The Social Change Model as Pedagogy: Examining Undergraduate Leadership Growth

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Abstract

Understanding whether leadership can be learned is important as many colleges and universities attempt to develop future leaders through a variety of programmatic efforts. Historic leadership research argues leadership is an innate skill. While contemporary leadership research tends to argue that leadership can be learned. The purpose of this paper is to examine student leadership skill development during a leadership course at a regional, mid-western university. This project explored the effects on undergraduate students after a 16-week, for-credit academic course based on the Social Change Model of Leadership (SCM). This project was completed using a quasi-experimental design between two non-equivalent groups. Participants completed the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale as a pre/post-test. The findings suggested that student SCM skill-based knowledge did improve compared to students who did not receive the intervention and subsequently that post-industrial leadership skills associated with the SCM can be learned in a structured, academic course.

Introduction

Most student leadership research from the last few decades has focused on individual students and how those students mature into their own leadership world view. A smaller branch has focused on whether or not a particular academic program is meeting the learning objectives of being a top-notch leadership program or intervention (Dugan, in press). Even with numerous leadership studies completed, little is known about how leadership develops or how a student's leadership voice evolves over time (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Therefore, the process of studying leadership as a teachable skill is a much more modern paradigm. Leadership articles, books, and studies abound, but few research projects test models to examine leadership development which would eventually inform practitioners (Dugan, 2006b). This project aims to address these inadequacies and to further test an academic model of leadership development in a classroom setting.

Past research endeavors have looked at knowledge retention and skill development over the span of a semester, with regards to collegiate student leadership development. Williams, Townsend, & Linder (2005) suggested that leadership knowledge learned in an academic classroom can be retained by students at a similar rate up to three years after course completion. Blackwell, Cummins, Townsend, and Cummings (2007) found that student perceptions of their own leadership skills did improve over the span of a semester with both practical and theoretical skills enhanced in a formal setting. While these studies targeted measures applicable to their specific settings, this current project attempted to use a widely recognized curriculum known as the Social Change Model and measured students with the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale (SRLS). Previous research projects have tested models during a classroom experience and showed a change but this project incorporated a control group. Therefore, this project attempted to show that any change in pre/post test scores occurred as a result of the intervention. Also, the SRLS survey has been in use for over a decade with strong internal validity and reliability. While specific knowledge retention is not the key focus of this project, student knowledge does lend itself to the personal growth tenets of the SCM as a student works to develop leadership skills.

Can the tenets of the Social Change Model of Leadership (SCM) be learned? More specifically, can the SCM be taught and learned in an undergraduate classroom? Some universities have launched full scale academic majors and minors in leadership development while maintaining co-curricular trainings in Student Life and Residential Life (Brungardt, Greenleaf, Brungardt, & Arensdorf, 2006). Research indicates that college students can and do increase their

leadership skills while attending college (Dugan, 2006b). It is during this time in which a student's personal identity is being formed and reformed through the process of attending a college (Chickering & Reiser, 1993). Therefore the development of future leaders continues to be a main goal for colleges and universities in both curricular and co-curricular venues (Astin & Astin, 2000). This paper outlines the following structure: theoretical framework, purpose, population, methodology, results, summary, and end with a discussion. The first section will examine the framework which led to this project.

Theoretical Framework

For those who choose to lead in a collegiate setting many leadership training opportunities exist such as weekend retreats, co-curricular learning opportunities, and formal academic leadership courses. The latter is the focus of this project. It is clear that a struggle still exists with defining leadership and with the aspect of determining who will serve as our next leaders (Billsberry, 2009). Also, the broader question regarding whether or not leadership can be learned at all, has received a lot of attention in both the academic world and the practitioner world alike (Extejt & Smith, 2009). As a result, the proper examination of leadership is ongoing and definitions of leadership are vast and ever changing (Watt, 2009). To help college students become productive parts of society, colleges and universities work to train students in both curricular and co-curricular aspects of development. This has led to the advent of leadership education, both in and out of class, as a means to offer a significant and structured program in colleges and universities in the United States of America (Billsberry, 2009). With that advent there are many leadership development models for educators to choose from regarding teaching leadership.

