Centre brings in various thought leaders to share their knowledge with faculty and program participants. Thought leaders are those who have spent considerable time studying, researching, and writing about various leadership topics and related fields. To read their work is one way to understand the concepts they think and write about. Reading their work tells me little about their character. However, spending three to five days with them in a forum or a program creates opportunities for prolonged conversations in which it is possible to experience the richness of their character as leaders and as people. I see each beyond their work. I see their humanness. This makes their work more real for me. I see them each being their full unique self, which in turn inspires me to be my full unique self.

Fritjof Capra exudes intensity and focus as he strives to make his thinking clear and available to the non-scientist. David Horth displays a depth and breadth of creative talent and thinking in the questions he asks and the ideas he explores. Through kindness and a gentle presence Patricia Madson extends her talent for combining theatre and leadership. The thoughtful David Hurst shares his knowledge with clarity and thoroughness, and willingly engages in aesthetic activities that take him beyond his comfort zone. Piers Ibbotson's playfulness and lightness of heart are combined with a thoughtful and compassionate mind.

Ron Heifetz challenges himself and participants by taking the group deeper into experiences than he has ever taken groups before.

Each of these thought leaders' ability to be fully present and engaged in their own unique way inspires me to bring my full self forward in my own unique way in the work that I do. Not only thought leaders, but faculty too have motivated me to bring my full self to my work. In co-facilitating programs with Tanis Helliwell, I've learned that courage is more important than talent. She demonstrates this every time she leads a group of reluctant participants through singing in rounds, doing a Maori chant or a Cherokee movement exercise. Her courage has given me the courage to lead groups through tai chi motifs and to gain a group's attention by singing "ah," which is way beyond my comfort zone and natural singing talent. Through the artists and performers, thought leaders, and faculty I have been able to expand and deepened my leadership character capacity beyond what I ever imagined I could.

Process. The pathway of *process* builds leadership character through enhanced learning programming which incorporates aesthetic-based learning with traditional lecture-based methods in order to integrate affective aspects of body, mind, and spirit with cognitive learning. Aesthetic-based learning activities, as discussed earlier in this paper, are designed to animate the theoretical knowledge by engaging the social, physical, and emotional dimensions of human functioning. The importance of the integration of body, mind, and spirit in learning is that behavioral change, i.e. capacity building, is linked to emotional and habitual behaviors as well as thinking. In addition to arts-based activities, The Banff Centre leadership development programs incorporate outdoor-based activities that facilitate this integration.

Each Banff Centre leadership development program includes an outdoor activity. This may include an ecology walk in which a local ecologist takes program participants into the natural environment, describes the ecological relationships between species found there, and discusses how these relationships illustrate various concepts that apply to leadership and organizational development. On occasion these walks include journal writing and meditation activities.

24 April 2006: *In today's meditative walk along the Bow River, I slowed down to "pay attention". I became aware of the sound of my footsteps, the smells of the river, the trees, the earth. I noticed the bark on a tree, the feel of the ground under foot, the dappled sunlight, the flow of my breath, shapes of juniper bushes, carpets of moss, the trickle of water over stones, the wind in the trees, the warmth of the sun. I was totally present, until my pace quickened in an effort to catch up with the others. Ever so slightly, as I moved faster - I noticed less. My focus shifted from the present to the future, to responsibilities and expectations - I stopped noticing.*

Other examples of outdoor activities include: rock climbing, high ropes course, team challenges, and orienteering. Rock climbing and high ropes engage both the physical and the emotional and serve to animate the relationship between risk and trust. Of the many things I've learned as participant and facilitator of these activities the one that stands out the most for me is that trust starts by being given rather than by being earned. By expanding my capacity to have trust in others, they expand their capacity to take risks, both physically and socially. The reciprocal is true as well, the more I risk in trusting others the more I am trusted. The reflexive nature of the trust-risk relationship makes it a very powerful leadership practice as well as a dynamic leadership characteristic.

As can be seen from the above examples, *process*, as a pathway to character development, is closely linked to *place*. While this is obvious for the outdoor activities in which the mountains exhilarate the heart and provide a sense of awe and wonder, it is also true of the arts-based activities that occur in the artists' and performers' spaces. It is the artists' and performers' spaces that add energy and dimension to the learning processes by connecting the participant to the creative culture of the arts. It is this culture of creativity that this approach to learning is trying to instill in the participant, a culture that is as integral to leadership as it is to the arts. It is also important to note that *process* is intimately linked to *people*. The mental, physical, and emotional demands of aesthetic-based learning processes, both arts and outdoor activities, provide an opportunity for participants to try new behaviors in their interactions with others as well as to observe the interactions of others in new contexts. By doing and observing, leadership character capacity is developed. The merger of these pathways enhances leadership development to a greater extent than any one of them alone.

