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Developing Student Leaders in Campus Outdoor Recreation Programs: An Appreciative Inquiry

Dan Sandberg
Bruce Martin
Andrew Szolosi
Ohio University

Sherry Early
Marshall University

Sharon Casapulla
Ohio University

Abstract

Campus outdoor recreation programs can play an integral role in developing student leaders. In this study, we sought a better understanding of the shared positive elements exemplary outdoor programs are using to develop their student leaders. The study was designed using a collective case study methodology and the theoretical lens of the Leadership Identity Development (LID) model. Representatives from five exemplary outdoor programs were interviewed with an appreciative inquiry approach. Five common themes emerged from the data: (a) Institutional Support, (b) Transformative Experiences, (c) Meaningful Culture, (d) Facilitative Structures, and (e) the Keys to the Castle: Authentic Leadership Opportunities. Themes were interrelated and contributed to an overall understanding of the environment that allows for successful leadership development in campus outdoor programs.

KEYWORDS: leadership identity development; campus outdoor programs; appreciative inquiry; environmental conditions; cocurricular outdoor program

Leadership ability is often cited as an essential quality for success, and as with any valuable commodity, it is highly desired and sought after (Northouse, 2013; Rost & Barker, 2000). Good leaders are needed in every aspect of society, and the development of students as leaders has long served as a central value for institutions of higher education (Astin & Astin, 2000; Bass & Bass, 2008). Leadership also contains a certain element of mystery; it escapes easy definition or a clear path to possessing it (Bass & Bass, 2008). Allen and Roberts (2011) define leadership development as "a continuous, systemic process designed to expand the capacities and awareness of individuals, groups, and organizations in an effort to meet shared goals and objectives" (p. 67). In this new era of global interconnectedness and complexity, leadership development serves as an avenue for universities to help graduates succeed in finding a job and achieving promotion (Hart Research Associates, 2015). The same process can also equip students with the tools and experience to be active participants in their communities (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Modern society demands more people need to be involved in the leadership process and "all leaders need to be better prepared to participate in leadership" (Day & Halpin, 2004, p. 4). Understanding the processes and components of leadership development is paramount for universities serious about cultivating the leadership potential of their students.

Leadership growth can be enhanced by the development of a leadership identity (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009; Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005). Komives et al. (2005) define leadership identity as the "cumulative confidence in one's ability to intentionally engage with others to accomplish group objectives" (p. 608). The development of a leadership identity occurs as people are able to integrate and internalize the ideas of leadership into their view of themselves, synthesizing the leadership role with their personal identity (Hall, 2004). An established leadership identity, then, allows for an individual to grow and adapt to take on the increasingly complex challenges of leading and following others (Day & Lance, 2004). If efforts are to be effective in preparing students to be involved in leadership amid an increasingly complex world, the process of building a student's sense of leadership identity needs to be a primary focus.

Literature Review

Leadership Identity Development (LID) Model

Komives et al. (2005) developed the Leadership Identity Development (LID) model to describe a process of identity growth that occurs incrementally over a series of six stages: Awareness, Exploration/Engagement, Leader Identified, Leadership Differentiated, Generativity, and Integration/Synthesis. The first two stages typically occur prior to entering college in the context of school or social communities (Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006). The first stage is Awareness, whereby people begin to recognize the presence or existence of leadership in their surroundings or in national and historic figures. As people becomes more conscious of leadership occurring around them, they move into the second stage, a stage defined by Exploration and Engagement. Within this stage, individuals tend to seek out opportunities to explore their interests and interact with peers in group settings. Teachers and older peers are identified as leaders.