A primary objective of an institution of higher education is to prepare students to become effective leaders within their communities for the betterment of society (Astin, 1993). The most obvious way to push for productive change is for higher educational systems to use a direct student leadership skill building program which will produce effective leaders (Astin, 1993).

Therefore, it is arguably time for colleges and universities to move beyond the tag lines in their mission statements about developing tomorrow's leaders and beyond teaching singular skills during a retreat to focusing on the broader, more complex vision of effective leadership (Komives et al., 1998). Students must be trained in the art of using multiple perspectives to solve real-world, complex issues (Hughes, Ginnet, & Curphy, 2006). Students must learn that leadership is a means to deal with the complexities and change found within their surroundings. Knowing this will help them learn coping skills to deal with their organization's

needs (Watt, 2009). Consequently, student leadership development must include a dynamic environment of strategic events with a heavy reliance on theoretical application, mixed with hands on learning of leadership knowledge with built-in reflection (Hughes et al., 2006; Komives et al., 1998).

The Social Change Model

One of the possible models to teach leadership is the Social Change Model (SCM) (HERI, 1996). The SCM was developed to act as curriculum to aid in the development of Individual values, Group values, and Community values (citizenship) (Astin, 1993). The SCM provides a framework which is consistent with contemporary, post-industrial leadership paradigms where leadership is viewed much more democratically (Dugan & Komives, 2007). There are two basic premises of the Social Change Model of Leadership. First, the model is designed to be inclusive of all levels of leaders: those with designated roles and those without set roles. The second premise is that leadership is viewed as a process and not a title or position (HERI, 1996).

Figure 1. Social Change Model of Leadership

The Social Change Model of Leadership
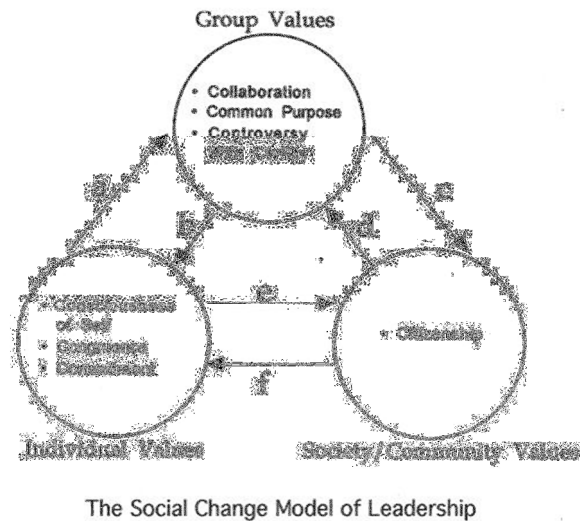
Reprinted from HERI (1996). *A social change model of leadership development: Guidebook version III.* Los Angeles: University of California Los Angeles Higher Education Research Institute. [Guideboks are available from the Natinal Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs; http://www.nclp.umd.edu/]

The SCM model promotes the values of social justice, equality, self-knowledge, empowerment, collaboration, citizenship, and service to the community by covering three distinct aspects of leadership development: Individual, Group, and

Community values (HERI, 1996). This curriculum, when fused with intentional theoretical and application-based activities, seemingly creates a well-rounded classroom experience. In this study, an experimental group was exposed to an intervention based on the SCM and utilized the most recent version of the text *Leadership: Theory and Practice* by Peter Northouse. Participants were examined over a 16-week semester-long experience. Since the SCM is based on Individual, Group, and Community values, all three aspects were covered in the intervention.

Individual Values

During the intervention, students were continually asked to examine Individual values by completing several personal reflection papers within the course to help strengthen their personal leadership vision. Students were also asked to complete well known, self-assessment tools found at the end of the text's chapter such as: The Style Questionnaire, Skills Inventory, the LMX7, the Least Preferred Co-worker Measure (LPC), to name a few. Students shared their scores with their peers in small and large groups and discussions ensued. Students were faced with perceptions of self which may have differed from their own thoughts, but also interacted with other students with similar and students with dramatically different scores. This helped students begin to understand that leaders must be able to know one's self and be able to function in groups with dramatically different people.

