Re-Examining The Philosopher’s Stone of Leadership

Fenwick W. English
Lisa C. Ehrich

Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of the article is to re-examine the phenomenon of leadership at the intersection of aesthetics, identity and self within a dynamic, fluid and interactive compositional mixture which is part of a leader’s continuous process of invention and reinvention.

Approach

The methodology of this article is a conceptual analysis and presentation involving some of the extant literature in the field of aesthetics, identity, and leadership, including Harold Bloom’s theory of poetry that provides an entrance point to understand the problem of identity. We argue that a person, such as a leader, has multiple identities and interactions with others which leads to the co-construction of the self. To demonstrate this argument, we explore a case study of the life of the opera diva, Maria Callas.

Findings

An exploratory conceptual model demonstrating the relationship between identity and self, and insights and Bloom’s theory are applied to illuminate the case study of Maria Callas’ life. A key finding of the analysis is that identity is linked to performance and co-constructed in relation to others.

Practical Implications

The article concludes by discussing two implications for developing school leadership performance: (1) the need for an aesthetic perspective of leadership and (2) the need to provide a range of teaching approaches to teach leadership.

Originality/Value

There have been few, if any, significant breakthroughs in understanding more about leadership from the traditional methods of social science. It is argued that until and unless researchers move towards working in aesthetic traditions there is not likely to be new understandings of it.
Re-Examining The Philosopher’s Stone of Leadership

Introduction

The philosopher’s stone was the process by which medieval alchemists turned lead into gold. In this paper, the phenomenon of leadership is re-examined conceptually at a new intersection of aesthetics, identity and self within a dynamic, fluid and interactive compositional mixture which is part of a continuous process of invention and reinvention. This process becomes the fabled philosopher’s stone, turning some average humans into leaders. It is a co-construction within a specific cultural context. The first part of the article, then, explores the relationship between leadership, identity, and the self, culminating in the development of an exploratory model.

It is argued, here, that the identity of a leader is best understood as an aesthetic construct, something which is characteristic of many aesthetic words such as *beauty* or even the word *art* itself. Moreover, as with many aesthetic words, *leadership* remains elusive to precise translation. It is not so much described, but felt. To illustrate the process we examine a case study of the life of opera diva Maria Callas, a world leader, and her personal battles with identity, self, and her legacy when her voice began to fade. Using Callas as an example, we argue that the trajectory of a leader is not as an unblemished icon, but a temporary truce between success and failure which underscores how fragile leadership is on the stage in which it is displayed. It is tested every day. Resilience is in part a measure of its plasticity rather than its obduracy. In the final part of the article, we apply our learnings from the case study by exploring two key implications for developing leadership performance. Central to these implications is that leadership development is best approached as an aesthetic inquiry where ambiguity and subjectivity are an accepted part of aesthetic traditions.
Leadership and Identity

While it may seem obvious in discussing a new conceptual intersection involving leadership, it should be stated that we assume that the notion of leadership exists at all. Much emergent scholarship calls this assumption into question (Eacott, 2018; Lakomski, Eacott, & Evers 2017). For example, when discussing effective school leadership, the idea that leadership is even present or required is already assumed as a norm. We define leadership as a co-construction between leaders and so-called “followers” (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2012). We discussed this phenomenon in the concept of “grass roots leadership” (Ehrich and English, 2012). Examples would be religious movements and many social movements. The idea of a co-construction of leadership is much less apparent in bureaucratic positions embedded in formal role hierarchies. Appointments to these roles do not always depend on the approval of followers or subordinates. However, we argue that once a bureaucratic appointment is implemented that the act of leading from a role which is grounded in decisions others might follow, voluntarily or involuntarily, represents a co-construction in the act of leading. We now examine how that co-construction is conceptualised.

Leaders have the same problems all of us do. They have to define themselves within their times, culture, and the issues of the moment. They have to construct their identities in such a way as to be able to relate to the people who might select them to be their leader. Identity is the key which unlocks the connective channel between leaders and the led. Viewed from this frame, identity is the swinging door through which leadership travels; and identity is always dynamic, fluid, emotional and rooted in exchange. Leadership and identity have yet to be deciphered from empirical, scientific studies. The intersection of identity and connectivity
between leaders and the led remains a phenomenon shrouded in a mystery akin to turning lead into gold.