As individuals begin to realize that they have leadership potential, they seek out new responsibilities and experiment with new roles. Efforts of this sort signal that a person has progressed into the third stage of the model, referred to as Leader Identified. In this stage, people tend to view leadership as positional, or a behavior only performed by those in formal leadership positions (Komives et al., 2006). For college students to move beyond this stage, a key transition is needed. This transition requires that students begin to understand the necessity and value of collaboration and interdependence to accomplish shared goals (Komives et al., 2006). When students are able to make this shift, they move into the fourth stage, identified as Leadership Differentiated. Leadership Differentiated is characterized by the realization that lead-

ership is a shared, participative process and that all group members play a part. In the fifth stage, Generativity, students begin to take on the role of model and mentor for others and crystallize a personal philosophy of leadership. By the sixth stage (Integration/Synthesis), people's leadership identity is an established part of who they are as a person (Hall, 2004; Komives et al., 2005). Students within Integration/Synthesis have confidence that they can effectively work with others toward a common purpose, regardless of context.

For students to transition successfully from one identity stage to the next, a certain degree of developmental mastery in each of four key categories is required. The first category is Developing Self, in which students develop an increasingly complex, deeper understanding of their personal identity. To progress through the identity stages, student leaders continue to build their self-confidence and learn and apply new skills related to working with others. Komives et al. (2005) found that making and deepening a commitment to a cause or passion was also important to this category. The second category is Group Influences, which includes students' continued engagement in groups, a recognition of the value of continuity within a specific group, and the understanding of groups as more than collections of individuals. These two categories combine to influence the third category, a Changing View of Self With Others, in which students transition from dependent, to independent, and finally interdependent relationships between themselves and their respective groups. Growth in this category goes on to shape the final category, a Broadening View of Leadership, in which students continue to develop the understanding that leadership is a process in which they and others can play a role. Progressive development in each of these categories allows for the establishment of an increasingly complex and permanent leadership identity, after which the cycle could begin again. Only through continued development in each area can students access the subsequent identity stages (Komives et al., 2006; Komives et al., 2005).

The model suggests students' movement through each stage does not occur independently, but rather is contingent on the presence of certain developmental influences. Those influences include what Komives et al. (2005) refer to as adult influence, peer influence, meaningful involvement, and reflective learning. These four developmental influences align with other identified "high-impact" or successful pedagogical practices for leadership development in the literature (Hall, 2004). These developmental influences are purposefully broad in order to apply to all leadership development activities and leave open to interpretation how they could be best integrated in specific contexts. Existing research shows how the LID model can be applied to substantiate development efforts of programs targeted at student leader populations within a number of communities, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students; minority students; and outdoor program student leaders.

Cocurricular Outdoor Recreation Programs

Outdoor recreation programs present opportunities to expand students' leadership identities by providing an outdoor-focused context within which the elements of the LID model can be creatively embedded. Boettcher and Gansemer-Topf (2015) explored the effect of an outdoor recreation program's 5-day trip-leader training on student leadership identity using the LID model. They found that the participants at the conclusion of the training were navigating through the final three stages—Leadership Differentiated, Generativity, and Integration/Synthesis—providing evidence that outdoor recreation programs can provide a context for leadership identity growth. Other research (Fields, 2010) showed leadership growth over the first six months of the leadership process, starting with classroom sessions and finishing after students successfully led a 5-day preorientation wilderness trip. These studies give initial support to the idea of outdoor program leader training as a successful leadership development incubator, but do not explore the effect of student leadership development beyond this 6-month juncture. Speelman and Wagstaff (2015) provide additional support that the theories and methods of adventure edu-

cation align well with the LID model within a university context. They provide two examples of collegiate outdoor programs that link adventure education with student leadership development, highlighting particular high-impact practices present in each program. Limited research exists, however, about the underlying framework that may cause a leadership program to succeed or fail. The purpose of this study was to explore the influences that allow for student leaders of co-curricular outdoor programs to develop their leadership identities over the course of their career within five exemplary programs, within the framework of the LID model. Therefore, the aim of this research was to address the following research question: What are the influences on leadership identity development for student leaders within five award-winning cocurricular outdoor programs?

