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INFUSION OF POPULAR CULTURE: A CATALYTIC APPROACH TO DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING IN UNDERGRADUATE LEADERSHIP STUDENTS

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Leadership educators are faced with the daily challenge of providing students with competencies and perspectives that will translate into successful personal and professional experiences. Specifically, the ability to think critically is paramount to develop within students as it leads to a rational and reasonable life (Elder, 1997). However competing values, an ever changing society, growing diversity, and expanding technology leading to a world of instant information complicate the efforts of leadership educators as they attempt to prepare the latest generation of leadership students. This challenge necessitates a more intentional approach to instruction as educators seek to cultivate competency development and meet the needs of Millennial learners. This study details a naturalistic examination of an intentional approach to leadership development through dissection of popular culture. Data illustrates that this approach engages undergraduate leadership students and empowers their leadership development. Data collection efforts also yielded emergent grounded theory linked to the critical thinking skill set noted by Facione (1990). The grounded theory provides leadership educators with a foundation for developing critical thinking skills in and promoting leadership education with undergraduate students. The conclusions and recommendations detail opportunities for leadership educators to identify with undergraduate students, raise their levels engagement, and develop leadership competencies that are paramount to professional, personal and civic success.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership education is a social science that has direct application in the real world. Educators provide curricula aimed at promoting self, organizational, and civic responsibility within students. These curricula are delivered via a variety of different methodologies including lectures, exercises, and application experiences aimed at development of leadership competencies. However this development does not occur in an accidental fashion (Beyer, 1987). It requires an intentional approach to learning and development on behalf of both the student and the instructor. It is also paramount that this approach has a firm connection to allow for application in real world settings.

Unfortunately, the average leadership course is based upon theories which average students have difficulty applying to average real world settings. This causes a disconnect that prevents the competencies and theories from being predisposed for application. Scherer and Baker state that typically organizational leadership theory courses are taught using a lecture format with discussions of case studies which, for many students, can seem dry and uninteresting (1999). Thus the manner of instruction becomes critical as the students attempt to transfer the foundational theory into practice in an effort to promote personal and professional success. Educators must find creative ways to help students understand organizational theories and applications of those theories to the practices of leading. The authors contend that based on the data collected, using film and popular culture to develop leadership competencies and apply leadership theory provides educators with a means of achieving elevated levels of engagement in the classroom and an effective methodology for developing a better understanding the general principles of leadership in traditional undergraduate

student populations. Specifically students develop the ability to apply the principles to real leadership situations through the use of critical thinking skills which are a vital piece of effective leadership practice.

CONCEPTUAL & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A Priority for Development of Critical Thinking Skills

Education during the industrial society focused mainly on the "what" rather than the "why." Students were taught to learn how to accomplish a task rather than question why the task was necessary. Leadership theories of the era focused on control relationships between managers and workers, where workers had very little to say about decision making processes. Since mid-twentieth century workers did not need to know how to think, they were not taught to use cognitive skills in the classroom.

Education today must focus more on perception, opinion, and critical thinking skills (Marshall & Tucker, 1992). Efforts to define, teach, and measure critical thinking have intensified throughout the last quarter of the century (Kurfiss, 1988; Morris & Ennis, 1989; Jones, Hoffman, Ratcliff, Tibbetts, & Glick, 1994). "It is vital for students aspiring to serve in leadership positions to develop the ability to think critically as they attempt to solve problems and make decisions with organizational implications" (Stedman & Andenoro, 2007, p 192).

Many scholars agree that a well-rounded education requires students to think critically about their course work. "We must prepare graduates who have the motivating habits of mind to be willing, if not eager, to engage in thinking" (Facione, Facione, & Giancarlo, 1996, p 2). Students' desire for knowledge and eagerness for learning is absolutely essential to cultivate during their undergraduate

tenure. This passion can be gleaned from using critical thinking skills. Critical thinking should be considered an essential outcome of a college education.