At the same time, leaders within bureaucracies can be studied more deliberately. A bureaucracy is a bordered universe. It is designed to be rational and logical. Leaders occupy framed roles within a hierarchical system of offices that are partitioned so as to be linked together, but with duties that are supposed to be unduplicated (Ehrich and English, 2012). Identity within a bureaucracy is less critical than outside of one. It could be argued that the function of a bureaucracy is to create a structure in which leadership is almost unnecessary (see Lakomski, 2005). In this scenario leadership is simply doing one’s job, that is, carrying out the prescribed duties and tasks as defined. As such, a leader is not expected to inspire people. Charisma is unnecessary and perhaps even a detriment to job performance since organisational effectiveness is based on the level of the authority associated with the leader and not on any of their personal qualities. The identity of a bureaucratic leader may even become one and the same as defined within a bureaucratic structure.

What is identity?

If every living cell in our bodies is replaced every seven years then we are quite literally never the same person over time. And if the old Zen proverb that one never steps in the same stream twice is also true, then there is no permanent reality even though it may appear to be so on the surface. Quantum theory indicates that there are no laws in physics, only probabilities. Michael Mann (2003), a prominent sociologist, observed “… we cannot build social science laws for the number of cases is far smaller than the number of variables affecting the outcome” (p. 341). All living things in the world are in a state of constant flux and fluidity. There can be no such thing as a permanent identity. It seems far more likely that in terms of human identity, as Ricoeur (1992) postulated, the “self” is a fiction by which we
invent and continually reinvent to construct and imbue it with coherence and meaning. Much of identity theory involves a person’s interaction with others and that this social interaction leads to a co-construction of a concept of self. However, as Shibutani (1955) noted “we all dwell in a bewildering variety of ‘social worlds’, participating in many cultures – of occupation, class, neighbourhood, gender, generation, hobbies, and many more” (p. 564). Because a person can belong to more than one social group there is more than one identity. The power of social identity in shaping human behaviour is amply demonstrated in every day news, from sports’ fans avid identification with their favourite team including donning team colours and regalia to joining jihadist and terror groups after they become radicalised.

It is argued that there is a dynamic in the formation of self due to the constant interaction of it with larger social groups. The dynamic indicates that the interactions can wax and wane over time. Examples abound in in religious circles where a devout member of a religious group can experience a disappointing event which leads to a falling out and even apostasy. One of the most famous examples is that of Martin Luther, once a devout Catholic monk who found the corruption rampant in the church so repugnant, especially in the sale of indulgences, that he nailed his 95 Theses on the door in protest. Later his call for reform resulted in a complete break with the church and the creation of a new religion and with it a new identity for the former monk.

A different frame to approaching leadership and leadership identity

Our dissatisfaction with prior leadership research was not due to a lack of effort or pursuing as many different avenues within it as appeared worth trying. But over the years, and especially in chairing doctoral research committees, we grew increasingly impatient with its limitations and the rather meagre results obtained from its usage. We soon were led to the
conclusion that the way we conceptualized leadership and the models used to frame it were part of the problem. We couldn’t find out anything more about leadership until and unless we learned how to ask different questions (English and Ehrich, 2015). One barrier was that both of us were long time practitioners in the traditions of social science research and it was challenging to shed the perspective and its assumptions which were so deeply ingrained.

We therefore resolved to try something very different. We moved away completely from starting with examining school leadership. We abandoned the approach of looking at leadership in bureaucracies. We wanted to look at leadership in a less structured (organizationally speaking) way and examine leadership more organically, and we wanted to consider leader behaviour in a more open-ended and flexible context. We wanted to jettison the idea of a fixed identity as a leader and we wanted to see the leader-self-identity tripod in dynamic juxtaposition and tension. This is shown in Figure 1.

<INSERT Figure 1 ABOUT HERE>

Figure 1 indicates that a leader balances their identity with what the leader was or is prior to engaging in the co-construction of the fiction of self-image. This latter relationship is dialectic. It is a co-construction heavily dependent on significant interactions with others and it occurs within a cultural context. Culture in this case is not monolithic, but may consist of distinct and often overlapping sub-cultures. Biographies of leaders are replete with narratives about how leaders construct and re-construct their identities based on significant victories or defeats in their lives. The line between identity and self can become blurry, but they are not the same (Ricoeur 1992). While neither one is a ‘rock’ or impermeable, we think that identity is much more subject to the vicissitudes of the trials and tribulations of events involved with
seeking to become a leader or in actually leading. As the gap between identity and self waxes and wanes, a leader may become increasingly consciously aware of how he or she is changing. We think here of the famed Mexican artist Frida Kahlo whose work primarily consisted of her self-portraits. These were intensely personal forays to bring to her consciousness how she was feeling and reacting to the events in her life.