Method

Research Design

In this study, we employed a qualitative collective case study approach. Yin (2003) suggested a case study design is appropriate when the focus of the study is to understand contextual conditions because it is believed they are relevant to the phenomenon under study. Furthermore, Yin described the purpose of a collective case study approach as replicating findings across cases. The adoption of this research approach allowed for in-depth exploration of each individual program and the opportunity to compare themes across programs (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). The goal of this study was to understand the influences on student leadership identity development within the context of five cocurricular outdoor programs with an emphasis on the shared positive commonalities between the selected programs. We placed emphasis on exploring program strengths rather than deficiencies by creating interview questions using an appreciative inquiry approach. Using this approach allowed us to focus on each organization's accomplishments and aspirations (Mather & Hess, 2013). This was done to capture the "best of what is" and envision "what might be" within these programs (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012, p. 15). By focusing on the positive shared elements rather than the negative, we hope to make this research more helpful to practitioners by sharing common ideals to work toward rather than pitfalls to avoid.

Data Collection

We conducted semistructured interviews with the leaders of five award-winning cocurricular outdoor programs within the United States. Each program had won the Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education (AORE) David J. Webb Program Excellence Award within the past 5 years (2011–2015).[1] The programs that participated in the study, starting with the most recent award winner, were James Madison University, Florida State University, Whitman College, University of Idaho, and Appalachian State University.

We conducted interviews with an individual in a senior leadership/director position within each program. For one program, two staff participated in the interview process together. In accordance with the university's institutional review board, all participants had to first provide informed consent prior to their involvement in the study. Consistent with the appreciative inquiry framework, the interviews explored what the study participants thought their programs were doing successfully and what their dreams and aspirations were for the future of their programs. The questions were adapted from the Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results (SOAR) model (Stravros & Hinrichs, 2009). We designed interview questions to understand better how

[1]Recipients of this award are selected based on evaluation on the following criteria: (a) outstanding nonprofit outdoor program that has provided dynamic and innovative services to its participants, (b) demonstrated professionalism and high standards of conduct, (c) contributed to the outdoor community at large by sharing information and assisting other programs, and (d) history and current organizational membership.

each individual program provided a context for student leaders to progress through the stages of the LID model and how each of the developmental influences (adult influence, peer influence, meaningful involvement, and reflective learning) were integrated into the training and development process. We sent the participants the interview questions in advance and then conducted one interview with each participant via Skype or telephone. Interviews ranged from 42 min to 1 hr 16 min. Interviews were recorded using QuickTime. We also conducted a document analysis (Creswell, 2013) of any program reflection tools or instruments used in debrief activities, looking for evidence of how programs structured reflection.

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed and entered into Atlas Ti qualitative analysis software. The responses of the two staff who were interviewed together were grouped together because it became difficult to differentiate their voices in the transcription process. We coded interview transcripts and documents using a constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2000), using open and then axial coding techniques (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). We applied the four developmental influences identified in the LID model as a priori codes (Komives et al., 2005). The research team coded the first interview together and developed a coding scheme. Any differences in the coding for the initial code book among the research team were reconciled to achieve intercoder reliability (Creswell, 2013). The lead author completed the coding of the subsequent interviews using the initial coding scheme, allowing for additional codes to emerge. The research team participated in grouping codes into categories, and themes began to emerge from the data at the case level and across cases (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Some codes were grouped under multiple themes. As a form of member checking, the five themes and each of the supporting quotations for each theme were sent to the research participants to increase external validity and credibility (Tracy, 2010). One participant from each institution responded; three participants responded to the member checks and confirmed the quotations were accurate and interpreted appropriately. Two participants suggested minor changes to their quotation to clarify the message that they were attempting to convey with the quotation. For the purposes of this study, a theme was defined as being present among all five programs.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the influences that allow for student leaders of co-curricular outdoor programs to develop their leadership identities. Five key influences became evident as we analyzed the data: (1) *Institutional Support*, (2) *Transformative Experiences*, (3) *Meaningful Program Culture*, (4) *Facilitative Structures*, and (5) *The Keys to the Castle: Authentic Leadership Opportunities*.

Institutional Support

One of the conditions that participants recognized as important to the success of their programs was institutional support. For example, participant H.M.[2] stated: "First and foremost, for us within the outdoor program to have the greatest possible impact on students we have to have support from higher administration at the university level." This support manifested itself in a variety of ways, one of the most important of which was financial support. Participant J.C., the director of one program, stated:

> Having the support from [the University] is essential in terms of money to pay students, to do the work that we ask of them. Money to pay ourselves. Money for support for GAs. There's a whole lot of support that the academic institution has to maintain to make all of that happen.

