

Searching for Authenticity in Student Understanding of Leadership: An approach using the methodology of Forum Theatre

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ABSTRACT: This article reports the use of Forum Theatre as a methodology to uncover young people's understanding of leadership. Thirty high school students (Years 9 to 11) participated in a process of collaborative inquiry using the method of Forum Theatre. Participants enacted two types of challenging classroom situations (student-student and student-teacher conflict) and explored alternative approaches to their resolution. Students enacted and evaluated three basic approaches to each situation: what typically happens, what they imagine is expected by authority figures, and what they consider to be an effective response. Peers generally evaluated their peer-appropriate strategies as more effective and demonstrative of leadership. However, they evidenced more difficulty in managing vertical (student-teacher) than horizontal (student-student) interactions. General principles for 'student leadership' were identified from the data. Participants evaluated the Forum Theatre method as a very engaging, safe and productive research method.

This study continues a program of research into young people's experience and perceptions of leadership. While there is an increasing awareness of the need to develop an empirically-based understanding of 'how young people feel and act in challenging situations' there is still considerable work to be done. The present study has a dual focus: firstly, on a content level, further investigating young people's conceptions of leadership in school settings; and on a process level, investigating the potential of active learning methods to engage young people in

collaborative inquiry. Thus, the present study will investigate students' perceptions of challenging peer and teacher-student interactions in the classroom using the vehicle of Forum Theatre.

Our previous work in this area has led us to identify a number of design features that facilitate 'student voice' when seeking to understand young people's conceptions of leadership (Dempster et al., 2010; Lizzio, Dempster & Neumann, 2011). Most critically, methods which position young people as co-researchers and seek to engage them actively in collaborative inquiry appear to be more engaging, communicate respect, and, consequently, facilitate greater authentic disclosure. In the present study we aimed to implement these insights by employing a research process that was both active and participative.

The method of Forum Theatre is based on the deceptively simple premise that people present their everyday situations as the focus of the drama and enact their thoughts instead of just speaking them (Boal, 2001). The underlying assumption is that the process of enactment contributes more to learning and to a different type of experiential knowing than that of discussion (Dwyer, 2004). Thus, participants have a dual role, becoming at once critical observers and actors, 'spect-actors' in Forum Theatre terminology. The method has received wide application in educational and community contexts for agendas such as conflict resolution, diversity training and empowerment of disadvantaged groups.

In essence, the value of the method is its interactive approach to collaboratively exploring the shared problems or life experiences of a group, and posing alternatives and different possibilities. The process usually commences with a short stimulus in which a protagonist encounters a challenge (usually shared by the audience or group) ('problem-posing' in Freire's (1972) terms), and the process of enactment is concerned with alternatively discussing and demonstrating responses to the central challenge. Clearly, while this cycle of enacted disclosure and feedback can strengthen trust and solidarity within a group, it also requires sensitive and ethical facilitation. Overall, the Forum Theatre method seems particularly suitable as a vehicle for collaborative inquiry with young people.

The method will be used to investigate two types of leadership situations commonly encountered by young people, student-student and student-teacher classroom conflictual interactions. Peers are particularly influential and challenging of each other during adolescence (Steinberg, Dornbusch & Brown, 1992), and negotiating with and influencing one's peers is both a common and important area of concern and efficacy for young people (Lizzio, Dempster & Neumann, 2011). Teacher-student interactions are also particularly influential on students' academic success and engagement (Marchant, Paulson & Rothlisberg, 2001). Furthermore, the ways in which teachers negotiate their authority and positional power with students can also influence students' world-views (Flanagan et al., 2007). Indeed, the student-teacher relationship is the most consistent contact (outside the home) that young people have with managing unequal power. Both types of situations are important in the everyday lives of young people, and therefore are particularly relevant when considering their views of leadership.

In summary, the present study sought to answer the following questions:

How effective is Forum Theatre as a method of collaborative inquiry in investigating young people's understanding of leadership?

