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Leader Identity Emergence of Study Group Facilitators

David R. Arendale, Amanda Hane, and Brian S. Fredrickson

Abstract

This qualitative study at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, USA, investigated leader identity emergence of study group facilitators. There is a gap in the professional literature regarding study group programs and identity emergence of the student paraprofessionals who facilitate the study sessions. This study built upon previous studies of identity formation by integrating educational theories that help explain the changes that occurred. Peer study group programs are powerful co-curricular experiences. This study provided answers to *why* and *how* identity emergence occurs. The Leader Identity Development Model for peer study group facilitators was developed based on the findings from this study and other experiences with study group leaders over the past three decades by David Arendale to help predict this change and the experiences that supported identity formation. Among those catalysts were written reflections by the study group leaders throughout the academic term on what they learned about themselves and about their conversations with other study leaders and the study group program manager. Implications are provided that explain how peer programs can become a more transformative learning ecosystem. Peer learning programs present an untapped personal and professional development opportunity for student leaders that would be even more powerful if it were intentional rather than serendipitous.

Introduction

Postsecondary and tertiary institutions have placed increased emphasis upon achieving student learning objectives (SLOs) and student development objectives (SDOs) (Patton, Rena, & Guido, 2016). Career preparedness is more than academic degree completion. Competency with SDOs provides an edge in job selection and career advancement. Some of these SDOs at the University of Minnesota (UMN, USA) include (a) problem-solving skills, (b) mastering knowledge and how to acquire it, and (c) understanding different philosophies and cultures. Co-curricular and extra-curricular activities can help develop SDOs. A few of the UMN SDOs include skill with (a) interacting with diverse individuals; (b) working independently, collaborating, and leading a group; and (c) completing tasks.

This research study examined how an academic peer study group program fostered development of essential commitments, experiences, and skills needed for future careers (Heckman & Kautz, 2012) including leader identity emergence. There is a significant gap in the research regarding personal and professional outcomes experienced by the peer study group leaders. Unfortunately, too much of the research involves simple surveys that are tabulated into frequency counts of particular skills that are acquired by the study group participants and student leaders. In addition to this gap, there has been little applied by educational theories to explain the emergence of identities by the study group leaders. This study builds upon previous work by

using theory to provide the how and why of identity formation by the study group leaders. This study provides a model that can be replicated by program managers of similar programs at other institutions to learn more about this process of change and the practical actions that can be taken to foster the development of their facilitators.

Research Context

The central question for this research study was whether the academic peer study group leader experience contributes to emergence of the facilitator's leader identity. Identity emergence is not the same thing as acquisition of leadership skills such as group organizing, public speaking, activity planning, and others. Our research question focused on what the study group leaders perceived about themselves—not on what new skills were acquired. Nearly all previous research studies (Arendale, 2019) have focused on skills, not identity formation. If this identity occurs as a result of the peer study leader experience, could the process for change be identified? If the process for change is understood, is it possible to be intentional about development of leader identity and skills for a study group leader? This research question first led to a careful examination of the professional literature of peer study group programs and then to careful formation of interview questions for the study group leaders, observation of them during study group sessions, and review of their journals where they recorded what they were experiencing and learning.

Review of the Professional Literature

This review of the literature is composed of three parts: (a) examination of seven major peer learning programs, (b) review of publications from these major programs related to leader identity and skills, and (c) theories that explain identity formation and student development. We first began by examining more than 1,550 descriptive and research publications related to postsecondary peer-led study groups in seven major programs: Accelerated Learning Groups (ALG), Emerging Scholars Program (ESP), Peer Assisted Learning (PAL), Peer-Led Team Learning (PLTL), Structured Learning Assistance (SLA), Supplemental Instruction/Peer Assisted Study Sessions (SI/PASS), and Video-based Supplemental Instruction (VSI) (Arendale, 2019). Most of the research literature reports contained simple grade comparisons of participants and nonparticipants in the study group programs along with some that contain simple survey frequency tabulations of student leader outcomes. In recent years, more studies are employing varying levels of rigor with quantitative and fewer qualitative methodologies. The rigorous studies are often results of dissertation research studies. The unevenness of the rigor and quality of research in the field is a major problem for study group programs and other student paraprofessional programs, as well. However, there were some of the peer learning program publications that contained rigorous evaluation protocols related to study group leader identity formation.