Presence. The role of *presence* as a pathway to increased leadership character capacity is in the development of the ability to "allow inner knowledge to emerge" (Senge, et al., 2005, p. 88). This requires being in the here-and-now. It requires being fully aware of what is going on not only in our surroundings but, more importantly, within our own consciousness. Presence begins with being an observer of our inner thoughts, feelings, and desires, and the influence they have on our outer behavior. Through this deep inner listening we become aware of the patterns and perceptions that drive our in-the-moment behaviors (Senge, et al.). Developing presence is a discipline that demands ongoing practice.

29 November 2005: *I am becoming much more cognizant of the notion of animating leadership concepts. While I've been exposed to the idea of it, I am just now really catching on to it. I'm constantly thinking about how I can apply it to my work. I've become more self-aware while becoming less self-conscious. I don't worry as much whether what I do will be done correctly or whether people are comfortable with it. I just tend to do it.*

The Banff Centre's character capacity-based programs provide time for participants to pause and reflect. Each participant is given a writing journal at the beginning of the program and time is set aside each day for reflective writing. The writing is often done after an intense outdoor or arts activity. The following journal entry was made after a photo mask activity. This activity is one in which some participants don masks that are life-size photographs of real people's faces. The mask wearer puts on an article of clothing that goes with the mask and then sits silently and motionless in a pose characteristic of the face on the mask. The rest of the participants study the mask wearers paying particular attention to their own inner reactions.

20 February 2004: I was unnerved by the mask wearers - the realness, the intensity and the boldness, the raw emotion of their presence. I became aware of how the human face functions as a mask. The awareness affects how I now see faces. I'm reluctant to look at others, afraid of what I might see. The flow of just looking - feeling the emotion, studying the lines, eyes, mouth - made me realize how much I miss by not really paying attention to these aspects of other people's faces. I became aware of how quickly I made up stories about what I saw in each face; I became aware of my own filters.

Artistic practices such as the improvisational activities also provide opportunities to practice being present in the moment, and thus serve to develop self-awareness and the ability to respond rather than react to what is happening. These activities focus on giving full attention to the moment, making authentic connections, bringing one's full self forward, and being available and open to what arises in the moment.

The pathway of *presence* interconnects with the pathway of *process* as can be seen from the above examples of journal writing and improvisational activities. As well, it mingles with the pathway of *place* in that the wild landscapes surrounding The Banff Centre offer an opportunity to reconnect with self. The mountains and woodlands provide private space, space to pause and reflect. This private, reflective space "is a space of the mind, . . . 'soul space'" (Lightman, 2005, p. 191). It is a space where the fires within are rekindled.

In the midst of the mountain forest
Escaping the noise of men and machine
Wondering without intention or purpose
Between the known and the unknown
Exhilarated not frightened
Filled with awe and wonder
A lost self is rediscovered

Performance. Given *place* and *people* as the foundation pathways and with *process* and *presence* as the drivers, *performance* becomes the keystone that pulls them all together. It is the pathway of direct action. It is where learning from listening, reading, watching, and experimenting is applied in simulated and real-world contexts. This pathway includes activities during Banff Centre programs and after participants return to their workplaces. The Banff Centre's aesthetic-based learning approach provides participants with a wide variety of safe and encouraging simulated contexts for practicing new behaviors. These simulated environments involving arts and outdoor activities provide a playground for experimenting with unfamiliar behaviors, thus preparing participants to use them in real-life contexts. Unlike the competency-based programs, which have only one creativity session, the character capacity-based programs weave an aesthetic-based learning practice throughout the entire program. For example, Colin Funk, master of aesthetic-based learning practices and director of creativity for Leadership Development at The Banff Centre, and I, with my newly gained understanding of aesthetic-based learning practices,

designed the *Leading in a Complex World* program with a focus on *imaging* (Palus and Horth, 2002). In this program we use Visual Explorer⁷ and painting with watercolors to explore various aspects of complexity. The participants also create storyboards to plan and shoot a 5-minute video in which they are to depict what it means to lead in a complex world. As well they explore the complexities of cultural value systems through an interactive theatre production produced by the Leadership Arts Ensemble.⁸ In each of these activities participants are examining the performance of others in addition to paying attention to and experimenting with their own behaviors. On the last day of the program, participants go on a meditative walk into the forest where they are given an opportunity to reflect and journal about how they will incorporate the new behaviors they have been practicing during the program back into their daily lives.