How do young people understand leadership in challenging student-student and teacher-student interactions?

What are the implications of findings for adolescent leadership development?

Method

Methodological perspectives

We undertook to gather young people's views using a deliberate mixed-methods approach, valuing both qualitative and quantitative data, and using one to complement the other (Robson, 1993). The first data source was students' enacted ideas about 'what to do in a situation'. Our approach, rather than seeking to engage students in direct abstract discussion about 'what might be leadership in this situation' (and thereby being more likely to access their espoused theories), was to elicit specific behaviours and strategies with the aim of gaining a potentially less filtered view of their theory of action (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Lizzio & Wilson, 2007). The second source of data was derived from students' 'reflection-in-action' and consisted of their commentary on and discussion about each enacted situation. The third source of data (reflection-on-action) came from students' individual summative ratings using a standard set of scales. The use of a standard item set enabled systematic comparison of students' perceptions across situations. We deliberately choose to phrase these standard items in very general terms (How realistic, effective, acceptable?) to minimise priming students' responses.

We purposefully choose to explore situations that were inherently conflictual or problematic. Such situations are not only more inherently engaging, but also require 'non-routine' reflective responses from participants, and are therefore more likely to access their underlying assumptions about appropriate and effective behaviour.

Finally, we were particularly sensitive to questions of the potential influence of authority figures (the research team) confounding students' responses. Young people telling adults 'what they want to hear' is a recurring challenge in this type of inquiry (Dempster & Lizzio, 2007). We employed three strategies to mitigate this: firstly, we sought to establish explicit norms at the outset of the session to 'tell it like it is'; secondly, we ensured that the young people (the forum drama troupe) 'ran the show' and managed the reflection as well as the enactment; and finally, we specifically included a step in the process which asked for students' views for 'the right response' from an authority figures' perspective, in order to ensure they consciously differentiated 'what they thought' from any imagined or implicit expectations.

Participants

Thirty students (16 boys and 14 girls) from a Queensland regional high school participated in this study. Students were in Years 9 to 11 with an average age of 14.2 years for boys and 15.1 years for girls. Ten students had a formal leadership role in the school (e.g., class captain, sports captain, student club executive). Students reported themselves as a mix of high (usually receive As) and average (usually receive Bs) academic achievers.

Procedure

A team of five university drama students (2 males and 3 females) comprised the Forum Theatre company. One of the students also functioned as the director of the enactments. Members of the team had worked previously with the research team and were familiar with the range of situations and responses likely to be encountered when working with high school students in this topic area.

The process for concurrently conducting the enactments and the research process is outlined in Figure 1. The setting was a school lecture theatre with raked seating. Students sat close to the front to enable their participation in the various enactments and rotated into the front row after each scene to facilitate opportunities for participation. Following introductions, the Forum Theatre company demonstrated the method to students and engaged them with the expectation of active audience participation, to which students responded positively. Specific techniques such as 'freezing the action' and the 'tap-in' (where a volunteer demonstrates an alternative way of responding) were also demonstrated. Students were also given an opportunity to practise the method used to record their responses to each scene.