Critical thinking researchers have presented various conceptualizations and dispositions of critical thinking in order to create variables for research and experiments. The American Philosophical Association's Delphi project identifies an ideal critical thinker as habitually inquisitive, well-informed, trustful of reason, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded in evaluation, honest in facing personal biases, prudent in making judgments, willing to reconsider, clear about issues, orderly in complex matters, diligent in relevant information, reasonable in the selection of criteria, focused in inquiry, and persistent in seeking results which are as precise as the subject and the circumstances of inquiry permit (1990).

Facione identifies six cognitive skills that are crucial to the development of successful critical thinking skills. The skills include interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation (1990). Examples of interpretation would include identifying a problem, paraphrasing the ideas of an author, and identifying a theme or purpose of an author. Analysis refers to the ability to identify the inferential relationships in a given situation, and interpretation is to comprehend the meaning of a given situation or experience. Analysis addresses the ability to compare the similarities and differences of a given argument. Evaluation assesses the credibility of situations or statements which include the perceptions and opinions of the student. Inference speaks to the idea of forming hypotheses and drawing conclusions from a given situation or experience, such as inferring what will happen next. To justify one's opinion or conclusion is to provide explanation for the results, and self-regulation involves personally monitoring cognitive activities and conclusions (Facione, 2000). Self-regulation may be the most important skill in critical thinking. The ability to evaluate one's understanding of a speaker or instructor, or to monitor how well one comprehends what he or she is reading is essential to applying critical thinking skills not only in the classroom, but also in situations in the future (Stedman & Andenoro, 2007).

The researchers assert that teaching leadership through the use of popular culture and film develops critical thinking skills in students through an application of leadership theories and concepts. Many researchers have addressed this similar perspectives focused on whether or not college students actually use critical thinking in the classroom, and if traditional teaching methods are effective in promoting critical thinking skills. Faculty concerned with fostering more objectivity and fair-mindedness in students might consider how to adjust course assignment and grading practices to give greater emphasis on fact-finding, objective analysis, and courageous questioning (Facione, Giancarlo, Facione, & Gainen, 1995).

Further when students are given a variety of learning opportunities to display critical thinking skills, they have the possibility of developing a better understanding of the course material. Through creative assignments like alternative assessment projects, students can be encouraged to think reflectively and develop a more self-directed approach to learning activities involving the personal construction of knowledge (Muirhead, 2002). The researchers agree that traditional assignments and lectures are not the most effective ways to intrigue students to think critically. Teachers can no longer maintain the tired routine of being an information giver. They must provide students with the ability to utilize and develop thinking and reasoning skills to reach their highest potential in today's society (Meyers, 1986). Ricketts and Rudd further validate this idea asserting that teachers must challenge students to always engage in learning processes and be well-informed citizens (2004). Thus, new innovative tools like films should be used in the classroom to effectively engage student discussion and input. Educators should engage students in a variety of experiences which challenge them to explore concepts from a variety of perspectives (Stedman & Andenoro, 2007).

Facione states that the dispositions of critical thinking go beyond the classroom and that having critical thinking skills do not mean students will actually use the skills (1990). This idea confirms that students must be challenged with non-academic examples in order to practice the six skills of critical thinking outside of the classroom. Instead of beginning a course with specific theories and concepts, instructors should show examples to students in order to get them engaged and ready to learn (Facione, Facione, & Giancarlo, 1997).

Popular Culture as Vehicle for Development

"Motion pictures not only push us to think beyond our daily work habits but can, when well done and consciously studied, permit us to get inside the minds and emotions of leaders who must cope with enormously complicated dilemmas" (Stillman, 2006, p. 6). "Nurturing the disposition to think is an important element in the curriculum of professional programs and liberal education programs alike" (Facione, Giancarlo, Facione, & Gainen, 1995, p. 13).