I, too, spend time reflecting on how I will incorporate what I have learned into my work. It seems more often than not during a program I am introduced to a book that I haven't yet read. The last *Leading in a Complex World* program was no exception. During the program I was introduced to Pat Allen's *Art is a Way of Knowing*. I obtained a copy from Colin Funk, took it home, read it, and then instead of taking a linear set of notes, I captured the essence of what it meant for me in a poem.

art is a way of knowing
where dangerous imaginings
dance with the soul
to half-remembered melodies
with shunned images
shifting incrementally with lived images
on a newly stretched canvas

art is a way of knowing
where a confluence of events
attractive but ephemeral
becomes a marriage of opposites
reclaiming the power
of unlived potential
of bright flame and wild dance

art is a way of knowing
where direct participation in life
dark and light and shadow
lead to living parallel stories
in slightly altered guise
requiring the stoic discipline of bearing witness
to the multiplicity of being⁹

The idea of capturing theoretical concepts in a poem is a new behavior for me, one that makes use of my poetic talents in a new way. The power of this is that the poem is much more metaphoric than linear notes. Reading the poem forces me to think more deeply about the concepts than I

⁷ Visual Explorer is a set of over 200 images compiled by the Center for Creative Leadership.

⁸ See Force & Funk, 2005, for a more complete description of this production.

⁹ The italicized words are phrases taken from *Art is a Way of Knowing*.

normally would. It is also much more enjoyable to read, so I revisit it often. With each visit I gain a richer understanding of the content.

As a result of attending and teaching Banff Centre programs, I have enhanced my teaching by incorporating aesthetic-based learning activities that I hadn't used before to animate leadership ideas and concepts, such as: accepting offers, being spontaneous, opening to what is emerging in the moment, generating ideas and building on other's ideas, imaging, attending to inner voice awareness, and being present. In addition to developing a better understanding of the role these concepts play in the development of leadership, I have also been able to apply them to the interactions I have when working on various faculty teams.

***30 November 2005:** Being on stage - what role, what character do I play - becoming conscious of it. "Not stacking," not coming into a situation with a preconceived notion of what will happen while having an idea of intended outcome. Being aware of my inner voice both positive and negative in the moment of performance and being aware of its impact on my behavior and being able to shift a negative to neutral or positive focus.*

***12 June 06:** As a result of my Banff Centre experiences my leadership has blossomed in ways that I hadn't expected. Through repeated practice in aesthetic-based learning sessions my creative talents have come to the fore and I've been able to blend them with my teaching talents. In this regard, I emerge.*

This idea of an emerging me, an emerging self, has come to my attention over the last few years as a result of studying and trying to understand how notions of complexity apply to leadership and organizational development. Now instead of limiting myself to linear approaches to explore this notion I use poetry.

Emerging Selves

in the depth of the cave
 i search for self
in the depth of the cave
 emptiness, nothingness, the non-dual
in the depth of the cave
 no separate self discovered
in the depth of the cave

at the mouth of the cave
 i stop and ask
where lives this authentic self
 others speak so highly of
where lives this authentic self
 distinct from others who
at the mouth of the cave
 stops and asks
where lives this authentic self
 not contained in body or brain
at the mouth of the cave

entering the lifeworld
 self begins to emerge
 interaction by interaction
entering the lifeworld
 patterns of relationship arise and deepen
entering the lifeworld
 self forms as a node
 of intersecting relationships
entering the lifeworld

emerging selves
 one becomes the alumni of others
 others become the alumni of the one
emerging selves
 become
 moment by moment
emerging selves

Again, the metaphoric nature of the poetry engages and extends my creative and theoretical thinking capacity.

Conclusions

In this paper I have told the story of how aesthetic-based learning processes, as practiced at The Banff Centre, have influenced the development of my leadership capacity. In telling the story I have come to understand that the role of aesthetic-based learning processes and the pathways to character capacity development is to release the potential within. They have done that for me. As I continue my work with The Banff Centre, I am confident they will continue to assist me in

releasing my leadership potential. They have provided me with another way of telling my story, and it is in telling my story that I continue along my journey of leadership development.

19 April 05:

We are the stories we tell

The stories we tell are who we become

We are always in the middle of multiple stories

Stories are enabling constraints

Stories give us permission to become

And limit where we can go

We co-evolve with our stories

We, our identities, are inseparable from our stories

Stories are the basis of action

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