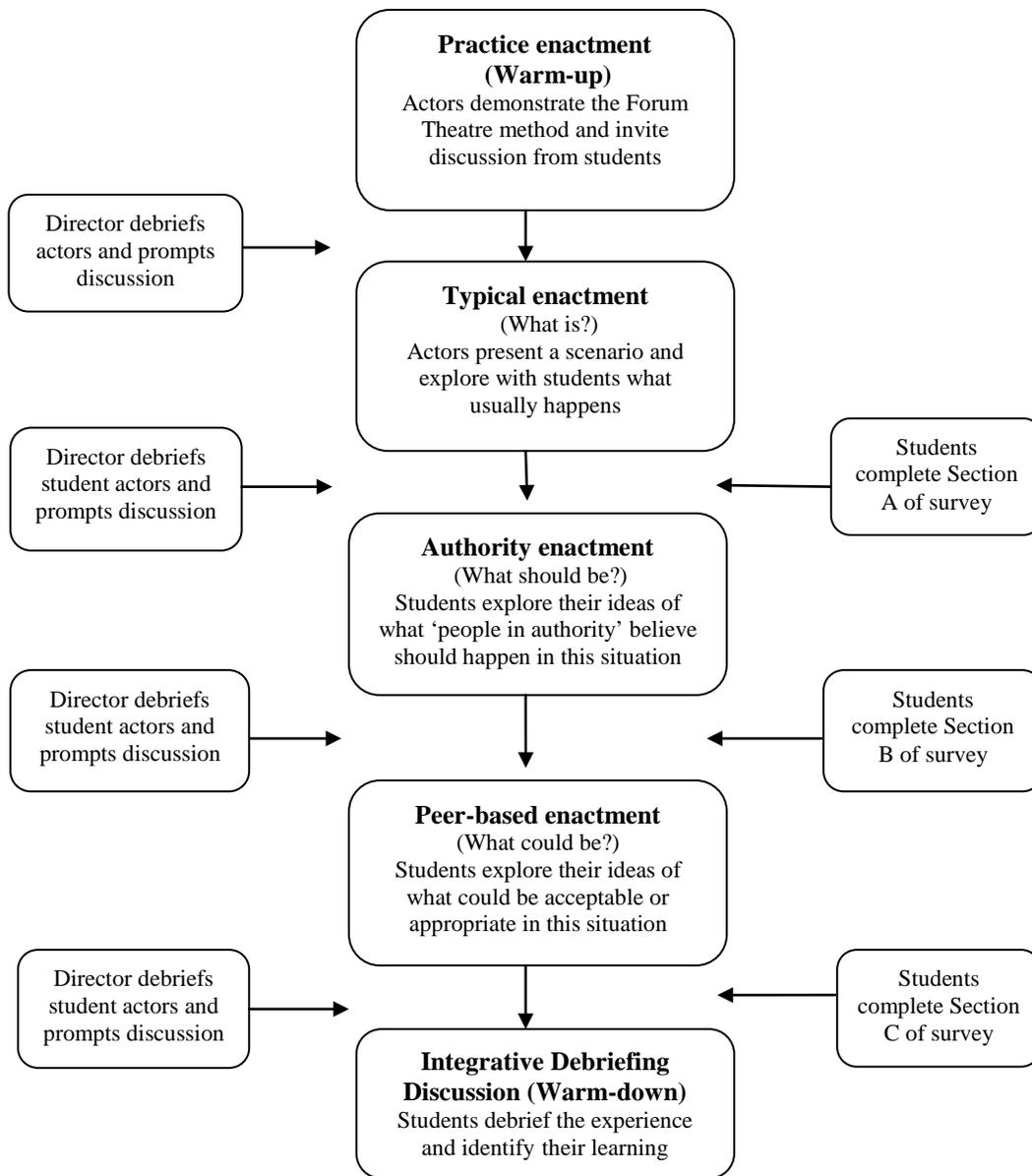
The enactment process was conducted in two cycles each exploring a different type of challenging situation: firstly, a student-to-student situation; and secondly, a teacher-student situation. Each cycle followed the same logic: a baseline enactment of 'what typically happens' (typical approach), followed by an enactment of 'what should happen' (authority figure approach), and concluding with an enactment of 'what could happen' (peer-appropriate approach). The rationale for this sequence is based on the methodology of situational analysis (Lizzio, Wilson & Gallois, 1993), which commences with participants assessing their typical or current approaches to a situation, then exploring (and where relevant, disputing or accommodating) the expectations of others (e.g., authority figures), and then concluding with developing their preferred strategy. The content of all enactments was based on students' ideas (What would you change here?) and suggestions (What are some ways to deal with this?) during the session. The duration of the session was approximately 2 hours.