Baker, Rudd, & Pomeroy concluded that using creativity and creative means of instruction in the classroom may encourage students to use critical thinking skills (2001). Teaching students to think must be a priority of our schools today. In any thought process we engage in both critical and creative thinking (Beyer, 1987). Instructors who teach critical thinking skills in the classroom will better prepare students to form their own opinions and perceptions in real-life situations. Students who are free to think, not just in the sense of having been given permission, but also in the fuller sense of having been given the skills and the deep desire to do so will be more successful in their given career.

Previous studies have promoted the use of reflective evaluations and assessments in order to gain feedback from students about the use of films in the classroom, the assignments given, and the amount learned in the course. Students do not always see the same leadership theories and concepts as their peers. Reflective evaluations can help instructors understand the perspectives of the students and develop critical thinking skills through application to popular culture. This practice allows students to expand their critical thinking skills and thoughts and opinions on leadership through examination of the films.

Student engagement also benefits from the use of popular culture in the classroom. Using the leadership concepts and traits of characters in a film was well liked by the students (Martinazzi & Ward, 2004). Students feel that their awareness of course concepts and application of course theories depicted in real-world events is heightened when addressed through the popular culture. Students note that "it is amazing how you are able to find examples of course concepts in any film and the film examples make it easier to remember the course concepts" (Bumpus, 2005, p. 807).

Research has shown that by using film to teach leadership styles and integrate leadership theory, students develop a better understanding of the general principles of leadership as well as the ability to apply the principles to real leadership situations. "Films offer both cognitive and affective experiences. They can provoke good discussion, assessment of one's values, and assessment of self" (Champoux, 1999, p. 11). Current students are familiar with technology, and may need more of a visual model for learning rather than solely lectures. Modern classroom instructors have many forms of media available for courses. Computer projection slides and other media are now used frequently in the classroom. Visual media such as films can give a more interesting presentation of various concepts (1999). Even though many films are for entertainment value, films seem more "real" and active to students when compared to readings and case studies.

Previous research has also provided a framework focused on various ways to use film and popular culture to teach leadership. However this framework must be used in an intentional fashion, as students may not realize the full effect of the lesson by simply showing films in class. Substantial effort and time must be invested in planning and preparing activities to be added to the viewing of films (Roth, 2001). Researchers have primarily focused on either showing clips of films or films in their entirety. After presenting theories and concepts, showing video scenes aid in connecting what has just been presented to the class (Champoux, 2001). Other resources and texts have been used along with the viewing of films, in an effort to provide students with multiple sources of reference and application. The majority of studies included discussion as a key component in a film-based course. Discussion is essential and becomes a focal point when using films to teach concepts and theories. Watching a film in class should lead

to a full class period of discussion (Scherer & Baker, 1999). After students view films and write papers, they need to discuss what they have learned from the project. Discussion themes should be created in order to begin the dialogue, which may include how a person becomes a leader, leadership dynamics, and the interaction of leaders and followers (Mello, 2003).

Some instructors have preferred to give students specific assignments that focus on the traits of characters or the traits in films. An analysis of a certain characters in a film gives students a specific focus of the concepts being covered in the course. Students can identify the leadership characteristics and traits of characters in a film, while identifying their own characteristics and traits that they can apply to reality (Martinazzi & Ward, 2004). Assignments that allow students to choose characters in films that they can relate to in some way make the students more enthusiastic about the assignments. Once the character is chosen, students are able to identify the leadership characteristics and contributions of the character (Mello, 2003).