**Leadership, aesthetics, connoisseurship and identity**

One definition of aesthetics refers to “sensory knowledge and felt meaning of objects and experiences” (Hansen, Ropo and Sauer, 2008, p. 545). In contrast to logic and reasoning, aesthetic knowledge is based on sensing, such as hearing, tasting, and seeing, as well as feeling, emotions and intuition (Ropo and Sauer, 2008). Leadership as an aesthetic construct captures the idea that leadership is a form of public theatre and involves aspects of performance. As Sinclair (2005) says, leadership “is a bodily practice, a physical performance in addition to a triumph of mental or motivational mastery … it works at [a] visceral and sensual level” (p. 387).

Conceptualizing leadership as a form of aesthetics gets around several longstanding problems. First is the definitional dilemma. Rost (1991) analysed 221 definitions of leadership in 587 books during the time period 1900-1990 and found no constant or consistent attribution. Similarly, Bass (1981) reviewed and analysed some 4,725 studies of leadership and reflected that “the endless accumulation of empirical data has not produced an integrated understanding of leadership” (p. vii). The problem with definition has led to some scholars indicating that leadership is a form of folk psychology (Lakomski, 2005) and does not lend itself to scientific inquiry. Science requires accurate definition as central to scientific
study. From this view **leadership** is too wishy-washy to permit a scientific approach to be utilised. And the implicit assumption is that unless something is **scientific** it is decidedly inferior and non-credible.

Our position is that **leadership** is an aesthetic construct and has all the earmarks of definitional ambiguity of many aesthetic concepts such as **art**, **classic**, **tableau**, and **image**. The word **leadership** presents the same problem as one would have with the word **beautiful**. **Beauty** is one of the many untranslatable concepts listed in *The Dictionary of Untranslatables* (Cassin, 2014). While **beauty** may be unsuitable to empirical, scientific study and is “indeterminate”, this does not mean that **beauty** is “empty of content, outdated, or unsuitable for conceptual treatment” (Groulier, 2014, p. 89). Leadership is similar to **beauty** in this way.

In an earlier paper, we utilised insights from the humanities, arts, and aesthetics to help us explore the metaphor of leadership as dance (Ehrich and English, 2013). This exploration yielded not only a new vocabulary for leadership (i.e. grace, beauty, presence) but also highlighted the significance of emotional and kinesthetic knowledge. We argued that to perform as either a dancer or leader requires not only a technical proficiency but also a demonstration of artistry that draws upon the emotions, intensity and intuition (Ehrich and English, 2013).

The importance of artistry in leadership led us to the field of connoisseurship which is often associated with the arts (Eisner, 1979, 2002) and aesthetics. In every-day language, a connoisseur is a person who has expertise in a particular area that enables him or her to make discerning judgements. Connoisseurs see what others do not see (Eisner, 2002) because of their advanced knowledge base and their ability to make significant distinctions and fine-grain judgements (English and Ehrich, 2016). We took the view that connoisseurship is not an either or status, but it exists on a continuum of development. At one end of the continuum
is an early awareness of and interest in a subject or practice through to different stages of accomplishment leading to advanced accomplishment and recognition (English and Ehrich, 2016).

In our research (English and Ehrich, 2016), we interviewed artists and leaders to learn more about the nature of connoisseurship and how they became more expert in their respective fields. One of the key dimensions of connoisseurship that we arrived at was the centrality of identity to both artists and leaders’ practice (English and Ehrich, 2016). Moreover, both artists’ and leaders’ formation of self/selves was an ongoing interaction with others (including colleagues, critical friends, mentors) who helped them construct their identities within their various contexts.