[2]Study participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

Multiple participants also mentioned their programs occupied "prime real estate" within recreational or campus center buildings, which showed a clear indication of institutional support that went beyond mere operating budgets to capital investments. Participant R.F. stated:

> We have a tremendous space at our student recreation center: we have a huge rental shop, we have a climbing center, we have a nice front office and lobby space. Right there shows the institutional support of the program, just in the space itself that they've provided us on campus.

Another indication of institutional support was investment in human resources. Participant J.C., for example, expressed appreciation for the three full-time positions allocated to his program:

> Without three full-time positions: my position, the assistant director and rental shop manager, we couldn't run what we run. The commitment by the college to have those staff positions in place is probably the biggest resource that the program has.

The advocacy of the university administration on behalf of the program was yet another show of institutional backing. The president of the university that participant R.F. represented regularly went out of his way to show support: "He has rented equipment from us, and, when he is bringing in VP candidates, he'll specifically bring them to the outdoor program and show them around."

Multiple participants emphasized that this support did not materialize overnight. Participant R.F. stated, "Like many other programs that have been around a long time, you start very small. You start in a closet in the basement of some building somewhere, or you start as a club, and eventually it grows." Participants reported that institutional support for their program was reciprocal in nature; their institutions recognized the value the program had in terms of student attraction and retention. Support for the program was considered money well spent. One program was formally recognized as a signature program as part of its university's broader marketing efforts, marking it as "something that the college considers very unique to the college and something it's proud of," participant J.C. stated.

Another show of institutional support was considered to be the willingness of administrators to accept higher levels of liability associated with these programs. According to participant H.M., the university was willing to accept this higher level of risk because of the rewards that the program promised to deliver in student development. Consequently, students were allowed to run programs that have inherent risk. H.M. stated:

> I have colleagues around the country whose directors say, "You have to go on the trips, we don't trust the students." And that's mind boggling to me that that occurs. I'm not going on every trip. In fact, my boss would question me if I was doing that.

These different forms of institutional support were considered to be essential to the effectiveness of these programs, and they can be viewed as foundational to other important program characteristics reflected in subsequent themes.

Transformative Experiences

The theme *transformative experiences* became evident early in the process of data collection and analysis. Although the term *transformative experiences* is broad and can be understood in a variety of ways (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Mezirow, 1997), we chose to use O'Sullivan's (2003) definition of the term. O'Sullivan defines transformative experience as "a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world" (p. 326). Our findings suggest that facilitating transformative experiences for students was a primary goal, if not the primary goal, of the programs examined in this study.

This theme is perhaps best captured through the common elements among the mission statements of the five programs. Each of the mission statements is composed of active verbs such as *grow, develop, adapt,* and *discover* to emphasize the process of change. All emphasize the priority on the student experience as well as a degree of change or transformation through their programs.

This theme was evident when study participants were asked to reflect on a high point in their careers working with student leaders. Participant P.T. reflected on a backcountry ski trip to the Canadian Rockies in which two students approached him after summiting in bluebird conditions. He recounted:

> They both came up to me, they said, that particular day was the best day of their lives. And that really struck a chord with me. That the things that we do with these students at times can have such an impact.

Study participants were incredibly proud of the student transformation that they helped facilitate. Multiple study participants remarked on how student transformation was in different ways a favorite aspect of their work. Participant R.F. remarked:

> I really love seeing the completely oblivious college freshman come into the program and do a trip or come in looking for a job and then watch how they progress as a person . . . and then leaving as a stand-up professional in whatever field that they are choosing to go into. For me, that is very meaningful and I find a lot of pleasure and success in that.

It represented a major inspiration for staff to remain motivated and engaged. Participant J.C. reflected:

> I thought I was only going to be here for two years and what kept me here is the students. [When] a student shares with you how powerful the learning experience was and how amazing the trip was, it's those things that I have to tuck in the back of my head to pull out on a rainy day . . . that's what keeps me going.