Research also identifies that specific genres of films such as animated films can be effective in teaching leadership and management concepts. This can be seen in the film *Antz*, which displays work, perception, and problem solving, while the film *Babe* shows Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y (Champoux, 2001). "What films do more than anything else is to provide a fictional situation that can be translated into a hypothetical situation in the workplace" (Higgins & Striegel, 2003, p. 4). In order to apply the concepts to reality, it is critical that class discussions included transferring films to organizations. Students benefit from discussions tailored to address whether or not the characteristics of the organization in the film could be compatible with real organizations. Through watching films and writing character profiles, students leave the course with an appreciation of leadership dynamics that are influenced by situational factors (Mello, 2003).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively assess the self-perceptions of popular culture and films as a means of developing critically thinking skills and leadership perceptions in undergraduate leadership classrooms. The following research objectives have been satisfied through examination of data collected in this study:

- Illustrate respondents' perceptions of the impact of popular culture and film as an instructional strategy on leadership understanding and development.
- Illustrate respondents' perceptions of the impact of popular culture and film as an instructional strategy on critical thinking skill development as outlined by Facione (1990).

- Discover and explain how undergraduate leadership programs can develop leadership competencies and critical thinking skills through the use of popular culture and film.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized qualitative research in order to study the interrelationships holistically. The data collected in this study provided insight into the impact of popular culture as a means of developing critical thinking skills and an understanding of leadership concepts in undergraduates.

A purposive sample was used to maximize the range of specific information that could be attained from and about the context. The purposive sample allowed me to purposely seek typical and divergent data and insights to capture the essence of the situation.

Respondents included undergraduate students enrolled in three sections of Leadership & Film, a Leadership Studies course at Fort Hays State University during the Fall, Spring, and Summer of the 2007-2008 academic year. Through their enrollment in the course they were exposed to methodologies, which attempted to use popular culture as a means of developing critical thinking skills and practical leadership competencies. The majority of respondents (87%) were between the ages of 18 and 23. Male and Female (65% Female) students were included in the data collection efforts and the majority of the respondents were Caucasian (76%) which is inconsistent with the student population at Fort Hays State University. The Caucasian student population makes up a much larger percentage of the total student population. Respondents also maintained interdisciplinary degree plans further adding to the diversity of their backgrounds.

The methods of data collection consisted of three focus groups with the purposive sample listed above and document analysis of content offered in the course. The focus groups were conducted at the end of each course. The total n for the respondents participating in the focus groups equaled 31. The data was coded to ensure for respondent confidentiality and the findings have been presented in aggregate form.

It is paramount to establish trustworthiness for this study. Hence, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were essential (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). Credibility was met through persistent observation, triangulation, referential adequacy materials, peer debriefing, and member checks. Persistent observation was maintained by constantly interpreting within the context in different ways. Triangulation assisted in establishing trustworthiness by collecting data from varying perspectives, specifically by addressing the program coordinators' perspectives, learners or graduates' perspectives, and document analysis of curriculum. Referential adequacy materials further provided my study with credibility as the researchers were able to reference their materials through recorded interviews and field notes. Peer debriefing also established credibility as the research and findings were

discussed with colleagues to provide for other perspectives within the context. Member checks with the respondents permitted the researchers to verify data before including it in their final report. The researchers used thick description by expressing data with sufficient detail so others could tell if data is applicable to their own studies and data. A dependability audit was also developed, so external reviewers could check the sources of data using an audit trail. This provided interview notes and logistical details for data.

Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This method starts to generate theoretical properties of the category, which provide an understanding of the data and how it relates to and affects other categories. It is incredibly useful because it provided grounding for the study, adding to trustworthiness of the research. These results were communicated through case study reporting, as it allowed the reporting of multiple realities and interactions with the site to promote transferability to other sites.

