



Doctor of Education: Leadership, Learning and Community

Fiction and Leadership Potential: An Investigation into Developing Leadership Concepts in Adolescents Using Fictional Characters from a Novel

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Introduction: The purpose of this mixed methods study was to discover whether 7th grade students could learn about leadership traits and show greater confidence in their ability to be leaders through the integration of fictional characters from a novel.

Problem of Practice: Whereas there is an abundance of literature and training in leadership geared to adults there is not an equivalent support for youth.

Research Method: Quantitative data were gathered from pre and posttests on leadership given to 38 7th graders. All the students received the same instruction, but the experimental group was exposed to additional discussions of the novel *Fahrenheit 451* in terms of the leadership traits of the characters from the novel. Qualitative data were gathered from interviews with 32 of the 38 students. The interview transcripts were analyzed after thematic coding and the results of this process were integrated with the quantitative data to confirm that both groups can describe the traits of a leader.

Summary of Findings: Though there was not a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post- test scores for either the experimental or the control group, the interviews revealed that though the students within the control group could describe the traits of leaders in an academic way, the experimental group demonstrated a more holistic understanding by providing contextual examples from the novel as well as from societal, current and personal experiences.

Limitation(s) of Study: The study consisted of two seventh grade classrooms, over one week, within the constraint of the International Baccalaureate program. In addition, research was completed using one novel, "Fahrenheit 451."

Implications/Significance of Study: This study suggested that, for the youth, fiction could be the needed bridge between leadership theory and its application. Future studies should focus on addressing ways to develop youth leadership in formal education.