Of these 1,550 descriptive and research publications, 78 reported development of leader leadership skills, and a few indicated emergence of leader identity. Two-thirds were from SI/PASS programs and the remainder were from PLTL. Arranged in frequency order, the studies were from the U.S., Australia, United Kingdom, Sweden, Canada, Ireland, and South Africa.

Development of leadership skills and identity

The second phase of our literature review were the leadership-related outcomes. Those 78 studies addressed the following topics: leadership skills (39 studies), leadership roles (7 studies), leadership development (6 studies), leader identity emergence (4 studies), and a few other topics with one or two studies. Following is a summary of the relevant leader identity research literature. A dissertation by Mason-Innes (2015) investigated SI Leaders at a Canadian college through the lens of the Leadership Identity Development (LID) theory (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Maincella, & Osteen, 2005) described later in this literature review. Through a qualitative research design, Mason-Innes determined that SI Leaders were influenced through initial SI training; SI job experience; interaction with SI staff, fellow leaders, and students within the study sessions; and intentional reflections about the SI job experience through the academic term. She recommended vocabulary of leadership models be part of initial training to provide background prompts for SI Leaders as they reflected on their experience. She believed this could serve as a catalyst for LID.

Eller (2016) employed a transcendental phenomenological method to investigate SI Leaders at a U.S. institution using Schlossberg's transition theory as a theoretical framework. While more diffuse than the findings of Mason-Innes regarding leader identity described above, the emergence of desiring to help others academically and otherwise emerged for the SI Leaders as a theme. Malm, Bryngfors, and Morner (2012) investigated SI Leaders at a Swedish institution. Among the themes that emerged from their research were several related to self-perceptions by the SI Leader. In addition to leadership skill acquisition, the SI Leaders reported their heightened desires to help others and a growing confidence in themselves to perform the task. Clearly, their investment in their roles as SI Leaders went beyond that of simple student employment positions. Their relationships formed with the participating students propelled them to do more and act as leaders rather than only as a convener of the study groups.

Skalicky and Caney (2010) investigated student study group leaders employed within the Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) program at the University of Tasmania in Australia. In addition to the dozen themes that emerged from their research of leadership outcomes, they also documented the positive outcomes reported from the leaders that were promoted to serve as mentors to new PASS leaders. This is an area not explored by previous research studies.

Three recent research studies investigated the impact of serving as a study group leader on enhancing their employability skills. The study by Chase, Rao, Lakmala, and Varna-Nelson (2020) identified that among the skills acquired were leadership skills for other work venues. Chilvers and Waghorne (2018) reported similar findings with development of leadership skills through serving as study group leaders and application of those skills in jobs after graduation. Wilkinson and Brent (2019) reported similar outcomes with development of leadership and teamwork skills. While these three research studies reported the development of new skills, none of them specifically reported emergence of leader identities among the student study leaders.

In the final phase of the peer study group literature review, we examined theories for leader identity formation to understand processes that the study

leaders perceived of themselves. These theorists explained the location and process for leader identity emergence. We examined the most widely-used model for change of students during and after their college experience as well as theories related to leader identity development.

Involvement development theory

A leading theory for explaining student change in and after college is provided by Alexander Astin and his research colleagues (Astin, 1984, 1993). Astin sought to quantify the impact of the college environment through a model that considered nearly 200 variables: students' inputs (demographics, academic preparation, prior experiences), college environment, and outcomes (attitudes, job skills, knowledge). This model became known as the Involvement Theory and the Inputs-Environment-Outcomes (IEO) model (Astin, 1984). Astin divided the variables impacting students during the college environment into two categories. The first were named bridge involvement since they were the first set of decisions made by the student upon entering the college environment. Examples include selection of residence location, choice of major, new student orientation, and campus job training programs. The subsequent set of variables were named intermediate involvement since they were selected by the students during their time at the college. Examples include involvement with academic content, faculty members, work, and student peers (Astin, 1984, 1993). A consistent finding of the ongoing research study was that the student's peer group was the top influence upon a college student. College impact was a function of the quality of student experiences and the number or quantity of them.