FINDINGS

The Context

This study examines the impact on undergraduates' critical thinking skill and leadership competency development through a new course offering titled, Leadership & Film, offered by the Department of Leadership Studies at Fort Hays State University. The course is similar to several of the courses noted in the literature review. However, it intentionally focuses on the development of critical thinking skills through varied methodologies including reflection, discussion, writing, and dramaturgical role-play. The course was offered virtually and face to face over the course of standard 15 week Fall and Spring semester courses and as an eight week Summer semester course. Six films were viewed plus an additional film chosen by the individual student. The six films included *A Civil Action*, *Patch Adams*, *Ghosts of Mississippi*, *Iron Jawed Angels*, *Michael Collins*, and *V for Vendetta*. Students were asked to write brief reflection papers incorporating the leadership concepts seen in the film with leadership theories and traits learned in previous leadership courses. Students were asked to participate in discussions which explored and developed their understanding of leadership and predisposed them to using critical thinking skills. The students also engaged in dramaturgical role-play activities, which offered them the opportunity to step into the role of the movie character and fully explore their context of leadership.

The following section will provide the findings within each of the first two guiding research objectives. The final objective will be addressed in the conclusions section.

Illustrate Respondents' Perceptions of the Impact of Popular Culture and Film as an Instructional Strategy on Leadership Understanding and Development

Overall the respondents noted a favorable response to the course and specifically the use of popular culture as an effective classroom tool to engage them in the leadership material. Respondents often noted that the alternative course format contributed to the overall experience because of how it differed from traditional lecture courses that they had experienced in their undergraduate experience (R2, R6, R7, R10, R13, R21, R22, R25, R26, R27, & R29). "I thought the course used a very unique way of identifying leadership, where one could see leadership in action" (R13). "Overall, the course is excellent. We watch movie, which is fun, then find out what leadership theory has been shown in the movie. The discussion helps us to understand more with leadership" (R6).

I really enjoyed it. It was a great twist to movies, as I had seen most of them, but watching them with a whole new perspective was fun! It was a great way to discuss leadership in a more current fashion - and an interesting one at that! (R25).

Further, the respondents appreciated the direct application of leadership theory in the films, which provided increased understanding when discussed. "I enjoyed the course, and felt it was another aspect in life where leadership was applied" (R9). "The course has increased my awareness of how individuals and groups interact and apply leadership principles to the success or failure of projects" (R21).

The course was also identified as a transformational tool that students could utilize outside of their academic program. "[The course] has been so beneficial to me. What I have learned in the class has really inspired me to be a more effective leader as a teacher, wife, mother, and community member" (R30).

This course was a nice change from the normal class format. The material and interactions have taught me to broaden my horizons and be more open-minded. The class taught me to look at movies from a different perspective and I could be more subjective about the people and leadership rather than simply giving the movie a thumbs up or down (R26).

The respondents noted that the lack of diversity among the characters observed in the films as a limitation of the material provided in class (R3, R9, & R27).

I think the class was great. Most of the movies I had not seen, nor did I have an interest in seeing them. However, the movies put a face to leadership styles. I wish the movies were more diverse

though. There was only one that portrayed a woman as a leader and none with people of color. It would be great to see leadership practiced with different challenges (R27).

Illustrate Respondents' Perceptions of the Impact of Popular Culture and Film as an Instructional Strategy on Critical Thinking Skill Development as Outlined by Facione (1990)

The course was aimed at the development of six core critical thinking skills: interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation (1990). Relating to the skills of interpretation and analysis, respondents noted that they found themselves interpreting and analyzing material while watching the movies and participating in the course activities. Specifically they noted perspectives addressing categorization, decoding of significance, clarifying meaning, examining ideas, and detecting and analyzing arguments (R4, R5, R8, R10, R17, R19, R20, R23, R24, & R27). "I really liked it, sometimes it took re-watching the movies with another mind set, but at the same time it was a good experience. It is funny that there are so many leadership roles in the movies, without this class I may not have noticed it!" (R8). "I loved [watching and discussing the movies] because you could apply and evaluate the different type leadership styles of each actor and person" (R19). "I liked being able to look at each character and analyze what their role was in the movie and the impact they had on the other characters" (R20). "I feel it has made me watch movies with a more analytical eye. The reminder being that leaders are often people just going about their lives and stepping up to the task because - someone has to" (R24).