Students were provided with a workbook which they used to record their perceptions of the three enactments (typical, expected by authority, and peer-based expectations) for each of the two situations (student-student and student-teacher). After each enactment students rated (on a 7-point scale, 1 *not at all* to 7 *very much*) the realism (*How realistic or close was this enactment to what usually happens?*), leadership (*To what extent was leadership shown in this situation?*), acceptability (*How personally acceptable to you was what happened in this enactment?*), and effectiveness (*How effective for the group or class was the outcome of this enactment?*) of each enactment.

How people try to 'make sense' of a situation (their appraisal of 'what's going on?' and 'what does it mean for me?'), influences both their emotional responses and possible behaviour (Reisenzein & Hoffman, 1990; Roseman, 1996). We thus sought in this study to measure the dimensions students used to appraise each enactment. Students were presented with a list of 40 stimulus words and asked to 'circle the words that would best represent how you might feel if you were a student in this situation as it was just enacted'. The words represented three dimensions of common situational appraisal: *evaluation*: what emotional response someone feels in a situation (positive feelings such as joy, amusement, happiness or satisfaction or negative feelings such as

anger, sadness or irritation); *responsibility*: how responsible someone feels to respond to what is happening (not my problem, responsible, guilty, accountable); and *potency*: how influential or capable someone feels in a situation (helpless, inadequate, confident).

FIGURE 1: FLOW CHART OF THE FORUM THEATRE METHOD



At the end of the session students firstly participated in a group review and debriefing, and then rated (using a 7-point scale, 1 *strongly disagree* to 7 *strongly agree*) their overall experience of the enactment in terms of outcomes achieved (e.g., *Good ideas came out of the process, I learnt useful things from this process*), the process itself (e.g., *I felt the process was safe, I was interested and involved in the process, I felt the process was confusing*) and its generalisability as an approach with their same age peers (*This approach will work well with other people our age*).

Results and Discussion

In this section we present students' ideas of the various types of strategies that characterise typical, authority figure and peer-based approaches to the student-student and student-teacher situations. We also present quantitative and qualitative findings regarding students' perceptions of these various strategies. Finally, we present students' overall evaluations of the Forum Theatre method. Mean differences were analysed using analysis of variance procedures (ANOVA).

Student-student scenario

What strategies did students identify?

The student-student situation was set in a classroom context. In the stimulus situation, the teacher needs to step out of the room and asks students to 'get on with your work' in her absence. In the *typical enactment* (what usually happens) students engaged in a range of off-task behaviours such as talking, annoying each other and walking around the class. At the same time, there was underlying tension as some students did want to work. In the *authority-figure enactment* students depicted an imagined need for positional leadership and vertical authority with one student 'taking charge' and attempting to organise the class to 'get stuck into this'. In the *peer-appropriate enactment* students depicted a more horizontal influence strategy with students who wanted to work seeking to convince their classmates to 'stay on task' because of the consequences (an exam next week), and offering to help those who are acting out in the teacher's absence.

How did students evaluate these strategies?

There were clear variations in students' perceptions of the three enactments of the student-student challenging situation (see Table 1). The typical scenario (what usually happens) was seen by both male and female students to be significantly ($p < .05$) more realistic than the enactment where the 'take charge' behaviour imagined to be expected by authority figures was demonstrated. This attests to the validity of the enactments in capturing students' authentic experience.

Both male and female students evaluated their peer-appropriate (horizontal influence) strategy as more effective ($p < .05$) for the class than what typically happens, but did not see this as more effective than the approach they imagined would be preferred by their authority figures. Both peer and authority figure strategies were seen to work in achieving outcomes. Consistent with this, while both male ($p < .05$) and female ($p < .01$) students perceived more evidence of leadership in their peer-appropriate scenario compared to what usually happens, neither perceived different levels of leadership between the authority-figure and peer strategies, with both evidencing at least moderate (range of 4 to 5 on a 7-point scale) leadership.