Group Values

Students were faced with learning about Group values by means of graded group projects (by faculty and by peers) and several group based hands-on activities. The largest assignment in the course focused on solving a peer authored case study. The students negotiated the case, the protocol for solutions, and then applied a theory from the text to solve the case. The group presented their findings and the teams authored a paper which outlined their decision making process. These activities, which may seem similar to other group projects, begin to become "leadership practice." Even the process of selecting a case study from a book builds on practical skills such as collaboration, civility, and common purpose. These are the three elements from the Group value section of the SCM.

Community Values

To examine Community values, students were required to complete five service hours at a non-profit agency and also work together as a class to fundraise for a local non-profit agency. This aspect fits well with the millennial generation as they are often defined by dedicating large amount of service to their communities

(Howe & Strauss, 2000). Students were evaluated by the site and received immediate feedback based on their service. This helps to satisfy the Community value aspect of the SCM as students receive immediate feedback to help guide personal reflection. Being exposed to non-profit fundraising allowed the students to grasp the concept of group impact and Community values while fundraising thousands of dollars – a feat no single student could have done alone. For each endeavor listed above, students wrote reflection papers to examine their Individual, Group, and Community value development.

Purpose

The purpose of this experiment was two-fold: to assess the learning outcomes of the introduction to leadership course and to compare two non-equivalent groups test scores for the Social Responsible Leadership Scale (SRLS) (University of Maryland, 2010) over the period of a 16-week semester. The SRLS is a set of statistically reliable and valid scales designed to measure the critical values of the (SCM). It was hypothesized that the assessment of the course would show positive growth for the leadership students and that cumulative SRLS scores from the experimental group, as a result of a Leadership course intervention, would show a greater increase compared to the control group not receiving the intervention.

Population

Participants were undergraduate students from a regional, mid-western university. The total population consisted of 260 students with an experimental group (Group A, n=108) and a control group (Group B, n=152). This project used a quasi-experimental design. As a result, Group A consisted of students enrolled in one of six sections of the introduction to leadership course taught by four unique faculty members and Group B was made up of a variety of psychology students from multiple sections with multiple instructors from that discipline. Students from Group B could not have taken the Leadership course in the past or be enrolled in that course during the semester when the data were collected. Participants from each section were given a unique code at the pre-test and were then matched with that code in order to take the post-test. The majority of respondents (69%) were female and the average age of the population was approximately 20 years old (μ=19.9). Seniors represented the largest class standing size (32%) with sophomores and juniors combining for over half (51%) of the sample. The remaining 17% were first semester freshman.

Each group was tested at the same university in the same time frame and Group A and B were relatively similar in demographics details (e.g., age, class standing

breakdown, gender, ethnicity). Out of class or co-curricular activity information was not collected. It was believed that with the Introduction to Leadership course being offered in the fall semester, that there would be many freshmen. Asking them to report on "co-curricular activities in college" would be challenging as the pre-test was given on the first day of the semester. Interestingly, freshmen represented the smallest class standing with only 17%. Knowing that there is a developmental difference between a new college student and a senior, the authors decided to make an assumption regarding the entire population. With this in mind, the authors hypothesized that both groups were exposed to the same amount of out-of-class opportunities, life experiences, and were certainly more similar than different. To determine if the groups were statistically different at the time of the pre-test, group demographics were compared. The results of an independent group sample t-test $t(108, 152)=.719$, $p =.473$ indicated that Group A and Group B were not significantly different at the time of the pre-test.

Methodology

To measure the impact of the intervention, participants took the 68 item Social Responsible Leadership Scale (SRLS). Participants completed a hard copy of the pre/post-test of the SRLS during the fall semester of 2008. The pre-test was given on the first day of class and the post-test was given at the end of the semester. To the best of both authors' knowledge, the SRLS has not been used to examine student leadership development during a 16-week intervention. As stated earlier, past authors have used other models during a classroom experience and shown a change (Williams, Townsend, & Linder, 2005; Blackwell et al., 2007) but this project incorporated a quasi-experimental design with a control group. Therefore this project attempted to show that the change in student scores was due to the parameters of the intervention.