I found myself trying to categorize characters and events from my past lessons. This influenced my position by clarifying what certain leadership traits were and how leaders dealt with leadership challenges (R27).

The respondents also noted perspectives that identified the presence of evaluation as a skill. Specifically, the respondents demonstrated the ability to assess claims and arguments (R1, R5, R7, R8, R11, R12, R16, R17, R22, R25, R26, & R29). "There were several different solutions for what characters did. This applies to leadership because a good leader needs to be able to make adjustments based on what situation they are in" (R5).

There are so many ways a person may sway in their portrayal of the movie, character, issue etc. I think applies to leadership in the fact that first of all you must take a stance on the movie, how you feel, and what method you will use to present the material. Also gives you a bit of a backbone to throw your

personal feelings and interpretation of the film on the discussion board for feedback (R8).

Many decisions in the real world are based on potential consequences. If a person makes a decision only on what they want or feel, they are not being a very good leader. A great leader will see the bigger picture, and make decisions accordingly (R12).

I realized that there was a range of solutions with different consequences. I think it does apply to leadership - a good leader must weight solutions for any given situation with the possible consequences, and find the solution that best benefits the given situation (R17).

Each film gave a variety of potential solutions to problems, and each time the leader chose a solution that aligned with their ethical and moral stance. This is very important in leadership to conduct yourself in a manner that is ethical and moral (R22).

For some of the characters their decisions had unforeseen consequences, I believe this applies to real life for many professionals and leaders. It is difficult to know how our actions will affect others and what consequences may come from them (R25).

Each leader needs to know which consequences they can handle and which ones are too far out there for them to even consider. Each decision in our lives has a certain consequence, knowing how to look at the problem and what the outcome may be is definitely something that the leader needs to focus on and be ready to deal with (R26). There were crossroads and solution options that each leader faced and the higher the risk the greater was the reward. Leaders make these choices everyday on a much smaller scale. Civic leadership in particular requires some form of personal sacrifice that is usually on a much grander scale (R29).

The respondents also identified key components that Facione noted in his depiction of inference (1990). Specifically they eluded to being able to query evidence, conjecture alternatives, and draw conclusions (R3, R4, R9, R10, R11, R14, R16, R18, R20, R25, & R28).

I did this especially in V For Vendetta and Michael Collins with all the murders that took place. In some instances it changed my ideas about what kind of leaders these two were (R4).

I was able to see the issues at hand from several different aspects, as a follower and a leader. It enabled me to see not only the immediacy of the situation but to grasp the bigger picture as well (R11).

I would ask myself if what they were doing was leadership and if so what theory did it fall under. I have learned and believe that leadership and its theories are the best way to go in many situations and will most of the time lead to positive results (R14).

I did analyze the issues and characters quite a bit. In some of the films, such as V for Vendetta, it definitely did influence my position. Although I initially found V's tactics to be terroristic, I came to realize the motivation behind the things he did, and came to respect his decisions even if I didn't necessarily agree with them (R16).

I analyzed the arguments as if I was in a position of negotiation. It did not really change my position in a given situation. However, it did allow me to see that the way a person negotiates can change the course of an issue (R25).

The respondents addressed key components included within explanation. Specifically they addressed the ideas of stating results, justifying procedures, and presenting arguments (R2, R3, R7, R8, R15, R17, R19, R20, R21, R23, R25, R28, & R31).

I think it helps, because you learn to support your message, and your views. You become more of an individual because your perception of a leader or the issue may be different than all the other students in the class, that's why it is fun to have individual discussion- and then allowance for feedback (R7).

I assigned value to the arguments and claims. I think it will help me to become a more effective leader - it opened up my way of thinking about leadership theory and helped me to see the different ways that it can be applied (R15).

I was able to assign value to the claims and arguments, and I felt that I got better at it each week. I think that being able to recognize choices that the leaders made in the movie in order to help their cause will help me to be able to make more effective choices as a leader (R20).