Leader identity development (LID) theory

Leadership Identity Development (LID) theory focused on how people internally perceived themselves as a leader in a positional role or informally within a group (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005). Leader skills and identity are different. Often the professional literature regarding peer study group leaders mentions acquisition of small group management skills rather than emergence of a new identity as a leader. Leader identity is not taught—rather it emerges from interaction with others. Four influences are catalysts for leader identity emergence: (a) feedback from respected adults, (b) interaction with student peers, (c) meaningful involvement in a job or school project, and (d) reflective thinking by the student about interactions with others and the work itself (Komives et al., pg. 596, 2005).

A six-stage LID model was created by Komives, Dugan, Owen, Slack, and Wagner (2006) based on qualitative research with college students. A person moves from dependence, independence, and finally interdependence through interaction with others. Identity emerges as a person changes their view of self. The six stages are a continuum of leader identity for self. Stages one and two occur during childhood and adolescence. Stage one, awareness, recognizes authority figures (e.g., family members, school teachers, and other community members) to which a child is dependent. Stage two, exploration/engagement, occurs often during middle or high school. The young person interacts with authority members in the community (e.g., others in school, athletic events, and community organisations). The person may be elected, selected, or recognized for formal or informal leadership roles (e.g., employee, athlete team leader, elected school club president, active class discussion or project participant, or mentor to younger family members). Stages three through six

often occur post high school. In stage three, leader identified, leader identity occurs as result of formal appointment to a positional group leader in a hierarchical position. Power is held by this person without shared leadership responsibility for the group (e.g., club president, employee supervisor, or teaching assistant). With stage four, leadership differentiated, the leader seeks to influence rather than command others. Power is shifted to the group so that others help direct efforts. Stage five, generativity, occurs when the leader not only shares power, but is also active in developing leadership capability and agency by group members. The next generation of leaders is cultivated within the group so many achieve their leader identity. The final stage, integration/synthesis, occurs when the leader of the group cultivates connections with other groups for mutual goal achievement (e.g., alliance with other college resources, student clubs, or external advocacy organisations). The group leader seeks only to influence and promotes others into formal or informal leader positions.

Network leadership development theory

A corollary theory to extend the previously described theory is Network Leadership Development Theory (NLDT) (Meuser, Gardner, Dinh, Hu, Liden, & Lord, 2016). Moving beyond progression of leader identity through six stages, NLDT states that life and work are a complex interactive dynamic environment requiring all group members to achieve leader identity to solve complex problems. Both LID and NLDT are relational network leadership theories. However, NLDT flattens the hierarchical elements of LID by stating that all within the group must function at the upper levels of the leader identity scale. This places increased emphasis on appointed leaders to place equal energy for task accomplishment along with helping network members to achieve their own leader identity to jointly lead solutions to problems (O'Connor & Day, 2007). According to their theory, hierarchy is a barrier for increased productivity. People can be leaders through valuable contributions to group conversations and gentle nudges towards project goal achievement without formal appointment as leaders or talking often.

This review of the professional literature found that many other researchers identified leadership skill development, but few examined identity emergence for the student leaders. Theorists have identified useful models for understanding identity change regarding leadership. There is much opportunity for integration of practice and theory with peer learning programs. Part of this literature review is an overview of the college/tertiary institution that was the focus for this research study.

University of Minnesota (UMN) PAL Program in this Study

UMN is a public research-intensive institution with students enrolled in undergraduate, graduate, and professional school degrees. During Fall 2006, the Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) program began at UMN to increase student graduation rates and persistence in academically rigorous programs such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) (Arendale, 2014a). PAL incorporates best practices of Supplemental Instruction (SI) (Arendale, 1994), Peer-led Team Learning (PLTL) (Tien, Roth, & Kampmeier, 2002), and Emerging Scholars Program (ESP) (Treisman, 1986). They were required to participate in weekly study review sessions, and their attendance was reported to the target course professors and to the campus PAL administrator to track compliance. These sessions were led by an upper-division undergraduate

student employed by the campus learning centre (Arendale, 2014a). To clarify the student leader's role during PAL sessions, their formal title is *facilitator* rather than *leader*. During the academic term, an important objective for PAL sessions is for the facilitator to transfer leadership for the review session from themselves over to study group participants. Another reason for this title is the intentional use of varied collaborative learning activities during PAL sessions so all are highly engaged.

