Peer Study Group Leaders Leadership Identity Emergence
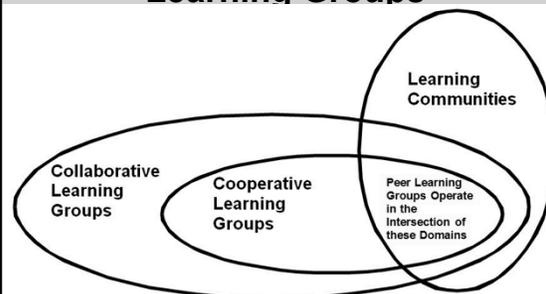
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Postsecondary Peer Cooperative Learning Groups

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Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) University of Minnesota Model

- Focused on first-year, historically-difficult courses with most in math and science
- Most PAL sessions mandatory participation
- Undergrads serve as PAL facilitators
- PAL program similar to Supplemental Instruction and Emerging Scholars Program
- Training and support of PAL facilitators
  - *Initial two-day prior to 1st academic term*
  - *Weekly prof. development course during 1st term*
  - *Bi-weekly team meetings, observations, & consultations*

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PAL Qualitative Study

- Undergrads from variety of academic majors, high GPAs, and evenly gender balanced
- Facilitators maintained weekly journal and completed online survey at end of fall term
- 43 detailed surveys: 2008, 2009, and 2010
- Data coding by researchers independently
- Themes and sub-themes identified through inductive data analysis

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Focus of the Research

- Focus on "*why*" attitudes and behaviors changed rather than "*what*" new skills developed by the study group leaders.
- More than fifty previous studies identified new skills acquired as result of study group leader experiences
- Postsecondary Peer Cooperative Learning Bibliography, http://z.umn.edu/peerbib

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Themes Emerged from Study

- Leadership identity development
- Professional identity development
- Vocational interest development
- Flexibility and adaptation to work demands
- Processes used during PAL sessions
- Academic skill and knowledge growth
  - *Participants*
  - *Facilitators*

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Leadership Identity Development of Peer Study Group Leaders

Image from renjith krishnan

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Prompting Questions

- "Describe and give examples of how you increased your personal skills, changed attitudes, or increased your confidence."
- "How did the experience of serving as a PAL facilitator impact you?"

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Professional Literature on Leadership

- Development of specific leadership skills
  - *Group management*
  - *Public speaking*
  - *Problem resolution*
- Development of personal leadership identity

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Leadership Identity Development Stages
Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Maniella, & Osteen

1. Awareness of leaders "out there"
2. Exploration/engagement
3. **Positional leader identified**
4. **Leadership differentiated and influences rather than commands**
5. **Generativity of shifting leadership to others by developing their agency**
6. Integration/synthesis by connecting with efforts of others for mutual goals

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Being Seen as an Authority

- "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."

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Age Factor

- "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."

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Being Dependent

- "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."

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Surprise at Response

- 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.

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Stewardship and Feeling Qualified

- "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*."

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Relationship-based Leadership

- [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.

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Leading, Not Observing

- I grew sooooo much within the PAL program. Prior to the PAL program, I had already participated in over 100 hours of observations throughout 3 different schools through the DirecTrack program for my initial licensure program, although I claim that I took out and grew more from PAL then 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.

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Rising to Expectations

- 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.*

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Facing Fear Led to Leadership Self-Efficacy

- 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.*

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Themes Emerged

- Leadership role fosters leadership identity formation (*what you do is catalyst for how you perceive self*)
- Structure of the peer learning group sessions reinforces feelings of leadership by the facilitator
  - *Authority figure requires leadership actions*
  - *Subject-matter expertise increases qualification to be leader*
  - *Bridging role of student peer and student near-peer*
  - *Move from teacher observer to operational teacher*
- Student feedback foster leadership identity
- Fear as mechanism toward leadership self-efficacy
- Most often perceive self as "*stewards of knowledge*" rather than knowledge experts
- Often surprised of success with peer students

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Change Model for Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) Facilitator Development
Based on Alexander Astin's Input-Environment-Output Model of Student Development Revised February 14, 2015

PAL Facilitator Input Variables Before Selection or Training	College Environmental Variables			Long-Term
	Professional Development Activities	Job Functions Required to Perform PAL Facilitator Role	*Immediate* Outcomes Influenced by PAL Facilitator Experience	Outcomes Influenced by PAL Facilitator Experience

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Structural Elements Encouraging Leadership Development

- Initial power differential inside sessions
- Feedback from participating students
- Risks and responsibilities as sole designated facilitator in the room
- Fear and uncertainty of the unknown during sessions
- Facilitator reflections on experience through team meetings and weekly journals

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Implications

- Peer study group program is an incubator of co-curricular college student development outcomes for participants and facilitators
- Peer learning programs are a living laboratory to try out leadership approaches and reflect upon them
- Leadership self-concept is a developmental process

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Possible Changes with Campus Peer Study Program

- Integrate leadership development models into peer facilitator training
  - *Assigned readings , discussions, and activities*
  - *Invite campus experts to assist with trainings*
- Peer program staff learn more
- Create leadership opportunities within the program (deliver workshops, organize social events, etc.)
- Integrate leadership self-concept reflections into training, team meetings, reflective journals, and evaluations

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Broaden Scope of Program

- Emphasize leadership development as one of the employee benefits when recruiting new study group leaders in publicity efforts.
- Network with other staff and faculty involved with student leadership development. Involve them with training and recruit their students.
- Position campus study group program as co-curricular venue to practice newly acquired leadership skills and knowledge.
- Assess leadership development with evaluation of peer learning program and report findings.

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Summary

- Academic assistance can be repositioned as a co-curricular development experience of study group participants and leaders for affective and cognitive development in multiple areas.
- Peer learning programs are an untapped cocurricular experience that are more powerful if intentional rather than serendipitous with development outcomes. With the highly competitive job market for today's graduates, institutions must use every opportunity to increase job readiness skills of its graduates.

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