TABLE 1: PARTICIPANTS' EVALUATIONS OF ENACTED RESPONSES TO CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

	Teacher-Student Situation				Student-Student Situation			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Typical Behaviour								
How <i>realistic</i> or close to what usually happens?	5.88	1.08	5.21	1.25	5.00	2.09	5.82	1.01
To what extent was <i>leadership</i> shown in this situation?	5.75	0.86	5.33	1.05	4.14	1.79	4.18	1.38
How <i>personally acceptable</i> to you was what happened in this enactment?	5.19	0.98	5.43	0.93	4.92	0.95	4.65	1.06
How <i>effective</i> for the group or class was the outcome of this enactment?	5.37	1.02	5.14	1.09	4.92	1.38	4.82	1.13
Perceptions of Authority Figures' Expectations								
How <i>realistic</i> or close to what usually happens?	3.53	1.55	3.31	1.65	3.84	0.98	4.76	1.09
To what extent was <i>leadership</i> shown in this situation?	5.13	1.25	3.53	1.77	5.15	1.14	5.65	0.86
How <i>personally acceptable</i> to you was what happened in this enactment?	4.25	1.44	2.89	1.94	5.00	1.08	4.76	1.03
How <i>effective</i> for the group or class was the outcome of this enactment?	4.25	1.43	3.57	1.74	5.69	1.11	5.24	1.09
Peer Appropriate Behaviour								
How <i>realistic</i> or close to what usually happens?	5.00	1.09	5.08	1.12	5.23	1.09	5.35	1.16
To what extent was <i>leadership</i> shown in this situation?	5.71	0.85	5.36	1.01	5.53	1.12	5.59	1.00
How <i>personally acceptable</i> to you was what happened in this enactment?	5.43	1.08	5.43	1.08	5.15	0.80	5.06	0.83
How <i>effective</i> for the group or class was the outcome of this enactment?	4.93	0.77	5.21	1.10	5.38	1.25	5.65	0.86

Students' appraisals of the three student-to-student enactments, characterising each using a standard menu of descriptive words, further extends our understanding of their experiences in these situations (see Table 2). Their predominant response to the typical enactment (what usually happens) was negative evaluation (students endorsed descriptors such as 'irritated' and 'disappointed'), and about one-third of students used descriptors (helpless, reluctant, anxious)

suggesting that they felt a low sense of potency to deal with the situation. Students' response to the enactment of authority figures' expectations was much more positive (relaxed, acceptance, mature) than the enactment of the typical scenario, suggesting some appreciation of the value of structure over chaos. However, while communicating a greater sense of predictability and safety, students, interestingly, described this authority strategy of 'one person taking charge' in terms of a low sense of potency (i.e., feeling helpless, confused, reluctant). In contrast, students characterised their response to their collaborative peer-appropriate strategy as both positive (happy, relaxed, satisfied) and potent (proud, confident and self-respect). Clearly, dealing with the situation 'in their own way' produced both positive feelings and a sense of empowerment.

TABLE 2: PARTICIPANTS' APPRAISAL OF ENACTMENTS IN TERMS OF THE DIMENSIONS OF EVALUATION, RESPONSIBILITY AND POTENCY

	Teacher-Student Situation				Student-Student Situation			
	N	Male Sample words	N	Female Sample words	N	Male Sample words	N	Female Sample words
Typical Behaviour								
Positive evaluation	2	happy,	3	amused	8	amused, happy	5	amused
Negative evaluation	27	frustrated, offended	29	irritated, sad, sorry	26	irritated, upset, bored	30	irritated, disappointed
Feeling responsibility	3	guilty	3	guilty	3	accountable, guilty	1	guilty
Rejecting responsibility	1		0		3	not-my- problem	0	
Higher potency	3	confident	2	confident	0		0	
Lower potency	11	inadequate	14	worried	6	helpless, anxious, stressed	11	worried, reluctant
Authority Figures' Expectations								
Positive evaluation	5	sensible, mature	3	relaxed	10	relaxed, acceptance	3	amused
Negative evaluation	13	offended, angry	4	sad, sorry	16	disappointed, bored	9	irritated
Feeling responsibility	2	guilty	6	guilty	2	accountable, guilty	4	guilty, responsible
Rejecting responsibility	2	not-my- problem	0		2	not-my- problem	1	not-my- problem
Higher potency	5	proud	2	confident	0		2	
Lower potency	11	anxious	19	stressed, helpless	8	confused, reluctant	9	helpless