Facilitators engage in extensive training before and during the academic term. A two-day workshop precedes the academic term where they receive basic instruction with PAL session procedures; participate in mock PAL sessions, assuming roles of facilitators and students; and work in small groups to plan PAL sessions and reflect on choices made. During fall term, they enroll in a one-credit course taught by a faculty member who co-developed the campus PAL program and is an advisor to the PAL program administrator. Students read assigned educational theory articles applicable to the PAL program and engage in guided group discussion, discuss PAL participant behaviors, create solutions to improve the learning environment, and engage in open-ended discussions about their growth as a result of the PAL experience. As part of the course requirements, they maintain a weekly journal of their observations of their study group participants' behaviors and attitudes. In addition, they also record reflections on their own personal and professional growth. In these journal entries, facilitators note changes in their students and themselves over the academic term and record examples in weekly journal entries. A PAL staff member administers the PAL program, conducts periodic team meetings with the student staff throughout the academic term, and performs program evaluation. PAL facilitators complete a detailed end-of-term written reflection about their job experience (Arendale, 2014b).

Our research methodology was informed through our creation of the research question, review of the relevant literature, and our institution's implementation design for the study group program. To investigate our research question, we selected a qualitative research design.

Research Methodology

The 43 participants (23 females and 20 males) in the study were UMN Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) facilitators. All 43 facilitators participated in an initial two-day (14 clock hours) training workshop focused on their job duties, and they enrolled in the PAL facilitator professional development course, Exploring Facilitated Peer Learning Groups (Arendale, 2014b.) To be a PAL facilitator, their grade point average must exceed 3.5 on a 4.0 scale, and they must be sophomores or higher in their undergraduate studies. Data was collected through a weekly journal that PAL facilitators maintained about their PAL experiences to reflect upon their personal and professional growth. The facilitators were expressly requested to notice changes with themselves and their students by recording examples in their weekly journal entries.

In his role as course instructor for the professional development course, David Arendale also was primary investigator (PI) for this study. He was responsible for data collection. The data were obtained through the previously described required course. He created an online survey for students to complete and selected survey questions based on review of previous data collection efforts by other peer assistance learning programs (Arendale, 2019).

At the end of the PAL professional development course, online anonymous surveys were administered to the facilitators. Students were informed that the course instructor would not know which responses were attached to which individuals. To earn a passing grade in the course, a survey must be submitted. The survey consisted of 10 open-ended and two forced-choice items asking them to reflect upon their experience as PAL facilitators, the possible impact that they had on their students, and the impact of the program on the facilitators' development. Two survey items potentially relevant to identity emergence were analyzed for this research study: "...describe and give examples of how you increased your personal skills, changed attitudes, or increased your confidence" and "...how did the experience of serving as a PAL facilitator impact you?" The survey took 30 to 45 minutes to complete.

Three additional data sources were consulted to triangulate data obtained by this online survey to validate consistency among these multiple data sources. First, David Arendale compiled observation notes of facilitators as they talked during the PAL facilitator course and during individual meetings with them. Second, Arendale read weekly reflections required as part of the PAL course concerning their experiences in the PAL position. Third, audio recordings were made of 15 PAL facilitators interviewed by Arendale during which they responded to questions similar to the online survey. Arendale found their statements related to leader emergence consistent among all data sources.

Data Analysis

This study employed both deductive and inductive analysis. It was deductive as it replicated previous studies of leader identity emergence of study group leaders (Dreyfuss, 2012; Eller, 2016; Malm, Bryngfors, & Morner, 2012; Mason-Innes, 2015; Skalicky & Caney, 2010; and Zacharopoulou, Gites, & Condell, 2015) and more than 70 previous studies that identified leadership skill acquisition (Arendale, 2019). The study was inductive since it identified responses in two survey questions "...describe and give examples of how you increased your personal skills, changed attitudes, or increased your confidence" and "...how did the experience of serving as a PAL facilitator impact you?" through which leader identity emerged.