I was able to assign value to the claims and arguments presented in the movies. I found myself

relating some of the issues to my IDS 401 and philosophy class. I feel I will be more effective as a leader because I am aware of how my actions may appear to others (R25).

I believe that this will make me a better leader. You need to know the followers that you have attracted and know how to focus them and inspire them and yourself to continue on to your goal (R28).

The respondents also addressed the final skill noted by Facione (1990). Development of self-regulation and specifically, self-examination and self-correction were apparent in the perspectives of the respondents (R1, R5, R9, R10, R12, R20, R25, & R30).

I noticed myself thinking about the decisions I have made in the past when faced with difficult decisions after we discussed the movies. I feel like I could have done some things different (R5).

Some of the characters were so frustrating, because based on the theory that we discussed I knew they were headed for trouble. But then I also wondered if the only reason I knew that was because I was looking at it from an outside perspective (R10).

It was really cool watching the movies because I would place myself in the situation of the characters and think about how I would change what they did based on our course materials (R12).

It seems like I will be more likely to [pause] before I do what I need to do next time I am faced with a leadership situation. I think I may look at what my first intension is and then think about how I can apply the leadership ideas that we talked about for the movies (R25).

CONCLUSIONS

The final research objective for the study was listed as: *Discover and explain how undergraduate leadership programs can develop leadership competencies and critical thinking skills through the use of popular culture and film.* It is absolutely critical to address this as millennial students force instructors to become increasingly dynamic in their approach to education. Inclusion of popular culture provides an innovative opportunity for instructors to reach their student populations. Stillman notes that motion pictures push students beyond conventional wisdom and permit audiences to explore the minds and emotions of leaders who must cope with enormously complicated dilemmas (2006). Respondents noted that their awareness of course concepts and application of course theories depicted in real-world events is heightened when addressed through the popular

culture (R2, R5, R6, R7, R12, R17, & R23). Students also note that they are able to find examples of course concepts in any film and that the film examples make it easier to remember the course concepts (Bumpus, 2005). This is a clear opportunity to engage students in leadership classrooms and develop their ability to think critically. Further, Baker, Rudd, & Pomeroy concluded that using creativity and creative means of instruction in the classroom might encourage students to use critical thinking skills (2001). An example of this can be seen in the use of dramaturgical role-playing in leadership topic discussions after viewing films. Within this practice, students are asked to step into the role of the characters within the film and use critical thinking skills to disseminate the correct behavior for their character. This creates a safe environment, so the student is able to learn without fear of severe consequences, but also challenges the student with direct situational application of their leadership knowledge. By providing students with an opportunity to learn in a context like this, they will be more predisposed to using critical thinking skills. Students who are free to think, not just in the sense of having been given permission, but also in the fuller sense of having been given the skills and the deep desire to do so will be more successful in their given career.

Reflection also needs to be a priority for the use of popular culture in the classroom. Dewey said that true learning does not occur without reflection (1938). This is consistent with the literature and findings. Students do not always see the same leadership theories and concepts as their peers. Reflective evaluations can help instructors understand the perspectives of the students and develop critical thinking skills through dissection of popular culture offered by the instructor. Reflection can also be maintained through discussion of the films. This provides students an opportunity to voice their perspectives and synthesize them with the other student perspectives to gain a deeper understanding of the material. Student engagement also benefits from the use of popular culture in the classroom.

Using popular culture and film to teach leadership styles and integrate leadership theory, allows students to develop a better understanding of the general principles of leadership as well as the ability to apply the principles to real leadership situations. This can produce a cognitive and an affective response, along with provoking good discussion, assessment of one's values, and assessment of self (Champoux, 1999).

This methodology also meets the needs of current students (R2, R5, R7, R9, R10, R12, R13, R14, R15, R17, R19, R23, R25, R26, R27, R28, & R30). Millennial students are familiar with technology and need more visually stimulating models for learning other than standard lectures. Visual media such as films can give a more interesting presentation of various concepts (1999). Even though many films are for entertainment value, films seem more "real" and active to students when compared to readings and case studies.