**Peer
Appropriate
Behaviour**

Positive evaluation	10	sensible, approval	5	relaxed	8	happy, relaxed	10	satisfied
Negative evaluation	14	crawler	15	irritated, grovel	3	bored, frustrated	2	irritated
Feeling responsibility	9	guilty	5	guilty	3	responsible	3	accountable
Rejecting responsibility	2	not-my-problem	1	reluctant	1	not-my-problem	1	not-my-problem
Higher potency	13	confident	12	proud	9	proud, self-respect	8	proud, confident
Lower potency	3	confused	10	helpless	3	confused, anxious	1	stressed

In summary, students viewed both the authority figure and peer strategies as somewhat equivalent in terms of overall effectiveness for the group, and also regarded both as 'demonstrating leadership'. However, students appeared to experience these strategies quite differently in terms of their personal processes (as evidenced by the differential profile of endorsed appraisal words). From a methodological perspective, this suggests that a more granulated measurement of perceived effectiveness (separate personal, relational and task dimensions) is required to better understand young people's complex responses to these situations.

Student-teacher scenario

What strategies did students identify?

The student-teacher situation was set in a classroom context. In the stimulus situation, the teacher is collecting assignments. A student has not completed her assignment on time. She explains to the teacher that she has been unwell. The teacher doesn't accept this as a valid excuse. The student becomes upset. In the *typical enactment* another student speaks up on her behalf (Please give her a break, she really has been sick). The teacher tells the advocating friend to mind their own business. The friend then escalates (It's not fair) and the teacher becomes defensive. In the *authority-figure enactment* students attempt a process of indirect influence through manipulation. The intervening friend uses flattery (You're a really nice person. I know you'll understand) to 'butter-up the teacher' and 'put her in a good mood'. This is similar to the lower-order social influence strategy of 'ingratiation' of getting someone to do what you want by putting them in a good mood or getting them to like you (Yukl, Falbe & Young, 1993). In the *peer-appropriate enactment* the student intervening on behalf of their friend asks to speak privately to the teacher, calmly provides a rational explanation for their involvement, and explores how the situation could be fairly problem-solved. Interestingly, this is similar to the higher-order influence strategies of rational persuasion (use of logical argument) and inspirational appeal (invoking values) which are generally perceived to be more effective (Blickle, 2003).

How did students evaluate these strategies?

Overall, students revealed a similar pattern of perceptions of the student-teacher scenario as with the student-student scenario. Once again, the typical enactment (escalating argument) was seen as significantly more realistic ($p < .01$) than the enactment of the authority figures' strategy (indirect manipulation). Students also evaluated their peer strategy (private problem-solving) to be a significantly more realistic approach ($p < .01$) than the one they imagined their authority figures would prefer. Both male and female students evaluated the authority figure strategy of indirect influence as significantly more acceptable ($p < .01$), more effective ($p < .01$), and as evidencing more leadership ($p < .01$) than the escalating confrontation and conflict depicted in the typical enactment. This is consistent with the strong social norms for conflict avoidance in social interaction (Argyle, 1983; Wilson & Gallois, 1993). However, once again, the peer-endorsed problem-solving strategy was seen as demonstrating greater leadership ($p < .01$) than the imagined authority figure ingratiation strategy.