Responses to the open-ended survey items were analyzed using a modified version of the steps for inductive data analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). Data analysis was conducted by David Arendale (faculty member) and Amanda Hane (graduate research assistant). Both approached the research analysis and interpretation as equals and resolved differences to each other's satisfaction. In step one, responses were collected under each question. In step two, Arendale and Hane independently identified themes across responses. They came together to discuss themes and collaborate to reconcile differences. A preliminary list of codes was co-developed. Codes were based on themes that emerged from the data but were also informed by the survey items since one of the questions was a specific prompt about potential vocational influence while the other question was open ended. In step four, Hane and Arendale double coded where each independently applied the codes to the data, and then they met to discuss their appraisals. They continued this process of double coding until they met 80 percent or higher level of agreement to establish reliability based on generally accepted standards (Boyatzis, 1998). After the collaborative process was completed, several initial minor themes

were discarded due to insufficient number of facilitators associated with them. A final version of the major themes was established and final data analysis occurred.

Results

In this study, more than 90 percent of the 43 PAL facilitators described growth in leadership skills, which includes group management skills. Half of the 43 facilitators expressed emergence of leader identity. For many, perceiving themselves and being recognized by study group participants as leaders was a revelation. From this theme of leader identity emergence, four sub-themes were identified: (1) positional leader identity; (2) leader identity evoked conflicting emotions of awe, confidence, and fear; (3) identity emergence was dependent upon subject mastery and peer relationships; and (4) serving as sole positional leader of the study group evoked leader identity.

Positional leader identity

A quarter of the 43 facilitators depicted their self-concept as leader in terms of being “in charge” or as “an authority figure.” As one PAL facilitator remarked:

I have always been apt at public speaking, but there is something different about giving a speech and presenting material or being an authority figure among your peers that is hard to adjust to. At first, I struggled with seeing myself as in charge, but as the semester progressed, I got more comfortable with my role, and I think I will be more comfortable overall next semester.

This facilitator’s response suggested that being a leader was the power differential between them and the students. Another facilitator articulated this power in terms of the students’ reliance on facilitators to provide them with direction. “My leadership skills improved dramatically because I was forced to facilitate 30 students at a time who were all dependent upon me for what we were doing that day and how the PAL session was going to be run.” The structure of the sessions, then, may have reinforced feelings of leader identity.

The leader identity evoked conflicting emotions

Five of the 43 facilitators expressed how being “in charge” was especially intimidating because most were leading sessions among students who were their age or slightly younger.

I had to walk in front of a group of 30 students the first day, all of whom immediately looked up to me as a leader even though I was their same age. That forces you to become a better leader.

A common result of the facilitator experience was increased confidence. A facilitator stated, “To me, doing PAL sessions is really helpful to gain confidence when I talk in front of many faces. Wh[y] should I listen to you?” Accordingly, a quarter of PAL facilitators were surprised when students responded well to them as leaders within the study group sessions.

Knowing that I can lead a group of students and gain their respect is a good feeling. I really didn't think I would be able to walk in on the first day and tell them what to do, but it is amazing to me that the students

responded as well as they did, both to direction and to the activities I planned.

This responsiveness most likely reinforced the facilitators' self-concept as a confident leader through the expressed respect and supportive behaviors by the study group participants. Four facilitators expressed fear and awe of the responsibility. One leader stated it this way:

I definitely increased my personal skills, attitude, and confidence. I feel much more comfortable and confident now standing in front of a group of students that expect something from me. It feels like I was someone they looked up to. Being a PAL facilitator comes with a lot of responsibilities.

At first, commanding respect and leading a PAL session was often a fearful prospect for nearly half the facilitators. Several facilitators described the growth in confidence in their leadership abilities and leader identity that resulted from the process of facing their fears.

Being a PAL facilitator has greatly increased my self-confidence and shown me that I can be a leader. I was a bit scared on the first day when I had to introduce myself and the program, but after the first session, I had a sense of liberation from my fear, and I could tell that I had gained so much confidence just from that first day.

This process of facing fears may be one of the key mechanisms toward which leader self-efficacy is achieved, contributing to leader self-concept emergence.

Identity emergence dependent upon subject mastery and peer relationships

For other facilitators, their self-concept as leaders seemed to be tied to subject matter expertise, or being "a steward of knowledge" as one facilitator expressed it: "I feel more confident in front of others, I have more self-discipline and responsibility from preparing sessions and as a steward of knowledge." Another facilitator stated, "PAL immensely increased my confidence in my ability to get up in front of a class of students and be solid in the knowledge that I am qualified to be helping them with the content." For this facilitator, leadership meant not only having a firm grasp of the subject matter, but also *feeling* qualified as a subject-matter expert. Finally, one facilitator discussed leader self-concept not only in terms of the academic setting but also related to the personal relationships the facilitator formed with students.