Strong identities are said to be ‘resilient’, which means they don’t crumble under adversity or defeat. This resilience comes from the plasticity of identity, not rigidity. The latter can be a distinct liability because it does not allow for adaptation. Plasticity stems from embracing the co-construction of identity through social interaction and the ongoing reinvention of self through both adversity and success. By embracing these dynamic processes, leaders can build strong identities that allow them to believe they have the right and competence to lead and can justify themselves to others that they can and should lead. They do this not only through their social position but also because of their confidence and efficacy (Shamir, Dayan-Horesh and Adler, 2005)

In the mainstream leadership and management discourse, a leader’s identity tends not to be given very much attention. And where it does appear, the dominant rationalist perspective sees identity as submerged within an organisational role where identity and the role are one in
the same (English and Ehrich, 2016). This simplistic view fails to recognise the complexity or relational and human centred nature of leadership. We concur with Lumby and English (2009) that “identity [i]s a self- and co-constructed performance which all experience as they existentially make sense of their being” (p. 100). Moreover, identity construction is ongoing, never final, and context-specific (Holland and Lave, 2001 in Lumby and English, 2009). It can be understood in terms of the values people (such as leaders) demonstrate and the way they interact with others. Archer (2000) puts it as:

... we are who we are because of what we care about: in delineating our ultimate concerns and accommodating our subordinate ones, we also define ourselves. We give a shape to our lives, which constitutes our internal personal integrity, and this pattern is recognisable by others as our concrete singularity. (p.10)

Identity is linked to performance; it is a living construct. It is fluid and a process of continuous creativity. It is about mastery of the moment and the result of social interaction. It is a socially constructed self-portrait, a complex layered, organic mixture of cognitive concepts, emotional leanings, deeply held values, cultural constructs and whimsical, idiosyncratic actions taken in the temporality of the moment. Seen from this perspective, identity is not a stable entity. Rather it is a quilt made up of many disparate things woven together by the threads of intentionality. Some of those threads are the result of a conscious weaving of self as a patch work blanket, while others can be unconscious formulations. All humans have blind spots and leaders are not exceptions. In this manner identities have limitations, fragments of beliefs, prejudices and biases sometimes unknown to the self. And no matter how solid an identity may appear from the outside, the inside is always a mixture of certitude, uncertainty and doubt. In this respect, Eric Hoffer (1951) quoted Ernest Rohm, a
leader in Hitler’s brown shirts, who asserted that he could turn “… the reddest communist into a glowing nationalist (Nazi) in four weeks” (p. 26).

Another way in which identity can be construed is via Harold Bloom’s classic work: The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry (1997). He argues that poets are influenced by poetry that has come before them, giving the example of Shakespeare who was “creatively obsessed with Marlowe” (Bloom, 1997, p. xxxi). Bloom traces several characters in Shakespeare’s plays that demonstrate Marlowe’s influence. He argues that the challenge awaiting poets is to differentiate themselves from previous generations of poets so that they can make original contributions and establish their own voice. According to Bloom, poets who are greatly influenced by other poets are weak; talented poets are those who “misread” others and are therefore able to carve out a creative space for themselves. His argument that pertains to poets can also be applied to artists more generally and leaders. For example, while leaders are influenced by their predecessors, they also strive to make their own way that distinguishes them from those who have gone before them in order to make a unique contribution to the field.

As a means of demonstrating the intersection of identity, aesthetics and leadership, the following case study of an artist, Maria Callas, is presented and then discussed. We chose an artist rather than a school leader to discuss because the notions of performance and aesthetics tend to be associated more with artists than school leaders. Moreover, choosing an artist to explore in this paper is a continuation of our previous work (see Ehrich and English, 2013, 2017; English and Ehrich, 2016) that has used artists’ lives, experiences and practices as an entrance point to understanding school leadership.
Case Study of dialectical and dynamic leadership on the world stage: Maria Callas

I am not an angel and do not pretend to be. That is not one of my roles. But I am not the devil either. I am a woman and a serious artist, and I would like so to be judged.

I would like to be Maria, but there is La Callas who demands that I carry myself with her dignity (Maria Callas in Suáleci Quotes, 2019)

Maria Callas was born in the United States in 1923 to Greek immigrants. In her generation she was known as one of the most famous and influential opera singers, dazzling audiences with her iconic roles in Norma and Tosca which she performed in the greatest opera houses in the world. According to one of her many biographers, Stassinopoulos (1981), Callas “revolutionised opera” by making every opera she performed unique so that every other performer who had formerly played those roles was forgotten. While she was adored by the public, she had her critics too. Some critics, even during her prime, described her voice as “unmusical [and] ugly” (Stassinopoulos, 1981, p. 14). Later in her life, after a long break from singing publicly, more and more commentators claimed that she had lost her beautiful voice (Stassinopoulos, 1981, p. 126). Jellinek (1999) reviewed several of Callas’ later opera recordings and pointed out that there was some evidence of “vocal infelicities in the high register” (p. 189) and her singing was “exciting but uneven” (p. 194).