It was clear participants viewed their programs as having a significant effect on students, going beyond the presumed purview of an outdoor program. Participant R.F. clearly believed in the transferability of students' leadership and life skills gained within the program:

> We really try to work on having them understand the skills that they have gotten through their time here, and how to transfer that to the real world, and how to showcase that through a résumé or an interview. As silly as that sounds, I don't think a lot of students really understand that transfer until you really help them to see it.

R.F. went on to emphasize that creating a space for student growth and self-awareness was at the core of their program, "We really want to create the opportunity for students to really grow and see that growth through reflection and conversation with their peers."

Participants relied on positive support and a belief in student development at the university level, but clearly created an additional emphasis on transformation within their programs. The themes *Meaningful Program Culture* and *Facilitative Structures* are the manifestation of this philosophy in action.

Meaningful Program Culture

Participants indicated that a meaningful program culture was a key ingredient to program success. Individual program cultures were unique and distinct, but all programs shared certain key characteristics. A characteristic held in common among all programs was an emphasis on feedback and improvement. Attesting to this, participant J.C. stated:

> We've created a culture within the program of people trying to always be growing and improving as leaders. On all our trips and trainings, we encourage people to be open and receptive to feedback and also to be asking for feedback . . . Without that, I don't know if we would have as strong of a program as we do.

Study participants indicated that student leaders were encouraged to take initiative and seek out opportunities to build their individual skills by attending voluntary staff training and development opportunities within the program. Students were expected to show their commitment and would receive support and additional training opportunities in return. Participant H.M. stated: "We're putting our resources and energy into giving the evaluation and feedback to somebody who's actually going to do something [within the program]."

Another important factor that emerged was the sense of community that existed on personal and professional levels. Participant R.F. described his approach to building community: "We want to have those personal relationships with our student staff, we want them to see us as people, and we want to get to know them as people. We want to have those relationships after they leave school." P.F. went on to emphasize how his program treats student leaders as professional peers, pushing them to adhere to high standards in their work:

> We treat them as peers, and we have high expectations of them that are very clear. I think just by treating the student staff like adults, something I don't think happens a lot in higher education, the more positive that relationship becomes.

Another aspect of culture that was reported was the community of student peers that emerged through the program, beyond the formal structures of training courses, in which students were encouraged to "take off and do things on their own." Participant H.F. sees this element of community as playing a significant role for students: "I hear students frequently refer to the importance of the adventure program [student] community to them."

Facilitative Structures

Facilitative structures were defined as standardized features or expectations that led to the ability to meet certain goals within the program. Structures included formal and informal training, mentoring, and reflection processes.

One apparent structure was the calendar of trips and clinics that the program offered. Participant R.F. described that many student leaders had their initial involvement with the outdoor program through "actually taking one of our programs." This marked a student's first interaction with the program and served as an opportunity to begin enculturing them into the norms and culture of the program.

When it came to hiring student staff, participants described a number of processes. Noncredit introductory courses served to "get students through the door" for participant A.R.'s program, familiarizing them with the program and exposing them to outdoor leadership topics. A.R.'s program then hired primarily from this pool of students. Others had a more traditional application and screening process, but participant R.F. emphasized that having previous outdoor experience did not necessarily qualify students for a position within their program. Rather, interest, commitment, and attitude were considered to be primary qualifications: "We don't only hire recreation students. We have everything from business to engineering to recreation to art."

Programs took different approaches to leadership development once students were hired and began training as student leaders. Some programs train student leaders as program generalists, and others encourage students to develop an area of specialty right away. One program is continuing to grow rapidly and has decided to promote specialization rather than generalization. Participant H.M. stated:

> . . . at the time we hire them we explain that we either hire them to work in one of three different areas. They will either work at the climbing wall, at our challenge course,

> or now we have an expanded equipment center so we'll hire them for the equipment center.

In contrast, participant P.T. indicated that he promotes working within a variety of areas within a program, allowing students to develop a variety of different skill sets. He advocates for his students to jump from role to role:

> . . . maybe they start doing some backpacking courses and then they take a leadership position with the wilderness orientation program during the summer, and then maybe they work on their climbing skills and get a job at the climbing wall, and then maybe they move into trip leadership within the climbing program.