[PAL] additionally increased my confidence in that the students were always interested in what classes I took, what major track I'm on, questions about foreign languages, and just general student life questions. It was nice to know that I could impart lessons I've learned along the way to my students, and that they value my advice.

This dynamic was most likely made possible by the fact that facilitators had some degree of authority in the sessions based on their position, and in some cases their age, but they were also peers to the students in many ways.

Serving as sole positional leader of the study group evoked leader identity

A quarter of the 43 facilitators were simultaneously in teacher training programs where they had led classes in the past, but under observation or with the help of a teacher. Several facilitators discussed how leading PAL sessions on their own was a vastly different experience, which contributed to a more noticeable increase in their leadership skills and emergence of the leader self-concept.

I grew sooooo much within the PAL program. Prior to the PAL program, I had already participated in over 100 hours of observations throughout three different schools through the DirecTrack program for my initial licensure program, although I claim that I took out and grew more from PAL than all of that time. It is so interesting to be the one in front of the class with everyone's eyes looking at you with the expression, "What do we do next?!" Something like that is certainly not felt during observations when there is a teacher, [o]ther than you, that has the reins and leading the class.

Being the sole person "in charge" may be another element of the PAL program structure that helped facilitators develop their self-concept as a leader since they needed to internalize a new identity to perform their role as the study group facilitator. The findings from this research study, as well as additional lessons learned over 30 years working with peer learning programs, led David Arendale to create the Leader Identity Development Model for peer study group facilitators (Figure 1) to help explain the process for leader identity formation.

Discussion

Findings from our study suggest that PAL facilitators self-identified as leaders due to experience within PAL and reflection on themselves. This new identity emerged from job duties as facilitator; feedback from the participating students, fellow facilitators, and the program administrator; recognition as a subject-matter expert; and numerous written reflections about themselves with growth in personal and professional dimensions. These are similar to the findings from the Mason-Innes (2015) study. Other facilitators grew in leader identity by bridging the roles of peer and superior—building relationships with students through their status as peer while also sharing their knowledge and experience. Twelve of the students who previously engaged in student teaching programs under the supervision of another teacher described facilitating sessions by themselves as leading to an increase in their leader self-concept. Findings from this study support previous research on emerging leader self-concept. Emery, Daniloski, and Hamby (2011) found that leader identity was not a necessary precondition for leadership position selection, but being placed in a leadership role could cultivate recognition of their leader identity. This finding coincides with many of the PAL facilitators' initial reports of feeling anxious and unsure of themselves; the leader self-concept for these facilitators may have been low at the beginning of the program, which would be at stage three (positional authority) of the LID theory of Komives et al. (2005) since they were appointed leaders of the study sessions and initially held most power.

Facilitator self-reflections and behaviors displayed when engaging with the study group participants demonstrated movement to higher-stage levels of LID: leadership differentiated, generativity, and integration/synthesis. The PAL

facilitators influenced rather than relied on their position power, delegated authority to participants, sought to raise agency of participants, encouraged their ownership of the group, and recognized their leader identity. This maturation underscored that being appointed to a leadership position could in and of itself promote leader self-concept through their experience with the study group and its members. PAL facilitators expressed need for positive feedback about their performance to reinforce their self-concept and sense of efficacy as leaders. They also indicated that their leadership self-concept was supported by student feedback in their sessions as well as by the PAL administrator in entrusting them with the role.

In their study of student leadership, Rubin, Bartels, and Bommer (2002) found that perceived intellectual competence of a student leader was associated with group recognition of the student as a leader, but that recognition was not significantly affected by whether the student was intellectually more advanced than the group or simply perceived as such. Our study upheld this finding since only 10 percent of the 43 facilitators cited academic expertise as a source of leader identity. Facilitators' responses state that it was not their intellectual abilities that undergirded their leader identity but the way the role symbolized "steward[ship] of knowledge." One facilitator described this dynamic as "being solid in the knowledge that I am qualified to be helping them with the content." It should be noted that this student did not express being "solid" in his or her knowledge of the subject matter, but rather "solid that I am qualified" to fulfill the role of "steward." As noted above, the role might have shaped perceptions of the facilitator's leadership competence, which in turn might have reinforced the leader identity.