Based on the literature and the findings of this study, the researchers would advocate the following framework for inclusion of popular culture in an effort to develop student leadership competencies and critical thinking skills in undergraduate classrooms.

Framework for Practice

1. *Present theories and concepts by showing scenes with diverse characters, that connect to the material recently presented in class* (Champoux, 2001; Roth 2001). It is important to do this, so there is direct and timely application, and movie situations that could be excellent opportunities for application, are not forgotten.
2. *Include a discussion or processing forum directly after viewing the film's scene to allow reflection to take place.* Discussion is essential and becomes a focal point when using films to teach concepts and theories. Watching a film in class should lead to a full class period of discussion (Scherer & Baker, 1999). Discussion themes should be created in order to begin the dialogue, which may include how a person becomes a leader, leadership dynamics, and the interaction of leaders and followers (Mello, 2003). In order to apply the concepts to reality, it is critical that class discussions included transferring films to organizations. Students benefit from discussions tailored to address whether or not the characteristics of the organization in the film could be compatible with real organizations. This can also be done through short reflections, application, or synthesis papers.
3. *Explore the use of dramaturgical role-playing following films.* An analysis of certain characters in a film gives students a specific focus of the concepts being covered in the course. Students can identify the leadership competencies and traits of characters in a film, while identifying their own characteristics and traits that they can apply to reality (Martinazzi & Ward, 2004). Assignments that allow students to choose characters in films that they can relate to in some way, make the students more enthusiastic about the assignments. Once the character is chosen, students are able to identify the leadership characteristics and contributions of the character (Mello, 2003).
4. *Be creative in your movie selections.* There are many different movies that can be used to convey similar concepts. As such it is important to match the film with the audience that the instructor is working with. For instance, even animated films can be effective in teaching leadership competencies in the classroom. This can be seen in the film *Antz*, which displays work, perception, and

problem solving. Further, the film *Babe* shows Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y (Champoux, 2001). "What films do more than anything else is to provide a fictional situation that can be translated into a hypothetical situation in the workplace" (Higgins & Striegel, 2003, p. 4). By watching films and writing character profiles, students leave the course with an appreciation of leadership dynamics that are influenced by situational factors (Mello, 2003).

Educators are faced with the daunting task of developing critical thinkers who can lead a generation to a successful future in a highly varied and highly dynamic world. This calls for educators to seize hold of any tool or strategy that can provide an opportunity to succeed in the face of this seemingly insurmountable challenge. Popular culture provides educators with that opportunity. In his speech to the Los Angeles Mensa Society in 1998, John Cones notes:

The motion picture is and always has been more than mere entertainment, it is (as the Supreme Court states) a significant medium for the communication of ideas. In my view, the motion picture is one of the most effective forms of communication yet devised by human kind. When you consider how much money, resources and talent go into creating the compressed 2 to 3 hours of the experience we call a feature film, there can be no doubt that a motion picture is an extremely effective form of communication. Just imagine how effective you could be in communicating something that was important to you if you were given \$30 to \$40 million dollars, had a couple of years to devote to the project and could hire some of the world's best writers, directors, actors, actresses, cinematographers and composers, along with all the other talented individuals whose services are routinely used in creating the magic in motion pictures. In addition to influencing a significant variety of commercial decisions and associated conduct, the idea that movies can be a powerful agent for positive social change is so widely accepted that members of the so-called "entertainment community" itself have created an organization referred to as the Entertainment Industries Council dedicated to the purpose of serving as a bridge between the entertainment community and the public interest in addressing health and social issues through films.

Cones' words resonate as educators have their opportunity with popular culture. Through this innovative methodology, educators can create positive change in student populations and empower critical thinkers with the skills to lead our

organizations into the future with confidence and perspective.

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