Multiple participants indicated that student leaders must progress through a hierarchy of leadership positions that allows for progressive development and progressive responsibility over time. One program organizes its student staffing structure using the following position titles: apprentice, instructor, and trip leader/lead instructor. Other programs have similar structures, with some also including student manager positions responsible for overseeing certain program areas. Progressing from position to position may occur quickly for motivated students or students with prior experience, or as participant R.F. said: "Somebody can come in and work for us and just be an assistant on trips their entire four years of college, and that's fine with us." However, students are typically encouraged to progress toward higher degrees of positional leadership. For example, participant A.R. stated: "I really try to empower these students to step up." To incentivize student investment in this process, multiple programs offer additional pay, support, or training opportunities and a higher degree of ownership within the program. As students progress through the leadership hierarchy, senior staff may be assigned as formal mentors to students or, in other instances, mentoring may be less formalized and more spontaneous.

Study participants reported that requiring certifications is a part of the structure for all of the student trip leaders, although to what extent differs from program to program. Some programs offer in-house certification, and two programs offer scholarships to support students in obtaining external training and certifications.

We discovered that structures and culture were completely intertwined at times; the structures for reflection within the trip-leading process create the opportunity for a culture of feedback, and this culture of feedback allows for meaningful learning during these reflection processes. Participant A.R. described his mind-set regarding feedback: "I'm trying to instill in them that asking for feedback gets them the best feedback." A.R.'s program highlights this emphasis on feedback by doing posttrip debrief sessions with staff on every trip that goes out, "even if it's just a full moon paddle that's a three-hour trip, we still do those posttrips and have that opportunity for feedback." Others reported having staff fill out a posttrip form that is reviewed and follow-up done as needed. Our findings suggest that facilitative structures serve an important role within the five programs, providing clarity, providing a process, and reinforcing program culture without being overly restrictive.

The Keys to the Castle: Authentic Leadership Opportunities

The Keys to the Castle is an in vivo term that a participant used to describe students being given freedom and the opportunity to take on real and meaningful opportunities. The importance of this freedom was underscored by participant R.F. highlighting his own experience entering the field:

> I feel that's how a lot of us have actually gotten in this industry. We were given an opportunity as a student that we did not really think we were qualified for. But you do it, and you do it well, and it opens up your eyes and it opens up a lot of doors. That's something that I want to continue to do with the program here.

Participant R.F. elaborated that as students progress through his program's leadership structures, they are guided and pushed by professional staff:

> We continue to just give them as much opportunity as possible, we try to feed them things that we think would suit their skills and push them a little bit. If it's not running a trip, it could be working on a specific project or leading an event for the program.

Participant H.M. echoed the significance of having room for growth and of having a setting within which to practice leadership skills. This often presents itself through opportunities to lead and direct their peers. H.M went on to say: "We can't really underestimate the idea of a college student teaching a lesson to their peers at the climbing wall."

Multiple participants indicated that as students progress in their leadership development, the level of responsibility increases. Participant J.C. indicated that because their program does not have graduate students, there are opportunities for "highly motivated and driven undergraduates" to take on significant responsibilities. For example, a student coordinator within this program is in charge of coordinating the briefings and debriefings of trips as well as all the logistics for all of the programming on any given weekend.

Participant A.R. described how their entire trip staff share responsibility for planning and coordinating all of the logistics ahead of time for their trips:

> Each student has an opportunity to propose roughly eight trips a semester. We then give them the opportunity to show what the cost of that trip would be and what it would take to offer it. The trip leaders hear all these trips and then vote on what they think would be the most successful trips and then we offer those trips for the following semester.

Participants recounted how sometimes allowing students such freedom and responsibility could result in canceled programs or a poorly handled social dynamic on a trip. Participant R.F. emphasized, however, that learning through failure is expected and even encouraged, "as long as it is in an appropriate setting." Participant J.C. agreed: "Having mishaps occasionally, where things do not go quite as well as they want, and then hearing them reflect upon what they've gained and learned: that's super powerful."