Being the sole facilitator in the room also seemed to provide the facilitator the freedom to take risks and the responsibility to guide the sessions, which may also have led to a sense of being a leader. Initially, commanding respect and leading a PAL session was often a fearful prospect for many facilitators. Several facilitators described growth in confidence as a leader by facing their fears. This process of facing fears may be a key mechanism toward which leader self-efficacy is achieved and leader self-concept recognized.

An earlier and less developed version of the Leader Identity Development Model for peer study group facilitators was developed by David Arendale based on his work with peer learning programs over the past three decades to help explain the behavioral and attitudinal changes of student paraprofessionals serving in the PAL program and elsewhere. The basic structure of the model is based on Astin's Involvement Theory (1984, 1993) and the leader identity emergence elements as well as the Komives et al. (2005) LID Theory and work of Meuser et al. (2016). While the previous LID emergence models provided general guidance for growth of the students, this new model incorporated more specific student involvement variables based on Arendale's observations of peer study group operation, interviews with his peer study group leaders, review of the professional literature regarding leader identity and leadership skill acquisition by student peer study leaders (Arendale, 2019), and findings from this research study. This working model is represented by Figure 1. The model helps to explain the findings of this research study.

Due to the interactive nature of student growth, it is recommended to view the model less as a hierarchical model for linear growth and more as an ecosystem

in which students move among identity stages in response to their involvement in the postsecondary/tertiary learning environment. Huijser, Kek, Abawi, and Lawrence (2019) identified a healthier environment for students to thrive for growth.

...an agile ecology for learning allows for the extension of the learning environment well beyond the university walls....seeking, harnessing and leveraging connections within what students bring to the formal learning environments (e.g., creativity) from other parts of the agile ecology for learning and the aim is thus to blur the boundaries between these different systems, both in a spatial and a temporal sense, in such a way that their connections become seamless. Our argument is that the more seamless or porous the ecology becomes, the more students' prior learning and creativity will be sought, harnessed and leveraged (p. 139).

As stated earlier, this ecosystem is dynamic with students cycling among the variables as they continue to grow throughout their college experience. The Input Variables column in this model represented in Figure 1 recognizes what future PAL facilitators bring with them: personal variables such as demographics, skills, personalities, and more. Separately, prior roles in leadership place them at different leader identity stages as outlined by Komives et al. (2005) or network leadership roles as identified by Meuser et al. (2016). Finally, their prior interest in the PAL program creates a baseline for their reasons and anticipated outcomes of the facilitator job.

The next major category of variables was the College Environment. As mentioned earlier, much of this design was influenced by Astin's model for explaining change within the college environment (1984, 1993.) Within this large overarching category, it was divided into two smaller clusters of variables. The Bridge Involvement column identified activities and decisions occurring immediately prior to interacting with the college environment. Initial training camps, orientations, and workshops occur before students began their roles with student paraprofessional jobs, undergraduate teaching assistantships, and participation on sports teams. During these activities, they received basic training for their roles and setting of expectations. These activities often included reflective writing, role-plays, and practices. At the same time as their formal or informal preparation for a particular activity, such as being an extended orientation leader, they concurrently made initial decisions and experienced other activities. Bridge involvement activities and decisions shaped the rest of their college experience, which was defined as Intermediate Involvement.

The Intermediate Involvement column was the second cluster of variables under the College Environment and contained the rest of the college experience. In the case of this model, it represented student experience during their first academic term in their student paraprofessional role or their involvement in an organization or sports team. Time was divided into five categories: (a) the work experience; (b) ongoing training, which could include a variety of activities such as team meetings, a formal leader course, observing other students at work, mentoring, communities of practices with other students, or debriefing with coach, administrator, or other student leaders; (c) personal written reflections of their work and discussions with others; (d)

Implications

Based on the findings and the discussion of the results, a number of implications have been identified for peer study programs at UMN and for peer programs at other institutions. As illustrated through this research study, student study group programs are co-curricular incubators of student development outcomes. Formal leadership programs are delivered most often through workshops, academic term courses, and academic minors or majors. While direct instruction in leadership is useful, a co-curricular approach such as campus mentoring, orientation, or academic study group program provides a living laboratory to try out leadership approaches, reflect upon them, and develop their own leader identity. Komives et al. (2011) describe approaching leadership education as a developmental process. It would be important to position the program as a field experience to practice leadership skills. Following are our suggestions for a campus study group program.