The SRLS scale is routinely used to measure events such as: weekend retreats, seminars, or other programs. The SRLS examines the 7 Cs of leadership development – *consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, common purpose, collaboration, controversy with civility, and citizenship*. These constructs are based on three levels: self, peers, and community. Questions are formatted in a Likert Scale, ranging from 1 to5, with 1 as Strongly Disagree and 5 as Strongly Agree. Validity and reliability of the scale were evaluated during its original testing (Tyree, 1998; University of Maryland, 2010) with Cronbach alpha scores ranging from .69-.92. Similarly, the SRLS exhibited strong reliability in this study as well, with Cronbach Alpha scores ranging from .70 - .85.

Data from the SRLS were recorded in SPSS 17 with means scores calculated for individuals on each of the seven constructs (7 Cs). A difference score between

pre- and post-test means on each construct was also calculated for each individual. Lastly, an overall mean score for all items on the SRLS was also calculated for individuals in both groups. The difference and mean scores were then examined across groups to determined if mean differences existed between the experimental and control group. Pre-test, post-test, and difference scores for the experimental and control groups are presented in Tables 1 and 2 respectively.

Findings

To determine if differences existed between the experimental group's overall mean score (μ=4.027) and the control group (μ=3.991) at the time of the pre-test, cumulative SRLS scores were examined for mean differences. Results of an independent sample t-test indicated (*t*=.719, *p*= .473) that groups were not significantly different at the time of the pretest. This data helps support the assumption that experimental and control group participants were from the same population (e.g., "undergraduate students from a regional mid-western university") prior to administration of the intervention. Following the intervention, mean cumulative SRLS-RS scores rose in both the experimental group (μ=4.202) and control group (μ=3.998). Post-test mean scores were examined for mean difference and results indicated (*t*=4.647, *p*<.001) that the experimental and control groups were significantly different at the time of the post-test.

Table 1
Pre-test, Post-test, and Difference Mean Scores for Experimental Group

SCM Construct	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference
Individual Values			
Consciousness of Self	3.937	4.101	*0.164*
Congruence	4.102	4.307	*0.205*
Commitment	4.387	4.520	*0.133*
Group Values			
Collaboration	4.094	4.250	*0.156*
Common Purpose	4.115	4.295	*0.18*
Controversy with Civility	3.953	4.087	*0.134*
Community Values			
Citizenship	4.028	4.288	*0.26*
Change	3.809	3.979	*0.17*
OVERALL	4.027	4.202	***0.175***

$*t(108)=4.402, p<.001$

To further understand the differences between the pre/post-test scores of the experimental and control groups, difference scores for each of the SCM dimensions were compared between the groups using an ANOVA. An ANOVA was chosen for several reasons. First, it is assumed that relationships existed between the 7 Cs in the SCM model and therefore should be examined simultaneously instead of independently. Second, an ANOVA is a preferred test to avoid the potential risk of inflating the Type I error rate by running multiple *t*-tests.

Table 2
Pre-test, Post-test, and Difference Mean Scores for Control Group

SCM Construct	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference
Individual Values			
Consciousness of Self	3.975	3.988	*0.013*
Congruence	4.184	4.157	*-0.027*
Commitment	4.394	4.379	*-0.015*
Group Values			
Collaboration	4.077	4.039	*-0.038*
Common Purpose	4.027	4.082	*0.055*
Controversy with Civility	3.901	3.895	*-0.006*
Community Values			
Citizenship	3.890	3.929	*0.039*
Change	3.734	3.749	*0.015*
OVERALL	3.991	3.998	*0.007**

*t(152)=.330, p<.742

Results of the ANOVA indicated that scores for the experimental group after the intervention were significantly different from the control group on five of the eight constructs (Table 3). These included the Groups Values of *Collaboration*, *Common Purpose*, and *Controversy with Civility*. It also included the Community Values of *Citizenship* and *Change.* All three Individual Values, *Consciousness of Self*, *Congruence*, and *Collaboration*, were not significantly different between groups.