Students' description of their responses to each of the three student-teacher enactments revealed both similarities and differences with their appraisal of the student-student situation. Once again, students strongly negatively evaluated (feeling frustrated and offended) the typical behaviour and reported more low potency (inadequate and helpless) than high potency (confident) feelings about their capacity to respond. While the authority figure strategy reduced the level of negative evaluations, students still reported similar levels of low potency (feeling anxious). This should not be surprising, since this strategy was based on catering to power while trading off one's self-respect to 'get an outcome'. Interestingly, male students found the manipulative authority figure strategy as significantly ($p < .01$) more acceptable and effective, and to be more reflective of leadership than their female peers. This may suggest that adolescent males may be more likely to endorse a more instrumental (it got the job done), as opposed to a personal and relational (what effect did it have on those involved) view of leadership.

Students' qualitative appraisal of the student-teacher peer strategy was remarkably different from their views of the peer student-student strategy. Whereas their appraisal of their student-student peer strategy was characteristically 'positive and potent', this was much less so in the present situation. Both male and female students described the peer strategy for the student-teacher situation in emotionally conflicted terms, concurrently feeling both positive (sensible) and negative (irritated, crawler, grovel) terms. Accompanying this mixed evaluation were feelings of responsibility (expressed as feeling guilty for what was happening) and a sense of potency (confident and proud). What situational factors would produce such a conflicted situational response? It would seem that attempting leadership in a horizontal or symmetrical status situation (peer to peer) is a more straightforward proposition than doing so in a vertical or asymmetrical status situation (student to teacher). Students appear to be much less clear about their own feelings, and less secure about their peers' perceptions about appropriate behaviour or violations of norms for group loyalty or self-aggrandisement (e.g., crawler). Certainly, this dynamic parallels the long recognised complexity of upward influence (managing upwards) in adult organisational life (Mowday, 1978).

What were students' overall perceptions of the forum drama process?

Both male and female students generally endorsed the process and outcomes of the forum drama session (see Table 3). Students' mean ratings of the positive process dimensions of the session (i.e., engagement and psychological safety) were in the high range, and their ratings of potential negative aspects (i.e., intellectual load or cognitive effort and personal anxiety) were in the low range. Students' comments in the session debrief reinforced this pattern of findings. Students commented on the value of the session being 'entertaining', 'interactive' and 'getting us involved'. Importantly, they identified a synergy between humour and learning, whereby one can 'learn about serious things without having to be serious'. In the post-session debrief students demonstrated a sophisticated appreciation of the underlying process design of the session. Students were asked 'How would you compare this method to other methods you may have tried (e.g., responding to written case studies or watching videos of vignettes)?' They quickly identified the importance of student-centred active learning process to their engagement (e.g., You asked us for our ideas and suggestions...it was pretty wicked to see them acted out. We felt important and valued. It's easy to get passive, and sit back and let it go in one ear and out the other...trying stuff out didn't let that happen).

TABLE 3: PARTICIPANTS' EVALUATION OF THE PROCESS AND OUTCOMES OF THE FORUM THEATRE METHOD

		Males		Females	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Process Evaluation					
1	I was interested and involved in the process	6.37	0.48	5.47	1.70
2	I felt the process was safe	6.18	1.70	6.42	0.51
3	I felt the process was hard work	2.37	1.54	2.93	1.81
4	I felt the process was confusing	2.31	1.57	3.36	1.33
5	I was scared to get up and act in the drama	4.06	1.61	3.92	1.77
Outcome Evaluation					
6	I thought the process gave students a good chance to say what they really think and feel	6.43	0.51	6.50	0.52
7	Good ideas came out of the process	6.31	0.60	6.43	0.65
8	I learnt useful things from this process	5.53	1.12	5.57	1.18
9	I thought we covered real issues in this process	6.00	0.52	5.86	0.86
10	I thought the exercise was a waste of time	1.63	1.25	1.60	1.12
11	I had fun doing this	6.60	0.63	6.57	0.64
Generalisability					
12	This approach will work well with other people our age	6.56	0.51	6.37	0.50

However, while both male and female students did generally endorse the process of forum drama, there were some noteworthy differences in their perceptions. Female students (5.47) reported being significantly less interested and involved than males (6.37) ($p < .05$), and found the process to be significantly ($p < .05$) more confusing (males 2.31 v females 3.36). While these are small gender-based differences they do alert us to the need to monitor the responses of both individuals and groups of students during the enactment process. Importantly, not one student reported feeling unsafe in or disinterested in the drama process.