Maria Callas was a controversial figure and renowned for her fiery personality and temper tantrums which saw her cancelling endless performances, walking out while on stage, and feuding with directors. In her private life she also attracted publicity through her battles with her mother, with whom she had a troubled relationship since childhood, and her nine year passionate relationship with shipping magnate, Aristotle Onassis, commenced while she and
Onassis were married to other people. This relationship all but dwindled when he married the former first lady of the United States, Jacqueline Kennedy. Yet, according to Stassinopoulos (1981), her greatest struggle was “the struggle between Callas [the performer] and Maria [the woman” (p. 10). Callas referred to her voice as though it was separate from herself; she referred to it as “her Siamese twin” (p. 40). In an interview with David Frost she explained that Maria, the person, was always in her performances since she approached her work with honesty (Callas, 1970).

One of the struggles she faced in relation to her identity was her physical appearance as a woman. As a young performer some of the critics made nasty and offensive remarks about her weight and size which made her self-conscious. Noteworthy is the point that women singers, more so than their male counterparts, are criticised for their physical appearance (Eidsheim, 2017). By the early 1950s, Callas made a decision to change her image. In the David Frost interview, she said she was motivated by two factors: a desire to feel more healthy and, when performing on stage, she wanted her facial features to be more defined and distinguished. Over a period of two years, she lost 90 pounds (Callas, 1970). The conductor, Guilini, who saw the new slim version said that on stage and “in every sense she [Callas] had been transformed … and another world of expression opened to her” (in Stassinopoulos, 1981, p. 125).

Plaguing her all through her life was self-doubt as she often felt anxious about performing. As her fame and reputation grew, she became more frightened to perform (Stassinopoulos, 1981, p. 219). These feelings of anxiety were exacerbated when she encountered more and more difficulties with her voice (Stassinopoulos, 1981, p. 126). Reflecting on her life, she expressed some regret that her highly privileged yet pressured career dominated her personal life and she paid the ultimate sacrifice of not having a family and children of her own (Callas,
1970). However, when she met Onassis in the late 1950s, he was said to have provided a “powerful counterattraction to her art” (Stassinopolous, 1981, p. 210) enabling her to concentrate on Maria, the woman. During her nine years with him, she performed very little and was known to cancel shows as her private life took precedence over her professional life. After her time with Onassis ended, she pursued acting and had a stint of teaching master classes at Julliard during 1971-1972. Stassinopoulos (1981) described her foray into teaching as “an attempt to break through her terror of singing in public” (p. 315) since it had been some time since she performed. Between 1973-1974 she embarked on an international recital tour with a fellow opera singer and piano accompanist receiving mixed reactions. In contrast to members of the public who clamoured to get tickets to see the living legend and once at the theatre showed their adoration and unbridled enthusiasm, critics were damning. John Ardoin summed up what other critics implied when he said that the tour “tarnished the artistry of her greatest years” (in Stassinopoulos, 1981, p. 321). Following the tour, Callas moved to France where she became very reclusive. In 1977, the year she passed away from a heart attack, she had a telephone conversation with her sister, Jackie, where she said, “since I lost my voice I want to die … Without my voice what am I? Nothing” (J. Callas, 1989, p.184).

Analysis

Bloom’s theory of identity is relevant to the artistry of Maria Callas. It could be said that Callas “misread” other opera singers and in the process was able to carve out a unique place for herself as a legendary performer. In her day she set new standards for opera and today opera singers continue to be judged against her genius. Her genius was described as the way in which she breathed life and drama into the roles she performed through both her body and her voice (Stassinopoulos, 1981, p. 13), leaving audiences mesmerised. Another biographer claimed that her stage impact was “enormous and tradition-shattering … [due to her] …
columnar sound and statuesque gesture” (Jellinek, 1999, p. 187). Yet she did not achieve her legendary status alone; there were several stand-out influential others who shaped her development and helped to create Callas, the legend. According to Stassinopoulos (1981), one of these figures was her teacher at the Athens conservatory, de Hidalgo, an experienced diva herself. She not only provided the young Callas with meticulous training and introduced her to a wide repertoire of operatic figures, but she also “bridged the gap between the vision and the reality, not only with her teaching but with her understanding, her encouragement and love” (Stassinopoulos 1981: 39).

