

Prologue

Good writing is suggestive and pungent, it evokes feelings—relief, recognition, drama, disdain, horror—and bodily responses—the flush of recognition and the sharp intake of breath, the tingle as we feel that this might be showing us something we hadn't thought or experienced before. Good writing is often unpredictable—shocking in its terseness or economy, audacious in its sudden sweep or the intimacy of a confidence. (Grey & Sinclair, 2006, p. 452)

I have an interest in theatre, so I want to set the stage. I wanted this dissertation to evoke the responses described by Grey and Sinclair (2006) and acknowledge that it may not. I played two roles simultaneously as this research project unfolded. I was studying as a fledgling academic and I was working as a leadership development practitioner within organizations. I wanted this writing to be compelling and rigorously academic, without being off-putting. I wanted readers to feel welcome and intrigued while exploring the intersection of academe and leadership development practice.

Many academics have studied issues important to organizational leaders (Day, 2000; Jackson & Parry, 2008; Storey, 2004); however, according to Hinkin, Holtom, and Klag (2007), the research results are rarely communicated effectively and there seems to be a disconnect between the scholars, practitioners, and organizational members. “Though numerous calls for more academic/practitioner collaboration have been made, there has been relatively little progress in achieving it” (Hinkin et al., 2007, p. 105). I wanted to design and participate in productive research while doing work I love in support of participants and their organizations. I wanted to apply what I learned in practice and deepen my understanding of what makes a difference to the organizations in which I work, so as a “pracademic” (thanks to Dr. Dan Wulff for the new word), I began writing this dissertation at the intersection of those two roles—practitioner and researcher.

This piece of writing has two primary objectives. One goal is to explain my findings and to answer the research question: What influence has the Government of Alberta Leadership Development Program had on participants, professionally and personally? The second goal, which is just as important as the first, is to tell the research story in a compelling manner and explain how I conducted the research, what I learned along the way, and how it integrated with and informed my day-to-day practice.