1. **Integrate leadership vocabulary into the program.** Raise awareness of basic concepts and leadership vocabulary within the initial training program, group discussions, and written reflections. Allow facilitators to make connections between the vocabulary and their lived experiences. The study group administrator could join leadership professional associations, read journals in the field, and make connections with others on campus involved with leadership education. Komives et al. (2011) provide a comprehensive list of these resources.
2. **Create leadership opportunities.** Create opportunities for study group leaders to exercise leadership within the campus study group program. This could include delivering initial and advanced training workshops for fellow peers, organizing social activities for fellow peer leaders to encourage bonding and morale, and other activities.
3. **Intentional use of reflections.** Facilitators could complete private weekly reflective journal entries regarding their past week's experiences. One prompt asks them to share leadership experiences within the group and their perception of themselves as leaders. These entries could be shared during meetings with fellow study group leaders and staff. Intentional reflection is a powerful catalyst for development (Zacharoppulou, Giles, & Condell, 2015).
4. **Assess leadership development.** Assess the leadership skill development and leader identity stage of the study group leaders through a survey, end-of-term reflective journal entry, weekly journal entries, focus group session, or personal interviews. This information could be included with annual reports to upper-level administrators to document attainment of these outcomes. This enhancement broadens the impact of the program and may provide additional rationale for stable or increased funding. This assessment will require more rigorous qualitative methodology than is typically employed to identify the nuanced outcomes peer study leaders' experience.

The major implication from this research and a review of the professional literature is the opportunity to expand the vision of a campus study group program. Repositioning it from a standalone academic help model to one that is a comprehensive co-curricular development experience for both the study

group participants and the student study leaders recognizes its potential for increasing student outcomes (SLOs and SDOs).

Limitations

While this research study has yielded a number of findings and implications, there are several limitations to the assumption that it will work effectively elsewhere. The first is the use of facilitator perceptions of their job experience. It is possible that they made errors in interpretation of the PAL experience. Second, the majority of the college courses served by the PAL program were undergraduate science and mathematics courses. It is possible a wider range of academic subjects and at the upper-division or graduate school level could have fostered different results. Third, one of the researchers is also the instructor for the PAL professional development course. Finally, PAL sessions at an open admission institution might have derived different interactions. These limitations create opportunities for further research on identity formation of student study group leaders.

Areas for Further Research

More research is needed about leader identity formation. A study could be conducted in which leader identity is included as part of the facilitators' training program and the outcomes could be measured as a result. Creation of a pre- and post-assessment could help measure change in their identity. Similar studies could be conducted to measure leader identity development in other academic or student affairs programs such as with teaching assistants, residence hall staff, and orientation programs. A longitudinal study could follow former facilitators to understand if there was residual influence of the experience with their leader identity in the workplace. A deeper investigation of network leadership theory could be done by recording study group sessions and analyzing the conversation among members. This could identify group members who are overlooked for their valuable contributions, which are masked by traditional studies that focus on impact on the appointed leader. This deeper level of analysis can identify more participants who have achieved leader identity but due to being quiet are overlooked.

Conclusion

This study began with a research question concerning leader identity emergence by peer study group leaders. The qualitative study identified how the experience as study group facilitators led to self-discovery of new leader identity and offers reasons *how* and *why* this occurred. It is a subtle shift from practicing the job role as appointed leader or group manager of a study group to embracing a leader identity. Several leadership theories predicted outcomes experienced by the PAL leaders. As a result of this research study and previous experience with peer learning programs and their student study leaders, David Arendale created the Leader Identity Development Model for peer study group facilitators. This model can be applied with other student paraprofessional roles to predict leader identity emergence and the key variables that can foster them. Peer learning programs present an untapped co-curricular experience that could be more powerful if they were intentional rather than serendipitous. The article provides guidance on how to be intentional with the development of personal and professional outcomes for students. For example, a key catalyst for the emerged identity was reflection on what the study group leader was learning about themselves and conversation with fellow study leaders and the program administrator. Leader identity emergence and interpersonal skill

development in helping other students could help prepare student leaders for a future career.

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