Jellinek (1999), a connoisseur of opera as well as Callas’s biographer, refers to recordings of Callas performing Norma and Tosca at two different times in her career:

The 1954 monaural Norma (CDCC 5 56271 2) finds Callas in opulent voice … By the time the stereo edition appeared in 1960, her performance betrayed signs of tonal unevenness and greater effort. But because she had repeated this celebrated role many times in the intervening years … her experience allowed her to bring a more rounded and womanly approach to her portrayal. If I were to choose between the two commercially released Normas, I would likely opt for the later one (CDMC 5 66428 2) because the 1960 supporting cast (Franco Corelli, Christa Ludwig, Nicola Zaccaria) represents a clear improvement. Both sets are enriched by Serafin’s [conductor] noble reading. When it comes to choosing between the early and late Toscas, the picture changes. In the 1964 recording … the diva is vocally a long way from her 1953 form and De Sabata’s [La Scala’s artistic director] authority is notably missing from Georges Pretre’s conducting. (p.188)
There is much that is telling in this extract. First that artistry in performance is more than technique. While Callas was said to have demonstrated vocal decline in the late 1950s through to the end of her singing career, her experience, dramatic intuition and masterful interpretation enabled her to compensate, to a point and for a time, the technical challenges she faced such as reaching the top register (Jellinek, 1999). Second, a leader’s performance needs to be understood in a wider context; a context that involves a myriad of interacting factors. In terms of Callas’ performances, these factors included the mastery of the conductor, the talent of the cast, the quality of the orchestra /musicians, and the receptiveness of the audience. Important here is that performance never operates in a vacuum; it is interactive and co-constructed and in relation to others. Third, identity in performance is fluid and changes in response to wider contextual variables. As Eidsheim (2017) says of all performances, they are “produced and performed within considerable cultural constraints and affordances” (p. 253). There are also the inner constraints within the performer that interact with the broader constraints. For example, and as identified earlier, Callas’s voice changed (no doubt for many reasons including the ageing process) and she battled insecurity and anxiety which impacted upon her presentation and performance.

If identity is central to aesthetics, and aesthetics are essential to understand leadership performance, then identity has some important implications for leadership development. Two are considered here.

**Implications for developing school leadership performance**

*Towards an alternative perspective of leadership*

In more recent times, writers in the field of leadership (Ehrich and English, 2013; Heffernan, 2019; Heffernan, Netolicky, and Mockler, 2019; Lumby and English, 2010; Thomson, 2019)
have argued that leadership is in dire need of alternative metaphors; metaphors that challenge both traditional and dominant views of leadership. One dominant perspective is the business model that reduces the work of leaders to technicians (English and Ehrich, 2015). Within this perspective, contemporary preparation of educational leaders is deeply embedded in bureaucratic functioning, bureaucratic thinking and bureaucratic hierarchies. This matrix of overlapping structures partly obstructs the true nature of leadership as co-constructed and how bureaucratic identities are coterminous with specific roles so a person is not a leader but an Inventory Manager. When persons are hired to fill these specific roles it is hard to imagine that they are co-constructed or co-dependent in anyway other than in a superior-subordinate relationship. When preparing school principals or school superintendents the image behind the role is akin to a statue with fixed properties. This is the fiction of identity and self fashioned into an inanimate object. The images, while perhaps aesthetic in some respects, hide a more profound reality that leadership is the result of a constant tension within an individual who is simultaneously interacting with other individuals, and also within specific cultural contexts. Preparation of educational leaders using job standards centred on bureaucratic positions completely miss the real challenges facing all leaders. It is preparation for a fake world.

Need to provide a range of teaching approaches to teach leadership

The dominant approach to formal school leadership preparation in many universities tends to be narrow and based primarily on technical skill development. The language of business and management is pervasive in such training and thus limited. We concur with Greenfield (in Greenfield and Ribbins, 1993) who cogently argued for an alternative to the current skills based approaches used in formal school preparation programmes. He pointed to programmes that provide school leaders opportunities to reflect upon their own values, beliefs, and
assumptions and therefore recognise the fundamental human-centred focus of their work. Greenfield and Ribbins (1993) argue that programs need to be redesigned in order to give leaders richer insights into the nature, problems and possibilities of their practice. Moreover, training for administrators should be seen as “training for life” with all of its tragedies, ironies and joys (Greenfield, 1983, p. 108). Lumby and English (2010, p. 82) put it well when they say that school preparation programmes should challenge school leaders “to consider their identities [and] the political context within which they work”.

