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Leadership in a South African Context

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The Montagu Project

The Montagu Project at its core is an inspiring example of cross-cultural leadership, community engagement, friendship, and sustainable partnership. The collective impact of the University of Southern Maine, the Rural Arts Development (RAD) Foundation, and the Red Zebra Foundation reaches far beyond the week they meet as The Montagu Project. Each one of these partners promotes global leadership, global awareness, leadership development, community engagement, and the empowerment of youth.

The History of the Montagu Project

“The Montagu Project itself had its origins in the relationship of long-term colleagues Tara Coste and Mark Dodsworth. Along the way Helen Gooderson, founder of the RAD Foundation in Montagu, South Africa became involved. The University of Southern Maine agreed to pilot this program on the American end and the dream became a full scope reality” (Coste & Peabody, 2017).

“It reminded me that we are all born leaders.” - William Swanpoel, Alumnus

Learning via Performance

Music and the arts are universal. They connect us, serve as a means of escape from the pressures of life, and help us celebrate. In Montagu, we connected through performative activities, including drumming, dance, singing, and playing. Performance and expression connected us across cultures.



Creating Meaning and Sustainability

“Africans recognize the importance of long-term sustainability. ... They incorporate the arts in daily life, recognizing their centrality to human existence” (Hooker, 2003, p. 313).

Social justice requires inclusivity and the creation of shared meaning using the views of both oppressed groups and oppressors. As visitors in the South African context, we had to open our minds and hearts to the perspectives of the local participants.

“Leaders who are emotionally intelligent are... happier and more committed to their organization[s]” (Connerley & Pedersen, 2005, p. 63). For this reason, emotions were at the core of our work in South Africa. We shared personal stories and realities which impacted our leadership paradigms.

Fundamentally, the Montagu Project taught participants how to learn in different cultural contexts, perpetuating the specific learning instilled in South Africa.

Buy-in for the Montagu Project was crucial; we had to believe that our learning was meaningful and applicable. Ending our trip with a community performance demonstrated the longevity and importance of our work.

Off-Shoot Projects

Walking in Their Shoes Project:

Assessment of immediate needs

Center Day Camp: To host selected project alumni as counselors

Bates Dance Festival: Scholarship

References

Connerley, M. L., & Pedersen, P. B. (2005). *Leadership in a diverse and multicultural environment*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
Coste, T., & Peabody, M. (2017). *The Montagu Project: Collective impact cross continents*. Manuscript submitted for publication.
Hooker, J. (2003). *Working across cultures*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Business Books.