Discussion

The identified influences appear to be deeply interwoven and interdependent, connecting the student and professional staff in an ongoing learning process. These themes illustrate the context, or environment, for the process of leadership identity development to occur.

Our findings further support Komives et al. (2005) in their findings that adult influences, peer influences, meaningful involvement, and reflective learning are essential tools for students to develop their leadership identities successfully. We found initial evidence that leadership identity development in the outdoor program context is directly tied to its environment, with the four developmental influences as essential elements. Our findings suggest additional layers to the outdoor program environment also exist that may support development of leadership identity, such as supportive institutional culture and the positive intersection of a student's academic and cocurricular life (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Renn & Arnold, 2003).

The four developmental influences were integrated and overlapping throughout the campus outdoor program environment. Professional staff seemed successful at balancing the task of creating structures, building culture, and unifying the program under a shared vision (Bolman & Deal, 2010). We found student leaders in these five programs had consistent access to professional staff who recognized their leadership potential and encouraged them to try out new or challenging roles within the program (Komives et al., 2005; Muir, 2014). Professional staff also had the opportunity to create the organizational structures to allow opportunities for ongoing

self-reflection, feedback, and community building to help students build awareness of self (Hall, 2004; Kouzes & Posner, 1995).

Peer influences were pervasive, with students learning from, collaborating with, and mentoring their peers in a positive and supportive environment (Day & Lance, 2004). Strong peer networks (both formal and informal) provided students with opportunities for peer interaction and relational support when facing challenges on or off trip (Block, 2008; Hall, 2004; Mather & Hess, 2013). The process of progressing through the roles of participant, apprentice, instructor, trip leader, and ultimately peer mentor to future student leaders supports previous research suggesting fraternal organizations (operating on a similar model) have been effective at creating student leadership identity growth (Harms, Woods, Roberts, Bureau, & Green, 2006; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Meaningful Involvement was directly represented by the Keys to the Castle: Authentic Leadership Opportunities theme, which suggests that students had no shortage of opportunities to learn and grow. This provides support to Speelman and Wagstaff's (2015) assertion that adventure education provides significant potential for meaningful involvement and is a powerful leadership development tool. One important aspect illustrated in our findings is a leadership process that progressively challenges motivated students with novel tasks that increase in complexity (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978). Our findings indicate an appropriate amount of support was available through peer and adult mentors to push student leaders to grow beyond their current capabilities, which allowed expanded personal growth (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978). Our findings also support previous research in a recreational sports setting that suggests growth only occurs when training is ongoing and leadership lessons are embedded over time (Tingle, Cooney, Asbury, & Tate, 2013).

Reflective learning was ongoing and integrated into the structures and culture of the five programs. Participants described regular and plentiful opportunities for student leaders to give and receive specific structured feedback and engage in self-reflection in posttrip debriefs (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999). Students were also challenged to goal set and think critically about transference of their experiences and skills from the outdoor realm to the classroom and their careers (Sibthorp, Furman, Paisley, Gookin, & Schumann, 2011).

The outdoor program is just one element of the complicated lives of student leaders, but our findings reveal outdoor recreation programs can be successful environments for students to develop their leadership identities. We posit student leaders who have superficial experiences with the outdoor program and lack commitment and engagement with the community will have limited developmental results, so emphasis should be placed on facilitating a student's continued involvement with the program (Keating, Rosch, & Burgoon, 2014; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Implications for Practice

The LID model suggests that developing a leadership identity happens over time and in a setting that includes certain essential factors. Practitioners, then, are tasked with creating an environment that provides these aspects and is compelling enough to encourage students to stick with the program over the course of their college career. The themes described offer a glimpse of what that environment looks like for some of the leading programs in the field.