Over the last ten years or more there has been a growing recognition of the place of the arts in leadership and management development. Authors such as Jenlink (2001) and Katz-Buonincontro and Philipps (2011) have recommended arts-based inquiry as a promising way forward to develop aesthetic understandings in leaders. By way of example, both Jenlink (2001) and Katz-Buonincontro refer to arts-based programmes they have used with doctoral students to heighten their awareness of themselves and their practice. Here Jenlink (2001) used aesthetic and literary works which students then connected to their educational practice while Katz-Buonincontro introduced artists in the classroom to help students produce pottery, drawings and other artefacts as a means of heightening their perceptions about the challenges and possibilities in their work.

The current authors of this paper have used case studies, biographies and autobiographies of artists and leaders (in book and films) from a variety of backgrounds and fields in formal preparation programs for school leaders as a means of helping them to recognise the critical influence of context in the formation of leadership identity (Ehrich and English, 2013; English and Ehrich, 2016). From experience we have found this type of learning methodology has enabled us to not only broaden students’ understandings of leadership but
also to open their eyes to the central role of identity in performance and to the aesthetic dimensions of leadership often missing from more mainstream narratives. It also underscores the criticality of performance in continuing to shape and define the fluid nature of leader identity.

**Conclusion**

Because of our proclivity in the past to envision leadership as embodied in fixed organisational offices and occupying relatively stable social spaces, we have also tended to see the leader’s identity and self as almost statute like in formation and expression. This is the lead in the philosopher’s stone. The fragility, fluidity, and impermanence underscored in Figure 1 in this paper have attempted to sketch out a more dynamic, complex and realistic portrait of the truer nature of leadership identity and its relationship with the self of the leader. This is the process of turning lead into gold.

The gold comes by changing to a different focus to examine leadership and seeing in leadership identity a more fluid, fragile, dialectical relationship with self and how these are impacted by events within cultures and sub-cultures. It is a perfect example of George Mead’s (1934) concept of self in which a person’s “self” is created through an interaction with the environment and social relationships. The philosopher’s stone is that leader identity represents a life time of continuing co-constructions with groups and significant others. Until death, leadership is a definition in progress. Even after death the revisionists will continue to re-assess a leader’s life for hundreds of years and identity can be transformed many times in the process. Not even the finality of death can stop this endless and continuing transformation.
References

Archer, M. (2000), *Being Human: The Problem of Agency*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Alvesson, M. & Sveningsson, S. (2012). Un and Re-Packing Leadership: Context, relations, construction and politics. In M. Uhl-Bien and S.M. Ospina (Eds.) *Advancing relational leadership research* (pp. 203-228). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Bass, B.M. (1981), *Stogdill’s Handbook of Leadership*, rev. edn, The Free Press, New York.

Bloom, H. (1997), *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. 2nd edn, Oxford University Press, New York.

Callas, J. (1989), *Sister*, Macmillan, London.

Callas, M. (1970), “Maria Callas interviewed by David Frost”, New York, 10 December 1970, (Audio), available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxJkg0wOgY0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxJkg0wOgY0) (accessed 4 May 2019).

Cassin, B. (Ed.) (2014,) *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Eacott, S. (2018). *Beyond Leadership: A Relational Approach to Organizational Theory in Education*, Springer, Singapore.

Ehrich, L.C. and English, F. (2012), “What can grassroots leadership teach us about school leadership”, *Halduskulttuur – Administrative Culture*, Vol. 13 No.2, pp. 85-108.

Ehrich, L.C. and English, F. (2013), “Leadership as dance: a consideration of the applicability of the ‘mother’ of all arts as the basis for establishing connoisseurship”, *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, Vol. 16 No. 4, pp. 454-481.
Ehrich, L.C. and English (2017), “The leadership identity dilemma: Franz Schubert and Winterreise” in Watson, T.N., Brooks, J.S. and Beachum, F.D. (Eds), Educational leadership and music: Lessons for tomorrow’s school leaders, Information Age Publishing, Charlotte, NC, pp. 101-114.

Eidsheim, N. S. (2017), “Maria Callas’s waistline and the organology of voice”, The Opera Quarterly, Vol. 33, No. 3/4 pp. 249-268.