Table 3
Comparison of Difference Scores Between Groups

SCM Construct	MS	*F*	*p*
Individual Values			
Consciousness of Self	.179	.408	.524
Congruence	.146	.377	.540
Commitment	.570	1.785	.183
Group Values			
Collaboration	1.638	5.894	**.016***
Common Purpose	2.871	11.557	**.001***
Controversy with Civility	1.881	6.764	**.010***
Community Values			
Citizenship	7.795	14.908	**.001***
Change	2.871	11.557	**.001***
SCM Construct	MS	*F*	*p*

*p<.05

For those constructs exhibiting significant mean differences between the experimental and control group, further analysis was conducted to explore the mean differences between pre- and post-test scores within the groups. Paired sample *t*-tests were conducted on the constructs of *Collaboration*, *Common Purpose*, *Controversy with Civility*, *Citizenship*, and *Change* for both the experimental and control groups. Results of these tests are presented in Table 4. Similar to the findings of the ANOVA, these results indicate that significance differences exist between the pre and post-test mean scores of experimental group respondents across these fives constructs. Likewise, all mean differences across the control group were insignificant, with the exception of the *Common Purpose* construct.

Table 4

Examination of Difference Scores Within Groups For Significant Factors

SCM Construct	Experimental[1] t-score p-value	Control[2] t-score p-value
Group Values		
Collaboration	3.318 **.001***	1.408 .161
Common Purpose	4.223 **.001***	1.991 **.048***
Controversy with Civility	3.248 **.002***	210 .834
Community Values		
Citizenship	5.477 **.001***	1.041 .299
Change	3.529 **.001***	.427 .670

[1] sample size *t(108)*
[2] sample size *t(152)*
*p<.05

Discussion

This research supports that the experimental group's scores increased over the span of the semester. Also, the intervention of a 16-week for-credit academic leadership course created a strong environment for learning the aspects of the Social Change Model of Leadership (SCM). Both Group A and Group B started at relatively the same level on the SRLS with the Experimental Group's (Group A) overall mean of 4.027 and the Control Group's (Group B) overall mean of 3.991. After the intervention, Group A's overall mean increased to 4.202 and Group B's increased by a very small level to 3.998. Group A's leadership skill development was also marked by significant mean differences from Group B in five of the eight SCM constructs.

Individual Values

Three of the eight constructs did not show mean differences. All three fell within the Individual values: *Consciousness of Self*, *Congruence*, and *Commitment*. Interestingly, Group B started with higher mean scores at the pre-test, but Group

A ended with higher mean scores in all three cases. So it could be argued that Group A improved during the intervention more than Group B although the change was not large enough to be significant. This may be due a high level of self awareness from the control group. A majority of that group represented advanced psychology students with a strong academic link to understanding and studying the "self." There may also have been a level of response shift bias (Rohs, 2002) as students in both groups may have over reported at the pre-test minimizing the final comparison of mean scores.

Komives et al. (2005) suggested that understanding the latter two SCM levels of Group and Community required a much deeper and more critical understanding of leadership found in a more developed student. This is similar to Chickering and Reisser's (1993) work which outlined the logical progression through vectors, the next level building on the last. Therefore since the Group and Community values were found to show significant mean differences between groups, the students fulfilling those aspects must have had "Individual" knowledge as well.

Group Values

Significant mean differences were found in all three Group values categories. In all three cases, Group A started and ended with higher mean scores than Group B. This may imply that the students in Group A already have developed some of the SCM group skills prior to the intervention when compared to Group B. More importantly, Group A appeared to improve and sharpen their skills as a result of the intervention while Group B witnessed a decrease in the mean scores of two of the three group categories (*Collaboration* and *Controversy with Civility* found in Table 2). The *Common Purpose* category did meet significance for Group B. This may be due to the fact that most of the psychology students were upperclassmen with psychology majors. Therefore, their cohort experience may have allowed them to develop shared aims and shared values during their time together.

Community Values

The final element of the SCM is the Community values. Both components were found to have significant mean differences when comparing the pre and post-test scores of Group A to Group B. Students in Group B were not exposed to service opportunities while in class. Dugan (2006b) indicated that connecting community service to a collegiate experience enhanced the leadership achievement level for those students. Service projects created an opportunity for students to experience positive social change. He suggested that service should be built into an experience as a way to enhance a student's knowledge of the SCM (Dugan, 2006b). The findings in this project strongly support that claim. The personal

reflections after a service project may have transformed and enhanced student development. Due to the cyclical nature of the SCM, this reflection may also have impacted the student's perception of self.