In terms of reported outcomes, both male and female students endorsed the value of the forum drama session in terms of providing an opportunity for voice, useful learning, realistic engagement with issues, and fun and enjoyment. Clearly, this wasn't 'just an enjoyable exercise' but also a useful vehicle for learning about the complexities of peer and teacher interaction in challenging situations. Students' high ratings for authentic participation (gave students a good chance to say what they really think and feel) were strongly correlated ($r = .78$) with their perceptions of coverage of realistic issues, and the learning value of the exercise ($r = .74$). This suggests that a key design feature contributing to the overall effectiveness of the exercise was establishing a culture of safe and genuine participation. Thus, in seeking to understand 'what makes these processes work' we must be careful to differentiate the relative contributions of the specific method (e.g., Forum Theatre) and that of the general culture and norms established in the group (Dempster et al., 2010). Dramatic enactments, while potentially engaging in themselves, are less likely to produce positive learning without appropriate sensitivity to the anxieties and needs for respect and safety that are critical ingredients for trust and self-disclosure (Lizzio & Wilson, 2001).

The young people in this study demonstrated considerable sophistication in their analysis of leadership. Ten key themes or principles are evident in their accounts across the various scenarios and enactments: *leadership as distributed across all participants in a situation* (you don't have to have a position to be a leader); *leadership as inclusive* (there are a lot of different ways to be a leader); *leadership as flexibility* (be willing to compromise); *leadership as doing the job at hand* (staying task focused); *leadership as working for others or something bigger* (helping those who need it without being asked); *leadership as emergent from the group* (sometimes just talking about it sorts it out); *leadership as conscious strategy* (think before you act); *leadership as self-management* (control yourself and you can control the situation, stay positive and relaxed and that will help everyone); *leadership as experimentation* (try something different and see what happens, it's unlikely to be a disaster); and *leadership as perspective and leverage* (little things can make a big difference to a situation, by doing one little thing you can turn around a situation).

Most importantly, students thought that the forum drama approach would be very effective with their peers. Students' perceptions of the generalisability of the method were most strongly correlated with their perceptions of the opportunity for voice ($r = .80$) and its level of fun ($r = .77$). Clearly, students regard these as key qualities for the engagement of their peers. That the present group of students was reasonably diverse in terms of age and gender provides a measure of confidence in trialling the method with other more culturally diverse groups of students.

What are the implications for future research?

There are several agendas arising from both the content and process of this study. In terms of *content*, it is clear that students appraise and respond quite differently to horizontal (peer to peer) and vertical (status-based) situations, and that any effective approach to student leadership needs to consider their distinct challenges. There is also a more general point to be made from these findings about the potential relationship between a sense of empowerment (or potency) and the use of effective strategies. It is well established that when people perceive themselves to be lacking power or see situations to be caused by factors outside of their control, they are more likely to employ less effective strategies (Bugental & Lewis, 1999). This suggests a need to incorporate a focus on empowerment (and to differentiate notions of structural and personal power) in constructing a framework for adolescent leadership. Finally, students collectively provided a sophisticated conceptualisation of 'leadership in their terms', and this should not only guide further investigation of the applicability of these principles, but also better inform adolescent-centred leadership development.

In terms of *process*, present findings strongly support the efficacy of action-based approaches to adolescent leadership research and development. While Forum Theatre was the method used in the present study, the design qualities that students endorsed are applicable to a related family of active learning approaches, such as role play, project work and sociodrama. Future research could productively investigate the potential contributions of these related methods of collaborative inquiry to young people's engagement, skill development, and, most critically, personal voice and empowerment.

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