Perhaps one of the most important findings from this study is the interrelation of factors that create the context for meaningful leadership growth. Positive institutional culture and support allow professional staff to design and execute programs in a way that emphasize student growth and transformation. This allows for the creation of a meaningful and unique program culture. Facilitative structures are created to perpetuate and create systems to support that program culture. The ability to offer and support authentic leadership opportunities for students relies on all of these elements working in unison. It is within this context that the developmental

influences suggested by the LID model are able to take effect. Participant J.C. summed up the phenomenon well:

> Outdoor programs around the country may share the same title but are all a bit different. What good programs tend to have in common is a dedication to run amazing experiences that are accessible, manage risk, and are run by well-trained and dedicated staff. A closer look often shows that while these outdoor programs may offer very different experiences with very different populations, staffing, and challenges, what they have in common are clear systems, organizational structures, commitment to staff training and development, and a vibrant supportive culture that works for them.

Care should be taken when viewing this research as a list of best practices. The efforts each of these programs has made are significant, but there is no formula to create the perfect campus outdoor program; successful elements for each of these programs may not be as effective or impactful in other institutional settings. What can be surmised is that these programs have found a way to contextualize each of the elements present in the LID model, including opportunities for students to develop a sense of self, learn and apply new skills, engage with and learn from others, and practice leadership, while providing the four developmental influences (adult influences, peer influences, meaningful involvement, and reflective learning). The model, in this sense, can serve as an excellent tool to aid in critical reflection for practitioners while developing and evaluating programs. Doing so will provide the best possible environment for leadership growth for students.

Limitations

This study represents a relatively small cross section of collegiate outdoor programs. Only programs that were recent winners of the David J. Webb Leadership Award were included, and only one participant at each program was interviewed, with the exception of one, in which two program staff were interviewed together. Although we supplemented the interviews with document analysis, the bulk of our data came from these five interviews, which led to a reliance on interviews as our primary data source.

An obvious limitation in this study was that the participants were all men. This was the case due to the confines of the staff makeup of the award-winning institutions; the one female administrative leader of the five included programs was not available on the scheduled interview day. This may have skewed the data toward a more stereotypically masculine view of leadership.

Future Research

This study could be replicated or expanded to support our findings on a larger sample. Subsequent studies could include observations at each program and/or interviews of additional leaders in each program individually to gather different perceptions. The research design of future research could also be adjusted to study how perspectives of leadership identity development might change based on gender, race, sexual orientation, or other elements of diversity for those in positions of program leadership. Relatedly, researchers could apply the work of Guthrie, Jones, Osteen, and Hu (2013) to explore how university outdoor programs could best deliver leadership development opportunities to students from diverse backgrounds; a study such as this would be of great value to the field.

To add depth to the understanding of the environmental conditions within an outdoor program and the institution, researchers could seek to understand cocurricular outdoor programs within the theoretical frame of an ecological model such as Bronfenbrenner's (1995) process–person–context–time (PPCT) model. To our knowledge, no such study has been published. The PPCT model might also serve as a way to understand how the environment under-

goes change over time in response to program successes or events such as the injury or death of a student on a trip.

Another relevant study would be to capture the experiences of student leaders and compare those with those of professional staff as represented in this study. It would be fascinating to discover whether the students' ideas of their own leadership identity development were equivalent to those in program leadership positions. We also recommend further study using an integration of models that are process driven, such as the Komives et al. (2005) LID model or Bronfenbrenner's (1995) PPCT model, with ones that are outcome driven, such as the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). A longitudinal design would add to the relevancy of this work and could take a mixed-methods approach. This approach could answer not only how a student is learning and developing within the context of a cocurricular outdoor program over time, but also how much. A research design that followed the college career of one cohort of student leaders over 4 years could provide especially persuasive results.

Conclusion

We approached this study with the assumption the processes described in the LID model (Komives et al., 2005) would be present within outdoor program student leader development initiatives as suggested by previous research (Boettcher & Gansemer-Topf, 2015; Speelman & Wagstaff, 2015). We conducted this study to better understand the influences within some of the nation's leading outdoor programs that allow for these processes to occur. We found the five essential themes allowed student leadership identity development to occur by maximizing the four developmental influences (adult influences, peer influences, reflective learning, and meaningful involvement) within a supportive and integrated institutional and outdoor program environment. Our findings indicate that outdoor recreation programs play an important role for universities that value the development of students as leaders.

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