The findings support the idea that the principles of the Social Change Model can be learned. Also supported was Howe and Strauss's claim (2000) that students of the current generation understand that service was part of their existence and it was no longer viewed as negative consequence or something that was required. They now view service and giving to those in need as a way to positively impact a community which should lead to positive social change (HERI, 1996). Each group was tested at the same university in the same time frame and they were relatively similar in demographics details and assumed similar in the amount of out-of-class opportunities and life experiences. Therefore the results indicate that the intervention impacted Group A's SCM skill set. It allowed Group A to nurture their SCM leadership skills, work on peer leadership projects, and participate in non-profit agency service projects. The intervention also provided an appropriate model for teaching and learning leadership to college-aged students.

Conclusions

For the past few decades, colleges and universities have developed leaders inside and outside of the classroom. It is time for leadership educators both co-curricular and academic based to embrace newly emerging paradigms. These newer ideas see leadership as a skill to be nurtured and fostered both inside and outside of the classroom as outlined in the post-industrial view of leadership. If the development of future leaders is an ongoing goal for institutions of higher learning, then it is time to embrace that important challenge by viewing leadership development as a holistic process which includes all levels of leadership training, both formal and informal. Since the intervention was effective with this population, more intentional, structured leadership opportunities based in both theory and practice should be made available for college-aged students. This model could be easily adopted and used at other universities.

Implications for Student Affair Professionals

The staffs who facilitate student life programs and residential life programs understand that leadership emerges outside of the classroom and that it transcends a college degree. As a result, leaders have been developed outside of the classroom by means of student organizations, leadership roles, weekend training programs, and lecture events. The goal may be to develop leaders, but that scope may be too broad. Therefore, the Social Change model should be used as a thematic backdrop to co-curricular leadership education programs. Each of the

three aspects: Individual, Group, and Community can be focused on to enhance proper training programs for students (Astin, 1993). Consequently a program which focuses solely on service or on team building or on self-discovery will not be as successful as the one which can focus on all three.

Implication for Academic Leadership Professionals

Leadership educators should note that the millennial generation seems to approach leadership development much differently than Generation X. As a result, leadership educators should scrutinize their own teaching styles. The Millennia's emerge from high school with many hours of service and have been working on group projects for years (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Service learning and group projects seemed like ground breaking ideas just a few years ago, but now it is common place for this newer generation of students. Therefore, it is important for faculty to develop lessons that will impact a student's common sense as well the ability to develop and articulate a leadership vision through the means of personal reflection. Faculty should consider more project-based peer evaluations as this adds a level of sophistication to grading and forces students to confront each other during group projects while maintaining accountability. This measure should enhance a student's leadership and interpersonal skills.

Finally, leadership educators must begin to collaborate and create a "leadership educators" best practices philosophy as leadership grows as an academic curriculum (Brungardt et al., 2006). All of these elements will enhance collegiate student leadership development. The process of developing students into productive citizens that will produce positive societal change can be enhanced by intentional, strategic, and well planned leadership trainings.

Recommendations for Future Research

The completion of this project creates opportunities for other researchers:
- It would be interesting to see this project replicated with other similar academic leadership programs and then compare the results which may lead to new pedagogy.
- Many researchers promote mixed methods or qualitative longitudinal studies following a project like this. This approach should follow a freshmen population. Following that group in a longitudinal fashion, with regards to student organizations and campus leadership roles would be an interesting study. In other words, do the freshmen, as a result of completing a leadership course during their first semester truly take on more quality leadership roles when compared to students that do not minor in leadership? Does it actually increase student persistence and retention?

To then match that data with narrative might allow researchers to better understand the development of a student leadership vision.

Some postulate that people choose to lead in the way that they like to be led and that perspective is too narrow. It implies that effective leadership is simple – just do what someone else did. To the contrary, leadership is highly complex as people are highly complex. Formal, academic leadership training prepares students to understand the countless ways to lead and the countless models to follow. This realization will open the future leader's eyes to the possibility that his or her mentor's style will not work in all situations. This leadership lesson can be learned in an academic setting.

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