Eisner, E. (1979), The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs, Macmillan Publishing Co Inc, New York.

Eisner, E.W. (2002), The Arts and the Creation of the Mind, Yale University Press, New Haven and London.

English, F. and Ehrich, L.C. (2015). “Innovatus interregnum: waiting for a paradigm shift”, International Journal of Educational Management, Vol. 29 No. 7, pp. 851-82.

English, F. and Ehrich, L.C. (2016). Leading beautifully: Educational leadership as connoisseurship, Routledge, New York, NY.

Greenfield, T.B. (1983), “The man who comes back through the door in the wall: Discovering truth, discovering self, discovering organizations”, in Gronn, P. (Ed.) Rethinking Educational Administration: T.B. Greenfield and his Critics, Deakin University Press, Deakin.

Greenfield, T. and Ribbins, P. (Eds) (1993), Greenfield on Educational Administration: Towards a Humane Science, Routledge, New York.

Groulier, J.F. (2014), “Beauty”, in Cassin, B. (Ed.) Dictionary of Untranslatables, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Hansen, H., Ropo, A. and Sauer, E. (2007), “Aesthetic leadership”, The Leadership Quarterly, Vol. 18, pp. 544-560.
Heffernan, A. (2019), “The ‘punk’ rock principal”: A metaphor for rethinking educational leadership”, *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, Vol. 51, No. 2, pp. 117-132, DOI: 10.1080/00220620.2019.1582476

Heffernan, D., Netolicky, D. and Mockler, N. (2019), “New and alternative metaphors for school leadership”, *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, Vol. 51, No. 2, pp. 83-86, DOI: 10.1080/00220620.2019.1585768

Hoffer, E. (1951), *The True Believer*, Mentor books, New York.

Holland, D. and Lave, J. (2001), “History in person, an introduction”, in Holland, D. and Lave, J. (Eds.), *History in Person*, School of American Research Press, Santa Fe, NM.

Jellinek, G. (1999), “Callas – Again?”, *The Opera Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 2, pp. 186-195.

Jenlink, P. (2011), “Examining the epistemological, pedagogical and methodological values of poetics in leader preparation”, paper presented at the University Council for Educational Administration Annual Conference, Pittsburgh, PA, 17-20 November.

Katz-Buonincontro, J. and Phillips, J.C. (2011), “‘Art, its creation and leadership [can be] revealing and frightening’: How school leaders learn to frame and solve problems through the arts”, *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 269-291.

Lakomski, G. (2005), *Managing Without Leadership: Towards a Theory of Organizational Functioning*, Elsevier, Amsterdam.

Lakomski, G., Eacott, S. and Evers, C. (Eds) (2017), *Questioning Leadership: New Directions for Educational Organisations*, Routledge, London.

Lumby, J. and English, F. (2009), “From simplicism to complexity in leadership identity and preparation: Exploring the lineage and dark secrets”, *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 95-114.
Mann, M. (2003), *The Sources of Social Power, Vol. 1. A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.

Mead, G. H. (1934), *Mind, Self and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. C.W. Morris (Ed.), University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Ricoeur, P. (1992), *Oneself as Another*, trans. K. Blamey, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Ropo, A. and Sauer, E. (2008), “Dances of leadership: Bridging theory and practice through an aesthetic approach”, *Journal of Management & Organization*, Vol. 14, pp. 560-572.

Rost, J. (1991), *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*, Praeger, New York.

Shamir, B., Dayan-Horesh, H. and Adler, D. (2005), “Leading by biography: Towards a life-story approach to the study of leadership”, *Leadership*, Vol.1, No. 1, pp. 13-29.

Shibutani, T. (1955), “Reference groups as perspectives”, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 60, pp. 562-569.

Sinclair, A. (2005), “Body possibilities in leadership”, *Leadership*, Vol. 1, No. 4, pp. 387-406.

Stassinopoulos, A. (1981), *Maria Callas: The Woman Behind the Legend*, Simon & Schuster, New York.

Sualci Quotes (2019), *Maria Callas’s quotes*, available at: 

https://www.quotatoinof.com/maria-callas.html (accessed 2 May, 2019).

Thomson, P. (2019), “Thinking about the school most of the time: Studio as generative metaphor for critical reflection”, *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, Vol. 51, No. 2, pp. 87-102, DOI: 10.1080/00220620.2018.1536039